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Useful for 'No One':

A Theological Response to 'No Self' Views of Human Personality

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An abstract of
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Abstract

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Most theological anthropologies formed within Christian traditions simply take for granted that human persons are animated by singular, centralized "selves." This is unfortunate (1) because many contemporary philosophers of mind and cognitive scientists have crafted compelling cases for adopting 'no self' theories of human subjectivity and (2) because essentialist commitments to "selves" and their "self-interests" – both prominent conceptual components within most contemporary Christian theologies – tempt persons to abandon aspirations toward saintliness and to neglect important duties of charity. In this paper, I argue that Christian theologians *as theologians* stand to benefit from respecting the phenomena-referencing conceptual expertise of cognitive scientists and philosophers of mind and from risking the use of 'no self' concepts for understanding human personality. Furthermore, I argue that by changing our understanding of "who we are" in this way, we effectively alter what passes for a valid and credible analogical representation of God-in-relation-to-our-world. If 'no self' animates human persons, then Christian theologians have reason to prefer (a) analogical representations of God's love for humanity that represent God's love as some set of divine processes whereby certain essential potentials among human lives are nurtured to (b) analogical representations of God's love that present God's love as some divine self's career of gifting human lives with futures of autonomy. If 'no self' animates human persons, love-realization cannot be viewed as a vehicle for self-realization. The person who becomes 'no one' is primed for acknowledging that love-realization is the unrivaled goal of Christian living.

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Introduction: If 'No One' is Home…

Imagine that throughout the life of the church Christian theologies have presupposed a theory of human subjectivity that has now been eclipsed by a radically different and evidently superior theory. Imagine that this shift has changed the way scholars conceive of human personality. As a consequence, existing theological research programs would degenerate as new paradigms for describing human personality emerged. Talk about God-in-relation-to-our-human-inhabited-world would need to change to accommodate new understandings of what it means to be a human person. Moreover, to the extent that our characterizations of God's personalities are analogically informed by and evaluated in relation to our understandings of human personalities, many would be compelled to re-conceive the personalities of God. Finally, insofar as scientific theories concerning human situations are relevant to the work of theology, some Christian doctrines – e.g., the Trinity, the image of God, the Incarnation, etc. – may require significant reconstruction. As a result, theologians may determine that some sets of beliefs and some forms of speech should be discarded.

During the past century, the core theories of most research programs in the human sciences have assumed that the phenomena of human personality may be adequately described and explained according to some *ego theory*. An ego theory describes and explains the apparent unity and continuity of first-person experience by hypothesizing human persons are characterized by a single, central, consciousness-unifying, enduring subject of experience. Ego theory responds to the question "what unifies some person's consciousness at any time?" – what makes it true, for example, that I can now both see what I am typing and hear the laughter of colleagues outside my office – with the hypothesis that both experiences are being had by me, person *x*, at time *t*.[1] Ego theory is the stuff of everyday 'self'-talk – the idea that I am animated by a single *self*. Imagine a scenario in which cognitive scientists have exposed ego theories of subjectivity to tests resulting in decisive disconfirmations. Imagine that, consequently, many scientists and philosophers agree that research programs built upon this assumption have become *degenerating* programs, such that the core theories of these programs are now only being preserved by mere face-saving maneuvers and linguistic tricks.

[1] Parfit, Derek. "Divided Minds and the Nature of Persons." *Arguing About the Mind*. Ed. by Brie Gertler and Lawrence Shapiro. New York, NY: Routledge, 2007, p. 230.

Moreover, imagine that, motivated to resolve this crisis, some critical mass of cognitive scientists and philosophers of mind collaborated to craft what was an apparently *progressive* research program[2] to supersede these now *degenerating* programs. Imagine the impact that this development might have upon Christian theologians. How would we respond? What new patterns of speech would need to evolve within the theologian's descriptions of faith, hope, and love? Which Christian traditions, if any, could supply us with adequate resources for speaking of Christian personalities if scientists were able to demonstrate the theoretical inadequacy of positing continuously existing, consciousness-unifying subjects?

Today, these questions demand our attention because the hypothetical situation described above is arguably not counterfactual. First, scientific theories are relevant to some of the theologian's work. In the practice of Christian theology, one cannot speak of God without speaking of humanity because the proper object of Christian theology is the *intercourse* between God and humanity. So Karl Barth argued,[3] and so I also assume in this thesis. To the extent that

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[2] A progressive program meets the following conditions: (1) it produces some new version of some driving theory (some core theory plus auxiliaries) that preserves the unrefuted results of some predecessor theory; (2) each new version accommodates excess empirical content over its predecessor, i.e. it predicts some novel, previously unexpected facts; and (3) some such facts are subsequently corroborated. Murphy, Nancey. *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990, p. 59.

[3] Barth, Karl. *The Humanity of God*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960, p. 56.

theological speech-acts are properly concerned with interrelations among God and humanity, theological speech-acts should be informed both by attention to alleged encounters with God and by attention to, ideally speaking, all of our knowledge concerning human situations – biology, psychology, sociology, etc. Second, cognitive scientists have exposed ego theories to tests that disconfirm much of the content common to such theories. In fact, several contemporary philosophers of mind and cognitive scientists are now suggesting that research programs containing core ego theories are destined to degenerate. Furthermore, some cognitive scientists are developing progressive research programs that utilize alternative theories of subjectivity.

In the present work, I risk a theological response to such developments in the fields of cognitive science and philosophy of mind. As the reader will discover, the present work gives special attention to a recently published alternative account of human subjectivity known as the *Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity*. I contend that if some alternative account of human subjectivity like the *Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity* accurately describes *the way things are* – if human subjectivity is largely reducible to phenomenal self-modeling processes[4] – then traditional Christian accounts of God's intercourse with humanity must be

[4] According to Thomas Metzinger, "Self-modeling is that special case, in which the target system and the simulating-emulating system are identical: A self-modeling information-processing system internally and continually simulates its own observable output as well as it *emulates* abstract properties of its own internal information processing – and it does so *for* itself." Metzinger, Thomas. *Being No One: The Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003, p. 301.

reconstructed. More precisely, I argue that if 'no one' endures throughout human lives, then Christian theologians have reason to prefer (a) analogical representations of God's love for humanity that represent God's love *as some set of divine processes* whereby certain essential potentials among human lives are nurtured to (b) analogical representations of God's love that present God's love *as some divine self's career* of gifting human lives with futures of autonomy.[5] Finally, I contend that, if we adopt such a vision of God's love, some common understandings of Christian faith and hope will require revision.

Part 1: Theology in Use

Theologians have crafted numerous descriptions of the work they perform. This plurality of descriptions reflects the diversity of personalities engaging in the practices of theology and also the very different situations in which those personalities conduct their work. The reader may observe that persons committed to different professions tend to practice different forms of theology – i.e. theology is not practiced by philosophers, poets, and politicians

[5] Because I use the term "process" here, some readers may suspect that, with the present project, I am seeking to invest Whitehead's metaphysical project. However, patient readers will discover that I have no such intentions. Process theologians may come to embrace my work; nevertheless, I neither write *as* a process theologian nor *for* the process theology movement. Moreover, an account of the relative merits of "process" theologies lies beyond the scope of the present project.

alike.[6] The reader may also observe that persons primarily concerned with particular publics tend to practice particular forms of theology. As David Tracy argues, philosophical theologies, systematic theologies, and practical theologies are typically developed by persons who prioritize the work of academies, churches, and societies, respectively.[7] In this section, I describe, in philosophical, systematic, and practical terms, some ways in which theologians may constructively engage the contents of scientific theories, as theologians work to form their own doctrinal commitments.

A Basic Philosophical Description of Theology

In broad, philosophical terms, theology is God-referencing discourse.[8] As such, the practice of theology is an intellectual-conversational discipline, a conceptual exchange. Theology, in other words, is participation in a peculiar form of linguistic practices. Consequently, any philosophical treatment of the potential meaningfulness and truthfulness of this-or-that theology, *as God-*

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[6] Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *Systematic Theology*. Vol. 1. Trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991, pp. 1-7.
[7] Tracy, David. *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*. New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981, pp. 56-57.
[8] In a similar manner, James Gustafson acknowledges this basic understanding of theology when he writes, "my interpretation of the significance of what I describe is theological in that its critical reference point is what . . . can be called an Other, an ultimate power, and thus is construed in relation to that." Gustafson, James M. *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*. Vol. 1: Theology and Ethics. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1981, p. 3.

referencing discourse, should attempt to sketch the potential usefulness of God-talk. We must ask, '*how* is God-talk useful?'[9]

Before addressing this question directly, however, it is important to note that, in relation to the theologian, God is both *the Creator of the theologian* and *the theologian's creation*. Stated more precisely, every theologian re-presents God, *the Creator*, by forming and reforming 'God,' *her creation*. Like all linguistic practices, theology uses phrases, i.e. symbolic expressions of concepts,[10] to cultivate human understanding.[11] In theological discourse, 'God' functions as a

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[9] The question "What might we reasonably hope to accomplish by using words and phrases to conceive of God?" has troubled theologians across several ages. Frederick Ferre observes that no statement with God as referent can mean what it would if it had any other referent (Gunton, Colin E., Stephen R. Holmes, and Murray A. Rae. *The Practice of Theology: A Reader*. London, UK: SCM Press, 2001, p. 287). Thomas Aquinas agreed in principle, although he added that theology is not equivocation but rather that "words apply to God and creatures by analogy or proportion" (Davies, Brian. *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 163). On the other hand, John Duns Scotus argued that "God is conceived not only in a concept analogous to the concept of a creature . . . but even in some concept univocal to Himself and to a creature" (see Gunton, *The Practice of Theology*, p. 295). Each theologian expresses a valuable insight into our inability to precisely analyze the particular representational content of "higher-level" concepts.

[10] I define concepts as "strongly conceivable states of affairs," such that a proposition *P* is "strongly conceivable" for a subject *S* if and only if *S* sees that *P* is possible, and a proposition P_1 is "weakly conceivable for S_1 if and only if S_1 does not see that P_1 is impossible. Furthermore, I agree with James van Cleve that "whatever is strongly conceivable for me is something I am prima facie justified in believing to be possible," in the absence of defeaters (Van Cleve, James. "Conceivability and the Cartesian Argument for Dualism." *The Way Things Are: Basic Readings in Metaphysics*. Ed. By W.R. Carter. Boston, MA: The McGraw-Hill Companies, 1998, pp. 239-244). By means of this definition, I mean to differentiate between intrasystematically coherent concepts and "entertainable" or even "believable" notions.

[11] Drawing upon the philosophical writings of Heidegger and Gadamer, Sandra Schneider describes *understanding* as that which "we finally seek in and through all cognitive effort." As she notes, the term 'understanding' has two meanings: "first, and most fundamentally, understanding is our characteristically human way of being, our fundamental mode of being-in-the-world," and "a second meaning of understanding, the one we tend to think of when we define the word, refers to the cognitive operation by which we come to know." As a rule,

concept.[12] As such, the functions of 'God' are limited by the cultural-linguistic frameworks persons inhabit[13] – i.e. the functions of 'God' are determined by "language games" particular to theological forms of life.[14] This essay takes for granted that, in an important sense, all concepts – even the gods – come from convictional, theory-laden "places,"[15] and that the theologian, by definition,

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theologians engage in both ontological inquiries and epistemological inquiries to cultivate both understandings in both senses described above. Schneiders, Sandra. *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Text*. 2nd Ed. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999, pp. 17-18.

[12] To say that God functions as a concept is not to deny the ontological status of God or to suggest that God does not maintain some causal relationship to the world. I do not mean that God is not personally active in our worlds. For the purposes of this essay, I merely wish to emphasize that 'God' functions as a theological concept concerning the relations of other concepts. 'God' is an axial concept that is, in some ways, inescapable for persons inhabiting our traditions of thought – a concept which gives form to our consciousnesses much like the meta-concepts of 'self' and 'world.'

[13] In his seminal work, *The Nature of Doctrine*, George Lindbeck argues persuasively that "a religion can be viewed as a kind of cultural and/or linguistic framework or medium that shapes the entirety of life and thought." He points out that, to a large degree, "human experience is shaped, molded, and in a sense constituted by cultural and linguistic forms. There are numberless thoughts we cannot think, sentiments we cannot have, and realities we cannot perceive unless we learn to use the appropriate symbol systems." According to Lindbeck, "a religion is above all an external word, a *verbum externum*, that molds and shapes the self [let the reader note, the conspicuous presence of self-referencing language in Lindbeck's account of religion] and its world, rather than an expression or thematization of a preexisting self or of preconceptual experience. . . . A comprehensive scheme or story used to structure all dimensions of existence is not primarily a set of propositions to be believed but is rather the medium in which one moves, a set of skills that one employs in living one's life." Lindbeck, George A. *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984, pp. 33-35. Note: by acknowledging that doctrines function as rules, I have not denied that doctrines may also function as "higher-level" analogical representations. I do not mean to "reduce" doctrines to rules.

[14] The terms "language-game" and "form of life" have their origins in the writings of Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein thought that verbal expressions of concepts were "defined", "constituted", "determined", or "fixed" by the "grammatical rules" of a language (a "language game") and that a rule was capable of being internalized insofar as following it implied a regularity of behavior, a "form of life" Fann, K.T. *Wittgenstein's Conception of Philosophy*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969, pp. 72-81.

[15] A hallmark of postmodernism is its epistemological skepticism concerning non-convictional foundations for belief structures. Modernists imagined that a perfect, philosophical method,

develops her starting "place" and establishes her "touchstone" beliefs in conversation with some community of faith.[16]

Now, if theology is a kind of "language game," the reader may ask 'how then may theology – the practice of forming and reforming God-referencing phrases – be used constructively by human persons?' Phrases are potentially meaningful to the extent that they potentially represent some set of events or

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founded in objective knowledge, might yield universal belief structures corresponding to reality (Lawhead, William F. *The Modern Voyage*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 2001, 206-210). According to modern foundationalists, some concepts are either "self-evident" or can be inferred from "self-evident" axioms. However, many "postmodern" thinkers argue that the notion that some concepts are "self-evident" is misguided. These thinkers admit that some concepts are properly regarded as more reliable than others; however, they still stress that individuals' evaluations of reliability assume subjective criteria that cohere with particular value-systems and methods of inquiry. Thus, ironically, these "postmodernists" ubiquitously accept the proposition "there are no non-convictional concepts" as grounds for an anti-foundational understanding of our conceptualization processes.

