

BERNARD MELAND ON THE NEW FORMATIVE IMAGERY OF OUR TIME

by Jerome Stone

Abstract. One of the key influences on radical empiricist theology, the thought of Bernard Meland is a challenge to overemphasis on precision and rigor of proof. This article (1) provides an introduction to Meland, (2) summarizes his view of the significance of post-Newtonian physics and of Darwin for religion, (3) discusses his relationship to Henry Nelson Wieman, and (4) assesses his contribution to current discussion in science and theology.

There is a revival of interest in the work of Bernard Meland. Teacher of constructive theology at the University of Chicago from 1945 to 1964, he was a collaborator with and friendly critic of Henry Nelson Wieman and a fountainhead, along with Charles Hartshorne and Bernard Loomer, of the present generation of process theologians and radical empirical theologians, yet he remained a persistent critic of what he considered the rationalist excesses of some exponents of process thought. Upon graduation from college he considered seriously a career in physics and continued to read and work in the history and philosophy of physics and biology throughout his life. He died on 8 February 1993.

In this article I seek (1) to give a general introduction to Meland, (2) to explicate how he saw the significance of post-Newtonian physics and of Darwin for the religious quest, (3) to show his relationship to Wieman, and (4) to show his contribution to current discussions in *Zygon*.

REALITIES DIMLY DISCERNED

A good place to begin is with Meland's notion of "appreciative awareness" or "sensitive awareness," phrases by which he tried to speak of being more open to the full dimensions of the world than is

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possible when clarity and precision are the dominant concerns. He did not deny the significance of clarity in both perception and thought but insisted that reality is more complex than can be captured by clear and distinct ideas. A radical empiricism will try to be open to these complexities instead of limiting its inquiries to the manageable. In his metaphor, there is a penumbra that surrounds the luminous area that we clearly know. Real experience overflows the boundaries of focused attention and abstract ideas. The effort to give full justice to this fringe is what Meland called appreciative awareness. It is not a special sense, but it can be nurtured. It draws on feelings or emotions and also on reflection upon the nuances of the world.

There is a danger of obscurantism here, but the danger is not greater than that posed by the truncated view which limits reality to what can be securely grasped. The way to counter the danger of irrationalism lies in training or discipline of appreciative consciousness. Such training is often overlooked as a possibility and is largely neglected in schools. Just as discrimination of wines can be improved, just as artistic taste can be informed, so awareness in all of its dimensions can be trained. Many theories that either dismiss or glorify feelings overlook this possibility of educating perception.

What Meland is referring to is not a special experience, certainly not a special religious experience, but an experience of the joys and sorrows of life. Such an awareness is not an awareness of God, but it can include an awareness of creativity and healing events in our experience. We may call these events the workings of God, although sensitivity to these events as windows to the realities of life is not a sufficient foundation for religious epistemology (there is none). However, without an awareness of such events, whether articulated in religious language or not, the phrases of religion ring hollow.

Although appreciative awareness is a good place to start in understanding Meland, it would be misleading to overlook the social dimension of his thought. Experience has a corporate, a public character. He used the term *structure of experience* to indicate the way in which a culture organizes the thoughts, perceptions, and sensibilities of its members, often in a tacit but powerful fashion. He did not believe in cultural determinism, but he did point to the major influence of inherited social patterns. Sometimes Meland could speak of the structure of experience as having both an individual and a social aspect, but its social, and thus its historical, aspect is never missing. Early a reader of cultural anthropology, Meland recognized the force of this observation in his two stays in India.

Meland does not seem to raise the question of the incommensurability of differing structures of experience, nor did he ask whether such a structure is a barrier to being in touch with the world. Such questions are raised today, of course, and thus it is fair to raise them of Meland. My hunch is that Meland would suggest that the difference between the organization of experience in varying cultures represents a difficulty, not an insuperable barrier to understanding. I feel on firmer ground in dealing with the second question. Meland had a sense that because there are realities with which we must deal, experience has a vector character. Culture *structures* experience (although it does not obliterate responsible choice), but it does not create experience from scratch (Meland 1962, 210–11; 1976, 187).

