

[Ethics] as the practice of relations among selves [It is] the enabling and developing [of] individual integrity and agency in relation to others. . . .[It] invokes a self who is both separate and related, a self which is neither autonomous nor dissolved: a self in community who is one among many.

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Fragile Selves, Moral Mediation, and Faith Communities: Reclaiming Practical Theology in a Liberal Voice²

A Theological Endeavor:

It is the contention of this author, contrary to some of our critics, that liberal religionists are neither theological dinosaurs nor merely mouthpieces for current cultural ideologies. In order to keep liberal religion intellectually alive and morally transformative, we are faced with continual constructive challenges as religious leaders and scholars. If theology is about questions of depth or meaning, that is, of what gives life significance, then we are continually challenged to articulate these dimensions in languages that resonate with our best understanding of human experience and are capable of moving persons toward wholeness and engagement with others. Our theological task is multifaceted. It is an interpretative endeavor, requiring perspective, a sense of location, a sense of the “times,” and the synthetic capacity to imagine a whole in which the varied dimensions of human living occur. H. Richard Niebuhr contented that “the primary task of theology is not that of building a total and coherent system. . . . [but] one of “understanding and clarifying as much as possible a given set of data, . . . [it] must content itself with the effort to discover the relations between various parts of the given

reality.”³ Theology, as the effort to bring into relation dimensions of human experience, seeks to both articulate, and then address the questions of our time. Hence, it is a neverending, always unfinished, process of interpretation within the languages and contexts of one’s generation. The challenge is to discern the current stories in which we find ourselves now—rather than search for endings to stories already past.

This paper addresses the dimensions of self and community as aspects of a practical theology within the circle of liberal religion. As used here, practical theology is contrasted with that of systematic theology. The contrast drawn is perspectival. If systematic theology is written from the perspective of belief, then practical theology is written from that of engagement. Practical theology draws upon one’s best understandings from the human sciences in dialogue with the resources of our liberal theological traditions in order to articulate the religio-ethical guides for right relations broadly conceived. Acts of translation and linguistic facility are mandatory in this endeavor to speak of the religious tasks of becoming human, drawing upon the most persuasive resources from the social sciences.⁴ Of particular interest is the potential dialogue between aspects of the Chicago School theologians and the contemporaneous psychological school of self psychology. This paper brings together the intellectual disciplines of American empiricist theology, ethics, and self psychology. To stand in such an intersection of discourse requires a certain multilingual facility in order to enhance the prospect of meaningful conversation across cognate professional territories. The contemporary global situation requires members of the intellectual disciplines to make their claims to truth by showing the relevance of their ideas to other disciplines.⁵

Three convictions anchor this paper. First, a primary function of the circle of liberal religion is the nurturing of sacred space. Liberal religion is a circle of influence in which the

potential of sacred space is realized in the complex relations among selves in the processes of becoming. The ability to do so is a significant marker of the creative vitality of our religious tradition. Such space is a sphere of influence in which the habits and dispositions for virtuous activity are nourished. They are also public spaces in which the continual tasks of creating and recreating democracy are always in process. Second, these relational endeavors are inherently moral activities, and therefore, require adequate ethical articulation. They are prophetic spaces in which visions of the good find voice. They are not therapy—although healing can happen. It is my experience that often therapy becomes a substitute for community.

Third, as social selves, we are fragile, moral selves, profoundly influenced by the responses of others. Our seventh principle, “respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part,” can be imaginatively extended to construe human selfhood in the image of a web as well. Our seventh principle implies that humans do not stand apart from the web of existence—except at our peril. How might we imagine our selves in relation to this imagery of the web. Several possibilities come to mind. We might see our selves, analogous to the fly caught in the spider’s web, as trapped; a foreign entity caught in a hostile environment. Or we might picture our selves, more holographically, as repeating in our makeup the macro processes of nature.

Metaphorically, human selves are more aptly described as the tangible expressions of enormously complicated patterns of continuous interactions of biological, cultural, social, environmental, and interpersonal dynamics. The lacework of a web suggests a woven network of interconnecting, intricate patterns, some of which are tightly woven, others loosely so. There may be dropped stitches and even holes in the weave. We can further imagine this web, in the created connections between selves, as a weaving and linking creating the space of

intersubjectivity.⁶ Such ontological imagery pushes us to consider the web as a continual process of weaving both within and between selves. The woven patterns between selves (re)creating between selves these “in between” spaces characterized above by the term intersubjectivity.

The web is a rather leaky metaphor; it is indeed full of holes. It does not convey the solidity of foundations or architectural structures. It conveys the risks, limitations and fragility involved in human becoming. It is an ambiguous image, both porous and dangerous, strong and encompassing. A passage from Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, illustrates the complexity and ambiguity resonant with such a metaphor.

Here was peace. She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net.
Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over
her shoulder. So much of life in its meshes! She called in her soul
to come and see. . . .⁷

Hurston uses the image of the fish-net to describe the realization of selfhood of the novel’s character, Janie Crawford. Web, or the analogous image of fish-net, is both an image of presence and amplitude as well as absence and loss. As anyone who has ever cast a net knows, it may have gaps and rents, yet still be sufficiently whole to catch the bounty of the sea.

Our Time: Our Context:

The conviction of an Enlightenment mindset privileges one dominant narrative, and the accompanying criteria of clarity and simplicity in the discernment of truth. Considerable ink has been spent in descriptions of the collapse of this Enlightenment hegemony of a dominant, monologic view of reality. Several generations of academics have spent their careers deciphering the contours of modern and postmodern sensibilities. Karl Marx’s depiction of the passing of the modernist mindset aptly captures the transition into a postmodern world.

All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable
Prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become
Antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that
is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses
his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind.⁸

What holds life together is fraught with ambiguity; what seemed firm ground under our feet, we suddenly realize is more like quick sand, a substance as likely to engulf us as to bear our weight. A recent newspaper headline aptly illustrates this point. It read “World Order, Disordered.”

We, as religious leaders and scholars, are challenged to find meaningful language, descriptively adequate to capture the contours of contemporary experience in its personal and social manifestations. We are challenged to engage in the work of symbolic reorganization necessary to negotiate the cultural sea changes invoked in the conceptual shifts from modernist to postmodern sensibilities. Hannah Arendt’s challenge “to think our doing” takes on heightened significance as we engage the symbolic reorganization of our worlds. The affective significance of losing as reliable guides the notions of simplicity, clarity and linearity should not be taken lightly as we search for alternative markers with which to find our way. The following three notions: pluralism, ambiguity, and complexity offer a deeper resonance with lived experience. Why these notions? Each one captures aspects of the contemporary world—both in its micro and macro dimensions of human interactions.

Pluralism, and with it diversity, describes one undeniable feature of the American social and cultural landscape. Communication technology, in recent months, has forcefully reminded many Americans of this undeniable global reality. Within a pluralistic frame, truth is plural, not singular; fluid, not fixed.

