

GLOBALIZATION AND THE AUTONOMY OF MORAL REASONING: AN ESSAY IN FUNDAMENTAL MORAL THEOLOGY

THOMAS R. KOPFENSTEINER

Kenrick School of Theology, St. Louis

IN A GROWING BODY of theological literature, globalization serves as a heuristic to structure and interpret the delicate balance between the experience of an increasingly interdependent world community and recognition of the radical differences among traditions and cultures. Meeting the exigencies of globalization has become the measure of the adequacy of contemporary theological reflection and education.¹ There are three possible responses to the issue of the globalization of theology: a renewed search for universalist criteria, a sophisticated but ultimately nihilistic contextualism, or the creation of a dialogic methodology which presupposes a solidarity upon which to reason about differences. In a global culture only the creation of a dialogical or hermeneutical methodology will be the adequate response if tyranny or chaos are to be avoided.²

How should the moral theological enterprise be carried out in a global context? The answer which this article proposes is that the experience of a global culture necessitates the creation of a fundamental moral theology which draws on theoretical reflections in modern hermeneutical theory and theological hermeneutics.³ In fact, the way in which the issue of globalization is treated will be one test of the adequacy of a hermeneutically oriented fundamental moral theology.

¹ Max L. Stackhouse, *Apologia: Contextualization, Globalization, and Mission in Theological Education* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988).

² *Ibid.* 159–61; Hans Küng, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic* (New York: Crossroad, 1991) 19–24; Mark Kline Taylor and Gary J. Bekker, “Engaging the Other in a Global Village,” *Theological Education* 26 (Supplement 1, 1990) 52–83.

³ See, e.g., Rüdiger Bubner, *Essays in Hermeneutics and Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia Univ., 1988); *Hermeneutics versus Science: Three German Views*, ed. John M. Connolly and Thomas Keutner (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1988); *Hermeneutics and Praxis*, ed. Robert Hollinger (Notre Dame, Univ. of Notre Dame, 1985). More specifically see Bénézet Bujo, “La remise en question du discours traditionnel en morale face à un monde polycentrique,” in *Novitas et Veritas Vitae: Aux sources du renouveau de la morale chrétienne*, ed. Carlos-Josaphat Pinto de Oliveira (Paris: Cerf, 1991) 161–73; David Tracy, “Practical Theology in the Situation of Global Pluralism,” in *Formation and Reflection: The Promise of Practical Theology*, ed. Lewis Mudge and James Poling (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 139–54.

Our approach here is to go beyond any single issue and to bring the formal structure of the moral knowledge and the moral agency of the Christian into the discussion of globalization.

In the background of the discussion is the conviction that every ethos must have a strategy to deal with the experience of the radically other.⁴ Here is a characteristic of Christian ethics which points the direction for the following reflections: the strategy of Christian ethics is not to influence the behavior of another by threats or promises, but to motivate another through communicative interaction. Experience of the other becomes a dialogue with the other.⁵

A HERMENEUTIC OF ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The phenomenon of globalization or cultural polycentrism poses three methodological challenges to Christian ethics. The first challenge is to resist the drive to create a new uniformity out of the experience of interdependence by imposing on the other the standards of science or the standards of secularized Western culture. The radically other, then, would exist only as a projection of one ethos or tradition onto another; the other would be reduced to a caricature which would be demeaned, enslaved, or dismissed. A global perspective would mean nothing more than the triumph of one tradition over others, achieved by sacrificing the cultural and ethical diversity of a polycentric world to the tactics of power and domination. Dialogue with the other would be nothing more than a thin veil for a "second colonization," whose goal would be "conformity to the established social order and its standards," thereby obfuscating the plurality of interests, cultures, and histories which must be respected in a globalized context.⁶

Secondly, there is also the temptation to assume that Christianity can shed its Western cultural heritage like a mantle.⁷ While it is true that a Christian ethic cannot be identified completely with its cultural

⁴ Dietmar Mieth, "Praxis ohne Theorie," in *Die Spannungseinheit von Theorie und Praxis: Theologische Profile* (Freiburg: Herder, 1988) 18.

⁵ Jürgen Habermas, "Discourse Ethics: Notes on a Program of Philosophical Justification," in *The Communicative Ethics Controversy*, ed. Seyla Benhabib and Fred Dallmayr (Cambridge: MIT, 1990) 63; David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987) 70-77.

⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Notes on Planning for the Future," *Daedalus* 95 (Spring, 1966) 580-81; Richard Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics and Praxis* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1983) 156.

⁷ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminism and Jewish-Christian Dialogue: Particularism and Universalism in the Search for Religious Truth," in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. John Hick and Paul Knitter (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987) 137-42.

expressions, it is equally true that no culturally preexistent ideal of the moral law exists. The moral law is not modeled on some Platonic idea to be applied to any culture whatsoever. There is no such thing as a culturally naked moral law.

Finally, the need for a hermeneutical culture must be acknowledged. To understand the radically other in a polycentric world, a culture like that described by Metz in alluding to Nietzsche is needed: "a culture of the acknowledgment of others in their otherness, a culture of togetherness . . . freed . . . from the will to power."⁸ An interest in hermeneutics is legitimated by the experience of distancing from the other in a polycentric world, or by the experience of pluralism in a world which is characterized as global and interdependent.

The first step of contemporary hermeneutics is to become aware of the preunderstandings with which the interpreter approaches the other.⁹ The possibility of interpretation depends on the forestructure of knowledge that conditions the work of the interpreter. Despite the Enlightenment's ideal of science and its "prejudice against prejudice," no interpreter is autonomous; every interpreter stands under the effects of history. For Gadamer, "the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being."¹⁰ Judgements are anticipated by and function within prior horizons. It is Gadamer's accomplishment to step beyond the Enlightenment's polemics surrounding autonomy and prejudgments, and to retrieve a positive notion of tradition and its authority, which, as he writes, "has nothing to do with obedience, but everything to do with knowledge."¹¹ The rehabilitation of tradition breaks beyond the subject-object dichotomy, and means that the world is experienced through the tradition and language to which we belong; our perceptions of the world are not pure but always already laden with meaning; the world is always presented as something and not another. One does not enter the act of interpretation as a disinterested observer, but with

⁸ Johann Baptist Metz, "The 'One World': A Challenge to Western Christianity," in *Radical Pluralism & Truth: David Tracy and the Hermeneutics of Religion*, ed. Werner G. Jeanrond and Jennifer L. Rike (New York: Crossroad, 1991) 209.

⁹ See David Linge's excellent introduction to Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1976).

¹⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2d rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1992) 276-77.

¹¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 279. Elsewhere Gadamer writes, "I assert that (reason and authority) stand in a basically ambivalent relation, a relation I think should be explained rather than casually accepting the antithesis as a 'fundamental conviction'" ("The Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection," in *Philosophical Hermeneutics* 33).

the effective history of tradition and language which "constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience."¹²

Acknowledging our preunderstandings is at the same time an acknowledgement of the other *as* other. This is the second step in modern hermeneutics: in the encounter with the other, there is not only an awareness of the interpreter's own tradition, but there is a recognition of the other's validity claims. In the hermeneutical encounter, the other is presented as an other who provokes serious attention; the other makes a claim on the interpreter. Questioning takes on a dual character: the interpreter not only asks questions of the other but is questioned by the other. The interpreter must risk acknowledging the other's claim to attention in order to reach genuine self-knowledge. How great this risk can be comes to full force in the encounter with the radically "ethical" other. The experience of the other may underline similarities or create a sense of resonance and commonality; but it may also elicit a sense of ambiguity and terror. The radically other may not embody only the good but evil. Ideology critique prevents too sanguine a notion of the hermeneutical recognition of the other. A variety of responses can emerge from the "hermeneutical recognition" of the other, ranging from acceptance to tolerance to repugnance.

