Features

Religion and Ethics

The Feature this issue concentrates on several different views of the relationship between ethics and religion. Some papers are more theoretical while others deal with some of the applied areas. Peter Forrest sets the scene with a scholarly discussion of difficulties associated with espousing a secular ethic. Several authors offer diverse views on the development and origins of ethics: E A Knight looks at the origins of moral conscience as explored in the works of Freud and Nietzsche; Robert McIver examines the continuing contribution of the Bible to personal and communal ethics; Majella Franzmann and Josie Fisher propose some questions from a feminist perspective on the ethical dimensions of reading and interpreting the Bible; and Andrew Gilman relates different aspect of congregational life to the development of categories of moral perception. On a more applied note Barbara Nicholas considers the value of story as related to bioethics and Alex Melrose looks at social justice and the politicised clergy.

The Mystery of Secular Ethics*

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I

One way of discussing the connection between religion and ethics is to examine attitudes towards the contemporary secularisation of traditional Western ethics, which developed in a religious, and, indeed, Christian-dominated culture. At one extreme we have the conservative position, which used to be an orthodoxy among secularists only a generation ago. This is to insist that the decline of religion, and the rise of Atheism[1] should not undermine traditional ethics, but rather purify it of supposedly obscurantist and reactionary elements, such as prohibitions on homosexual acts, as well as unworthy motivations, such as fear of divine punishment[2]. At the other extreme is the radical position, going back at least to Sade, namely that it is absurd to retain traditional Western ethics, even in a 'purified' form, if you abandon traditional religions[3].

Before proceeding I should make two remarks. The first is that the way I have stated these two secular attitudes involves a restriction to Western ethics and to a culture which used to be dominated by Christianity. That is not because I think similar discussions of secularisation in other cultures would be unimportant, merely that it might be risky to generalise. The second remark is that I shall not be making a distinction between the ethical and the moral.

It is my purpose in this paper to argue that the radical position is correct provided the word 'absurd' is interpreted to mean 'defying explanation', or, for short 'mysterious'. Of course, philosophical argument is never conclusive, and there are, no doubt, replies to every one of my arguments, to which, no doubt, I would have rejoinders and so on. Nonetheless, it is important to state the case for the mysteriousness of secular ethics[4]. Assuming this case to be correct, there are three options for those who have abandoned traditional religions. One is a return to their religious roots, or to some other religion, partly because it provides a way of understanding their ethical convictions[5]. The second is to revise their ethical convictions in ways which the majority in the community may well find shocking. The third is to argue that we all have to accept mysteries somewhere or other, and to accept 'with natural piety', that is without comprehension, a secular but otherwise traditional ethics.

The sociology of post-Christian ethics is beyond the scope of this paper, but my impression is that it tends to take the form of an antinomian virtue ethics. Like other virtue ethics it stresses the importance of cultivating virtues and avoiding vice[6]. It is antinomian in rejecting any moral 'laws'. I explicate this as the rejection of the following three theses concerning moral obligation:

(i) Moral supremacy
(ii) The distinction between obligations and works of supererogation
(iii) The deontological character of moral obligations.

I suspect, however that a further principle is still widely accepted by secular moralists, even though it is not applied to obligations, namely:
(iv)The principle of universality

II

It is my purpose to argue that none of these four theses can be understood in a thoroughly secular context. As a preliminary I shall discuss what each of them means. To say that moral obligation is supreme is to say something about the phenomenology of moral judgement[7]. It has an imperious character to it such that someone who fails to act in accordance with their considered moral judgements is considered to be weak-willed or, which hardly differs, to have succumbed to temptation. Thus the truly *wicked*[8] who treat moral obligations as themselves temptations to be resisted are considered to have lost their sense of the character of moral obligation – they no longer know what it 'feels' like.

The distinction between obligations and works of supererogation is that the morally obligatory is a minimum moral standard and that a virtuous person will typically perform acts which are of a higher moral character than the minimum of satisfying ones obligations. This is related to the supremacy of moral obligation because that supremacy only attaches to the minimum standard. Now puritanism is the pernicious attempt to give even the supererogatory the imperious character of obligation. I shall argue that the op-

posite is characteristic of secular morality, namely treating traditional moral obligations as works of supererogation.

To say that moral obligations have a deontological character is to allow that an act might be obligatory in the circumstances even though some other act has, as far as we can tell, better consequences. The classic example is executing an innocent person in order to prevent the communal violence that would result if no scapegoat were found. The Western tradition has it that this ought not to be done, even though, as far as we can tell, the communal violence would result in the death of many more innocent people.

Universality is not to be confused with universalisability. The latter is the principle that if one person has an obligation in one set of circumstances, any other person has a similar obligation in similar circumstances. Although hard to make precise this has widely been taken as an essential characteristic of moral obligations[9]. Universality, however, is the principle that morality concerns the welfare of, at very least, all of humanity, and, plausibly, all sentient life[10]. It is part of the Western ethical tradition that we restrict moral considerations neither to those we know nor to those who are related to us, nor to compatriots, nor to those of our own culture.

III

My aim, then, is to exhibit the religious, or more specifically theocentric, understanding of these four characteristics of traditional Western ethics, while pointing out the difficulty of understanding them in a secular context. First, the supremacy of moral judgements can be understood by treating moral obligations as divine commands. To understand them in that way is not a matter of thinking hard about meanings, rather it is analogous to understanding the anomalously high boiling point of water in terms of hydrogen bonds. Once you know what water really is then you can understand what initially seemed puzzling. Likewise once you understand what moral obligations really are then you can understand their supremacy.

There are several well-known objections to the Divine Command theory, all of which have been extensively discussed in the literature. Of these, I shall mention only two[11]. One concerns the Euthyphro Dilemma: it is said that God commands various actions because they are good, not vice versa. That, I reply, is simplistic in two ways. First, not all value is moral value. God, we may suppose, commands various things because it is good to command them, and what God commands is, as a result, morally obligatory. The second way in which the Euthyphro dilemma is simplistic in this context is that we are giving an explanation of moral supremacy. So we could say that *for God* there is no distinction between the obligatory and the supererogatory, and hence no imperiousness to the moral. For God, then, it is as many secularists suppose morality is for us: it neither commands nor demands but beckons.

The other well known objection to the divine command theory is that if God commanded something horrific, say the torture of innocents, it would not become right. That is correct, so we have to modify the divine command theory by stipulating that the commands are of a loving God, who commands not capriciously but for the good of all creatures. I assume that stipulation has been made.

Secularists have no trouble in explaining away moral supremacy. A Durkhe-

imian explanation as the internalised authority of the community comes to mind, but Marxist, Freudian and others can be provided. This is however, precisely the explaining *away* of moral supremacy. For while individuals will typically take seriously the good of the society to which they belong they will, on reflection, find nothing supreme in that good, unless, that is, they claim that there is already a moral obligation to sacrifice their own good to that of society as a whole. The difference here between the command of God and the command of society is that the former but not the latter is sufficiently powerful to make it reasonable to trust *come what may*.

What I am claiming, then, is that those morally upright atheists who accept moral supremacy are a mystery to themselves.

Perhaps it will be replied that virtue is its own reward, or, more relevantly, that there is no comfort like a good conscience. But those who come sincerely to judge that moral obligations lack any supremacy would be the mere victims of irrational guilt feelings if they continue to act as if there is moral supremacy. And to say that we treat moral obligations as supreme but only because we suffer from irrational guilt is still to explain away moral supremacy.

Again, it might be objected that moral supremacy may be derived from the way our moral standards make us the women and men we are. So to go against moral obligation is a sort of suicide, we lose part of ourselves[12]. I reply that unless we already regard moral obligations as supreme we do not lose part of ourselves in occasionally ignoring these obligations. To be sure, if secularists adopt a virtue ethic then they can argue that the fostering of moral virtues should be of great importance because our virtues make us what we are. There is, however, still the gap between attaching great importance to the exercise of virtue and acknowledging moral supremacy.

I conclude that although moral supremacy is easy to explain away by atheist observers of the moral scene, the actions of the morally upright atheists who endorse moral supremacy in their lives are mysterious to themselves.

A corollary of the mysteriousness of moral supremacy in a secular context is either the mysteriousness of the distinction between moral obligations and works of supererogation, or the collapse of that distinction. For without its imperious quality moral obligation amounts to nothing more than an act being a good thing to do, or the sort of thing a virtuous person would do, which is precisely the category of the supererogatory. Against this it could be said that pragmatic considerations will incline sometimes to praise for performance and sometimes to censure for non-performance. And that, it could be further said, provides the opportunity for something like the traditional distinction between the obligatory and the supererogatory. My reply is that this is not at all like the traditional distinction. For we should all recognise that sometimes it requires heroic virtue just to do what is obligatory. In such cases merely to withhold censure is churlish. More generally we tend to praise acts which it is obligatory to perform and to censure acts which it is obligatory not to perform. So the praiseworthy/censurable distinction cuts across the supererogatory/obligatory distinction.

Secularists might well accept this last point but go on to say that we should revise our moral practice so that the distinctions do coincide. More precisely, they could argue that there is a clear enough

distinction between acts with harmful consequences, which we are obliged not to perform, and acts with beneficial consequences, which we are not obliged to perform but which are supererogatory. A revision of standard moral judgements along those lines would, however, result in the abolition of a moral obligation to help those in need. Sufficiently tough-minded secularists might accept this conclusion saying that obligations to help the needy are mere relics of religious morality, but that would simply be a way of saying that traditional ethics indeed becomes absurd if preserved in a secular context. I rather hope that most secularists would conclude, instead, that the obligatory/supererogatory distinction has evaporated, so helping the needy is as much one as the other.

IV

I now turn to our deontological intuition. By that I mean the intuition that certain acts are wrong[13] even though, as far as we can see, they have better consequences than the alternatives. This is puzzling. For, it seems, the rationale of morality is the cultivation of what is beneficial and the avoidance of what is harmful. Our deontological intuitions can, however, be explained in theistic terms: God knows the long term effects of certain kinds of act; and God knows that, more often than not, when they seem to us humans to have consequences which are better than the alternatives, then we are mistaken. Hence God decides it is for the best always to forbid such acts.

Initially it might seem that we do not need to bring God into the picture to provide some such account. Rule utilitarians, for instance, can point to the ease of deciding what sort of actions in general have harmful consequences compared to the difficulty of making decisions in particular cases. Hence, they may argue, we should consider as morally wrong just the actions of the kinds which lead, on the whole, to harmful consequences. This response is inadequate because occasions arise, although no doubt they are rare, when our ability to predict what will happen in the particular case is sufficient to make it unreasonable to rely on knowledge of general tendencies. Indeed the standard example of needing to condemn one innocent person for the sake of the whole community could easily be such a case. If you seek to understand moral obligations directly in terms of the consequences, then for morally upright atheists to uphold our ordinary moral intuitions in such cases would either be, as Smart calls it, rule worship[14], or, as I would say, a mystery to themselves.

By contrast, theists such as myself are in a somewhat different situation if they are convinced that God has forbidden acts of a certain kind because they are in general harmful, although on this occasion good rather than harm will result. For the worship of God is vastly more reasonable than rule worship. That is not, however, the relevant difference between Theism and Atheism, which is that theists cannot reasonably be convinced that on this occasion it will do more good than harm to disobey God. For while we may assume that we have been given an immense degree of control over our lives, we cannot reasonably be convinced that God does not retain some ultimate control over our affairs, in which case God can adjust the consequences so that in cases where disobeying God results in good not harm, obedience results in even greater good. To be sure, atheists can be 'moral opti-

mists' too. That is, they too can believe that the intuitively right action will, in the end, have more beneficial consequences than the alternative. But they can have no way of understanding their moral optimism[15].

In the above I have assumed that the correct theory of moral value is a consequentialist one, namely that the moral value of an act depends, in some fashion or other, on its consequences. I have argued that Theism provides the best way of reconciling such consequentialism with our deontological intuitions[16]. A thorough deontologist would reject my consequentialism, claiming that moral values are not entirely dependent on non-moral values. In response to this, I note that the problem of the clash of intuitions also occurs for deontologists. For even if moral values do not entirely depend on consequences, and even if moral values outweigh non-moral ones, a case can still be made for sacrificing the innocent to prevent greater harm. For, as has widely been pointed out, the greater harm in this case includes the performance of far worse acts by other people, so the appeal to moral values is irrelevant[17].

I conclude that the widespread, and commendable, respect for deontological intuitions among atheists must be mysterious to them. Against this it could be objected that for the non-performance of an act to be mysterious it must at least be considered as a real possibility, and that to the truly morally upright such acts are *unthinkable* [18]. By that I mean that the performance of the act is not seriously envisaged and any thought about it is as if thinking about what someone else might do. My reply to that is first to distinguish moral *innocence* from moral uprightness. (The distinction might be elucidated by considering the opposites: the opposite of innocence is corruption, the opposite of uprightness is depravity.) To the innocent many things are unthinkable, but the corrupted person, to whom all things are 'thinkable', might still be morally upright. This distinction may be reinforced by noting that what is unthinkable is that which there is a taboo against, which may or may not coincide with that which is morally wrong, so the innocent person is not necessarily morally upright. Thus public nudity is unthinkable for many. It seems, therefore, that an innocent person might fail to do the right thing, if that involved running naked down the street to save a life.

V

A secular ethics which has abandoned the supremacy of moral obligation, the category of the supererogatory and strong deontological constraints might still be recognisable as belonging to our tradition, provided it extols the virtues of justice, compassion, benevolence, honesty and so on. And, secularists might add, if these virtues were conspicuous, then human beings would flourish more than in a world constrained by the supposedly high standards of moral obligation. There is, however, one further feature of traditional morality which must be retained if the Western tradition is not to be completely abandoned, namely universality. Our moral concern must not be restricted to those whom we love. Nor is it restricted to our neighbours in the sense of those whom we know as individuals. Instead, traditional morality concerns all human beings, whether they are known to us or not, even, most would say, to future generations. Indeed, granted that we accept the universality of moral obligation, a

strong case can and has been made for extending our moral concern to all sentient life[19].

Suppose we abandon universality, but cultivate various virtues in ourselves and our children. Then we shall certainly be concerned about the few who are poor in our own affluent suburbs. And we shall certainly seek justice for the oppressed whom we know. But what about those who are our of sight? Upright atheists might well act *as if* they were emotionally involved, as indeed might devout believers. However, we neither can nor ought to be emotionally moved with those whom they have never met. (Loving your neighbours is possible, though hard, even if they hate you. Loving those whom you do not know, and so are not your neighbours, is psychologically impossible.)

The universality of moral concern can be understood easily enough in the context of traditional Western Religion. While none of us can know and love everyone, God can and does; so God commands us to act in various ways regardless of how we feel or whom we know. By contrast, I say, the universality of ethics must seem absurd to those upright atheists who have not abandoned it.

Here it might be objected that not only the technical requirement of universalisability but universality itself is part of our concept of moral obligation, perhaps even of a moral virtue. For instance, generosity is not a *moral* virtue unless it extends to all. Hence any system of moral obligations and moral virtue must involve universalisation. Perhaps that is so, but secularists can no more define morality into existence then theists can define God into existence[20]. Hence if morality requires universality and if a thoroughly secularised ethics has no place for universality, that just makes the secular/religious contrast all the more stark. Traditional morality will have been replaced not by a system of moral virtues but by a system of non-moral virtues.

Notes

* I would like to record my gratitude to Tony Lynch for many helpful comments on an earlier draft.

1. For simplicity, I shall suppose that all religious believers are theists and all secularists are atheists. In fact both could be agnostics. Agnosticism about whether there is a God merely confuses the issue, implying as it does, a further agnosticism in cases where religion has ethical consequences.

2. A representative statement of this conservative position is Nowell-Smith's article for a 1967 Encyclopedia of Philosophy. (Patrick H Nowell-Smith 'Religion and Morality' *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, The Macmillan Company & The Free Press, New York, 1967, Vol 7, pp. 150-8.)

3. Among which I include any religion with a personal God similar to that of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. So much religion which is not Western could support Western ethics.

4. J L Mackie is notably clear sighted in following the moral implications of his Atheism. See *Ethics, Inventing Right and Wrong.*, Pelican: Harmondsworth, 1977. As Mackie acknowledged, the moral realism he attacks is a secular moral realism. See especially pp. 227-31.