[16] Persons confident in their speech-acts concerning truth and falsity often experience talk of conceptual and linguistic "usefulness" profoundly bothersome. In an important sense, doers of theology should aim to represent *the way things are* rather than merely accumulate support for this-or-that profitable cause. However, doers of theology should also acknowledge that persons ever-negotiate with possible beliefs by seeking to achieve coherence between parts that they have identified as important and significant. In the words of Michael Ruse, "unless challenged, one accepts the touchstones and tries to make a comprehensive, consistent, and meaningful overall picture." Ruse, Michael. *Can a Darwinian Be a Christian?* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 109. Moreover, whenever some set of beliefs becomes challenged, we work to analyze conceivable belief options, make comparisons between alternative options, and probe for evidence in support of this-or-that option, and as W. V. Quine and J. S. Ullian have pointed out, this process is characterized by "certain arbitrariness," in that persons often must arbitrarily select some belief option, among some set of contradictory beliefs, to which they will give their attention. Quine, W. V. and J. S. Ullian. *The Web of Belief*. 2nd Ed. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1978, p. 18. In my view, persons never shake themselves free from this process. If we insist that some belief is believed to be true simply because it corresponds with reality, we have closed our eyes to this process. This is not to say that persons should never become certain that they "know" *x* is really real. It is, however, to say that '*x* corresponds to reality' is an irresponsible answer to the question, 'how do they know that *x* is really real?', even if '*x* corresponds to reality' is not an irresponsible answer to other sorts of questions (e.g., 'why do you believe in *x*?').

elicit reflection upon some set of events.[17] To show that God-referencing discourse is potentially meaningful, we must show that God-concepts potentially represent or elicit productive reflections upon some set of events – past, present, or future. Some theologians have taken the latter route, arguing that God-concepts are meaningful inasmuch as they elicit productive reflections upon the conceiver's own personality.[18] However, such arguments fail to satisfy the theologian who wishes to discern whether or not the predicates of her God-talk are truly attributes of some divine personality, or process. Insofar as theologians are concerned not only with the meaningfulness but also with the truthfulness of their God-talk, their God-referencing discourse should develop God-concepts that adequately represent some aspect(s) of reality – either potential or actual.[19]

Here it is important to note that the concepts theologians use to think about God are distinct from the concepts biologists use to think about dogs. Constructing some God-concept that credibly represents God's relatedness to the world is, in some ways, more difficult than constructing a dog-concept that

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[17] This is not to say that all meaningful phrases represent non-subjective states of affairs. A phrase that represents or elicits reflections upon "mental" events – e.g. a phrase usefully referencing some *qualia* experienced during an episode of hallucination – may be considered meaningful.

[18] Gunton, Colin E., Stephen R. Holmes, and Murray A. Rae. *The Practice of Theology: A Reader*. London: SCM Press, 2001, pp. 303.

[19] As David Tracy writes, "the characteristic which distinguishes theology as a discipline from religious studies . . . is the fact that scholars in religious studies may legitimately confine their interests to 'meaning' while theologians must, by the intrinsic demands of their discipline, face the questions of both meaning and truth." Tracy, David. *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*. New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981, p. 20.

credibly represents the relatedness of some novel breed of dog to the world. Our concept of the genus dog is informed by knowledge developed from controlled, repeatable observations of dog-phenomena, and this knowledge is useful for the production of concepts with which to represent some novel breed of dog. However, our God-concepts are not informed by knowledge developed from controlled, repeatable observations of God-phenomena because God, unlike a dog, is not a *thing*.[20] Consequently, theologians cannot compare God to other life-forms, to which biologists might compare dogs, in order to classify and subsequently analyze their experience of God according to observable categories – e.g. kingdom, phylum, class, order, etc. In this way, the theologian, relative to the scientist, is epistemologically disadvantaged – she cannot possess knowledge of God-in-relation-to-her-world in the same sense that the scientist possesses knowledge of dog-in-relation-to-her-world.

We may, then, appropriately ask, how could attention to human experience tell us anything about the reality of God? As stated above, our "knowledge" of God is unlike our knowledge of *phenomena*. 'God' does not represent some event of sensory experience.[21] Rather, 'God' is inferred from

[20] Tanner, Kathryn. "Is God in Charge: Creation and Providence. *Essentials of Christian Theology*. Ed. by William C. Platcher. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003, pp. 116-131.
[21] Of course, for Christians, the concept 'God' is very much associated with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Christ, the son of the living God. Moreover, "language games" of

intuitions, i.e., concepts that represent relations among sets of concepts. (The reality of God is arguably "knowable" only as a concept inferred from such intuitions.)[22] An intuition is a meta-concept representing relationships between some set of concepts and how we normally encounter and otherwise conceive of the world. Personal perspectives, or worldviews, consist of concepts (cognitive representations of sensory experience) integrated by meta-concepts (cognitive representations of relations between concepts). God-concepts, in my view, perform an integrative function among meta-concepts – a meta-narrative, meta-theoretical, meta-ethical function.

Now, two states of affairs are not somehow more real than the relationships between them. In fact, we usually affirm that representations of sensory experience (e.g., facts) and representations of relations among representations of sensory experience (e.g., theories) both appertain to the same reality. To the extent that "higher-level" representations appertain to the same reality as "lower-level" representations, the theologian may hypothesize that her representations of 'God' appertain to her reality. Assuming as much, the theologian may then engage in God-referencing discourse to determine the

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Christian God-referencing must, by definition, remain accountable to these events – i.e., all Christian God-concepts, as a rule, must prove compatible with canonical Jesus-events.

[22] Thinking and talking about God requires entry into mystery. Whenever persons are surrounded by mystery, they "feel" their way around. Theologians are uniquely tasked with examining pre-cognitive "feelings," or intuitions, concerning God and with using reflections concerning such intuitions as data.

adequacy of her 'God' relative to the other concepts that inform her experience of the world. With words, the theologian works from some "place" of faith toward more adequate understandings of her personality, her situation, and her God.

This point, of course, requires further clarification. Words are not only representational utterances. They are syntactically manageable symbols. Each word in a syntactical unit may represent a simple concept; however, a whole sentence, paragraph, book, or series of books is often required to represent complex concepts (e.g. meta-concepts) in a comprehensible manner. Much of the theologian's work consists in rendering her God-concept(s) intelligible to others, which she accomplishes by organizing *phenomena-referencing* concepts into syntactical units that clarify her understanding of her *noumena-referencing* God-concepts. Her syntactically ordered expressions may then be submitted to peer review, analyzed to determine their coherence with other truth claims, and evaluated in terms of their potential for preparing persons to participate in truth-speaking,[23] receiving and interpreting divine revelation,[24] facilitating world transformation,[25] or any number of other goals.

Now, we ordinarily assume that some syntactical structures better organize given sets of concepts than other possible syntaxes. Assuming as

[23] cf. *The Analogical Imagination*, pp. 56-58, 62-64
[24] cf. *The Analogical Imagination*, pp. 56-58, 64-69
[25] cf. *The Analogical Imagination*, pp. 56-58, 69-79

much, theologians work to evaluate syntax-governing meta-concepts and to re-organize "lower-level" concepts according to better syntactical structures. In this "bottom-up" manner, theologians work to better understand and negotiate with those "higher-level" God-concepts which currently structure persons' interactions with reality. However, theologians have traditionally claimed that participation in this process also yields "top-down" benefits, such that persons who have cultivated better God-concepts are, to some extent, in a better position to evaluate their intuitions and re-organize "lower-level" concepts into authentic syntactical structures. The theologian thus seeks, by virtue of her participation in God-referencing discourse, to refine her understanding of God-in-relation-to-her-world.

Finally, the theologian seeks to publish her work *as doctrine-forming statements*. Of course, the statements she publishes may or may not become authorized by some faith community such that they function as church doctrine in any official capacity. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that participation in the discipline of theology is frequently conceived as participation in the work of publicly reconstructing those doctrines which presently function as norms of communal belief or practice. On the one hand, these doctrines, *considered as rules of faith and practice*, "are not first-order propositions, but are to be construed as

second-order ones,"[26] such that their present syntactical forms "assert nothing either true or false [i.e., nothing either verifiable or falsifiable on evidentiary grounds] about God and his relation to creatures, but only speak about such assertions."[27] Nevertheless, theologians may collaborate with others to discern whether or not previously published doctrines are "felicitous" to the attitudes some group of Christians hold concerning the world.[28] However, on the other hand, insofar as some doctrine consists of phenomena-referencing concepts which theologians use analogically to represent God-in-relation-to-our-world, these phenomena-referencing component parts of our doctrinal statements may be tested against our experiences and compared with our scientific world-models to determine their world-representational adequacy. In this sense, doctrines, *considered as "higher-level" analogical representations of God-in-relation-to-the-world*,

[26] Lindbeck, George A. *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984.
[27] *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 69.
[28] As David Kelsey argues, "a self-involving performative utterance may fail, not by being falsified by evidence, but – to use the quasi-technical term J. L. Austin employed when he drew attention to these matters – by being infelicitous. It may suffer 'infelicity' if I am insincere, lacking the attitude or intention I express. Or it may suffer 'infelicity' if what I involve myself in is a promise and, however sincere I may be, I am unable to carry it out. Clearly, then, if the community that uses the doctrine to help elucidate its credal expression of its own self-identity lacks deep dispositions toward the relevant attitudes and intentions (say, gratitude or a commitment to care for the well-being of creatures), then its doctrine of creation fails by 'infelicity.' Affirming the doctrine would no longer be an authentic expression of the truth of the community." Kelsey, David. "The Doctrine of Creation from Nothing." *Creation and Humanity: The Sources of Christian Theology*. Ed. by Ian A. MacFarland. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009, p. 64.

may be judged more or less truth-conducive, and the phenomena-representing concepts that compose them may be held accountable to scientific discoveries.[29]

A Basic Systematic Description of Theology

To say this – that theologians may hold their doctrines accountable to scientific discoveries by comparing the "lower-level," *phenomena-referencing* conceptual parts of their doctrines with scientific world-models to determine the world-representational adequacy of that doctrinal component – is not to say that theological and scientific "language games" are entirely commensurable. Theology and science are distinct practices[30] informed by distinct traditions[31] of inquiry. The theologian and the scientist perform their work within different *rooms of reference*, prioritize different goals, and claim different epistemological

[29] Nancey Murphy points out that "as a matter of fact, scientific hypotheses occur regularly in theology – for example, as aids in the interpretation of biblical texts." Murphy, Nancey. *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990, p.198.

[30] Like MacIntyre, I use the term 'practice' to mean "any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended." MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue*. 3rd Ed. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007, p. 187.

[31] A tradition is a project, which belongs to a community, aimed at recognizing, understanding, extending, correcting, and (if possible) transcending that community's past achievements (intellectual, moral, socio-economic, political, or other). Moreover, traditions are characteristically, even if tentatively, directed towards some *telos* (e.g. the beloved community, an all-encompassing explanatory model) appropriate to the heroes venerated, stories rehearsed, and (other) practices normally embodied in that community, which predispose persons belonging to a specific tradition to share common sets of intuitions. Finally, traditions (ideally) are history-conscious enterprises, i.e. traditions presuppose a "theory of knowledge according to which each particular theory or set of moral or scientific beliefs is intelligible and justifiable—insofar as it is justifiable—only as a member in an historical series." (MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 146)

advantages. Consequently, they normally develop somewhat different forms of consciousness and patterns of attention, such that they may be said to inhabit different worlds of perceptive potential wherein they employ different "frames of interpretation."[32] In this sense, the theologian and the scientist enter into different domains of inquiry. However, I will argue that their work intersects, insofar as both participate in *rooms of experiential reference*, such that descriptions of theology and science as "non-overlapping magisteria" tend to misconstrue the ideal relationship between theologians and scientists.

In *Rocks of Ages*, Stephen Jay Gould notes that "science tries to document the factual character of the natural world, and to develop theories that coordinate and explain these facts."[33] To engage in science is to engage in a procedure for investigating the natural world in terms of efficient causes, directed toward the end of developing our shared knowledge of natural phenomena into some unified, explanatory model. Like Gould, I recognize that "each domain of

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[32] I borrow the term "frames of interpretation" from Thomas F. Torrance who argues "as a *science* theology is only a human endeavor in quest of the truth, in which we seek to apprehend God as far as we may, to understand what we apprehend, and to speak clearly and carefully about what we understand. It takes place only within the environment of the special sciences and only within the bounds of human learning and reasoning where critical judgment and rigorous testing are required, but where in faithfulness to its ultimate term of reference beyond itself in God it cannot attempt to justify itself on grounds occupied by the other sciences or within their frames of reference" (pp. 281-282). The reader will note that, to this point, my description of theology, in relation to science, is largely consistent with this statement. Torrance, Thomas F. *Theological Science*. London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1969.

[33] Gould, Stephen Jay. *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1999, p. 4.

inquiry frames its own rules and admissible questions, and sets its own criteria for judgment and resolution" and that "no single [teaching authority] can come close to encompassing all the troubling issues raised by . . . [a complex subject] so rich as the meaning of our relationship with other forms of life."[34] Scientists *as scientists* are especially concerned with developing objective knowledge concerning phenomena – i.e., *things* [or events] *perceived through the senses* – and with forming theoretical representations that account for the widest possible range of phenomena, exhibit the strongest possible degree of predictive power, and suggest lines of further research. Every scientist works to produce reliable and fecund *phenomena-referencing* concepts for understanding the world. Consequently, science, in general, may be described as a "site for dialogue and debate"[35] concerning the phenomenal world – a *room of experiential reference*.

Now, we may ask, 'how could the work of science, as such, inform some system of specifically Christian theology?' Christian theology is God-referencing discourse informed by faith in Jesus *as the Christ, the son of the living God*. Because Christian theology is uniquely informed by attention to the personality of Jesus Christ, our theology is, to some extent, methodologically distinct from other

[34]*Rocks of Ages*, pp. 52-53.
[35] *Ibid*., p. 61.

types of theology.[36] Nevertheless, like theologians of every kind, we engage in God-referencing discourse believing that the practice of conversing with God-concepts is useful for developing healthy understandings of our shared existence. We attend to our scriptures, traditions, experiences, and rationalities believing that God-concepts derived from these *rooms of reference* can be used to craft meaningful and truthful[37] responses to our most bothersome questions.[38]

However, among Christian theologians, disagreements concerning how persons should participate in these *rooms of reference* are plentiful. Consequently, Christian theologians, as a matter of fact, practice a plurality of methodologies. As suggested above, this plurality of methods reflects the fact that individuals formed within different contexts often concentrate on different theological

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[36] Gunton, Colin E., Stephen R. Holmes, and Murray A. Rae. Ed. *The Practice of Theology: A Reader*. London, United Kingdom: SCM Press, 2001, pp. 1-2.