As a third step in modern hermeneutics, Gadamer offers the model of the "game" (*Spiel*) to capture the interaction that occurs in an encounter. The structure of a game is such that it fulfills its purpose "only if the player loses himself in his play."¹³ The reality of the game is disclosed or brought about by players who allow themselves to be controlled by the back-and-forth movement that constitutes the game. To play the game means to be lost in something that is really beyond one's control. A player who takes charge by breaking the rules of the game is nothing more than a spoilsport. As Tracy writes, "When we really play any game it is not so much we who are playing as it is the game which plays us."¹⁴

"Playing a game" is an analogue for the dialogue or conversation that occurs in the encounter with the radically other. Entering into conversation with the other becomes like entering into a game where what is put into play are our prejudgments, and we thereby risk them—risk their repudiation, modification, maturation, or substitu-

¹² Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem," in *Philosophical Hermeneutics* 9.

¹³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 102.

¹⁴ David Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other: The Interreligious Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 64; *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 113.

tion.¹⁵ The rules of dialogue require a willingness to take seriously the validity claims of the other. "When no question other than our own is allowed, then conversation is impossible."¹⁶ What occurs in the to-and-fro of the dialogue, then, is neither the escape from one tradition to another nor the creation of a transhistorical viewpoint, neither the naive assimilation of one perspective into another nor the precipitous dismissal of one by the other; what takes place is what Gadamer calls a "fusion of horizons."¹⁷ The outcome of a true dialogical experience or conversation is not foreseen beforehand. The dialogue with the other leads to the transformation of perspectives, the discovery of new possibilities, and a growth in knowledge. Hermeneutically, then, the focus is on the "newness" that results from the dialogue with the other. "To understand at all is to understand for and within genuine dialogue allowing real manifestations of the other's truth and thereby mutual transformation."¹⁸

The consequence of overlooking this process of transformation or halting it prematurely by raising one perspective above revision is captured by Lonergan when he writes:

The general bias of common sense involves the disregard of timely and fruitful ideas; and this disregard not only excludes their implementation but also deprives subsequent stages both of the further ideas to which they would give rise, and of the correction that they and their retinue would bring to the ideas that are implemented.¹⁹

The condition of possibility for this kind of development is the malleability of tradition and language; what they create is a limited but fluid horizon capable of being enriched through the encounter and interaction with the other.

This hermeneutical conception of knowledge has ontological and ethical implications for the encounter with the radically other: through the dialogue with the other new insights and perspectives on the world are continually disclosed in a way that resists domination by any of the partners in the conversation. But there is also a methodological advantage to this conception of knowledge. Viewing the encounter with the radically other as a dialogue has the advantage of steering between the Scylla of relativism and the Charybdis of essen-

¹⁵ Matthew Foster, *Gadamer and Practical Philosophy: The Hermeneutics of Moral Confidence* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1991) 33.

¹⁶ Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity* 18. ¹⁷ *Truth and Method* 306.

¹⁸ Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other* 44.

¹⁹ Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957) 229.

tialism. The question of ethical pluralism cannot be adequately treated by either exclusivist or inclusivist methodologies.²⁰ Rather, one enters the dialogue from a particular tradition acknowledging its validity claims, and at the same time with the conviction that one can learn—i.e. be enriched—from a dialogue with the radically other.²¹

THE CHARACTER OF MORAL KNOWLEDGE

In bringing a hermeneutical methodology into the area of morality, a first concern is the nature of moral truth. The rational structure of reality that is presupposed by moral cognition is ordered by meaning.²² Meaning is the rationally necessary and ultimate ground of justification of a moral norm. Moral claims that are meant to guide praxis encapsulate the implications of this ultimate ground.²³ In a word, moral truth is a truth of meaning. This points the direction for the further considerations; this theory of knowledge creates an anthropology of knowledge, in which, as Apel writes, “all the presuppositions which make the formulation of a problem meaningful can be brought to the fore.”²⁴

As a science of meaning, ethics refers most originally to the ideology of human flourishing or the meaning of the morally good life. As a truth of meaning, the ideology of human flourishing is not perceived as an object that stands alongside others; rather it animates one’s entire life project. The ideology of human flourishing does not stand over and against reason like an object in the world; rather it is the goal of our striving.²⁵

²⁰ Attention is given to the epistemological options that guide these alternatives in David J. Krieger, *The New Universalism: Foundations for a Global Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), and in William C. Placher, *Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation* (Louisville: John Knox, 1989).

²¹ John B. Cobb, Jr., “Beyond Pluralism,” in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. Gavin D’Costa (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990) 84–88; Klaus Demmer, *Die Wahrheit leben: Theorie des Handelns* (Freiburg: Herder, 1992) 78–79.

²² Jörg Splett, “Meaning,” in *Sacramentum Mundi* (London: Burns and Oates, 1969) 4.5–6.

²³ “Sittliche Wahrheit ist auf ihre praktischen Implikationen hin aufgeschüsselte Sinnwahrheit” (Klaus Demmer, “Vergebung empfangen und der Versöhnung dienen: Überlegungen zur Berufung des Christen auf dem Feld des Ethos,” *Gregorianum* 67 [1986] 237).

²⁴ Karl-Otto Apel, “Szientifik, Hermeneutik, Ideologie-Kritik: Entwurf einer Wissenschaftslehre in erkenntnisanthropologischer Sicht,” *Man and World* 1 (1968) 39.

²⁵ “So mag es konsequent erscheinen, sittliche Wahrheit in dieses Telos einschwingen zu lassen, mithin sittliche Grundbegriffe als solcherart finalisierte Tendenzbegriffe anzusehen” (Klaus Demmer, *Deuten und handeln: Grundlagen und Grundfragen der Fundamental-moral* [Freiburg: Herder, 1985] 15).

As the soul of one's life project, meaning conditions freedom. In a moral context freedom is not the ability to choose between objects; freedom is the ability to achieve the good. By providing a normative orientation to reality, meaning provides the legitimate boundaries of freedom.

This approach to moral truth and freedom also impacts the objectivity of a moral claim. The justification of moral conduct differs crucially from the neutral assessment of the natural sciences. The justification of a moral claim makes sense only in reference to the insight and freedom of the subject; this protects against any heteronomous justification of the moral claim. In terms of the sociology of knowledge, the context of genesis is not only embodied in the context of justification, but the former is constitutive of the latter.²⁶ The objectivity of a moral claim cannot be detached from a more original subjective context. Though a transcendental category, human subjectivity is not an empty category. Human subjectivity is structured by the mutually conditioning relationship between the ideology of human flourishing and the normative understanding of human reality. Together they guide freedom and insight. The progressive mediation of morality and anthropology—or between metaphysical and historical categories—is the task of the autonomy of moral reasoning.

The autonomy of moral reasoning is not understood in a Kantian sense of the self-sufficiency of reason. Recent studies in epistemology and the philosophy of science have underlined the hermeneutical axiom of the conditionedness of all thought and knowledge.²⁷ Reason is always already embedded in cognitive and linguistic contexts. In a postmodern environment, the reference is always to a relational autonomy of reason. But while there has been a clear antimodern emphasis in the literature detailing the narrative structure of moral reasoning, that structure cannot be taken to mean that reason is landlocked in a closed horizon; the narrative structure of reason would degenerate then into "confessionalism" or "fideism."²⁸ If that was the case, the radically other would take the shape of Wittgenstein's lion, of whom he said, "If he could talk, we could not understand him."²⁹ Such

²⁶ "Eine sittliche Verpflichtung gründet in einem transzendenzverwiesenen Setzungssakt, der Selbstverpflichtung meint. Genesis ist aus diesem Grunde nicht nur manifestativ, sie ist zugleich konstitutiv" (ibid. 17).

²⁷ For instance Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago, 1970), and Stephen Toulmin, *Human Understanding 1: The Collective Use and Evolution of Concepts* (Princeton: Princeton Univ., 1972).