The dilemmas of diversity – how to bridge difference without doing violence— frame much current social science debate.⁹ How to think of diversity and pluralism without reducing them to superficial realities is one of the more daunting tasks we face. The events of September 11th terrifyingly illustrate how difficult it is to bridge difference without doing violence. Even the briefest perusal of media in the last few weeks, reveals how hard it is to imagine the world from someone else’s point of view (Jew-Arab, Christian -Muslim, pacifist-militarist). On a micro level, conflict, experienced as ambivalence (literally being of two minds about matters) can become an insurmountable obstacle to functioning in the world. The internal violence one might self inflict in order to overcome such ambivalence may foster conditions that promulgate further violence toward oneself and toward others. The processes of discernment which guide our actions, whether within the fields of the interpersonal, societal or global, involve inescapable conundrums about acceptable degrees of violence. Such violence may take the cataclysmic proportions of global terrorism. Or, the violence may manifest itself in institutional patterns, which covertly continue exclusionary practices based, for example, on sexual orientation, gender, race, religion or class. Or, the violence may be as subtle and amorphous as the earliest patterns of infant-caretaker interactions such that the infant’s forming self learns distrust as her/his basic basic relational norm. Violence may be nearly invisible, but is nevertheless present. Ethical frameworks offer assistance precisely in the negotiation of the determination of what degree of violence can be legitimated.

The dilemmas of diversity are often rife with dissonance or conflict. Conflict or dissonance manifests itself in several arenas: environmental, social, interpersonal or intrapsychic. Whether conflict and dissonance are perceived as nuisance or opportunity is a matter of one’s interpretative stance; whether they are interpreted as aspects of health or

dysfunction is heavily dependent on one's perceptual location. From a modernist sensibility conflict and dissonance are things to be overcome; their continued presence an obstacle marring the desired perfection of integration. Through postmodern eyes, dissonance may not be resolvable; conflict may be a guide into more complex perceptions—rather than a nuisance of which to be rid.

Ambiguity, in a postmodernist sensibility, is given a more prominent place in both human and environmental processes; within an accounting of reality as process or as flow,¹⁰ ambiguity is the field of human existence. Closely linked to ambiguity is the notion of uncertainty. Chaos theory, which articulates a kind of macro-predictability yet an openness to spontaneous change, speaks to the inherent instability of experienced reality. Ambiguity becomes a “given” characteristic of human interaction, an existential task worked out historically in human development. The still dawning realization that we are all participant observers in our environments grants ambiguity a new status, in that our acts of observation literally change the realities we are “observing.” There are no neutral observers. There is no place of uncontested certainty from which to make decisions about the givenness of reality. John B. Cobb suggests that the question worthy of our attention is the following: “Given the profound ambiguity of all concrete events how should one live and act.”¹¹ We each carry the weight of ambiguity and uncertainty differently, using highly personal strategies in the negotiation of these forces in our lives. We are hardwired to continuously create meaning—from within the relational nexuses into which we are born and within the life circumstances in which we are located. We seek—even create—a sense of intelligibility. The inability to do so is one of the hallmarks of trauma: this capacity for meaning making is disrupted or even destroyed. We create what developmental researchers refer to as procedural memory. These

are patterns, largely resting outside of conscious awareness, begun in the dynamics of our earliest relationships, which we use to interpret the givenness of the world and of being human. It is a kind of implicit envelope into which we slip the multitude of specific memories we acquire over a lifetime. If procedural memory is the envelope, the episodic memory is the letter.

Finally, the notion of complexity, already threaded through the dimensions of the first two terms, has many facets. Chaos theorists remind us that complexity is a quality of events, not objects. The events of the natural world manifest complexity as does human becoming. We are forced to reconsider our models of human selfhood in process terms. Selves are process. If we want to speak of human self as structure, we would be wise to think of structure as an event moving at a slow rate of change. For the purposes of this paper, complexity refers to fact that we, as humans, live in complexly unequal relationships.¹² How relationships, in their myriad of forms, are negotiated is directly tied to preunderstandings of what is trustworthy and the guides used to determine the degree of trustworthiness. It is perhaps easier to appreciate the complexly unequal nature of relationships when they are projected onto the larger screen of social and global affairs. Of particular significance here are the emotional and moral significances we carry for each other. These dimensions are often barely visible or dismissed by us as inconsequential –unless they have been disrupted.

Liberal Religious Communities:

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), the word “circle” refers to a “nonmaterial sphere of influence, . . . it is the circumference, not the space within.” Community, according to the OED, is “a noun about the quality of relations.” A later meaning involves the aspect of “ownership of common goods” or “shared characteristics. These

definitions of the term “circle” are also suggestive of some of the qualitative forms of affiliation of the religious communities that comprise the Unitarian Universalist Association. The term community is frequently invoked, albeit with widely varying experiences of what it, in practice, does mean or should mean. At times, it seems to imply shared interests, or commonly shared characteristics. At other times, it clearly involves deeply held, lifechanging relationships.

The OED definitions of circle also bears rather striking resemblances to H. Richard Niebuhr’s brief typology of human communities. He explored the highly heterogeneous phenomena of faith and the inherited structures of human relations in a posthumously published work, *Faith on Earth: An Inquiry into the Structure of Human Faith*,¹³ drawing on three sociological terms, association, society, and community, to differentiate the kinds of intimacy which structure human relations. Associations are characterized by shared interests, societies are those of interested individuals, and communities are those of selves. Marriage arrangements as well as social, political and religious organizations are used to illustrate his typology of the three forms of relations.. The movement from one form of relation to another is not evolutionary. If it occurs, it occurs through, in Niebuhr’s language, leaps of faith.

In associations and societies, relations are organized in reference to common interests. In such associations, the terms of relationship are external. Individuals are related through shared interests, common goals or beliefs. Associations are organizations of interests in which individuals participate, although significant transformation of the individual participants is not assumed. In societies, an intensity of life together is often apparent in shared histories, expectations of the future and the activities of ordinary living. The terms of relation

are internal, but are those of interested individuals. Niebuhr uses the example of the traditions, languages, and customs of a family in its shaping of its members to illustrate this type.

In communities of selves, the terms of relationship are internal and character forming. Niebuhr pushes beyond the social psychological perspective of externally observed behavior, suggesting a further distinction between communities of individuals and communities of selves. Selfhood rests in the dynamism of trust (of which there are several dimensions: fidelity, respect, responsibility) which structures the relationships between selves. Unless disrupted, these binding threads of trust remain largely invisible—taken for granted. Such communities are entered into by choice, the choosing of others as partners. Although the terminology becomes at times confusing, Niebuhr point is that trust is integral in these communities of faith. Trust is the relational medium which opens up the possibility of transformation—whether the context is interpersonal or societal.

