FROM THE SENSES TO SENSE: THE HERMENEUTICS OF LOVE

by Ingrid H. Shafer

Abstract. Drawing on philosophy, theology, comparative religion, spirituality, Holocaust studies, physics, biology, psychology, and personal experience, I argue that continued human existence depends on our willingness to reject nihilism—not as an expedient "noble lie" but because faith in a meaningful cosmos and the power of love is at least as validly grounded in human experience as insistence on cosmic indifference and ultimate futility. I maintain that hope will free us to develop nonimperialistic methods of bridging cultural differences by forming a mutually intelligible vocabulary that celebrates diversity, enters the worlds of others in respectful dialogue, and fosters a postmechanistic, organic, ecological, holistic, dynamic, interactive, open-ended model of reality. I lay the foundation for a "hermeneutics of love" to complement Paul Ricoeur's "hermeneutics of suspicion" and invite speculation on the ways science, technology, and society would be transformed if those "glasses of friendship" were widely applied.

Keywords: Altruism; cross-cultural dialogue; cross-disciplinary dialogue; hemisphericity; hermeneutics; *hesed;* holism; hope; mysticism; religion as language; second naiveté; truth and meaning; two-culture split.

That art thou, Śvetaketu.

—Chāndogya Upanishad

. . . the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

—Gerard Manley Hopkins

Ingrid H. Shafer is Mary Jo Ragan Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies and Professor of Philosophy and Religion at the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma, Chickasha, OK 73018, and can be reached most readily by e-mail (facshaferi@mercur.usao.edu). This article was originally delivered at the Templeton Symposium, "Science and Religion: Two Ways of Experiencing and Interpreting the World," organized by *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* and the Chicago Center for Religion and Science, 31 August–2 September 1993. This symposium and its publications were made possible through the generosity of the John Templeton Foundation.

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Living things reach out to each other, spirit leaps between. Tropism becomes scent, becomes fascination, becomes lust, becomes love. Lizard to fox to monkey to man, in a look, in a word, we come together, touch, die, serve spirit without knowing, carry it forward, pass it on. Ever more winged the spirit, ever greater its leaps. We love someone far away, someone who died long ago.

—Allen Wheelis, *"Reflections"*

". . . yes I said yes I will Yes"

—Molly Bloom/James Joyce, *Ulysses*

The critical problem then for those who wish to expand the area of trust and love in human relationships is not to eliminate diversity but to understand how diversity can be integrated in some form of unity. . . . The critical question is how to use these tensions and diversities to create a richer, fuller human society instead of a narrow, frightened and suspicious society.

—Andrew Greeley, *Why Can't They Be Like Us?*

Love is saying yes to belonging.

—David Steindl-Rast, *Belonging to the Universe*

ONE

What Is Hermeneutics? The title I chose for my presentation sounds ominously erudite. There is something about the word *hermeneutics* that makes the hearts of philosophers, literary critics, and theologians flutter with anticipation. In fact, the word is in-group academic jargon for "interpretation" and "theory of interpretation" as they relate to the ways we construct our worlds from whatever is given from outside. We are interpreters who create or at least cocreate what we consider "reality" in and through the active matrix of our imagination and pre-understanding. That matrix, in turn, is not fixed. It developed in the context of a particular cultural tradition and community, and is constantly being calibrated in light of the ongoing experience. The kind of world we see ourselves inhabiting and everything we do in response to that world are largely a function of the matrix we use to construct that world initially, that is, a function of our preexisting hermeneutics.[1]

Douglas Hofstadter compares our ways of information processing to a tree whose mighty trunk and branches tower above ground but depend for their very existence on the invisible root system below the surface. "Real world thinking" takes place above ground but is nourished by complex unconscious processes (1980, 569). Hofstadter suggests that those "uninterpretable" lower-level events (which bear close resemblance to Michael Polanyi's "tacit" knowing and Gadamer's *Vorverständnis*) are not only connected with imagery and

analogical (nonrational) "thinking" but also provide the matrix for creativity (1980, 571).

Brain hemisphere research tends to support Hofstadter's model by providing a neurophysiological basis (complete with measurable changes in the ergotropic and trophotropic subsystems and brain stem "toggles" designed to activate one or the other) for the two complementary ways of feeling and knowing. According to James P. Henry (1986, 55–58) and others, the left hemispheric system is primarily concerned with everyday reality and processes information sequentially, remembering temporal rhythms and patterns, ordering events in time. The right system concerns itself with dreams and other inner states of emotional involvement; it functions in a holistic, intuitive manner as it integrates parts into a whole and processes information in terms of spatial organization. While the systems are different and use mutually exclusive models of organizing information, neither is complete in isolation. Working together as one integrated, balanced system, they allow us a fullness of experience and expression impossible to each separately.

Citing Roger Sperry (1965), Hofstadter proposes a Hegel-evoking, time-inverting, paradox-embracing paradigm he calls "Strange Loop" or "Tangled Hierarchy" (in which the top level interacts with the bottom level while itself being determined by the latter) as foundation for human thought and ultimately the human self (Hofstadter 1980, 709).

After outlining hemispheric characteristics, Mordechai Rotenberg speculates that in cultures which encourage holistic, transcendent explanations of cosmic activities reality is apprehended primarily through right hemispheric operations. On the other hand, if the interpretation of reality is limited to a rational-analytic hermeneutic code, primarily left hemispheric operations will be involved (1986, 208). Citing Eugene d'Aquili (1983), Rotenberg argues that effective adaptation to the ever-changing environment requires a dialogical system which allows for multiple interpretations of reality. He speculates that in practice human "survival may largely depend on a double hermeneutic code allowing for balanced simultaneous reading of reality through analytic-rational-left hemisphere spectacles and through affective-mystic-right hemisphere lenses" (1986, 208).