²⁸ This touches the debate about the public character of theology; see Tracy, *Analogical Imagination* 28–31.

²⁹ This famous adage is found in his *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M.

theoretical incommensurability between moral traditions unwittingly contains the refusal to recognize the other as an other who could challenge one's validity claims.³⁰

Dialogue with the radically other, however, prefigures and presupposes the conditions of universal communication as its implicit telos.³¹ The universal community of communication impels the expansion of the finite perspectives of the participants. With a relational autonomy, the dialogue with the radically other shifts the emphasis away from the narrative structure of reason to the experiential adequacy of reason's conditions. Again, the hermeneutical category of "newness" comes to the fore. This means that in the dialogue with the radically other, the autonomy of moral reason assumes the responsibility to project beyond the limits of cognitive and linguistic horizons, to think beyond oppositions, and to achieve mutual and cooperative understanding.³²

The relational autonomy of moral reasoning also implies a conception of history. History is not equated with the cosmocentric category of time. History is an anthropological category; it is the explicitation or projection of meaning into time; history is time interpreted or transcended by meaning.³³ The ideology of human fulfillment and the normative understanding of reality which embodies it point the direction for this process, and they provide the necessary network of cognitive relations and the standards of freedom in which history takes place. History is the accomplishment of freedom and insight. Moral reason builds a normal scientific tradition with a family resemblance or internal coherence among norms. Sharing in a cognitive tradition allows moral reason to pose questions in a meaningful way, perceive relevant

Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1985) 223. The issue of radical incommensurability is discussed by Donald Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984) 185.

³⁰ Franklin I. Gamwell, *The Divine Good: Modern Moral Theory and the Necessity of God*, with a Foreword by David Tracy (San Francisco: Harper, 1990) 135.

³¹ Karl-Otto Apel, "The Problem of Philosophical Fundamental-Grounding in Light of a Transcendental Pragmatic of Language," *Man and World* 8 (1975) 267; also "The A Priori of the Communication Community and the Foundation of Ethics," in *Towards a Transformation of Philosophy*, trans. Glyn Adey and David Frisby (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980) 263.

³² Klaus Demmer, "Der Dienst der Versöhnung als Berufung des Christen im Kontext autonomer Sittlichkeit," in *Theorie der Sprachhandlungen und heutige Ekklesiologie: Ein philosophisch-theologisches Gespräch*, ed. Peter Hünemann and Richard Schaeffler (Freiburg: Herder, 1987) 152.

³³ Bernard Lonergan, "Theology in its New Context," in *A Second Collection*, ed. William Ryan and Bernard Tyrell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974) 62.

problems, and provide adequate answers. As in all sciences, however, the traditional criteria for the recognition and solution of problems stand in an essential tension with emancipatory possibilities. At times, the scientific community is required to question the otherwise unquestioned assumptions by which the community works; new insights are progressively discovered, communicated and carried through in better alternatives of action.³⁴ The resultant shift of paradigm is characterized as progress. Similarly, the autonomy of moral reason serves not only the appropriation but the transvaluation of its linguistic and cognitive tradition. In the tension between traditional and emancipatory possibilities, moral reason assumes a critical and creative role vis-à-vis the tradition.

The creative role of moral reasoning comes to the fore in the encounter with the radically other, an encounter that opens up the possibility of new insights being achieved, revising normative descriptions of the world and altering traditional standards of freedom. No doubt this depends upon the willingness to acknowledge in the other an authentic embodiment of exemplary experience and the identification of the criteria by which this is so.³⁵ The mutual recognition of participants that is a prerequisite for a genuine dialogue is dependent upon the recovery of the standards of freedom disclosed in the exemplary experiences of the participants. Only then can the transformative power of the encounter with the other come to the fore. Dialogue with the other, then, becomes the means to expand the community of communication; the history of moral freedom is a history of emancipation. The autonomy of moral reason is responsible for this process of liberation which can be characterized as moral progress.

In the dialogue with the other, attention is focused also on the network of cognitive relations in which moral reason works and the mutually conditioning relationship which exists between insight and freedom. Tradition is the objective and prior condition of possibility for moral reason; but this means that tradition provides the subjective knowledge of the real possibilities of freedom.³⁶ Tradition legitimates

³⁴ Paul Ricoeur, "Ethics and Culture: Habermas and Gadamer in Dialogue," *Philosophy Today* 17 (1973) 165–73; Jürgen Habermas, "A Review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*," in *Understanding and Social Inquiry*, ed. Fred R. Dallmayr and Thomas A. McCarthy (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1977) 335–63.

³⁵ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action 1: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1984) 20; also "Questions and Counterquestions," in *Habermas and Modernity*, ed. Richard Bernstein (Cambridge: MIT, 1985) 202.

³⁶ "[Tradition] ist objektive Vorgegebenheit, auf die alle sittliche Urteilsbildung sich

inquiry and the parameters of freedom; tradition safeguards the conception of human flourishing towards which members of the community of communication strive and against which their actions are judged. Outside of the tradition there is only a possible world which may be the object of the community's speculation, not of the community's praxis. Moral freedom is characterized by the entwining of moral goodness and moral rightness. Moral goodness refers to the motivation of the person; moral rightness refers to the intention of the act.³⁷ While distinct, these categories cannot be artificially separated. The unity of goodness and rightness reflects the accumulated experience and insight of the community; the unity of both categories maintains the tradition's legitimate expectations of freedom. In this way, the community's moral praxis reveals the plausibility and communicability of the conditioning ground of freedom and insight. In the dialogue with the other, however, the legitimate expectations of freedom and the community's traditional insights are communicated and risk transvaluation. The mutually conditioning relationship between insight and freedom is not broken, but expanded by the revision of the tradition and the creation of a new perspective on the world.

The dialogue with the other also impacts normative ethics. Normative ethics cannot be separated from hermeneutical reflection. Hermeneutical reflection guards against either a reductionist view of moral rightness or a conception of moral goodness that is relegated to motivation alone. The propositional form of the norm is ambiguous. The categorial meaning of the norm mediates a more primordial transcendental project containing the ideology of human fulfillment, a normative understanding of human reality, and historically accomplished standards of freedom. Through the weighing of goods, moral reason mediates this transcendental ground into the material content of a norm.³⁸ In this way, moral norms assume a prophylactic role prior to their prescriptive or proscriptive character. To forget that inner-worldly behavior embodies a more original project is to work with a truncated notion of the reasoning process. On the one hand, the inner-

bezieht. Sie ist aber auch subjektive Zuhandenheit, ein unmittelbares Mitwissen um das der Freiheit Mögliche und Zutragliche" (Klaus Demmer, *Moraltheologische Methodenlehre* [Freiburg: Herder, 1989] 59).

³⁷ There is an original use of this distinction in James Keenan, S.J., *Goodness and Rightness in Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologiae* (Washington: Georgetown Univ., 1992).

³⁸ Within the hierarchy of goods, there are personal goods and material goods. When the accent is on a personal good, the ideology of human flourishing impinges directly on the norm; when the accent is on a material good, the ideology of human flourishing impinges mediately on the norm.

worldly behavior sanctioned or prohibited by the norm is predetermined by this transcendental project to avoid any hint of subjectivism; on the other hand, only an objectivist paradigm of moral knowledge would separate the categorial content of the norm from its transcendental ground.

