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Theology of Creativity: Neo-Confucian and (Neo-)Christian(?)

HUANG Yong

Abstract

There is a scholarly consensus that a theology of pre-Confucius Confucianism can be distinguished, especially in the Xia and Shang dynasties, whereas it is debatable whether there is a theology in the classical Confucianism of Confucius and Mencius. For neo-Confucianism, it is agreed that there is only metaphysics but no theology. Focusing on the neo-Confucian brothers Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi, I argue that, instead of regarding the divinity in Confucianism as some *thing*, some *entity*, or some substance that acts and gives birth to everything in the universe, the Confucian God is the *activity*, the *life-giving activity* (*sheng* 生), and the *creativity* manifest in the world. Such a theology may be unfamiliar to us, but I shall propose that it has a surprising resemblance to the contemporary (neo-)Christian theology developed by Gordon Kaufman.

In recent years, I have tried to provide a theological interpretation of neo-Confucianism in the Song 宋 and Ming 明 periods, particularly through its founding brothers, CHENG Hao 程顥 (1032–1085) and

CHENG Yi 程頤 (1033–1107).¹ “Neo-Confucianism” refers to what Chinese call the learning of *li* 理, which has been variously translated as “form,” “law,” “reason,” “pattern,” “organism,” and, most commonly, “principle.” Of course, the term *li* is not an invention by the Cheng brothers. However, it is through the Chengs that *li* not only obtains, for the first time, a central place in Confucianism but is also regarded as the ultimate reality of the universe. Cheng Yi, for example, claims that “only because there actually is *li* can there actually be a thing; only because there actually is a thing can there actually be a function”,² and “all ten thousand things under heaven can be explained by *li*.”³ So for the Chengs, *li* is ontologically prior to things. It explains not only how a thing exists but also why a thing is such a particular thing instead of something else. If there is no *li*, there can be no things; things can exist because of *li*. It is in this sense that the Chengs use *li* interchangeably with many other terms that have been commonly used to refer to the ultimate reality in the Confucian tradition. For example, Cheng Hao claims that the ultimate reality, which does not have any sensible quality, “is called change (*yi* 易) with respect to its reality; is called *dao* 道 with respect to its *li*; is called divinity (*shen* 神) with respect to its function; and is called nature (*xing* 性) with respect to its being the destiny in a person.”⁴ Cheng Yi also states that “with respect to *li* it is called heaven (*tian* 天); with respect to endowment, it is called nature, and with respect to its being in a person, it is called heart/mind (*xin* 心).”⁵ In these passages the Chengs regard *li* as identical to *dao*, nature, heart/mind, divinity, change, and heaven, among others.

In terms of the relationship between *li* and ten thousand things, it is sometimes claimed that there is some similarity between the Cheng brothers’ *li* and Plato’s form. In the sense that both form and *li* are on-

¹ See the translator’s introduction by Huang Yong, “Gordon Kaufman’s Constructive Theology and Neo-Confucianism,” in *Mian Xiang Aomiao: Gouzao lun shenxue* 面向奧妙——構造論神學 [In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology] (Hong Kong: Logos & Pneuma, 2004), xiii–lvi; Huang Yong, “Confucian Theology: Three Models,” *Religion Compass* 1, no. 4 (2007): 455–478; and Huang Yong, “Cheng Brothers’ Onto-theological Articulation of Confucian Values,” *Asian Philosophy* 17, no. 3 (2007): 187–211.

² Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi, *Er cheng ji* 二程集 [Complete Collections of the Two Chengs] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), 1160.

³ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 296.

tologically prior to things, it is true that they are similar. However, there is also a fundamental difference between the two. In Plato, while everything must partake in a form, a form does not have to exist in a thing. This is made most clear in his analogy of image or reflection. A shadow of a tree cannot exist without a tree of which it is a shadow; yet a tree can exist without any shadows. However, for the Chengs, while *li* is indeed ontologically prior to things, it does not exist outside things. To use the language familiar to contemporary Confucians, we may say that Plato's form is externally transcendent, while the Chengs' *li* is immanently transcendent.