In his introduction to Paul Ricoeur's *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (1981), John Thompson distinguishes between two major and opposed types of hermeneutics. Advocates of the first type view hermeneutics as the "restoration of a meaning addressed to the interpreter in the form of a message. This type of hermeneutics is animated by faith, by a willingness to listen, and is characterized by

a respect for the symbol as revelation of the sacred." Advocates of the second type regard hermeneutics as the "demystification of a meaning presented to the interpreter in the form of a disguise. This type of hermeneutics is animated by suspicion, by a scepticism toward the given, and it is characterised by a distrust of the symbols as a dissimulation of the real" (1981, 6). Obviously, if one of these interpretive schemes is considered totally right and the other totally wrong, they yield incompatible results. The potential for conflict increases once we superimpose these interpretive spectacles on other bifurcations, such as scientists versus humanists or scientists versus theologians, or even scientists versus scientists and theologians versus theologians. Cacophony, however, can be transformed into dynamic, fugal harmony if the interpretive schemes are allowed to play with, around, off, and against one another, each simultaneously enriching and complementing the other(s). In love, humanity has a universal translator that can serve as gateway into all knowledge, scientific and humanistic, a bridge that potentially connects us not only to other people and their myths, but to others in general—plants, animals, nature, conceivably the entire cosmos. Love is the channel that links us with what theologians call The Other. Love also allows us to get and remain in touch with ourselves.

The "Two Cultures" Revisited. The science-religion controversy grows out of competing methodologies rooted in the presumed intrinsic substantive differences that C.P. Snow called the "two cultures" in 1961. On the one hand, this model insists, there are the disciplines dealing with quantifiable data and mathematical relationships; on the other hand, there are the disciplines that confront the ambiguities of human existence. The former assume that rational solutions can be found to specific problems; the latter address what Crane Brinton refers to as the "Big Questions" that are inherently unquantifiable and allow for no single correct answer. The former have been called "hard or fixed" and the latter "soft or fluid." When validity is denied the latter, we enter the world of the Skinnerian human automata, programmed by positive and negative reinforcement, mechanical puppets or CD-ROM disks with no claim to "freedom and dignity" and, consequently, no accountability. At this point, quantification becomes an obstacle to self-understanding rather than a tool, especially since the claim of the "hard" sciences to privileged objectivity is losing ground, even among practitioners themselves. Ultimately, quite apart from failing to acknowledge the hybrid social sciences, the "two culture" paradigm is a barrier to understanding either the natural sciences or the humanistic

endeavor. It is precisely when we do what Douglas Hofstadter calls "real world" thinking which interactively joins intuition and intellect that the "hard" methods fail.

According to Ian Barbour (1966), this distinction affects the relationship of science and religion in two major ways. The first concerns method. Many scientists believe that science "provides technical knowledge of a specialized kind, rather than a total philosophy of life" and does so in the spirit of "impersonal objectivity," while theologians deal with issues of "ultimate concern" that demand personal involvement and are limited, for at least some theologians, to "God's self-disclosure in historical revelation" rather than "human discovery" (1966, 2). The second concems language. Linguistic analysts distinguish between the "spectator-language" of science that serves the purpose of "the prediction and control of publicly observable, repeatable phenomena" in contrast to the participatory "actor-language" of religion that evokes "worship and self-commitment to a way of life" (1966, 3). While these languages are viewed as complementary, they have—in this view—no business attempting dialogue since they exist in totally separate spheres. Scientific findings are irrelevant to the religious enterprise and vice versa. Barbour considers the "separation of science and religion as complementary languages" a good beginning but argues that the spheres are not absolutely distinct and "that there are significant possibilities for dialogue. . . . The two sets of statements must contribute to a coherent interpretation of all experience, rather than remain as unrelated languages" (1966, 4–5).

This is precisely what David Tracy does in *Blessed Rage for Order* (1975), where he points to Bernard Lonergan's category of self-transcendence as the ground of authenticity. Self-transcendence is a human imperative. We live in an environment, a habitat, a community, and a universe that form a "world of meaning" (1975, 96). For all people, but especially for the scientist, transcendence means relating, questioning, clarifying, generalizing, making judgments; it means moving "from sensitivity through intelligent and critical reflection to deliberate action" (1975, 97). This urge to transcend leads into the religious sphere. According to Tracy, building on Lonergan, religious experience articulates or implies a "limit-experience" in terms of "limit-to" or "horizon," such as death and contingency, and "fundamental structures" that ground that experience, such as "our basic belief in order and value" (1975, 93). These "limit-experiences" can occur in any context, but especially in the moral and scientific spheres. Tracy argues that "the very concept of limit provides a logical key for understanding the distinction

between scientific and religious meaning on the one hand and the distinction between moral and religious meaning on the other" (1975, 94).

Wendy Doniger[2] describes her ideal historian of religion as a hunting sage, the "sympathetic scholar," one who in the metaphoric language of Indian aesthetics "acknowledges his need to live both in the head and in the heart" (O'Flaherty 1988, 12). While Doniger is not discussing the relationship of science and theology, her analogy fits our search for scholars on both sides of the chasm who are willing to bridge the two-culture gap, to cross over limits. In addition, the term "sympathetic scholar" points to the currently unfashionable idea of approaching one's field with empathy rather than with suspicion. Along similar lines, Harold Nebelsick refers to Carl von Weizsäcker's image of the natural and human sciences each as a half-circle that must be joined to form a full circle (1981, 37).

Before death took him at far too young an age, critic and novelist John Gardner found himself drawn into bitter controversy for swimming against the stream of cynical academic criticism. Gardner argues that "fiction and religion and education ought to be in the business of keeping the kid alive, keeping that noble self alive" (1978a, 36). Gardner's "kid" alludes to the "second naiveté" (*inter alia* Ricoeur 1967, 352–57), Paul Ricoeur's intriguing sublation of the "hermeneutics of suspicion." Gardner sums up his theory in *Moral Fiction* (1978b), his gauntlet thrown at the naysayers, where he describes the true artist as "a passionate, easily tempted explorer who intends to get home again, like Odysseus" (1978b, 204). He affects readers precisely because he cares about them and his characters (1978b, 97), and his effect on them is going to be the greater "the more intensely the artist imagines his dream world, the more fully he surrenders to it, the more passionate his devotion to capturing it" (1978b, 203). "Great art," according to Gardner, "celebrates life's potential, offering a vision unmistakably and unsentimentally rooted in love" (1978b, 83), adding, "'Love' is of course another one of those embarrassing words, perhaps a word even more embarrassing than 'morality,' but it's a word no aesthetician ought carelessly to drop from his vocabulary. Misused as it may be by pornographers and the makers of greeting-cards, it has, nonetheless, a firm, hard-headed sense that names the single quality without which true art cannot exist" (1978b, 83). In *Belonging to the Universe* (Capra and Steindl-Rast 1991), Benedictine monk David Steindl-Rast links the yea-saying of love to horizon experience and divinity: "God as ultimate horizon holds everything together. In this sense, God is the great 'Yes' to belonging that holds everything there is together. But

this is another way of saying 'God is Love.' Love is precisely this: the 'yes' to belonging. This 'yes' is the word lovers say to each other. It is the most creative of all words" (1991, 108)—and this is precisely what James Joyce hints at when he concludes Molly's culminating 1,610-line stream-of-consciousness soliloquy at the end of *Ulysses* ([1922] 1986) with "yes I said yes I will Yes." (p. 644).