[37] As Alasdair McIntyre argues, the virtue of truthfulness is indispensible for achieving and exercising independent practical reasoning abilities (MacIntyre, Alasdair. *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*. Chicago, IL: Open Court Publishing Company, 1999 , pp. 94-98, 147-154).

[38] As David Tracy writes, "every theologian, by the very acts of speaking and writing, makes a claim to attention. What is that claim? A claim to public response bearing meaning and truth on the most serious and difficult questions, both personal and communal, that any human being or society must face: Has existence any ultimate meaning? Is a fundamental trust to be found amidst the fears, anxieties and terror of existence? Is there some reality, some force, even some one, who speaks a word of truth that can be recognized and trusted? Religions ask and respond to such fundamental questions of the meaning and truth of our existence as human beings in solitude, and in society, history and the cosmos. Theologians, by definition, risk an intellectual life on the wager that religious traditions can be studied as authentic responses to just such questions." Tracy, David. *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*. New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981, p. 4.

processes – prioritizing diverse preliminary tasks[39] and attending differently to scriptures, traditions, experiences, and rationalities. Nonetheless, in my view, participation in each of these *rooms of reference* is a necessary prior condition for attaining certain theological ends. Participation in the revelation of God's Word in Jesus Christ, which is mediated to us through the Scriptures, is logically and historically prior to Christian patterns of consciousness.[40] Meanwhile, participation in some Christian tradition is technically prior to Christian ethical imaginations. Finally, participation in some human experience and rationality is epistemologically prior to every human discovery.

Christian theologians typically regard their Scripture as *the* primary source for theology because God's revelation in the personality, crucifixion, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ functions as *the* norm for Christian theology. Normally, Christian theologians demand that every doctrine crafted for the church should, in principle, be tested against the revelation of the Word of God

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[39] Some important theological tasks: to hypothesize the content of healthy consciousnesses so that the church can test for and discover what makes for healthy consciousness; to interpret the Scriptures, clarifying the force and nature of God's revelation in the history and personality of Jesus Christ; to identify and represent goods internal to the ongoing practices of the Christian tradition; to articulate understandings of the divine-human encounter, preparing believers for *recognizing* God's activity in the world, thereby empowering them for *participation* in God's activity; to render theologies persuasive to public audiences for the purpose of ecumenical and cross-cultural conversations (and to receive insights and wisdoms more perfectly developed among other traditions); etc.

[40] Consciousness may be described as *the appearance of a world*; if you are conscious, a world appears to you (Metzinger, Thomas. *The Ego Tunnel: The Science of the Mind and the Myth of the Self*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2009, p. 15). It may also be described as *the space of attentional agency*– to be conscious of some object is for that object to be a potential object of attention (p. 44).

in Jesus Christ. In other words, the logics of Christian theological systems must be structured according to some 'rule of Christ.'[41] Because traditions of Christian theology so privilege the revelation of God's Word in Jesus, which is communicated in the Scriptures, this revelation is logically[42] and historically[43] prior to properly Christian forms of consciousness and are, therefore, prior to properly Christian forms of life. However, "in practice, theological reflection may also find its point of departure in tradition, experience, or rational analysis,"[44] i.e. tradition, experience, and reason may each assume a kind of priority[45] in our theological reflections concerning divine-human relations.[46]

To promote epistemological sobriety and encourage theological conversation in pluralistic contexts, we should acknowledge that our acts of

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[41] In the apostle Paul's writings, the notion that Christ-concepts should regulate the churches' exercises of faith were expressed in terms of the "law of Christ" (cf. Gal. 6:2; 1 Cor. 9:21) and the "law of the Spirit" (cf. Rom. 8:2). Furthermore, throughout the history of the church, orthodox clergy have defined the tasks of Christian theology according to some "rule of faith" and/or "rule of charity" implied in their understandings of Jesus Christ.

[42] By definition, an occasion of theological reflection is Christian theological reflection if and only if that occasion is characterized by devotion (whether explicitly or implicitly regarded) to the decisive revelation of the Word of God in Jesus Christ.

[43] The revelation of God's Word in Jesus Christ *comes to* every contemporary theologian *as a set of historical events*, contextualizing the personal histories of Christian theologians. Moreover, this revelation is also a *chronological antecedent to* Christian traditions and Christian religious experience.

[44] UMC Book of Discipline (2008), ¶ 104.

[45] In order to accomplish specific goals, theologians may adopt techniques of theological inquiry that emphasize and/or 'depart from' reflections on tradition, experience, and reason.

[46] Karl Barth rightly contends that the object of theology is "the *intercourse* between God and man?", that "one cannot speak of God without speaking of [humankind]." (*The Humanity of God*, p. 56)

theology are informed by traditions[47] of God-referencing discourse. Our traditions persuade us to privilege certain forms of consciousness and certain forms of life.[48] We engage in Christian theology because we have come to believe that practicing the language games of some tradition is both a person-enhancing and community-enhancing activity. As theologians, we speak as tradition-inhabiting persons energized by reformations in human consciousness.

Fully engaging in the practice of theology involves working to think through our freedoms for health and love, to invite potential conversation partners into dimensions of human existence that we have discovered, and to allow others to direct our attention to dimensions of human existence that they have discovered.[49] As we perform this work, we should always remember that

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[47] While I emphasize that Christian theology occurs within traditions, I do not mean that Christian theology is merely an exercise in rehearsing and appropriating insights gathered from the past. I agree with Migliore that "becoming Christian involves far more than appropriating and repeating [what he calls] a tradition" and that "to respond in faith to the revelation of the living God mediated through Scripture and the witness of the church is to become a free and joyful witness of the truth of the good news one has received and to share responsibility for interpreting it and living it out" Migliore, Daniel L. *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*. 2nd Ed. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004, p. 43).

[48] God-informed consciousness is a kind of embodiment. More ultimately, Christian theology aims at engendering Christ-like participation in God (or Christ-like living); more proximately, theology aims at engendering God-consciousness. Moreover, realizing God-consciousness and embodying Christ-like living are events that have a strong, positive correlation. Perhaps each is a 'way' to the other.

[49] My approach is similar to the 'fifth model' of revelation that Dulles identifies in his *Models of Revelation*, which Migliore terms "a new awareness that leads to transformative action." Unlike the models that Dulles critiques, though, my four doctrines did not downplay the witness of Scripture and tradition; instead, my renderings of these doctrines specifically pays special

while our thinking and conversing may yield novel insights, our every theological move is guided by theory-laden methodological assumptions and conceptual tools (i.e., doctrines)[50] that come to us from the traditions we inhabit.[51] The traditions we inhabit largely determine the techniques and technologies through which we receive the revelation of God's Word, through which we

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attention to the roles of Scripture and tradition in theology. (Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, pp. 34-35).

[50] A helpful metaphor for thinking about doctrines *as conceptual tools* – a metaphor which will become clearer after the reader has engaged Part Two of this essay – goes as follows: tools are to a hand as doctrines are to a soul. Human persons are representational systems, which generate and experience *the appearance of a world*, i.e. consciousness. As a special property of that world-model, human persons generate and experience a *phenomenal self-model* (PSM), and our brains map our PSMs onto a world-model, typically as the "center" of that model. Our PSMs are extraordinarily adaptable (relative to other animals), such that we are able to easily integrate tools with our PSMs. In other words, we are capable of focusing on tools *as if* they were parts of our bodies; with practice, we can focus on the location of a racquet head *as if* it were our hand (Metzinger, *The Ego Tunnel*, p. 79). Humans are able to temporarily integrate tools as into their PSMs, enabling us to achieve goal-directed and intelligent tool use. Such tool usage is the product of a very useful form of conscious experience, an extension of our conscious experience, relocating the "center" of our consciousness (our potential for attention) beyond our ordinary PSMs (our everyday body-minds). Likewise, integrating doctrines with our self-concepts and world-concepts relocates the "center" of our consciousness beyond our ordinary patterns of consciousness.

[51] Traditions supply persons with rationalities that organize and direct, often on the level of intuitions, the projects that are undertaken by communities belonging to this-or-that tradition. Many traditions also incorporate criteria according to which operant structures of belief and practice may be evaluated and critiqued. As arguments and conflicts arise within some tradition, even when those conflicts are interminable, engagement with those arguments and conflicts sustains and that tradition (MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 260). In the end, a tradition successfully may demonstrate its superiority relative to another tradition only if the adequacy and explanatory power of histories (including predictions) and models that tradition enables persons to compose are vindicated over against the histories/models of rival traditions in properly dialogical encounters with members of rival traditions (MacIntyre, Alasdair. *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988, pp. 402-403). Ecumenism, therefore, has a kind of technical significance that post-Enlightenment individuals cannot ignore. We are best prepared to evaluate and critique the organizations and directions of our own projects when we practice respectful and self-conscious conversations with members of rival traditions. I have embraced the rhetoric of consciousness because I believe that the church stands to gain much from conversations with members of Hindu traditions, Buddhist traditions, and contemporary philosophies of mind -- traditions each very much informed by some distinctive rhetoric of consciousness.

experience 'self,' 'world,' and 'God', and through which we proceed with theoretical and practical reasoning.[52]

Finally, experience is *the* source whereby human persons acquire knowledge. In a sense, we inherit the greatest part of our 'knowledge' from the lips and pens of others, in that we receive from others the beginnings of our ever-developing world-pictures, the often transparent "matter-of-course foundation(s)" for our research.[53] Nevertheless, we must rely upon interpretations of our *senses* to provide us with the data that inform our knowledge, whether that data is acquired by hearing from others or seeing for ourselves. The reception of sensory data, whether or not we become aware of the information being processed, is a necessary condition for knowledge acquisition. As we practice theology, we develop new 'knowledge' *only insofar as our 'eyes see' and our 'ears hear.'*

Of course, for Christian theologians, human dependence upon our *eyes* and *ears* is a matter of deep concern because systems of Christian theology are normally informed by some doctrine of sin. Among Christian theologians, the following is a relatively uncontroversial doctrine: human persons ordinarily inhabit ill-directed forms of consciousness, such that human persons ordinarily

[52] Even where persons 'break' with traditions, they do so *by means of attending to the particularities of that tradition*.
[53] Davies, *Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 22-23

experience their lives in unhealthy ways. According to Christian theologians, both the *a priori* frameworks that human persons inhabit and the *a posteriori* judgments of human persons are distorted by ill-directed forms of consciousness that destine human persons for sinful action, or separation from proper *intercourse* with God.[54] Therefore, (seemingly) sound reasoning can lead persons to embrace untruth and embody illness. The term 'reason' represents an appeal to some rational apparatus, some method of reflection – some cognitive tool in the hands of (ordinarily) sick animals. Thus, human reasoning, many Christian theologians have concluded, is ordinarily destined for error.[55]

Nevertheless, even among sick minds, reasoning performs an important positive function. The tools of rational analysis allow us to organize our understandings of Scripture, tradition, and experience, to render them internally coherent, and to relate our witness to "the full range of human knowledge, experience, and service."[56] Reason enables human persons to responsibly appropriate certainty[57] and to utilize prior knowledge for developing further knowledge. In an important sense, rationality is prior to discovery.[58]

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[54] Here, I am not attempting a reductive explanation of sin as ill-directed consciousness; rather, I am pointing to the 'form' of human existence that naturally results from histories and habits of sin.

[55] In the famous words of Martin Luther, "Reason is the Devil's greatest whore."

[56] UMC Book of Discipline, ¶ 104.

[57] By rational analyses, persons may determine whether or not they are "rationally entitled" to assurance. Seeking rational justifications for our self-assurances is a responsibility important to

Insofar as scientists and theologians both rationally occupy *rooms of experiential reference* they may participate in constructive dialogue concerning the world, such that Christian theological systems may be informed by scientific discovery. In other words, to say that theology is God-referencing discourse is not to say that the theologian *as a theologian* does not participate in world-referencing discourse. As the theologian crafts doctrines to represent God-in-relation-to-the-world, 'the world' remains a conceptual component of her doctrine. Therefore, though every properly Christian theological doctrine, as a whole, remains "logically distinct"[59] from scientific theories, in that the credibility of scientific theories is not a function of consistency with any 'rule of Christ,' Christian doctrines, like scientific theories, contain words and phrases *about* the world.

Furthermore, as stated above, theologians regularly engage in "bottom-up" and "top-down" reasoning as they work to represent part-whole relations. With regards to the totality of her situation, attention to scientific theory may enable the theologian to more adequately form the "lower-level" parts (i.e., the

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our social projects. By means of reason, we may identify misbehaviors *as misbehaviors* and persuade ourselves and others to correct those misbehaviors.

[58] While persons may 'stumble onto some insight,' we do not apprehend observations *as discoveries* until we have related the content of our observations to other experiences and principles by means of reasoning. Phenomena of persons intuitively sensing that they "may be onto something" should not discount this claim. Anticipating discovery is not the same as apprehending an observation as discovery.

[59] *Rocks of Ages*, p. 110.

phenomena-referencing conceptual components) of her whole perspective. Therefore, insofar as systematic theology "moves back and forth between two poles, the eternal truth of [revelation] and the temporal situation in which the eternal truth must be received"[60] and scientific theories inform our understandings of "temporal situations," the systematic theologian may, to her advantage, remain partially accountable to the work of science. Furthermore, if certain scientific theories inform her understanding of her situation, *how* the theologian interacts with Christian scriptures and Christian traditions will, to some extent, become influenced by those scientific theories.

A Basic Practical Description of Theology

Here, we may ask, 'in what practical sense might theologians stand to gain from keeping their work partially accountable to the products of science?' The work of theology is directed toward three kinds of goals: one therapeutic, one diagnostic, and one ethical. To this point, I have argued that the phenomena-representing conceptual components of theological doctrines may be compared with the phenomena-representing conceptual components of scientific theories to determine the world-representational value of those doctrinal components. Here, I argue that the representational contents of 'God-in-relation-

[60] Tillich, Paul. *Systematic Theology*. Vol. 1. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1951, p. 3.

to-her-world,' shape the theologian's *ways of healing, knowing, and relating*, such that her form of life may become significantly altered if she risks appropriating new conceptual tools for composing doctrinal commitments.