Finally, although the abstract formulation of the moral norm helps guarantee a level of communicability and agreement across diverse moral traditions, there is a deceptive surety to the abstract formulation of the norm. The meaning of the norm is only known in praxis. Praxis is not only the goal of the norm: praxis is the foundation for the understanding of the norm.³⁹ Because they embody prior normative descriptions of reality, norms that read the same may sanction or prohibit radically different praxis. In this sense, there may be a practical incommensurability between moral norms. In the terminology of the philosophy of language, a norm may have the same *locutionary* force, but that is no guarantee that a norm will have the same *illocutionary* force.⁴⁰

MORAL AUTONOMY AND SALVATION HISTORY

In recent literature, the relevance of faith for normative ethics has been treated under the rubric of an autonomous ethic in the context of faith, or an ethic of faith (*Glaubensethik*).⁴¹ The debate has focused on whether or not there is a *specifically* Christian ethic.⁴² Lacking in the literature, however, is a concern for the interests that condition and limit the question of specificity. For instance, while an autonomous ethic protects the rational and communicable character of a moral claim, it is based on a tacit ideal of science which has been surpassed by a historically informed philosophy of science. On the other hand, while an ethic of faith underlines the fact that adjudicating evidence is always rhetorical, it overlooks the need to question a claim's adequacy to experience.⁴³ Neither option can adequately conceive of the encoun-

³⁹ Matthew Lamb, *Solidarity with Victims: Toward a Theology of Social Transformation* (New York: Crossroad, 1982) 82–88.

⁴⁰ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ., 1962) 98–107.

⁴¹ Vincent MacNamara, *Faith and Ethics: Recent Roman Catholicism* (Washington: Georgetown Univ., 1985).

⁴² Compare for instance Josef Fuchs, "Autonomous Morality and Morality of Faith," in *Personal Responsibility and Christian Morality* (Washington: Georgetown Univ., 1983) 103–109, and Bernhard Stoeckle, "Evidence," in *Concise Dictionary of Christian Ethics* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979) 90–93.

⁴³ Narrative and rational-critical thinking must complement each other; alone, neither is sufficient to capture the theological enterprise.

ter with the other. Argumentative discourse is not self-legitimizing, but always presupposes defined criteria of meaning; narrative discourse, on the other hand, cannot criticize or put itself in question. A hermeneutical methodology opens the way for a more nuanced and correlational treatment of the relationship between faith and reason. The need is to respect the narrative function of faith and, at the same time, allow faith to contribute to the universal community of communication.⁴⁴

What significance do the truths of faith have for moral truth?⁴⁵ Within the Catholic tradition, it would be a distortion of both revelation and moral reasoning to reduce revelation to divine commands directly regulating moral behavior. Moral truths are not deduced directly from either the fact or content of revelation. This in no way implies that the two are unrelated; the question is *how* they are related. Their relationship is hermeneutical: reason cannot be separated from what one professes in the creed nor can faith be evoked simplistically as a mystery when reason reaches its limit. Faith and reason are in a mutually conditioning relationship.

On the one hand, faith is in harmony with reason (DS 3009). This precludes any voluntaristic conception of revelation; the claims of faith presuppose—as a condition of their possibility—the ability of the person to understand them; they contain an element of intelligibility and plausibility. This does not impose a reductive rationalism on the mystery of faith; the analogy of being safeguards the mystery of faith from ever being exhausted by human reason. The question is what does the creed offer to human self-understanding, to the community's view of the world, and to the believer's way of being-and-acting-in-the-world.⁴⁶

On the other hand, faith illuminates reason (DS 3019); *ratio fide illuminata* is the subjective principle of all moral knowledge. Historically a pure reason does not exist; a pure reason is a construct of an historically naive conception of science. Behind the question of "spec-

⁴⁴ Compare George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984) and David Tracy, "Lindbeck's New Program for Theology: A Reflection," *The Thomist* 49 (1985) 460–72. For the relevance of this debate for moral theology, see David Hollenbach, "Fundamental Theology and the Christian Moral Life," in *Faithful Witness*, ed. T. Howland Sanks and Leo O'Donovan (New York: Crossroad, 1989) 167–84.

⁴⁵ Josef Fuchs, "Moral Truths—Truths of Salvation?" in *Christian Ethics in a Secular Arena* (Washington: Georgetown Univ., 1984) 48–67; Jean Marie Aubert, "Debats autour de la morale fondamentale," *Studia Moralia* 20 (1982) 213–15; James Walter, "The Dependence of Christian Morality on Faith," *Église et Théologie* 12 (1981) 237–77.

⁴⁶ "Die bedrängende Frage lautet, was der Glaube für das Selbstverständnis des Menschen, für sein Weltverständnis, für den Sinn seines Daseins und Wirkens beinhalte" (Demmer, *Moraltheologische Methodenlehre* 72).

ificity" is an anthropology of knowledge within which faith and reason remain juxtaposed to each other; when faith is extrinsic to reason, reason too easily assumes a universalist character.⁴⁷ Breaking from the ideal of science of the Enlightenment has an immediate impact on natural-law arguments in theology. The object of the natural law is not only inner-worldly behavior but the transcendental ground of behavior. Similar to the grammar that structures the meaningful use of language, this conditioning ground sketches the horizon in which natural-law arguments are made; it predetermines moral experience and insight; it provides the criteria for normativity. In this way, there is no natural-law argument that is not under the sway of the effective history of faith.⁴⁸ Faith provides the hermeneutical key to unlock the meaning of nature—not in its phenomenal structure, but in its normativity.

Pedagogically, the creed incorporates the believer into a community. So while the truths of the creed do not provide specific moral norms, the truths expressed in the creed influence moral reasoning in an indirect way by forming the self-understanding of the believing community. There are what Demmer calls "anthropological implications" of faith which determine freedom, guide reason, and animate moral action. They stand as middle terms between moral truth and the truths of faith.⁴⁹ The anthropological implications of faith form the background knowledge of anyone incorporated into the believing community. They provide the contours of a Christian pattern of perception. They form a habit of mind, and sensitize the believer to perceive the world a certain way; they inform and elucidate descriptions and interpretations of the world. They form basic human integrative convictions through which moral experiences are organized; they circumscribe a horizon in which moral reason works.⁵⁰ The anthropological implications of faith do not solve moral problems; rather, they help "set the problem" and put into motion a network of cognitive relations through

⁴⁷ For the prevalence of this epistemological option in the Catholic manualist tradition, see the excellent historical studies of Gerhard Stanke, *Die Lehre von den "Quellen der Moralität": Darstellung und Diskussion der neuscholastischen Aussagen und neuerer Ansätze* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1984); and John A. Gallagher, *Time Past, Time Future: An Historical Study of Catholic Moral Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1990). For a critique of this epistemological presupposition, see Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics After Babel: The Languages of Morals and Their Discontents* (Boston: Beacon, 1988).

⁴⁸ Jean Marie Aubert, "Pour une épistémologie de la morale chrétienne," *Studia Moralia* 18 (1980) 93–97.

⁴⁹ Demmer, "Der Dienst der Versöhnung" 157.

⁵⁰ "[Die anthropologische Implikationen des Glaubens] sind Wegmarken zu vergleichen, die eine Richtung des Denkens anzeigen" (Demmer, *Moraltheologische Methodenlehre* 82); also Küng, *Global Responsibility* 66–69.

which believers speak and reason about the world in a meaningful way. Hermeneutically, the profession of the creed and the community it establishes provide the pragmatic conditions of argumentative discourse. In this way, faith is not a limit but the condition of possibility for moral reasoning.⁵¹ The question is whether the Christian creed can provide the pragmatic conditions of the communicative interaction needed in a global context. Is the Christian creed capable of sustaining a dialogical rather than a polemical encounter with the radical other? Can the Christian creed allow a truly universal communication?

A first article of faith is the *imago Dei*. Being created in the image of God (Gen 1:26–27) confers an indestructible dignity upon the human person. This dignity is not merited; it is not destroyed by sin; it is not diminished by any quality that might distinguish persons from each other. The recognition of the full and unique humanness of the other is the indispensable presupposition for any dialogue with the other; without it dialogue is not possible.