For Niebuhr, an act of loyalty elicits faith as trust which can, in turn, enable us to extend our loyalty to others. Thus a closed self can become an open self. The potential for trust generates the dynamism of community. The human self either trusts or distrusts its environment, and on that basis reaches out to engage its environment through committed participation or draws back in protective defensiveness. The trusting participative self engages its environment openly, receptive to the supports and challenges provided by the environment. The distrusting self closes in on itself in order to protect itself from what it anticipates to be a hostile environment. What cripples the self in this view is not a lack of will but varieties of defensiveness which prohibit the attitude of trust and openness. Such defensive patterns, in turn, constrict a fuller participation in the human communities in which the self is located. Writ large in terms of communities of such selves we have open and closed societies; these

dynamics of trust translate into how societies are structured.¹⁴ Of the three types of relations discussed by Niebuhr, it is the community of selves which is the nexus for the discussion that follows. Only communities of selves, in their potential for moving persons toward wholeness and engagement in the world, merit the appellation of faith community.

The Chicago School of American Empiricism:

The “Chicago School” of American Empiricism began with a cluster of scholars, in the last decade of the 1900s, at the newly founded Divinity School at the University of Chicago.¹⁵ The later Chicago School includes Bernard Loomer and Bernard Meland, and a subsequent generation of whom William Dean is one figure. As an intellectual discipline it is characterized by its pragmatic, contextual method of inquiry, its functional criteria for assessing the value of various human practices or conceptual theories, and a processual and social understanding of human development. Truth and meaning are significant conceptual categories in their function as tools to assist human beings achieve proper relations within the whole of life.

Charles Peirce, from whom the term pragmatism has its origins, was one of the early American empiricists. He made the epistemological and semiotic claim that truth is discerned contextually, amidst a community of enquirers around some regulative ideal.¹⁶ Later thinkers within this emerging tradition, which came to be known as pragmatism or American empiricism, built on Peirce’s triad of a focus on historical particulars, truth as contextually acquired within a community of enquiry, and truth as the continuous multifaceted acts of interpretation. Knowledge is thus a matter of cooperative social engagement. It does not exist “out there” separate from specific human communities. The term “experience” has been given to this interpretive process, usually expressed in narrative form as the story of one’s life.

Within American empiricism, experience is a social process carried on by communities of interpreters who together seek both practical and theoretical knowledge

The work of William Dean, an empirical historicist theologian, illustrates the general contours of this theological genre.¹⁷ Three central notions organize his work. First, experience is thoroughly empirical. To paraphrase Alfred North Whitehead's ontological principle, there are reasons for things.¹⁸ Such reasons are concrete and tangible, rooted in either the past or in the present. This perspective stands in sharp contrast to a belief in immutable laws, universal principles, or eternal truths. Truths are particular, neither abstract nor idealist.

Second, a radical notion of history is assumed. That is, there are no intervening, extrahistorical forces. History has no structure until it is interpreted; and that interpretation gives history much of the structure it has. This form of historicism claims that history-transcending realities do not exist. Reality is rooted in the concrete particularities of lived experience. Everything is historical; everything lives within natural and cultural processes. Everything begins through some historical gesture and lives only as long as other historical gestures allow it to live. Dean uses the evolutionary metaphor to illustrate this claim. Every interpretation begins, like a spontaneous variation of some historical creature; each interpretation is either accepted or rejected through environmental selection, and every interpretation perishes when it is environmentally no longer useful. The truths, the wisdom we hold do not transcend us, they have grown up around us and will perish when we are gone.

Third, meaning-making occurs wholly within the historical context of human interactions. This understanding highlights the transactional character of living in relation to both immediate experience and inherited language, appreciating the codeterminate relation between language and experience. This religious historicist cosmology places God, or any

ultimate reality, thoroughly within history. God is a cultural and historical convention. Placing God so thoroughly within history does not deny God's existence; what is affirmed is God's existence as historically significant. Traditions of moral and religious values are imagined, literally, created by human beings. At the same time, human beings feel called upon to honor and obey these traditions as realities that stand over against themselves. In this understanding, "the religious" is a people's sense of the whole of the world and their place within this whole; it offers a mythic standpoint from which to gain a sense of the whole. Dean's conviction is that interpretations of this sense of the whole contribute to, that is, change our experience of the whole. Interpretation does not simply reflect what is "out there;" it bears a dynamic relationship to the reality it attempts to describe.¹⁹ A thoroughly historical religious understanding inclines people of faith to look for religious meanings within their historical circumstances. The religious does not exist apart from the historical developments of a society; a religious sense of the whole (particularly, for communities and individuals in dialogue with inherited religious traditions and the contemporary environment) involves corporate, public, private and existential dimensions.

A primary task of such theologians as Dean and this author is as religious critic of a society's spiritual culture. Spiritual culture incorporates all those public dimensions of thought, behavior, emotion, and language that express the most basic *raison d'etre* of a society. It is the contextual whole out of which pragmatic guides and motivations for action are drawn. This religious sense of the whole, a largely noncognitive apprehension of the ideals shaping a society's sense of the whole, undergoes continual change and revision. Members of a society are constantly required to imagine how, by what ideals, the received spiritual history can be reconciled with contemporary history.

Dean's work describes the processes of cognitive reorganization (and more recently, the affective dimensions of such theological shifts); that is, the discerning of the relationships between inherited traditions and ideals, and new understandings emergent from contemporary historical circumstances. Out of this process, not only a new past, but a new orientation for the present are created. What may appear as only a new construction, a new interpretation or story about the past, may turn out to be a way to change the future.

Deeply felt existential consequences accompany the acceptance of this historicist theology. Dean likens it to the victory of the quantum physicists, who in accepting history helped defeat classical physics, and then realized that this was the kind of accomplishment after which " 'you smile for months and then you weep for years.'"²⁰ To paraphrase William James, the universe is no longer experienced as responsive to our human needs and wants.

Historical change is both wild and predictable. As with the insights of quantum physics, history is both particle and wave. First, it is wild, the result of spontaneous action; historical change is abrupt and unanticipated, dependent on the spontaneous decisions of things present. Second, it is predictable, governed by causality; it is predictable and regular to the degree that change is caused by things past. Dean argues that the acceptance of this understanding of history, and this version of historical change leaves the historical person in the existential quandary of being both terribly responsible and utterly alone.

With this view of historical change, the realization dawns that the present becomes responsible for the future. Individuals are faced with the potential of enormous causal power to affect the future. To accept that human affairs are not plotted by some trans-historical being, set of universal principles, or pure ideas is to accept "that people are defined by and define others in the course of a discontinuous train of events and decisions."²¹ The psychological

weight of this realization, that this power rests on their own spontaneous decisions Dean names as the “burden of historical responsibility.” Dean suggests that, to the degree that an individual freely chooses, freely acts, this individual stands alone in the solitude of the decision-making process. Dean names the existential feel of this process as the “burden of historical solitude.” Thus, the historical person experiences both intensified responsibility and intensified solitude. Dean articulates the existential feel of what James suggested is the paradigmatic moral situation; in this moment the universe becomes a moral universe.