5. This would be part of the project of Best Explanation Apologetics.

6. Not that secularists have a monopoly on virtue ethics. See Peter Geach, *The Virtues*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1977. What is characteristically secular is the total replacement of traditional obligation ethics with virtue ethics.

7. John Henry Newman is probably the best known exponent of the imperiousness of morality. For a discussion, see Grave, S A *Newman on Conscience*, Clarendon Press, 1989.

8. 'Wicked' here translates Aristotle's 'kakios' and is contrasted with the merely weak-willed 'akratos'.

9. Hare, for instance assimilates moral obligations to universalised prescriptions. (R M Hare, *The Language of Morals* , Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1952.) I am not taking universalisability to be itself controversial. It implies that if we restrict the range of those to whom we consider ourselves to have moral obligations, then we should accept a similar restriction by others. This consideration does not, however, imply universality. For it is perfectly rational to adopt a maxim of moral indifference to the 'alien' group expecting them to be indifferent to 'us'. What might be irrational is to adopt an attitude of positive hostility to the 'alien' group accepting that they will do the same.

10. Although not myself a right wing liberal, perhaps it is worth recalling their denial that others have the right to our help. We should distinguish, however, between recognising a right, which has political implications, from recognising a moral obligation. Typically, right wing liberals expect that in a society with minimal government, and hence low taxes, the wealthy will recognise a moral obligation to help the poor.

11. See my 'An Argument for the Divine Command Theory of Right Action', *Sophia,* 1989, pp. 2-19, for further details.

12. I am indebted to Tony Lynch for pointing this out to me as a possible response.

13. I say an act is (morally) wrong just in case there is a moral obligation to refrain from doing it.

14. J J C Smart 'Extreme and Restricted Utilitarianism', *Philosophical Quarterly,* 6, 1956, pp. 344-54.

15. Mackie in *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (pp, 149-68, p. 229) grants that his secular approach to Ethics cannot entirely underpin our deontological intuitions.

16. See my 'An Argument for the Divine Command Theory of Right Action', *Sophia,* 1989, for further discussion.

17. Bernard Williams' example of Jim being offered the 'privilege' of killing one Indian to prevent all twenty being killed, is one in which the moral harm is less if Jim kills one Indian. Williams himself uses the example to make the point that it is by no means obvious that Jim does the right thing if he kills one Indian. I am giving a rather different account of our conflict of intuitions in this case. See Bernard Williams 'A critique of utilitarianism' in J J C Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against,* Cambridge University Press, : Cambridge, 1973, pp. 93-99.

18. Once again I am indebted to Tony Lynch for bringing this to my attention.

19. Notably by Peter Singer.

20. As on some, perhaps mistaken, construals of the Ontological Argument.

Freud and Nietzsche on the Origins of Religion, Moral Conscience, and the Notion of God(s)

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Religion, the notion of god(s), along with culture and society are all within the realm of social anthropology and have been of significant interest for a long time. However, it was not until the late 19th and 20th centuries that the intrigue about the **origins** of religion, culture, and the notion of gods escalated, perhaps due

to the influence of the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution and the increasingly scientific approach in various fields. The advent of Darwinism ushered in a new contemporary world view in the field of anthropology, and the notion of God was no longer considered a sufficient answer to questions of origin. Ontological metaphysics on the whole lost a lot of its influence. Freud's work on the origins of religion and Nietzsche's on the notion of god(s) respectively may be considered first and foremost socio-psycho anthropological and then philosophical. Both can be seen as attempts to establish the origin of moral systems.

The purpose then, is to analyse and critically compare what Nietzsche has to say concerning the origin of the notion of god(s) in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887), with Freud's views on the origins of religion in *Totem and Taboo* (1912-13). In order to fully benefit from a critical comparison of the two authors, it is important to understand fully the main thread of their respective theses. First Freud's theory on the origins of religion is looked at - as well as a short feminist critique of the Oedipus complex and the role of patriarchal prejudice in the development of his theory - then Nietzsche's theory on the origin of the notion of gods is given. Next a comparison is made of the two works interpreted as historical, followed by a comparison interpreted as psychical and philosophical works. The thesis that the historical evidence of both theories is undermined by an overvaluation of the psychological explanations is presented. Finally, very briefly the general difference between the motives and aims of Nietzsche and Freud in compiling their works is addressed.

In *Totem and Taboo* Freud employs psychoanalysis to explore certain characteristics of the cultural life of primitive races to hypothesise about the origins of culture and religion. Primeval culture is made contemporary in a sense, with the study of certain indigenous races which he considers the closest we can get to see a well preserved picture of an early stage of our own development. He associates the magical and animistic ideas of primitive culture with the 'omnipotence of thought' in neurotics, claiming that both are characterised by the overvaluation of the psychical to the detriment of the real. He also explains the dual nature of taboo that is both holy and defiling, by comparing it with the emotional ambivalence found in obsessional neurosis.

Amongst tribes where religious and social institutions as we know them, do not exist, there is a system of totemism. A totem according to Freud, is an object, animal or occasionally a plant or natural phenomenon that stands in relation to the whole clan as their ancestor, guardian, helper and spirit, which spares its own people. Most importantly, as we shall see, the totem is sacred and must not be killed or eaten if it is an animal except during festivals. Freud's theory takes an enterprising turn in the last part of his book, where he interprets the totemic festival in which the totem animal was eaten in ceremonial fashion as a remembrance feast, a repetition of an event which happened in the primordial era when a primitive group of sons slaughtered and ate their father because they were jealous of his sole access to the women in the group. However, the sons afterward were weighed down by guilt and remorse because their father was the object of their love as well as their hatred, so as a form of expiation, they renounced their actions by instituting the two fundamental laws of culture: the prohibition of murder (commemorated by the

ban on killing the totem animal except during a festival when the original killing is remembered) and the prohibition of incest (because the sons relinquished any further claims on the women of the clan). Hence there developed a relation between totemism and exogamy, in the form of a law against people of the same totem having sexual intercourse with one another.

Freud suggests the killing of the primal father has permeated into the consciousness of Western culture, as the Jewish religion was founded on the killing of Moses their father- image and later Christianity which had its own image of the Son - a filial revolt against the father, which is the 'secret' meaning according to Freud's theory, behind the Eucharist. He 'comes clean' eventually at the conclusion of his book and states clearly that the beginnings of religion and culture converge in the Oedipus complex. The Oedipus complex is also considered to be at the heart of all neuroses according to Freudian psychology. This central thesis of Freud however, shows several difficulties and weaknesses when his arguments are examined. First, there is the assumption that the early organisation of tribes resembled that of the Darwinian higher apes and not monkeys which are primarily 'troop' orientated and nomadic. Secondly, he assumes that **all** cultures were affected by ancient tribes where the blood sacrifice was central to their beliefs, which is practised by the ancient near-eastern cultures, whereas other cultures outside this blood sacrifice practice had no influence. Furthermore, he does not sufficiently establish that totemic sacrifice in fact was originally from ancient near-eastern primeval cultures.

If a man's relation to his father is the single most important discovery in the science of psychology and social anthropology (as Freud implies)[1] then it is indeed a very useful one, however, there is some doubt about the cogency of the theory of the Oedipus complex. More specifically, it is possible that such a theory is itself culturally influenced rather than influencing culture. A feminist critique of the Oedipus complex for example, argues that it is a patriarchal culture that becomes internalised within children at a very young age. Eva Figes for example points out that Freud's theory of the resolution of the Oedipus complex was a reaction to the feminist movement in an attempt to secure the social and economic dependency of women. She accuses Freud of being "...thoroughly bourgeois" with his theories being based on a total acceptance of the status quo as a norm of civilised behaviour.[2] Shulamith Firestone develops this idea and claims that the theory can only be seen in terms of power. Numerous inequalities in the patriarchal nuclear family create an oppressive climate in which the child grows up, and from an early age is aware of a hierarchy of power. Moreover, Firestone claims that the effects of the Oedipus complex decrease in societies where men have less power.[3] Considering this feminist critique, we may accuse Freud of placing the proverbial cart before the horse by thinking that the origins of religion and culture converge in the Oedipus complex, when the complex may well have been influenced by culture. However, it is then reduced to a case of "which came first, the chicken or the egg?".

It is nonetheless possible that the totemic ritual was based on an actual patricide (as Freud argued) which led to the development of an Oedipus complex, that served as the seed of modern day religion and culture. But if historical, when it comes to patriarchal contempt, Freud is

not sufficiently convincing by way of evidence that the sons would kill, let alone **eat** the father. It is possible to conjecture using psychoanalysis that an infant may displace its father-hatred upon a totemic object, but this is not enough to substantiate that the sons in the primeval tribe did so after slaying the father. If a father-to-tem-object was established after the murder, was the remorse felt enough to resolve never to kill the totem again? It also seems unlikely that this would have been enough to restrain their sexual desires for women of their tribe. If it was possible, the women whom they resisted would probably have been accessed by strangers and the sons would be left with nothing except individual attachment to other tribes, thus destroying the solidarity that was so anxiously needed to be preserved. However, historical or not, it seems an unsound hypothesis that this primeval tribal event or "Deed" as Freud puts it, was the archetypal phenomenon that has persisted into modern culture and religion. There is a great assumption that there is a continuity of psychical behaviour through succeeding generations and no indication as to how this continuity is established. In general, Freud's work appears to be filled with conjecture and unproven hypotheses, and in this instance looks like a fallacy of 'writing a theory to fit the evidence'.

Nietzsche's thesis concerning the origin of the notion of god(s) is based on fear of the ancestor. In *On the Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche considers fear and pain to be instrumental in the institution of creditor-debtor legal obligations, which led to the moral concepts of 'guilt' and 'bad conscience'. Promise-making was the right only of the free, independent noble persons who could fulfil their obligations, but to those who could not, compensation had to be sought in the form of the debtor's body, his spouse, his freedom or even his life. Furthermore, according to Nietzsche, the creditor could inflict pain, indignity, torture or mutilation upon the body of the debtor to receive compensation in the form of pleasure gained when doing such things, and this he believes is the true motive of all forms of punishment. It is from this that the moral concepts of 'guilt' and 'bad conscience' developed, that is, out of the sphere of unfulfilled legal creditor-debtor obligations. The desire for pleasure from cruelty is an important ingredient in the 'normal' quality of humans, and this is true according to Nietzsche because primitive races and even the apes did not exercise pleasure without cruelty, hence cruelty and the spilling of blood was a satisfactory form of compensation to the creditor. In view of this, moral conceptualisation, the 'Law', the 'Tao' or even Kant's 'categorical imperative' is soaked in blood and smells of cruelty.[4] Cruelty also served to enforce memory, literally carving it into the body causing the formation of a psychical as well as a corporeal person, because only by such means will a person remember five or six "Thou shalt nots".

'Bad conscience' or 'guilt' originated from obligations demanded by the creditor-debtor relationship, that has developed even further through history with the progressive repression and internalisation of our natural instincts of joy in cruelty and torture, which Nietzsche illustrates by personifying humanity as an imprisoned man who desperately wants to be free to exercise his natural instincts but cannot, and so invents the 'bad conscience'. Religion accompanies the 'illness' of guilty indebtedness or 'bad conscience', and because Christianity has the greatest god so far, it

is accompanied by the greatest sense of guilt. The consequence of this according to Nietzsche is that humanity will run away from and despise its freedom. He is forcibly severed from his animal past into a new unnatural standard of existence.[5] The instinct for freedom is Nietzsche's 'will to power', and the desire to get joy out of pain has been revitalised as 'bad conscience'.

Nietzsche interprets the litigal relationship between the debtor and creditor as being developed into a relationship between the present generation and its ancestors. Primeval tribal communities recognised an indebtedness to their ancestors based on the presupposition that without them their tribe would not exist, hence they would appease their ancestral spirits by 'paying them back' through feasts, honour, sacrifice and obedience. Therefore, a fear of the ancestor and its power grew, and the 'bad consciousness' of indebtedness increased as the power of the tribe increased, until the ancestor of the most powerful tribes grew to such dimensions that it was transfigured into a god. This Nietzsche claims, is the origin of the notion of god(s). The Christian God is the apogean transfigured ancestor/god in the Western world so far, and hence conveys the maximum feeling of guilt or bad conscience. However, Nietzsche also can be criticised for not substantiating his reference's to "the original tribal community".[6] There is an assumption of continuity through succeeding generations of the civil-law relationship between the debtor and his creditor, with no indication to how this continuity is established. Furthermore, there is no indication of how the 'indebted' psychical conscience grew in relation to the strength and power of a tribe.

Both Nietzsche and Freud depend on a historico-anthropological interpretation of tribal-cultural development to consolidate their respective theses. Freud for example, consistently makes anecdotal reference to studies of primitive tribes carried out by anthropologists like Frazer, Morgan, Baldwin, Durkheim, and McLennan, because he considered primitive races as the most well preserved direct representatives we can have today of a picture of early stages of our own (Western) development. For Freud, his explanation of the origins of contemporary religion and culture would have been impossible without the strong historical criticism he provided, and evidently he considered events such as the development of taboo restrictions, the horror of incest and totemism as historical. Claims that psychical reality should over-ride factual reality when reading *Totem and Taboo,* are dispelled by Freud's own admission that "...in the beginning was the Deed"[7]. Nietzsche similarly relies on human prehistory to establish the fundamental relation of the creditor to the debtor, which is vital in establishing his thesis of 'bad conscience', ancestral fear and the notion of the origin of gods. He refers to the cultural practices of ancient civilisations like Egypt, Rome and Greece to consolidate this. Nietzsche also subscribes to the ancient practice of cruelty in celebration and festival to illustrate his notion of the free uninhibited pain-inflicting instinct of humans. He even refers to the apes who devise "bizarre cruelties" and anticipate man because they are considered his "prelude" [8]. So we can see that both authors use a historico-anthropological method to trace the dawn of social history in a factual sense in order to establish their theses and provide reason for the notions of gods, and culture. The relationship between the pre-

sent generation and its practices cannot be separated from its ancestral history and its factual practices. However, there is reason to reject a purely historical comprehension of their work on the grounds that such an interpretation is extreme and arbitrary. The works of Freud and Nietzsche considered here, should be seen more as a dichotomy of the historical and the psychical.

Even so, we cannot be too hasty in concluding a straightforward dismissal of the historical, even for Freud. However much *Totem and Taboo* and *On the Genealogy of Morals* are interpreted in a psychical sense, both works are still born out of a historical foundation. Freud's origins of religion converge in the Oedipus complex, whose archetype was discovered through **historical** anthropology. Nietzsche's notion of the origins of the gods was attributed to ancestral fear, also discovered through *historical* anthropology. Though there is a definite psychical element in the interpretation of both works, both authors conceive society and culture as bound to the past, hence the historical element naturally has to take precedence (however unfounded it may seem), which is why both Freud and Nietzsche have to be seen as social anthropologists first in these particular works.

This is not to say that the psychical interpretation is not more important. To begin with, both Freud and Nietzsche postulate a psychical theory about the development of the unconscious and the reasons for its current principal constitution. Freud postulates that where totemism is practiced amongst primitive tribes, there is an unusually high horror of incest. This particular prohibition is of interest for psychoanalysis because it is an infantile feature born out of fear of punishment, and is strikingly similar to the mentality of neurotics. This of course is correlative with the Oedipus complex, where a child's relation to parents is dominated by incestuous desire, which forms the nucleus of adult neurosis. The fixation of incestuous desire is one of the dominant parts of the **unconscious** in modern society, but amongst primitive peoples it is a very real threat, hence the severe enforcement of the prohibition. For Nietzsche, the unconscious was a driving force or natural instinct to be oneself in joy through hostility, persecution, and cruelty, until this was constricted, and societies were made aware of their instincts, hence it developed into a 'conscience'. Like Freud, Nietzsche's unconscious is a natural instinct that is possibly somehow innate within us. It can be traced back to even the primates who are our prelude, but the greatest travesty is that we have been made conscious to this instinct and subsequently forced to repress it, which henceforth led to the development of the 'conscience' as he described it.