It can be further illustrated by their view about the relationship between *li* and vital force (*qi* 氣), of which actual things are made. In the Chengs' view, *li* or *dao* cannot be outside *qi*. Commenting on a statement in the *Book of Change*—"the unceasing transition between *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽 is *dao*," Cheng Yi claims that "*dao* is not *yin* and *yang*. *Dao* is the unceasing transition between *yin* and *yang*."⁶ Here, although he says that *li* or *dao* is not the *qi* of *yin* and *yang*, he states that *li* is the unceasing transition between *yin* and *yang*. It is then clear that *li* cannot be outside these vital forces. Cheng Yi further argues that "there is no *dao* if there is no *yin* and *yang*. The *becoming so* of *qi* is *dao*. *Yin* and *yang* are *qi* and so is physical, while *dao* is metaphysical."⁷ Such an interpretation is confirmed by the Chengs' view on the relationship between a related pair of concepts: *dao* and *qi* 器 (instrument or a concrete thing). Regarding the distinction between the two, Cheng Hao quotes the *Book of Change*: "what is metaphysical or above the form (*xing er shang* 形而上) is called *dao*, while what is physical or below the form (*xing er xia* 形而下) is called concrete thing."⁸ Although it is important, for the Chengs, to make the distinction between *dao* as the metaphysical and *qi* as physical and emphasize the ontological priority of the former over the latter, they also emphasized their inseparability: "outside *dao* there are no things and outside things there is no *dao*."⁹

Then what is *li* that ontologically determines *qi* 氣 and *qi* 器 yet being temporally and spatially inseparable from them? *Li* in the Cheng brothers is primarily not some *thing*, but the *activity* of things. According to XU Heng's 許衡 *Explanation of Script and Elucidation of*

⁶ Ibid., 67.

⁷ Ibid., 162.

⁸ Ibid., 119.

⁹ Ibid., 73.

Characters (*Shuo wen jie zi* 說文解字), *li* is originally a verb, meaning to work on jade. Since jade is a gemstone with veins and clouds of varying colors, a carver has to be adept at following the veining. CHEN Rongjie 陳榮捷 (Chan Wing-tsit), noticing this original meaning, argues that the meaning of *li* had undergone a transition from the physical (*xing er xia*) meaning of “governing” in ancient classics to its metaphysical meaning of “pattern” in neo-Confucianism, a transition in its usage from verb to noun.¹⁰ If this transition does take place, it actually indicates the reification of *li* as some *thing*, as it is originally an activity, not a thing. From the Heideggerian point of view, nothing reified can be regarded as metaphysical in its true sense. Even God, being conceived as an absolute being and however different from any other beings, is still some *thing* and in this sense *xing er xia* (below the form), whose ontological or metaphysical being still needs to be explained. It is my contention that the unique contribution of the Cheng brothers is precisely their de-reification of the Confucian idea of the ultimate reality by their unique interpretation of the term *li*. In other words—the Cheng brothers’ *li* is still a verb meaning some *activity*, not a noun referring to some *thing*. For example, illustrating what he means by “nowhere between heaven and earth is there no *dao*,”¹¹ Cheng points out that with regards to father and son, their relationship is embedded in affection; with regards to king and minister, their relationship is embedded in seriousness (reverence). From these to the relationship between husband and wife, between elder and younger, between friends, there is no activity that is not *dao*. That is why we cannot be separated from *dao* even for a second.¹²

It is in this sense that in his commentary on the *Book of Change*, Cheng Yi complains that “Confucians in the past have all seen the heart/mind of the heaven and earth as something quiet. They did not realize that it is the origin of activity that is the heart/mind of heaven and earth.”¹³

Yet what exactly do the Chengs mean by activity? It refers to the life-giving activity (*sheng* 生). Cheng Hao, for example, claims that

¹⁰ Chen, Rongjie 陳榮捷, “The Evolution of the Neo-Confucian Concept of Li as Principle,” in *Zhongguo zhexue sixiang lunwen ji: Song Ming* 中國哲學思想論文集——宋明 [Essays on Chinese Philosophical Thoughts: Song and Ming Periods] (Taipei: Shuiniu, 1991), 57.

¹¹ Cheng and Cheng, *Er cheng ji*, 73.

¹² *Ibid.*, 73–74.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 819.