What Do I Mean by Love? The word *love* is rarely found in current theological literature (though it lurks beneath such academically respectable terms as *limit-experience* and *desire*) and would seem absurdly out of place in texts on the scientific method (except, perhaps as a potential source of trouble). This dismissal is unfortunate, because love is a universal and ancient way of passionately empathetic being-knowing-acting that can not only span the "great divide" between science and religion but can serve to facilitate conversation involving the most diverse and hostile positions. It is not accidental that the ancient Greeks coined the term *philosophy*—**love** of wisdom, and we should not forget that theology and the sciences separated out of the philosophical root. I emphatically do not mean by love the blind emotion unregulated by reason that Karl Popper criticizes—while turning it into a bit of a straw man in the process (1966, 236). I argue that anything we call love that can lead to possessiveness, hatred, and violent conflict is not love at all, but an avaricious imposter—Plato's Alcibiades—masquerading as love. I use the term *avaricious* instead of *selfish* because love for the other is legitimately linked to love of self and could be seen as a benign form of selfishness. Avarice, on the other hand, only wants what it wants, ultimately without regard for the other or any others that stand in its way. I agree with Swami Vivekananda who wrote a hundred years ago, "It is better not to love, if loving only means hating others. That is no love. That is hell! If loving your own people means hating everybody else, it is the quintessence of selfishness and brutality, and the effect is that it will make you brutes"([1907] 1972, 1:474).

By love I mean an approach to life that focuses on reciprocity, mutuality, connectedness, interdependence. Love views the other as process of becoming, wills the best for the other from the other's perspective, and does so in such a way that both one's own integrity and the other's otherness are preserved. If that other is a human being, love refrains from violating the other's autonomy by trying to force the other into a mold. This, I argue, is the meaning of Jesus' injunction to love God, ourselves, our neighbors, and our enemies. This kind of respect for diversity grounded in love can be found in numerous religious traditions. During the third century C.E., for

example, the Buddhist King Ashoka expressed it in rock edicts such as the following: "Concord, therefore, is meritorious, to wit, hearkening and hearkening willingly to the law of piety as accepted by other people" (Rock Edict XII, cited in Zimmer 1951, 497). What I call "love" also appears to inspire Peter Donovan's nuanced response to the odd alliance of atheistic postmodernists and conservative Christians for the joint bashing of religious pluralism as European Enlightenment imperialism (1993, 218). Referring to both Ashoka and John Stuart Mill, Donovan points to the necessity of taking "account of all sides of an issue" and in the process helping "keep the way open for the enlargement of spirit which comes through the interaction of competing ideas" (1993, 229).

My understanding of the term *love* is very close to Bernard Lonergan's. In *Method in Theology* (1972), Lonergan argues that love is rooted in a sense of connectedness, a "prior 'we.'" He notes that "just as one spontaneously raises one's arm to ward off a blow against one's head, so with the same spontaneity one reaches out to save another from falling. Perception, feeling, and bodily movement are involved, but the help given another is not deliberate but spontaneous" (1972, 1). This spontaneous act of protecting another can grow into willing the good of a person, and that will Lonergan equates with loving the person in *Insight* (1970, 699). When love of persons expands to include the universe, it means willing not "the clockwork perfection of mechanistic thought but the emergent probability of the universe that exists. It is not to demand that all things be perfect in their inception but to expect, and will that they grow and develop" (1970, 699). He concludes that good will is joyful, and "as emergent probability, it ever rises above past achievement. As genetic process, it develops generic potentiality to its specific perfection. As dialectic, it overcomes evil both by meeting it with good and by using it to reinforce the good" (1970, 700).

Elaborating on Pascal's well-known remark that the heart has reasons which reason does not know, Lonergan differentiates among the first three levels of cognition, of experiencing, of understanding, and of judging. "Finally," he adds, "by heart I understand the subject on the fourth, existential level of intentional consciousness and in the dynamic state of being in love. The meaning, then, of Pascal's remark would be that, besides the factual knowledge reached by experiencing, understanding and verifying, there is another kind of knowledge reached through the discernment of value of a person in love" (1972, 114). Lonergan connects this fourth level with the new beginning of falling in love, noting that "in religious matters love precedes knowledge and, as the love is

God's gift, the very beginning of faith is due to God's grace" (1972, 122-23).

When I speak of love, I also think of Martin d'Arcy, who argues that the perfection of love "is to be found in personal friendship whether between a man and a woman, between man and man or between man and God. When God revealed himself as love, the last fear was removed from man's heart. Neither God nor nature nor other human beings were enemies and a menace. They could all be looked at with interest and love, and in the case of persons, love could be mutual. Even Eros, if it knows its own nature, can go with Agape" (1956, 31-32).

Loving lets us see ourselves as parts of a dynamic whole, as related in an expanding spiral through those closest to us to all of humanity and beyond.[3] Loving offers the key to what Ralph Burhoe calls transkin altruism: it allows us to consider all of humanity our family. In a similar vein, Steindl-Rast speaks of the medieval Pax Benedictina holding "the world together as an Earth Household" (1991, 71). Love sees complementarity where indifference or hatred see antagonism. Love is inclusive rather than exclusive and not only experiences/weaves/projects reality in terms of both-and, it even understands why others insist on either/or.

TWO

History-Mystory-Mystery . . . How did love enter my life? Love came to me on cat paws, on blades of grass, on the wings of a bird, and in a cosmic vision so powerful it will be with me until I die and even, I trust, beyond.