When a structure of experience tries to convey something of the ultimate issues of human life, it creates a myth. Meland was one of the earliest Christian theologians willing to use this term. He started with cultural anthropology, noting that anthropologists use this term to speak of inherited modes of valuation and feeling. Even though in Europe and America in recent centuries there has been rebellion against the Christian faith, the Christian myth has remained as a cultural force to give a particular character to cognitive and emotional life.

To Meland, the function of myth is not to give definitive meaning but to keep alive a vision of our ultimate relations. It operates through poetry, song, drama, devotional literature, and cantata. Theology is secondary to the language of myth. The literalist, whether a believer or skeptic, is frequently religion's real, if unintentional, enemy, for the literalist fails to rise to the elevation of insight to which seers and poets have beckoned. The literalist is not reverent before ideas that are beyond his or her understanding and does not stretch her mind toward them. Nevertheless, even though myth overflows precise meaning, the theologian has an obligation to give what cognitive meaning is possible to the language of myth.

With his emphasis on both the social and the individual character of experience, Meland finally came to speak of culture, cult, and individual experience as the three vortices of the Christian witness. He used the term *vortex* rather than *source*, since he wished to say that these three point to deeper realities than themselves. Note that the social aspect of experience includes both culture and cult. Meland was so impressed with the cultural embodiment of myth that he found it to be formative outside of ecclesiastical boundaries. John Milton or Johann Sebastian Bach, to use two of his examples, are as much a part of our culture as they belong to any church (Meland 1976, 155–159).

Much of Meland's mature thought concerned the so-called New Vision in science and metaphysics, which he saw as replacing the Newtonian worldview (Meland 1937; 1947, 49-56, 120-22; 1953a, 13-14, 17; 1962, 91-94, 116-27, 130-33, 145-64, 198-99, 290, 343). The basic emphasis of this New Vision is that individuals exist in community. Creativity or novel events occur, not through an individual alone, but in interaction with other individuals. The whole is more than the sum of its parts. Relations are dynamic. Time is real. When a new gestalt occurs, it may be a genuine novel advance, not just the redistribution of parts in another possible permutation.

As creativity occurs, differentiation of structure becomes apparent, so that it is well to speak of different levels, such as the physical world, life, personality, and spirit. When Meland spoke of such levels he stressed that the discontinuities between levels takes place within the continuities between them. The novel event is never reducible to its antecedents, yet it is never separated from its parts or lower levels. Like existentialism, this view provides for the reality of freedom, but unlike existentialism it sees freedom and novelty as occurring within continuities of structure. This notion of levels which are novel and yet subsume the lower levels avoids the dangers of reductionism and dualism, whether Cartesian, Kantian, existentialist, or supernaturalist. This is a keynote in Meland's thought. For all of his emphasis on novelty, Meland deeply values the past. The past has a tendency to live on, in part through the structure of experience. It is internally related to present events through duration.

Another aspect of Meland's New Vision is the tentative character of all human formulations in attempting to conceptualize the events and processes with which we deal. Tentativeness is not a call to irrationalism but a caution against rigid dogmatism, against the premature enclosure of concrete events within preestablished categories.

Meland used the term *depth* to indicate three characteristics of events that make tentativeness necessary (Meland 1962, 93-94). The first is that reality is complex, too thick to be adequately grasped. Further, it has a dynamic, changing character. Third, there is the mystery resident in events, the presence of ultimacy in the concrete. *Ultimacy* refers to reality beyond the immediate data of empirical observation and practical problems, to meanings, values, truths, and hopes grounded in a reality beyond one's own being. The full notion of ultimacy is grounded in God.

I find that there is a shift in Meland's use of the term *spirit*, although this may be an idiosyncratic reading. In his earlier writing, such as *America's Spiritual Culture* (1948), spirit is a new emergent

occurring at some points in human life, the next development beyond the human, the possibilities of which are rooted in the psychophysical nature of the human organism, just as life and mind represent new levels rooted in the lower levels. Beginning with *Seeds of Redemption* (1947), published a year before *America's Spiritual Culture*, and becoming clearer in *The Realities of Faith* (1962), spirit refers to the relational ground of individual selves, to the workings of God in the concrete events of human life (Meland 1947, 72–75; 1948, 81–88; 1962, 181, 225).