Even as empirical theologians urge the acceptance of history as the province of human meaning making and the locus of the religious, it is singularly silent in two important ways. First, it offers few guides for discerning how individuals or communities negotiate the particularities of human interaction, specifically as these particularities shape shared notions of common good. The Enlightenment conviction that there are some things that “all reasonable men” will be in agreement on as to what is found right, just, and good still lingers behind many of the empirical theological claims about community and the determination of the common good. William James once wrote that religion is about uneasiness and a solution to that uneasiness.²² Empirical theologians have done a masterful job of demonstrating that about which we, in a global industrialized economy, should be uneasy. They have remained largely silent about how individuals and communities are moved to moral responsiveness. Second, they have developed few constructive understandings of the sustaining aspects of religious visions, practices or community life, what Dean refers to as the consolations of religion. The notion of radical autonomy or radical individualism, another legacy of the Enlightenment worldview, lingers on in the conceptual languages of empirical theology and in the field of ethics, such that a radical restructuring of the operative anthropologies is needed.

John Dewey wrote that the religious, as providing a sense of the whole, contributes to a person's functioning in that it offered strategies of survival in the here and now. In Dewey's understanding, this capacity to sense the whole enables a society to recognize their motivating vision as either life enhancing or life denying. Again, this is a sense of the whole as within history—about a particular society in a particular place and time. Thus, the sense of the whole is about plural narratives, plural notions of the common good, and the set of practices that enable a particular society to achieve its best vision of the whole. Dewey assumed that the workings of communal democratic process are more self evident than is warranted.²³ Dewey and subsequent ethicists have tended to focus on the procedural outcomes, failing to address the dynamics of what moves people to act. Dewey also wrote about the ideal of the democratic personality, marked by the qualities of intelligent action and passionate commitment. Of primary concern for Dewey was the capacity to respond to contingencies, particularly the tragic in life. The specific details of how these capacities, individually and communally, are nurtured requires further elaboration.

Bernard Loomer addressed this existential concern through his notion of stature.²⁴ Stature is the individual's "capacity to hold together, within his or her interior life, ideas and affections contrasting so widely that, if they were any wider, they would destroy that person's unity as a person."²⁵ It is the strength of character to allow within oneself fundamental contradictions, especially those that go to the heart of all that one holds dear. It is to live strenuously, to acquire the grounds for creativity and to experience God, understood as that in the world that encourages one to absorb and reconcile the most dissonant contrasts, to embrace the enemy, to actually bring the enemy within oneself. To do so is not to leave history by resorting to other worldly principles or eternal truths. It is to take the wildness of history into

oneself. Such a stance incorporates both the pain of historical responsibility and that of historical solitude. A community of great stature would be capable of arousing by virtue of its spiritual culture the motivation of its members toward moral responsiveness and action. Spiritual maturity is then the lived ability to sustain the focus of unity and difference in which they are one song; one song in which ambiguity is not denied, but embraced. The process by which one develops this quality of stature is not addressed by Loomer, nor is the process by which a community develops this quality articulated.

Religious Ethics Reconsidered:

The Greek etymology of the word ethics is derived from two words. The first, as a noun, refers to a “dwelling” or “stall.” In its root meaning it refers to the stability and security necessary if one is going to act at all. Initially this term was first applied, not to humans, but to animals. In this early usage the key idea is the stability and security provided by a “stall” or “dwelling” for animals. The second form, as verb, translates as “to be accustomed to.” In its origins, the relationship between stability and custom was viewed as a kind of elemental datum of experience. Ethics, as it has developed historically, has to do with “life and with all that concerns us.”²⁶ It is the glue of human society, providing the stability and security indispensable to the living of human life. It is a consummately interpretative endeavor to which the history of Western ethical thought testifies. In constant play are various notions of the good, evil, anthropologies, and the location of moral motivation (whether it is habit, will, reason, or emotion, or located extrahistorically as eternal truths, metaphysical principles or divine sanctions). Religious ethics, as a discipline, differs from philosophical ethics in the presuppositions upon which ethical reflection is based. Ethics, framed by Enlightenment narratives, is governed by the criteria of what is

universal and reversible. Morality and the process of moral decision-making is decontextualized. Only moral rules which can withstand the criteria of depersonalization and decontextualization meet the standards for ethical norms. Truth resides within what is universal—within what is objective, not subject to the vagaries of local custom and individual emotion. Objectivity, the ability “to have no preference, predilections or prejudices, no biases, no preconceived values or judgments in the presence of facts,”²⁷ guides the ethical rationality of decision-making. The particular, the situational, and moral guidance rooted in emotion are deemed suspect in their inability to be universalized as ethical rules of conduct.

One response to the collapse of the Enlightenment, or modernist worldview, is the stance of ethical irrelevance or relativism. Charles Taylor, in his substantive work, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*, suggests one alternative, illustrative of William Dean’s historicist theology outlined above.²⁸ Taylor addresses what is commonly, and in his opinion mistakenly, called the Western crisis in meaning. He does so by attending to the development of “modern identity” as the often dissonant pull between moral goods. One’s sense of identity is a movement towards some sense of moral goods. These goods infuse the very fabric of the self; the roots of one’s identity are located in one’s experience of constitutive goods.²⁹ To make even minimal sense of one’s life, that is, in order to have a sense of self, one needs some orientation to the good. This sense of the good is intertwined within one’s self-understanding in narrative form, as an unfolding story. Ethical action begins with moral intuition in response to what Taylor calls hypergoods, that is, values that supply a sense of the whole.³⁰ Moral capacity is the affective origin of the self, understood as the complex expression of its location within a particular historical and cultural

evolution and social matrix of relationships. The critical challenge for such a self is the tensive pull between affirmation and mutilation. Affirmation of one's identity as a moral self is experienced in its meaningful overall form. Subjectively, it is the affective congruence between identity and that which is experienced as good. Mutilation refers to the risk of the dissonance, the fracture or disjunction between one's self experience and action and what is affirmed as the orienting good(s) of one's life. Taylor's efforts are toward reclaiming for ethics the recognition of the psychosocial processes by which individuals become moral selves who are moved to respond to others. For Taylor, as for Dean, the language of God, as what designates one's experience of the good, is consequent—not antecedent to one's experience of the good. In other words, metaphors of God have meaning or value because they resonate with what is experienced as already having value in one's experience of being a self.