I remember my first cat when I was not yet three. She was half-grown, grey with white paws. Mama had told me not to pick kitty up by her stomach, but I knew better. One day I was dragging the cat around the room, and she scratched me, hard. In a fit of anger I picked her up and threw her against the wall. She hit with a thud, screeched an eerie, piercing yowl, dropped to the floor, and started limping off, still making funny little mewing noises. In one terrible moment that cat and I connected. My scratch was forgotten. This little furry creature hurt so much more than I did. I felt her pain, and I felt responsible. I had meant to hurt her! It's the first time I remember feeling truly ashamed of anything I had done. I also felt an overpowering sense of caring for the kitten. More than anything, I wanted her to be all right, to be able to run and jump and enjoy life. I made a promise to myself that I would do my best never again intentionally to hurt a creature that could feel pain. As for the kitten,

she was fine a few minutes later and purred contentedly when I petted her and asked her to forgive me.

I remember the day the lawn cried out to me. Toward the end of World War II, along with several other families, my parents and I were temporarily living in Schloß Freiling, an Upper Austrian castle, surrounded by forests, orchards, and lily ponds. One summer day, when I was about five, I was running around barefoot, enjoying the cool, lush grass against my feet and ankles. Suddenly I had an odd sense of connecting with the ground below my feet. I felt as though plants and earthworms and ants and other insects were crying out in pain, and the awareness of their agony somehow traveled up in waves from the soles of my feet along my legs all the way to my belly. The feeling was so intense, so urgent, so powerful, that I ran to the gravel path on tiptoes and hobbled all the way back to the castle steps on the tiny sharp rocks to keep from injuring or destroying any more lives. For a while thereafter I made sure to wear sandals and stay off the grass.

I remember the bird. When I was around thirteen, a student at the girls' *Realgymnasium* in my native Innsbruck, I decided to walk home along a different route from the one I normally took. I found myself passing by a large church I had never entered (or even noticed) before and decided to say a quick prayer. The interior was dark. The candle flickered reassuringly near the distant altar, indicating the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. I knelt down, facing the altar through the eight-foot rod-iron grate with its locked gate that separated the court of the gentiles from the sanctuary. Suddenly I heard an odd rustling or scraping sound and became frightened. As my eyes adjusted to the gloom beyond the patches of colored light cast by the stained-glass windows, I noticed a slight movement by the altar steps. Some little creature was trying to climb up the steps, but kept falling down. A small bird! As I saw the desperate, futile struggle, I was invaded by such a sense of compassion that nothing seemed to matter except for saving the bird. There was no way for me to get physically through the locked gate. Against all common sense, I started calling the bird. I made the kind of soft kissing sounds I normally reserved for my cat and, incredibly, she started to waddle toward me, step by awkward step, spreading out wings for balance, in the central aisle. I kept calling softly, and after what seemed an eternity, she was directly in front of me, right inside the fence. I stretched my arm slowly through the bars, putting the back of my hand in front of the little pilgrim's tiny claws. The bird climbed on my hand, and up a heavy brown coat sleeve, all the way to my shoulder, where she nestled under my hair. Her heart beat furiously against my neck. I took her home, and my

mother telephoned a local zoologist. He identified the bird as a type of swallow that must launch itself from the heights, and suggested I throw her way up into the sky. If she could manage to stay in the air for a few minutes she would capture enough insects to recover and go on. I did as he said, and the bird circled overhead a couple of times, in widening orbits, before disappearing from sight.

But most of all, I remember THE VISION. It came to me when I was around ten or eleven, and I can only tell it as if it were happening now, in words and images that are at best pale approximations, Platonic shadows, of the experience:

I am hovering above an empty plain, looking toward the distant horizon line where the grey flatness below meets the grey hemisphere above. I am pure consciousness without body of any kind. I will become aware of this as unusual only in the recalling of the experience, when I am Ingrid Winter again, in my bed in a downstairs apartment at Wiesengasse 6.

For the moment I am seeing. Seeing is I. I see everywhere at once. I look toward the horizon and note a distant speck, a growing blob, a mighty, churning, amorphous mass. I am filled with a combination of anticipation and dread. It comes upon me like a seething storm, a soothing breath, a gentle fog. It is. I am. We are. One.

I am a crystal in the void, a double pyramid light-shape in black, blank nothingness, both myself and outside of myself observing myself, an octahedron in empty space. My axis slightly inclined, I begin to rotate, waltzing slowly at first and then more rapidly, turning and turning toward the left. I am both whirl and axial stillness. My facets and edges multiply, gleaming, glowing white light, sparkling, sparking, diamond fire, exploding into red-blue-purple-yellow-green slivers. I spin a cocoon of radiance and weave a filigree of sound, infinitely more pure than any tone ever teased from flute or string or edge of fine glass. I glow. I sing. I grow. I spin. I grow-spin-glow-sing-grow-spin-glow-sing-grow-spin-glow-sing-grow until I fill the void: I am a cosmic bubble, a limpid sphere, floating in silent grandeur. I am the all. I AM.

I think "universe" and am countless pinpoints of brightness that burst into showers of color, spiraling out in a ballet of lights that dance on the void of my outer membrane. I think "earth" and sense myself zooming in and in and in, until I am the waters that feed the dandelion roots that nourish the stem that supports the blossom that transmutes into seeds that fall into me to grow new roots. I am mosquito and bee and grub and lizard and viper and vulture and sparrow and hyena and blood-dripping hare in the jaws of a wolf and wolf tasting the salty hot fresh kill and wet newborn calf standing on

wobbly legs. I am the maggot that eats the flesh of the not-yet-quite-dead old man while a brown-skinned woman squats in the forest, howling her pain plain song of birth as her son drops into the leaf-lined hollow beneath her buttocks. I am the stink of death, the shriek of life.

I AM.

I shiver-tremble-quiver-glisten in opalescent shimmer. I explode into a fine mist. Then nothing. Void. For a microsecond or a billion years:

I AM NOT.

I am hovering above an empty plain, looking toward the distant horizon line where the gray flatness below meets the gray hemisphere above. I am seeing. Seeing is I. I see everywhere at once. I am pure consciousness. I remember having been here before. I remember what is to come. Future is past! I look toward the horizon expecting .... Cognition becomes recognition: a distant speck, a growing blob, ... and then I hear The Voice:

"Wake up or you will be trapped! Wake up and tell!"