On either conception, spirit is always discerned in relationships, especially with other people. “Spirit, or the realm of spirit, understood as the stratum of sensitive meanings, heightening the sense of the person, is actualized and sustained by a growth toward community” (Meland 1953a, 166–67). Indeed, “spirit connotes a depth of sensitivity that forms the matrix of relations in which all life is cast” (Meland 1962, 233).

Spirit is no longer an embarrassing concept. It includes physical aspects that relate humans to other creatures; psychical aspects that mark the distinctively human; and manifestations of a goodness that, while appearing in the human character, are manifestations of a good not our own. When he employed the imagery of emergent levels, Meland indicated that spirit, as emergent, is not to be reduced to the natural or the human and yet is in relation to and rests upon them. Thus he attempted to sidestep both the mythological view of spirit and the reduction of spirit to a phenomenon of social psychology.

Meland was clear that we can speak of God as the creative and sustaining nexus of relationships, from which matrix come resources of grace that alert us to goodness in existence. Thus, rather than trying to define God in any complete sense, Meland directed attention to such empirical notions as the creative and redemptive work of God in history. He was led empirically to speak of God as the Ultimate Efficacy within relationships (Meland 1976, 151–52).

Although we are continually sustained and nurtured by this creative nexus of spirit, our occasions of conscious encounter with it are spontaneous, intermittent, and of short duration. Often these occasions are situations in which a sense of defeat and despair is resolved through forgiveness, love, friendship. Or there may be a sense of awareness in which the not-self is apprehended—as in I-Thou relations. Such occasions frequently are times of sorrow or joy. Note that the commonly interpersonal nature of such occasions, as well as the references to sorrow and joy, are the experiential anchors of Meland's empiricism. The key is that these are experiences in which the self comes to recognize its limits and receives a good beyond itself.

To apprehend Meland's basic background, one would have to explore the work of Henri Bergson, William James, Alfred North Whitehead, Samuel Alexander, Jan Christian Smuts, as well as his mentor at Chicago, Gerald Birney Smith (Stone 1992, 48-51, 115-21).

Although Meland on principle shied away from definitive articulation of a conception of God, there were two images that he used. One is that God is "a sensitive nature within nature," brooding upon, attempting to persuade, seeking to bring meaning out of brute force. Here the notion is explicitly Whiteheadian. The divine works as a lure, not as an efficient causal force. This is a repudiation of cruder notions of a God who acts miraculously to change things in the physical world, bring the rain, or stop our enemies. There are hints here of the notion that individual growth of character, the blossoming of care and beauty between people, even institutional creativity are called for and also empowered by the divine sensitivity at work in natural and human concerns. Most clearly there is a wager on the strength of patience, of gentleness, on the power of love and nurture, and a repudiation of arrogance, aggression, and conquest. This is religious naturalism insofar as the divine power is located creatively and redemptively within the world. It is a rejection of fossilized institutions and overbearing individual egotism. It is close to dualism in that the divine forces of sensitivity patiently forming significance and meaning are vulnerable and are ever subject to defeat by the evils of egotism, misguided power, inertia, fatigue, and disorder. Hence, faith, in the sense of a psychic energy or cultural power, is never won without wrestling long and hard with the full acknowledgment of the powers of destruction. Thus the real puzzle is not that there is evil in the world, but that there is as much goodness as there is. A small blade of grass emerging through concrete indicates how much efficacious power there really is in the fragile powers of growth, meaning, and sensitivity.

Meland's other image is that God is a sensitive matrix of relations that nurtures and sustains us. This image is of a piece with his naturalism. Familial love, the nurturing web of friends, schools, community, and heritage are all part of this matrix of relations. However, the door is left open for a "More" of nurturing forces that may not be disclosed by any empirical analysis. Note that if there is any transcendence of divine powers it would be a discontinuity within continuity with the natural. The reality of such a matrix cannot be proved, but it can be discerned if experience is conceived of broadly. I am not sure that Meland was conscious of the feminine connotation of the term *matrix*, but I think that he would embrace it,

provided that the strength of the maternal is recognized. He did not wish to pursue the pluralistic possibilities of the image of a matrix, but it would be continuous with the interplay between the plurality and singularity of the divine in his earliest writing (Meland 1931; 1933; 1934, 144-57, 165-70).

There is much that is omitted in this sketch of Meland's thought, including his historiography of liberal theology, an analysis of secularization, a christology in emergent categories, his use of poetry, and a view of encounters between religions.

