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Reply: Beyond Optimism and Pessimism, Praise and Blame

"Apocalypse Now and Not Yet" is a nicely written essay even if any direct connections with my paper on geography and humanism are hard to fathom. "The Search for Humanism" addresses the paper, chapter and verse, but seems to have missed its spirit entirely. "Apocalypse" invites speculation on the future in discourse ranging from theology to science fiction, while the "search" fixes an inquisitorial gaze on the past, outraged about the disrespect shown for Enlightenment rationality and the apparently wanton flirtations with relativism and nihilism apparent in my interpretation of Western humanism.

Chappell's lament about forgotten heroes and reminders about those myriad authors whose names were omitted in my paper are quite understandable and informative. His chief concern, however, seems to be about correct labeling of people and intellectual territories into clear-cut and mutually exclusive categories. Rarely is a scholar mentioned without a prefix. And in the allocation of praise and blame, no distinction is acknowledged between *authors* and *texts*, between ideas and their eventual use or abuse. Such concern for rubrics and boundary-definition is characterized as "Faustian" in my paper and indeed I deliberately highlighted ideas and texts which transcended such fences. Linnaeus who, according to Chappell (p. 340) was not "known for studying humanity at all," authored poetic travel accounts and encouraged the study of economics, geography, natural history and a theology of creation.¹ As for moralistic judgments, I'm reminded of Manuel's remarks concerning von Herder's work: "the notion that a thinker should be held morally responsible before some self-appointed historical Grand Judge for the subsequent fortune of his thought is a patent absurdity" (Manuel 1968, xvi). Labels and rubrics are convenient for the ordering of one's notebooks and libraries; fun, too, for the sophomoric who's who and whodunit exercises of graduate student days. But they can freeze images and ossify the potentially creative impact of inherited literature when they are accorded the kind of ontological status which Chappell apparently advocates. It is precisely with the aim of liberating the dis-

of individuals that my paper seeks to discern a story unfolding through Western intellectual history in mytho-poetic rather than literal terms.

This distinction between literal and allegorical use of terms is also essential in responding to the other commentary. Scott and Simpson-Housley draw a distinction between two ways of defining apocalypse: (1) The advent of the future as (a) the critical appropriation of the past and present and (b) the responsibility of human agents; and (2) the advent of the future as (a) the replacement of the past and present by a transcendent world and (b) effected through nonhuman, supernatural agency. They favor the first and criticize the second (which is also read as my position!) as speculative, pessimistic, ethically irresponsible, and as such, simply a misrepresentation of historical change. They defend apocalypse as a significant subject for geographic enquiry, however, defining it (after Collins 1979) as "a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an *otherworldly being* to a human recipient, disclosing a *transcendental reality* which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, *supernatural world*" (p. 343) (emphasis mine).

Aside from a parenthetical reference to contemporary attitudes toward global issues, the subject of apocalypse is scarcely broached at all in my paper. Implicitly, however, a critical stance is taken on apocalyptic discourse as defined in terms (1a and b) above, characterizing it, together with other scenarios with which postmodernists play, as expressions of Narcissus.² Apocalypse according to definition (2a and b), which points toward a discourse scarcely distinguishable from the commentator's own position, projects a vision which is even more deeply at odds with the spirit of my paper. The idea of some transcendent power (supernatural deity or nature itself) as prime mover in the ending of days—an externally-imposed event to which potentially recalcitrant humans must willy-nilly respond—is regarded as something particularly repugnant to the spirit of Western humanism. Other utopian scenarios, e.g., Marxist-Leninist, Manichean, and others which ascribe leading roles to such abstract forces as good versus evil, love versus hate, material versus spiritual processes, would also jar.

It is precisely as the *cri-du-coeur* of humanity

t humanism is defined in my paper. A recurrent theme is the notion of *humanitas* as potentially free to work out its own destiny through the full use of its talents, especially reason. *Magna Charta* for the humanities announced a study of humanity in its own terms, not as part of nature, not as object of Divine grace. Some humanists have certainly not denied the potential relevance of such movements for theology and personal spirituality, but most would cringe at the image of *humanitas* projected therein. Many of Western humanists' emancipatory claims, far from denying the creative presence of God in human affairs, are in fact heralds of new approaches to theology and religion. Phoenix in my account seeks to evoke the mystery of regeneration and renewal emerging from within; a stark contrast between externally-imposed events from "otherworldly reality."