Unexplored in Taylor's work are the relational matrices that may give shape and content to the hypergoods delineated by Taylor. Emmanuel Levinas and Zygmunt Bauman, in their philosophical writings, begin with the face as the "place" of moral capacity and of moral responsiveness.³¹ Edward Farley, building on the work of Emmanuel Levinas, locates the physical vehicle of this dynamic of empathy as conveyed through the medium of the human face.³² Psychologically, one must ask what is it that one encounters in the human face that can elicit moral responsiveness? What is this elusive substance and how do we nourish it?

Bauman describes this moral capacity of the individual as the affective responsiveness to the other. It is the "nonrational, un-arguable, no-excuses-given and noncalculable urge to stretch towards the other, to caress, to be for, to live for, happen what

may.”³³ For Bauman, moral responsiveness precedes all thinking about decisions. That is, he argues against the focus of modernist ethics on the rational process of decision-making. Moral capacity is located in an individual’s empathic reaching towards the subjectivity of the other. Unexplored in these writers are the relational matrices that may contribute to these capacities for empathy and trust which allows a stretching across the dissonance of diversity.

Contributions from Self Psychology:

Both Taylor and Dean, have written of the need for contributions from psychological theory to enhance the constructive work of ethics and theology. Taylor expresses hopefulness that self psychology might contribute to the project of developing “a conceptual language which permits personal resonance” in the articulation of crucial human goods.³⁴ Dean notes that American Empiricism neither persuasively articulates the historical particularities of human relationships nor addresses the affective experience of individuals in relation to both the moral and theological claims it makes.³⁵ Self psychology offers some conceptual maps from which to begin rethinking the operative anthropologies implicit in the current discussions of constructive theology and ethics most conducive to liberal religion. Self psychology is an intellectual community of discourse and clinical practice, which encompasses several schools of thought. It originated with the works of Heinz Kohut, a Hyde Park contemporary of Bernard Loomer and Bernard Meland.³⁶ Epistemologically it is pragmatic and radically historical; meaning and significance are located within the context of human relationships. In other words, it is not dependent on some version of psychological eternal truths such as instinct or drive theory. It is empirical in that it understands experience and the constitution of the human self as conditioned

by the interplay of the dynamics of human interaction with the neurobiological, environmental and cultural dimensions of human life. Who we are is historically conditioned.

The constructs of self, selfobject functions, and empathy are the key theoretical concepts. At the risk of oversimplification, the self can be thought of as the organization of feelings about one's person developed since infancy. The self is a particular organization of experiences; it is a context dependent system whose vitality, continuity over time and cohesion depend upon the perceived responsiveness of others. Its specific form of organization is patterned from the mix of the affective exchanges occurring within the space between oneself and another. The particular configuration of continuing self needs in adulthood is weighted differently for each of us. The affective quality of these interactions are "remembered" in the form of self organization as procedural memory.

The motivational priority of humans is toward the preservation of a sense of self. Self-functioning implies the functions of others (human or not) in the life long sustenance of vital dimensions of self experience. The term "selfobject" refers to the various psychologically necessary functions provided by objects (both human and nonhuman). Selfobject experiences are potentially resident in any experience humans have – with their total absence comes psychic death. In the recent film, *Castaway*, a soccer ball, named Wilson by the protagonist, played by Tom Hanks, powerfully illustrates some of the essential selfobject functions needed to sustain life. To experience something as a selfobject is to experience one's self as enlivened by sharing in the qualities of the affective space between oneself and another.³⁷ Such space, referred to as intersubjective, is neither wholly social nor necessarily a matter of equality or mutuality. To use the term self is in actuality to presume an implicit, life long matrix of relations in which the person's sense of self is nested and sustained.

The self-selfobject system is the interpretive baseline from which to assess deviance, dysfunction, and disequilibrium. The central theoretical concern becomes one of the “meaningful overall form of the self.”³⁸ Questions of meaning are approached within a holistic notion of self-functioning. Health is assumed to take a wide variety of forms dependent upon the particular synergism of the developing self in relation to the available selfobjects. An assessment of well-being is more appropriately phenomenological, in terms of the vitality, cohesion and continuity of the self.

Empathy is the capacity to recognize complex psychological states in another. The optimal experience of the human self from infancy through death is one of attenuated empathy. The emotional oxygen of empathy and understanding facilitate the biopsychological self righting abilities of the individual.³⁹ The capacity for self righting is nurtured or undermined in the intersubjective dynamics of human interaction. Human beings display enormous ingenuity in their efforts to self right and recover a recognizable sense of self—even at the cost of their physical life. Self righting efforts can also take more innocuous forms, as witnessed en masse among former dieters in the weeks since September 11th. Food, as can almost any substance, becomes a vehicle to restore equilibrium.

Three themes implicit within the above discussion of liberal theology and ethics are worthy of further discussion. They are: fragile selves, facework as moral mediation, and faith communities. Selected self psychological constructs offer some empirical insights into the following three claims. First, the notion of self states provides a broader perspective in which

to understand the existential consequences Dean identifies as corollaries of embracing American Empiricism as a theological stance. Second, developmental research lends conceptual credence to Taylor's reconfiguration of ethics: his articulation of individual identity as inherently moral. Third, clinical work from the perspective of trust enhances Niebuhr's claims of trust as resting at the heart of faith communities –and as the pivotal dynamic in the process that motivates transformation and engagement with others.

The first theme is that of fragile selves. Within American empirical thought the work of George Herbert Mead has been significant in recasting an understanding of the self as inherently social. The fragility, or vulnerability, of the human self is implicitly reflected in the repeated claims to the social character of selfhood. As social, it is the result of multiple social interactions characterized by ambiguity and uncertainty. The self, as the affective experience of one's identity and as moral self, in the language of Dean and Taylor, is a situated self, particular and social. American empiricism presumes that communities, in some form, are integral in the constitution of the self. At issue, are the ways in which communities function in the sustaining of selfhood.

Kohut and Ernst Wolf in, "The Disorders of the Self and Their treatment: An Outline," offer a suggestive template from which to think about the historically conditioned variations implicit within any notion of a social self.⁴⁰ Each self state described is linked to disturbances in the necessary selfobject relations and consequent experiences of distress. Connection is the starting point from which to unpack the question of meaning in one's self of distress. Of interest for this discussion are four self states: the understimulated, the fragmenting, the overstimulated, and the overburdened. The overstimulated self state relates to the premature focus on the skills, work products of the self, such that a sense of the whole of

the self is lost in the work performance. The ambitions or ideals are responded to, in an excessive manner, in isolation. The weight of one's work or one's responsibilities overwhelm, threatening to flood one with anxiety. This self state captures Dean's sense of the burden of historical responsibility.