For those interested in reading Meland, his books of 1953, 1962, and 1976 are recommended. The volume of selected readings (Meland 1988) is highly recommended. William Dean, Nancy Frankenberry, and Jerome Stone all have written treatments of Meland. Tyron Inbody's book is an outstanding study. The articles by Dean, Frankenberry, and Inbody in Miller (1992) are very helpful.

CHANGES IN FORMATIVE IMAGERY

In discussing the relationship between science and religion, the focus of Meland's attention was on the worldview or formative imagery that science fosters, and in particular on the change in formative imagery occasioned by the shift from Newtonian to post-Newtonian physics (Meland 1962, 109-36).

Sir Isaac Newton climaxed a process starting as early as René Descartes, the fundamental notes of which were the orderliness of the world, conceived of eventually as mechanical, and confidence in the power of the human mind to understand this order, especially confidence in the power of precise and exact thought. Of course, this development also represented a barrier to belief in anything outside of the clearly conceived human orbit of meaning.

As an additional note, given the status of mathematical physics as the model of knowledge, truth became limited to what had universal application. Hence, the historical religions and cultural traditions lost validity except for whatever could be found in the way of an apparent core of truths universal to all of them.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the prevailing naturalism transferred this formative imagery to the biological and human sciences. Behavioral scientists often kept to this Newtonian view of knowledge, focusing on a rather limited area of inquiry. Finally, to complete the process, industrialization spread this imagery to all areas of culture.

Meland found that the development of post-Newtonian physics played a major role in the development of a new basic imagery in

culture at large. Specifically, Meland focused on such themes as the importance of relations and contexts, the possibility of discontinuity (quantum jumps), and the limitations of human knowledge (the uncertainty principle, the apparent validity of both the wave and particle models of the electron, the relativity of the observer, the loss of absolute time and space, and the discovery of the limitations of the until-then prevailing physics). Above all, the physical world was no longer seen as inert, mechanical, and easily comprehended within a deterministic outlook. Meland perceived that changes in other areas of inquiry, such as Gestalt psychology, also fed into this imagery, which in his view crystallized into the process-relational worldview articulated most thoroughly by Whitehead. He always felt a kinship with Whitehead. He stressed the role of imagination in Whitehead's work, the metaphorical nature of basic categories, and the tentativeness of metaphysical generalizations. He was particularly fond of Whitehead's *Modes of Thought*, which is especially critical of the tyranny of clear and distinct ideas.

Once again, Meland cautioned that the recovery of the sense of depth beyond the easy grasp of precise and clearly formulated human thought did not mean an abandonment of reason and disciplined thought. It did mean a chastened and modest sense of the limitations of human powers of comprehension.

With this change in formative imagery, Meland found that concern for what he called the immediacies of life no longer had to mean an automatic rejection of the ultimacies of existence. Ultimate reality comes to us in the very commonplaces of our ambiguous experience. Indeed, once the tyranny of the mechanistic worldview had been overthrown, it became possible once again to explore the fuller dimensions of the Christian mythos. No longer need the Christian message be restricted to the limits of the rational and the moral—a limitation he saw as the weakness of the liberal period in Protestant theology.

Thus, Meland found the locus of the relation between science and religion at the level of worldview or basic imagery and further found that the new physics removed the major barriers that science had placed before religion. More positively, the new vision in science and metaphysics provided resources for a comprehension of depths of the Christian tradition that had been denied or truncated in an earlier era when religion had to mean either a withdrawal from or compartmentalization of the scientific spirit or else a trimming down of our understanding of religious realities to their rational or moral dimensions.

As a historian, Meland focused, not only on the impact of physics,

but also on changes in biological imagery. The Darwinian emphasis on functional adaptation gave a rationale and impetus to the secular ethos of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which ignored questions of ultimacy and focused on immediate practical issues. Seen in this light, the post-Darwinian era, beginning with the implications of the new physics, marks a reconception of this preoccupation with immediacies, not an abandonment of them. In this reconception, ultimacy is neither ignored nor viewed as remote but is seen in the immediacies of existence.