“the reason we say that ten thousand things form one body, is that they all have this *li*. It all comes from this fact. ‘The unceasing life-giving activity is called change.’ It is right in this life-giving activity that *li* is complete.”¹⁴ His brother Cheng Yi concurs: “*li* as the life-giving activity is natural and ceaseless.”¹⁵ The Chengs believe that the existence of ten thousand things is due to *li* precisely because the life-giving activity of ten thousand things is ontologically prior to the ten thousand things that have the life-giving activity. Without the life-giving activity, the ten thousand things will be nothing, as they would lack the act of “to be.” Of course, for the Chengs, the life-giving activity is always the life-giving activity of the ten thousand things, and the ten thousand things are always things that have the life-giving activity. As we have seen, the Chengs identified *li* with many other things that have been traditionally regarded as the ultimate reality of the world. In their view, this is also because all these terms have the same meaning of the life-giving activity. Regarding *dao* and *tian*, Cheng Hao, commenting on a statement from the *Book of Change*—“the unceasing life-giving activity is called change,” makes it clear that “this [the unceasing life-giving activity] is how *tian* can be *dao*. *Tian* is *dao* only because it is the life-giving activity.”¹⁶ With this, his brother Cheng Yi completely agrees: “*dao* is the natural life-giving activity of the ten thousand things. A thing’s coming into being in the spring and its growing in the summer are both *dao* as the life-giving activity. . . . *Dao* is the unceasing natural life-giving activity.”¹⁷ Regarding the heart/mind, both of humans and of heaven and earth, they claim that “the heart/mind is nothing but the *dao* of the life-giving activity. Because of this heart/mind, one’s body is born. The heart/mind of commiseration is the human *Dao* as the life-giving activity”;¹⁸ and “the heart/mind resembles the seed of grain. Its *li* as life-giving activity is *ren*.”¹⁹ Cheng Hao explains *xing* (human nature) also in terms of life-giving activity, particularly in his interpretation of Gaozi’s 告子 “*sheng zhi wei xing*” 生之為性 in the *Mencius*. This phrase originally means “what one is born with is human nature.” However, Cheng Hao, relating it to a statement from the *Book of Change*—“the greatest virtue of

¹⁴ Ibid., 33.

¹⁵ Ibid., 167.

¹⁶ Ibid., 29.

¹⁷ Ibid., 149.

¹⁸ Ibid., 274.

¹⁹ Ibid., 184.

heaven and earth is the life-giving activity,” explains: “the most spectacular aspect of things is their atmosphere of life-giving activity.”²⁰ Therefore, this phrase, to Cheng Hao, no longer means “what one is born with is human nature” but “one’s life-giving activity (*sheng*) is the human nature.”

My claim is that the Chengs’ doctrine of *li* can be properly regarded as a neo-Confucian theology. To make this claim, it is necessary to examine the role of another important idea of the Chengs’: *shen* 神, which can be literally translated as divinity or God. It is true that sometimes *shen*, particularly in Cheng Yi, means spirit and often goes together with ghost as in the phrase *guishen* 鬼神 (ghost and spirit). Yet, as we have seen earlier, the Chengs do also use *shen* in a different sense to refer to the same ultimate reality referred to by such terms as heaven, *li*, *dao*, and nature. For example, talking about heaven, Cheng Hao claims that “its reality (*ti* 體) is change, its *li* 理 is *dao*, and its appearance is *shen*. . . .”²¹ Cheng Yi relates *shen* to human nature and argues that “*shen* and human nature are always together.”²² In this sense, *shen* is obviously not a physical vital force but a metaphysical reality: the life-giving activity. In their view, “the reason that it is cold in the winter and it is hot in the summer is *yin* and *yang*; the reason of change and movement is *shen*. So *shen* does not have a location and change does not have a body.”²³ Here *shen* is clearly distinguished from *qi*. *Shen* does not have a location, as change does not have a body, because both refer to the life-giving activity. While things that act have locations and bodies, the act of things does not.

However, if *shen* is indeed a metaphysical and ontological idea, in what sense can we regard it as theological? The reason that the Chengs use “*shen*” to refer to the Confucian ultimate reality is to illustrate the two related aspects of the life-giving activity: the mysterious wonderfulness (*miao*) and the unpredictability or incomprehensibility. For example, Cheng Hao states that “*tian* is nothing but *li*. We call it *shen* to refer to the wonderful mystery of *li* in ten thousand things, just as we call it lord (*di*) to emphasize its being the ruler of events”,²⁴ and “the mysterious wonderfulness of transformation is what is meant by

²⁰ Ibid., 120.