Eschatology is a fascinating field, the waxing and waning of its appeal reflecting the oscillations of pessimism and optimism in Western societies. North Americans today reflect on the geography of science fiction, nuclear holocaust, pre- or postmillennialist prophecy, for they apparently wield influence on attitudes toward environment (Curry-Roper 1990). Eschatology's central concern is with ends. "Ends," of course, imply "beginnings," and on the question of beginnings, the Western tradition has entertained several irreconcilable theories (Leau-Ponty 1978). Myths of cosmic catastrophes, e.g., universal flood or fire, which ended the world and annihilated humans except for a single couple, abound. The end of the world was followed by the appearance of another regenerated humanity (Eliade 1963, 54-55). The Book of Genesis tells one such story, and it, as well as the Johannine *Apocalypse*, has often been read as projecting a linear progression of time from "beginnings" to the "end of days." As sharp contrasts are drawn between the pre-Christian tradition and those where temporal flow is construed as cyclical, oscillatory, perennially returning; where "ends" constitute thresholds to new beginnings. The mytho-poetic figures of Phoenix-Faust-Narcissus in my paper are intended to evoke a sense of cyclical flow even within our Western recollections.

The essential point is that eschatological and apocalyptic texts should be interpreted as allegory rather than dogma. And it is this ten-

dency in apocalyptic movements to transpose such texts from allegorical to literal terms that would evoke caution for the humanist. Eschatological theories which ascribe ultimate power to "otherworldly reality" have often been used by certain humans to enslave others, from the divine rights of kings, to *Blut und Boden*, to what's good for General Motors. The idea of humankind and nature as being essentially in a fallen state, with only an "elect" whose salvation was virtually guaranteed, recalls the perennial tension between the Ciceronian (*humanus* vs. *barbarus*) and Terentian (*nihil humani a me alienum puto*) approaches to life. History abounds with cases where theological texts have been abrogated by secular ideologies to defend the superiority of certain groups and subjugation of others with weapons or welfare, missions or management.

Speaking of ends, few scientists today would question the prospect of an "end" in time for the earth itself and its living inhabitants. Western theologians might well reconsider their inherited eschatologies where focus has rested primarily on relationships between God and humans, late-comers anyhow in the terrestrial story. How different cultures have construed the place of humanity within this wider drama—mytho-poetically, rationally, or liturgically—could indeed provide a fascinating focus for the humanist geographer. In the context of promoting mutual understanding among the earth's various civilizations—one of the central aims of my paper—this invitation to parley on such culture-bound currents of thought as are featured in the commentary seems quaintly narcissistic.

As the second millenium reaches its close, one again faces a neo-Manichean type of environmental eschatology which spreads feelings of insecurity and guilt, and in some cases despair. Insights from history, and from the vast variety of human environmental experiences, are particularly needed at this time. Christians might well remember the saga of Phoenix and Faust in their own history and rediscover a spirituality which embraces the whole of living creation (Doughty 1981; Fox 1984). And in the contemporary panic about ends of the earth, the geographer might well heed the words of James Lovelock: "It's not the Earth that's fragile; it's we who are fragile. Nature has withstood catastrophes far worse than what we've delivered. Nothing we do will destroy nature. But we can

easily destroy ourselves" (1990, 44). Contemporary prophets of doom bemoan the destruction of forests and wildlife and the eventual threat to populations and economies. But beyond pessimism and optimism, the most fragile and most endangered resource today is hope. That's what Phoenix in my paper is all about.

Notes

1. In his *Iter Dalecarlicum* (1734) Linnaeus wrote:

O Great Creator and Preserver of all things, You who
On Lapland heights let us reach so high above
Falun's mine - - - so deep below
On Lapland heights have shown me *diem sine nocte*
Falun's mine - - - *noctem sine die*
On Lapland heights to feel the unrelenting cold
Falun's mine - - - the unrelenting heat

From one high point to see all 4 seasons at a glance
Falun's mine where none of the 4 seasons ever is

Through mortal dangers on these Lapland
heights you've borne me unharmed

Falun's Bergslag - - - for health so harmful

Praised be all that You have created

From the beginning to the end

(Translation mine, from the 18c mss. in Swedish,
ed. Gullander 1980, 192)

2. Eschatological pronouncements such as Nietzsche's abandonment of all Western traditions as symptoms of decadence to be replaced by a new age and race of *Übermenschen* in a rebirth of Dionysos, Spengler's *Decline of the West*, Heidegger's "other beginning" after the Gnostic *Weltnacht* of the universal evil of technology, Foucault's early ideas

about the "end of man" to be replaced by another linguistic-cosmogenic *episteme*, are construed as expressions of a love/hate relationship to inherited Faustian forms and (at best) revealing the "twilight longings" for a new Phoenix (for a more profound critique, see Gadamer 1975, xxiv-xxvi).

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