Darwin was immersed in the vision of a mechanistic world order and its dream of the human conquest of nature through measurement and prediction. Darwin helped to extend this view into biology and, through the development of these ideas in Darwinism, the Newtonian worldview was extended into psychology, sociology, and history. Thus, an understanding of the change from the Newtonian to the post-Newtonian worldview must address the important development of Darwinism. Indeed, the persistence of mechanistic imagery in the human sciences has been a real obstacle to the spread of the post-Newtonian revolution in fundamental notions. (The case has been made by William Dean and some of the more metaphysically oriented process thinkers that the deficiency of many continentally oriented philosophies and theologies—from Kant through existentialism, neo-orthodoxy, deconstructionism, and narrative theologies—has been the depreciation of the physical world, and this view has been rooted in a persisting deterministic view of nature.)

Meland found that the concept of emergence was crucial in the new modes of thought. Meland saw Jean-Baptiste Lamarck and vitalism as extreme versions of the attempt to move beyond the mechanistic simplicities of Darwinism (Meland 1962, chap. 4, esp. 124f.). In this new view, emergence is not a result of the functional selection of fortuitous variations. Rather, structures or *gestalts* carry within themselves a potency that is creative of new situations; mechanism has yielded to relationships; the creativity of relationships is at once internal and external.

Emergence further means that novel events, including organic, personal, communal, and spiritual processes, are not reducible to, yet not separable from, their antecedents, for the higher subsumes the lower. Discontinuities occur within the context of continuity. Grace and spirit now can be seen as transcending without being separate from personality. Thus a chief fault of liberal theology, its reduction of religion to the rational and moral, now can be overcome, and the traditional Christian language of Revelation, Redemption, and Spirit and the biblical images of Covenant and *Imago Dei* can be

retrieved in the new imagery. Finally, the individualism of the earlier industrial period is merged into the fuller notion of the individual in community.

In discussing post-Newtonian imagery, Meland deals with Bergson, James, Whitehead, Gestalt psychology, and—significant for the notion of emergence—Samuel Alexander, C. Lloyd Morgan, Jan Christian Smuts, John Elof Boodin, and Edmund Noble. A fuller treatment of emergence would include the notion of continuity in process thought in Roy Wood Sellars, John Dewey, Richard Rorty, John F. Post, and Charley Hardwick.

Further, since mechanism no longer is the basis of evolution, idealism no longer is needed to relate science and faith. The creative character of the world replaces the antithesis of humanity and nature in both mechanism and idealism.

For religion, this revolution in biological imagery meant that the evolution of life no longer is a source of despair or a matter to be denounced but, rather, an anchoring of humans within the matrix of biological and physical nature. For Meland, this included rooting the spiritual in the psychophysical and the possibility of the creative advance of humans toward spiritual growth. Although some of this is commonplace, its implications for environmental thought and hermeneutics have yet to be fully assessed (see important articles by Ferré and Dean in Miller 1992; Dean 1992).

MELAND AND WIEMAN

Henry Nelson Wieman's first appearance as a teacher at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, when Meland was a graduate student, made a powerful impression on several people (Meland 1962, 109–11). He came bringing a sense of the reality and objectivity of God in naturalistic terms but with a sense that God is more than our conceptions of God. Some of the faculty, especially Shailer Mathews, had inclined toward a "conceptual theism" in which God is our conception of the personality-producing forces in the universe, and Wieman's thought challenged the incipient subjectivity of this view. Further, with the Whiteheadian categories of his early days, Wieman brought a metaphysical dimension to the discussion at the Divinity School, which had been dominated by the sociohistorical approach of Mathews, G. B. Smith, and Shirley Jackson Case.

Shortly before his oral examination, Meland's mentor and friend, Gerald Birney Smith, died suddenly. Meland was shattered. Wieman stepped into the void, giving support and encouragement to Meland as his adviser. Then, during Meland's early years at Central College

in Fayette, Missouri, Wieman continued to provide support through correspondence, even referring to his own difficulties in getting published. Correspondence between them can be found in the Meland collection at the University of Chicago library.

At Wieman's urging, the two collaborated on *American Philosophies of Religion*. During this time, they discovered differences within a common commitment to empirical religious naturalism. As Meland put it, they agreed to go their separate ways, Wieman to develop a science of religion focusing on the manageable aspects of experience, Meland on the unmanageable.