Suddenly, I was wide awake in my bed, feeling as though I had been rudely dropped into my body and switched on. I tried to tell my mother, but she thought I was delirious with some sudden fever and threatened to keep me home from school. So I said nothing about the experience until 1967 when Professor Gustav Mueller in a graduate philosophy course wanted to know what had prepared me for understanding Hegel's *Phenomenology* with such intuitive ease.

There was no sense of loving in this experience *per se*. It was purely noetic. But it left me with such an overpowering, abiding sense of cosmic interconnectedness that everything made sense, malice-envy-hatred became an impossibility, and all-embracing love emerged as the only path.

THREE

From Senses to Sense to Transcendence. Clifford Geertz challenges sociology's pretensions at objectivity while providing us with a contemporary definition of religion as a symbol system which mediates our encounter with the ambiguities of life. Jean-François Lyotard affirms narrative as a "central instance of the human mind and a mode of thinking fully as legitimate as that of abstract logic" (1984, 11), while he reports the death of the great master-narratives. Fredric Jameson (in his introduction to Lyotard's book) resolves the tension by relegating the prematurely buried master-narratives to the cultural unconscious whence they continue to affect ways of thinking

(1984, xi–xii). Michael Polanyi demonstrates the extent to which the "scientific method" depends on the preconscious, "tacit" matrix. In an attempt to elucidate the quantum-mechanical superimposition of states, Douglas Hofstadter suggests that we might think of the universal wave function "as the mind—or brain, if you prefer—of the great novelist in the sky, God, in which all possible branches are being simultaneously entertained" (1986, 472). Paul Ricoeur (despite his "hermeneutics of suspicion," which is itself grounded in an acceptance of the narrative structure of consciousness) challenges theologians to find the way toward the second naiveté and (like Carl Gustav Jung, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and Bernard Lonergan) elaborates on the Platonic roots of the Freudian concept of desire, envisioning it as thrusting toward ever higher (or more profound) levels of consciousness; Charles Laughlin, John McManus, and Eugene d'Aquili ground transcendent desire (1993, 162) leading to mystic experiences in neurophysiology and credit Ricoeur's category of "philosophical reflection" (p. 164) with allowing the rational integration of knowledge gained during a numinous experience into a cycle of meaning that can be shared. D'Aquili and others also consider myths bridges which provide the means for left-right hemispheric homeostasis. Northrop Frye notes that ours may be the dawning of a new age, characterized by "return" to a form of metaphorical language of primitive communities (1981, 15).

By associating the production and interpretation of stories with the satisfaction of our hunger for meaning, scholars such as Stephen Crites, William MacIntyre, John Shea, and Terrence Tilley provide us with a possible solution for the intellectual and spiritual crisis of the present age. The essentially interactive analogical imagination used so effectively by theologian David Tracy to cut through the Gordian knot of the Gnostic/Manichean dualism which has haunted Christianity since its foundation emerges as promising methodological option for bridging the chasm between the past and the future, fragmentation and coherence, East and West, theory and praxis.

While the analogical imagination is not a panacea, it does appear particularly well suited to developing modes of knowing and being responsive to the needs of a pluralistic world and "strange loop" hemisphere-bridging epistemological models. It is an invitation to engage in a dialogue, a conversation with countless traditions and texts. In its rootedness within the preconscious, creative, symbol-bearing matrix of individuals and cultures, it presents us with a method of dynamic intrahuman and interhuman communication not possible with discursive logical analysis. It provides an ongoing

opportunity for engaging in Lyotard's "future anterior" process of constituting the very syntax of the new language of post(or post-post)modernity being birthed; an interactive, dynamic, poetically philosophic language capable—like love—of plying between opposites and articulating similarity-in-difference (without dissolving authentic conflict in relativism or freezing it in rigid, authoritarian univocity); a language of reflexively reflective allusion which can witness *simultaneously* to the unrepresentable we intuit as *deus absconditus, anatta,* "the silence between the words" *and* the proleptic event of the Incarnation, "the futural eschatological ideal of a self committed to the reign of love and justice" (Tracy [1981] 1986, 434).[4]

Shared Humanity and Radical Altruism. After Auschwitz and Nagasaki, it is difficult to justify not only faith in a loving God and orderly universe, but even a continued linking of meaning and truth. Human life seems a "tale told by an idiot," or worse still, no tale at all but merely a random assembly of isolated events pointing nowhere, Yeats's falcon adrift in space. In the first part of this century both existentialists and positivists began to envision human beings as isolated atoms with no meaningful connections either to one another or the past. By mid-century those alienated atoms were busy translating rootlessness into cosmic ruthlessness. More recently, Alasdair MacIntyre depicts the prevalent self-image of the intellectual as a schizoid division into at least two irreconcilable realms—that of the human cog caught helplessly in bureaucratic organization and that of the private individual desperately trying to escape all social constraints (1981, 31-33). We live in the first epoch of human history in which we can see clearly that we have the power to annihilate the world and that we can do so either with a nuclear bang or an ecological whimper.

Still, foolishly, some would say, the human animal continues to hope. Otto Rank interprets this quest for meaning as the human need for the crutches of illusion; Ernest Becker considers it the "vital lies" without which we would lack the strength to live. Like Nietzsche, Sartre, and Camus, such thinkers are certain that we must choose between truth or meaning and cannot have both. Some, such as Becker or Loyal Rue with his *By the Grace of Guile,* accept the necessity of the (noble) "lie" as essential for a relatively healthy psychic life and survival. Others decry the tendency to hope, the Jamesian "will to believe" as vicious forms of "false consciousness."

This essay is a call BOTH to faith in hope AND faith that faith in hope is neither a deliberate "noble lie" nor self-deception but empirically grounded in the experience of loving action, particularly if we

allow the experience to help us view ultimate reality as essentially gracious. In unconditional caring for the other, truth and meaning are reconciled, God becomes possible again, and we become fully human. As Philip Hefner notes (agreeing with John Hick), loving action for its own sake confers "genuine personhood" on those who do what they consider virtuous for no reason other than its intrinsic value (1993, 208). Thus it is precisely against the backdrop of the Holocaust, in the extraordinary actions of selfless love performed by ordinary people, that Mordecai Paldiel finds evidence for the cosmic principle of *hesed* (the principle of compassionate love which, in cooperation with *zedek,* righteousness, creates and sustains the universe) breaking into everyday life and somehow deactivating supposedly universal responses of self-preservation (1986, 97-98). Paldiel's discussion of the practice of *hesed* is important both as earthly hint of gracious transcendence and as manifestation of the kind of undiluted love toward others that grounds human experience and is capable of dialogically joining opposites.