As suggested above, Christian theologians seek to craft meaningful and truthful responses to bothersome questions. However, theologians are not merely concerned to possess answers to our questions. Theology, like other disciplines, is a consciousness-forming and, therefore, personality-forming activity. Having produced some initial response to some question, theologians subsequently reflect upon our initial responses. This process of attention to theological prolegomena reforms our consciousnesses and, consequently, our lives. From our 'first words,' traditions of practicing healthy consciousness evolve.[61] This therapeutic goal – to cultivate forms of consciousness,[62] or habits

[61] A 'healthy' consciousness, then, might be described as an experience of world-appearance that conforms to the particular norms a community associates with 'healthy' humanity (i.e. as a form of life properly related to the ultimate concerns of human existence). For the Christian, 'healthy' consciousness may be defined as the appearance of a Jesus-exalting world, or alternatively as "having (Jesus') eyes to see" and "having (Jesus') ears to hear" the reign of God.

[62] As Tillich argues, the form of something conserves the dynamics of that something and destines that something for directedness defined by a limited set of *teloi* (Erskine, Noel. *King Among the Theologians*. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrims Press, 1994, pp. 22-23). A form of consciousness, then, is an experience-rendering structure that conserves certain potentialities and destines a person's attention for particular dimensions of reality. For instance, high-jumpers have remarkable potentials for propelling their bodies over obstacles because (as a result of jumping practices) their jumps exhibit a form of jumpiness that directs their bodies, especially their appendages, toward specific states, at specific times, with specific intensities, during their jumps. Similarly, saints have remarkable potentials for embodying some 'ultimate concern' because their lives exhibit a form of consciousness that directs their bodies, especially their organs of attention, toward specific states, at specific times, with specific intensities, during their lives.

of mind, among persons that empower them for faithful participation in God – is arguably the principle goal of theology.

This principle, therapeutic goal of theology has been given a variety of expressions. Stated in cognitive terms, the principle goal of theology is to release human persons from worldly webs of belief and to establish within persons proper belief in God. Stated in phenomenological terms, the principle goal of theology is to develop among human persons, *eyes to see* and *ears to hear* the Word of God. In existential terms, the principle goal of theology is to "anchor" the anxious souls of human persons in some macro-purpose (or meta-narrative),[63] to empower persons for courageous participation in some ultimate concern.[64] Theology *as therapy* is theology in pursuit of *new being*.[65]

In soteriological terms, the principle goal of theology is preparing personalities for salvations. Here, I speak of Christian salvations as moments and processes wherein persons come to inhabit forms of life (i.e., patterns of

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[63] "The religious person . . . is primarily concerned with meaning rather than with general structure. That is to say, he asks the question about a purpose in existence as a whole to which he can "anchor" his own small purposes, and the question of a resource of power and of love that can overcome the tragedy, the conflict, and the guilt that darken his personal and social existence." (Gilkey, Langdon. *Maker of Heaven and Earth: A Study of the Christian Doctrine of Creation*. Garden City: NY: Doubleday, 1959, p. 38)

[64] According to Paul Tillich, the work of theology is reducible to existential therapy: "*Our ultimate concern is that which determines our being or not-being. Only those statements are theological which deal with their object in so far as it can become a matter of being or not-being for us*." (*Systematic Theology, vol. 1*, p. 14)

[65] For Tillich, the Christian message should be understood as "the message of 'New Being'." (*Systematic Theology, vol. 1*, p. 49)

attention and action) informed by Jesus-exalting personalities (i.e., patterns of potential attention and potential action informed by the proclamation 'Jesus is Lord').[66] To fulfill our God-ordained vocations *as humans*, human persons, according to most Christian theologians, need breakthroughs in human consciousness. Attention to our traditions and reasons and experiences is necessary but insufficient. We must attend to something that provides us with a possibility for needed breakthroughs.

As suggested above, the Scriptures supply us with such a possibility by mediating to us God's Word revealed in Jesus Christ. However, before such breakthroughs in consciousness are realized, human persons must (through participation in some tradition, experience, or rationality, become persuaded to) attend to God's Word. By attending to God's Word, persons prepare for a needed breakthrough – an encounter with God, a participation in God-consciousness.[67] However, it is not our experience of breakthrough that 'saves'

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[66] While salvation involves the transformation of individuals' consciousnesses, salvation is a communal project. Salvation is *the* (proper) project of the Church, which must be accomplished in-the-public. A Jesus-exalting consciousness is only sustainable within certain socio-economic, politico-religious arrangements. Individuals do not control their consciousnesses despotically, i.e. individuals cannot directly will a change in their consciousnesses. Individuals can only negotiate with their consciousnesses politically, i.e. individuals can only attempt to persuade their brains to adopt a shift in consciousness.

[67] What I am claiming here is somewhat similar to doctrine of justification crafted at the Council of Trent. Broadly speaking, the doctrine of justification proclaimed in the *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* conceptualizes justification as both a process of transformation—from a state of sin, to a state of grace— where movement/growth in grace is caused both God's provocative/empowering grace and person's agency/preparation. Because of the perversity of

us; rather, our *experience* of breakthrough enables us to *know* what salvation is and that we are saved, but it is not knowledge that saves human persons. Instead, our (religious) salvations *are* transformations of human personalities, involving breakthroughs of human consciousness, graciously initiated by God and realized by a 'hearing of faith.' As such, Christian salvation involves a process of events destining us for habits of loving-kindness, restoring us to healthy humanity, and thereby animating us with life-giving energies.[68] Participation in theology performs a therapeutic function for human persons, to the extent that participation in God-referencing discourse prepares our minds for breakthroughs of human consciousness, which prepare our personalities for the divine processes whereby our essential potentials as humans are realized. Finally, the representational contents of the 'God-in-relation-to-her-world' to which the theologian attends will determine, to some extent, her *way of healing* – i.e., her way of preparing for salvation.

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humanity consequent to original sin, the justification of humans is contingent upon God's grace, particularly the benefit communicated to persons of faith via the faith of Christ. However, justification is also contingent upon personal preparation for receiving God's grace and upon persistent cooperation with God's grace. *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*. Trans. by H. J. Schroeder. Rockford, IL: TAN Books and Publishers, 1978, pp. 29-45.

[68] In addition to God-directed breakthroughs of human consciousnesses (salvation), we may also talk about God-directed activations of human bodies (sanctification). We may use the term 'salvation' to describe the evolution of new potentials for attention and action and the term 'sanctification' to describe the evolution of new patterns of attention and action. Of course, these processes of evolution overlap. By developing habits of attention and action, persons are generating new potentials for attention and action. Moreover, developing some new potential for attention and action *is simultaneously* a new development of some inchoate form of attention and action. For example, becoming conscious of some sick person is becoming an inchoate healer; however, to realize healing, my body must exert energies in specifically healing patterns.

Theology, of course, is not only useful for preparing persons for conversions. The theologian may also participate in God-referencing discourse to diagnose and rationally reconstruct her community's *way of knowing* her situation. She may work to craft and execute some research program designed to focus her scholarly attention upon particular kinds of data that, in her view, justify some theistic description of her situation. To perform this task, the theologian must identify data that not only bears upon the psychology (or history) of religion but also, arguably, upon the character of God-in-relation-to-her-world.[69] Toward this end, some theologians focus their attention upon revelation received through the scriptures, some upon specific sets of historical facts, some upon introspections concerning some special dimension(s) of human experience, and some upon results derived from communal practices of (spiritual) discernment.[70] Whatever her preferred foci, the theologian may work to propose God-referencing statements, developed in response to some set(s) of

[69] *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, p. 130.

[70] *Ibid*., p. 188. Murphy's describes her own foci as "Scripture and the varied results of discernment." Murphy proposes that data collected from these sources could function to establish God-entailing hypotheses, with the support of certain auxiliary hypotheses (e.g., doctrines of revelation, doctrines of providence), such that God-entailing hypotheses may come to function as core theories for "scientific" theological research programs that may successfully predict novel facts (pp. 170-171). Like Murphy, I want to affirm that theological research programs may compete with other research programs in a Lakatosian manner; however, unlike Murphy, my description of theology does not reduce the purpose of theology to diagnosing and reconstructing some community's knowledge (cf. pp. 196-197).

observations, which subsequently determine *how* persons interpret certain kinds of phenomena.

Furthermore, it may be the case that the theologian, by attending to doctrine, actually develops her capacities for diagnosing and reconstructing representations of her situation. When attempting to reconstruct representations of part-whole relations, persons often more adequately represent the object of their attention by performing both part-to-whole and whole-to-part diagnoses. With regards to the totality of our existence, participation in science promises to help theologians more adequately develop *knowledge* of its parts, while participation in theology promises to help persons, even scientists, more adequately develop *intuitions* concerning the whole. Though we cannot know concepts like God-in-relation-to-our-world in all the same ways we can know concepts like dog-in-relation-to-our-world, attention to the former may result in us knowing the latter differently, and vice versa.

Both knowledge and intuition are preceded by conceivability – i.e. before some person can know or even intuit some phrase, the representational contents of that phrase must become, at least, weakly conceivable for her. Hence, in my view, the ideal relationship between theologians and scientists consists in a mutual exchange of their conceptual (i.e. representational) expertise. For

example, theologians depend upon scientists for counterintuitive discoveries, and scientists depend upon theologians (and non-theological philosophers) for counterfactual imaginations. Finally, each may, in principle, utilize concepts, if not statements, crafted by the other for diagnosing and reconstructing their own belief structures.[71]

Finally, God-referencing discourses may also yield concepts useful for ethical discourses, wherein counterfactual imaginations may function to represent goal-states (consequences or virtues), which persons may hope to inhabit. Moreover, insofar as theological statements reference some *ultimate* object of hope, appeals to theological statements may function to *ultimately ground* deontological claims. According to the theologian, every this-worldly creature stands in some ultimately significant relationship to 'God-in-relation-to-her-world.' Thus, for the theologian, 'God-in-relation-to-her-world' may function as a transitional object in her relationships to all other creatures.[72] To

[71] While scientists methodologically exclude God-referencing explanations of phenomena from their work, scientist – especially those working in the human sciences – may borrow concepts appertaining to the human situation which were originally developed in the context of God-referencing discourse.

[72] In terms of object relations, a transitional object is an item that has become symbolic of the relationship between some subject and some object, such that relations between that subject and that object become, in the mind of the subject, associated with a third "transitional" object, which affects how the subject conceptualizes (i.e. internally represents) normative relations between the subject and that object. For example, an infant's first "transitional object" is often her own fist, which she may put in her mouth to create "a mediating reality between inner and outer realities" (pp. 95-96). Also, divorce mediation counselors often discover that some object being fought over functions for both spouses as a "transitional object . . . the loss of which both partners

change the representational content of 'God-in-relation-to-her-world,' then, could alter her attitudes concerning her relationships to objects which she has come to associate with 'God-in-relation-to-her-world' and, consequently, change her *way of relating* to those objects.

understand, individually and subconsciously, as the final sign that the relationship is over" (p. 172). Culbertson, Philip. *Caring for God's People: Counseling and Christian Wholeness*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000.

Part 2: Changing the Subject

During pre-modern ages, theological statements were regarded credible insofar as persons could demonstrate logical connections between those statements and the privileged teachings of officially recognized authorities.[73] For theologians like Thomas Aquinas, the *external* witnesses of church authorities functioned as the ultimate ground of intellectual assurance.[74] However, as the events of the Reformation highlighted the "problem of many authorities," theologians (along with other scholars) were forced to debate which authorities should be recognized as authorities, such that theologians began developing new ways to adjudicate between competing "authorities" by appealing more-and-more to *internal* evidence and a newly emerging commitments to probability.[75]

As a matter of historical fact, the "problem of many authorities" emerging from the Reformation eventually resulted in scholars abandoning scholastic understandings of authority altogether. As scholars have re-imagined the processes of authorization, the conviction that *no authority* exists – that no article of writing is *a pure product of divine disclosure* – has approached consensus. Whereas scholastics tended to describe phenomena of collective persuasion (e.g.,

[73] Stout, Jeffrey. *The Flight from Authority*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981, p. 109.
[74] *The Flight from Authority*, p. 108.
[75] Ibid., p. 149.

subconscious attraction, affective potential, perceived cogency) *as a result of inherent authority,* subsequent scholars have increasingly described such phenomena *as the result of various processes* – evolutionary, socio-cultural, and psychological. Consequently, the work of theology evolved in accordance with new understandings of authorization.

As their attention turned inward, scholars came to re-conceive both the nature of human interiority and God-in-relation-to-the-world. Then, the writings of Immanuel Kant changed the way scholars (including theologians) conducted their work by compartmentalizing human interiority and decisively distinguishing between *phenomena* (things as humanly experienced) and *noumena* (things-in-themselves). According to Kant, the human mind is constructed such that it only enjoys epistemological access to phenomena; that is, we cannot acquire objective knowledge concerning noumena (e.g., God). As a result of his work, theologians have come to generally assume that human persons cannot acquire objective knowledge *about* God-in-God's-self because 'God' does not represent a phenomenal object – an object located in space, in time, and in contingent relation to other things.

Today, Western understandings of human interiority are continuing to evolve. During modern ages, theological statements were regarded credible

insofar as they could be shown to be either implied by self-evident foundational[76] beliefs or properly basic beliefs grounded in "justification-conferring conditions."[77] For theologians like Schleiermacher, the phenomenology of pre-reflective human consciousness functioned as the ultimate ground of intellectual assurance. However, as globalization processes highlight 'the problem of many consciousnesses' and as neuroscientific research programs highlight 'problems of any consciousness,' theologians are now forced to debate which forms of consciousness should be regarded as ultimately concerning, such that theologians are developing new ways to adjudicate between competing norms of consciousness by appealing more-and-more to *pragmatic* considerations and new commitments to holism.

Eventually, the "problems of consciousness" emerging from contemporary academies may result in scholars abandoning modern notions of

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[76] During this "modern" period (ca. 1650-1950) theologians – as well as philosophers and ethicists – increasingly abandoned the "scholastic" program of studying authorities and crafting deductive arguments from their prescribed premises in favor of newly formed "foundational" programs. (*Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, p. 3.) Nancey Murphy summarizes the seminal argument of foundationalism as follows: "When we ask for justification of a belief, a chain of reasons that would constitute justification cannot be circular without begging the question and must not result in an infinite regress. Therefore, the chain of reasons must at some point end in a 'foundation' needing no further justification" (p. 6). During this period, the rhetoric of "self-evidence" functioned to justify the practice of establishing 'foundations' for argumentation by appealing to *internal* evidence. Of course, the globalization processes and psychological studies of a later (post-modern) period eventually highlighted the "problem of many selves," such that so-called "foundations" were no longer regarded *credible* by virtue of experiences of phenomenal self-evidence.