After that time, Meland wrote a number of papers and pages on Wieman's development and became a sympathetic yet persistent critic of what he felt was Wieman's focus on what could be articulated within precise and objective language (Stone 1992, 149-56).

Meland and Wieman were colleagues briefly at Chicago. After that, Meland continued to teach Wieman to his students, although Wieman's last books did not loom large in Meland's scholarship. Meland's criticism of Wieman was mainly a one-way street. The relationship between these two is still a matter of importance for many religious naturalists.

MELAND AND THE CONTEMPORARY DISCUSSION

Meland can be seen as resource and critic of a number of current figures. He was a sympathetic yet firm critic of the rationalist strand of process thought, including that of Charles Hartshorne and Schubert Ogden. He is significant for a number of contemporary religious "radical empiricists," including Nancy Frankenberry, William Dean, and myself. His radical empiricism poses questions addressed by such diverse thinkers as Ralph Wendell Burhoe, Nancey Murphy, and Wesley Robbins. Finally, it represents an alternative approach to what Wentzel van Huyssteen and Arthur Peacocke achieve in their critical realism.

Meland agreed with the emphasis on time, genuine novelty, and the importance of relationships that process thinkers find in Whitehead. He was very appreciative of the process-relational worldview. However, he became increasingly critical of Charles Hartshorne and Schubert Ogden for placing too much confidence in the power of human reason to decipher the mystery of God. It is not that our alternatives are blind faith or trust in authority. It is rather that we need to have a strong sense of the fallibility of our thoughts, the tentativeness of what we think we know, and the lack of penetration of our concepts when it comes to the important matters of

life, including religion. He felt that some process writers pretend to know too much, with too much certainty. Part of the discussion here is whether to emphasize the strand of tentativeness to be found in Whitehead, as in *Modes of Thought*, and his affirmation that metaphysical generalities are tentative formulations of ultimate generalities. In this respect, Meland's critique of Hartshorne is a continuation of his judgment on Wieman. Perhaps the clearest statement of his criticism of the rationalistic strand in process thought is to be found in "Analogy and Myth in Post Liberal Theology" (Meland 1988, 157-66).

Meland has influenced the recent rise of radical empiricist thinkers such as Nancy Frankenberry and William Dean. Taking its name from William James, radical empiricism may be thought of as a type of empiricism that attempts to pay attention to the less precise and measurable aspects of experience. Meland refers to such attention as appreciative or sensitive awareness. Radical empiricists would not be especially interested in proofs for the existence of God or in a special kind of experience called "religious experience" and certainly not in authoritative revelations in persons, texts, or churches, although they would be interested in such as expressions of the human reach after matters of import. Radical empiricists would be interested in the hints in our lives of a goodness that impinges upon us. Such hints, which might occur in any type of situation, could be considered as intimations of a "More," to use James's phrase, or of a sensitive nature within nature or a matrix of sensitivity, to use Meland's terms, that is somewhat analogous to, if not identical with, what traditionally has been called the grace or redemptive presence of God.

Nancy Frankenberry's *Religion and Radical Empiricism* is a clear statement of the problems facing empiricists in calling for an appeal to experience (Frankenberry 1987). Experience means many things. She traces the varieties of empiricism from classical British empiricism, through logical positivism, on through linguistic empiricism, to American neopragmatism. As an alternative, she explicates a variety of radical empiricism, drawing heavily on her analysis of James, Whitehead, and Meland. In the process, she shows how radical empiricism in religion gives rise to new conceptions of God which totally bypass the arguments for and against theism as found in most philosophy books.

William Dean is another voice in the renewal of radical empiricism (Dean 1986; 1988). In his view, American religious and philosophical thinkers have gone astray by studying almost exclusively European Continental writers from Georg Hegel and Friedrich Nietzsche to Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida. In so doing, they have

overlooked the valuable resources of the American philosophical tradition, including the radical empiricism of James, Whitehead, and the Chicago School. Dean is correct. The American tradition is a richer and more balanced view that avoids the one-sided simplifications of the European tradition, which has been infected by the subject-object separation inherited from Descartes and Kant. After the passing of existentialism, the current example of such simplification is the attack of deconstructionists on the metaphysics of presence with its ontotheology. This ignores the various American processes and naturalistic approaches to the divine, which can hardly be painted with the same brush that the deconstructionists use to daub the Western tradition. Also, suggests Dean, the controversy between foundationalism and the relativism, even nihilism, of the deconstructionists ignores the possibility of a pragmatist or radical empiricist approach to questions of truth and of the process of inquiry. The spirit of Bernard Meland moves throughout Dean's works.