The overburdened self state refers to the trauma of unshared emotionality. It is a self state in which there is often too much insight; in which there is an inability to self soothe. It is a failure of idealization—to be able to sufficiently merge with the calmness of the idealizable – to participate in something larger than oneself. This self state speaks to what Dean names as the burden of historical solitude. Both of these self states speak to the loss of selfobject functions carried by the idealizable functions of grand narratives, eternal truths or shared community in which one could take solace. This would seem to be the affective weight of Dean's comment that “people are defined by and define others” The weight is twofold, that of being diminished oneself by the (non)response of others, and likewise, diminishing others by one's own failure to respond empathically. The consolations of religion, which Dean notes as insufficiently attended to in American empirical theology, would be the selfobject functions that provide the possibilities of values or goods worthy of shared idealization and the tangible location of communal participation, in which to experience shared emotionality.⁴¹

Studies in infant, child, and adult attachment patterns have identified four distinct attachment patterns. Research suggests that there is a strong correlation between early attachment patterns documented within the first six months of life and those in adult life.⁴² These studies identify four patterns of attachment. Secure attachment is characterized by a fundamentally trusting attitude. Insecure attachment is the stance of seeming nonattachment. Aversive-antagonistic attachment is characterized by withdrawal, distrust and disavowal of the

significance of connections. Disorganized attachment is linked to the inconsistency and unpredictability of caregivers in their emotional availability and affective attunement. Of the four major attachment patterns, secure, insecure, disorganized, and avoidant-antagonistic, the pattern of secure attachment bears similarity to Loomer's notion of stature. Secure attachment correlates in adulthood with a basic reservoir of self esteem, self reliance, and an ability to tolerate contradictory and ambivalent self states.

At issue in these attachment patterns, and in the correlative patterns of selfhood, are the most elemental expressions of trust and distrust. A fundamental disposition of trust or distrust infuses the tenor and quality of selfhood. If the operative motivational priority is the preservation of a sense of self contingent upon relations with others, then the downside is that prior aversive experiences, and the anticipatory expectation of mismatched responses is also operative. These defensive patterns serve to protect the nascent cohesion, vitality, and continuity of the self in response to the environment. In other words, defensiveness buffers the inclination to trust from further trauma. However remote, the nascent potential to trust—if presented with responsive others—remains available. What is at issue are the qualities of connection, the dimensions of trust implied, and one's capacity for assessing what is trustworthy.

Doris Brothers, a self psychologist, suggests that the phenomenon of self trust, as the essential ingredient for a cohesive sense of self, can be deciphered into four generalizable tendencies of the individual in the continuous experiencing of self with other.⁴³ They are trust-in-others, trust-in- self, self-as-trustworthy, and others-as-self-trusting. Trust-in-others is the ability to perceive significant others as trustworthy providers of necessary psychological functions. Trust-in-self is the ability to view oneself as capable of eliciting needed selfobject

experiences from others. Self-as-trustworthy is the perception of oneself as a trustworthy provider of such experiences for others. Others-as-self trusting is the ability to perceive significant others as trusting of their capacities to obtain and provide selfobject experiences. This language of trust dimensions reconfigures selfobject functions within more interactive dynamics.⁴⁴ The particular composition and interplay of these dimensions have a direct bearing on one's ability to assess what is trustworthy, within oneself and in others, one's proclivity for connection throughout life, and the ability to embrace ambiguity and contradiction. For example, the ability to trust the capacity of others to serve as selfobjects in the pursuit of reliable knowledge would be one illustration of trust dimensions in play. How do we judge what is trustworthy? Brothers suggests four criteria. They are realism, abstractness, complexity, and differentiation. With each criterion, a range extending from more rigidly fixed to increasingly complex discriminations of qualities linked to what are experienced as signs of trustworthiness is operative. For example, one day my daughter came home thoroughly enthused about the teacher of her freshman English class. As a mother who tends towards the cerebral and enjoys ongoing love affair with the language of words, I was quietly thrilled. Upon further conversation, I realized that what drew my daughter into the subject matter was neither the eloquence nor theatrical experience of this instructor (the criteria most relevant for me), but rather the shoes worn by this man—which spoke apparently volumes to my daughter. From my vantage point, one can easily say that my daughter's criteria would exemplify the more rigid and concrete end of the spectrum. The spectrum suggested by Brothers is weighted toward the ability to hold opposites without collapsing difference. Within this framework, health is capacity for flexibility and selective trusting while maintaining the ability to act.

The second theme of facework as moral mediation is shorthand for the more abstract notion of emotional work as moral mediation. A repeated concern in contemporary discussions of theology and ethics revolves around what moves individuals to act ethically. Taylor raises twin questions: of the motivational sources of ethical action as well as what is the nature of moral selves. Bauman's image of "stretching toward the other" speaks in poetic and philosophical language what, in self psychological language, would be the use of oneself as selfobject in response to the perceived self needs of the other. What are the origins of this empathic sensibility toward the other? The works of Daniel Stern and Beatrice Beebe provide research data supportive of Taylor's philosophical claim of the development of one's sense of self as morally framed by self – other interactions. The work of Daniel Stern illustrates the relational and affective dimensions of a parallel emergence of a subjective sense of self along with the beginnings of a moral self.⁴⁵ Stern's developmental research lends support to Taylor's claim that what has moral meaning, has power in its personal resonance, in its implicit affirmation of one's sense of self.

Stern's research demonstrates, in detail, the parallel development of one's sense of self "as a self," and oneself as a moral self, outlining a theory of self-emergence involving four sequentially ordered, developmental senses of self spanning the first eighteen months of life. Each reflects an organizing of the subjective experience about the self and other. The first three senses of self, for the infant, entail the development of rudimentary interpersonal capacities: a shared focus of attention, a shared intentionality with another, and the recognition of dissonant or congruent feelings in others. The fourth sense of self, the verbal sense of self, involves linguistic, mutually negotiated "we meanings." It is worth noting that within each of these phases, the moral space is asymmetrically interactive, between emergent and already

“formed” selves. The dynamics documented by Stern, give us a first glimpse of “ethics as the practice of relations among selves... the enabling and developing of individual integrity and agency in relations to others....invok[ing] a self who is both separate and related...neither autonomous nor dissolved,” as the epigraph with which this paper begins describes ethics. The ability of the “formed” self to both recognize and allow an integrity to the dissonant affects and moods of the infant is a rudimentary moral experience and perhaps the earliest origins of what Loomer came to call stature.

Stern’s research contributes knowledge of the specific interactions that underlie our understanding of moral development as including autonomy and connectedness, a both/and position. These qualitative dimensions of early self-other experiences anchor both the sense of enduring selfhood (as cohesive, continuous and having positive affective coloring) and the rudimentary outlines of a moral self. Morality is thoroughly infused within our interactions with others from the beginning of life. Stern situates the complex origins of morality in the earliest experiences of the self-in-relation. The eventual emergence of a well defined sense of morality is equally dependent on the development of a firm sense of self. Hence, emotional work (in this instance, that of a mother-infant dyad) is implicitly moral work. The ethical dimension of life has psychological relevance -- specifically in its supportive function for the organizing of the self. For Kohut, it was the functional question of whether the ethical proscriptions and injunctions serve to support and stabilize the self or unduly undermine a potentially vulnerable or enfeebled self that is of concern.⁴⁶

Beatrice Beebe’s work demonstrates the interactive quality of emotional work as moral mediation—in which each participant in the caregiver-infant dyad is doubly open to the response of the other.⁴⁷ These early interactions lay down the rudiments of the

attachment patterns mentioned above. Beebe's work, documented on film, enables one to observe the literal opening and closing of the affective space between mother and infant. She refers to the optimal infant-caregiver interaction as matching behaviors. Two dynamics are worth noting. First is that optimal responsiveness is asymmetrical—by just a hair's breath. An optimal response does not precisely mirror the facial expression of the infant, rather it synergistically builds on it. As an observer you literally see the slightest space (measured in intervals of multiple seconds) between the expression of the infant and that of the responding adult. If the adult responds, more as a mirror, she effectively closes the affective space. In such interactions, the infant moves quickly into distress. In effect, the nascent self of the infant has been affectively annihilated. Research suggests that the most secure children are those whose parental figures are neither low nor high trackers, that is, the quality of their interactions has the feel of more spontaneous engagement. They are neither oblivious to the efforts of the child to engage nor anxiously attentive to every gesture of the child.

Second, if the adult is misattuned to the infant and attempts to visually force a response, the infant quickly turns away, "playing dead." This psychological strategy is an effort of self defense, to protect the nascent self from being overwhelmed by the affective flooding and selfobject needs of the adult. In observing these tapes, one can feel the painful contortion that this strategy of psychic deadness on the part of the infant requires, when the movement in the affective space is organized solely around the needs of the adult participant.

These "spaces between" in which the movements of relating occur are the awe filled (or awful) spaces in which selfhood is born (or destroyed). The collapse of these

“spaces between” is a kind of annihilation of self. Intimacy carries, not life, but the threat of destruction. The need to deny what one feels, perceives, or experiences, in order to keep necessary ties intact, is born. The research findings of Stern and Beebe provide concrete details of the moral dilemma Taylor names as that of affirmation or mutilation. The private moral reasoning of the individual adult, ala Taylor’s sweeping depiction, can be conceived of as the interiorizing of the affective interactions through which one first experienced morality, as carried through the selfobject relations forming the contours of our self experience. The longitudinal studies of attachment patterns show a strong consistent correlation between the early attachment patterns of infants and attachment patterns in adult life. The shadows of others continue to color the agency of the self—even as the memories may be experienced as one’s sole property.

The third theme is that of faith communities. Such communities are the social groups in which we interpret and understand the personal, social and natural worlds in which we seek meaning and purpose. Through the medium of community we come to understand ourselves: who we are, who we are not, who we may become. We use story and ritual in many forms to convey the web of connections that link us from the past into a future. Our participation in such stories and rituals hopefully offer agency, belonging, affirmation, shared emotionality, and values and goods worthy of shared idealization. That the stories we tell and the rituals we share possess for us understandability is a kind of selfobject glue linkings us, as selves, with others worthy of our esteem.

If this affective, intersubjective “space between” is a space of moral mediation, then the work of moral mediation tacitly includes the work of trust in its multiple dimensions. We are left with a theological and moral imperative to keep this moral space open, to allow

the intricate dance of trust in its various selfobject dimensions to occur. How might the dynamics of trust translate into an understanding of faith communities? Theologically speaking, the dynamics of trust are the fundamental medium of human interaction. They provide the architecture of community in the quality selfobject relations. In Niebuhr, it is in communities of selves that the greatest potential for the movement toward wholeness and engagement in the brokenness of the world exists. The possibility of such movement requires an openness and vulnerability—a willingness to be changed. Just as importantly, it requires a responsiveness to that openness.

As religious leaders it would be clarifying for us to gain a sense of which of the organizations we serve are actually communities of selves. We may find in spite of the rhetoric, that they are, to use Niebuhr's language, associations or societies. It can be a freeing thing to realize the "nature" of the organization we serve. If indeed, we serve communities of selves, the notions of attachment patterns and dynamics of trust are handles for appreciating how individuals, families, even groups may desire such community but enter it through patterns of relating otherwise difficult to comprehend. Such patterns are efforts of self righting, which protect the nascent hope for trusting responses from further trauma. This approach contrasts sharply with the understanding that the contemporary human fault is one of rampant narcissism in need of containment and control. To concentrate on such narcissism is to get caught of in symptoms and miss the underlying illness. The focus, here, is shifted to those complexly ambiguous dimensions of connection/disconnection which shade the contours of our lives. The gift of being able to see around the patterns of protection to the kernel of trust hidden within, and steadfastly

nurture ways that a community can respond with an ear to the dimensions of trust in play offers the hope of sacred spaces.

¹ Sarah Lucia Hoaglund. *Lesbian Ethics: Toward New Value* (Palo Alto: Institute of Lesbian Studies, 1989)

² I wish to thank Dr. Carol Hepokoski and Dr. Spencer Lavan for their careful reading of an earlier version of this paper. Their suggestions were appreciated and have hopefully improved the quality of this paper. The initial impetus for this paper begin in collaborative discussions with my Hiart colleague, Dr. Thomas Byrnes. Knowledge is indeed a collaborative endeavor as my conversations with Dr. Byrnes reminds me time and again.

³ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Faith on Earth: An Inquiry into the Structures of Faith* ed. Richard Niebuhr (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1995), 102; see also H. Richard Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), chapter one. Rejected is the view of the view of the theological endeavor as one of system building. The danger of such an approach is that of the hegemonic urge to eclipse those more ambiguous and complex aspects of reality in the service of clarity and simplicity.

⁴ By religious tasks I mean the processes of developing answers to such questions as “What do I know about God, who am I, where did I come from, why am I here, what is worthy of my commitments and where am I going?”

⁵ Edward O. Wilson. *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998) argues strongly, out of an Enlightenment agenda, of the need for the academic disciplines to come together in a unity of knowledge. Wilson’s philosophical argument for a genetic materialism moves in a different direction than the argument posed here.

⁶ Intersubjectivity is used here in its clinical and nonclinical meanings. In self psychology, it refers to the affective space in which our senses of self are formed and sustained by significant relationships; nonclinically, it is used to reference the affective dimensions of the myriad of relations that continuously compose who we feel ourselves to be.

⁷ Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978 [1937]), 286.

⁸ Karl and Frederick Engels, “The Communist Manifesto,” *A Handbook on Marxism* (New York: International Publishers, 1935), 26.

⁹ See Kathleen M. Sands, *Escape From Paradise: Evil and Tragedy in Feminist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).