[77] Plantinga, Alvin. "Religious Belief as 'Properly Basic'." *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology*. Ed. by Brian Davies. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 42-94.

'the self' (and 'God's self') altogether. As scholars re-imagine the processes of consciousness, the conviction that *no self* exists – that no human life is *unified by a single subject of experience* – may approach consensus. Whereas modern scholars tended to describe phenomena of first-person experience (e.g., ownership, pre-reflexive self-intimacy, perspective) *as a result of some subject-self "having" experience*, contemporary scholars are increasingly describing such phenomena *as the result of various processes* – biochemical, neurophysical, environmental, computational. Consequently, the work of theology, must respond to evolving insights concerning the nature of human consciousness.

As our attention turns *onward* (i.e. onto the brain), scholars are re-conceiving the nature of human interiority. Soon, the writings of Thomas Metzinger may change the way scholars (including theologians) conduct their work by redefining human subjectivity and distinguishing between *transparent* self-modeling processes and consciously experienced *internal* processes. According to Metzinger, "the phenomenal self is not a thing, but a process – and the subjective experience of *being someone* emerges if a conscious information-processing system operates under a transparent self-model."[78] As a result of his work, theologians may eventually come to assume that human personhood is a

[78] Metzinger, Thomas. *Being No One: The Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003, p. 1.

complex *representational* phenomenon – the result of phenomenal self-modeling processes.

In this section, I will construct a very abridged case for suspecting that *'no one'* enjoys human existence – that explanations of human subjectivity are largely reducible to descriptions phenomenal self-modeling processes, or something of the like. As cognitive scientists learn more about the neural correlates of various conscious phenomena, the world-representational value 'the self,' relative to the theoretical entities informing rival accounts of human subjectivity, continues to diminish. As 'the self' proves less tenable, new theoretical entities are emerging that may come to irreversibly reform our understandings of the nature of human personhood.

Ego Theory & Its Alternatives

If you randomly ask a person to explain the unity of her consciousness, what makes it true that she is both hearing your voice and seeing your facial movements, she is likely to claim that both experiences are being had by her, person *x*, at time *t*.[79] If you ask her to explain the unity of her whole life, she is likely to narrate a set of stories which she believes were had by the same person –

[79] Ibid., p. 230.

a single subject of experience.[80] She has communicated to you a hypothesis concerning human personality, a particular way of talking about human identity which has long dominated Western thought, even Christian theology. She has answered your questions by positing a theoretical entity – an *ego*, or *self* – the existence of which is, for her, self-evident.[81] Neverthless, her *ego theory* is not self-evident to all. Rival accounts of human personality have, in fact, become strongly conceivable for others.

Of course, the intuition '[that] I am [someone]' is *felt* so strongly by many adult human persons that some authors have declared that this "existential intuition" is fundamental to human personality.[82] Others have pointed out that the concept 'self' occupies a "central position in Western thought," such that our value rationalities are committed to particular ways of understanding human

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[80] In *The Foundations of Buddhism*, Rupert Gethin writes, "Our everyday linguistic usage of terms such as 'I' amounts in practice to an understanding of self as precisely an unchanging constant behind experiences. Thus when someone declares, 'I was feeling sad, but now I am feeling happy,' he or she implies by the term 'I' that there is a constant, unchanging thing that underlies and links the quite different experiences of happiness and sadness." Gethin, Rupert. *The Foundations of Buddhism*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 135.

[81] Proposition *p* is self-evident to some person *x* if and only if (a) the contents of proposition *p* are strongly conceivable for person *x*, (b) proposition *p* is rhetorically useful for person *x*, and (c) no alternatives to proposition *p* are weakly conceivable for person *x*. Cf. footnote #7.

[82] Tallis, Raymond. *I Am: A Philosophical Inquiry into First-Person Being*. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2004, p. 2. Furthermore, Tallis argues that because the 'existential intuition' has specific representational content, it has to be attached to some enduring particular (p. 279). However, we may object that the specific contents of this-or-that 'existential intuition' inadequately represent *the way things are*.

actions, science, religion, and autonomy-in-relation-to-heteronomy.[83] Given the predominance of 'the self' within Western cultures, persons may only become capable of productively contemplating alternative theoretical entities for describing human subjectivity as a result of some conversion experience, or some epiphanic moment. Perhaps it will prove "exceedingly rare" that some person, who has been socialized into some Western culture, becomes capable of executing independent practical reasoning without reference to 'the self.'[84] Whatever the likelihood of mass conversions, the reader should note that unsettling cases against ego theory have already been constructed. In fact, many persons, meditating upon classic objections to ego theory, developed by Buddhists, scientific materialists, and Nietzsche, have already become persuaded that 'no one' unifies a human life.

First, Buddhist traditions, both philosophical and religious, teach that the world-distorting, suffering-causing habit of identifying with some 'self,' or

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[83] Steinvorth, Ulrich. *Rethinking the Western Understanding of the Self*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 5-6. Steinvorth distinguishes between what he calls our *subject* and our *self* and argues that 'the self' is "what we are left with when we distance ourselves from anything that only happens to us" (p. 9). On his view, 'the self' is identical to our faculty of judgment (p. 8) and inseparable from our ambition for extraordinariness (p. 10). What he means by 'the self' is roughly our capacity for independent practical reasoning. However, calling this "capacity" for enacting relatively independent judgments 'the self' is quite misleading, insofar as 'the self' has become closely associated with ego theory.

[84] In *Stages of Faith*, James Fowler observes that some persons, whom he regards as the most developed participants in religion, have entered into a stage of faith in which boundary conditions imposed by 'the self' dissipate such that "their felt sense of an ultimate environment is inclusive of all being."Fowler, James W. *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*. New York, NY: HarperOne, 1981, pp. 200-201.

atman, must be overcome to achieve *nirvana*, the final goal of the good life. On this view, human existence is characterized by sufferings (*duḥkha*) caused by attachments (*upādāna*) to ever-changing realities.[85] According to the Buddha, whatever is represented by the concept 'self' is not unchanging; therefore, to identify the mind with some 'self' is to form an inappropriate attachment. Consequently, the Buddha taught that persons must unlearn this way of thinking.

Of course, the Buddha was not opposed to talk concerning *vijnāna*/*vinnāna* – "an awareness of ourselves as thinking subjects having a series of perceptions and thoughts;" however, the Buddha taught that persons should not imagine that this phenomenal property of human consciousness (i.e., *ownership*)[86] is best explained by positing the existence some 'self' – i.e., some unchanging entity underlying experiences.[87] Instead, the Buddha taught that descriptions of phenomenal first-person perspectives should not multiply hypothetical entities for describing human consciousness beyond five conventional aggregates (*skhandas*): (1) bodily phenomena, (2) feelings, (3) labeling or recognizing, (4)

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[85] Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, p. 70.

[86] The phenomenal property of *ownership* may also be referred to as "mineness," a mode of thought of which Buddhist traditions are critical. According to the Dalai Lama, "'mine' is a characteristic of the self, for the thought 'I am' immediately gives rise to the thought of 'mine.' The grasping at mine is a form of grasping at selfhood because 'mine' grasps at objects related to the self. It is a variation on the egoistic view, which sees everything in relation to an intrinsically existent 'I'. Dalai Lama, The. *The Middle Way*. Trans. by Thupten Jinpa. Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2009, p. 74.

[87] *The Foundations of Buddhism*, p. 136.

volitional activities, and (5) conscious awareness.[88] Among Buddhist traditions, this conclusion is supported by three classic arguments against *ego theories*. First, though some imagine 'the self' as an "inner controller," humans have no ultimate control over the five aggregates of physical and mental events.[89] Second, though some imagine 'the self' as permanent, everything is changing and, therefore, attaching ourselves to something *as if* it were permanent is a source of suffering.[90] Third, though 'the self' may be conceivable, the term 'self' is vacuous insofar as 'the self' is not the object of any particular experience.[91]

In Buddhist thought, 'the self' is merely a (misleading) conceptual package imposed upon certain physical and mental phenomena associated with phenomenal first-person perspectives, an (errant) attempt to describe and explain apparent connections among such phenomena. Rather than introducing some *ego theory* to guide reflections concerning personal identity, Buddhist traditions contend that "the 'person' that is me . . . subsists not in some entity remaining constant for [*x* number of years] but merely in the fact that certain

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[88] *Ibid*., p. 136.

[89] The Buddha argued that body is not a self. If body where a self then it might be that it would not lead to sickness; then it might be possible to say, "Let my body be like this, let my body not be like this." But since body is not a self, so it leads to sickness, and it is not possible to say, "Let my body be like this, let my body not be like this." Collins, Steven. *Selfless Persons: Imagery and Thought in Theravāda Buddhism*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. 97.

[90] Collins, *Selfless Persons*, p. 98.

[91] Collins, *Selfless Persons*, p. 98-103.

clusters of physical and mental events are linked causally."[92] In the words of the Buddha, "actions do exist, and also their consequences, but the person that acts does not. There is no one to cast away this set of elements, and no one to assume a new set of them. There exists no Individual, it is only a conventional name given to a set of elements."[93] Let the reader note, this view of human personalities remains quite at odds with the everyday *ego-referencing* discourse of many western cultures.

Second, traditions of scientific materialism argue that human persons, like everything else, are simply component parts of a closed physical system. In this view, 'mental' phenomena commonly cited as justification for 'self'-talk should not be contrasted with 'physical' phenomena[94]; rather, 'mental' states are *identical* to brain states.[95] Many effects we normally attributed to 'mental causation' clearly have full physical causes, such that talk of 'mental causation' in these cases, which would amount to causation twice-over, is rendered absurd.[96] Furthermore, concerning those effects attributed to 'mental causation' that less

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[92] *The Foundations of Buddhism*, p. 142.
[93] Parfit, Derek. *Reasons and Persons.* Oxford, UK. Clarendon Press, 1984, p. 502.
[94] *Ibid.*, p. 172.
[95] Papineau, David. "The Case for Materialism." *Arguing About the Mind*. Ed. by Brie Gertler and Lawrence Shapiro. New York, NY: Routledge, 2007, p. 125.
[96] Stated more formally, the case for scientific materialism that David Papineau develops involves the following three premises: (1) Conscious mental occurrences have physical effects; (2) All physical effects are fully caused by purely *physical* prior histories; and (3) the physical effects of conscious states aren't always overdetermined by distinct causes. "The Case for Materialism," pp. 126-127.

clearly originate from physical causes, the scientific materialist may invoke these cautionary words of David Hume:

> Motion, in many instances, from gravity, from elasticity, from electricity, begins in matter, without any known voluntary agent; and to suppose always, in these cases, an unknown voluntary agent is mere hypothesis; and hypothesis attended with no advantages. The beginning of motion in matter itself is as conceivable *a priori* as its communication from mind and intelligence (*Dialogues*, Philo, part VIII).[97]

In such cases, scientific materialists often suggest that, at some point in the future, ongoing scientific investigations will decisively demonstrate that supposed effects of 'mental causation' have some full physical cause.[98] Others, who acknowledge that objective understandings of the world are destined to remain incomplete,[99] nevertheless maintain that talk of some body-governing 'self' tends to obscure from view the physical causes behind our actions.

Third, drawing upon traditions of Buddhism and scientific materialism, Nietzsche argued that "a thought comes when 'it' wishes, and not when 'I' wish,

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[97] Hume, David. *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. Ed. by Richard H. Popkin. 2nd ed. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980, pp. 49-50.
[98] Hasker, William. *The Emergent Self*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999, p. 29.
[99] In "The Incompleteness of Objective Reality," Thomas Nagel argues that, even on our most objective description of the physical processes underlying human consciousness, "something will inevitably be lost. . . . We will not know exactly how scrambled eggs taste to a cockroach even if we develop a detailed objective phenomenology of the cockroach sense of taste" (p. 47). However, Nagel argues "even if objective understanding can be only partial, it is worth trying to understanding it, for . . . the pursuit of an objective understanding of reality is the only way to expand our knowledge of what there is beyond the way it appears to us" (p. 48). Nagel, Thomas. "The Incompleteness of Objective Reality." *Arguing About the Mind*. Ed. by Brie Gertler and Lawrence Shapiro. New York, NY: Routledge, 2007, pp. 36-49.

so that it is a falsification of the facts of the case to say that the subject 'I' is the condition of the predicate 'think'" (*Beyond Good and Evil, § 17*).[100] Whatever actuality philosophers successfully represent with the term 'self,' Nietzsche contended, was a *political entity* (or bundle-self) – a "communality" (*WP* 492) or "aristocracy" (*WP* 490) or "social structure" (*BGE* 12) of drive, affect, impulse, need, and desire.[101] This bundle-self, according to Nietzsche, should only be understood as "a *decision*, a pragmatic issue that ultimately fails to rest upon a deeper metaphysical fact."[102] 'The self' is merely a particular configuration of passions within which some drives have come to dominate others, such that our bodies tend to conjoin its various drives and impulses in ways that direct us toward certain actions and perspectives.[103] Finally and, on Nietzsche's account, most importantly, no single 'self' functions to control the faculty of 'willing.' Instead, "each drive *is* a willing, but there is no such *thing* as willing, so no *faculty* of willing."[104] According to Nietzsche, it is ultimately decadence and *ressentiment*

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[100] Nietszsche, Friedrich. "Beyond Good and Evil." *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Trans. by Walter Kaufmann. New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2000, p. 214.
[101] Hales, Steven D. and Rex Welshon. *Nietzsche's Perspectivism*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000, p. 159.
[102] *Nietzsche's Perspectivism*, p. 161.
[103] *Ibid*., p. 174.
[104] *Ibid*., p. 179.

that motivate us to fabricate 'selves' to which we might remain accountable for 'willing.'[105]

Finally, even if we produce reasons for rejecting these alternative accounts of human personality, whatever account we develop must reckon with objections to ego theory posed by contemporary cognitive scientists and philosophers of mind. The commonplace idea that our human bodies are ordinarily animated by *a single mind* at time *t*, when viewed in light of modern split-brain studies, now seems rather dubious.[106] These studies have also prompted some philosophers of mind to question whether we should suppose that *the same mind(s)* animate an otherwise historically continuous human body at times *t* and $t + n$.[107] In a very

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[105] *Ibid*,, p. 178.

