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Review Symposium: Four Perspectives on *Karl Rahner's Theological Aesthetics*, by Peter Joseph Fritz

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I.

This is an exciting publication, both for the theological reception of Rahner's philosophy, which has stagnated somewhat in the last decade, and for those (like me) interested in Rahner's reception of Heidegger. About Fritz's book as a re-reading of Rahner's work, I can add little that is of value, since (as I demonstrated to Fritz's frustration in my *Heidegger & Theology*) I know incomparably less about Rahner than he does. But as an account of Rahner's engagement with Heidegger, the book is full of new insights and interesting questions.

Fritz begins with a careful reading of the debts that Rahner's theory of knowledge in *Geist in Welt* owes to Heidegger's *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, the book that most directly informed the university courses Rahner took with Heidegger. This reading demonstrates the complexity of Rahner's attempt to open up the post-Cartesian subject, pursued through an adaptation of Heidegger's reading of Kant as a lens on Thomas Aquinas's metaphysics of knowledge.

As we know, Rahner follows Heidegger's reorientation of epistemology towards ontology, which is driven by the claim that human subjectivity is rightly understood not as self-founding or sufficient, but as constitutively open to Being. A chief part of Fritz's project, building on a sketch of this agreement, is to highlight and defend Rahner's creative opposition to Heidegger's circumscription—which Rahner and Fritz regard as dogmatic—of Being as intra-historical, and of human existence as finite. Rahner's human openness to Being always implies openness to God, who is the 'sustaining ground' of both being and knowledge.

This line of the book can be read in two modes: as an extended argument against Heidegger, or as a constructive outline of a Roman Catholic worldview. As the latter, it largely succeeds: Fritz sketches an attractive vision of what he identifies as the fundamental Roman Catholic posture, namely radical openness to God's self-revelation in and through the world; and he presents Rahner's philosophical

theology as a sophisticated account of that posture, appropriating a rich theological-philosophical tradition from Aquinas to Kant to Heidegger. To what extent Rahner in fact offers a coherent philosophical defence of this basic Catholic posture is harder to assess, partly because Fritz's terminology sometimes obscures rather than illuminates its contours. For example, large parts of Fritz's argument depend on Rahner's understanding of the imagination, which Rahner adapts from its complex technical senses in Thomas Aquinas, in Kant, and in Heidegger's reading of Kant. For Fritz's Rahner, the imagination is the faculty that enables an anticipation of being (*Vorgriff auf esse*); but Fritz never gives a satisfactory account *how*. A fuller analysis of the imagination in Aquinas, Kant and Heidegger, and of its inheritance by Rahner, would have been necessary to carry the argument, which is central to the book, but never seems fully formed. This becomes especially important when Fritz proceeds to extend the structure of Rahner's act of cognition to his understanding of being-in-the-world (chapter 2) and of history (chapter 5). These transpositions are fascinating, but they need to be worked through more carefully to appear as more than loose analogies.

Read in the first, critical mode, Rahner's contestation of Heidegger as recounted by Fritz seems to me inconclusive. Fritz presents Rahner's reading of the human openness to Being as a constitutive, pre-discursive openness to God as more cogent than Heidegger's positioning of that openness in a non-transcendent realm. But he does not offer criteria by which the relative coherence of the two could be judged. In this way, *Rahner's Theological Aesthetics* is an illustration precisely of the difficulty of establishing claims such as "the finite can only show up against the horizon of the infinite"—or, put in transcendental form, "a pre-apprehension of God is the condition of the possibility of any apprehension at all." How is one to adjudicate whether or not this is so? What sort of control test can one devise? These are genuine questions, particularly for the many Christian philosophers who have tried to beat Heidegger from his best ward. This book does not seem to me to advance their resolution, and I would be keen to discuss them further.

The interpretation of Rahner's theology of history as apocalyptic is exciting (especially for someone like me who has argued for an eschatological reading of Heidegger); and the overall vision of the Christian life that emerges from Fritz's synthesizing reading of Rahner is invigorating, and promises to fuel good continuing constructive work. The labelling of Rahner's account of ontophany as an "aesthetics," and of the realization of that ontophany as "sublime," seems to me less successful than the accounts themselves. But I very much look forward to their development in the author's future work.

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II.

When the request to review this book arrived, my first reaction was surprise. Some years ago I contributed an article on Rahner's theological aesthetics to *The Cambridge Companion to Rahner* (2005). Rahner's writings on the arts had received little recognition thus far and it was an opportunity to bring to a larger audience some seminal insights by Rahner on the connection of faith, theology, and the arts, especially visual art and poetry, about which he, however, was rather modest, claiming to know little about the arts. Given the fact that Rahner only wrote a few, yet important, articles on this topic, I was indeed curious that someone had dedicated an entire Ph.D. and book to Rahner's theological aesthetics.

A glimpse at the table of contents makes clear that Fritz has something rather different in mind, i.e., a new engagement with Rahner's theology which, Fritz claims, "should be read as aesthetic all the way down" and which he conceives in terms of what he defines as the "Catholic sublime" (13). An

ambitious work, Fritz carries out his investigation with a close reading of relevant writings of Rahner and his teacher Heidegger with a view of showing the proximity and fundamental divergences in their approach to being. Fritz explores their respective philosophical and theological positions over five chapters (“Rahner’s Aesthetics,” “Rahner’s Sublime,” “Rahner and the Spirit of the Age,” “Rahner Refounding Theological Language,” and “Rahner’s Apocalypse”) concerning Thomas and Kant, finitude, the “Home,” “Openness,” negative humanism, mystery, history, and revelation. In Hölderlin and Rilke and Rahner’s on Ignatius, Mary, and angels. It is in the last chapter, “Rahner’s Apocalypse,” where their differences come out sharpest. Fritz points out that history constitutes the “culminating conflict” between Heidegger and Rahner. Both consider history as revelatory, but while for Heidegger this is the revelation of being, “Rahner’s entire aesthetic perspective begins with Jesus Christ” as does his theology of history (211). Fritz asserts that in Rahner’s theology everything ultimately “reduces to the self-revealing, loving Mystery of God,” while in Heidegger’s philosophy everything “reduces to the self-concealing, callous mystery of *Seyn* [sic]” (256).

The notion of the sublime, in particular, the “Catholic sublime,” is the central category with which Fritz develops his approach to Rahner’s theology as an aesthetics. Aware that aesthetics usually connotes theories and perceptions of art and beauty, he wants to define it “slightly differently” and describes it as an “account of the manifestation of being” or “ontophany.” Thus aesthetics is closely related to ontology. In short, “if ontology asks what being is, aesthetics asks how being manifests itself” (11). As Rahner made his central quest the reflection on how God manifests Godself in history, Fritz begins his book by stating that Rahner’s “major theological achievement consists in his account of God’s self-revelation, which implies a way of being—a Catholic way of being—that seeks, receives, and responds to divine revelation with radical openness. The Catholic way of being I call the Catholic sublime.” While noting that Rahner rarely used this term, Fritz goes on to define the sublime with recall to, and going beyond, Kant and puts it in theological terms as the “incomprehensible mystery of God, and how creation, particularly the human person, reflects this incomprehensibility” (15). Rahner’s theology “through and through” was the reflection on divine mystery. Fritz thus takes “the Catholic sublime” as the book’s “anchor” in order to elaborate on two things—Rahner’s resistance to modern subjectivism and “the fact that Catholic theology need not cede terms like “subjectivity” and “sublime” to modernity.” Catholic theology can develop its “own versions” of these terms. He asserts the sublime “is a modern thought that I turn towards Christ by applying it to the achievement of Rahner’s thinking” (16).

The book then is the unfolding of these central notions which Fritz lays out clearly in his first chapter. For Fritz the “Catholic sublime” essentially means Catholicism’s holism, the recognition in Catholicism of divine mystery being revealed in the expanse of things, including angels, imagination, art and poetry, etc. Much of what Fritz writes is interesting, raises new perspectives on, and is an impassioned defence of, Rahner. His writing throughout must be commended for its structure, organisation, and clarity of argument. Naturally, it will also provoke debate among Rahner scholars. Baumgarten defined aesthetics as the science of sense perception and related it, at least in part, to beauty, poetry, and the imagination. A question would be whether the term “aesthetic” can be broadened as far as Fritz suggests, i.e., to an account of “the manifestation of being.” In a way it is close to Baumgarten, in another way one might conclude then that since much of theology is concerned with faith and revelation, with the manifestation of the triune God in the world and beyond, then most or all of theology is in fact aesthetics. This could well be affirmed but what then about Baumgarten’s and subsequently Kant’s concept of aesthetics in terms of sense perception, judgements about beauty, taste

and the arts?

Further, “the sublime” is centrally associated with the Romantics, mostly German, in the context of Enlightenment rationalism and its reactions. Fritz writes on Kant but does not make any mention of Edmund Burke, nor any of the Romantic thinkers, artists, musicians and writers, notably including Friedrich Schlegel, Schleiermacher, Caspar David Friedrich, or Robert Schumann. He mentions Schelling. All of these were Protestants, mostly Lutherans. Indeed, Schleiermacher’s “feeling of absolute dependence” and his “sense and taste for the infinite,” addressing the “cultured despisers” of religion primarily from the aesthetic category of feeling should hardly be left unmentioned concerning the discussion of the sublime, including the notion of a Christian sublime. Fritz overlooks relevant Protestant theologians like Barth or Tillich, and the fact that the whole field of theological aesthetics/theology and the arts over the last twenty years has seen an unprecedented growth, notably due to Lutheran and Anglican as much as Catholic theologians.

Certainly, the Romantic thinkers and artists and contemporary Protestant theologians working on faith and the arts are not Fritz’s central focus, but one would have expected at least some brief remarks. His repeated stress on the “Catholic sublime” with a capital “C” and hardly any reference to Protestant theologians, comes across a little too often as if it were only Catholicism which is open to the senses, the sublime, the aesthetic, i.e., the manifestation of the Holy in all things. In fact, it struck me that much of the time instead of the “Catholic sublime,” the “Christian sublime” would have been just as fitting. Yet, the fact that Fritz has given new importance to the “sublime” is attractive and must be welcomed.

The author’s tendency to dismiss other scholars as not having properly understood or misinterpreted Rahner comes across as somewhat too self-assured and too frequent. At the end of the day, Fritz, like any other, uses selected writings of Rahner to support his basic argument. That is legitimate and normal; Lonergan might call this authentic objectivity. Rahner probably would have no problem with his theology being interpreted as an aesthetics and would find it illuminating, one imagines. However, I doubt whether the ever humble Rahner would be happy with broad sweeps at his other interpreters, who also worked to the best of their knowledge and judgment offering their interpretations of his thought.

For those, moreover, who want to go back and know more about what Rahner wrote concerning art and music, it will be best to consult Rahner’s own writings. Fritz’s analysis of Rahner’s writings on poetry and use of theological language on the other hand are well-considered. This is a well-written, interesting, and imaginative book and will be valued in stimulating new interest in Rahner’s theology and its reception.

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III.

On the occasion of the publication of *Karl Rahner’s Theological Aesthetics*, Leo O’Donovan shared with colleagues at a meeting of the Karl Rahner Society an enthusiastic review of Fritz’s book. I appreciate the opportunity to second O’Donovan’s endorsement. Fritz’s “prodigious” Rahner’s work as a whole. Fritz characterizes Rahner’s contribution as the articulation of a “radical, Catholic openness to God’s self-manifestation” in history that grounds a distinctive way of life—an openness and ethos Fritz characterizes as the “Catholic sublime.” Fritz’s sustained comparison of Heidegger and Rahner, and the sometimes surprising choice of texts and themes compared, are brilliantly illuminating and apropos.

O'Donovan had singled out the ways Fritz's reading corrects misconceptions which arise if the significance of Rahner's contribution is measured primarily as a bridge between neo-scholasticism and modern (or postmodern) thought, or by his ability to render traditional faith language understandable to "modern man" and to bring into focus the "salvific essentials." O'Donovan captured Fritz's thesis succinctly: "Rather than these partial views, Fritz proposes, Rahner's contribution was to disclose through all the realities of the world how we might live in the grace of God won by the cross of Christ and communicated by the Spirit unrestrictedly through history. His vision was a practice that he himself performed." While O'Donovan looks forward to Fritz's next book, I anticipate that others, like myself, will find themselves also returning more than once to engage this one—high tribute to Fritz's accomplishment.

Since one goal of a review symposium is to move forward the discussion of the book, my comments bear on an issue that invites such further engagement. The strength of Fritz's account is its bold and sustained focus on the counter-subjective character of Rahner's and Heidegger's thinking. This focus on the counter-subjective serves as a corrective to misguided readings of both thinkers and as a vehicle to make Fritz's case, with Rahner as exemplar, for a reorientation of Catholic theology that would give greater emphasis to God's selfmanifestation (Fritz uses the word aesthetic to indicate this aspect) with something of an apocalyptic accent on Christian distinctiveness. Although this lens provides a clarifying and accurate depiction of the thrust of Rahner's thought, this highly focused optic is also partial and freighted with potential of its own to mislead and to undercut Rahner's own practice. Hence to initiate discussion with Fritz, I propose a first reaction about matters that his revealing, but very focused, optic potentially obscures.

Fritz's focus on the issue of subjectivity puts two issues in the foreground, one interpretive, one corrective. On the interpretive side, his analysis foregrounds being's manifestation in Heidegger and God's manifestation in Rahner. On the corrective side Fritz foregrounds, as "conventional," readings of Rahner open to criticism for elaborating a theology that succumbs to the worst proclivities of the modern philosophical turn to the subject—a turn that is disastrous insofar as it makes human subjectivity normative and closes off any possibility for God's self-manifestation. While highlighting the one provides a compelling corrective to the other, this optic tends to distort other dimensions of Heidegger's and Rahner's thinking, and to skew the reception and appropriation of Rahner's theological vision.

Consider, for example, Fritz's remark early in the book that "Rahner increasingly emphasized the incomprehensibility of God . . . largely as a response to his supporters" (9). Is that Rahner's motivation? Fritz's subsequent analysis provides no evidence for that claim, but it does offer a compelling exploration of the importance of God's incomprehensibility already in Rahner's earliest work. Another more likely possibility suggests itself. I am curious how Fritz would respond, since I think this other interpretation is more consistent with his own analysis. He admits in a section discussing Kant that "it may be true that Rahner's only explicit, sustained, published exegesis of Heidegger limps a little" (47). And Fritz then demonstrates that "Rahner's employment and deployment of Heideggerian ideas in *Geist in Welt* and his other works evidences a deep, substantial, and sophisticated engagement with Heidegger that amounts to a rejection of Kantian and other subjectivisms" (48).

I argued many years ago, however, that Rahner's early essay on Heidegger did not fully grasp Heidegger's efforts to give thought to a question that he believed was more fundamental than metaphysics can ask. Fritz's analysis does not appear to provide grounds for changing that assessment of Rahner's initial response. But since Fritz provides compelling and illuminating evidence of Rahner's

continued engagement with Heidegger's work, couldn't such engagement be a significant factor in Rahner's later increasing emphasis on God's incomprehensibility? Cannot one grant "the disastrous consequences of Heidegger's apriorism of finitude" (258) and still suspect that Heidegger's insistence that "being proves too sublime a thought for metaphysics" (264) provides a substantial motivation and model for Rahner when he eventually came to write about poet, priest, the symbol, and God's mystery.

Similar optics are operative in the interpretation of Heidegger. I do not disagree with Fritz's conclusion that Heidegger's apriorism of finitude in the end is very much at odds with Christianity as Rahner understands it. Fritz is correct that the "Catholic sublime allows for greater scope of thinking and greater manifestation of being, than the Heideggerian sublime" (202). But looking at Heidegger's thought through such a highly focused lens again obscures crucial aspects and the range of possible interpretations and appropriations. Fritz's focus on Heidegger's motivation to defeat the omniscient modern subject, for example, simply precludes readings of Heidegger that would insist his primary motivation and issue is always to bring something so elusive to thought that no question, including the question of being can capture.

Finally, Fritz's strong focus on this problem of subjectivity presumes a sharply critical reading of Rahner's reception among "Rahnerians," but provides little support for it. While many of the misunderstandings Fritz targets are certainly instantiated in one or another interpreter of Rahner, it is contentious, although sadly not unusual among some, to describe these as the "conventional" reading of Rahner, which Fritz says or implies a number of times. Rahner's own practice and performance belie reading his work exclusively, or perhaps even primarily, as a counter-subjective and apocalyptic theology. His vision is so much more capacious than that. So, I agree with Gesa Thiessen's comment that "the ever humble Rahner" deserves a broader interpretive lens and critical appropriation.

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IV.

Karl Rahner's Theological Aesthetics (KRTA) by Peter Joseph Fritz inserts us into the intellectual context that gave rise to Rahner's *Spirit in the World*. That book from 1939 is primarily about "spirit," about the human capacity to reflect metaphysically on the act of knowledge. In that reflection, Rahner teaches, we can discern the God who created us with a metaphysical and reflective capacity. But Rahner's book is not just about spirit from a metaphysical viewpoint. It is about spirit in the "world," the tangible world that testifies to the reality of intangible spirit. Fritz's book deserves praise for focusing our attention on that world. He has invited us to see the aesthetic moment, what he calls the "Catholic Sublime," in which spirit comes to expression. Rahner's *Spirit in the World* had engaged both St. Thomas's medieval metaphysics and the modern tradition in German philosophy. Fritz does the same in *KRTA*, accenting the "aesthetic" or sensible world in which the "metaphysical" capacity discovers spirit.

Rightly, we laud Rahner's Catholic approach. He has shown us how Thomistic metaphysics can illuminate the problems of modern philosophy, particularly the problems of transcendence and human finitude. Fritz's book grapples with the Rahnerian synthesis of St. Thomas and German Idealism, but this is not always an easy task.

Kant, for example, has shown how Anselm's ontological argument for the existence of God was not persuasive. He argued that a truly ontological proof for God must be based on pure, a priori concepts, without any assistance from experience. But for Anselm, the *ens realissimum*, the most real thing, must be a thing with attributes—in this case, God's goodness, knowledge, mercy, etc. For Kant,

this was decisive. Being has no attributes, he realized, and to the degree that one argues by means of attributes, an ontological proof is not ontological (Kant 1965, 505, A598–600/B626–628). For Kant, Anselm’s proof falls flat on its face. A mere concept of the highest being does not entail that the highest being actually exists.

Kant (who famously said that he had to deny knowledge in order to make way for faith) criticized the ontological argument for treating the divine as if God could be compared to any other item of cognition (Gadamer 1999, 6). He understood that knowledge of God was not like the knowledge of other things. Apart from the way of knowing that we call faith, Kant argues that human beings cannot know God. God cannot be a matter for pure rationalism or disinterested speculation. Hence we can certainly see the relevance of Kant to a theologian such as Rahner, even though Fritz too broadly identifies Kantian philosophy with subjectivism.

KRTA retraces the Kantian question through Heidegger to Rahner. Fritz shows how the Kantian revolution—the clear-eyed acknowledgement of the limits of human knowledge—bore fruit in Rahner’s concept of transcendence. Human beings are finite creatures, said Rahner, who are aware of their limitations and yet are able to transcend them. They do so by means of an anticipatory grasp of reality. Human beings, aware of their finitude, are nevertheless capable of imagining what lies beyond it, including the infinite God. Fritz’s book leads the reader into the philosophical thickets of finitude and transcendence, in which one can lose sight of God altogether. He then brings us out again into the sunlight of the Catholic tradition, where the role of the imagination in human knowing has an honored place.

Fritz seizes upon imagination as an interpretive key to unlock St. Thomas’s language about the role of “phantasms” in cognition. Human beings are able to convert sense impressions into mental concepts (or phantasms) by using their imagination. In Rahner’s understanding of Aquinas, human knowledge is not the result of unmediated access to intelligible ideas. Instead, imagination mediates them. Fritz says that every idea

results from a process of receiving sense impressions, configuring them imaginatively, acting upon these reconfigured impressions [26] with the intellect, and coming to a concrete recognition of the thing sensed. (Fritz 2014, 25–26)

By focusing on what the imagination does with sense impressions, Fritz establishes Rahner as the founder of a theological aesthetics.

The greatest challenge to Rahnerian aesthetics, however, is the apparent absence of aesthetics in Rahner. Fritz acknowledges this and makes a provocative claim. “*Geist in Welt*,” he says “lays the philosophical groundwork for theological aesthetics, even if Rahner does not say this” explicitly (Fritz 2014, 23). So if Rahner does not say this explicitly, what is the basis for Fritz’s claim? Fritz offers several arguments.

- Aesthetics (says Fritz) “means an account of the manifestation of being” (Fritz 2014, 11). That is Rahner’s theme. Being, a metaphysical concept, becomes manifest in the tangible world.
- Aesthetics, next, is shorthand for the Rahnerian insight that “being’s manifestation is broader than the human capacity [15] to receive and to contain it” (Fritz 2014, 14–15). Although Rahner does not speak of aesthetics per se, his work testifies to the richness of the aesthetic moment, when the imagination converts sense impressions into ideas that the intellect can grasp.
- Aesthetics, finally, is apropos because Rahner shows “how metaphysical knowledge might be accessed through sense experience” (Fritz 2014,34). *Spirit in the World* shows how the act of knowing sensible things leads to an insight into being itself.

With these arguments, Fritz does not demonstrate the explicit existence of a Rahnerian aesthetic theory, but he paraphrases Rahner faithfully. The reception of sense impressions, the conversion of them to mental images, and our reflection on them, all manifest spirit in the world. Fritz has translated the medieval language, grasped the Thomistic insight, and shown its relevance for Rahner's theological aesthetics.

Fritz gives us a detailed analysis of Rahner's relationship to Martin Heidegger, under whom Rahner studied in Freiburg im Breisgau from 1934–1936. This is one of the strong points made in *KRTA*. Fritz portrays Rahner as "resistant to Heidegger." Rahner (he says) "breaks ranks" with him:

- First of all, because of Heidegger's "proscrip- [18] tion of the infinite" (Fritz 2014, 17–18);
- Secondly, because "both modern subjectivism and Heidegger purvey false sublimities" (Fritz 2014, 21); and
- Lastly, because "Heidegger directs his thinking of time and of the abyss implicitly . . . against the Christian God" (Fritz 2014, 56).

In short, Heidegger and Rahner parted ways (Fritz says) because Heidegger seemingly excluded the infinite and the possibility of God. This exclusion separated him from God and deformed his philosophy. For Rahner (but not for Heidegger), writes Fritz, "God is infinite spirit," and Rahner "cannot accept a philosophy that bars the infinite's entry."

Rahner may have "broken ranks" with Heidegger over theology, as Fritz says, and perhaps Heidegger's link to National Socialism required such a break. But almost every page of *Karl Rahner's Theological Aesthetics* attests to Heidegger's positive influence on Rahner. Heidegger was a philosopher, not a theologian, and his philosophy had a profound effect on Rahner. From Heidegger (Fritz says), Rahner learned how to read Thomas aesthetically (Fritz 2104, 43). This happened as Rahner discovered Heidegger's lectures on Kant, published in 1929, shortly before Rahner began to take Heidegger's courses.

It was Kant (according to Heidegger), who saw that the knower does not "grasp" being, but "receives and approaches" it (Heidegger 1990, 44). Kant anticipated the basic Heideggerian doctrine that being itself is not like the being of this or that thing. Kant argued that we are not just passively receiving, but actively forming our impressions. When we share our impression of the essence of a thing with other people, we discover that their understanding may differ from ours. In part from Kant, Heidegger learned the lesson that this is not a deficit, but a type of productivity.

To be sure, we forget what we once thought as we move to a deeper understanding. This forgetfulness does not signify a compromising subjectivism, however, but is the historical nature of our being. This is what Heidegger meant when he emphasized human finitude. He said that the essence of metaphysics is "brought forth and preserved through the more original working-out and increased preservation of the problem of finitude" (Heidegger 1990, 166–167, §45). The finitude of *Dasein* lies in forgetfulness. What Heidegger apparently means is that human beings, far less than the masters of nature that they might imagine themselves to be, are in fact finite. We are doomed to live with only a partial understanding of the world. Scientists may mourn this limitation and believe that they can eventually overcome it, but their efforts are in vain. From the philosophical standpoint, we are creatures of our age, and our forgetfulness—in brief, what we cannot see—defines us and our finitude, for those who come after us.

As Rahner assimilated the insights of Kant (by means of Heidegger), Rahner gained an insight. He began to prioritize the imagination, as Fritz shows, with its "fundamental openness to the other from the start" (Fritz 2014, 47). To speak of Rahner "breaking ranks" with Heidegger can be misleading. It can

suggest that Rahner was Heidegger's disciple only until he turned against him. But Fritz's own analyses show the enormity of Rahner's lifelong debt to Heidegger.

KRTA is a profound exercise in philosophical idealism—idealism in the ancient sense of the word, the sense that Heidegger tried to reawaken (Heidegger 1959, 50). Fritz's book is committed to the principles of idealism, the belief that reality is intelligible, that the mind can grasp it, and that by doing so fulfills itself. We Christians would say that such philosophical idealism is possible because the world is God's creation, within which God has given us an intellectual faculty. In this light, Fritz's identification of idealism with the excesses of Berkeley, Kant, or Hegel (Fritz 2014, 45, 58, and 57) seems short-sighted. His book displays a wider field of view, in which occasional critiques of idealism highlight idealism's excesses, rather than the more profound meaning of idealism apparent throughout Fritz's text. It contributes to philosophical idealism, as well as to theology, by examining the relation between being and the empirical world. Being opens itself to the metaphysical imagination. It does so "in the world," the world of tangible impressions and aesthetic sensibility. By showing this, *KRTA* illuminates the metaphysics of Rahner and deepens our appreciation of him.

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Author's Response

Thank you to Richard Penaskovic, outgoing editor of the Rahner Papers, for convening this symposium, and to Judith Wolfe, Gesa Elsbeth Thiessen, Robert Masson, and Mark Fischer for their generous, probing, and challenging commentaries on my book, *Karl Rahner's Theological Aesthetics* (hereafter *KRTA*).

Currently, I am finalizing my second book, a companion to *KRTA*. This symposium gave me the occasion to revisit my editorial choices made five years ago. Upon review, I overbilled *KRTA* as a "comprehensive statement on Rahner's theological aesthetics" (Fritz 2014b, 13), and perhaps, too tightly circumscribed it, limiting it only to the issue of subjectivity in Rahner and Heidegger. I welcome this occasion for intellectual conversion prompted by distinguished scholars uniquely situated to comment on *KRTA*'s topics. Thus I share in the Church's mission of being *semper reformanda*.

Rahner

Leo O'Donovan's and Richard Lennan's laudatory published reviews of the book, along with Fischer's, Thiessen's, and Masson's critical yet positive assessments, tell me I am on the right track (O'Donovan 2015a, 2015 b; Lennan 2015). That experts in Rahner have affirmed my articulation of Rahner's theology dealing with aesthetics has encouraged me to continue writing on him.

In unison with O'Donovan, Masson highlights a main contribution of *KRTA*: showing how Rahner articulates and lives a capacious and distinctive Christian way of life. He rightly prompts me to ensure that my thematic focus on "countersubjectivism" and "apocalyptic" does not foreclose Rahner's generative openness. Surely, at times, my *articulation* of Rahner's theological vision stands at odds with the vision itself. Most daunting about Christian life is the tension it implies between universal openness and concrete personal love. Often, I collapse either to one side or the other. Fischer's affirmation that I lead readers of *KRTA* into "the sunlight of the Catholic tradition," though, encourages me that overall, I faithfully sustain the proper tension.

KRTA exhibits less fidelity in regard to my occasional failure to capture Rahner's humility. Thiessen rightfully admonishes me for directing many broadsides toward prior Rahner interpreters. Masson points out my dismissiveness toward uncited scholars, thus joining Richard Viladesau in raising the question of who specifically are my opponents? (Viladesau 2016, 127).

Thiessen, Masson, and Viladesau are right to criticize. My polemics against earlier Rahnerians are sometimes unsubstantiated, often wrong, and smack of ingratitude. Excuses will not do; I regret these passages in *KRTA* (Fritz 2014b, 9, 27–28, 205, 219, 221, 265). A brief explanation will have to suffice. My sometimes combative tone resulted in part from my uncritically imbibing dismissals of (or negative innuendo about) "Rahner's disciples" by theologians from Hans Urs von Balthasar through Patrick Burke (Balthasar 1994, 148; Burke 2002, ix, 276, 298), and Catholic media such as EWTN, where Rahner and unnamed "followers" are blamed for all the "ills" found in the postconciliar church. Not wanting to blame Rahner himself for the waning deference paid to him in contemporary Catholicism, I facilely blamed anonymous "commentators." Surely this detracts from the book. I shall, in future work, emulate Rahner's "humble confidence" (James Bacik's brilliant formulation) and the gorgeously measured irenicism of Brandon Peterson, who made me aware that I stand on the shoulders of giants (Bacik 2014, ix–x; Peterson 2017, xiv–xv).

