This is a profound and important book. A large part of its aim is to puncture the 'charm of disenchantment' which oozes from reductive scientific accounts of the human condition, and restore our intuitions of human uniqueness, freedom, the sacred and the transcendental. It explores many features of this disenchantment, such as our habits of overconsumption and pleasure-seeking, and the assault on subjectivity exemplified in fashion, pornography, faceless architecture, the desecration of the earth, and even fast food. Taking the human face as the paradigm of meaning, the author leads us on a tour of the destructive and de-personalising temptations that surround us, and blot out the Face of God from our awareness.

It is an ambitious enterprise. The prose is rich and suggestive, displaying in many short phrases a range of perceptive insights that it might have taken a less deft writer many paragraphs to articulate. For that reason, the text does not lend itself to easy paraphrase; in places, the work is more like a painting of a remembered vision than a set of propositions with supporting arguments. As the title suggests, the vision is essentially a religious one, but unlike many religious apologists, Scruton does not regard theism as an hypothesis confirmed by empirical data. Instead, he maintains that God is a transcendental being, who cannot in principle feature in any scientific explanations – not even in explanations of our belief in the transcendental. God answers to the 'why?' of reason and meaning, not of causal explanation; he is the *logos* 'which relates object to subject as a smile relates you to me' (p. 9). Yet the author recognises that this raises deep puzzles about how God intervenes in the world, and of how we can love him or know that he loves us. He endorses Durkheim's claim that religions...
endure because they offer us membership, and hence sees the force of the obvious question: 'How can we reconcile the community-forming nature of religious beliefs with their claims to truth?' (p. 18). For it is clear that different communities believe very different things.

We may doubt that Scruton entirely succeeds in defusing this problem. But in the chapters that follow, he prepares us for the dénouement by introducing difficult, yet suggestive ideas about how subjects, and the attributes possessed only by persons, can be understood in ways that neither deny what is scientifically known, nor are reducible to the deliverances of science. He maintains that God is a pure subject, 'who reveals himself as persons do, through a dialogue involving three critical words, “I”, “you” and “why?”' (p. 23). We come to some understanding of this by reflecting on what human subjects are: persons who act under the guidance of concepts knowable only to persons (as when we act for the sake of another, which non-human animals cannot do) and according to moral norms. And in passing, Scruton incisively debunks some of the confused but fashionable outpourings of 'neuro-philosophy'.

How we know that these things are true of us is discussed in Chapter 4 ('The Face of the Person'). For the human face is where meaning resides. It is the subject, revealing itself in the world of objects. Animals do not have faces as we do; they do not smile, laugh, or experience sexual desire or shame. Human modesty and shame arise from the fact that the 'I' is on display in the body. But we live in a culture where the 'I' is 'defaced': *eros* is re-designed as a commodity, and desire is being replaced by hunger, which turns sexual attentions into something insulting. However, while we should appreciate the truth in this, the author has a rather polarised view of human sexual phenomena: *either* they conform to Christianity or (at least) Wagnerian romanticism, *or* they are something debased - even 'a crime against humanity' (p. 111) - with little in between. But at least the erotic is rescued by sacramental marriage, whose purpose is to incorporate *eros* into the world of *agape*. 
In exploring 'The Face of the Earth' (Chapter 5) Scruton argues that it is only through a concept of the sacred that we can make sense of concern for environmental protection; that sacred places are steeped in the sacrifices of those who fought for them, and are thus gifts to succeeding generations. The biblical idea of the Promised Land is central here, for the true settlement is the one in which God dwells among us and is worshipped in a sacred Temple 'in which the architecture and rituals convey a clear conception of his nature and presence' (p. 115). Such things as ugly architecture and de-personalised former Soviet towns stand in opposition to this, since they mock our yearning for dwelling and home.

The route from these explorations to the Face of God is deep, difficult and in a way tentative. God's existence is neither to be inferred from 'design', nor metaphysically proven. Scruton well understands and partly accepts the deliverances of the Enlightenment (especially the insights of Kant) and does not dismiss the difficulties they pose for religious belief. Yet he tries to put them in their place. They can say nothing decisively either for or against the faith that is founded in the experience of the sacred and sustained by the 'moment of communion' and the 'moment of gift'. Such religious experience cannot lead us to infer a divine cause of it, but it is legitimate to interpret it in a religious way, especially if we understand God as the reason for everything that exists, and if we 'receive the world as a gift, by relating it to the transcendental subjectivity, the primordial “I”, in which each thing occurs as a free thought...this is the message of religion in all its forms' (p. 169).

How, though, is God to explain anything, if not – in the end – causally? This and other questions will lead some readers to an interesting question: does the author really believe in God? That is, does he believe that God exists, and is the Creator of Heaven and Earth, and of all things, seen and unseen? The answer seems to be yes, but one notices an air of 'as-if-ness' at certain junctures. He is aware that how God interacts with or shows himself in the world of objects is a mystery, and he may be sceptical about miracles: '...when we attribute an event to
his [God's] will, we are saying that there is a reason for it, and that this reason is God's
answer to our question “why?” We are not describing it as a miraculous intervention, and we
can accept Hume's scepticism about miracles, while acknowledging God's presence as an
agent in space and time' [my italics] (p. 57). In relation to this, the reader cannot fail to notice
that while Scruton writes movingly about the essence of God as self-sacrificing agape, shown
in the life and death of Jesus, he is reticent about Jesus' resurrection.

Such suspicions of covert scepticism are probably unfair. But the author's attachment
to tradition does not lead to an appetite for dogma, and any tentativeness or ambiguity in the
work come from its being a profound and learned engagement both with all aspects of
modernity, and the religious instinct. The book is thus a plea for a 'consecrated world', in a
culture which wants to flee the 'eye of judgement'.

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