[106] In "Brain Bisection and the Unity of Consciousness," Thomas Nagel reports that, in patients who have undergone surgical procedures to sever their corpus callosum, we may observe "things happening *simultaneously* which cannot fit into a single mind: simultaneous attention to two incompatible tasks, for example, without interaction between the purposes of the left and right hands" (p. 223). Observing these cases, he argues that "there is no whole number of individual minds that these patients can be said to have" (p. 225), and suggests that, even in cases of anatomically normal humans, "it is possible that the ordinary, simple idea of a single person will come to seem quaint some day, when the complexities of the human control system become clearer and we become less certain that there is anything very important that we are *one* of" (p. 226). Nagel, Thomas. "Brain Bisection and the Unity of Consciousness." *Arguing About the Mind*. Ed. by Brie Gertler and Lawrence Shapiro. New York, NY: Routledge, 2007, pp. 214-226.

[107] In "Divided Minds and the Nature of Persons," Derek Parfit argues the *bundle theory* position, which involves three premises: (1) "we can't explain either the unity of consciousness at any time, or the unity of a whole life, by referring to a person," (2) "instead, we must claim that there are long series of different mental states and events – thoughts, sensations, and the like – each series being what we call one life," and (3) "each series is unified by various kinds of causal relation, such as the relations that hold between experiences and later memories of them" (p. 230). To make his case, Parfit engages his readers in a thought experiment designed to show that if some critical percentage of some person's cells were replaced, that person could no longer claim to *be* the person who existed before cell replacement, although she may remain

important sense, the person I was at thirteen is not the person I am at twenty-six. Impressed by such arguments, some philosophers of mind have come to contend that 'the self' should be regarded only as a fictional object.[108] Others contend that the language of 'selves' should be abandoned altogether.[109] In any case, what many cognitive scientists and philosophers of mind are making clear, concerning our everyday understandings of human personalities, is that something has to give.

Metzinger's Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity

Thomas Metzinger's "Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity," or something like it, in my view, represents a possible turning point in studies concerned with human subjectivity and personality. Like others before him, Metzinger argues that "strictly speaking, there is no essence within us that stays the same across

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psychologically continuous with that person (pp. 231-234). Finally, Parfit argues that ordinary survival is quite like "being destroyed and having a Replica" (p. 234).

[108] In "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity," Daniel Dennett argues that concepts of 'the self' function like the concept 'center of gravity,' i.e. *as a convenient, theoretical fiction* (p. 238). According to Dennett, "we are all virtuoso novelists, who find ourselves engaged in all sorts of behavior, more or less unified, but sometimes disunified, and . . . we try to make all of our material cohere into a single good story . . . our autobiography," and "the chief fictional character at the center of that autobiography is one's *self*," such that "if you still want to know what the self *really* is, you're making a category mistake" (p. 246). Dennett, Daniel. "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity." *Arguing About the Mind*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2007, pp. 237-247.

[109] In "There is No Problem of the Self," Eric T. Olson argues that "a problem must be a problem *about* something: even if there are no selves, there must at least be some problematic idea or concept of a self, if there is to be a problem of the self," but he suggests "there is no such idea" nor are there even "any agreed paradigm cases of selves, things we could point to or describe and say, 'A self is one of *those*'" (p. 262). Olson, Eric T. "There is No Problem of the Self." *Arguing About the Mind*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2007, pp. 262-277.

time, nothing that could not in principle be divided into parts, no substantial self that could exist independently of the body."[110] In his view, "subjective experience is a biological data format, a highly specific mode of presenting information about the world,"[111] such that "the Ego is merely a complex physical event – an activation pattern in your central nervous system."[112] In other words, human organisms, rather than possessing 'selves,' only inevitably mistake our systems as a whole for the representational contents of the transparent self-models currently activated in our brains.[113]

The reader, of course, may ask, 'how is Metzinger's theory of subjectivity different from other materialist accounts of human subjectivity?' Metzinger's theory of human subjectivity may revolutionize the materialist position because it systematically extends two novel theoretical entities – the "phenomenal self-model" (PSM) and the "phenomenal model of intentionality relations" (PMIR) – in very useful directions. In short, his work has yielded conceptual tools that allow for scientific investigations into some of the 'self'-related problems that have, in the past, motivated rival accounts of human subjectivity.

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[110] Metzinger, *The Ego Tunnel*, p. 208.
[111] *Ibid.*, p. 8.
[112] *Ibid.*, p. 208.
[113] *Ibid.*, p. 209.

As I understand the Buddhist, materialist, and perspectivist traditions of reflecting upon personal identity outlined above, each is primarily concerned with problems related to the "three phenomenal target properties of first-person perspectives" for which Metzinger's PSMs provide a cogent account. Buddhist traditions emphatically contend that human persons ordinarily misunderstand a particular phenomenal property of first-person perspectives, namely *ownership* – i.e. our consciously experienced sense of "mineness."[114] Working to explain 'the rubber hand illusion,'[115] Metzinger argues that our 'sense of ownership' is "a form of automatic self-attribution that integrates a certain kind of conscious content into a PSM,"[116] a phenomena which "has to do with [the brain] functionally integrating something into a feedback loop and then making it part

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[114] Examples of how persons ordinarily refer to this consciously experienced phenomenal property include the following sorts of claims: "I experience *my* leg subjectively as always having belonged to me"; "I always experience *my* thoughts and *my* emotions as part of *my own* consciousness"; "voluntary acts are initiated by *myself*." Metzinger, Thomas. "Being No One: Consciousness, The Phenomenal Self, and the First-Person Perspective." *Foerster Lectures on the Immortality of the Soul*. Delivered Oct. 12, 2004. Berkeley, CA: The UC Berkeley Graduate Council. <http://grad.berkeley.edu/lectures/event.php?id=13&lecturer=11>, Accessed Jan. 15th, 2012.

[115] 'The rubber hand illusion' is an exercise wherein some person's "sense of ownership" can be manipulated. In this very repeatable experiment, a patient places one of her hands out of her view and a proctor synchronously strokes a finger on her hidden hand and the corresponding finger on the rubber hand. Eventually, the patient comes to 'feel' the strokes administered to the rubber hand. The patient 'feels' that she is *having* the experience of the stroking of the rubber hand! Furthermore, "if one of the rubber fingers is bent backward into a physiologically impossible position, subjects not only experienced their phenomenal finger as being bent but also exhibited but also exhibited a significant skin-conductance reaction, indicating that unconscious autonomous mechanisms, which cannot be controlled at will, were also reacting to the assumption that the rubber hand was part of the self." *The Ego Tunnel*, pp. 76-77.

[116] *The Ego Tunnel*, p. 75.

of a control hierarchy."[117] Traditions of scientific materialism emphatically contend that humans ordinarily misunderstand a second phenomenal property of first-person perspectives, namely *selfhood* – i.e. our consciously experienced sense of "pre-reflexive self-intimacy."[118] Metzinger argues that "selfhood-as-subjectivity is intimately related to 'modeling mental resource allocation,'" as when some "system is already given to itself through minimal self-consciousness and then, in addition, [by means of the PMIR] represents itself as being *directed* toward an object."[119] Finally, Nietzsche emphatically contended that we ordinarily misunderstand a third phenomenal property of first-person perspectives, namely *perspective* – i.e. the structure of our conscious experience.[120] Metzinger argues that "the world simulation created by our brains includes the experience of a *point of view*," which is to say "we possess an integrated inner image of ourselves that is firmly anchored in our feelings and bodily sensation."[121] In these ways, using his innovative theoretical entities, the PSM and the PMIR, Metzinger produces a response to classic "problems of

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[117] *The Ego Tunnel*, p. 81.

[118] Examples of how persons ordinarily refer to this consciously experienced phenomenal property include the following sorts of claims: "I am *someone*"; "I experience myself as being *identical* through time"; "the contents of my phenomenal self-consciousness for a *coherent whole*"; "before initiating and independently of any intellectual operations I am already 'directly' acquainted with the contents of my self-consciousness." (Metzinger, *Foerster Lectures*, 2004).

[119] *The Ego Tunnel*, pp. 102-103.

[120] According to Metzinger, each human perspective has "an immovable center." Examples of how persons ordinarily refer to this consciously experienced phenomenal include the following sorts of claims: "I am this center *myself*." (Metzinger, *Foerster Lectures*, 2004).

[121] *The Ego Tunnel*, p. 7.

consciousness" capable of satisfying the Buddhist, the scientific materialist, and the ghost of Nietzsche.

Furthermore, Metzinger's self-model theory of subjectivity supplies plausible explanations for many "problems of consciousness" that have concerned contemporary cognitive scientists and philosophers of mind. If we ask, 'what unifies human consciousness?' Metzinger responds: first, "conscious information seems to be integrated and unified precisely because the underlying physical process is mapped back onto itself and becomes its own context,"[122] and second, "feature-binding" occurs in the human brain when rhythmic, synchronous neural responses to stimuli create "a network of neurons representing a single object . . . for [that person] *at a particular moment*."[123] If we ask, 'what creates the lived present?' He responds: "appearance *is* simply presence, and the subjective sense of temporal immediacy *is* the definition of an internal space of time."[124] If we ask, 'how is it that I am born a naïve realist?' He responds: "the brain creates what are called *higher-order representations*" that may take as their objects lower-order representation of some object, such that if the higher-order process "integrates its information in a smaller time-window" than the lower-order process, the integration process will become transparent on

[122] *Ibid*., p. 31.
[123] *Ibid*., p. 33.
[124] *Ibid*., p. 37.

lower levels – that is, you cannot consciously experience it.[125] Finally, if we ask, 'what entity actually has conscious experiences?' He calmly responds: the PSM.

At this point, the reader may ask, 'but why would any scholar, much less some theologian, support a materialist account of human personalities?' If scientific research programs guided by core materialist theories of human subjectivity prove *progressive*, such that scientific research programs guided by mentalist theories of human subjectivity begin to *degenerate*, scholars may suspect that some theoretical entity native to the former more adequately represents *the way things are* than some theoretical entity native to the latter. Moreover, because the self-model theory of subjectivity accounts for an impressive range of phenomena, some of which remain unaccountable to any version of ego theory,[126] predicts novel facts that scientists may possibly corroborate in the future,[127] and equips cognitive scientists with tools for experimenting with first-person perspectives,[128] scientific research programs guided by this theory may, in time, prove undeniably progressive. Finally, theologians, so I have argued, must work to negotiate between the "lower-level" component parts of doctrinal

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[125] *Ibid.,* p. 42. As Metzinger points out, "transparency is not so much a question of the speed of information-processing as of the speed of different types of processing (such as attention and visual perception) relative to each other." (p. 42)

[126] E.g., his self-model theory accounts for the rubber hand illusion (see footnote #115).

[127] E.g., his self-model theory of subjectivity anticipates novel facts concerning altered states of consciousness (e.g. intensive meditations, lucid dreaming, out-of-body experiences) and psychiatric syndromes (e.g. schizophrenia and Cotard's syndrome).

[128] E.g., his self-model theory of subjectivity introduces and systematically extends two novel theoretical entities, the PSM and the PMIR.

statements and the scientific theories used to execute progressive scientific programs, acknowledging that scientists *as scientists* are especially well-equipped to discern the world-representational adequacy of phenomena-referencing concepts. Therefore, if scientific research programs guided by the self-model theory of subjectivity prove progressive, responsible theologians may be tempted to exchange intuitive but evidence-barren concepts like 'the self' for counterintuitive yet evidence-birthing concepts like Metzinger's PSMs.[129]

[129] For the purposes of this essay, the reader need not be convinced that the world-representational value of PSMs exceeds that of 'selves.' An attempt to construct the all the various kinds of arguments required to fully support this conclusion lies far beyond the scope of this project. However, I have attempted to render a potentially unsettling case that *'no one'* enjoys human existence conceivable for the reader. With this possibility now before the reader, I turn to consider the theological implications of imagining 'selfless' human persons.

Part 3: Faith, Hope, and Love in a 'Selfless' World

In Part One, I argued that theological doctrines may be described as "higher-level" analogical representations of God-in-relation-to-the-world. While every Christian doctrine, as a whole, remains logically distinct from scientific theories, both doctrine and theory contain words and phrases *about* the world. Consequently, the phenomena-representing conceptual components of theological doctrines may be compared with the phenomena-representing conceptual components of scientific theories to determine the world-representational value of those doctrinal components. Moreover, this possibility for constructive conceptual exchange between scientists and theologians is no trivial matter. Insofar as the representational contents of 'God-in-relation-to-her-world,' determine the theologian's 'way of healing,' 'way of knowing,' and 'way of relating,' the theologian's form of life may become re-formed if she risks appropriating new conceptual tools for composing her doctrinal commitments.

In Part Two, I suggest that theologians have some reasons to suspect that 'the self' inadequately represents *the way things are*. Not only have rival accounts of human subjectivity become strongly conceivable, but ego theory is becoming less and less credible as cognitive science learns more about the neural correlates of various conscious phenomena. Today, scientific and philosophical studies

concerning human personalities seem to be approaching an important conceptual turning point. As I have suggested, Thomas Metzinger's self-model theory of subjectivity may provide scholars with the conceptual tools needed to progressively and, perhaps, irreversibly re-conceptualize the nature of human personalities. Consequently, the belief that 'no one' endures across human lives – that human subjectivity is largely reducible to the workings of phenomenal self-models, or something of the like – may approach scholarly consensus.

Now, at last, we may ask, 'so what?' 'What might be the implications of such developments for the theologian?' To this point, I have argued that the theologian uses phenomena-referencing concepts to compose "higher-level" analogical representations of God-in-relation-to-her-world and that changes to some doctrinal component may subtly alter her 'way of healing,' 'way of knowing,' and 'way of relating.' However, because the ultimate object of her theological reflections is God-in-relation-to-*her*-world, the theologian's network of beliefs would require more-than-subtle reconstructions if she came to use a radically different core theoretical entity for conceptualizing her personhood. Within our webs of belief, 'God,' 'world,' and 'self' (or 'personhood') ordinarily function as axial concepts – three points of integration from which all other concepts hang. A radical change to some scholar's theoretical orientation to

'personhood' would be an intellectually epic event. In this respect, the theologian is no different from other scholars.