²¹ Ibid., 4.

²² Ibid., 64.

²³ Ibid., 121.

²⁴ Ibid., 132.

shen.”²⁵ With this Cheng Yi agrees: “when the *qi* is complete, the *li* is straight; and when the *li* is straight, there will be impartiality; and when the impartiality is complete, it is *shen*,”²⁶ as “*shen* means the extreme mysterious wonderfulness.”²⁷ It appears mysterious and wonderful to us, because it is beyond our comprehension and anticipation. Cheng Hao, for example, claims that “the unceasing life-giving activity is called change, and the unpredictability of the change is called *shen*.”²⁸ To illustrate the life-giving activity as mysteriously wonderful, the Chengs provide us with some examples: “being swift without hurrying and reaching destiny without moving is what one has to ponder deeply in order to understand, and for this reason we use *shen* to describe it.”²⁹ It is natural for us to think that we have to hurry in order to be fast and we have to travel in order to arrive somewhere. When the life giving activity is fast without hurrying and reaches destiny without moving, it is beyond our understanding, and it becomes something mysterious and wonderful at the same time. Similarly, in the Chengs’ view, “the *heaven-li* is to have things done without action and to reach a goal without walking.”³⁰ From our human point of view, we need to do something in order to get something done, and so when we see things getting done without any efforts of doing them observed, we regard it as mysteriously wonderful.

When the Chengs use *shen* to show the two aspects of the life-giving activity omnipresent in the world, the unpredictability and the wonderfulness, the Chengs indicate that while this life-giving activity is not fully known to us, we can still be sure that it is good. Thus, for the Chengs, “the heaven takes the life-giving activity as its *dao*. Whatever continues with this *dao* of life-giving activity is good.”³¹ In another place, they directly connect this life-giving activity with the most fundamental Confucian virtue, humanity (*ren*): “the life-giving activity of the ten thousand things is the most spectacular. This origin is the beginning of the good, the so-called *ren*.”³² The reason is that, for the Chengs, *ren* itself is the life-giving activity. To explain it, they use two

²⁵ Ibid., 121.

²⁶ Ibid., 597.

²⁷ Ibid., 64.

²⁸ Ibid., 133.

²⁹ Ibid., 121.

³⁰ Ibid., 215.

³¹ Ibid., 29.

³² Ibid., 226.

different analogies related to the other two meanings of the same character *ren*. Cheng Yi states that human “heart/mind is like a seed of the grain, whose nature of life-giving activity is *ren*.”³³ Cheng Hao makes the same point by showing what is the opposite of *ren*: “doctors regard one’s inability to feel pain and itch as one’s lack of *ren*, and humans regard one’s not knowing, feeling, and recognizing moral principles as one’s lack of *ren*. This is the best analogy.”³⁴ Here the lack of *ren* means lack of life, as one becomes unfeeling.

Hence, Confucian theology for the Cheng brothers is primarily not an intellectual pursuit but a way of self-cultivation. If one understands the ultimate reality of the universe, one acts according to such an understanding. For the Chengs, “When one’s knowledge is profound, one will necessarily act accordingly. There is no one who knows and yet cannot act. To know and yet to be unable to act is not profound knowledge. . . . A person does bad things only because the person does not know.”³⁵ And the person who knows and acts best is a sage. So while the life-giving activity appears to be mysterious and incomprehensible to common people, it is not so to sages, because sages, or rather the activities of sages, are identical to the life-giving activity itself. Cheng Hao, for example, states that “sages are no different from heaven and earth”;³⁶ and Cheng Yi also claims that “the *shen* of sages is the same as Heaven. How can they be different? That is why they can hit the mean without trying hard and understand things without thinking. Their heart/mind is no different from heaven and earth.”³⁷ In other words, when one becomes a sage, one can understand the life-giving activity of the ten thousand things and can hence act naturally in light of this cosmic life-giving activity. It is for this reason that Cheng Hao argues that “sages are selfless,”³⁸ and Cheng Yi concurs that “sages are faultless.”³⁹ Of course, sages do have emotions as common people do, but “they are happy with things that one should be happy with, and are angry at things that one should be angry at. Thus, a sage’s being

³³ Ibid., 184.