Animism in *Totem and Taboo* is described by Freud as a doctrine of souls that gives a will and living character to inanimate objects, that are occupied by invisible spirits. Such a doctrine plays an important psychological role because of its relation to myths which are part of the foundation that religions are built upon. A certain type of mentality developed in primitive society where the power of thought was unequivocally connected to physical reality. In other words, control over thoughts corresponded to control over external objects. Eventually, thought became overvalued and reality became less real, while an association grew between mental processes and external reality, hence the creation of spirits. A similar idea can be seen in Nietzsche where the reality of ancestral spirits led to fear

which compelled ancient tribes to exercise various acts of expiation or 'debt honouring'. They feared their ancestors as very present threats which eventually transfigured out of proportion into gods. Psychical reality was projected into external reality.

The most striking psychical readings of Freud and Nietzsche come to light when there is sufficient recognition of the importance that both authors place upon the role of emotional ambivalence, repression and the internalisation of desire, in the development of their respective theories. There is a similarity between Freud and Nietzsche's idea of the emotional consequences when the natural instinct or drive is forced to be repressed. Freud's two principle taboos are the desire to touch (or the desire for incest) and the desire to kill ones' father or father-figure. The fulfilment of such desire is of sublime enjoyment, but a person is prohibited to perform it and so learns to despise it at the same time. For Nietzsche there is enjoyment to be gained from dominance and cruelty to others, but this also has been translated into a bad desire, hence a prohibitive 'bad conscience' or guilt developed in people. In both cases there is the instinctive desire to gain pleasure from actions that are prohibited, hence the ambivalence or conflict of emotions that results when a person is torn between an enjoyment and a detestation of certain feelings.

This ambivalence of emotions leads to neurosis according to Freud, and requires an enlightened psyche or a Nietzschean "noble" quality to rise above the 'categorical imperative' or 'Law' or 'Tao' (or whatever we may choose to call it) that constrains us. Our conscience or sense of 'guilt' is therefore dominating and keeping in check an unconscious desire.

The similarity between taboo and neurosis (which Freud maintains throughout his work) point to the relation between neurosis and the development of contemporary culture. It is for this reason that Freud considers obsessional neurosis to be a caricature of religion.[9] When repression is prominent in a culture, the culture is alleged to be prevented from developing. The process of repression of vital instincts into the unconscious is encouraged through fear of punishment incurred as a result of socio-cultural demands. Nietzsche saw the need to transcend the fear of ancestors, spirits and the notion of gods in order to create a superior culture. Freud saw guilt as a psychological symptom of instinctual repression, and the love-hate ambivalence towards the father or father-image (totem) as the fundamental phenomenon involved in the origin of religion.

So we can see then , that *Totem and Taboo* and *The Genealogy of Morals* can be given a very sound psychical interpretation, and indeed this is how the authors (especially Freud) are most commonly read in relation to social anthropology and the origins of culture, religion and gods. Their ideas however, imply a certain historical conception. Yet, despite this evident historical-psychological dichotomy, it is questionable whether one can safely sit beside the other without some consequences. The explanations provided for the origins of culture often vacillate between being historical and psychological in character, and Freud in particular often appears to confuse historical with psychological truth. Nevertheless, although there are assumptions and conjectures in Nietzsche which are similar in nature to Freud's, the ramifications seem not as severe. It appears that Nietzsche is primarily attempting to un-

dermine religion, whereas Freud is attempting to establish a credible thesis about the origin of religion and culture.

Finally, whatever inconsistencies or difficulties that may be found in their theories of cultural origins, clearly the theme behind Freud's views on religion is that the psychological needs served by religious beliefs, make such beliefs no longer believable. For Nietzsche, the theme behind his views was a conviction of awakening to the real or higher purpose of humanity that was being restrained by religion. To them (however they may have arrived there), ethics is embodied in the human instinct or unconscious and needs to be developed and realised.

Notes

1. S Freud, *Totem and Taboo* in *The Pelican Freud Library*, Penguin Books, vol. 13, 1986, p219.
2. E Figes, *Patriarchal Attitudes*, London, 1981, p135.
3. S Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, London, 1970, p50.
4. F Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Essay 2, ch 6.
5. *Ibid.* ch 16.
6. *Ibid.* ch 19.
7. S Freud, *op cit.* p224.
8. F Nietzsche, *op cit*, Essay 2, ch 6.
9. S Freud, *op cit* p130.

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The Bible and Ethics

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The Bible is not a handbook of ethics[1], but because biblical religion (both Judaism and Christianity) strongly links religious commitment to behaviour, the Bible deals extensively with ethical issues. It is precisely in the area of ethics that biblical religion makes itself real in the life of the believer, and it is the point at which the relevance or irrelevance of religion is felt most keenly. The question, "Is the Bible still relevant today?" is frequently answered in terms of the perceived ethics inherent in the Bible.

This article will survey some of the more prominent themes in biblical ethics, and will discover these to be astonishingly relevant to modern societies, societies far removed in time and culture from those who first received the written word of God. Ethics are normally divided into personal and social ethics, but it is perhaps slightly more convenient

to subdivide the ethical principles found in the Bible into two categories: those effecting individual Christians, and those that effect wider society (Christian and non-Christian alike).

Ethical Principles Effecting Wider Society

The Rule of Law

If the king is the source of law, then he is above the law. Whatever the king did is, ipso facto, lawful and right. This was the case in practice (if not in theory) in all of the kingdoms of the Ancient Near East. Israel stands as unique in this matter, because, as George Mendenhall points out, ". . . there was no independent religious tradition in the pagan nations of the ancient world which had enough vitality and support to become the basis for a condemnation of royal policy while the king was still alive."[2]

The religious traditions embodied in the Old Testament carried the strong conviction that everybody in society was subject to the one law. That law was the law of God. Everybody in Israel and Judah, from the king(s) downwards, was obligated to keep this one law. Although often circumvented, it was an ideal enshrined in the deepest religious convictions of the nation, and the king defied it at some risk to his throne.

Not only was the king and the ruling elite subject to the rule of divine law, this same law was applicable to the disadvantaged and poor of society. "You shall not pervert the justice due to the sojourner or to the fatherless, or take a widow's garment in pledge; but you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this" (Deut 24:17-18)[3]. In all ancient societies (and in many modern ones) the law was often used to the advantage of the rich over the poor. Some ancient societies even had different law codes for the different strata of society - different laws for the princes, the priests and the common people[4]. But Yahwism abhorred this. All those in Israel were of the one family, and were entitled to equal access to law.

Consequently, any society wishing to model itself on biblical ideals will be a society under the rule of law. There will be one rule for all - one law for the poor, and the same law for the rich and politically powerful.

Separation of Church and State

The doctrines of the separation of church and state and the right of free worship according to conscience have been principles that have only emerged out of the inability of post-Reformation states to enforce one religion in one region. At the outset they owed their promotion to pragmatics and humanism rather than religion[5], but there is a strong ethical basis for it dating back to New Testament times. Jesus and the early church were challenged by this matter again and again. How can one legitimately challenge the dominant religion, especially when such is closely allied to the ruling political forces? Is civil disobedience in religious matters unethical? Is the governance of religion another of the legitimate spheres of government? On the other hand, does the acceptance of the radical demands of the kingdom of God exempt Christians from the obligations of society?

The New Testament makes it clear that the answer to these questions is nega-

tive. When the civil(-religious) authorities tried to gag the earliest Christian preachers, they replied that where there is a conflict between the desires of human government and the requirements of God, then God must be followed, even at the cost of personal liberty, and (sometimes) life itself. In the mouth of Peter this principle becomes: "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

On the other hand, Jesus did not advocate a complete withdrawal from the legitimate demands of society. When challenged about the payment of taxes, he asked for a coin. The picture on the coin was Caesar's, therefore Christians were enjoined to "Render . . . to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matt 22:21). The Christian was expected to pay the hated and oppressive Roman taxes - even taxes used to oil the machinery of a army of occupation, and a pagan government - because this belonged to the legitimate sphere of government.

Consequently, the New Testament develops the principle that there are legitimate spheres of activity for both the church and the state, and that these should be kept separate from each other. One of the features of the terrible oppression pictured in Rev 13 is that the religious and civil authorities combine to enforce an apostate religion by civil means. It is against the illegitimate combination of church and state that the New Testament speaks so strongly. When Christianity achieved political domination, to its shame it forgot its heritage, and even resisted the principle of the separation of church and state proposed by humanists and pragmatists.

The Right of Civil Authorities to Rule

Concomitant with the principle of the separation of church and state, is the Christian's recognition of the civil authority's right to rule in its legitimate sphere. Paul outlines some of these rightful roles in Rom 13:1-7: they are to be terrors to bad conduct (preserving society from the forces of lawlessness and anarchy), to enforce laws, and to raise revenue to do their task. In Paul's day, these tasks included running a civil service, making and enforcing laws, keeping civil order, maintaining transportation networks and providing the infrastructure of the community (water supply, sewage disposal, etc.).

Support of Weak and Underprivileged

The weak and underprivileged were to have equal rights under law. The righteous judge was to ensure that they received the justice due to them (Exod 23:6-9). In Israelite society the agricultural practices were so arranged that the poor would have enough food. The edges of the field and the gleanings were theirs (Lev 23:22; Deut 24:19-25). Interest was not supposed to be charged (Exod 22:25; Lev 25:35-38), protecting the poor from the trap of debt (a law widely flouted in Old Testament times, when interest rates between 50 - 150 % were not unknown[6]).

Egalitarianism

In contrast to surrounding societies, both the Old and the New Testament have a strong stress on the equality of all, expressed, among other ways, by the concept of brotherhood. The Old Testament,

for example, calls a fellow Israelite's lost ox "your brother's ox" (Deut 22:1-4). In the New Testament a fellow believer was often called "brother" or "sister" (Acts 1:15-16; Rom 16:14, 16; Eph 6:23; 2 Pet 1:10, etc.). Within Christian circles there was to be no distinction between rich and poor, Jew or Greek, male or female (Gal 3:28). Christians were to distinguish themselves from Gentiles who wished to lord it over others - a Christian was to take the role of servant (Matt 20:25-28). Clearly, Jesus and Paul were speaking specifically about roles within the community of believers, but Christians were to represent a wider ideal, an ideal embodied also in the laws governing Old Testament society.

Basic Right of Economic Self-sufficiency

The underlying assumption behind many of the Old Testament land laws was that every family should be given the means for self-sufficiency. Each family was given an inalienable inheritance. If debt forced the temporary alienation of the land, it reverted back to the family every jubilee year (Lev 25:13, 28), and could be redeemed at any time (Lev 25:25-28). In this way, each family was given the means to provide for itself. It is interesting to note the combination of private ownership and community sharing. The resources were to be equitably shared, but were privately owned.

Stewardship of the Earth's Resources

That Israelite society was to act as faithful stewards of the resources of the country both physical and human, is made clear from who owned the land - it belonged ultimately to God. Israel had been placed in the land to husband it, and preserve it for the good of themselves and of their neighbours. Consequently each individual was responsible to be a good steward of the resources entrusted to him/her. This is but one of many biblical ethical principles that applied to the individual. It is to these individually applicable ethical principles that we now turn.

Ethical Principles Applicable to Individuals

While the ethical principles discussed thus far can be reasonably expected of society in general, and can perhaps be also argued on other than specifically biblical grounds, within the Bible there is a large number of ethical principles which particularly apply to individual believers.

Ethical Decisions Are to be Made on Basis of Inward Convictions, not Outward Conformity to Rules

Jesus consistently showed implacable hostility to the interpretation of the law of the Pharisees because their interpretation was almost exclusively centred on the careful observation of the minutiae of the rules. Instead, Jesus stressed the inward motivation of the law. The Pharisees had built a wall of protection around the Sabbath, for example. They had carefully defined 39 different types of work, and analysed their exact constituents. Consequently, they knew the disciples were guilty of reaping, threshing and winnowing as they plucked the grain to eat as they went through the cornfield on the Sabbath (Matt 12:1-8). Jesus vehemently dismissed their understanding of Sabbath-observance. In its place he stated the prin-

ciples that God desires mercy rather than sacrifice (Matt 12:7), and that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27). This is all rather disturbing for folk wishing to know whether it is permitted to go swimming on the Sabbath on a hot day, because Jesus did not leave a list of rules. Rather, he left a series of principles in this and in all the other areas of behaviour.

Not only did he leave principles, Jesus internalised and intensified the obligations of the law. Whereas the law condemned adultery, Jesus said the Christian should not even look upon a woman with lust (Matt 5:27-28). The external act is transformed into an internal motivation. Similarly, whereas the rule said it was wrong to murder, Jesus said it was wrong to hate (Matt 5:21-22). The goal of Jesus was none other than the ideal embodied in the promise made through Jeremiah, "I will write my law on their hearts." The Christian's motivations to keep the law are internally based, not externally based.

Love, especially for enemy

Jesus made a clear hierarchy of principles of law observance. Several times he identified the most important principle as the principle of love. It is by loving that the law is fulfilled (Rom 13:8; Gal 5:14). It is love of God and of fellow man that summarised the whole intent of the law (Matt 22:35-40).

There is something unique about Christian love, though: not only does the Christian love those that love him, he loves the enemy. The Christian is like God in this respect, whose love includes both good and bad (Matt 5:44-48).

Christianity has practical impact on all of life

When Paul prayed, "May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess 5:23), the intent was that an individual's Christianity would have an impact in every area of their life. This would included not only what they believed, but how they behaved - their eating habits, choice of friends, choice of career, choice of leisure pursuits, business relationships and dealings.

Strong motivation to keep God's Law

Christians know forgiveness, because they know the love of God revealed by His giving His son Jesus to us. In response, the Christian wishes to keep God's law. The motivation is not to earn salvation, but that of gratitude. The Christian forgives much, because much has been forgiven. We respond to the saying of Jesus, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15, 23). Love is our motivation.

While Christians are characterised by the realisation that there is nothing which will commend them to God (the members of the Kingdom of God are poor in spirit, Matt 5:3), their life is characterised by an intense striving after righteousness. Christians desire righteousness with the passion of a starving man seeking food, or of a woman dying of thirst seeking water (Matt 5:6)

Non-resistance of evil

First-century Christians found themselves a threatened minority. It may be this that explains the great stress that is placed upon the appropriate response to evil and persecution:

Rom 12:14 Bless those who persecute you
Rom 12:19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance in mine, I will repay, says the Lord."
Rom 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."
Matt 5:39 But I [Jesus] say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; . . .

Respect for others and seeking their good

When Jesus said, "whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them" (Matt 7:12), he was reiterating the principle of seeking the good and respect of others. The Christian ethic takes the viewpoint of the other into consideration.

Forgiveness

In their relationship with others, Christians remember at all times that God has forgiven them debts of great seriousness and enormity. In their prayers, they repeat "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors," and conclude from the parable of the unforgiving servant that if they do not forgive others, then they are not forgiven. Thus, in Christian interpersonal relationships, forgiveness and reconciliation find center stage.

Situational

Biblical ethics also take the specific situation into account. Since the publication of Joseph Fletcher's book *Situation Ethics* many conservative Christians have been nervous of the label "situation ethics," because of the fear that if the situation is considered then the underlying principles of biblical ethics might be ignored. While it is true such arguments have been advanced with disastrously unbiblical conclusions, this should not prevent us from hearing the testimony of Scripture on this account.

When Jesus was defending his disciple's actions on the Sabbath, for example, he cited the case of David eating the shewbread (Matt 12:4). Normally this would have been forbidden to David, but David's need was more important than the customary way of showing reverence for the temple. The situation changed what was normally the correct behaviour. There were two conflicting needs: the need to observe the sanctity of the tabernacle, and the need of human hunger. The need to preserve human life took priority. Thus, in Scripture, there is a willingness to take the situation into account, and to choose between two competing ethically desirable actions.

The Ethical Dimensions of the Christian Attributes

Christian attributes are listed several times in the New Testament. Perhaps the best known of these lists is that given by Paul in Gal 5:22-24: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against which there is no law." All of these have implications in

the conduct of the Christian. While they are not directed at a specific situation and do not provide a detailed list of rules which must be obeyed, they do give guidelines to the kind of behavioral options available to the Christian. What the Christian does will be determined by love. The Christian's actions are characterised by kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and patience.