Heidegger

KRTA begins to describe a distinctively Rahnerian theological aesthetic. This task is similar to Rahner's in *Geist in Welt*: to identify in Thomas Aquinas a distinctively human way of knowing, and an attendant metaphysics. *KRTA* foregrounds Rahner's engagement with Heidegger because this is the best possible entrée into Rahner's distinctive theological aesthetics. Heidegger, with his focus on being's disclosure to beings that actively receive this disclosure, sends forth an ontophanic pulse that impels Rahner's thinking about sensibility, symbol, sacrament, spirituality and other aspects of Christian life apropos of aesthetics. Heidegger opens *KRTA*'s possibility.

Wolfe, Fischer, and Masson all focus on *KRTA*'s negative estimation of Heidegger, demanding greater fairness. Assuredly, Heidegger deserves a treatment that is both variegated and sympathetic. I do believe I achieve this. I delve deeply into Heidegger's corpus, from major works like *Being and Time*, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, *Contributions to Philosophy*, *On the Way to Language*, and *Gelassenheit*; to lesserknown ones like the lecture course *Hölderlins Hymnen*, "Germanien," und "Der Rhein." Of course, Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics (as Wolfe points out) proves decisive for *KRTA*. My attentiveness

and close documentation invites readers to give Heidegger the respect he deserves. Fischer admits, even with his criticisms, that “almost every page of *KRTA* attests to Heidegger’s positive influence on Rahner,” and that my “own analyses show the enormity of Rahner’s lifelong debt to Heidegger.”

I did not intend to portray Heidegger as a dogmatist of finitude (Wolfe’s charge), but surely intention and performance often differ. Were I to revise, I would attempt to make crystal clear that Heidegger takes finitude as axiomatic, against a philosophical tradition he deems dogmatically committed to infinitude. Heidegger sees the infinite’s entrance into philosophy as illegitimate infiltration. Heidegger makes a philosophical decision—this is the most one can do—to stipulate being’s finitude.

But I must defend my negative judgment of Heidegger, which, again, starts from Rahner’s critical descriptor for his teacher’s thought, as “apriorism of finitude.” Heidegger’s insistence upon being’s constitutive finitude from “What Is Metaphysics?” (1929) forward, is *philosophically* (not just theologically) disputable. Heidegger’s view of being, which once privileged being’s disclosure (up to the *Kantbook*, 1929), angles toward being’s nondisclosiveness, being’s withdrawal that leaves beings in the lurch. *This* is what Heidegger ultimately means by “finitude,” and this is a philosophical problem. How, for example, can one think being, if being never gives itself to be thought?

Furthermore and crucially, I stand by my contention that, from a Rahnerian point of view, Heidegger’s apriorism of finitude—however brilliantly he renders it—should be judged negatively because of the form of life in which it issues, viz., a fatalism that opens equanimously toward good *and* evil (Fritz 2014b, 194–204). Nondisclosive being is callous toward beings; it would only make sense for *human* beings to be callous, merciless, permissive toward evil, too. (This is the upshot of my argument regarding Heidegger; see Fritz 2014b, 183; cf. Bugyis 2015, 333; Inman 2015, 141.) Philosophically, especially ethically, this is unacceptable. Add to this, then, Heidegger’s explicit and sometimes militant anti-Christianity (from the 1920s up to, arguably, his death), and theologians ought not to take his provocations lying down. We must testify to God, the mystery who mercifully and lovingly comes near to us.

Aesthetics

Reviewers have found *KRTA*’s main premise disturbing, viz., that one may detect in and elicit from Rahner’s work a theological aesthetic. Oleg Bychkov and Richard Viladesau have been overtly dismissive of this. (Even with my strident disagreements with Bychkov’s reading of my book, I commend his thorough treatment of it, especially its lexical corrections, e.g., Bonaventure’s word *perscrutatio*, which I misquoted as *persuocratio*.) All four reviewers in this symposium voice comparable concerns. Thiessen will occupy most of my attention. Theological aesthetics is her primary field, and she wrote “Karl Rahner: Toward a Theological Aesthetics” (Thiessen 2005). I would have done well to adopt the tact she expresses with the term “toward,” in the title of her chapter. *KRTA* works toward a Rahnerian theological aesthetics by identifying ingredients in Rahner’s work for it. Interested parties like Bychkov, Viladesau, and Thiessen protest that not all essential ingredients appear, including art.

Theological aesthetics should bear some relation to art, but art need not occupy center stage. *KRTA* sublimates and subsumes the question of art (in)to questions of subjectivity and ontology (being’s manifestation). This hardly disqualifies the description “theological aesthetics.” I could have engaged more obviously “aesthetic” Rahnerian texts, like “Poetry and the Christian” (1960) (but for an example of how I have done this more recently, see Fritz 2017, 196–203; cf. Rahner 1968, 193–95, 196–204). Thiessen and Brent Little have covered this ground (Thiessen 2005; Little 2011). Instead, I worked

toward a Rahnerian aesthetics that focuses distinctively on the whole of human life—indeed all of creation—as “art”: God’s creative activity and creation’s imperfect manifestation of it (cf. the frequent mention of the doctrine of creation in Fritz 2014b, 9, 15, 27, 31–32, 113, 133–34, 156, 212, 214, 219, 224–25, 233–37).