Furthermore, the theologian develops her capacity for theological imagination as she practices using "lower-level" representations of persons-in-relation-to-her-world to form "higher-level" analogical representations of God-in-relation-to-her-world. For example, theologians imagine God's love by analogy to Christ's love, Christ's love by analogy to others' love, and others' love by means of empathy. Consequently, if we redefine the objects of our empathy (i.e. persons), we repave the ground of our analogical imaginations. If 'no one' unifies the human life, Christian theologians must discover that the ground of our analogical imaginations is not suitable for cultivating representations of God's love *as some divine self's career* of gifting human 'selves' with futures of autonomy. Instead, we would have reason to prefer representations of God's love *as some set of divine processes* whereby certain essential potentials among creatures are nurtured. Consequently, the conceptual pole of '*God*-in-relation-to-the-world' would begin to exert a different force of meaning, affecting all concepts associated with 'God.'

Because 'God,' in principle, can be associated with all other concepts, the possible consequences of rethinking God's love are innumerable. No writer

could illustrate every possible effect of such developments.[130] Nonetheless, we may identify some of the implications to follow from internalizing the concept '*divine-processes-of-love*-in-relation-the-worlds-of-*no-one*.' If the theologian is 'no one,' serving a God whose priority is nurturing essential potentials among persons (both human non-human), then some common ways of understanding (1) *the act of 'self'-assertion* in relation to faith and (2) *the goal of 'self'-realization* in relation hope must be revised. First, the 'selfless' theologian has no duty to 'self'-assertion competing against the duties of charity entailed by her loyalty to a crucified Christ. Second, the 'selfless' theologian would hesitate to identify the ultimate object(s) of her hope with extant potentials for 'self'-realization.

Faith and Self-Assertion

Within properly Christian worldviews, (the) '*faith of Jesus Christ*' (πιστεως Ιησου Χριστου),[131] as opposed to some '*authentic self*,' functions as the

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[130] Some Christian theologians will, no doubt, become concerned with whether my account of human personality remains accountable to creedal affirmations concerning "the resurrection of the dead." For those counting on an afterlife, the task of faithfully and responsibly imagining what happens to us after we die is difficult on *any* credible, non-dualistic account. For an insightful discussion concerning personal identity issues related to resurrection expectations, I recommend, to the reader, William Hasker's essay "Prospects for Survival," the eighth chapter of his book *The Emergent Self*, published by Cornell University Press, 1999, pp. 204-235.

[131] I have presented the phrase πιστεως Ιησου Χριστου in order to maintain the ambiguity of the phrase "faith of Jesus Christ." Within this phrase, Ιησου Χριστου could be taken as an objective genitive meaning "faith in Jesus Christ," or as a subjective genitive meaning "faithfulness of Jesus Christ." Also, it is possible that the phrase is presented in this ambiguous form intentionally, as a double entendre. I lean towards the latter understanding of the phrase, seeing that Paul usually makes use of the phrase to reveal both something about the character of Christ and the character of the believer in light of the character of Christ. Also, it is important to note that, for Paul, the

Fact of facts for Christian individuals.[132] Among Christians, participation in (the) *faith of Jesus Christ* remains logically and lexically prior to *authentic self-assertion* – i.e., no act of assertion authentically fulfills a person's human potential which contradicts (the) *faith of Jesus Christ*[133] and no person authentically 'has' Christian faith who disregards the theological and ethical priority of (the) *faith of Jesus Christ*. Moreover, if (the) *faith of Jesus Christ* is understood as a way for some 'selfless' person to incarnate divine processes of love, then we cannot reductively identify (the) *faith of Jesus Christ* with some action or habit of authentic self-assertion. Therefore, in a human life unified by 'no one,' devoted to imitating (the) *faith of Jesus Christ*, which is to faithfully participate in divine processes of love, no impulse or drive can ethically compete with the rule of love.[134]

Here, we may ask, 'what sort of love should govern the assertions of Christian persons and to what extent should duties of charity rule a person's

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character of Christ is defined by Jesus' relationship to the Father and the Spirit. In my view, (the) πιστεως Ιησου Χριστου may be understood practically as *the* core Christian symbol for God-in-relation-to-the-world.

[132] Wittgenstein notes that 'the world' represents all that is the case—*the totality of facts*. Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Trans. by C.K. Ogden. New York, NY: Barnes & Noble, 2003, p. 7, § 1.0, 1.1.). For Christians, Jesus is the Fact of facts, in that all other facts were created through him and are to be understood according to him. Therefore, Jesus, as the Fact of facts, functions as a rule for faith – a.k.a. the "rule of Christ."

[133] Cf. John 14:6

[134] Of course, many persons are bound to become unsettled by the idea that 'the authentic self' cannot be the ultimate concern of Christ's followers. However, persons who risk a life of faith, ruled by love, unwilling to practice unloving 'self'-assertions, may discover that such a form of life is uniquely suited for enacting solidarity, the value of which is obscured for those who imagine that God is primarily in the business of liberating 'selves' for futures of autonomy.

life?' Jesus commanded his disciples to practice an unconditionally-committed, equal-regarding, passionately-serving love for others. According to the Gospels, Jesus taught that the greatest commandment(s) were to love God with all your heart and to love your neighbor *as yourself*.[135] This text should not be read as some biblical warrant for belief in 'selves'; instead, this text reveals that Jesus commanded his disciples to embody an ethics of love that obligates persons to perform acts of compassion not prescribed by ancient laws of limited retaliation. In fact, Jesus' command recapitulates an ethics of unconditional commitment to the good of the other.[136] Meanwhile, Jesus also taught[137] and enacted a universally inclusive understanding of neighborliness, commanding and demonstrating an unconditional commitment to the good of others and regard for the well-being of others.[138]

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[135] Cf. Matt. 22: 34-40; Mark 12:28-34

[136] Cf. Luke 10:29-37

[137] Cf. Matt. 5:38-48

[138] The desirability of *agape* has been sharply criticized by meritarians (as well as naturalists, liberalists, and feminists). Concerning the meritarians: Thus conceived, love is considered objectionable to the meritarian, who argues that the performance of unconditional commitment and equal regard is impossible, undesirable, the impoverishing because the extension of such concern necessarily exhausts an inordinate amount of our personal resources. Instead, the meritarian argues, that persons should commit themselves to the well-being of great persons, to the exclusion of concern for the well-being of lesser persons, because such an ethics most efficiently distributes a persons' resources, including his/her psychic energy. However, since the practice of love is generative of the capacity to love (i.e. love is not a zero-sum game), the calculus of the meritarian is misleading. Therefore, as commanded by Christ, Christians should unconditionally commit themselves to the good of others (though not necessarily obeying the commands of others) and to an equal regard for others (though not necessarily issuing in unlimited sacrifice).

Furthermore, in the Gospel of John, as Jesus anticipates his betrayal and death, he establishes a new commandment: to love one another, *just as I have loved you*.[139] Jesus finally commands that his own *kenotic* personality, to which the eventual consummation of his life and teachings at the Cross bears witness, should function as his disciples' dominant metaphor for loving neighborliness. In this way, he reorients his disciples' understanding of (the) *faith of Christ* away from images of 'self'-care.[140] With this new commandment, Jesus calls his disciples to embody passionate service and openness to sacrifice for the sake of the other—to practice a restorative *Way* of unconditional commitment to the good of the other and equal regard for the well-being of the other.[141]

In pragmatic terms, an emphasis upon the 'self'-abandoning form of Christ's love may function as a corrective measure for our ordinarily sick consciousnesses and ordinarily ill-formed volitional habits.[142] Human persons, according to orthodox Christian traditions, ordinarily suffer from habits of 'self'-assertion that distance them from God and neighbor and distort their understandings of human personalities. For this reason, autonomous 'self'-love cannot function as the ground for our analogical imaginations of God's love. The final commandment of Jesus demands a form of neighborliness rooted in

[139] Cf. John 13:34-35
[140] Cf. John 15:12-13
[141] Cf. John 14:6
[142] Cf. Rom. 1:18-32

attention to a personality distinct from 'the self'—the peculiar, 'self'-forgetting, even 'self'-abandoning, personality of the crucified Christ.

Not surprisingly, some scholars have criticized visions of Christian faith that summon persons to prepare their body-souls for imitating the 'self'-abandoning love of the crucified Christ. For example, some feminist theologians have objected that any appeal to 'self'-denial that imagines sin *as fundamentally rooted in pride* (i.e., inordinate 'self'-assertion) assumes an androcentric view of the human predicament. The sins of women, the argument goes, have tended to involve *sloth* more than *pride*; consequently, hyper-attention to the Cross as *the* image of (the) *faith of Christ* tends to discourage women from practicing appropriate 'self'-assertion, which she believes to be a necessary corrective for women's sins of sloth.[143] On this view, Christian ethics should be rooted in a Trinitarian vision of God that summons persons to pursue mutuality and to understand that situations of sacrifice are "symptomatic of disruptions in the primordial harmony,"[144] never to be performed *for the sake of sacrifice*.[145]

Indeed, (the) *faith of Christ* is not reducible to sacrifice. A responsible vision of (the) *faith of Christ* requires that sacrifice always be both constructive

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[143] Andolsen, Barbara H. "Agape in Feminist Ethics." *Feminist Theological Ethics: A Reader*. Ed. by Lois K. Daly. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994, p. 151.
[144] "Agape in Feminist Ethics," p. 157.
[145] *Ibid.*, p. 155.

and consensual.[146] However, *openness to sacrifice* issuing in occasions of 'self'-forgetting love, as necessitated by human need, has been rendered a categorical imperative for Jesus' disciples. Moreover, the 'self'-forgetting love of Jesus does not merely function for Christians as another conceptual tool in their cognitive repertoire. Christ-like love also performs a positive work upon us, reconciling us with God and with our neighbors. It *bestows* worth to human persons, rather than merely *appraising* human worth.[147] It tempts us to toward gratitude, which is an antidote to pride, and it empowers us to share in (the) *faith of Christ*.

Furthermore, persons who faithfully participate in receiving and giving such love, who subordinate desires associated with some 'self' to (the) *faith of Jesus Christ*, often become capable of embodying saintly forms of solidarity with afflicted persons. The writings of Simone Weil challenge us to acknowledge this fact. Few persons have pursued solidarity with afflicted persons as intensely as Weil, and very few writers have performed such 'self'-conscious ethical evaluations. Her theological ethics represent, in my estimation, a "saintly" attempt to imagine the meaning of (the) *faith of Christ* and the shape of Christian liberty. Though her projects were burdened with the idea of 'the self,' her

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[146] Jackson, Timothy. *The Priority of Love: Christian Charity and Social Justice*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003, p. 55.
[147] *The Priority of Love*, p. 37.

attention to affliction has issued in a corrective understanding of what the priority of love entails in a tragic and violently 'self'-assertive world.

In an age conceptually dominated by 'the authentic self,' Weil's writings commended solidarity. Solidarity is a kind of fellowship that involves sharing "common responsibilities and interests" and giving/receiving mutual care.[148] Relationships of solidarity are generally predicated upon commitments to equal regard for the well-being of others. However, under the conditions of affliction, as Weil describes them, the well-being of others is significantly precluded.[149] Under the unexpected and impersonal weight of affliction, persons are stripped of their life-energies and their grounds for hope,[150] such that their very personalities become threatened, their subjectivities *unmade*.[151] As Wendy Farley has argued, persons afflicted with such radical sufferings often become

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[148] Isasi-Diaz, Ada Maria. "Solidarity: Love of Neighbor in the 1980s." *Feminist Theological Ethics: A Reader*. Ed. by Daly, Lois K. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994, p. 79.

[149] "Affliction is an uprooting of life, a more or less attenuated equivalent of death, made irresistibly present to the soul by the attack or immediate apprehension of pain." Weil, Simone. "The Love of God and Affliction." *Waiting for God*. Trans. by Emma Craufurd. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009, p. 68.

[150] "It *is* surprising that God should have given affliction the power to seize the very souls of the innocent and to take possession of them as their sovereign lord. At the very best, he who is branded by affliction will keep only half his soul." ("The Love of God and Affliction," p. 69)

[151] "If the mechanism were not blind there would not be affliction. Affliction is anonymous before all things; it deprives its victims of their personality and makes them into things." (*Ibid.*, p. 73)

empowered to resist their tragic suffering only when the power of compassion is mediated to them through enactments of solidarity.[152]

Because Weil was intellectually hampered by 'the self,' she was forced to describe the experience of solidarity in paradoxical terms: as love at a distance, as separation, analogous to the abandonment Christ experienced at the Cross.[153] Since her writings contain many paradoxical celebrations of Jesus' sufferings at the Cross, Weil has been accused of emphasizing 'self'-sacrifice, or 'self'-abandonment, as Christianity's cardinal virtue. However, Weil's affinity for the Cross should not be understood as a kind of masochism. Weil did not celebrate Jesus' act of "putting himself in harm's way"; instead, she celebrated Jesus' *consent* to allow God's compassionate love "free passage" in and through him.[154] Weil imagined that all situations are God-ordered, such that persons can "never

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[152] Farley, Wendy. *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion: A Contemporary Theodicy*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990.

[153] "Our misery gives us the infinitely precious privilege of sharing in this distance placed between the Son and his Father. This distance is only separation, however, for those who love. For those who love, separation, although painful, is a good, because it is love. Even the distress of the abandoned Christ is good." ("The Love of God and Affliction," p. 75)

[154] "The soul does not love like a creature with created love. The love within it is divine, uncreated; for it is the love of God for God that is passing through it. God alone is capable of loving God. We can only consent to give up our own feelings so as to allow free passage in our soul for this love. That is the meaning of denying oneself. We are created for consent, and for this alone." (*Ibid.*, p. 80)

escape from obedience to God"[155] – that even affliction is a God-ordered situation, "a divine technique" for piercing the center of a person.[156]

As I read Weil, she did not teach that God simply afflicts persons *for their own damn good*. Having been victimized by afflictions, she struggled to produce a theological account of *grace* (personal freedom) also capable of genuinely expressing her tragic encounters with the weightiness of *gravity* (natural law). In a world that prizes 'self'-assertion, Weil, a woman pinned under the weight of 'gravity,' attempted to communicate the priority of (the) *faith of Jesus Christ*, understood in terms of love and solidarity. Encumbered with the conceptual trappings of 'the self,' she spoke of *'self'-decreation* for the sake of obedient consent to the will of God, such that her writings offend Western, liberal sensitivities.[157]

Because Weil's writings have become an occasion for cognitive dissonance, her writings have also become occasion for revisiting 'the self.'[158]

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[155] "Men can never escape from obedience to God. A creature cannot but obey. The only choice given to men, as intelligent and free creatures, is to desire or not to desire it." (*Ibid.*, p. 76)

[156] "Affliction is a marvel of divine technique. It is a simple and ingenious device which introduces into the soul of a finite creature the immensity of force, blind, brutal, and cold. The infinite distance separating God from the creature is entirely concentrated into one point to pierce the soul to its center." (*Ibid.*, p. 81)

[157] Her ethics are usually criticized for (1) failing to uphold the 'self'-worth of human persons and for (2) portraying suffering (even radical suffering) can be received as a gift from God – a vision which some worry may encourage victims of oppression to become complicit in their own oppression.