My own attempt to formulate a type of religious naturalism has been strongly influenced by Meland, although my *The Minimalist Vision of Transcendence* (1992) may be more precise in its naturalism and its pluralism than Meland would agree to. Underlying my own theory of a generous empiricism in religious inquiry has been a move from Wieman to Meland.

Meland was appreciative of the desire of Burhoe to reconstruct religious thought in the light of modern science. Meland did question the certainty and precision of language that Burhoe used when he equated the judgment of God with the process of natural selection. Meland was much impressed with the tentativeness and fallibility of all thought. He also had a keen sense that language, especially about God, was metaphorical and imaginative.

If Meland had had a chance to read Philip Hefner's new book, *The Human Factor*, I am sure he would have been appreciative of the subtlety with which Hefner deals with the same topics as Burhoe. While I cannot say how far he would agree with the Lakatosian methodology, he would applaud the carefulness with which Hefner treats the differences yet interrelatedness of scientific hypotheses of varying levels of generality and degrees of determination, myth and ritual, doctrinal material, and theological reflection.

Nancy Murphy's research program for theology has important merits. It is ecumenical, embracing the corporate and the oft-neglected charismatic dimensions of the church. It includes strong experiential and practical components, and her sense of discerning the present activity of God nicely holds tradition and innovation in

creative tension and has great pastoral value. Perhaps the crucial point in a comparison with Meland is that Murphy holds that it is appropriate to say that one can make a direct claim to knowledge about the activity of God, that a Christian community can know that God called Ignatius to the life of a celibate priest and forbids Christians to use the sword (even though she does say that the judgment of the community is tentative and subject to self-correction and development). Meland would agree in affirming the experiential element. He would stress the discernment, the dim apprehension of God's grace and lure, but would shy away from statements about knowing God's activity in such detail. Partly, this comes from a sense of finitude and ambiguity, a distrust of that degree of precision in judgment, and partly from a caution against using the verb *to know* with such certitude.

Meland would have a different set of questions to press against Wesley Robbins. Meland on occasion called himself an "empirical realist." This is always qualified by his fallibilism, his sense of the metaphorical nature of language, and his appreciation of the vagueness of experience which overflows our affirmations. Nonetheless, he would question why some neopragmatists, such as Robbins, develop theories that would cut them off from the realities that impinge on them, that seem to isolate them from experience. I believe that a better guide is Dewey's notion that experience is a transaction between the experiencer and the situation, that even though language is probably a dimension of all experience, it is not the only dimension. To say that reality is language—and only language—"all the way down" is misleading. While Meland had questions about how much room there was for appreciative consciousness in Dewey's own theory of inquiry (despite Dewey's talk about primary experience), I do think that Dewey's notion of the transactional nature of experience is a helpful way to explicate Meland and the questions he would press against neopragmatists (Meland 1953b, 48-78; Stone 1992, 127-35).

There are some interesting convergences between the critical realism of Arthur Peacocke or Wentzel van Huyssteen and Meland's fallibilistic realism. All three have a strong sense of religious realities and yet stress the fallible and metaphorical nature of language, and all three find that the history of science supports this sense of fallibilism and metaphoricity.

What Meland can contribute to their views is his stress on appreciative awareness and its nurture and discipline. His view of God is less clearly personalist and probably more finitist than that of Peacocke and that of van Huyssteen, although the latter has not made himself explicit on this. Meland would be interested in what

Peacocke is doing, especially his critical realism, but would stress the “critical” aspect. I do not know what Meland’s judgment would be, but I can make a reasonable guess that he might have some question about whether Peacocke goes too easily from the latest science to a belief in a God as a personal agent.

CONCLUSION

Although he wrote before Thomas Kuhn, Meland’s understanding of science focused on paradigm shifts. He is a major source of process-relational thinking, a persistent critic of its more rationalistic strands, a continuing resource for radical empiricism and some religious naturalists, and a fruitful contributor to the exploration of an empirical dimension to postmodern thought.

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