³⁴ Ibid., 33.

³⁵ Ibid., 164.

³⁶ Ibid., 17.

³⁷ Ibid., 22.

³⁸ Ibid., 126.

³⁹ Ibid., 364.

happy or angry does not depend upon his own mind but upon the things he is happy with or angry at.”⁴⁰

Because of this, not only is the life-giving activity as the ultimate reality not mysterious to sages, but also the activities of sages that appear mysteriously wonderful and incomprehensible to the common people. For example, we common people cannot understand how “sages never try to memorize anything and yet can remember everything.”⁴¹ So when explaining Mencius’ statement that, “when beyond one’s understanding, sages are *shen*,” Cheng Yi points out that “this does not mean that *shen* is above sages. *Shen* is merely sages beyond our understanding. This means that sages’ behaviors are so mysteriously wonderful that we cannot anticipate.”⁴²

It is in this sense that I claim that there is a theology in neo-Confucianism. Of course, this is not a theology of creator, but a theology of creativity. It is true that this is an unconventional type of theology, very different from the traditional Judea-Christian conception of God as some *thing* that is beyond, beneath, or behind the ten thousand things in this world. However, some contemporary Christian theologians have questioned the plausibility of such a deified conception of God and the resultant two-story world picture. Here I particularly have in mind the late Harvard theologian Gordon Kaufman, whose Christian theology has surprising resemblance to the neo-Confucian one that I have been presenting here, not only in broad strokes, but also in much detail. In his book summarizing his life-long search for the meaning of God, *In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology*, Kaufman argues that his theology is not a leap of faith nor purely rational reasoning; rather it consists of six small steps of faith, and it is interesting to point out that each of these six steps has its clear counterpart in the Cheng brothers’ neo-Confucian theology.

Kaufman is critical of traditional Christian theology:

there do not seem to be any compelling reasons any longer which can be cited in its favor. . . . Indeed, it is not clear just what count as a reason for speaking of the existence and nature of some being—a cosmic agent—who exists on the other side of a metaphysical divide

⁴⁰ Ibid., 461.

⁴¹ Ibid., 64.

⁴² Ibid., 177.

as absolute as that supposed to obtain between the creator and creation.⁴³

Moreover, Kaufman believes that such a reified conception of God is politically dangerous, as it “can easily become, for example, a notion of an essentially authoritarian tyrant, one who is arbitrary and unjust in the exercise of omnipotence”;⁴⁴ it is metaphysically unintelligible, as “the world-picture generated in connection with it is fundamentally dualistic and is thus difficult to reconcile with major strands of contemporary thinking”;⁴⁵ and it is theologically naïve, as

this model presupposes that selfhood or agency can be conceived as freestanding, as metaphysically self-subsistent and self-explanatory; but everything we know today about persons suggests that they could neither come into being, nor continue to exist, independently of long and complex cosmic, biological, and historical processes.⁴⁶

Abandoning such a traditional Christian picture, Kaufman argues that we face a choice between secular positivism, denying anything transcendental or searching for an alternative understanding of God that makes sense to us. There are reasons for both, and so when he takes the latter option, he argues that this is the first small step of faith. This first small step of faith is consistent with the Cheng brothers’ neo-Confucianism, which attempts to provide a transcendental foundation for classical Confucian values; and this foundation is *li*.

With this first step of faith taken, Kaufman argues that we face a choice between seeing God as a creator and as the creativity. Again there are reasons for both, and so his choice of the latter indicates the second small step of faith. Thus, instead of conceiving God as creator, Kaufman suggests that we should conceive God as creativity, that is, “the evolutionary and historical processes which produces us,” as well as the cosmic processes in which the evolutionary and historical processes take place.⁴⁷ By such a re-conception, Kaufman aims to underscore this important fact: “change is more fundamental than structure:

⁴³ Gordon Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 273.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 270.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 271.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 271.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 330.

all structures come into being in the course of time and eventually pass away again in time.⁴⁸ Clearly, this second small step of faith is fully consistent with the Cheng brothers' emphasis on *li* not as a reified thing but as the unceasing life-giving activity.