[158] It has been said that persons are always engaging in ethical evaluations, but persons only reflect 'self'-consciously on ethics when we are imperiled or confused or experiencing some other form of cognitive dissonance.

Contrary to our 'self'-assertive tendencies toward rapid productivity and gratuitous consumption, Weil represents the virtues of patience, humility, and openness to corrective guidance from God and neighbor. Stripped of motivating clauses that describe the 'self'-improving payoff for consenting to God's will, her ethics reassert that virtue which the Old Testament wisdom literature refers to as "the fear of the Lord" – i.e. an unconditional commitment to faithfully attend to God and consent to his will.[159] For Weil, to prioritize (the) *faith of Jesus Christ*, i.e. to be a Christian, is to prioritize solidarity and love and subordinate desires associated with 'the self' to duties of charity.

Now, if we believe (1) that the priority of (the) *faith of Jesus Christ* is an unconditionally-committed, equal-regarding, passionately-serving love for others, which becomes incarnate in acts of compassionate solidarity with afflicted persons, and (2) that every person should always assert (non-harmful) impulses healthily birthed from his or her 'authentic self,' then we have backed our brains into a corner. Given the myriad crucifixions regularly occurring in our tragically constructed world, a responsible person cannot sustain both an unflinching commitment to (the) *faith of Jesus Christ* and an unbroken commitment to authentic 'self'-assertion. If every human life is unified by some

[159] The Book of Job ought to be understood as a dialectical representation of the fear of the Lord, understood as unconditional attention to the Lord and consent to his will. The drama that unfolds is an elaborate exploration of whether or not Job (the moral hero) fears God "for nothing," or "without cause." (cf. Job 1:9; 9:16-17; 13:13-16)

single 'self,' every human person is faced with a "lose-lose" decision concerning her master – either she will prioritize (the) *faith of Jesus Christ* or 'the authentic self.' Within this schema, costly grace costs the only 'self' we will ever have. *We are damned if we do, damned if we don't*!

However, if 'no one' unifies the human life, a great conceptual barrier to practices of costly grace is dissolved. If the human person is not essentially animated by some singular 'self,' then 'self'-abandonment does not entail pathology. Instead, 'self'-abandonment is merely a term used to describe the act of subordinating one set of drives/ideals to another set of drives/ideals. In this case, we have no basis for deontological objections to 'self'-abandonment *as 'self'-abandonment*. We are obligated only to care appropriately for our body-souls, unless (the) *faith of Jesus Christ* compels us to lay even these down. Within this schema, costly grace costs some set of possible futures. However, there is no essential 'self' to forsake. *When one door closes, another door is open*!

Hope and Self-Realization

A 'selfless' view of human personalities would also affect the way many Christians practice hope. In *Though the Fig Tree Does Not Blossom*, Ellen Marshall describes Christian hope as a "sense of possibility that generates and sustains moral agency" that is informed by a particular object, some vision of *basileia tou*

theou.[160] Like Troeltsch and H. R. Niebuhr, Marshall argues that a theological ethics of hope should be informed by the unsettling work of negotiating between the realities of history and the ideals of faith.[161] Christians, she argues, should constantly evaluate and occasionally adjust our visions of *basileia tou theou*, as well as the more preliminary objects of our hopes, such that we may remain accountable to the perils and promises of our shared existence.[162] In particular, Marshall envisions the *basileia tou theou* as "a community in which . . . we are free from inhibiting structures and free for self-realization, mutually rewarding relationships, and self-expression"[163] and clearly articulates what it means to hold responsibly to such a vision. However, in a world where human persons are no longer viewed as either 'self'-sustaining or 'self'-governed organisms and God's love is conceptualized as a divine process of nurturance, theologians would hesitate to render extant potentials for self-realization the primary objects of our hope. Were this possible future realized, the theologian would, instead, regard opportunities for participation in the potential-making power of divine love the primary objects of her hope.

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[160] Marshall, Ellen O. *Though the Fig Tree Does Not Blossom: Toward a Responsible Theology of Hope*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006, pp. *xiii, xv.*
[161] *Though the Fig Tree Does Not Blossom*, p. 4, 10.
[162] *Ibid*., p. *xx*.
[163] *Ibid*., p. 71.

In that day, theologians will come to acknowledge that the rhetoric of self-realization tends to exaggerate our potentials for independence from one another, often obscuring from view the extent to which human persons remain vulnerable and dependent throughout their lives. Moreover, no theologian concerned with remaining accountable to our best theories for explaining human consciousness will suppose that human persons are governed by singular, relatively stable 'selves.' Finally, theologians will also come to generally acknowledge that the work of love is prior to the work of justice and that, consequently, we should approach the object of our hope (i.e. the flourishing of all creation) by prioritizing participation in the worth-bestowing (i.e. potential-making, justice-initiating) activity of divine love.

Like Marshall, theologians will remain interested in constructing a responsible account of Christian hope useful for provoking and sustaining moral agency – an account which both "conveys a promise and issues a call."[164] However, whereas Marshall's account of hope primarily conveys a promise concerning extant potentials and primarily issues a call to perform duties of justice, our accounts will primarily convey a promise concerning future potentials and will primarily issue a call to perform duties of charity. Of course, Marshall is also concerned that persons expect future potentials and perform

[164] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

duties of charity, just as we will be concerned that persons locate extant potentials and perform duties of justice. Nevertheless, because we will work from anthropological and theological assumptions distinct from Marshall's, our accounts of Christian hope will tend to proceed from different points of departure.

We will acknowledge that human persons are animals, vulnerable to innumerable possible afflictions, who inherit opportunities for human flourishing only as a consequence of virtuous care-giving. Unfortunately, this already known fact often becomes obscured by the rhetoric of self-realization predominant within much western ethical discourse. The rhetoric of self-realization suggests that human persons are animated by relatively stable 'selves' concerning which we have "direct" access to reliable self-knowledge, such that human flourishing consists in human persons inhabiting particular kinds of freedoms, given which we are able to independently actualize potentials privately known to be inherent to our 'selves.' This way of imagining human personalities tempts us to forget that "it is most often to others that we owe our survival, let alone our flourishing, as we encounter bodily illness and injury, inadequate nutrition, mental defect and disturbance, and human aggression and

neglect,"[165] and that "it is by having our reasoning put to the test by others, by being called to account for ourselves and our actions by others, that we learn [to practice independent reasoning]."[166]

In that day, we will acknowledge that humans, like other animals, are characterized by a capacity for practical rationality, such that reasons for action develop within us prior to reflection.[167] However, unlike (most) other animals, humans normally develop beyond an "initial animal state of *having reasons for acting in this way rather than that* towards [a] specifically human state of *being able to evaluate those reasons, to revise them or abandon them and replace them with others*.[168] Because humans typically inherit some capacity for independent practical reasoning, the discipline of ethics – "the study of our choices about the good life, both individually and in the whole picture of a good life that our choices, taken together, create"[169] – is possible (and necessary) for us. Like Marshall, theologians will maintain that humans should work to form habits for choosing actions that contribute to "a flourishing system . . . a community in which human beings have their basic needs met and the positive conditions necessary to realize

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[165] MacIntyre, Alasdair. *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*. Chicago, IL: Open Court Publishing Company, 1999, p. 1.
[166] *Dependent Rational Animals*, p. 148 (see also p. 95).
[167] *Ibid*., p. 5-6, 55-56
[168] *Ibid*., p. 91.
[169] Lovin, Robin W. *Christian Ethics: An Essential Guide*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000, p. 16.

their full potential."[170] We will not, however, strictly proportion our giving and receiving in accordance with the potentials we perceive within this-or-that 'self' because (a) persons, in our view, are not animated by some single, essential 'self,' and (b) we will develop *eyes to see* that acts of charity often develop, within and among human persons, imperceptible potentials, which only become apparent after some persons receive some form of generosity.

Of course, apart from talk about 'selves', we may, nevertheless, attend to potentials characterizing this-or-that human body. We will still allow reflections upon our bodily potentials to guide our ethics of hope. However, as we study the particular bodily potentials of human individuals, we will remember that our bodies contain potentials that often remain, to us and to others, imperceptible. We will recognize that we are often surprised by our bodies and by the bodies of others. Though we may craft helpful generalizations concerning human bodies, our bodies are characterized by an inescapable unpredictability – a depth of mysterious, weakly conceivable (often inconceivable) potential which is never fully represented in our calculations. Therefore, we will come to see that visions of human flourishing informed only by attention to strongly conceivable human potentials tend to yield habits of justice that, ironically, fail to "make space for" unexpected possibilities for personal and social transformations.

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[170] *Though the Fig Tree Does Not Blossom*, p. 70-71.

While our hope will be informed by strongly conceivable human potentials, we will also work to cultivate that dimension of peculiarly Christian hope, which, realized among the saints, is rooted in faith that "[God] is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine."[171] We will acknowledge that, in order to be maximally responsible (i.e., dutiful to some form of justice), a person must work to actualize and defend some set of potentials which, for her, are strongly conceivable,[172] and that meanwhile, in order to be maximally redemptive, a person must practice charity unconditionally, motivated, at times, only by "a sense of possibility" generated by faith in the power of divine love. Furthermore, we will come to see that a tension exists between duties of justice (the call to responsible action) and duties of charity (the call to redemptive action), such that the act of emphasizing one often changes the way we conceive of the other.

In that day, our views concerning the tensions between duties of justice and duties of charity may become more consonant with the views of "strong *agapists*," like Timothy Jackson. In *The Priority of Love*, Jackson argues that the virtue of *agapic* love, more than any other virtue, is indispensible to the growth of moral persons insofar as "our adult capacity for balancing competing interests

[171] Cf. Ephesians 3:20
[172] *Though the Fig Tree Does Not Blossom*, p. 77.

and for keeping valid contracts comes only after our unconditional nurturance by others while we are weak and dependent children, incapable of either stating our interests or entering into binding agreements."[173] In his view, *Agapic* love "involves three basic features: (1) unconditional willing of the good for the other, (2) equal regard for the well-being of the other, and (3) passionate service open to self-sacrifice for the sake of the other."[174] While practicing *agapic* love, as such, is not incompatible with justice, practices of such love do "precede and transform" the meaning of justice insofar as the practice of *agapic* love is productive of worth which justice then functions to distribute.[175] Therefore, since Christians *as devotees of the God who is love*[176] ought to craft and execute ethics that prioritize participation in *agapic* love,[177] *what it means to attend responsibly to* the potentials of humans (and other creatures), for Christians, cannot merely consist in appraising extant potentials and "making space for" their actualization.

In that day, we will acknowledge that Christians, by definition, are animals learning to expect the power of divine love to produce unexpected

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[173] *The Priority of Love,* p. 7.
[174] *Ibid.*, p. 10.
[175] *Ibid.*, pp. 28, 33-34. Jackson writes, "I prefer to speak of love 'preceding and transforming' justice to accent three points: (1) *agape* undergirds modern, a.k.a. "naturalist," conceptions of justice in that it nurtures individuals and groups into the capacity for self-conscious interests that distributive and retributive principles then adjudicate; (2) *agape* affirms the importance of giving people their due, thus it never falls below what justice (as *suum cuique*) requires; yet (3) *agape* occasionally transcends justice so understood, thereby displaying the leavening priority of the good to the right (*tsedaqah* to *mishpat*) (pp. 33-34).
[176] Cf. 1 John 4:8, 16
[177] Cf. 1 Corinthians 13

worth within and among human persons (and other creatures). Consequently, the "sense of possibility" that generates and sustains our moral agency will not utterly dependent upon our abilities to imagine potentials for "self-realization, mutually rewarding relationships, and self-expression." We will recognize that even where such potentials remain unseen, trust in the potential-making power of divine love may function to generate the "sense of possibility" we need to fulfill duties of charity and justice. In this way, we will genuinely come to embody the enduring "sense of possibility" animating the psalmist who hopes "even though [s/he] walks through the valley of the shadow of death."[178] Finally, we will acknowledge that often no other "sense of possibility" can be provoked or sustained within religious participants of the type William James identifies as "the sick soul."[179]

While I affirm Marshall's analysis of that which constitutes responsible hope, looking forward to a 'selfless' day, I suspect that visions of *basileia tou theou* which primarily emphasize *freedom for* "self-realization, mutually rewarding exchanges, and self-expression" may not tend to provoke and sustain, for the

[178] Ps. 23:4

[179] Whereas the "healthy-minded" religious participant is predisposed to acknowledge extant potentials for good in the world, William James describes the "sick soul" as a one in whom "the entire consciousness of the poor [person] is so choked with the feeling of evil that the sense of there being any good in the world is lost for him altogether." (James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2002, p. 149.) For persons incapable of sensing extant potentials for good in the world, a program of imagining extant potentials for self-realization prescribes an exercise in futility.

broadest range of persons, a maximally redemptive "sense of possibility." Because, within human lives, the work of love always "precedes and transforms" the work of justice, human persons only approach the ultimate object of Christian hope (i.e. the flourishing of the whole) when we prioritize opportunities to participate in the worth-bestowing (i.e. potential-making, justice-initiating) activity of divine love. Furthermore, if human persons are vulnerable, dependent animals within whom no 'self' may be located, then, for human persons, the rhetoric of self-realization is an inappropriate vehicle for describing properly human hope to the extent that it tends to obscure these facts of our situation. For these reasons, we will prefer speaking of *basileia tou theou* in ways that primarily emphasize *freedom for* participation in processes of divine love. Love will become the stand-alone theological priority of 'no one.' In that day, whoever finds their *psyche* will be lost.[180]

[180]Cf. Matt. 10:39

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