¹⁰ See, for example, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990), and *The Evolving Self: A Psychology for the Third Millennium* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1993).

¹¹ John B. Cobb, Jr. “Theism and Paganism: A Response to C. Robert Mesle,” *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* Vol., no. 3 (September, 2001), 271.

¹² For a discussion of the ethical dimensions of idea of complexly unequal relationships, see Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality*. (New York: Basic Books, 1984). Closely related are the questions of power, accountability and authority.

¹³ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Faith on Earth: An Inquiry into the Structures of Faith* . ed. Richard Niebuhr (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1995), see chapter six.

¹⁴ The three volume work of Frances Fukuyama on the implications of trust for the structuring of the corporate and economic dimensions of various societies greatly expands and illustrates Niebuhr’s claim. See, Frances Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

¹⁵ By American empirical tradition, I am referring to the uniquely American school of thought anchored, in the 19th century, by the figures of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Josiah Royce, Charles Peirce and William James, and in the 20th century, by such figures as Alfred North Whitehead, John Dewey, Richard Bernstein, and Richard Rorty, as well as an array of theologians, collectively referred to as “the Chicago School.” American empiricism is a mansion with many rooms. It is important to note that the above list is only partial and does not list the current philosophers who locate themselves within this tradition. Most are members of the Highlands Institute for American Religious and Philosophical Thought.

¹⁶ Peirce offers a three part semiotics: the study of meaning, the study of reference, and the study of interpretation. The study of reference also includes three parts: symbolic or language defined, indexical or pointing, and iconic or the assertion of likeness. See, Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Works*. eds. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934).

¹⁷ See, for example, William Dean, “Empiricism and God,” *Empirical Theology: A Handbook*. ed. Randolph Crump Smith (Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Education Press, 1992), “Recreating Religious History,” *The Transient and Permanent in Liberal Religion*. eds. Dan O’Neal, et.al. (Boston: Skinner House Books, 1995), 255 – 268, and *The Religious Critic in American Culture* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994).

¹⁸ Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 192.

¹⁹ See, Susann Pangerl, “Into the Woods: In Search of Our Stories,” *The Transient and Permanent in Liberal Religion*. eds. Dan O’Neal, et.al. (Boston: Skinner House Books, 1995), 289 –298.

²⁰ Dean, *Ibid.*, 1.

²¹ Dean, *Ibid.*, 3.

²² William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 400.

²³ Dewey placed great hope in education as the arena in which democratic personalities could be nurtured for participation in the public life.

²⁴ Bernard Loomer, *Faith and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), esp. chapter 6.

²⁵ Dean, *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁶ Diogenes, Laertius, *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*. trans. R. D. Hicks, *Loeb Classical Library*, vols. 184 and 185. (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1925). . Bk I, Prologue, par. 18.

²⁷ Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1936), xv.

²⁸ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

²⁹ This stands in partial contrast, for instance, to Niebuhr’s claim that faith communities take the objective experience of God as the center. Taylor and Dean’s claims find some footing of resonance with Niebuhr’s claim that all communities of selves invariably involve a third term, which becomes the object of loyalty and trust. Dean and Taylor would suggest that this is antecedent—that the object in question has moral persuasiveness because it already resonates with one’s moral sense of self.

³⁰ Taylor identifies , in Western culture, three such goods: benevolence, the affirmation of ordinary life, and autonomy.

³¹ See Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. A. Lingus (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), and Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994). In addition, several feminist scholars write about emotional work as “moral management.” See, for example, Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

³² Edward Farley, *Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

³³ Zygmunt Bauman, *Ibid.*

³⁴ Charles, Taylor, *Ibid.*

³⁵ William Dean. “Process Theology and the American Spiritual Culture,” *The Journal of Liberal Religion* Vol. 2, Number 1 (Fall, 2000), 1 –12.

³⁶ His later works include, *The Restoration of the Self* (New York: International Universities Press, 1977), and *How Does Analysis Cure?* ed. Arnold Goldberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

³⁷ These selfobject functions have developed several nuanced descriptions over the last twenty years. Kohut referred to the functions of idealization, efficacy, twinship (i.e. belonging as sameness), alter-ego (i.e., belonging where others carry qualities not associated with one self), mirroring (which includes functions of affirmation, recognition, confirmation, witness), and adversarial . Later theorists have the affiliative function.

³⁸ For a carefully nuanced discussion of meaningfulness as a critical outcome sustaining selfobject relations, see Arnold Goldberg, *A Fresh Look at Psychoanalysis: The View From Self Psychology* (Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press, 1988), 135.

³⁹ For a detailed discussion of the neurobiological correlates of the selfobject relations see, Allen N. Schore. *Affect Regulation and the Origins of the Self: The Neurobiology of Emotional Development* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1994).

⁴⁰ Heinz Kohut and Ernst Wolf, "The Disorders of the Self and their Treatment: An Outline," *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* Vol. 59, Part 4 (1978), 413- 425.

⁴¹ See Michael Basch's discussion of affect attunement. Michael Basch, "Selfobject and Selfobject Transferences: Theoretical Implications," *Kohut's Legacy*. eds. Paul Stepansky, *et.al.*, (Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press, 1984).

⁴² See for example, Malcolm L. West, *et.al.*, *Patterns of Relating: An Adult Attachment Perspective*. (New York: Guilford Press, 1994), and M. Main, ed. *A Topology of Human Attachment Organization: Assessed in Discourse, Drawing, and Interviews*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

⁴³ Doris Brothers, *Falling Backwards: An Exploration of Trust and Self Experience*. (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1995).

⁴⁴ The intricate dance of these dimensions is well captured in the Sondheim play, *Into the Woods*. At the heart of that play are profound contingency, ambiguity and uncertainty which can only be negotiated, in unanticipated ways, by its characters.

⁴⁵ Daniel N. Stern. *The Interpersonal World of the Human Infant: A View From Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology* (New York: Basic, 1985).

⁴⁶ Kohut spoke of the psychological significance of ethical dimension of life in its supportive and stabilizing functions for a vulnerable or enfeebled self. See, for example, Heinz Kohut, "Stranger, Take this Word to Sparta, Here We Lie Obeying Her Orders (July 16, 1981)," *Self Psychology and the Humanities: Reflections on a New Psychoanalytic Approach*. ed. Charles B. Strozier (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1985), 263 – 269.

⁴⁷ See, for example, Beatrice Beebe and Frank Lachmann, "Mother-Infant Mutual Influences and Precursors of Psychic Structure," *Frontiers in Self Psychology: Progress in Self Psychology*. Vol. 3, ed. Arnold Goldberg (Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press, 1988), 3 – 26, and Beatrice Beebe and Daniel Stern, "Engagement, Disengagement, and Early Object Experiences," *Communicative Structures and Psychic Structures*. eds. N. Freedman, *et.al.* (New York: Plenum Press, 1977), 35 – 55.