Conclusions

If this were an academic article it would carry a title something like: "Some Aspects of Biblical Ethics," because a full description of biblical ethics would take a book-length manuscript. What has been presented, however, is perhaps suggestive of the kinds of issues which such a work might encompass.

The ethical principles implicit in the Bible are striking for their contemporary flavour, and astonishing in their relevance to many of the issues that are facing today's societies and individuals. Once again Scripture is seen to be relevant to the problems of flesh and blood people. Biblical religion does have something to say about the wider issues of meaning, and the doctrines of the faith are challenging to the greatest of intellects, but, where it expresses itself in the lives of people, it is extremely practical and real. The Christian message to society is one that it still needs to hear: that a just society operates under the rule of law, it separates the functions of the church from that of the state, it supports the weak and underprivileged of society, its ethos is basically egalitarian, and it extends to all of its members the right and means for economic self-sufficiency.

The message for the individual Christian is perhaps more challenging and disturbing, but no less relevant. The individual Christian makes moral decisions based on principles, not on rules. The greatest of these principles is the principle of love for others, even for enemies. Neither this principle, nor the fact that Christians recognise that there are sometimes two competing ethical standards between which a choice must be made, mean that the Christian has no regard for the specifics of God's law. Indeed, the Christian desires more than anything else to be in conformity to the revealed will of God. Finally, the Christian attributes of forgiveness, humility, meekness, unselfishness, patience, forbearance and kindness will all play a part in determining what particular course of action will be taken by the Christian in any given circumstance. Indeed, the Christian will try to act as a true ambassador of Christ, to walk where Jesus would walk, to say what Jesus would say, and to act in a way that will sense that in some way they are also dealing with Jesus.

Notes

1. It is not possible to draw a straight line between the ethics of the Bible and ethics for our day. One has to interpret the bible against its own historical context. It is at the level of principles that Biblical ethics can be seen to have universal applicability, not always at the level of the specifics (c.f. what Jesus does with some of the Old Testament specific laws in Matt 5:21-48). There is insufficient space to deal properly with the issue of methodology. Those interested in pursuing the methodological question might read with profit the survey articles, John Brunt & Gerald Winslow, 'The Bible's Role in Christian Ethics', *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 20 (1982) 3-21; and Allen Verhey, 'The Use of Scripture in Ethics', *Religious Studies Review* 4 (1978) 28-39.

2. George E Mendenhall, 'Ancient Oriental and Biblical Law', in *The Biblical Archeologist Reader*, Vol 3, edited by E F Campbell, Jr, and D N Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), p4.

3. This, and other quotations from the bible in this article are from the RSV translation.

4. The 17th Century BCE Code of Hammurabi, for example, establishes different legal provisions for three classes in society: the patricians, the free artisans, and the chattel slaves. R H Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (London: Tyndale, 1969), 102.

5. See, eg J H Elliott, *Europe Divided 1559-1598* (London: Collins, 1968), passim, summarised on pp388-397.

6. Isaac Medelsohn, 'Slavery' *Biblical Archeologist Reader*, edited by Edward F Campbell, Jr, & David Noel Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 3:132-33. On the interest laws as protection of the poor, see Hillel Gamoran, 'The Biblical Law Against Loans of Interest', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 30 (1971): 127-134.

The Ethics of Reading and Feminist Biblical Interpretation

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This brief article has its starting point in some preliminary questions posed by the authors for a much larger project that aims to study the correlations between what feminist[1] biblical interpreters are currently saying about the ethical dimensions of reading and interpreting the biblical text, and the philosophical bases of the methods which they use to interpret the text. The broader context of the project comprises current writing on ethics by feminist writers in general.

As Mary Ross indicates, much of the current general literature on ethics addresses basic concepts such as virtue, personhood and what it means to be human[2]. Although feminists have tended to deal with specific issues such as abortion, domestic violence, and work conditions, they are also looking at more fundamental issues of ethics, as well as critiquing standard categories of moral philosophy, and considering how feminist ethics might differ from various received ethical traditions[3].

While there is no single 'feminist ethic' one widely held view is that ethics is situated, that judgments are relationally

oriented. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, one of the leading figures in feminist biblical scholarship, holds that

...a critical theory of rhetoric insists that context is as important as text. What we see depends on where we stand. One's social location.... is decisive of how one sees the world, constructs reality, or interprets biblical text.[4]

For feminists this notion applies to ethical thinking in general. There is, therefore, a responsibility to recognise the way their ethical thinking is influenced by who they are, their history, and their social position. Elly Hanley thinks that it is necessary to 'clarify critically' the position one occupies within society and to recognise that ethics is culturally grounded[5]. The question then becomes how *ought* context, culture and social position influence ethics?

When feminists appropriate traditional philosophies such as liberalism, marxism and so on, in order to consider issues that specifically concern women, then what they are doing can be regarded as radical hermeneutics. Not all feminists are comfortable with this for it seems to ground feminist ethics in philosophical frameworks that are the product of Western patriarchy. However, even those feminists who eschew traditional theories and articulate models which, they claim, better reflect women's experiences still have to resort to patriarchal language to express their experiences, which experiences are dependent upon situation and context[6].

Rosemarie Tong points out that while feminist approaches vary, there are major points of agreement about women's oppression, repression and suppression and a rejoicing in the fact that many women have been able to take charge of their own lives and have encouraged other women to do likewise[7]. Nonetheless, there are major areas of disagreement especially to do with the origins of women's oppression, accounts of gender differences and the evaluation of difference. Tong claims that resolving the tension between the recognition of diversity and difference on the one hand, and integration and commonality on the other hand, is a major challenge which needs to be addressed if feminist ethics and politics are to be possible[8].

Although there is no single feminist perspective that can claim to emerge from 'women's experiences', feminist perspectives are being trialed by women from disparate backgrounds in order to see whether the analysis they provide of male domination and difference makes sense in their situation[9]. Difference is seen, especially by Womanist thinkers, as being a structure of separation and domination as well as a form of resistance and empowerment, aiding the identification of ethical norms and values which are appropriate to their lives[10]. As bell hooks cautions:

When we write about the experiences of a group to which we do not belong, we should think about the ethics of our action, considering whether or not our work will be used to reinforce and perpetuate domination[11].

Similarly, in her critique of Rebecca Chopp's *The Power to Speak: Feminism, Language, God* [12], Pamela K. Brubaker argues that when 'Chopp claims to speak from the marginality of women's experience', the following questions need to be asked: '..not only who is on the margins with Chopp, but who is being empowered to speak? For whom? About what?'[13].

Feminist biblical scholars presume to speak for those marginalised and op-

pressed by a variety of biblical interpretations throughout history, yet they have begun only recently to focus explicitly on the ethical implications of the metholodogies that direct their interpretive strategies[14]. One of the earliest discussions took place in December 1987, when Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza delivered the presidential address to the American Society of Biblical Literature[15]. In this address, she stated her basic concern as the 'public-political responsibility of biblical scholarship'[16], and called for biblical scholars to follow a two-fold ethics of historical reading and of accountability.

The first ethics has to do with strategies of reading, Schüssler Fiorenza insisting (from her position as a scholar who follows the methods of historical criticism) that biblical scholars be 'respectful' of the text by being aware of it in its original historical context[17]. An ethics of accountability focuses on the effects of the interpretation of the biblical scholar in the broader public-political sphere. In this way, Schüssler Fiorenza has broadened the usual pattern of the components of the process of scholarship as it has been perceived by some historical biblical critics in the past (text - scholar - scholarly community), reminding us that biblical interpretation can have immense power in the public-political sphere, as can be seen from its use to legitimate wars, anti-Semitism, misogyny, slavery, colonial dehumanisation, and so on[18].

We do not question Schüssler Fiorenza's call to scholars to be aware of the ethical dimension in their interpretations on a number of levels, though we do want to question whether her stance on ethics is commensurable with the philosophical premises which inform her attitude to what is possible to claim in reading and interpreting the text. Concerning the critical rhetorical hermeneutic which she supports, she states:

A rhetorical hermeneutic does not assume that the text is a window to historical reality, nor does it operate with a correspondence theory of truth. It does not understand historical sources as data and evidence but sees them as perspectival discourse constructing their worlds and symbolic universes.

Since alternative symbolic universes engender competing definitions of the world, they cannot be reduced to one meaning. Therefore, competing interpretations of texts are not simply either right or wrong, but they constitute different ways of reading and constructing historical meaning. Not detached value-neutrality but an explicit articulation of one's rhetorical strategies, interested perspectives, ethical criteria, theoretical frameworks, religious presuppositions, and sociopolitical locations for critical public discussion are appropriate in such a rhetorical paradigm of biblical scholarship.[19]

There is some ambiguity in the exposition concerning competing interpretations in the second paragraph quoted. Does the author hold that there is no right or wrong interpretation of the text, but only different ways of reading and constructing meaning from each interpreter's value-laden perspective? Or is she saying that there are different value-laden interpretations, but one can make a judgment of right or wrong concerning these? If her argument is the former, then the rhetoric in the conclusion of her paper against the biblical interpretations of right-wing fundamentalists and biblical literalists, seems at odds with her methodological stance.

Perhaps a clue to her meaning can be found in her earlier work, *Bread Not Stone* [20]. In a chapter outlining what she terms 'feminist evaluative hermeneutics'[21], Schüssler Fiorenza emphasises

the ambivalence in biblical interpretation which could find in the biblical text 'a resource for solving moral problems and generating moral challenges, as well as for legitimizing dehumanization and violence'[22]. This relates with what we have already noted of her stance on the possibility of a variety of value-laden interpretations, although she would also want to limit the number of interpretations which could be given legitimately to any text[23].

However in *Bread Not Stone*, the discussion regarding the scholarly enterprise is viewed rather more narrowly than in her presidential address. Here she is concerned specifically for *Christian* 'biblical' ethics that may be gleaned from a study of the biblical text itself rather than for a more general ethics of scholars who respect both the text and the process by which the public are influenced by their interpretations of this text. Moreover, in *Bread Not Stone*, she is concerned not only with a search for Christian biblical ethics, but also for this enterprise as an activity involving Christian scholars.

For Schüssler Fiorenza, the first step in interpreting the moral character of the biblical text must be to undertake critical theological discourse which attempts to rescue the biblical vision of liberation from ideologically distorted interpretation. For this discourse she stresses that a disciplined theological scholarship is necessary which finds its basis in scholarly historical and theological assessment of biblical texts. It is not a discourse which concerns biblical scholars alone but rather will be more effective if carried out as a dialogue between biblical scholars and moral theologians. In such a discourse, she states, biblical ethics can be developed which do not presuppose an apolitical character to the text and do not promote the authority of the scriptures on the basis of canonicity[24].

Since Schüssler Fiorenza is concerned with a dialogue that she proffers as a 'Christian' event, it seems obvious that her understanding of the process must be influenced by her view of the Christian woman, which she outlines as follows:

> *What it means to be a Christian woman is not defined by essential female nature or timeless biblical revelation, but grows out of the concrete social structures and cultural-religious mechanisms of women's oppression as well as our struggles for liberation, selfhood, and transcendence. Feminist identity is not based on the perception of women defined by female biology or feminine gender and societal-ecclesial roles, but on the common historical experience of women as an oppressed people, collaborating with our oppression and at the same time struggling for our liberation in patriarchal biblical history and community.*[25]

Her feminist evaluative hermeneutics, as a means to proposing 'biblical ethics', does not in fact derive its canon from the bible as its primary source, but rather from the struggle of women and other oppressed people for liberation from patriarchal structures[26]. It seems too that the canon for the dialogue she suggests is not limited to the Christian sphere but rather to the struggle for liberation in a global sense, as is clear when she moves from speaking of the Christian woman to speak of feminist identity.

In the presidential address, and even at the beginning of this chapter from *Bread Not Stone*, Schüssler Fiorenza seems to be implying that those whose interpretation she opposes as not legitimate have failed to work on the biblical text in a satisfactorily disciplined or scholarly manner. By the end of this chapter, however, it appears that she is at least conceding

that her reading of an ethos of coequal discipleship from the text can claim only as much scriptural authority and canonicity as a reading which posits an ethos of a patriarchal pattern of submission. Moreover, the latter reading 'can claim even greater historical influence and institutional power...' in its formation of Christian tradition and communal structures[27]. Her opponents in this matter have also used their skills of critical scholarship and have also been aware of an ethical responsibility to the community, albeit from their own value-laden perspectives. Thus in the end, we see that it is not the case that her opponents necessarily lack an ethics of interpretation or of accountability, whether implicitly or explicitly[28]. What makes the difference for Schüssler Fiorenza, and what she suggests gives her the authority to make a critical evaluative judgment on her opponents, is the oppressed experience of women which is the basis of her canon of liberation[29]. Yet this authority base is open to question on the grounds that the experience of women within patriarchal systems is multi-faceted, and an individual cannot claim to speak for (or to) other women who are remote from her in their particular lived experience.

The tension demonstrated by such concerns finds expression in meta-ethical debates about objectivity, and involves considerations of the status of moral judgments. Briefly, objectivity is seen as giving authority to moral judgments. The question is how and whether objectivity can be attained. If there are no objective moral judgments, what authority do specific moral judgments have? Does ethics become a subjective, relativistic enterprise consisting of merely different positions without normative content? Should differences be regarded in the same way as differences in personal taste? How are we to adjudicate between incommensurable moral judgments? We do not suggest that this problem is particular to either Schüssler Fiorenza, nor to feminist biblical hermeneutics, but rather to all interpretive enterprises. What we have done here is simply to flag the controversy.

Notes

1. We use the term 'feminist' in a general sense. It must be understood to include 'womanist', 'majeurista', and other terms with which non-white scholars identify themselves.

2. M E Ross, 'Feminism and the Problem of Moral Character'. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion,* 5, 1989, pp 47-64.

3. The question, 'How does feminist ethics differ from various received ethical traditions?' finds one of its most radical answers in Sarah Lucia Hoagland's *Lesbian ethics: toward new value,* Institute of Lesbian Studies, Palo Alto, California, 1988. She writes, '...much of what is called ethics in our culture involves, not the integrity and moral capability of an individual, but rather the extent to which she participates in the structural hierarchy of a social group or organization by adhering to its rules. The ethical virtues as we know them are master/slave virtues... I find the function of traditional ethics involves promoting social organization and control at the expense of individual integrity and agency.' pp 11-12.

4. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza,'The Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: Decentering Biblical Scholarship', *Journal of Biblical Literature,* 107, 1988, p 5.

5. Elly Hanley, 'Towards a White Feminist Ecological Ethics', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion,* 9, 1993, pp 75-6

6. Eloise A Buker 'Rhetoric in Postmodern Feminism: Put-Offs, Put-Ons, and Political Plays', *The Interpretive Turn,* Hiley David R, Bohman, James F and Shistermann, Richard, eds, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1991, p 218.

7. Tong, Rosemarie, *Feminist Thought,* Routledge, London, 1992, pp 1-2.

8. Ibid, p 7.

9. Jane Mansbridge and Susan Moller Okin, 'Feminism', *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy,* Robert E Goodin, & Philip Pettit, eds, Blackwell Reference, Oxford, 1993, pp 283-6.

10. Joan M Martin, 'The Notion of Difference For Emerging Womanist Ethics', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion, 9,* 1993, pp 41-53.

11. bell hooks, *Talking Back,* South End Press, Boston, 1989, p 43 quoted in Ruth L Smith, 'Relationality and the Ordering of Differences in Feminist Ethics', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion,* 9, 1993.

12. Crossroad, New York, 1989.

13. Pamela K Brubaker, 'Sisterhood, Solidarity and Feminist Ethics', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion,* 9, 1993, p 59.

14. In this area, Dana Fewell has done much to promote what she refers to as self-consciously ideological readings of biblical narrative. In her article, 'Feminist Reading of the Hebrew Bible: Affirmation, Resistance and Transformation', *(Journal for the Study of the Old Testament,* 39, 1987, pp 77-87), she describes a way of entering into the value system of a work by a process of dialogue, that does not necessarily call for adopting the values of the work, but which leads to the transformation of the reader - transformation, that is, which is marked by a 'holistic view of human experience' (pp 77-8, 85). For further work by Fewell on the ethics of interpretation, see her article with David M. Gunn, 'Tipping the Balance: Sternberg's Reader and the Rape of Dinah.' *Journal of Biblical Literature,* 110, 1991, pp 193-211.