Secondly, in the creed one confesses belief “in Jesus the Christ, born of the Virgin, and made flesh.” Through the Word made flesh God draws close to humankind; the Incarnation allows for a new form of human solidarity. One of the basic anthropological implications of the profession of faith is that one should “view all human contact as part of the incarnate presence of God.”⁵² It is the Christian’s willingness to approach and listen to the other—even when the other takes the radical form of an enemy (Matt 22:37)—that creates a space of encounter from which speech may arise.

In a third article of faith, the Christian professes “to wait for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.” With this belief, the Christian confidently leaves the final judgment on history to God (1 Cor 4:5). This allows moral reasoning to continually relativize “final” judgements within human relationships. In other words, dialogue with the other is never broken off in resignation. Language involves not only speaking but listening. Listening to the other translates into a readiness for reconciliation so that the healing of brokenness and divisiveness is at the heart of human language.⁵³ Dialogue with the other presupposes that truth emerges through listening; through the *conversatio cum aliis*, truth unfolds into history. By its nature, dialogue transcends the vicious circle of violence and retribu-

⁵¹ Josef Fuchs, “Christian Morality: Biblical Orientation and Human Evaluation,” *Gregorianum* 67 (1986) 745–63; Demmer, *Moraltheologische Methodenlehre* 83–85, 90.

⁵² Klaus Demmer, “Reliability,” in *Dictionary* 215.

⁵³ Klaus Demmer, “Forgiveness,” in *Dictionary* 106; Fred Dallmayr, “Critical Theory and Reconciliation,” in *Habermas, Modernity, and Public Theology*, ed. Don Browning and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1992) 144–45.

tion with the hope of reconciliation (Matt 18:21–22). In the end, the ability to dialogue with the other generates a capability for peace and leads to the achievement of reconciliation and the bettering of the situation at hand.⁵⁴

These articles of faith provide a strictly theological ground for the necessary pragmatic conditions of dialogue: the principle of respect and the principle of reciprocity.⁵⁵ The pragmatic conditions of dialogue, however, entail normatively relevant assumptions. The principles of respect and reciprocity have normatively relevant content that precedes and guides the dialogue with the other. In entering into the dialogue with the other, the foremost aim of the Christian is not to resolve differences but to sustain “those normative practices and moral relationships within which reasoned agreement *as a way of life* can flourish and continue.”⁵⁶ The pragmatic conditions of dialogue entail a pledge to resist any effort to close off the principally universal horizon of communication or draw in the boundaries of the hermeneutical circle so as to exclude the other.

The Christian community, then, does not have a complete body of moral knowledge which is simply transferred from one context to another. Rather, by resisting the temptation to alienate or dominate the other, the Christian community is in a position to acknowledge and integrate into its horizon of meaning the truth of the other.⁵⁷ At the same time, the plausibility of the insights and praxis of the faith community serve the universal community of communication. Implicit to the universal community of communication is the search for truth and a responsibility for the world that extends beyond the faith community.⁵⁸ Finally, the basic principles of discourse ethics together with the normative constraints of argumentation serve as critical tests of the moral claims of the dialogue partners.⁵⁹ By being submitted to the requirements of communicative interaction, traditional standards of freedom can be criticized, destabilized and revised in order to set into

⁵⁴ Hans Küng, “Dialogability and Steadfastness: On Two Complementary Virtues,” in *Radical Pluralism & Truth* 249.

⁵⁵ Seyla Benhabib, “Communicative Ethics and Contemporary Controversies in Practical Philosophy,” in *The Communicative Ethics Controversy* 337.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 346.

⁵⁷ “Die Gemeinschaft der Glaubenden tritt nicht mit dem Anspruch auf, in allem eine vollendete sittliche Erkenntnis zu haben; sie nimmt keinen geschichtsjenseitigen Standpunkt ein. Wohl aber reklamiert sie für sich ein vollendetes Erkenntnisprinzip. Das versetzt sie in den Stand, ohne Vorurteil wahre Erkenntnis zu rezipieren” (Demmer, *Moraltheologische Methodenlehre* 91).

⁵⁸ Placher, *Unapologetic Theology* 147–49; Demmer, *Moraltheologische Methodenlehre* 90.

⁵⁹ Benhabib, “Communicative Ethics” 346–47.

motion a new history of moral insight.⁶⁰ Freedom and praxis, experience and insight are in mutually conditioning relationships. Between them there is a circular structure that cannot be broken but must be expanded; this expansion is the task for moral reasoning.

It would be illusory to assume that the normative conditions of universal communication translate directly into some ideal form of life. "No historical society coincides with the form of life that we anticipate in the concept of the ideal speech situation."⁶¹ The universal community of communication, though anticipated in any dialogue with the other, remains a regulative and critical ideal. There is a tension between present realities and the counterfactual—in theological terms, between ethics and eschatology. The universal communicability of moral insight is limited by its historical horizon. The tension is progressively but never definitively resolved through the constraints of discourse ethics; its resolution is a permanent task for moral reasoning. When the resolution of this tension is accomplished through dialogue, it can never imply the subjugation of the other but the mutual enrichment of the partners through the introduction of new and previously unknown perspectives on the world.⁶² The model of discourse ethics allows moral reasoning to pursue and achieve higher or better standards of freedom in a way that expands the community of communication and offers new possibilities for being-and-acting-in-the-world.⁶³ The expansion of the community of communication on account of better alternatives of moral action is characterized as moral progress; moral progress is the goal of the dialogue with the other. A communicative rationality, then, contains an eschatological perspective which is not naively equated with speculation about an unknown fu-

⁶⁰ The critical, stimulating and integrating function of faith is described in Alfons Auer, *Autonome Moral und christlicher Glaube* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1984) 189–97.

⁶¹ Jürgen Habermas and Niklas Luhmann, *Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie—Was leistet die Systemforschung?* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1971) 140–41.

⁶² Unfortunately, Placher speaks of the enrichment that results from a conversation in terms of correcting errors or discovering who is right and who is wrong; see *Unapologetic Theology* 147. This leads to a dangerously whiggish view of history; similarly see Stout, *Ethics After Babel* 24–28. In contrast to this approach, Demmer writes with regard to the goal of the conversation: "[Dabei geht es] nicht in erster Linie um die Aufdeckung einzelner Fehler, sondern um eine umfassende Verbesserung" (*Moraltheologische Methodenlehre* 78). Here historical change results from the effective historical mediation of theory and praxis. See Paul Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text," in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ., 1984) 197–221.

⁶³ "Immer geht es darum, solche Handlungskriterien zu finden, die eine umfassende Verbesserung der Situation herbeiführen" (Demmer, *Moraltheologische Methodenlehre* 85).

ture, but provides moral reasoning with an emancipatory power, an ability to bring about the state of affairs "which appears in discourse and which discourse presupposes."⁶⁴

THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST

Although the profession of faith is in harmony with the necessary communicative presuppositions of argumentative discourse, the effective history of faith sets into motion a new standard of freedom and insight in the universal community of communication. The freedom of the believer is founded in the person of Jesus Christ disclosed in the texts of the New Testament. It needs to be shown how the gospel inspires the moral freedom of the Christian in the dialogue with the other. What standard of freedom can be retrieved from the New Testament to aid the dialogue with the other?

The Christological foundation of morality stands as a reaction to the manualist natural-law tradition. The neo-scholastic manuals were modeled on the scientific ideal of the Enlightenment. No doubt this ideal helped guarantee the universal communicability of a norm, but there was a concomitant dualism between the law of grace and the law of nature.⁶⁵ With the separation of faith and reason, faith was relegated to the level of motivation; the material content of the moral claim was determined by the natural law.