It is interesting to see that Kaufman also focuses on the idea of change that the Cheng brothers borrow from the *Book of Change* in their discussion of *li*. Since these cosmic, evolutionary, and historical processes or the creativity exhibited in them is something that cannot be completely understood by us, Kaufman regards it as a third step of faith to see this creativity as serendipitous. To illustrate this serendipitous creativity, Kaufman describes it in history as

the tendency in history to produce more than was intended by the women and men acting in and through them, the tendency to outrun human expectations and purposes. Although the movements of history are shaped in many ways by human decisions and actions, much more is going on in them than simply the realization of deliberate human intentions.⁴⁹

As examples of such a serendipitous creativity, Kaufman mentions Columbus who intended to find an easier way to India but unexpectedly discovered America; a group of Dutch settlers who intended to found New Amsterdam which, beyond their expectation, developed into the modern New York city; King John who signed the Magna Charta to guarantee certain feudal rights but, without his anticipation, it became the foundation of constitutional liberties and modern democracy. Because God as creativity is serendipitous, Kaufman claims that God is ultimately a mystery.⁵⁰ When the Cheng brothers claim that the life-giving activity is unpredictable and incomprehensible, they are also stressing its serendipitous nature.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 252. Robert Neville, an influential Christian theologian who is seasoned with the Confucian tradition, also calls Christians to abandon the view that "God is a being apart from the world"; instead of creator, Christian God should be understood as the act of creativity. In his view, "the act depends on nothing and the world depends on the act. The world has no separate being from the act, although the ontologically creative act is not itself another thing within the world. Its nature is part of the created world, but its creativity is not. In the West, the ontological creative act is called God." Robert Cummings Neville, "A Comparison of Confucian and Christian Conceptions of Creativity," *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 6 (2007): 128.

⁴⁹ Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery*, 273.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 312.

While the creativity omnipresent in the world is serendipitous, we can either regard it as absolutely blind and accidental or as directional, and it takes Kaufman another small step, the fourth step of faith to think that there is a direction of the serendipitous creativity. For Kaufman, it is a “fact that movement in and through time . . . seems to be irreversible and in this respect unidirectional”; in other words, although there are many whirls, eddies, and detours, “there seems to be through all of this an essentially continuous movement onward toward new forms, toward unprecedented development . . . and increasingly effective adaptation may appear over successive generations, leading to the emergence of further new species.”⁵¹ From our human standpoint, “directional movements toward what we cannot but regard as ‘higher’ forms may appear; and on line (our own) this has given rise to what is actually a new order of reality: history”; and “it would be strange indeed were we not to affirm the forward movement of this trajectory as *good*, to be valued (at least by us).”⁵² This small step of faith affirms the Cheng brothers’ view that the life-giving activity itself is good.

The above four steps, strictly speaking, are steps toward, not of, faith. In other words, they only determine whether the symbol of God still have any meaning to us and, if so, what meaning it has, but the question is whether we should believe in such a God, and so there is a need for the fifth small step of faith in God, which is indicated by our decision to be devoted to God and to regulate our life in light of God. In other words, this step consists in

(a) our discernment that there are in our world some movements and momentums toward a more humane and ecologically sustainable order of life for women and men, (b) our living in the hope that these are the visible evidences of a deeply grounded trajectory along which human history is moving and may continue to move, and (c) our committing ourselves and our lives without reservation to this hope and the possibilities it opens up for us and the rest of life on earth.⁵³

This fifth small step of faith is consistent with the Cheng brothers’ emphasis that to know *li* involves acting according to *li*.

Finally, the Cheng brothers’ view about the relationship between sage and the life-giving activity is similar to the last small step of

⁵¹ Ibid., 282.

⁵² Ibid., 282–283.

⁵³ Ibid., 373.

Christian faith that Kaufman discusses. In Kaufman's view, since the symbol "God" refers to the

cosmic serendipitous creativity which manifests itself in the evolutionary-historical trajectory that has brought humanity into being . . . our *concepts* of humanity and of God are logically linked to each other[; and] to see our conceptions of God and the human as significantly interconnected in this way is to take up a proto-Christian stance. For central to Christian faith has been the claim that at one particular point in human history (in connection with the man Jesus) we are given a paradigm for understanding what God is and what the human is.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Ibid., 375–376.