15. 'The Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: Decentering BiblicalScholarship.' *Journal of Biblical Literature,* 107, 1988, pp 3-17.

16. *Ibid,* p 4.

17. *Ibid,* p 14.

18. *Ibid,* p 15.

19. *Ibid,* pp 13-14.

20. E Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation.* Beacon Press, Boston, 1984.

21. *Ibid.,* "4. Discipleship and Patriarchy. Towards a Feminist Evaluative Hermeneutics." pp 65-92.

22. *Ibid,* p 67.

23. See her article, 'Biblical Interpretation and Critical Commitment', *Studia Theologica,* 43, 1989, pp 5-18, especially p 12.

24. *Bread Not Stone,* pp 67-70. See her idea of the bible as historical prototype, open to feminist theological transformation, rather than timeless archetype, p 88.

25. *Ibid,* p 86.

26. *Ibid,* p 88.

27. *Bread Not Stone,* p 92.

28. A similar situation of one set of moral judgments over against another is dealt with explicitly by Fewell and Gunn in their argument against Sternberg's interpretation of the rape of Dinah (op cit, p 194). They suggest that Sternberg's reader values 'an ethic of rights, the so-called higher principled morality', whereas their reader 'responds with an ethic of responsibility, where relationships, care, and consequences shape moral choices.' (p 209). They read 'a moral point diametrically at odds' with Sternberg's (p 211), creating an opposition between objective ethics interested in justice, and relational ethics interested in responsibility, relationships, and perhaps compromise in certain social situations.

29. 'Not only does Schüssler Fiorenza's feminist theology begin with women's experience of oppression, but this experience functions as the central focus and evaluative norm of her theology and other theologies of this type.' (Pamela Dickey Young, *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology. In Search of Method,* Fortress, Minneapolis, 1990, p 25.

Congregational Life and The Categories of Moral Perception

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In the 1930s more than eight hundred American pastors were asked, among other questions, whether they discussed social issues from the pulpit. 71.5% said that they did so when it reflected a moral concern. The ministers frequently reported that when their topic was understood as a political matter, they received a fairly hostile hearing. However, "when a clear moral issue was involved there is no objection."[1]

This finding is likely to appear obvious. Indeed it is almost entirely unremarkable. However, the very self-evident nature of the survey's result invites comment. How does an issue become identified as either "moral" or "political?" How are these basic labels established? How do we learn such things?

Part of the answer, and it is only a part, is that the practices of the groups and organisations to which we belong teach us the self-evident knowledge that everybody knows.

One example of this general claim is the way that religious institutions help instil in us a sense of moral categories. Such distinctions are an important ingredient in morality. Before any principles can be brought to bear or rules invoked, a particular matter must simply be seen as appropriate for consideration. An initial step toward ethical response is the act of noticing something as morally relevant. An issue must be recognisable. Unless it falls within the appropriate boundaries, it will fail to merit our serious consideration.

The process of noticing seems so direct and unreflective and it may not seem to warrant much attention. But it does. For one thing this sort of awareness of distinctions can be significant. The way issues are labelled matters and often more is at stake than the acceptability of sermons. Indeed, profound ethical consequences can result, as is shown in the response of local churches to the 1957-8 school desegregation conflict in Little Rock, Arkansas show. This situation was studied by Ernest Campbell and Thomas Pettigrew who noted that leading pastors there tended early on to support the modest integration of Central High School as a religious concern. However, as tensions rose and opposition from within their own congregations intensified, the pastors generally downplayed the issue by framing it primarily as a political matter.[2] For many the dominant theme became an emphasis on peace and order rather than the dignity of all persons. This was an effort of re-categorisation. The issue of desegregation was relabelled, which contributed to the general silence of the churches on this issue. Further, by withdrawing their generally moderate voices, the churches helped make possible a heightened polarisation within the city. This is an example of the consequences that can result from the category to which a matter is assigned. It is also an encouragement to inquiring how such perceptual labels are generated and sustained.

The process by which these categorical distinctions are established is complex. Many things, ranging from abstract philosophy to the most concrete images, affect our outlooks. Most obviously in the case of religious institutions, the explicit content of sermons and official pronouncements help identify matters as moral or political. To say publicly that some issue or cause is a matter of moral concern does much to shape the sense of boundaries parishioners have. However, the question that immediately arises is how such statements become plausible. What makes a sermon or a pronouncement credible? It is here that the practices of the institution play a significant role. They help predispose people to accept some claims as self-evidently true and to contest others. The way a religious institution operates contributes to the moral perception of its participants.

Two sociological perspectives are especially useful to reinforce this claim. One is the thought of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in *The Social Construction of Reality*. Here they consider the way in which elements of the world which we take for granted acquire their self-evident status. They assert that knowledge of this sort is a product of social experience. We know certain things to be true because the way our world is arranged reinforces our sensitivities. Social practices sustain our sense of the way things are. They are an important ingredient in reality-maintenance. That is, routine patterns of interaction reinforce our conviction about taken-for-granted features of one's world. Berger and Luckmann call these patterns "plausibility structure." They are the social bases and processes for the maintenance of one's subjective assurance of the reality of objective conditions.[3] These reinforce our sense of reality less by what they say and more by what they assume. It is what they transmit as implicitly self-evident that is most powerful in sustaining our sense of the world. A simple, but basic, example is everyday conversation. Our routine verbal interactions entail, to some degree, our participation in a shared sense of the world. Our conversation carries with it implicit assumptions to which we give tacit support merely by continuing to talk. In this way certain presuppositions are reinforced and sustained. Our sense of the way things are is made more plausible.

A second sociological perspective is that of Pierre Bourdieu, who has investigated the social determinants of judgment.[4] Bourdieu employs the notion of a "field," which is a set of relations within which one lives one's life. Like the water in which a fish swims, the field is an environment that refracts light and affects one's vision. But also like the fish's water, it is so omnipresent that it becomes invisible. The field influences one's outlook, but in so pervasive a way that it does not draw attention to itself. The fields are constructed by innumerable actions, great and small, which cumulatively serve to establish a sense of how things are. Rituals, social customs, patterns of consumption and the like combine to encourage the tacit acceptance of certain assumptions as fixed realities.

These two perspectives indicate why the operation of religious institutions is important for the establishment of categorical perception. Local congregations function as fields. Their practices are plausibility structures for the moral assumptions and sensitivities of their participants. Of course, it is the case that churches are places of talk. Their discourse undoubtedly affects the outlooks of their participants. However, the way

the community does things is equally influential, if not more so. Often, in fact, actions actually do speak more loudly than words. Church practices are a means by which taken-for-granted assumptions are sustained.

Church life shapes a sense of categorical distinctions by patterns of exclusion and inclusion. Part of this process is the distance maintained between religious and non-religious concerns. The question here is the degree of differentiation between religious and non-religious matters as well as the permeability of the boundary between the two. A further aspect of the process is the way that elements are clustered together within each category. The question here is the extent or range of religious matters. What is included? What counts?

There are at least five practices (understood broadly as ways an organisation operates) of religious institutions that help establish a sense of categorical distinctions. These five are taken from the American context, which may have a distinctive pattern for its congregations. However, most of the dynamics probably have broader relevance.

One aspect of church life that has a fairly direct bearing on the sense of categories is the physical location of a congregation's building. A site can indicate something about the distance between religious and worldly matters. Constructing a church building in a remote, or isolated setting, can represent graphically a strong sense of separation between matters of faith and secular concerns. For example, a study of two Presbyterian churches in the Hartford, Connecticut area observed that part of the source of identity for the conservative church was the location of its sanctuary on a former farm, far removed from any sort of civic center. The seclusion of the site was heightened by the fact that its immediate neighbourhood was a small housing development primarily for church members. In addition to its explicit theology, this church's location gave the implicit message that the world is a place from which religion needs to remove itself.[5]

On the other hand, when City Methodist Church was built in Gary, Indiana during the 1920s, it was intentionally place in the city center. Although many of its more prominent members lived in residential areas, the church building was deliberately located in the downtown business district. Moreover, it was built to be big and to attract attention. It understood itself as a social gospel cathedral. It wanted to be a powerful part of the life of the city, with facilities not only to impress, but to provide for a wide range of community activities.[6]

The location of the building is one way a church transmits a sense of the separation between religious and non-religious concerns. The style of its liturgical language and the range of allusions during worship is another way. These practices can also help sustain a sense of withdrawal from, or connection to, the world and its concerns. Beyond the explicit content of such discourse, style communicates implicit assumptions which reinforce particular perspectives. Two examples taken from the worship of neighbouring Chicago churches in the late 1960s show quite diverse orientations. The prayer of the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church is expectedly traditional:

Almighty and everlasting God, who art worthy to be held in reverence by all the children of men, we give thee most humble and hearty thanks for the innumerable blessings, both temporal and spiritual, which without any

merit or worthiness on our part, thou hast bestowed on us. [7]

The sort of language used here communicates a great deal. It is set off from everyday patterns of speech and implies a sense of distinction between religious and non-religious concerns. In this way, the style heightens the sense of categorical differences. A clear contrast is the less formal language of the prayer used in a nearby Methodist/United Church of Christ congregation:

O Lord, we seldom see ourselves honestly. Maybe it's too painful or maybe we don't want to take the time. But we do know that we let the brokenness of life overshadow the eternal wholeness. We fail to transmit life from the source of life itself.
Renew us! Fill us with joy. Let us dance with Snoopy, sing with Pete Seeger, and shout with our brother man for joy. Amen! [8]

Here the commonplace language patterns as well as the references to contemporary figures reinforce a weak sense of differentiation between religious and non-religious concerns. One could extend this sort of analysis to include aspects such as the attire of leaders and worshippers, the sanctuary's decorations, and the sort of repertoire from which anthems are chosen. These are practices by which a sense of distinction between church and secular matters is sustained.

Within a religious institution, the arrangement of space is a third practice which can reinforce assumptions about the degree of proximity between worldly and sacred concerns. Some churches preserve a heightened sense of the separation between these two realms by emphasising a region within their building as sacred space. For example, Melvin Williams observed a Black Pentecostal church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and found that seating patterns during worship reflected a sense of the importance of the area at the front of the church where solos are sung, sermons preached, and communion celebrated. There are no formal rules excluding people from this area, but it is generally recognised as a set-apart place. Thus, when a church trustee arranged for the presentation of a humorous gift during the worship service, it was done outside of this area.[9]

Here the sacred space was used to emphasise a sense of distinctiveness about religious matters. An interesting twist on the use of such space occurred in the Reform Synagogue studied by Frida Furman. The congregation she studied was fundamentally committed to modernity. Most of the male participants did not wear yarmulkes, although this was a matter of preference. However, when the president of the Synagogue wore a yarmulke on the *bima* (the raised platform in front), one woman complained sharply. She acknowledged that the president generally had the right to choose to cover his head. "As her representative on the bima, however, she felt offended by his use of the yarmulke, since she had been brought up in a classical Reform synagogue where head covering was anathema."[10] Here the sacred region was seen as a place to reinforce the a sense of lack of distinction between religious and worldly matters.

A fourth practice that helps sustain categorical perceptions are the clusters of concerns that the church legitimates in one way or another. For example the sort of announcements that are included in its bulletin can represent what a church identifies as valid matters of interest. In comparing the announcements that were listed in the bulletins of two Presbyterian churches in neighbouring towns, Stephen

Warner observed that the more liberal of the congregations announced a variety of concerns, many of which were of general community interest. The announcements of the other church, a more evangelical congregation, were primarily parochial. The range of legitimate concerns was broader, more inclusive, and less purely spiritual in the first church.[11]

Often in the American context, there is a marked contrast between black and white religious traditions in this regard. Historically, as the only institution over which African-Americans had control, the church has played a large role in community life. Politics, understood broadly, has been part of the traditional function of religious institutions. Thus, a member of a middle-class African-American church in Oakland in the 1950s and 1960s remembers, "Scarcely a week passed when Downs did not sponsor or host an activity that was politically oriented."[12]

Similarly, a sense of boundaries can be established, in part, by the range of admissible social interactions that occur within a local congregation. Donald Shriver, Jr, who served as a pastor in Gastonia approximately a decade prior to participating in a study of attitudes there, was anxious to involve the church in social concerns. But some avenues were more open than others. Thus, not only were his sermons about racial justice better received than his sermons about economic justice, but "...the contacts I began to have with *race* relations in Gastonia I had largely *through the church*; the contacts I began to have with *industrial* relations I had largely *outside the church.*"[13] Because certain topics could be heard and certain interactions could occur, a particular categorisation of morality increased in plausibility.

Local congregations help make categories plausible in part by the issues and concerns they either exclude or include. Another aspect of this dynamic refers not to political causes or cultural matters, but to persons. The response to distinctions between insiders and outsiders is a fifth way that institutions undergird assumptions about moral categories. By establishing the basis on which one differentiates between members and strangers and by raising or lowering the barriers between insiders and outsiders, the institution reinforces certain assumptions about categories and boundaries.

For example, a Roman Catholic church in Hartford, Connecticut represents clearly a stance of aloofness in the way it presents itself. This parish maintained an active liturgical life. At the time of the study, it was conducting thirteen masses a week. However, it did little else beside provide these worship opportunities for its participants. It was not generally involved in its community. "The sanctuary is locked most of the time. There is not even a sign outside that announces St. Felix's name. 'If it weren't for the steeple and the cross,' one neighbour noted, 'You'd have to be a member to even know it was a church.'"[14]

A similar sort of exclusivity, although for different reasons, is reflected in the small, highly activist congregation Jeffrey Hadden and Charles Longino, Jr studied. This was an experimental church in Dayton, Ohio in the late 1960s. It was a small and intense group, which in many ways was quite adept at using publicity to advance the causes it supported. However, it intentionally refrained from publishing general announcements of its meetings, as a way of protecting itself from the sort of corruption that comes with institutional promotion. In the words of one member,

"'If people are interested, they will find us.'"[15]

This general lack of interest in strangers contrasts with the orthodox Jewish community Samuel Heilman studied. This group was eager to transform outsiders into participants. Indeed, such inclusion was taken as a sign of the vitality of the institution. Heilman notes "Inability to transform...the Jewish stranger...would perhaps raise the group's anxieties about its integrity and continued existence to intolerable levels." [16]

The above illustrates how practices of a religious institution help establish a sense of categorical boundaries. The point is not that aspects such as physical setting or linguistic style or the range of announced meetings determine a participant's outlook. Such a claim seems excessive, especially for an institution that people can join or leave at will. Rather, the suggestion is that practices such as these form a plausibility structure that enables the institution to function as a field, encouraging and sustaining certain predispositions and fundamental attitudes. They help shape one's moral perspective. Some perceptions will be more accessible and others more obscure because of factors such as a building's location and the sort of allusions common during worship. Some connections will be easier to make, and others more difficult because certain matters are routinely listed on the bulletin or not. Some topics will appear self-evidently legitimate and others obviously out of bounds because of the sort of people normally included in programs and the degree of distinctiveness in interior space. Certainly, attitudes, assumptions, and modes of perception are complex matters, fed from many springs. But one important source is the set of an institution's practices.

Notes

1. Frederick F Mueller and Hugh Hartshorne, *Ethical Dilemmas of Ministers* (NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), 51.

2. Ernest Q Campbell and Thomas F Pettigrew, *Christians in Racial Crisis: A Study of Little Rock's Ministry* (Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press, 1959).

3. Peter L Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, Doubleday & Co, 1967), 154.

4. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

5. Douglas B McGaw, with Elliott Wright, *A Tale of Two Congregations: Commitment and Social Structure in a Charismatic and Mainline Congregation* (Hartford, CT: Hartford Seminary Foundation, [1979]).

6. James W Lewis, *The Protestant Experience in Gary, Indiana, 1906-1975: At Home in the City* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 160.

7. Quoted in Michael H Ducey, *Sunday Morning: Aspects of Urban Ritual* (New York: The Free Press, a division of Macmillan Publishing Co, 1977), 116.

8. Ibid, 117.

9. *Community in a Black Pentecostal Church: An Anthropological Study* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974), 154.