The Christological foundation of morality in no way implies a hermeneutically naive use of Scripture in moral argumentation. The Christian texts are insufficient in terms of both moral content and methodology.⁶⁶ Only a crude fundamentalism would allow individual passages to be transposed into new contexts without going through a multifaceted hermeneutical filter. The critical use of Scripture in moral argumentation must take into account not only the fact that individual texts contribute to a literary canon and cannot be understood outside of this whole, but the use of Scripture must also reckon with the fact that there is an immanent historicity to moral knowledge.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Nicholas Lash, "Conversation in Gethsemane," in *Radical Pluralism & Truth* 56–61; Karl Rahner, "The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions," in *Theological Investigations* 4 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966) 334; Demmer, *Moraltheologische Methodenlehre* 91–92.

⁶⁵ The separation of these two realms was based on a metaphysical and ahistorical conception of the natural law. The pluralism of moral insight is conceivable only within an historical understanding of the natural law.

⁶⁶ Wolfgang Schrage, *The Ethics of the New Testament*, trans. David E. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) 5–12.

⁶⁷ "Es gibt nicht nur ein Fortschreiten in der Erkenntnis Gottes, sondern auch in der

A basic methodological tenet of hermeneutical theory is that a text must be read in the context in which it occurs.⁶⁸ This means that the general context for the Synoptic Gospels is the Hebrew Scriptures; more specifically the context for the gospel writers is first-century Judaism. The New Testament must be read as a source for and product of first-century Judaism. The tradition of Judaism in the Second Temple period provides the context that will underline both the continuity and the newness that is found in the Synoptic Gospel accounts of Jesus' ministry.⁶⁹ By understanding the Judaic background of Jesus' preaching, one simultaneously captures the originality of his teaching. Newness or novelty is only understood in relation to the tradition it supersedes. The fundamental question is how a text confirms and/or critically develops the tradition from which it comes?⁷⁰

But hermeneutical reflection is not limited to a retrospective analysis; it is completed by a prospective analysis. Though the hermeneutical meaning of "context" refers primarily to the prehistory of a text, secondarily it refers to the effective history of the text. Here the theologian will move from the historical-critical questions of textual origins to the interpretive potential of the Christian texts.⁷¹ The Christian texts provoke a history of interpretation; there is an ongoing reading of the Christian texts. Hermeneutical theory must bridge the distance between the text and the present. "Reading is the *pharmakon*, the 'remedy,' by which the meaning of the text is 'rescued' from the estrangement of distanciation and put in a new proximity, a proximity which suppresses and preserves the cultural distance and includes the otherness within the ownness."⁷²

Through reading there is a fusion of horizons between the text and the reader.⁷³ The ongoing fusion of horizons underlines the unavoid-

denkerischen Vermittlung zwischen Glaubenseinsicht und sittlicher Einsicht. Der Schriftgebrauch des Moralthologen hat darauf Rücksicht zu nehmen" (Demmer, *Moraltheologische Methodenlehre* 113).

⁶⁸ Demmer, *Deuten und handeln* 98–99.

⁶⁹ See the work of John Riches, *Jesus and the Transformation of Judaism* (New York: Seabury, 1980) 62–86; Bernard J. Lee, *The Galilean Jewishness of Jesus: Retrieving the Jewish Origins of Christianity* (New York: Paulist, 1988) 53–95.

⁷⁰ "Die Frage des Hermeneuten lautet dann: Wird die Tradition bestätigt oder kritisch weiterentwickelt?" (Demmer, *Moraltheologische Methodenlehre* 113).

⁷¹ Paul Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation," in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* 139–40.

⁷² Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian Univ., 1976) 43; also Demmer, *Deuten und handeln* 87.

⁷³ The fusion of horizons turns the hermeneutical circle into an expanding spiral. See

able finitude and relatedness of all knowledge and the essential reference to tradition in all reasoning, but also the freedom to constitute new perspectives of thought and action within this tradition.⁷⁴ The importance of Scripture for moral argumentation is not that passages can be repeated so as to solve a contemporary moral dilemma. The importance of Scripture is that through a "reading" or an act of interpretation its truth may be continually and progressively appropriated by moral reasoning.⁷⁵ Accordingly, as Jeanrond writes, the meaning of a text is "not at one's disposition in a static grasp but rather in the dynamic of the recipient's linguistic activity of reading."⁷⁶ In this way, biblical passages continue to effect the self-understanding of the community. No doubt each historical interpretation of a text is limited, but in the limitation of every interpretation is founded the freedom to discover ever new, genuine, and possible modes-of-being-and-acting-in-the-world.

The dual nature of hermeneutical reflection is exemplified by a brief reading of the antithetic statements of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:21–48). Surely, the antithetic statements are not taken literally to provide material normative claims. They must be interpreted in light of the central concern for the writer which is that with Jesus the kingdom of God is at hand. Such a message sets the gospel in contemporary Jewish restoration eschatology.⁷⁷ With the coming of the kingdom, however, the status of the Mosaic law changes; it is neither absolute nor final, and needs to be reinterpreted for the new age.⁷⁸ On the one hand, the writer avoids any hint of Christian antinomianism ("Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law and the prophets" [Matt

David Tracy, "Creativity in the Interpretation of Religion: The Question of Radical Pluralism," *New Literary History* 15 (1983–84) 289–309.

⁷⁴ For the prospective dimension of a text, see the excellent hermeneutical study of Werner G. Jeanrond, *Text and Interpretation as Categories of Theological Thinking*, trans. Thomas J. Wilson (New York: Crossroad, 1988) 151–52.

⁷⁵ As Franz Böckle writes: "*Moraltheologie läßt sich nicht auf exegetische Aussagen über Moral reduzieren. Sie muß darüber hinausgehen; denn die evangelische Botschaft bedeutet nicht eine retrospektiv biblische Verkündigung, sondern auf das Leben hin dynamisch orientierte Verkündigung biblischer Aussagen in je neue Zeiten und je neue Gegebenheiten hinein*" ("*Moraltheologie und Exegese heute*," in *Ethik im Neuen Testament*, ed. Karl Kertelge (Freiburg: Herder, 1984) 199–200 [emphasis in the original]).

⁷⁶ *Text and Interpretation* 83.

⁷⁷ Klyne R. Snodgrass, "Matthew's Understanding of the Law," *Interpretation* 46 (1992) 369; A. Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraints of History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982) 53–54.

⁷⁸ Riches, *Jesus and the Transformation of Judaism* 184; Paul M. van Buren, *A Christian Theology of the People Israel 2: A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality* (New York: Seabury Press, 1983) 230–39; Schrage, *The Ethics of the New Testament* 56–62.

5:17–18]), and on the other hand, the writer sets out to correct erroneous or limited interpretations of the law (“but what I tell you”).⁷⁹ The hermeneutical key by which Jesus reinterprets, fulfills (*plērōsai*), and redirects the Law is the “better righteousness” he requires (Matt 5:20).

The fulfillment or accomplishment of the Law happens in two distinct ways. In the primary antithetic statements the Law is interiorized; “do not kill” becomes “do not be angry” (Matt 5:21–23); Jesus affirms the Law and presses beyond it by recovering its intention. As Sanders writes, “Jesus here appears as interpreter of the law, not its opponent.”⁸⁰ In the secondary antithetic statements, however, Jesus assumes the freedom and authority to provide a new standard which transcends that embedded in the Law.⁸¹ His teaching is a redirection of the Law in light of the command to seek a better righteousness. For instance, in place of the *ius talionis*, Jesus admonishes his disciples to seek better alternatives of action when confronted with the limitations and constrictions of human living (Matt 5:38–42).⁸²

Jesus’ transcending of the *ius talionis* has repercussions on the logic of the casuistry which the law determined. The law of talion made sure that injustice was not ignored and limited uncontrolled vengeance by the threat of equal retaliation; the law served as a dam to keep evil at bay.⁸³ In the new age, however, the disciples of Christ receive a competency that redirects the casuistic logic of the *ius talionis*; they are able to strive for what is “qualitatively more.” Evil is no longer to be controlled but surpassed by a better righteousness.⁸⁴ The extreme examples given in the gospel—turning the other cheek, giving up possessions, walking the extra mile, giving to those who ask—are not a new set of norms for the Christian, but reflect the Christian’s seriousness to discover and implement better alternatives in face of all situations of human injustice, conflict, and limitation. The driving force

⁷⁹ As E. P. Sanders points out, “the verb ‘to say’ in legal debate means ‘to interpret’” [“The Synoptic Jesus and the Law,” in *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah: Five Studies* (London: SCM, 1990) 93].