The Christian theologian might call it God's kingdom breaking into the everyday. That is certainly what appears to have caused the metamorphosis of would-be war-profiteer Oscar Schindler into unlikely savior of more than fifteen hundred Jews between 1943 and 1945 (Gilbert 1985, 777). On a grand scale, it is the equivalent of Lonergan's spontaneous stretching out of one's hand to keep a stranger from falling. It attests to a psychological layer of Lonergan's "prior we." Paldiel calls it an "impulsive type of altruism," an "immediate response to help a kindred human being in distress—come what may—even at great potential risk" (1986, 93). Auschwitz survivor Hermann Langbein describes what many would call "unnatural" humane responses to the reduction of life to a brute struggle for survival. Auschwitz officials tried to discourage prisoner flight by randomly selecting groups of inmates to be put into a dark cell where they would be left without food or water until the escapee was caught or the hostages had starved to death. This policy led to acts of heroic love, such as the well-known self-sacrifice of Maximilian Rajmund Kolbe, a priest who has since been beatified for his willingness to die for another. In July 1941, the camp commander picked fifteen hostages. One of them, a young man, wondered what would become of his wife and children. Kolbe stepped forward and offered to take the married man's place. The commander allowed the exchange, and the priest died of a lethal injection on 14 August 1941.[5] Less publicized is the case of Marian Batko, a college physics teacher from Chorzóv who volunteered for darkness and starvation on 23 April 1941. Four days later he died (Langbein [1972] 1980, 277-78).

While the extreme conditions of the death camps desensitized inmates to suffering in themselves and others, they also became the occasion for the practice of altruistic love, from the smuggling of food to written communication and words of warning—all potentially punishable by death. Comparable acts of self-sacrificing altruism can be found in every extreme situation, such as the Los Angeles riots and even the recent flooding in our Midwest.

Every culture is held together by, or grounded in, certain kinds of primordial structures, certain shared and unique-to-that-community ways of relating to what is considered ultimate reality as well as other members of the particular society. At an even more basic level, however, we can discover something radically human beneath the diversity of customs, rationalities, and traditions, and it is this fundamental quality of shared humanness which constitutes an overarching or underpinning bond connecting even the most distant worlds across time and space. Anthropologists such as Paul Ekman have demonstrated that facial expressions and body language relating to surprise, joy, anger, fear, sorrow, disgust, dominance, submission, sexual intercourse, and mother-infant interaction are universal. So is the simple smile, as Lonergan notes. He calls smiling an intersubjective communication of meaning that occurs in "an enormous range of variations of facial movements, of lighting, of angle of vision. But even an incipient, suppressed smile is not missed, for the smile is a *Gestalt*, a patterned set of variable movements, and is recognized as a whole. The meaning of a smile is global" (1972, 59).

Shared humanity lies at the deepest, preconscious or almost preconscious archetypal levels of individual and corporate experience which manifest themselves through images, symbols, and rituals, and which are most easily approached by appealing to the analogical imagination, the narrative faculty. As Cardinal Newman's motto tells us: *Cor ad cor loquitur:* "heart speaks to heart." These primordial experiences can provide us with a rudimentary universal vocabulary of certain "tones" or "hues" containing variations of responses to such universal human experiences as being born/giving birth, frustration of desires, sexual maturing, fascination and falling in love, bonding or marriage, cosmic consciousness, loss and separation, watching others die, and, finally, dying oneself. Those emotions/embryonic narratives are precognitive or tacit, to use Polanyi's term; they precede (and inform) the rational labeling process. Once the shared "vocabulary" has been established, the conversation (though halting) may proceed because the outsider has been touched on a fundamental human level and a new language of understanding *and* evaluating can start to take form.[6] In addition, there is the most

radical level of all, that of mystic contemplation with its cross-cultural archetypal symbols, such as the portal (Laughlin et al. 1993, 165).[7]

On the level of praxis, the hermeneutics of love—looking at all we see through loving eyes, listening to all we hear with loving ears, sensing all we touch with loving hands (as well as being open to the love of others) does not eliminate suffering and evil, but it makes it bearable and allows us to stop the vicious cycle of injury-retribution. When we look at the world through lenses of love, we see that beyond difference, beyond individuality, beyond fragmentation there is not sterile sameness but organic interconnectedness.

Civil Rights lawyer Morris Dees describes what happened in a courtroom when a member of the Ku Klux Klan confronted the mother of the young man he and others in his group had lynched to send a signal to the legal establishment that black members were not acceptable on any jury. This was a civil suit for damages, since an all-white jury had already found the defendants innocent of murder charges. Beulah Mae Donald had been quietly rocking back and forth throughout the proceedings. Suddenly, one of the defendants faced the woman and began speaking. He said he was sorry, he said he would spend the rest of his life paying damages, and he concluded with, "'I want you to understand that it is true what happened and I'm just sorry that it happened.'" At that point "Beulah Mae Donald stopped rocking. 'I forgive you,' she said softly'" (Dees and Fiffer 1991, 329). It is important to note at this point that the kind of love I am suggesting is NOT identical with playing compliant doormat to the stomping boots of despots. It has much in common with Mohandas K. Gandhi's *satyagraha*—truth force—that nonviolently stands up to injustice and does so with passionate intensity and quiet strength.

To loving eyes there is no crime, no sin, no evil beyond forgiveness and redemption. Paradoxically, this attitude helps victims at least as much as those who have transgressed against them. Calls for "victim's rights" generally equate those rights with "no parole for offenders" or "a life for a life." Year after year victims or the family members of victims attend parole hearings and sit in courtrooms during appeals, nursing their pain and hatred, keeping the wound open, calling for justice, instead of letting go of the bitterness and allowing their wound to heal. They don't realize that their cry for revenge is no different from the mindset that perpetuates ethnic warfare in such places as the Balkans, where people can't forget the wrongs of the past. As Andrew Greeley notes at the conclusion of *The Friendship Game* (1971a), if the human species is to survive, relationships between people of different groups must involve "some

trust, some invitation, some promise, some gift-giving, some delight, perhaps even some faint touches of ecstasy. There is no other way that man knows how to conquer terror, and terror is the root of hatred." He goes on, "To put the matter more bluntly, in the modern world friendship is not optional. And so, whether we like it or not, all of us have to learn to love one another" (1971a, 159). When Jesus told us to love our enemies, he gave us the key to liberate us from the vicious circle of hatred engendering hatred. And Jesus is certainly not the first to do so. In the Western classical tradition, one of the most powerful examples of both the destructive force of hatred/revenge and the healing power of love/empathy can be found in Homer's *Iliad.* In Book 24, Priam, the Trojan king, comes into the enemy camp to ask that his son's body be returned for proper burial. He kneels before Achilles who has killed Hector to avenge the killing by Hector of Achilles' best friend, Patroclus. Achilles' thirst for vengeance is so great that killing his friend's killer is not enough; he wants to subject Hector's soul to eternal torment by having the corpse lie unburied to be torn to bits by carrion eaters. Somehow, the limit-experience of shared grief allows those two men to transcend hatred, and Achilles' fury dissolves into mercy as the enemies weep together for their lost loved ones.

Incarnation and Love for the Earth.[8] It is that kind of love that Christians believe manifested itself in the Incarnation when the Word took on Flesh and God began to communicate with humans on their own level. In the linguistic metaphor, Christ is the translation of divine love into earthly terms. Christ, the Logos, is the supreme text that "aims not only to communicate a *truth* but simultaneously to communicate *a true way of being in the world*" (Bryant 1989, 78).

Love for the earth with all its creatures, including but not limited to humans, flows from the *central* doctrine of Christianity, the Incarnation. Incarnation literally means that God poured Him/Herself into the world, *became* world, by becoming a man. The German term *Menschwerdung* (humanation) says it well. Incarnationalism leads to Saint Thomas's *analogia entis* and lies at the basis of the (primarily Roman Catholic) Christian view of the "sacramentality of the world" (developed especially by Karl Rahner) that allows literally every physical object, every natural event, to serve as conduit of God's grace.

On a simple, popularly accessible level, this means visiting that long-ago stable in Bethlehem with its first witnesses to the birth of Jesus: the oxen and asses of legend and folklore. The animals at the

crib are nonscriptural: only Luke suggests a stable as the birthplace of Jesus by having Mary put the infant in a manger (2:7, 16). Matthew places the Star of Bethlehem over a "house" (2:9-11), and neither Mark nor John deals with the birth at all. None of them say anything about animals. Yet, one of the most persistent, powerful, and cherished images of Christian tradition has been that of the holy family—Mom, Dad, and Baby—not in an elaborate birthing chamber but in a stable, surrounded by cattle and mules and sheep!

This is a powerful image, a limit-metaphor which explodes our comfortable illusions: Jesus, God Incarnate, the King of Kings, lying humbly in hay intended for cattle stomachs. Christians should ask themselves why God chose (or permits us to believe that he chose) to enter the world in a stable. For the purposes of this argument it is irrelevant whether one is or is not a believer. What matters is that this story has touched everyone born into the Western cultural domain for at least fifteen centuries. The Christmas story can be unpacked to mean that God's birth from a woman was meant to embrace not only humans but all of nature, from the heavenly bodies (the Star of Bethlehem) through the assorted livestock found in a stable—including not only official tenants but an entourage of mice, rats, flies, and germs—all the way to the grains used for feed, and the straw-covered earth of the stomped dirt floor. God-on-High came down from beyond the clouds and mountaintops to claim the realm of flesh and earth. Folk wisdom has known this for centuries. Austrian peasants, for example, believe that on Christmas night animals are given the power to speak, and that the Christ-rose blooms beneath the snow to celebrate the coming of the Savior. Limited by their own set of priorities, the gospel writers may not have recorded Jesus speaking of our responsibility toward nature; Jesus may never have addressed the issue; but none of this matters, since properly understood, the event of the Incarnation itself is incompatible with exploiting the earth. In Jesus, God became our friend, and the image of God-as-friend-of-humans should open up new possibilities for human beings to befriend nature.

Early and not so early theologians, their heads filled with dualistic preconceptions, failed to see the significance of the traditional popular embroideries upon Luke's gospel and/or the unnamed Q-source which seems to underlie both Matthew and Luke. They continued the Old Testament convention of placing nature at the bottom of a hierarchy of value, and reinterpreted this position almost exclusively in neo-Platonic terms as material, evil, and even satanic, uninformed by the higher levels of rarefied spirituality and goodness. Meanwhile, popular culture not only continued to delight in its versions of the

birth narrative but added to Mary and Joseph a growing entourage of other saints, many of whom were baptized pagan nature deities, even as the Virgin herself assumed some of the characteristics of Great Mother Isis/Ishtar/Kali/Gaia until she became, as she is portrayed in a fifteenth-century wooden statute, now housed in the Paris Cluny Museum, the Mother of God (Neumann [1956] 1985, 310; figs. 176, 177), a *vierge ouvrante* with hinged doors in her belly to conceal/reveal the image of the trinity within: Mother Nature-Madonna giving birth to Yahweh-Christ-Spirit who ouroboros-like would in turn create their own source, an idea that is oddly in sync with some of the more mind-bending hypotheses of the "New Physics," such as nonlocal connections and chronologically reversed causality, John Wheeler's strange loops in time. Medieval Catholicism (despite Saint Augustine & Co.) assimilated and baptized pagan practices, feasts, and nature deities. Hence, Saint Francis could joyfully speak of "Brother Sun," "Sister Moon," "Brother Wind," "Sister Water," "Brother Fire," and "our Sister Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us . . ." (1982, 39). Thomas Aquinas considered nature analogous to God. Martin Luther and John Calvin, on the other hand, focused on the transcendence of God and the weakness of sinful humans in their natural state. Calvin, like Plato, considered the body the prison of the soul and expected the destruction of nature if people should cease to praise and worship God. The natural world, in this perspective, was a by-product of the church, a resource to be dominated by the elect, a stage for the divine-human show. There was no room on those whitewashed meeting house walls for Earth-Mother Mary, sitting in a green meadow with flowers in her hair and a naked God-baby in her lap. Once again, God became primarily the stern judge and ruler who would eventually be transformed into the divine but aloof clockmaker of the Enlightenment, Max Weber's guiding spirit of capitalism, or His Awesome Majesty of a Karl Barth or Søren Kierkegaard.

In 1903, the Catholic Modernist theologian and maverick priest George Tyrrell anticipated James Lovelock's *Gaia* when he wrote that the divine can be found where the human spirit draws its nourishment, "deep down where its roots and fibres are seen to spread out under the soil and make one continuous network with those of all finite spirits, the whole clinging to the breasts of that common mother-earth from whom, and in whom, they move and have their being" (1903, 9). While Tyrrell had been excommunicated, aspects of Modernism resurfaced in the work of such twentieth-century theologians as Karl Rahner and Henri de Lubac, who profoundly influenced the Second Vatican Council, as well Pierre

Teilhard de Chardin, who fused evolution and Christianity.

In that spirit—reinforced by Buddhist-Taoist attitudes toward nature—the acclaimed Japanese Catholic novelist Shusaku Endo sees God's face in myna birds and dogs. On the other hand, there is much arrogant hostility toward nature in the extra-Franciscan Catholic tradition. In the late 1980s, the editor of a diocesan Catholic paper, for example, compared the nature film *Gorillas in the Mist* with dog food commercials and pet cemetery advertisements. He deplored what he considers the "nutty" tendency of contemporary Americans to "confer family privileges on beings formerly assigned to a doghouse or a cage," and ridiculed the possibility of seeking "loving, caring relationships" with sparrows, noting "what I detest is treating animals as human persons and human persons as animals" (Monohan 1988, 10).

Yet, it is not until we consider all of humanity along with the entire cosmos our family—in a rational, nonsentimental, and yet passionately caring way—that we are truly free to understand ourselves as inextricably embedded in the human community as well as nature. Once large numbers of people across the globe learn to think in those terms, we can finally leave behind the exclusive in-group chauvinism and genocidal mentality that for thousands of years has allowed us to rationalize (and even justify as pious acts of faith) environmental abuse, racism, sexism, religious persecutions, and ethnic cleansing. Then we can truly live in a global community where variety is celebrated and all are neighbors linked in mutual respect.[9] Then we can behave as responsible denizens of the natural world instead of complacent parasites or negligent vandals. In the oft-cited words of poet W. H. (Wystan Hugh) Auden, "we must love one another or die."

NOTES

1. The importance of interpretation in acquiring knowledge has long been acknowledged. In 1620, Francis Bacon (1561–1626) called this tendency of the human mind the epistemological equivalent of idol worship and argued that empirical certainty could be attained if we became aware of our tendency to misinterpret observations in terms of personal, linguistic, and ideological presuppositions, and simply stopped doing so. Unfortunately, even if we could attain Bacon's kind of certainty, it wouldn't be science. Genuine science demands more than accurate observation, quantification, and generalization; it demands creativity and imagination of the kind Bacon dismissed as ephemeral spiderwebs.

2. After a great deal of publishing as Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, the author has recently returned to the name Wendy Doniger.

3. Compare Confucius's "love with distinction," that is strongest toward those nearest to us and assumes love for all to be grounded in moral principle and the natural goodness of humanity. In contrast, Mo-Tzu and his followers believed that the Confucian kind of selective love breeds conflict by pitting individuals and groups against one

another. Mo-Tzu is a pragmatist who argues that universal love is to be practiced not for its own sake but because it works and thus follows the will of a rather pragmatic Heaven.

4. Both Hans Robert Jauss's "reception aesthetics" and Lyotard's "future anterior" event reflect (consciously or unconsciously) what may be the most striking characteristic of contemporary epistemological horizons: the computer-inspired (or at least computer-manifested) emphasis on dynamic interactivity as epistemological category. It is precisely this issue which Paul Ricoeur confronts in *Time and Narrative* as he points to the meaning-constituting event of the intersection of the "world projected by the text" and the "life world of the reader" and insists that this new focus will demand the "radical reformulation of the problem of truth" to include "the capacity of the work of art to indicate and to transform human action" (1985, 160).

5. There is an irony in Kolbe's sacrifice and beatification. He was a longstanding and outspoken anti-Semite, and hence entrenched in the very aspect of Christain tradition that represents the antithesis of the kind of universal love for which I argue in this essay. The man for whom he died was not Jewish. Although Kolbe's action would have been a far better example of the kind of radical altruism under discussion if he had sacrificed his life for a Jew, his action was noble and shows that people need not be saints to practice radical altruism. On the other hand, while one can hope that Auschwitz changed Kolbe's view of Jews, I question the appropriateness of his beatification.

6. A slightly different version of the preceding two paragraphs was first published in 1989, on p. 13 of my article "Non-Adversarial Criticism, Cross-Cultural Conversation, and Popular Literature," *Proteus* 6, no. 1: 6-15.

7. The image of limen (L. *limen,* threshold) is related to the Lonergan-Tracy "limit-experience" (L. *limes,* boundary), and encounter with thresholds/boundaries is, in turn, a variant of the kind of love that pulls us out of our puny selves by joining us to that which lies beyond.

8. Portions of the following section of this essay were first published in 1989, in my article "Religious Matrix and Ecological Responsibility." *Proceedings of the Oklahoma Academy of Science* 69: 63-69.

9. There are numerous active ongoing Internet discussions that are dedicated to precisely this kind of interdisciplinary conversation among groups, academic areas, methodologies. In March 1994, as I was about to make final revisions to this essay, I sent a comment about the religions-as-languages paradigm to a discussion group called "Different Christianities Dialog" (which I had discovered via a notice in my "American Catholicism" list) housed in a computer at Yale. Less than half an hour after I had posted the message I received an electronic letter from the owner of another list (located in a computer at Berkeley), called "The Bridge Across Consciousness" and dedicated to ecumenical dialogue with emphasis on the relationship of mathematics, science, and religion. The list-owner invited me to join his group as well. One of the participants in that group is currently setting up an electronic university in Ukraine.

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