10. Frida Kerner Furman, *Beyond Yiddishkeit: The Struggle for Jewish Identity in a Reform Synagogue* (Albany, NY: The State University of New York Press, 1987), 54.

11. R Stephen Warner, "Visits to a Growing Evangelical and a Declining Liberal Church in 1978," *Sociological Analysis* 44(3), Fall, 1983, 249.

12. Dona L Irvin, *The Unsung Heart of Black America: A Middle-Class Church at Midcentury* (Colombia, MO and London: University of Missouri Press, 1992), 11.

13. Ibid, 19-20.

14. David A Roozen, William McKinney, and Jackson W Carroll, *Varieties of Presence: Mission in Public Life* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1984), 181.

15. Jeffrey K Hadden and Charles F Longino, Jr, *Gideon's Gang: A Case Study of the Church in Social Action* (Philadelphia: A Pilgrim Press Book, United Church Press, 1974), 156.

16. Samuel Heilman, *Synagogue Life: A Study in Symbolic Interaction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 109.

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Politicised Clergy: A Sociological Comment on a *Social Justice Statement*

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The Social Justice Statement jointly issued by ten New Zealand churches shortly before the 1993 general election has been criticised as both political and secular. This paper briefly examines the connection between a discernible theological position (that God is immanent) and the political overtones of the document (that the restructuring of social institutions will alleviate social inequalities). The conclusion reached is that the Statement is a legacy of the radical clericalism of the sixties, and reflects a clergy who are overtly politicised but face the dilemma of being extraneous to decision making institutions.

Introduction

There exists a certain distrust between sociologists of religion and theologians; no doubt exacerbated by a common area of interests which is characterised by a different style of approach. Robin Gill has called for sociologists to take theology more seriously, and suggests that there are at least three operational models that could be used for greater interaction between the two disciplines: namely, a sociology of theological positions, a sociology of theological situations, and thirdly, the treatment of theology as a sociological variable. This latter approach was used to good effect by Max Weber in his study of the consequences of the Calvinist mind-set. That said, Robert Towler's study of the epistolary response to Bishop Robinson's *Honest to God* seeks to outline the varying configurations of how people can express their "religiousness".

Here is no straightforward "theology" for sociologists to play with. It seems redundant to say that the debates within the churches over theological constructs of appropriate or relevant expressions of religiousness have not come to any conclusion. However, I would argue that sociologists can attempt to unravel connections between religious positions and attitudes towards non-religious action. What I mean by this is that theology can be studied as a sociological variable: theological constructs do generate patterns of belief and behaviour. A mundane case in point is the work by Steve Bruce in which he reiterates the "ideological resonance" between churches' fund-rasing programmes and theological positions.

It is tempting therefore to search for the underlying theological constructs or ideological position of the church leaders who jointly issued a *Social Justice Statement* before the 1993 New Zealand general election. The church leaders sought to impress upon the government that greater emphasis should be given to social justice and fairness in developing economic and social policies. Church members were also called upon to exer-

cise their vote with a greater regard to how the policies of individual parties might impact upon social justice issues.

Three quotes from the document will illustrate the overall temper of the *Statement*:

1.The Churches cannot avoid confronting the requirements of social justice. The commitment to social justice is an essential part of life lived according to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and in the prophetic words found in other parts of the Bible;

2. Christian faith is concerned about the whole of life and every facet of our life together in society. Life is a unity. Therefore it is our continuing responsibility to join with all people of goodwill in working for a society whose structures serve truly just ends. We ask the members of our churches: "Do you experience New Zealand society as a fair one, and does your way of life contribute to the development of a fair society?";

3. The first principle of social justice is to support and develop structures that serve the well-being and protect the dignity of every human person.

Response to the *Social Justice Statement*

The public and media responses to the church leaders was often scathing. New Zealanders do not have an expectation that churches should (or could) speak out on social issues, or even enter into poltical debate. This would appear to be quite unlike the Australian situation where the church, especially the Roman Catholic church, has a respected tradition of speaking out on public concerns. The role of the Australian churches in successfully blocking the opposition's policy of introducing a goods and services tax is a case in point. New Zealand clergy or laity who have sought to speak out have often been met by personal vilification. Two examples of this: individual clergy were subject to a great deal of anger by the then Prime Minister, the late Robert Muldoon, for supporting the opposition leader in a "Clergy for Rowling" campaign during the 1975 general election; churches as a whole were criticised for speaking out against the Springbok tour of 1981 (and indeed the large white cross borne by one protester during the aborted match at Hamilton provided a visible target for the anger and violence of that day).

However, reaction to the church leaders *Statement* **was mainly directed by Christians.** (A major metropolitan paper, recognising a good bust up when it saw one, ran several articles debating the **issues.**) One writer dismissed the document as the work of "politicised clergy". Another similarly saw a danger in the churches "identifying a political philosophy with the gospel", adding that the "churches should view political philosophies with the same reserve as they view governments, recognising that they are pragmatic, consensus-based and unstable". A senior National Party MP, writing "as a Christian" warned that the church leaders "risk being consumed by ideological debate".

The theological basis of an ideological position

Obviously, the church leaders were entering a political debate, which is an area of religion-state dispute in a variety of contexts globally. I wish to focus on the evident secular nature of its pronouncements. Consider, the leaders emphasis on "monism" ("unity" of life), sociality ("life

together in society"), and polity (just "structures"). The church leaders were speaking from a ideological position. What then were the theological constructs behind such a position?

One of the criticisms levelled at the *Statement* is the lack of a clearly defined audience. Noting that the church leaders do not hold a traditional "two-kingdom" perspective on the relationship between the human world and the sacred world, Michael Irwin asks for whom the document was written.

If they are addressing the community of faith they can invoke its sacred texts and traditions as well as reason their arguments...If they are addressing the wider community they need to appeal to reason and community values...

Christians, therefore, are members of both communities but the spiritual demands of the former overshadow the demands of the latter. In reply, Richard Randerson, then Social Responsibility Commissioner for the Anglican Church, stated:

Michael Irwin offered a thoughtful piece which shares much common ground with the church leaders. His opening 'two kingdom' (secular and religious) theology, however, is being superseded in contemporary thought by a view which affirms the integration, rather than the separation, of God and creation. In offering such a critique the church leaders have chosen to affirm gospel values rather than lapse into political ideology.

The church leaders may well have escaped a collapse into a political ideology, but this type of theological insistence on an immanent construct of God, implies certain demands that include political involvement.

The American model of Christian political involvement: revivalism

Christian involvement in American politics has taken a different stance to that of the New Zealand *Social Justice Statement.* There is close affinity between American church life and political activity, and it most notably involves traditional or fundamentalist Christian leaders. William Garrett and Martin Marty have both concluded that the model of Christianity most dominant amongst politically active church leaders (and Falwell's Moral Majority is the prime example) is that with a revivalist ethos. **Revivalism** has three main intertwined elements. God is theologically conceived as transcendent - sovereign, holy and radically other-worldly. God is experienced personally and directly. Conversion to the way of God is voluntary, immediate and distinctively personal. The political corollary of this is that change in society is created by the moral and spiritual actions of individuals as they live out their daily lives in accordance with their faith. Clearly, the Christian values expounded reinforce the American pursuit of individual liberty and self-esteem.

This is very remote from the overall tone of the *Social Justice Statement.* As an example, two excerpts from the document:

1. The human person is fulfilled in community. We are all quite literally inter-dependent. In a truly just society this sense of community is to be encouraged and facilitated by those elected to govern;

2. A just society is one in which its members and its structures serve the common good. In this, government plays a vital role.

What is significant in these two passages is the reliance by church leaders on secular mechanisms to exercise and maintain so-called gospel values. The churches as institutions have a role of injecting "values" into political considerations (as New Zealand's Cardinal Tom Williams argues), but there is not a reliance on Christians acting out gospel values. It is, as one critic wrote,

(that) provided the state collects the tax, Christ's work will be done. This comes perilously close to meeting the challenge of the Gospel through the tax system.

Or put more harshly,

Many simplistic clergy seem to regard the welfare state as the implementation of the Sermon on the Mount.

The church leaders are searching for secular solutions to New Zealand's social and economic problems. To use Garrett's terminology, their theological and social outlook is that of **social reformism.**

The paradigm of social reformism

Social reformism has certain discernible traits. The most notable is the translation of the concept of God into "some theological category of immanence, wherein God either revealed Himself solely through the world, or God and the world became inextricably one." (Garrett: 387). There are profound sociological consequences of this move toward the immanence of God. First, any discussion and maintenance of the notion of God becomes increasingly difficult. Either one can accept a sacralisation of the world or a secularisation of belief. Either way, "[a] reference point no longer exists against which to discern the presence or absence of God" (Garrett: 388). The growing inability to talk meaningfully about God is replaced by a positive move to taking the concerns of the world more seriously. In other words, a coherent doctrine of God falls by the wayside and secular and worldly concerns become the main focus of Christian activity.

...the doctrine of God tends to drop out of reformers' theological systems as an operational concept, and the secular idea system becomes the functional framework informing their beliefs and activities (Garrett: 388)

This leads to the main confrontation between revivalism and social reformism:

Rather than adopting the circuitous route of the revivalists who sought to alter society by converting men one by one, reformers have consistently been of one mind that significant social change would occur only after the structures of society have given way to their reordering activity. [Social reformers have]... the intent of correcting social evils by changing the institutions which created or maintained the inequities present in the wider social order (Garrett: 389).

Social reformism as a specific legacy of the nineteen-sixties

The origins of social reformism would appear to lie in the radicalisation of clergy during the sixties. These clergy were dubbed the "New Breed" by Harvey Cox, referring to a growing number of clergy who shared common assumptions and attitudes. This "New Breed" of religious men and women presented a bold self-image as innovators of new theologies and activists against old or iniquitous institutions (of which the church was

considered one). As a whole, this "New Breed" were urban, well educated, ecumenical and alienated from traditional Christianity. The conviction of the "New Breed" was that they provided

...the last hope of redeeming organised religion from ethical sclerosis and ossified ecclesiastical structures (Garrett: 383)

The most popularly articulated of this "New Breed" was of course Bishop Robinson, who stated his intention of being "Honest to God". In New Zealand, the Principal of the Presbyterian Church's only theological college, Lloyd Geering, made headlines with his denial of traditional Christian belief and trial for heresy in 1966-67. The collapse of Church Union initiatives during this time is also due to the tension between ecumenical and traditional trends within the New Zealand denominations. The curious question Garrett asked himself in 1973 was whether the radicalisation of the clergy would last, and if it did, in what form. He suggested that the clergy who remained in the church would rise within the church systems. However the role and position of the radicalised clergy would become increasingly tenuous given their reliance on the fate of the social sciences and the radical politics which, after all, provided the conceptual frameworks within which new and varied theological enterprises would unfold.

If this secular infrastructure should be rejected by the counterculture which carries it, then radical theology would almost certainly collapse along with it (Garrett: 397).

Final Remarks

It is tempting to argue that the 'counterculture' has indeed moved on. Prevailing economic and political theories increasingly emphasise the primacy of individual belief and action, together with the devolution of state mechanisms. Indeed, John Terris, a former New Zealand Labour MP and cabinet minister in the government which introduced new right monetarist polices to New Zealand (also an Anglican clergyman) has said of the *Social Justice Statement*:

I blame the sixties...[They were a] time when most of the people who are now in positions of responsibility were coming to maturity and formed their attitudes. Many such people, inside and outside the church, are forty-something Flower Children.

The church leaders thus find themselves in something of a dilemma. The theological reconstruction of Christian belief has given rise to political and social attitudes that run contrary to governmental agencies. That in itself may be deemed a good thing, and is a tradition encouraged by some key statements in the Old and New Testaments. However, the church leaders cannot offer a moral or religious platform significantly different from other secular moral systems. The 'secularisation' programme of the "New Breed" has ironically placed the church in the position of being one of many secular bodies presenting community values.

The exasperation of Simon Upton, National Party MP, is evident:

The churches' message is full of academic discourse on social justice, curiously preoccupied with governments and systems and structures. Their historic claims to the truth about our ethical existence are simply not lis-

tened to. Only about 17 per cent of New Zealanders are regular churchgoers; surveys suggest a deeply secular society. No wonder the churches have adopted the language of secular social justice theory and its advocacy.

The final word should perhaps go the political cartoonist Tom Scott, who envisaged something of the same kind. The cartoon is of a large cathedral. Before the assembled five members of the congregation the minister proclaims "Political parties need to know that they ignore the churches' statement on justice at their own risk...". Indeed.

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The Power and the Story

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Introduction

The Boff brothers begin their book on liberation theology[2] with a story. They tell of a bishop finding a woman sitting on the steps of the cathedral, surrounded by three small children and holding a baby. The bishop could see that all were fainting with hunger and that the baby looked almost dead. Full of good intent, no doubt, the bishop instructed the woman to feed the baby, and insisted over her protestations that she must. Eventually the woman undid her blouse and presented her breast to the baby, who sucked violently. Then the bishop at last understood. There was no milk. The woman's breast was bleeding. There was only blood for the child to drink.

This is my body. This is my blood.
Do this in remembrance of me.

What we hear, how we respond, depends on our networks of thought and the significance and content we grant language, images and metaphors.

Increasingly we are becoming aware of the impossibility of perceiving the world from some objective, 'out there' position. We are inevitably socially situated, we see the world through particular eyes, and interpret what we see in particular ways. As Brueggemann urges his readers to recognise

...our knowing is essentially imaginative, that is, an act of organising social reality around dominant, authoritative images. This means that the assumptions that have long had unexamined privilege among us are now seen to be sturdy, powerful acts of imagination, reinforced, imposed, and legitimated by power.[3]

This has been well demonstrated by liberation theology. Once theology is done from a different perspective (such as third world, people of colour or women) the partial and socially situated nature of mainstream theology becomes clear. All theology reflects a particular social situation and history.

In this paper I wish to explore some of the implications for bioethics of this awareness of the links between knowing and imagination - and story which informs both. Ethics is as much an imaginative process as any other discourse. Formed and transformed through the telling and interpretation of story as much as any other discourse it is a product of a particular social context and time.

I will argue that the insights of feminist theology's understanding of the use of story can assist ethics to be ethical, and to resist the temptations and pressures to become a discourse of power, mediating and justifying the status quo.

Bioethics

Bioethics is a clear example of a discourse formed through the telling of story. While often being claimed as applied philosophy by the philosophers, it is a discipline that has emerged from the telling of painful stories of abuse and silencing, in both clinical and research contexts.

In America for example, concern about the use of humans in research began to surface in the medical literature in the 1960s. A doctor Beecher published an article in the *New England Journal of Medicine* [4] expressing his concern at the use of humans in ways that were not acceptable. Medical and then wider public discussion soon surfaced a host of horror stories, dating back several decades. A group of black men in the southern states were denied treatment for gonorrhoea when it became available, so that the long term progress of the disease could be followed. Experiments on treatments for dysentery on children in state orphanage, the deliberate infection of mentally handicapped children with malaria and the trial of various treatments, the use of psychotic patients in similar research were all carried out with no informed consent from patients or their guardians[5]. Presidential commissions were established to set up guidelines for the research on human subjects, and bioethics has since become a discipline (and career path) in its own right. In NZ the development of ethical guidelines and regulations was greatly stimulated by the Cartwright Report, the result of a Commission of Enquiry into allegations concerning the treatment of cervical cancer. It emerged at the enquiry that doctors had been failing to treat women showing the signs of pre-invasive cancer, and had instead chosen to monitor them. These women were part of "an unfortunate experiment" which left some of them dead and many suffering effects of delayed and denied treatment[6].

Other social changes associated with the development of bioethics are the rise of high technology treatment options in medicine, the crisis of limited resources now being experienced in developed countries, and the new issues raised by the explosion of possibilities in genetic research and manipulation, and the many new decisions facing us in the use of

these techniques. Here too, public perceptions are formed by the telling of stories. Those working in research know the impact of a good news item - people denied access to treatment, children needing gene therapy to survive, couples holding their longed for baby born with the help of IVF, and so on. Those resisting the development of these technologies, or questioning their use, also know the importance of counter-narratives eg women who experience ART as abusive and dangerous, the babies given invasive and ultimately futile treatment. It is in people's actual lives that we realise the urgency, the need, to address ethical issues.

Bioethics has now gained centre stage, become a dominant discourse. It is granted the authority to structure many of the discussions about these issues. Sometimes, it is as if ethical experts are being asked to substitute for the lack of common authorities in religion and politics. Ethicists are being given great social power to give voice to community values and priorities, and to name the limits of behaviour in many areas.

As a consequence, those who began as thorns in the flesh, unwelcome reminders of the negative consequences of the social attitudes of those with power, have now become essential components of the system - discerning, regulating, pronouncing. There is a danger that ethicists may have been reduced from prophets to caretakers, regulators of the system, but no longer questioning the system itself. Whereas once, ethicists sat on the margins of say medical discourse, gave voice to the voiceless, we now sit centre stage, integrated into the dominant discourse.

This is not a bad thing. The need for ethical issues to be raised and discussed continues. But it is important that the edge is kept to ethics. Those involved in public ethical discussion need to be alert to the ways in which a discourse can be co-opted into the wider powerful discourse. Ethics needs to be aware of the impact of its structures, assumptions and decisions upon those who are least able to be heard; ie those with less power within institutions and conversations.

I am proposing that keeping ethics ethical can in part be achieved by attending to the ways in which we use story - whose stories are told, who tells them, who interprets, whose voice is granted authority? All these issues are attended to in feminist hermeneutics. Bioethics can learn from the insights of feminist hermeneutics and learn to use story in deliberative and self-reflective ways, so that dominant constructs can be constantly destabilised and ethics and ethicists kept accountable for their use and participation in dominant discourses.

Story in Medicine

Attending to story in bioethics is not difficult. So much of bioethics is based on the telling of stories - stories of people in comas and families making decisions about their treatment; stories of women making decisions about abortions having learnt from an ultrasound scan that their child is anencephalic; stories of participation in research trials; stories to justify or resist screening programs, genetic testing, genetic manipulation. Bioethics debates are nearly always rooted in the reality of people's lives and the choices with which they and their care-givers are dealing.

Nearly always these stories are told from the perspective of the professional, the professional talking about the patient, their family, their context. The detached language of the "case study" or "case pres-

entation" implies an objective telling of the story, the "eye of God" perspective. The implication is that all important details are told, anything significant for discernment is known to the reader.

This is of course consistent with medical culture from which much bioethics emerges. Hunter (1991) has explicated some of the many ways in which story is an integral part of medical life[7]. The primary story is that brought by the patient - a description of symptoms, a history of what brings the patient to the doctor. The doctor creates a new narrative, based not only on the patient's story and additional information elicited by the doctor, but also on a reading of the patient's body (based on examination) and on the reading of test results. A new narrative, "written" by the doctor, draws on knowledge and frameworks based on the telling, observation and hearing of many stories of illness, disease, death and recovery. This new narrative is offered back to the patient by the doctor who (at best) gives meaning to the patient's story, offers diagnosis and the possibility of treatment.[8]

Hunter points out that the story (re)presented by the clinician or student (as part of their medical training) is a different story from that told by the patient, a representation rather than a replication. The doctor will tell a story that draws on the patient's story, but also on additional information not necessarily seen as significant by the patient, but which is incorporated into this new doctor-told narrative; for example test results, examinations of the patient. In the creation of this narrative, the doctor in constructing a meaning out of what could be seen as disparate symptoms. The doctor has selected from the patient's story that information which is seen as important or significant, and ignored other aspects. The information selected is interpreted, given meaning within a framework of understanding which has been put in place through the telling of other stories, stories of other patients with which the doctor identifies similarities or discrepancies. The adequacy of the diagnosis or narrative is judged by its ability to fit within the total medical discourse.

There is great power in this. In the clinical situation doctors are able to judge what is important and what is not. Information is interpreted into their world view and the medical discourse. Considerations central to the lives of patients may be totally screened out or given different meaning. Doctors may end up making decisions that in fact, are not in the patient's best interests.

Let me illustrate. In a study of how health care is delivered to women and enacted in the doctor-patient relationship, Fischer (1986)[9] identifies some of the ways in which views that were not strictly medical views had an impact upon treatment offered. Over a period of six years she examined medical decision making in a variety of institutional settings. Her work included both interviews with patients, and taping and observations of interactions between medical staff and patients. She analysed the language and patterns of discourse between patients and doctors and explored the manner in which language functions strategically in reaching treatment decisions.

She observed that within the clinical interview various strategies are used which have an impact upon negotiation of treatment options. These strategies can enable doctors to influence treatment decisions heavily through implying what are the most desirable options, by providing frameworks of thought in which patients can interpret the symptoms and options,

and by assisting patients to re-interpret information in new ways amenable to the doctor's perception of a correct or best course of treatment.

The consequence for the women was that some had hysterectomies in situations where that was not medically indicated. The women for whom this was true tended to be those of lower social-economic status, minority women, women on welfare or who had multiple abortions or several children without being married. Fisher argues that the doctors, in their communication with patients, were reflecting in their language and assumptions not strictly medical criteria but views

consistent with the traditional view that a woman's primary value is as a wife and mother. If women reject marriage and motherhood, if they do not want children or more children, if they are near the end of their reproductive years, or if they cannot manage reproduction without financial assistance from the State, then they no longer need their uteruses (1986 p57).

There is no intent to marginalise women's concerns, or to impose one's world view upon another, but there is a power associated with being part of a dominant discourse, in retelling someone's story, and determining in what framework it will be told. That power can be used in ways that intentionally or unintentionally are abusive to others.

Feminist Hermeneutics.

Those of us involved in liberation theology are already aware of the issues as we engage with dominant theological constructs and with the institutions of which they are a part. I believe this gives us a particular contribution to bring to the public discourse of ethics, whether our involvement is as academics, member of ethics committees, or participants in community conversations. We have discovered that there is no neutral place to stand, and that the framework of thought we bring affects what we notice, and how we respond. An obvious example would be the debate about the ordination of women. Assumptions made about the place of women in the scheme of things - made in God's image or from the rib of Adam and hence derivative in worth - have a major impact upon the way one approaches the issue theologically.

Today I wish to highlight just three insights of feminist hermeneutics, and suggest that they are able to make an important contribution to ethics conversation and theory.

1. The texts granted authority are themselves an expression of power and of the dominant discourse
2. There is no neutral reading of the texts, and
3. we need to listen to the silences

1. The texts granted authority are themselves an expression of power and of the dominant discourse

To even the most casual reader of the biblical text it is obvious that this is largely a story of the men, told by men, for men. While women are present from tine to time, they are not central to many texts, and where they are, are often the subject of abuse (eg Rape of Tamar, the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter). The many biblical writers are not really concerned with women. Their presence, or absence is taken for granted, as are the norms of relating to them. Few commentators for example on the story of Tamar, even comment on the patriarchal world view which makes possible Tamar's rape. Few question the world view which de-

nies women's presence at the mountain when Moses talks with God, the absence of women at the last supper, or the attitudes to women perpetuated through understandings of ritual uncleanliness and purity.

The texts that have become our authoritative texts are the texts of the powerful, shaped, edited and transmitted by those who had the influence and place to chose or prescribe which writings spoke to their condition, fulfilled their purposes. What is included, what is left out, how the story is shaped and told reflects the assumption and power of those who are socially dominant.

The telling of the same story through the eyes of those who are marginalised within the texts as we have them soon reveals the bias and agenda that is there. Retell Hagar's story, Tamar's or Mary Magdalene's, as they might have experienced it, and the agenda and questions shift, new dynamics are noticed and the power of the authorised telling apparent.

2. There is no neutral reading of the texts,

This awareness of the social power conveyed through the authorisation of certain texts also alerts us to the use of the texts to meet our own agendas, as communities and as individuals.

There are some wonderful illustrations of this emerging from third world contexts. And the telling, re-framing of biblical stories by women is, of course, not neutral. In naming central texts which have been marginalised, as does Trible's *Texts of Terror* [10] we are claiming a place, pointing out our presence, and highlighting the assumptions and social conditions with which women have had to contend.

In telling stories in a new way, for instance by telling them with attention to social conditions of the time, we also highlight liberation tendencies within the text. The story of the syro-phoenician woman's encounter with Jesus can be told in such a way that it becomes possible to see her ability to destabilise Jesus' assumptions and change his perceptions of the world. Such a telling validates and legitimates women's continuing efforts to make visible the cost marginalised groups such as women bear in a patriarchal world.

Voicing/proclaiming these alternative readings, allowing them to speak into dominant frameworks, makes apparent the lack of neutrality in the way we use texts. With the best of intentions we are still people of a particular time, and with particular social commitments and imaginations. We can nearly always find texts to support our positions. We all screen out texts with which we are not comfortable or for which we can see no relevance. And we will always be able to find inadequacies and political commitments in the use others make of texts/stories that are found within the tradition.

3. and then there are the silences

There are all those things we do not attend to, all those people marginal to the texts, written out or written off.

Feminist hermeneutics has made us conscious of the relative silence about women's lives, and the impact of the gospel upon the social reality. What we hear, what we are told, is very much the male voice, speaking from an androcentric world view, struggling to establish new communities, assuming the appropriateness of certain social relationships. Then, as now, women's reality was largely invisible to the male world, taken for granted and rarely reflected upon. Almost inevitably it rarely makes it into the texts.

But there are enough signs of women's presence that we know they were there. Christianity was not a male-only sect.

But what is not said? What are we not told? Who is not referred to? How did Hagar experience this God of Abraham? Where were all the women at the last supper? What did it mean for the women to leave all and follow Christ? What roles did women have in leadership in the early church? What happened that it did not *seem* to continue in much strength for long? What did the women think of Paul's injunctions? Did anyone care?

So much we do not know, have not been told. His story is not her story.

Feminist writers have taught us something about a hermeneutic of suspicion. The silence can say almost as much as the words. When we listen for certain voices, we can be deafened by the silences. Yet these silences can tell us something. They tell us about the assumptions and world-view of the authors and editors of the texts. What is not reflected upon is as revealing as that which is discussed at length. The silences reveal the biases and constructions of power which shape the texts.

Implications for bioethics

These three insights of feminist hermeneutics have something significant to say to bioethics. Bioethics, too, uses particular texts and traditions to legitimate and inform its discourse. For instance, certain stories have become almost canonical, eg the story of Karen Ann Quinlan, maintained on life support, and her family's struggle to be allowed to withdraw that support; the denial of surgical treatment of baby Doe, a decision largely determined by her intellectual handicap.

And bioethicists are constantly creating new texts, putting stories together to highlight issues, illustrate points, focus student's perceptions. We are always on the lookout for new stories, new situations, new narrations.

None of this is neutral. In any telling of a story some information is left out or emphasised. We make judgements about what is important, relevant, trivial or optional. And once written, we interpret the texts through particular eyes - we are never neutral readers. Our judgements are inevitably influenced by our perceptions of the world, the eyes through which we look, the extent of our participation in the conversations of the dominant social groups, our personal experience, and those of the people with whom we identify.

In the midst of our discussions and debates, it can be hard to be still long enough to also listen to the silences. Full of good intentions, confident in our analysis of the situation, we may not even notice who is not included, or who sits there, unable to speak against the flood of words from those skilled in the conversation and confident in the culture of academic and professional discourse.

An example: should an intellectually handicapped 15 year old woman be given a hysterectomy because she is having trouble coping with her periods, and caregivers are anxious that she may get pregnant at some stage? What are the important issues here?

I have been in a conversation which discussed this topic only in terms of informed consent. The language used was totally medicalised, as if the woman was sick, and the doctors would obviously be doing her a favour to remove the incon-

venience of it all. The framework of discussion made no room to acknowledge the normality of menstruation, nor was there any questioning of the conditions of her care which made her at risk of getting pregnant. Dominated by a group of men the conversation reflected their perceptions of women's bodies, and de-emphasised the importance of social context in creating sexual safety for women. As the only woman in the room it was difficult to speak up, to alert them to an alternative worldview, and to make them aware of the lenses though which they looked at the situation.

Becoming aware of the impact of our social position can make us more careful in how we participate in ethical judgements - not careful in the sense of politically correct, or keeping out or trouble, but careful in the sense of making sure that our ethics are ethical, that we are not using the language of ethics to support and justify social arrangements that are abusive. We can notice who is participating in the conversations, who is silent and who is absent. We can be alert to the particularity of our judgement and discernment and reminded to take heed of the social power we are utilising.

A place to stand

Recognition of the importance of perspective and power in the writing and use of texts raises another important issue. If no objective or neutral position is possible, where do we stand as users of text, transmitters of the tradition, and teachers and educators within a discourse?

I think that contemporary awareness of the extent to which knowledge is socially constructed, and reflective of social power, requires a self-conscious and deliberate situating of ourselves. It is no longer possible to claim the 'eye of God' position, the detached perspective. We are people of a particular time and place, and we chose where to position ourselves, and to what purpose we put the tradition and culture of which we are a part.

Liberation theology and feminist ethics, both having engaged with the issue of the power to which tradition, language and story are put, propose a similar commitment - that of overcoming oppression. While liberation theology in South America made its initial commitment to the poor, it is now recognising that financial and material poverty is not the only form of oppression that is wrong - attention must also we paid to sexism and ethnic oppression. Feminists are recognising that oppression of women is not the only issue, and that focusing only on that avoids oppression on the basis of class, sexual orientation or race. It is oppression per se that is wrong.

Such a standing place or ethical commitment is not a proposal that leads to tidy resolution or moral high ground. Despite our best intentions it is possible to become absorbed into the dominant discourse, to mouth-off about overcoming oppression, and yet continue to participate in the structures that cause it. But it is a commitment that keeps our participation in ethics accountable, accountable to those with least social power, most marginalised in society, in our institutions, and in our ways of working.

Attention to story can help generate propitious destabilisation - that constant disturbance of our stability, our categories, our confidence that we have the final resolution or solution. Feminist hermeneutics can remind those of us with social power (in which I include all here!) that we need to watch the political purposes

for which we use story. How we use story, what stories we use, who we authorise to interpret, and whose voices we muffle or silence are central issues in creating modes of ethical discourse which are themselves ethical.

Notes

1. Postal Address: PO Box 913, Dunedin, New Zealand.

2. Boff, Leonardo and Boff, Clodovis 1987 *Introducing Liberation Theology* Burns and Oates

3. Brueggemann, Walter 1993 *Texts Under Negotiation* Minneapolis:Fortress Press p18

4. Beecher, Henry J 1966 'Ethics and Clinical Research' *New England Journal of Medicine* 274 (24):1354-1360

5. Rothman, David 1991 *Strangers at the Bedside* Basic Books

6. Coney, Sandra 1988 *The Unfortunate Experiment* Penguin Books

7. Hunter, Kathryn Montgomery 1991 *Doctors' Stories* Princeton University Press

8. See Toombs (1992 *The Meaning of Illness* Kluwer Academic Publishers) who discusses the impact upon the patient of the different "reality" of illness for doctor and patient, and argues that the healing relationship requires a physician to "perform a temporary 'shift in consciousness' from a purely naturalistic construction of a patient's disease to a life world interpretation of the patient's disorder in order to gain a more complex understanding of the patient's illness"(1992 p98).

9. Fischer, Sue 1986 *In the Patient's Best Interests: Women and the Politics of Medical Decisions* New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press

10. Trible, Phyllis 1984 *Texts of Terror* Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

The Ethics of "Brainwashing" Claims About New Religious Movements

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Introduction

Many young people have been involved with new religious movements (NRMs) - sometimes pejoratively called "cults" - over the past several decades in American and other Western societies. These young people have often been among the most affluent and better educated of youth in their societies, which has contributed to controversies erupting about the meaning of such participation. Parents, friends and political and opinion leaders have attempted to understand the phenomenon, and develop methods to control activities of such groups (Beckford 1985; Barker 1984).

Joining NRMs, which may appear quite strange in their beliefs and organizational patterns, is interpreted by some as an act of ultimate rejection of Western cultural values and institutions -- including religious, economic and familial ones. This "culture-rejecting" explanation has been difficult for many to accept, prompting a search for other explanations for involvement, a search raising serious ethical issues.