Thus my book enters a long stream of modern aesthetic reflection stretching from Giorgio Vasari, who exposes the whole lives of artists as art (analogous to divine creation and Incarnation), to Andy Warhol, who questioned this analogy while connecting artistic creation to everyday life. I deemed, perhaps incorrectly, an *implicit* deployment of aesthetic resonances to be a more streamlined and readable authorial strategy, but I could have framed the discussion better. As an artist myself, I do not want to displace art—nor do I accept arriving at it too early or too easily.

Thiessen asks why I did not treat prior aestheticians like Alexander Baumgarten and the Romantics. She could have included French postmoderns. She correctly affirms that I seem to know them. I treated some (modern thinkers such as Kant, Burke, Hölderlin and postmodern ones, e.g., Jean-François Lyotard, Jean-Luc Marion, Jean-Luc Nancy) in my dissertation. I eliminated these elements in *KRTA* because it would have been too taxing to readers if I gave an in-depth analysis of eight or more complex thinkers. Thiessen’s intimation that Schleiermacher lurks behind *KRTA* is perceptive. I see significant overlap, for example, between Rahner’s catholicity and Schleiermacher’s aesthetic holism in *On Religion* (1799). I left him out to avoid undue controversy. Thiessen also names Schelling who, from the *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) forward, presents an aesthetic revision of Kant’s transcendental idealism guided by the productive-intuitive power of imagination. Schelling and Rahner bear deep affinities, as I argued in an article published simultaneously with *KRTA* (Fritz 2014a), and Schelling features prominently in my second book (as promised in Fritz 2014b, 61n107).

The question of the “Protestant sublime” arose during the defense of my dissertation. Thiessen raises it anew. With the phrase “Catholic sublime,” I do not mean to be exclusionary, triumphalistic, or antiecumenical. Paul Tillich thinks the Protestant sublime, foregrounding the feeling of estrangement by sin as expressed in art like Picasso’s *Guernica* (Tillich 1959, 68–75). But his aesthetics and his sublime are not *Rahner’s* aesthetics and sublime. While Tillich stresses human brokenness and alienation (sublime experiences of elevation-through-failure), Rahner emphasizes human potential for actively receiving God’s self-communication (sublime experiences of supersensible vocation through God’s [super]sensible self-communication). Perhaps both perspectives are needed, but they transcend the parameters of *KRTA*. My pursuit of a distinctively Rahnerian theological aesthetics obviated the kind of ecumenical juxtaposition Thiessen recommended—however necessary dialogue is for theological aesthetics generally.

KRTA’s efforts toward a Rahnerian theological aesthetics center on the theme of imagination. Wolfe justly requests a more thorough analysis, asking: How does the imagination enable an anticipation of being? Clearly she, like many Thomists, is suspicious of this “transcendental-Thomist” idea. I must in the future answer her suspicion at greater length than *KRTA* permitted. I have commenced reassessing Rahner on the imagination with further study of Joseph Maréchal, Kant, Schelling, Heidegger, Thomist critics, and recent phenomenologies of anticipation as found in Jean-Yves Lacoste.

“Aesthetics” and “sublime” remain underdefined in *KRTA* (Fritz 2014b, 11–16). But no less a thinker than Immanuel Kant might support this. Late in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant distinguishes between mathematics and philosophy. The former begins with clear, complete definitions. The latter cannot imitate the former. “In philosophy,” Kant teaches, “an incomplete exposition precedes the

complete one,” at which it only gradually arrives. He continues, “It follows that in philosophy the definition, as distinctness made precise, must conclude rather than begin the work” (Kant 1998, 639 [A730–31/B758–59]). *KRTA* is a philosophical-theological work, not a mathematical one. It reaches toward a better definition that comes at the end only, risking incompleteness along the way.

Conclusion: The KRTA Trilogy

The final paragraph of O’Donovan’s *Theological Studies* review acknowledges that the “Karl Rahner’s theological aesthetics” project has only begun with volume one. He anticipates volume two’s contents, noting my current research into Rahner’s theologies of freedom, sacramentality, and the church as embodying God’s grace. The second book, provisionally titled, *Freedom Made Manifest*, will do this (examining sin and concupiscence, also). O’Donovan adds, looking ahead to what I envision as volume three, that I “will demonstrate how Rahner’s Catholic ethos incorporates his basic theses that truth is fully attained only when it is transformed into love, and that the love of God and love of the neighbor are inseparably united” (O’Donovan 2015, 190). *Love’s Terrible Radiance* will assume this task. The trilogy will show a distinctively Rahnerian theological aesthetics. Rather than contemplating transcendentals of beauty, goodness, and truth, a Rahnerian theological aesthetic traverses finite experiences of sublimity, freedom, and worlding (Heidegger again). Put phenomenologically, Rahner’s theological aesthetics effects a reduction from the infinite to the finite, hoping that, as with Christ’s incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and bestowal of the Spirit, the reduction will metamorphose finitude (cf. Falque 2012, 6).

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