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Robert Banks, *Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ., 1975) 182–203.

⁸² Compare E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 23–58, 335–40; and Schrage, *The Ethics of the New Testament* 62–67.

⁸³ “Das Gesetz ist—um im Bilde zu sprechen—einem Damm oder Bollwerk vergleichbar, welches den Freiraum des Guten umschreibt und absichert” (Demmer, *Deuten und handeln* 101).

⁸⁴ Wilhelm Egger, “Handlungsorientierte Auslegung der Antithesen Mt. 5, 21–48,” in *Ethik im Neuen Testament* 125; Schrage, *The Ethics of the New Testament* 146.

behind the Christian's freedom to surpass evil with good is the unbounded mercy of God which the Christian is called to imitate (Matt 5:48). The New Testament understanding of God exerts a stimulating effective history on the ability of freedom to achieve the good in a way that even the strictest obedience to the Law was incapable of achieving. With this new competency of freedom comes a new strategy for moral action; the logic of the law of talion is reversed: the Christian is never resigned merely to controlling evil, but will strive to expand the area in which good can be done.⁸⁵

The Christological foundation of morality, when seen in a hermeneutical methodology, throws new light on the question of the *proprium* of Christian ethics. On the one hand, there is no specific normative content that is exclusive to Christians. On the other hand, locating the *proprium* of Christian ethics in a specific Christian intentionality overlooks the unity of experience and action.⁸⁶ Epistemologically, neither alternative is adequate; neither contributes to dialogue with the other in a global context.

The hermeneutical method that enables the dialogue with the other allows for a more radical solution by refocusing the question. Hermeneutically, the Christological foundation of ethics is not a question about *specificity* but about *newness*.⁸⁷ In this way, the question of the *proprium* of Christian ethics avoids the inadequate and abstract contrast between the law of Christ and the natural moral law. No doubt the newness of Jesus' preaching is of a formal nature, but that does not lessen its categorial relevance. What is given in the person of Christ is a criterion of moral agency to be continually recovered through the labor of interpretation.⁸⁸ The "reading" of the Scriptures sets into motion a new effective history of freedom which allows Christian moral reasoning to reconcile differences into a higher perspective or a more inclusive synthesis. With the competency of Christian freedom to strive for the qualitatively more, a new and better weighing of goods becomes possible. The qualitative more that Christian moral reason-

⁸⁵ Jesus provides the community with a new standard of freedom and strategy for action. E.g., putting a limitation on forgiveness has no meaning for the Christian community (Matt 18:21–22); see Demmer, *Deuten und handeln* 102–103.

⁸⁶ Auer, *Autonome Morale und christlicher Glaube* 92–95.

⁸⁷ Klaus Demmer, "Il nuovo nell'attuale problematica intorno allo specifico dell'etica cristiana," in *Il problema del nuovo nella teologia morale*, ed. Lorenzo Alvarez-Verdes (Rome: Editrice Rogata, 1986) 83–85; also *Deuten und handeln* 96–99.

⁸⁸ Lash, "Conversation in Gethsemane" 60; Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William Dych (New York: Seabury, 1978) 157–58.

ing strives for, however, is not some unattainable or utopian ideal, but the development of genuine, communicable, and plausible possibilities of action for the community of communication.⁸⁹

The newness of Christian ethics can be understood in terms of the distinction between moral goodness and rightness. Hermeneutically, there is no weighing of goods or moral rightness without reference to the legitimate expectations and standards of goodness. That is, there is no moral rightness as such; rightness is always bound to and reflective of an achieved competency of moral freedom. But this means that as freedom achieves new standards, moral rightness becomes a continual historical accomplishment. Moral rightness is not determined "by the nature of things" or nature's objectivity, because nature's normativity is under the effective history of freedom.⁹⁰ The reciprocally conditioning relationship between moral freedom and insight strives progressively to overcome prevailing limitations, injustices, or conflicts in human living. In this process of history, freedom is resituated in relation to nature, and moral norms are innovatively reformulated and given new meaning; then the moral praxis of the community is given a new communicative foundation.⁹¹

SPEECH ACTS AND MORAL ACTION

A hermeneutical methodology also allows for a more nuanced treatment of moral action. A parallel or analogy can be made between speech acts and moral action.⁹² A speech act can be analyzed according to the rules of the grammar which structure it (*langue*) or as an act of communication (*parole*). Linguistical and hermeneutical analysis are not separate concerns; both interests mutually condition each other.⁹³ As structured communicative acts, speech acts and moral acts are mediated realities.

⁸⁹ "Weil die Befindlichkeit des Handelnden sich qualitativ gewandelt hat, werden neue und bessere Abwägungen möglich. . . . Ihm ist die Gabe der Unterscheidung gegeben, das qualitative Mehr seiner sittlichen Einsicht zu ergreifen. Dabei bliebe hervorzuheben, daß dieses Mehr nicht als ein unerreichbares Ideal zu verstehen ist, an dessen Verwirklichung man sich aufreibt, sondern als eine geschenkte Möglichkeit des Handelns" (Demmer, *Deuten und handeln* 111–12); see also *Die Wahrheit leben* 40–44.

⁹⁰ Demmer, *Moraltheologische Methodenlehre* 116.

⁹¹ Demmer, *Deuten und handeln* 110.

⁹² Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text" 197–221; Ingolf Dalferth and Eberhard Jüngel, "Sprache als Träger von Sittlichkeit," in *Handbuch der christlichen Ethik*, ed. Anselm Hertz et al. (Freiburg: Herder, 1978) 2.454–73; Charles Taylor, "Language and Society," in *Communicative Action*, ed. Axel Honneth and Hans Joas (Cambridge: MIT, 1991) 23–29.

⁹³ Jeanrond, *Text and Interpretation* 77–78, with reference to Elisabeth Gülich and Wolfgang Raible, *Linguistische Textmodelle: Grundlagen und Möglichkeiten* (Munich: Fink, 1977) 47.

Moral acts are structured by one's convictions and commitments.⁹⁴ Normative ethics cannot be separated from virtue ethics; the latter provides the background against which the former is understood. One's actions reveal one's character. An adequate analysis of moral action must include the issue of character. This perspective shifts the emphasis away from an analysis of principles and norms; it focuses attention on the inner structure of moral action. The linguistic formulation of a moral norm is a second-order reality; the meaning of a moral norm is dependent upon the self-understanding of the subject.⁹⁵ One's basic commitments embody one's life goals and point the direction of future decisions; one's basic commitments form a communicative core that integrates experience and provides the physiognomy of moral insight. Contrast experiences sharpen the profile of one's life project.⁹⁶ They reveal that there is not only a hierarchy of truths but also a hierarchy of decisions. One's life project is present in a tacit way in individual moral acts and creates a family resemblance among them. Right actions are exemplary instantiations of what one has taken to be the meaning of human flourishing; moral action, then, can be said to be the last element in the constitution of history.

The parallel between the moral action and speech acts also precludes any solipsistic analysis of the moral act which is encouraged by a truncated notion of normative ethics. Both are social realities. As the means of communication, language presupposes a common world of understanding.⁹⁷ Similarly, an isolated moral act—like an isolated word or text—has no meaning; an act rather receives its meaning from within a community of communication. There is no context-independent analysis of moral action. The practice of virtue or the formation of character make no sense outside socially embodied traditions whose normative descriptions of the world shape one's moral vision.⁹⁸ The analysis of the act is incomplete without the recovery of the anthropological context in which it is embedded. Every speech act discloses and witnesses to this more original and implicit context. The Eucharist, for instance, is the *memoria passionis, mortis, et resurrec-*

⁹⁴ Stephen E. Fowl and L. Gregory Jones, *Reading in Communion: Scripture & Ethics in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 9.