An appealing alternative explanation has been so-called "brainwashing" theories (Bromley and Richardson 1983; Fort 1983). According to those espousing these ideas, youth have not joined NRMs volitionally, but have been manipulated or forced into participating by groups using powerful psychotechnology practiced first by communist, anti-Western societies. This psychotechnology allegedly traps or encapsulates young people in NRMs, allowing subsequent control of their behavior by leaders of the groups, through "mind control."

These techniques were originally developed, according to these claims, in Russian purge trials of the 1930s, and later refined by the Chinese communists after their assumption of power in China in 1949, and then used by them with POWs during the Korean War of the early 1950s (Solomon 1983). Now these techniques are allegedly being used by NRM leaders against young people in Western countries, who are supposedly virtually helpless before such sophisticated methods Richardson and Kilbourne 1983).

When questioned about obvious logical and ethical problems of applying these theories to situations without physical coercion (such as participation in NRMs), proponents have a ready answer. They claim that physical coercion has been replaced by "psychological coercion," which is supposedly more effective than simple physical coercion (Singer 1979). These ideas are referred to as "second generation" brainwashing theories, which take into account new insights about manipulation of individuals. Supposedly physically coercion is unnecessary if recruits can be manipulated by affection, guilt or other psychological influences.

These theories can be considered ideas developed for functional reasons by those who have a vested interest in their being accepted, such as parents of members, therapists, and leaders of competing religious groups. The ideas plainly are a special type of "account" which "explains" why people join the groups and why they stay in them (Beckford 1978). Whatever the origin, and no matter that the veracity of such accounts is questionable, these ideas about NRM participation have become commonly accepted.

For instance, DeWitt (1991) reports that 78 percent of a random sample of 383 individuals from Nevada said they believed in brainwashing, and 30 percent agreed that "brainwashing is required to make someone join a religious cult." A similar question asked of a random sample of 1,000 residents in New York prior to the tax evasion trial of Reverend Moon (Richardson 1992) revealed that 43 percent agreed "brainwashing is required to make someone change from organized religion to a cult." Latkin (1991) reported that 69% of a random sample of Oregon residents who were asked about the controversial Rajneesh group centered in Eastern Oregon agreed that members of the group were brainwashed.

These notions about "brainwashing" and "mind control" have pervaded institutional structures in our society as well, even if they are problematic. Such views have influenced actions by governmental entities and the media (van Driel and Richardson 1988; Bromley and Robbins 1992). The legal system has seen a number of efforts to apply brainwashing theories as explanations of why people might participate in new religions. Several civil actions have resulted in multimillion dollar judgments against NRMs allegedly using brainwashing techniques on recruits (Anthony 1990; Richardson 1991; 1994).

Thus it appears that ideas about brainwashing of recruits to new religions have developed a momentum of their own in several Western societies. These notions are impacting society in many ways, including limitations on religious freedom (Richardson 1991). Thus, we need to examine the brainwashing thesis more closely, in order to see if it is an adequate explanation of the process whereby people join and participate in NRMs, and to examine the underlying ethics of offering such explanations of religious participation.

Critique of "Brainwashing" Theories

Brainwashing theories serve the interests of those espousing them, which is a major reason they are so readily accepted. Parents can blame the groups and their leaders for what were probably volitional decisions to participate by their sons and daughters. Former members can blame the techniques for a decision to participate which the participant later regrets. Deprogrammers can use brainwashing theories as a justification for their new "profession" and as a quasi-legal defense if they are apprehended by legal authorities during attempted deprogrammings, which often have involved physical force and kidnapping. Societal leaders can blame the techniques for seducing society's "brightest and best" away from traditional cultural values and institutions. Competitive religious leaders as well as some psychological and psychiatric clinicians attack the groups with brainwashing theories, to bolster what are basically unfair competition arguments (Kilbourne and Richardson, 1984).

Thus it is in the interest of many different entities to *negotiate an account* of "what happened" that makes use of brainwashing notions. Only the NRM of membership, which is usually politically weak, is left culpable after these negotiated explanations about how and why a person joined an NRM. All other parties are, to varying degrees, absolved of responsibility (Richardson, van der Lans and Derks 1986).

The claim that NRMs engage in brainwashing thus becomes a powerful "social weapon" for many partisans in the "cult controversy." Such ideas are used to "label" the exotic religious groups as deviant or even evil (Robbins and Anthony 1982). However, the new "second generation" brainwashing theories have a number of logical and evidentiary problems, and their continued use raises profound ethical issues.

1. Misrepresentation of Classical Tradition

Modern brainwashing theories sometimes misrepresent earlier scholarly work on the processes developed in Russia, China, and the Korean POW situation (Anthony 1990). These misrepresentations are as follows: First, the early classical research by Schein (1963) and Lifton (1961) revealed that, contrary to some recent claims, the techniques were generally ineffective at doing more than modifying behavior (obtaining compliance) even for the short term. Such theories would seem less useful to explain long term changes of behavior and belief allegedly occurring with NRM participation.

Second, the degree of determinism associated with contemporary brainwashing applications usually far exceeds that found in the foundational work of Lifton and of Schein. Anthony and Robbins

(1992) contrast the "soft determinism" of the work of Lifton and of Schein with the "hard determinism" of contemporary proponents of brainwashing theories such as Singer and Ofshe (1990). The "hard determinism" approach assumes that humans can be turned into robots through application of sophisticated brainwashing techniques, easily becoming deployable "Manchurian Candidates." Classical scholars Lifton and Schein seemed more willing to recognize human beings as more complex entities than do some contemporary brainwashing theorists.

Third, another problem is that classical scholars Lifton and Schein may not comfortable with their work being applied to noncoercive situations. Lifton (1985: 69) explicitly disclaims use of ideas concerning brainwashing in legal attacks against so-called cults, and earlier (1961: 4) had stated: "...the term (brainwashing) has a far from precise and questionable usefulness; one may even be tempted to forget about the whole subject and return to more constructive pursuits." The work of Schein and of Lifton both evidence difficulty in "drawing the line" between acceptable and unacceptable behaviors on the part of those involved in influencing potential subjects for change (Anthony and Robbins 1992). Group influence processes operate in all areas of life, which makes singling out one area like NRMs for special negative attention quite problematic. Such a focus cannot be adopted on strictly logical, scientific, or ethical grounds.

2. Ideological Biases of Brainwashing Theorists

Contemporary applications of brainwashing theories share an ideological bias in opposition to collectivistic solutions to problems of group organization (Richardson and Kilbourne 1983). In the 1950s many Westerners opposed collectivistic communism; in the 1970s and 1980s many share a concern about communally oriented new religions. Another ideological element of contemporary applications concerns the ethocentrism and even racism which may be related to their use. The fact that a number of new religions are from outside Western culture and were founded and led by foreigners should not be ignored in understanding the propensity to apply simplistic brainwashing theories to explain participation and justify efforts at social control.

3. Limited Research Base of Classical Work

Research on which the classical models are based is quite limited (Richardson and Kilbourne 1983; Anthony 1990). Small nonrepresentative samples were used by both Lifton and Shein, and those in the samples were presented using an anecdotal reporting style, derived from clinical settings, especially with Lifton's work. As Biderman (1962) pointed out, Lifton only studied 40 subjects in all, and gave detailed information on only 11 of those. Shein's original work was based on a sample of only 15 America civilians who returned after imprisonment in China. This work may be insightful, but it does not meet normal scientific standards in terms of sample size and representativeness.

4. Predisposing Characteristics and Volition Ignored

Contemporary applications of brainwashing theories to NRM recruitment tactics typically ignores important work on predisposing characteristics of NRM participants (Anthony and Robbins 1992).

The techniques of brainwashing supposedly are so successful that they can transform a person's basic beliefs into sharply contrasting beliefs, even against their will. This aspect of brainwashing theory is appealing to proponents who have difficulty recognizing that an individual might have been attracted to a new and exotic religion perceived by the recruit as offering something positive for themselves.

Sizable numbers of participants are from higher social class origins in terms of education level and relative affluence, a finding raising questions about application of brainwashing theories as adequate explanations of participation. Both Barker (1984) and Kilbourne (1986) have found that there are predisposing characteristics for participation in the Unification Church -- such as youthful idealism. Thus, the brainwashing argument would seem to be refuted, even if such data are often ignored.

Brainwashing proponents also conveniently ignore volitional aspects of recruitment to new religions. Brainwashing theorists such as Delgado (1982) turn predispositions and interest in exotic religions into susceptibilities and vulnerabilities, adopting an orientation toward recruitment which defines the potential convert in completely passive terms, a philosophical posture that itself raises serious ethical problems. Most participants are "seekers," taking an active interest in changing themselves, and they are often using the NRMs to accomplish planned personal change (Straus 1976, 1989). There is growing use of an "active" paradigm in conversion/recruitment research which stresses the predispositional and volitional character of participation. This view is derived from research findings that *many participants actually seek out NRMs to accomplish personal goals* (Richardson 1985a). This nonvolitional view ignores an important aspect of classical work in the brainwashing tradition. For instance, Lifton's (1961) work clearly shows the voluntaristic character of much of the thought reform which went on in China (his last chapter discusses voluntaristic personal change).

5. Therapeutic Effects of Participation Ignored

Brainwashing theorists usually claim that participation in NRMs is a negative experience, claims countered by many lines of research. Participation seems to have a generally positive impact on most participants, an often-replicated finding which undercuts brainwashing arguments, but is usually ignored by proponents of such theories. Robbins and Anthony (1982) summarized positive effects which have been found, listing ten different therapeutic effects, including reduced neurotic distress, termination of illicit drug use, and increased social compassion. One review of a large literature concerning personality assessment of participants concluded (Richardson 1985b: 221): "Personality assessments of these group members reveal that life in the new religions is often therapeutic instead of harmful." Kilbourne (1986) drew similar conclusions in his assessment of outcomes from participation, after finding, for instance, that members of the Unification Church felt they were getting more from their participation than did matched samples of young Presbyterians and Catholics.

Psychiatrist Marc Galanter, who has done considerable assessment research on participants in some of the more prominent NRMs, has even posited a general "relief effect" brought about by participation (Galanter, 1978). He wanted to find out what about participation leads to such

consistent positive effects, in order that therapists can use the techniques themselves. McGuire (1988) found that many ordinary people participate in exotic religious groups in a search of alternatives to modern medicine, and many think themselves the better for the experience. To ignore such scholarly conclusions seems ethically quite questionable.

6. Large Research Tradition and "Normal" Explanations Ignored

There has been a huge amount of research done on recruitment to and participation in the new religious groups and movements, research almost totally ignored by brainwashing theorists. This work, which is summarized in such reviews as Greil and Rudy (1984), Richardson (1985a), and Robbins (1985), applies standard theories from sociology, social psychology, and psychology to explain why youth join such groups. These explanations seem quite adequate to explain participation, without any "black box" of mystical psychotechnology such as offered by brainwashing theorists.

Examples of such "normalizing" research include Heirich's (1977) study of the Charismatic Renewal Movement, Pilarzyk's (1978) comparison of conversion in the Divine Light Mission and the Hare Krishna, Straus' (1981) "naturalistic social psychological" explanation of seeking religious experiences, Solomon's work (1983) on the social psychology of participation in the Unification Church; and the examination of process models of conversion to the Jesus Movement (Richardson, et al. 1979). The ethics of ignoring such work, while propounding empirically weak notions such as brainwashing and mind control seem questionable.

7. Lack of "Success" of New Religions Disregarded

Another obvious problem with brainwashing explanations concerns assuming (and misinforming the public about) the efficacy of the powerful recruitment techniques allegedly used by the new religious groups. Most NRMs are actually quite small: the Unification Church probably never had over 10,000 American members, and can now boast only 2,000 to 3,000 members in the U.S.; the American Hare Krishna may not have achieved even the size of the Unification Church. There are no more than a few hundred members of the UC or the HK in Australia. Most other NRMs have had similar problems recruiting large numbers of participants.

A related problem concerns attrition rates for the new religions. As a number of scholars have noted, most participants in the new groups remain for only a short time, and most of those proselytized simply ignore or rebuff recruiters and go on with their normal lives (Bird and Reimer 1982; Barker 1984; Galanter 1980). Many people leave the groups after being in them relatively short periods (Wright 1987; Skonovd 1983; Richardson, et al. 1986).

An example of one well publicized group in Australia is The Family (formerly the Children of God) which has had over 57,000 young people worldwide join it over the group's 25 year history. However, the group has only about 3,000 adult members world-wide at this time, which could be construed to mean they have a serious attrition problem!

These histories of meager growth and/or rapid decline raise serious questions about the efficacy of brainwashing explanations of participation. Such powerful techniques should have resulted in

much larger groups, a fact conveniently ignored by brainwashing proponents, who seem intent on raising the level of hysteria about NRMs, through misleading the public their size and efficiency in keeping members.

8. "Brainwashing" as Its Own Explanation

A last critique of brainwashing theories is that they are self-perpetuating, through "therapy" offered those who leave, especially those forcibly deprogrammed. As Solomon (1981) has concluded, those who are deprogrammed often accept the views which deprogrammers use to justify their actions, and which are promoted to the deprogrammee as reasons for cooperating with the deprogramming. These views usually include a belief in brainwashing theories. One could say that a successful deprogramming is one in which the deprogramee comes to accept the view that they were brainwashed, and are now being rescued. Solomon's finding has been collaborated by other research on those who leave, including by Lewis (1986), Lewis and Bromley (1987), and Wright (1987). The social psychological truth that such ideas are *learned interpretations or accounts* undercuts truth claims by brainwashing theorists.

Conclusions

The preceding critique indicates that brainwashing theories of participation in new religions fail to take into account considerable data about participation in such groups. However, many people still accept such theories, and high levels of concern about the "cult menace" exist, in part because of the promotion of ideologically based brainwashing theories of participation. Serious attention should be paid to alternative explanations which demystify the process of recruitment to and participation in the new religions.

Motivations for accepting such empirically weak theories as "brainwashing" should be examined. Also, those who propound brainwashing theories of participation need to examine the ethics of promoting such powerful "social weapons" against minority religions. When such theories are used to limit people's religious freedom and personal growth, then the society itself may suffer.

Note

This paper was written while on sabbatical leave associated with the Criminology Department at the University of Melbourne and the Anthropology and Sociology Department at Monash University. Appreciation is expressed for this support. The paper derives in part from one presented at the annual meeting of the Australian Association for the Study of Religion, Adelaide, 1994, and from part of a chapter by the author in *Sects and Cults in America*, edited by Jeffrey Hadden and David Bromley (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1994).

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Book Review

Freedom and Purpose: An Introduction to Christian Ethics
Robert Gascoigne. 1993. E J Dwyer, Newtown

Robert Gascoigne has written an extraordinary sensible and useful book. It is an introductory manual for students and the degree to which it presupposes philosophical background is reasonably lim-

ited. It canvasses the material in a helpful way and discusses particular topics sensibly. Any student using this as a guide would not be led astray as to the main issues nor as to the generous form of Roman Catholic moral theology.

The context is set with an introductory chapter on ethics in a pluralistic society. There is an introductory summary of various ethical theories. I faintly regretted the presence of the fire of some modern writers such as Alasdair McIntyre who would have been sympathetic to much of what Gascoigne is saying. The discussion in Chapter 2 introduces how one might approach Christian ethics in a way which retains its open discussibility, its public character. It is in this chapter that the Roman Catholic tradition comes most noticeably to the fore. Tradition is highlighted but what makes this chapter striking in the contemporary secular environment and in the modern religiously secular environment is the emphasis upon harmony of creation and revelation.

This discussion of Christian faith and ethics leads again naturally into a discussion of the moral person and the sorts of choices that one might make. There are then a series of chapters on sin, the good world, love rights and moral norms and a penultimate chapter on the task of moral reasoning. Chapter 7 on the task of moral reasoning is a particularly important chapter in the structure of the book. In many ways it draws the discussion to a conclusion but at the same time it prepares one for a very generous interpretation of the teaching authority of the church. I wonder if the text was written before the publication of *Veritatis Splendour*.

Clearly, this book is designed for tertiary students, probably in Catholic institutions. It is written from a Roman Catholic perspective but it is written in a way which would make it not only accessible but also valuable to Christians who come from other traditions.

Very useful, sensible, and generous not only to the issues under discussion but in the presentation of his own Roman Catholic tradition, a book warmly to be welcomed.

B N Kaye
Anglican General Synod