⁹⁵ "Normen stellen immer eine abgeleitete Wirklichkeit dar, die demgemäß auch der Peripherie des tragenden Selbstbewußtseins zugehören" (Demmer, "Der Dienst der Versöhnung" 162).

⁹⁶ Stackhouse, *Apologia* 185–88.

⁹⁷ A common form of life is presupposed for moral action. See, e.g., Paul Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1989) 18–24; Ann Patrick, "Narrative and the Social Dynamics of Virtue," *Concilium* 191 (1987) 69–71.

⁹⁸ Fowl and Jones, *Reading in Communion* 10.

*tionis Jesu Christi.*⁹⁹ When this dangerous memory is reenacted, the Church continues the reconciling words and actions of Jesus. As the founding event for the community's identity, it is the measure of the believer's action in the world. It recalls the central motive of the believer's actions: the imitation of the infinite mercy of God. This dangerous memory continually intervenes in the dialogue with the other to resist a life that is "incapable of discovering a trace of God in the countenance of the alien and uncomprehended other."¹⁰⁰ In order to witness to this event, the moral action of the Christian programmatically aims at reconciliation, a bettering of the situation at hand, and peace.

There is a third parallel between moral action and speech acts. Communication is partial when a common intersubjective horizon or world is lacking. In other words, language carries the effective history of the community of communication. When the common world of understanding develops, words receive new meanings and old meanings are discarded; the new context gives the same word new content. This is especially true after a shift of paradigm. The historicity of language finds a parallel in the history of moral action.¹⁰¹ Like language, the act can take on different meanings in different contexts. The phenomenal structure of the act is underdetermined; it is flexible in light of the development of the criteria of normativity. This development presupposes that the analysis of the moral act is based on historical and personalist categories rather than the essentialist metaphysics of the tradition.¹⁰² As historical-communicative action, moral acts share in the effective history of experience and insight.

The historicity of language underlines the creative function of moral reasoning in the dialogue with the other. In the dialogue with the other, the community of communication "develops anomalies in its application in new contexts."¹⁰³ A tension emerges between the tradition and its transvaluation. In opting to revise a tradition, however, moral progress will exact a price: this process will have repercussions

⁹⁹ Metz, "The 'One World' " 213.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. What can be called "eucharistic living" calls for a willingness to offer hospitality to others, especially the foreign "other"; Fowl and Jones, *Reading in Communion* 71-80.

¹⁰¹ Taylor, "Language and Society" 34.

¹⁰² "Die Metaphysik der Handlung geht von personalistischen Kategorien aus, das Modell einer Substanzmetaphysik wird verlassen" (Demmer, *Moraltheologische Methodenlehre* 128). See also Robert Hollinger, "Hermeneutics and Pragmatism," in *Hermeneutics and Praxis* ix-xx.

¹⁰³ Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine* 39.

on how reality is normatively construed and the standards by which goods are weighed; moral reasoning will be resituated in relation to nature and new criteria for normativity will emerge.

How does this impact the dialogue with the other? The dialogue with the other aims to expand the hermeneutical circle formed between the community of communication and its speech acts. When normative construals of reality come into conflict with one another, communities are able to learn from each other.¹⁰⁴ For this to happen, however, the moral norm must have a hypothetical character or an openness to assume different meanings in new contexts; norms share in the historicity of reason and freedom. There is a reciprocal relationship between a theory of action and normative theory. The meaning of a moral norm is open to revision in light of the discovery and implementation of better alternatives of insight and action. Moral norms exert a rational control over possible actions; they reflect the accomplished standards of action within a community of communication; but at the same time, moral norms are flexible in light of emerging possibilities of action giving the encounter and dialogue with the other an emancipatory character. The emergence of better alternatives is not understood in any mechanistic way; nor can the task to justify them be minimized. This cannot be done, however, without reference to the life experiences of the believer; here purely discursive arguments wane and proposed arguments take the form of an invitation to share in a life world and its approbated moral praxis. Possible and emerging moral practices must maintain the internal coherence of the community of communication and be seen as liberating instantiations of human meaning and purpose.

The recognition of the historicity of language and moral action has another important consequence in the dialogue with the other. Any dialogue with the other will be characterized by an attitude of tolerance. As Demmer writes, "tolerance is the virtue of the hermeneutician."¹⁰⁵ Tolerance is consequent to the recognition of the immanent historicity of moral knowledge. An attitude of tolerance will take into account not only the different ethological contexts which condition the assessment of moral problems and guide moral insight, but also the factors that "delimit the available possibilities of *praxis*."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ "Eine Kommunikationsgeschichte ist darum immer eine Lerngeschichte" (Demmer, *Moraltheologische Methodenlehre* 151–52).

¹⁰⁵ "Vergebung empfangen und der Versöhnung dienen" 248.

¹⁰⁶ The attitude of tolerance "macht ernst mit der Tatsache, daß es nicht nur eine unterschiedliche Rhythmik sittlicher Erkenntnisprozesse gibt, sondern auch unter-

The historicity of speech acts, and by analogy moral acts, does not imply any sort of relativism; that would undermine the communicative purpose of language. Rather it is consequent to the fact that there is no private language, no language that would be invulnerable to critique and revision. The historicity of language and moral action protects the dialogue with the other from degenerating into the actualizing of one vision of the world at the expense of others; dialogue presupposes a nonexclusive commitment to the good of the other. In the end, the historicity of language underlines humankind's capacity to learn from the other and to put into motion an effective history for a better future.

CONCLUSION

With the recognition of problems that effect the entire planet, there is a concomitant recognition of the pluralism of ethical traditions which must be taken into account in any adequate solution to any one problem. The experience of the "one world" is not evidence for the need to create "one ethic." An essentialist metaphysics is an inadequate methodological response to the issue of globalization. What is needed in a global context is a hermeneutical methodology articulated in the need to dialogue with the other.

This article has attempted to explore the implications of a hermeneutical methodology for a fundamental moral theology from within the Catholic tradition; this tradition is associated methodologically and materially with an autonomous ethic. Introducing a hermeneutical methodology within an autonomous ethic has immediate consequences on a number of traditional fundamental moral themes. Above all is the nature of moral truth which methodologically predetermines the solution to any problem; it predetermines the meaning of a moral norm. Moral reasoning is responsible for the discovery, formulation, and interpretation of the norm. Moral reason, however, is never purely autonomous. The transcendental conditions of freedom guide the weighing of goods in a way that praxis embodies the community's standards of freedom and reveals their plausibility.

A hermeneutical methodology also implies a conception of history. Through the dialogue with the other the norm is open to reformulation and new interpretations. The history of moral reasoning is understood as a history of emancipation. The emancipatory impetus of moral reasoning is rooted in the words and actions of Jesus, especially those recounted in the secondary antithetic statements of the Sermon on the

*schiedliche anthropologische Rahmenbedingungen und Handlungsmöglichkeiten. Toleranz ist der Versuch, den Nächsten aus seinen ihm zuhandenen Voraussetzungen zu verstehen. . . ." (ibid. 247–48); also Stackhouse, *Apologia* 203.*

Mount. In the dialogue with the other, the autonomy of reason becomes the competence of reason to step beyond differences and to emancipate a tradition into a more integrative description of the world. Reason informed by faith strives to raise the legitimate expectations of freedom. Better and liberating alternatives for action emerge with the achievement of new standards by which to weigh goods.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Research for this article was supported by a grant from the Pew Charitable Trust and the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada.