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HOPE: PEDAGOGY IN A DESPAIRING WORLD

by

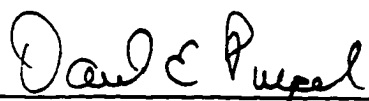William Moore McLaurin, Jr.

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the Faculty of The Graduate School at
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The first chapter asserts that we have exhausted our cultural repertoire, careening

through both modern certainty and postmodern disorder without finding hope--the things

in and for which we have been told to hope do not keep us from despair. The chapter

critiques failed definitions of "hope" and proposes boundaries for this work which lead to

a quest theme, and a series of questions against which to test whatever might be found

in that quest.

The second chapter expands the theme of cultural exhaustion, maintaining that,

if one is to avoid despair, the discovery by an individual of this cultural failure must be

intentional, the product of a search which involves bringing conscious awareness to what

are usually automatistic behaviors. The necessary type of consciousness for that search

is found to occur in an eclectic group of anthropologists, critical theorists, psychologists

and iconoclasts--a group whose work generally includes a critique of modernist rationality,

scientism, and control, as well as a critique of the relativism endemic in postmodernism.

To render this search more generally accessible, a similar type of consciousness

is sought--and found--in several Christian theologians, of a generally prophetic or liberation

bent. Others, who stand against such "God talk", are acknowledged, and a path around

some of their objections sought in a negative theology, requiring the sort of approach most

familiar as "skillful means" in Zen practice.

The fourth chapter is a personal narrative of this quest, situating the author's

sources from mystical traditions and his life experience within the preceding analytical

frame, and relating his own encounter with the chasm's edge to a transcendental experience of unreasonable assurance.

The final chapter looks back to consider what the preceding analysis and narrative might say about how to be a teacher. It asks what sort of pedagogy is implied in what has been asserted and whether such a pedagogy might truly make a difference--questions to which it responds affirmatively with a pedagogy and a credo grounded in the perennial quest for Wisdom through transcendent experience and manifested in a compassionate classroom praxis.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty

of the Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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Chapter I.
MY AGON: SEARCHING FOR HOPE IN THE FACE OF EXPERIENCE.

In my fifty-second year, well after what I had taken to be my mid-life crisis, I find myself struggling to disengage from the world of business and begin an academic career. At a time when my survival instincts (and my business associates) tell me that a citizen of a nation which is downsizing its expectations should be carefully tending to capital gains and wealth conservation, I find myself at the end of a decade of trading income opportunities for study time. My journals and my recollections tell me that, while I have advanced several different explanations for beginning this behavior, all of them seem to be variations on a theme of moral nearsightedness. Looking back over thirty years in the marketplace, I recall several recurrences of this malady, the main symptom of which is that one presumes that conflicts of conscience occurring in one's work world are isolated in the immediate instance and not endemic to the entire system.

My most recent (and the definitive) outbreak occurred at the beginning of my decade of study, and centered around the implosion of a firm in which I had held a position of considerable responsibility. Acknowledging that the origins of that failure lay in the unethical behavior of the principals was difficult for me, since I had known them long and well; however, the circumstances were clear and undeniable. Still under the sway of my moral myopia, but able to see a little farther

than previously, I concluded that the industries within which I had worked all my life must be particularly subject to such problems, and resolved to change fields. As a part of this inductive process, I also suspected that if I had been a more competent manager, I would have known ways to prevent such problems in a business. As a result of both of these "lessons" I decided that I needed to re-educate myself, a decision that led to a BS in psychology and an MBA, both obtained in evening degree programs while remaining employed full-time. For that rather large expenditure of life and treasure, I finally came to see clearly a society which systematically tolerates (and rewards) behavior which it claims to abhor and to realize that I had been seeking meaning in a cultural context which was at best indifferent to such a goal.

And thus to the Academy, seeking to make the process of doctoral study a transformative one, a personal quest for a grail whose nature, at this point of beginning, I do not fully understand. At the beginning of this paper, which is to be both a chronicle and a means, I search for insights which I hope will transform my confusion and the pain of living here at the ending of the Second Millennium; transform them perhaps into the beginning of Wisdom in the Third.

The Problems.

Bill Moyers suggests (1995) that the mark of an educated person is to be deeply moved by statistics--then he tests us with these: there were 2.7 million *reported* incidents of child abuse or neglect last year; between 1986 and 1992, the number of children killed by firearms rose by 144 percent; a 1990 survey in Baltimore found that 25% of young people had witnessed a murder and 75% knew someone who had been shot; a midwestern survey showed that 55% of youth had been involved in a violent incident in the past year.

Ours is becoming a culture of despair, wherein fear of the future is becoming married to fear of the now, and cynicism is the common coin of our political discourse. And these responses seem, increasingly, to be justified by events. I am the product of a culture which has considered itself too wise for the faiths of its childhood, and now finds itself bereft of its second faith, in critical rationality, a faith which has slain itself, falling upon its own deconstructive sword.

At a loss for other responses, we rush from one to another with stories about our pain. Reporting the pervasiveness of this awful triumvirate of despair, fear, and cynicism, and the apparent rationality of subscribing to it, occupies much of the time and attention of our popular culture. Television, with its vulgate edition of "investigative reporting" is a principal organ of cynicism, while the balance of its "news" is tilted toward the most marketable (read fearful) items: a condition arising

from the readily observable fact that marketing, in its various guises, is the dominant user of our burgeoning knowledge of the workings of the human mind. These characteristics of electronic journalism have established the standard for print media as well, spawning a nationwide epidemic of *USA Today* look-alikes. As a result, most of our conversations have taken on the same coloration: largely meaningless sensation, focused upon limbic stimulation.

Yet, I certainly do not intend to suggest that this crisis is only a product of the media, an illusion subject to remedy by a period of total immersion in public radio. Rather, I would share the concern of Abraham Heschel, who, commenting on the state of our culture, in the context of materialism, environmental degradation, our apparent propensity for genocide, and the threat of nuclear weapons, said that we are in:

> ... a situation that puts the problem of man in a new light. The issue is old, yet the perspective is one of emergency. New in this age is an unparalleled awareness of the terrifying seriousness of the human situation. Questions we ask seriously today would have seemed utterly absurd twenty years ago, such as, for example: Are we the last generation? Is this the very last hour for Western civilization (1965: 13)?

And this evaluation is not restricted to those who hold a spiritual brief. David Harvey, a historical materialist and a master of much of postmodern thought, possessed of a finely honed understanding of how our new-found comprehension of the limits of critical rationality has freed us from the oppression of the past

without providing us with a ground for meaning, also finds our condition, adrift in the chaos of indeterminacy, to be perilous:

> The experience of time and space has changed, the confidence in the association between scientific and moral judgements has collapsed, aesthetics has triumphed over ethics as a prime focus of social and intellectual concern, images dominate narratives, ephemerality and fragmentation take precedence over eternal truths and unified politics, and explanations have shifted from the realm of material and political-economic groundings towards a consideration of autonomous cultural and political practices...(1990: 328)....cultural life...brought within the grasp of the cash nexus...the degree of fordism and modernism or of flexibility and postmodernism, is bound to vary from time to time and place to place, depending on which configuration is profitable and which is not....the seemingly infinite capacity to engender products feeds all the illusion of freedom and of open paths for personal fulfillment (1990: 344-5).

Paul and Anne Ehrlich (1991: xii-xiv) describe the effects of such a culture on its home:

> A substantial portion of the life that shares Earth with us is now doomed to go extinct. Partly as a result, a billion or more people could starve in the first few decades of the next century, hundreds of millions of environmental refugees could be created, the health and happiness of virtually every human being could be compromised, and social breakdown and conflict could destroy civilization as we know it....[however] Society's difficulty in evaluating its environmental peril has long been recognized. Aldo Leopold wrote almost half a century ago:
>
>> One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives in a world of wounds....An ecologist must either harden his shell and make believe that the consequences of science are none of his business, or he must be the doctor who sees the marks of death in a community that believes itself well and does not want to be told otherwise.

The consequences of science in the absence of morality and compassion become daily more difficult to obscure with make-believe: *World Press Review* reports from India that the theft of kidneys by surgeons during other operations nets the doctor $18,000 apiece; China apparently schedules the execution of political prisoners to coincide with the airline schedules of westerners seeking heart transplants (Hongda, 1995).

Even the relatively privileged are savaged. Like most of my generation, I have found myself so committed to hope in materialism as to be almost beyond hope in any other guise; but the children of my generation, through their self-destructive struggle against following our path, seem to insist that there must be another way, even if the alternatives that we have allowed them (drugs, alcoholism, psychosis, cultism, fundamentalism of various stripes) are all as bad or worse than our religion of consumerism. Clearly, this paucity of alternatives is a manifestation of the self-preservation capacity of our socialization: if our culture admitted to any less destructive escape, the young would almost certainly abandon the values of our generation.

Both as an adult student and as a teacher, I have witnessed and experienced the fear and the dehumanization that stalk the Academy in these troubled times. I have known those who gave their evenings and week-ends to education, having been promised either a cure for, a talisman against, the threat of falling from the

middle class, or else a hope of entry into it. I have taught seemingly privileged students who were beginning their adult lives with the compliant attitudes of those already defeated by life. I have seen Admissions converted to Marketing and seen the old conflict between research and teaching set aside as grant writing became the criteria for success. I have sat with administrators awaiting the outcome of state and federal recision bills, contemplating the dismemberment of the work of lifetimes.

And as an MBA who once held hopes of learning how to mitigate the worst excesses of the marketplace, I share a feeling similar to Leopold's angst in the Ehrlich piece, as I see the business world cast aside the last shreds of pretense of attention to the common good, and unashamedly embrace successful predation as definitive of good management. Avoiding the obvious predatory analogies in acquisitions, I would note instead the newly acknowledged (as opposed to *new*) relationship of corporations to their employees. According to *The Wall Street Journal* (Murray, 1995), in a lead article entitled "Thanks, Goodbye: Amid Record Profits Companies Continue to Lay Off Employees; Eliminating Salaries Boosts Earnings But Also Adds to Anxiety and Disloyalty":

> While corporate profits were surging to record levels last year, the number of job cuts approached those seen at the height of the recession....The stock market frequently views layoffs as a bullish signal. After Mobile announced the cuts of 9.3% of its work force--just a week after reporting profit of $636 million...its stock rose to a 52 week high....At Xerox, a company spokesman says the contract between workers and employers is fundamentally different from what it had been...."I know it can sound very

heartless when you're making these decisions when individual's careers are affected, especially when the company's making money. But I think its a new reality"....Some workers become burnt-out nihilists, figuring they mean nothing to their companies. Others hop onto an ever-accelerating treadmill, pushing themselves to work 12 or more hours a day, six or seven days a week, out of fear that anything less will make them targets next time. And it doesn't help [stress symptoms] when people who are worried about losing their jobs have more work dumped on them because co-workers have been fired...In a recent survey by the American Management Association, nearly half of the respondents said they feel more overwhelmed at work that they did in early 1993--before the economic recovery gained full steam.

Perhaps the most distressing aspect of this in my own work life has been the almost universal acceptance that the-way-things-are is inevitable and immutable, both among those who profit and among those who suffer. While there certainly are a number of highly cynical individuals who clearly understand this problem and use that knowledge to manipulate their environment for personal gain, the majority of business people wrestle with (and triumph over) their consciences frequently, at least in their early careers. Although I know of only a few who see themselves as "bad guys" and find moral concerns amusing, most have fallen far below what they might once have hoped to be, hiding their shame in vague rationalizations about having to make a living and being realistic about the nature of human beings, finally concluding, "Better him than me." I suspect that the resultant thinly veiled guilt is directly proportional to the vociferousness with which my colleagues in the business world have endorsed the Lunatic Right of Gordon Liddy and Rush Limbaugh.

My Search for Hope: A Response to these Problems.

This description of a despairing world is not offered for the purpose of joining with those merchants of cynicism whom I have criticized for deepening that despair. Certainly we are right to be afraid of ourselves, certainly the foregoing describes a world that cannot, and should not, be sustained; however, it also prompts my search for some ground of hope, better than those current in this Hobbesian late capitalism that we inhabit. This is the way that I have come to see the quest of which I spoke at the beginning: for me I suspect that meaning lies in finding and sharing such a hope.

Although I have spoken of a search for hope, the reader will likely have noticed that here I have begun to say that my search is for some *ground* for hope, rather than simply for hope itself, as an acknowledgment that what I am doing implies that I am already filled with hope; albeit a hope challenged, belittled, orphaned, and homeless in this world of despair. In that sense, my search is perhaps more accurately described as a venture into apologetics: how am I to explain to my peers (and to myself) why I should be hopeful?

My experience, both in business and in academia confirms that apologetics is not an inappropriate choice of terms. Among certain friends, my preference for positive possibilities is considered an endearing eccentricity; among others less well disposed to my case, it has been taken for naivete, and even for a lack of courage

before the existential precipice, the contemplation of which is fashionable with many. Thus, I am dealing with two different levels in my search: the level of apologetics, where I try my faith against the anvil of doubt (both mine and my peers); and, the level of pedagogy, of a *praxis* where I would attempt to engage questions about the transmissibility of hope in a forum with the potential for mitigating what I have described of our world.

Yet I did not know of the hope for which I now seek to craft an Apology until I contemplated the teaching of hope to others. Whatever else these two levels represent, their relationship is obviously dialectic, and so, in the service of both, it is my intention that naming the awfulness that surrounds us be the first step toward the development of a Credo which speaks to faith and pedagogy: a Credo conceived in this *Agon*, whose gestation is this dissertation and whose form is not yet known to me; a Credo which maintains there is yet time and cause for hope, a Credo which both faces our condition and engages the Mystery that, despite living here, we persist in hope. It is thus intention and hope, not certainty or intellection, that says that while this Credo will not avert its eyes from our condition, it will also acknowledge that even at these depths, humanity retains its capacity for that *something more* which Doris Lessing senses in her description of an all too plausible projection of this world into our future:

> This, then, is the condition of [humans] now, still only a few, but more and more, and soon—multitudes. Nothing they handle or see has substance, and so they repose in their imaginations on chaos, making strength from

the possibilities of a creative destruction. They are weaned from everything but the knowledge that the universe is a roaring engine of creativity, and they are only temporary manifestations of it. Creatures infinitely damaged, reduced and dwindled from their origins, degenerate, almost lost—animals far removed from what was first envisioned for them by their designers, they are driven back and away from everything they had and held and now can take a stand nowhere but in the most outrageous extremities of—patience. It is an ironic, and humble, patience, which learns to look at a leaf, perfect for a day, and see it as an explosion of galaxies, and the battleground of species. [Humans] are, in their awful and ignoble end, while they scuffle and scrabble and scurry among their crumbling and squalid artefacts, reaching out with their minds to heights of courage and...I am putting the word *faith* here. After thought. With caution. And with an exact and hopeful respect (1979:203).

Heschel says, "Gazing soberly at the world man is often overcome with a fear of action, a fear that, without knowledge of God's ways, turns to despair (1955: 284)." It may be becoming obvious which of two paths that Heschel describes has fallen to us:

There are those who sense the ultimate question in moments of wonder, in moments of joy; there are those who sense the ultimate question in moments of horror, in moments of despair....[when] The world is in flames, consumed by evil. Is it possible that there is no one who cares (1955: 367)?

And how is the hazard of this progression from fear to despair related to our situation and to the Mystery of why we hope? Speaking to the *something more* which Lessing adds, Heschel has it that:

Fear is the expectation of evil or pain, as contrasted with hope, which is the anticipation of good. Awe, on the other hand, is the sense of wonder and humility inspired by the sublime or felt in the presence of mystery. Fear is "a surrender of the succors which reason offers"; awe is the acquisition

of insights which the world holds in store for us. Awe, unlike fear, does not make us shrink from the awe-inspiring object, but, on the contrary, draws us near to it. This is why awe is compatible with both love and joy....In a sense, awe is the antithesis of fear....Awe precedes faith; it is at the root of faith (1955: 76)....Unless History is a vagary of nonsense, there must be a counterpart to the immense power of man to destroy, there must be a voice that says NO to man, a voice not vague, faint and inward, like qualms of conscience, but equal in spiritual might to man's power to destroy. The voice speaks to the spirit of prophetic men in singular moments of their lives and cries to the masses through the horror of history. The prophets respond, the masses despair (1955: 171).....Yet almost every true prophet begins with a message of doom, and only after long periods of misery and darkness is he able to speak of the dawn and to proclaim a message of hope (1955: 225).

And thus, though I will certainly listen carefully to hear the voices that would speak to my intellect (to, among others, psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, biologists, educators, and neuroscientists, to philosophers, historians and theologians, even to economists and the purveyors of laws), that which speaks only to the intellect is half or less of what must be heard. Other voices speak in form: as art, as music, as life narrative, or movement, or caring touch. And yet again, I must hear the quiet, almost voiceless ones that Heschel and Lessing have heard: poets, mystics, prophets, gods--and God.

Bringing Method to Questing.

With so many voices and with an issue of cosmic proportions, can my own limited experience in the search (the struggle, at least, regardless of outcome) yield meaning for me and for others? Does so small a subset of such a problem remain

the same question? In response to such questions, I have adopted an interpretive stance in this work, reporting my own life experience of the search, attempting in that process to show how that experience has been shaped by the experiences I have borrowed from others, in the spirit that Max van Manen suggests:

> So phenomenological research is a being-given-over to some quest, a true task, a deep questioning of something that restores an original sense of what it means to be a thinker, a researcher, a theorist. A corollary is that phenomenological research does not start or proceed in a disembodied fashion. It is always a project of someone: a real person, who, in the context of particular individual, social, and historical life circumstances, sets out to make sense of a certain aspect of human existence....A phenomenological description is always *one* interpretation, and no single interpretation of human experience will ever exhaust the possibility of yet another complementary, or even potentially *richer* or *deeper* description (1990: 31).

And in a similar vein, this work will attempt to reflect what David Purpel recommends in speaking of the importance not only of situating our work in a personal context, but also of bringing the fruits of that personal inquiry into our community and into our *praxis*:

> Not only does moral education involve social, psychological, and metaphysical inquiry, but it also requires personal self-reflection and individual soul searching. Each of us engages in some form or another in the troubling and daunting task of searching for and acting on meaning and I believe that those of us who are educators ought to integrate this quest into our professional responsibilities. My view is that educators need to share that struggle and infuse personal reflection into the intellectual and ideological dimensions of their work not only as legitimate self-reflection but as a necessary part of genuine dialogue. We all come out of some tradition, some life-view, some basic posture towards our existence which are, of course, modified and altered by experience and reflection but still in some way inform who we are and what we do. Perhaps more to the

point, we need to share our current struggles and address the basic
questions of meaning as they influence our ongoing work, and in doing so
we join self-reflection, research, learning, and teaching (1995: 156).

In such a methodology, the impossibility of being exhaustive is not a barrier to
beginning. I am at liberty to focus these issues to the limits of my human
instrument, recognizing that a failure to transcend those limits might prove to be
instructive in itself.

Thinking about Some Boundaries of Hope: Recognizing the Quarry.

To what is this method to be applied? There is certainly no shortage of definitions:
in this one word we have invested our attitudes toward birthday presents, the
lottery, financial success, social reconciliation, species survival, spiritual
understanding, and salvation—a behavior which must be at least unimaginative, if
not self-defeating. Yet, we seem to understand its usage rather well from context:
taking hope psychologically, as a motivation based on statistical likelihood, few are
uncomfortable with speaking of a market economy as driven by the hope for profit,
or with a parent expressing a hope that children might experience an increasing
standard of living; and no confusion seems to ensue from that same person then
saying that he/she has a hope for eternal life so certain that it may be annulled by
no event. Thus, what has been called *hope* spans the range of human endeavor,
the same worn word having been used to describe the most base of motives and
the most sublime of truths. It can be seen as the epitome of credulity, the poppy
from which is distilled the opiate of the masses, the Judas-goat which leads the

gullible to slaughter. This same word, to others, names the only alternative to absolute despair: humanity's only chance to turn aside from an irreversible descent.

As an educator, I do not want to lose sight of this broad usage; the pluralistic nature of our culture is nowhere more obvious than when one examines the hopes that are stated and implied in the educational enterprise. Whether taken as expectation, belief, anticipation, aspiration, refuge, certainty, or sophistry, each of the stakeholders (e.g., students, faculty, parents, government, community, the past and the future) brings several kinds of hope to our table, many of them confounded and conflicted, yet each one dearly held.

Just as David Purpel (1989) has argued that there is no morally neutral curriculum, in the same sense (and on the same and similar evidence) I would argue that there is no curriculum without hope. The point at issue is not if there is hope, but rather, "Hope in and for what?" For example, North Carolina's public school curriculum proudly grounds hope in the alleged capacity of the state to shape its population to fit the needs of the current economy for labor. (At least we cannot be faulted for aiming too high.)

There are thus visions of hope that do not seem to me likely to contribute either to my personal quest nor to the search for a pedagogy of hope. For that reason,

I shall narrow what I mean by hope in the context of this work. I shall, in order to differentiate that which I seek, and without denying others their use of this pervasive term, reserve the word *hope* for use in the context of those experiences, ideas, and feelings which bring us to the awe of which Heschel spoke, substituting for the remainder such useful--but less laden--words as optimism. This is not to discount the value of optimism, as I intend to demonstrate in the next chapter; nor is it to deny the importance of fear and despair, when they drive us from the death-like sleep of an unconsidered life; rather, it is to indicate the need to rescue the sign *hope* from an exhaustion of Heideggerian *Alltaglichkeit* (everydayness) that has worn away its power. (I am indebted to Walker Percy's discussion (1991: 353) of this issue in relation to education.)

Heschel certainly knows what he means by hope, and while I cannot yet confess such a faith, I honor it as pointing in the direction that my heart wants to go:

> Over and above the deep sadness of our melodies, fears and experience of persecutions, rituals of mourning and memories of sorrow, hovers the power of hope.
>
> Hope is our power. It is a vital quality always at work within a person, anticipating freedom from misery. It is a power of perception, an intuition, a foreseeing.
>
> Hope cannot stand alone, It must be morally substantiated, faithfully attended. It must not lose the element of constancy and the intensity of expectancy.
>
> Hope is not cheerfulness, a temperamental confidence that all will turn out for the best. It is not an inclination to be guided by illusions rather than by facts. Hope is a conviction, rooted in trust, trust in Him who issued

the promise; an ability to soar above the darkness that overshadows the divine....Hope is the creative articulation of faith (1967: 93-4).

Some Questions in the Context of Apologetics.

While I do not wish to gratuitously dichotomize my search, the distinction made earlier between what I have named apologetics (the personal quest to understand and defend the hope that I find already extant within myself) and a pedagogy of hope (concerned with the transmission of hope, which is intended to make the personal quest socially meaningful) does seem to require that I engage somewhat different questions in considering each. However, it is intended that these differences will eventually serve a dialectic purpose, yielding a synthesis superior to either.

First then to apologetics. In attempting to frame my experience of finding hope already present in my own heart, I first sought to explain its presence by following a trail of life experiences that seemed to lead me to perceive a continuum, from despair--through optimism--to hope. I can reconstruct memories and master theories which offer to explain how, through a process of proper parenting, genetic determinism, and socio-economic good fortune, I have come to hold within myself a sense of energy and possibility, rather than of despair. The discovery of such a process would provide me with a map of the way back home, were I to fall into despair; and, it would prove invaluable as a pedagogy for those who were in

despair (or were merely optimistic) and who would wish to follow its procedures to find hope. If that initial impression of my experience were to prove to be accurate, if such a continuum were to exist and if I (and others) might move along it in a smooth linear fashion from one signpost to another, then apologetics (and pedagogy) in the cause of hope would be a rather pedantic exercise.

If on the other hand, as seems more likely from the continued existence of the problem, such is not the case, if I find it necessary to conclude that such a would-be continuum is actually interrupted, once again the persistence of the problem, if nothing else, argues that it would be no small gap, but rather a radical discontinuity dealing with questions of the absolute nature of hope: a chasm of such proportions as to be bridged only by a Kierkegaardian leap. If such a discontinuity does exist, as I suspect that it does, and as I will attempt to show in the next chapter, then whole classes of possible answers to, "Hope in what?" become less useful. In such a case, what are we to make of our hope in ideologies, in political change, rational argument, scientific and technical progress, and human evolution? Similarly, the things we would hope *for* would need to undergo reconsideration. Would we still hope for material success, psychological states, political and social goals? My decades of failure in the effort to hope *in* and *for* such things add the weight of personal conviction to the dichotomous side of the scales.

Were I uninterested in the opinions of others, or in the condition of my community, such a separation would be a welcome release from concern with the mundane; however, such is not the response of my conscience to the problems we face. Much of the work required of my apology is then to be in the attempt to bridge this chasm, in a way that recognizes the absolute foundational nature of the ground of hope, while maintaining the capacity to say that how one lives one's life is important and has meaningful consequences. It is to say that history and tradition are important, meaningful, pragmatically useful tools for navigating the path to hope; and, at the same time, to deny that they define the ground for hope. This problem might be more recognizable in one of its religious forms: the perennial question of spiritual authority between tradition and mystical experience; the schism over the gnostic question of the worthiness of the world; or the struggle to reconcile immanence and transcendence.

Education offers a similar opposition that illustrates this problem. Recasting the question of traditional authority and mystical knowledge in an academic mold, would substitute *critical rationality* as our tradition, and set opposite the authority of that tradition our struggle for a *praxis* that give more than lip service to a pluralism capable of questioning that rationality. Our dedication to that struggle, with so little success thus far, is an acknowledgement of our perceived need for a brand of pluralism which would protect us from being the cultural imperialists that

our history sets us up to be, a pluralism that recognizes the possibility of many paths to God.

It seems to me that the crux of each of these problems illustrates a very difficult issue in the search for such wisdom: the claim by many (if not all) of those whom I find to be credible representatives of some degree of attainment in a spiritual tradition to have acquired in that process some "special knowledge" not available to those who maintain their prejudice toward a linear view of reality: a knowledge that resolves such dichotomies, showing them to be false, but false only from a transcendent viewpoint. That knowledge rests in what I might call the "radical foundationalism" of those mystics, who claim that one's range of perception is radically expanded by their experiences on the Path, that "only one who tastes, knows." This will obviously be a major sticking point for many who wish to have all answers judged in peer reviewed journals. Yet it is the core of the reason why the need for verbalizing a consensus is not felt among such persons. They apparently see the real commonalities as transcending what we are able to say, and acknowledge that attempts to draw back together various schisms through negotiation, compromise and argument, while pragmatically useful as "skillful means," are not in themselves paths to truth.

This argument seems so contrary to the position currently fashionable in the Academy (and found in its more extreme form among radical postmodernists) that

I feel the need to point out how far the two positions travel together. I will argue that the deconstructive process so important to postmodernism is not an invention of the last century of European philosophy; rather, it appears perennially as a part of the pedagogy of most spiritual teaching traditions. What is unique to the current deconstructionists is a lack of understanding of the context in which this work has previously been done--they find themselves in the situation described by a Middle-Eastern teaching story, wherein Moses, having thunderously berated a simple shepherd for idolatry after coming upon the man offering, in prayer, to comb the hair of God, is in turn reprimanded by God for having taken away the man's faith without having first given thought to his inability to offer a replacement.

It is an appeal to experience rather than to tradition or theory that distinguishes the view that I am proposing. I acknowledge the difficulty of defining "experience" so as to simultaneously satisfy phenomenologists, psychologists, mystics and other interested parties. The issue is explored with great skill and sympathy by Harvey Cox (1995), and by Franklin Merrell-Wolff (1994), while a strong critique of this thesis is to be found in Wayne Proudfoot (1985), whom I obviously feel has missed the point in attempting to constrain experience within language. In any case, considerable care is required to avoid unnecessary confusion through assuming that our "common sense" understanding of the word is meaningful. While the next chapter will deal with experience in more detail, the recent book by Harvey Cox

(cited above) focused upon American Pentacostalism, offers a model of the future of religion that provides a social context for this position:

> As both scientific modernity and conventional religion progressively lose their ability to provide a source of spiritual meaning, two new contenders are stepping forward--"fundamentalism" and for lack of a better word, "experientialism." Both present themselves as authentic links to the sacred past. Both embody efforts to reclaim what is valuable from previous ages in order to apply it to the present and future. Which of the two rivals eventually prevails will be decided in large measure by which one grasps the nature of the change we are living through....The proof for me [that experientialism is becoming an important force] is that there are so many ordinary people who...are no longer content with either one-dimensional modernity or with stagnant religious practices. Though they might not use the words, they are more trustful of intuition and immediacy, and they are looking for ways to participate instead of observing. They are attracted to archaic and mystical modes of perception but do not want to surrender the more inductive ways of thinking recent history has evolved. Their worlds include both acupuncture and open-heart surgery, both meditation and international e-mail. They are fumbling for a new consciousness but do not want to live in a monk's cave. They appreciate a measure of material well being but they envision a more equitable and inclusive society too. Which of the two challengers--fundamentalism or experientialism--seems more likely to touch their inmost aspirations (1995:300-302)?

And once again, this consciousness is not new to our time. D. T. Suzuki relates a teaching exchange from the Zen tradition, speaking to the difference between discourse and the experience of *Satori* (self-realization):

> [Student]: Is it not that thinking comes from hearing and that by thinking and reasoning one comes to perceive what Suchness is? Is this not self-realization?
> [Teacher]: That is not so. Self-realization never comes from mere listening and thinking. O son of a good family, I will illustrate the matter by analogy. Listen! In a great desert there are no springs or wells; in the spring-time or

in the summer when it is warm, a traveler comes from the west going eastward.; he meets a man coming from the east and asks him: I am terribly thirsty; prey tell me where I can find a spring and a cool refreshing spring where I may drink, bathe, rest, and get thoroughly revived?

The man of the east gives the traveler, as desired, all the information in detail, saying: When you go farther east the road divides into two, right and left. You take the right one, and going steadily further on you will surely come to a fine spring and a refreshing shade. Now, son of a good family, do you think that the thirsty traveler from the west, listening to the talk about the spring and the shady trees, and thinking of going to that place as quickly as possible, can be relieved of thirst and heat and get refreshed?

[Student]: No, he cannot; because he is relieved of thirst and heat and gets refreshed only when, as directed by the other, he actually reaches the fountain and drinks of it and bathes in it.

[Teacher]: Son of a good family, even so with the Bodhisattva. By merely listening to it, thinking of it, and intellectually understanding it, you will never come to the realization of any truth (1994:13).

Following that exchange, the teacher removes any doubt that what he is describing is entirely apart from academic disciplines, doctrine, oral tradition or any of the fundamentalist verities which Cox discussed previously:

The truth of self-realization [and Reality itself] are neither one nor two...Reality itself has neither form nor no-form; like space it is beyond knowledge and understanding; it is too subtle to be expressed in words and letters....Why? Because it is beyond the realm of letters, words, speeches, mere talk, discriminative intellection, inquiring and speculative reflection; and again it is beyond the realm of the understanding which belongs to the ignorant, beyond all evil things which are in accordance with evil desires. Because it is neither this nor that, it is beyond all mentation; it is formless, without form...(1994: 14-15).

Nor is this claim strictly an eastern phenomena. It may be presented in a quite

formidable fashion by one who masters western philosophy, such as Franklin

Merrell-Wolff:

> Truth is a complex of two determinants: form and substance. In the empiric realm, the form is logic, and the substance comes from sense experience. I contend that the same holds true on the metaphysical level—that there is substantive Truth attained only by the function of introceptional Realization and that there is a logical form in which it is enrobed. The logical form without the Realization becomes, with respect to metaphysical material, only speculation—but, in combination with the introceptional content, it becomes a transcriptive presentation of a Transcendent Reality (1995: 305).

And in the Christian tradition, John Sanford, in his commentary on the Gospel of

John, says:

> As long as our awareness is limited by that of our senses we cannot imagine any way that the soul could live except in this earthly existence and framework. Jesus points out that there are many possible abodes ["many mansions"] in which the soul can exist; he tells how he will go before the disciples into a spiritual realm unseen by them in order to prepare a place for them in a realm of reality that the ego in its fleshly state, limited as it is to sense impression and ego-awareness, cannot perceive. This spiritual realm of which Jesus speaks is, in fact, only apprehensible through inner experiences such as visions and ecstatic experiences, like the experience Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 12:1-4, in which he tells of being caught up into paradise and hearing things that cannot be put into any ordinary human language (1993: 266).

Yet these teachers work with great energy in the world, in the marketplace, not

retreating into caves. To attempt to explain why this is and as a keystone in the

aforementioned bridge that I must build, I will introduce here a concept known as "skillful means," a concept to which I will return at length:

> All of the Buddha's teaching are a finger pointing to the moon. To see the moon, we use the finger, but we must not mix up the finger and the moon. The finger is not the moon. "Skillful means"--in Sanskrit, *upaya*-- are methods created to guide people toward awakening. But if these methods are taken as a description of awakening or as awakening itself, they become a kind of prison. As soon as we think that the finger is the moon, we no longer look in the direction the finger is pointing.
>
> Skillful means can be a verbal declaration or a simple gesture. Great masters possess what Buddhism calls the *Wisdom of the Skillful Ways (upaya-jnana)*, or the capacity to create and employ different methods suitable for different personalities and different occasions....
>
> But these means are only skillful if they are suitable to the *particular circumstances*. For them to be *effective*, they must fulfill the real needs and particular mentalities of those they seek to guide. If a master is not capable of understanding the mentality of the student, he or she will not be able to create skillful or effective means....Zen underlines the importance of effectiveness and skill in bringing disciples to awakening (Hahn, 1995: 51-2).

Questions in the Context of Pedagogy.

It seems to me that the search for a pedagogy thus becomes one of finding a way to invite one's students to this personal quest; a way of bringing my own search for an apologetics of hope into the public context of the classroom. One of the obvious hazards is the deterioration of such an effort into indoctrination, with students either uncritically adopting the teacher's life experience as their own, or resisting such an indoctrination and finding further ground for the endemic cynicism. Yet to allow such hazards to preempt any effort toward a pedagogy of hope is to isolate the personal quest in introspection or intellectual enclaves.

Refusing to make this effort affirms the pretense that our hidden curriculum does not already contain the "hidden hopes" that were discussed earlier.

Aside from the feasibility of transmitting hope, there is the more important question of whether or not it should be done. Certainly if one is a merchant of the hopes of the marketplace or of those which, in the previous discussion, I have attempted to set aside from my search, the moral ground ranges from ambiguous to absent. Central to the current effort is the question of conveying that hope which is associated with the feelings of *awe* expressed by Heschel in the previous quote, with the *numinous* by Rudolf Otto (1923), and with similar reports of spiritual experience. In the course of this work, I shall pursue an intuition gained from my exposure to many traditions, that both the question of the technical feasibility of transmitting hope and the larger moral issue of its permissibility may both be resolved in a classroom where the teacher is a student of such ideas; that in such a situation, with a teacher concerned to avoid indoctrination yet willing to take the risk of avowing a personal path, students may "catch" hope in a form compatible with their own traditions.

Remembering the pedagogical importance of questions, and the rarity of good ones, I have compiled the following list to hold before this inquiry and, if they prove to have any of that rare quality, to be recommended to students. To these questions, I would solicit, either from myself or from students, not answers, but

responses, believing that such questions, to the extent that they touch upon important issues, also touch upon a mystery that should be encountered, not resolved. It is the change that such an encounter makes in our lives that is the determinant of quality in a question; to answer such a question is to throw away a good tool prior to completion of the task.

What is the nature of hope? Is there a developmental continuum along which one might move toward hope? If so, does it range from despair--through optimism--to hope? Is fear more appropriate as hope's opposite on that continuum than despair? (Fear sometimes has the redeeming feature of prompting flight from its cause, unless that cause lies within oneself, in which case the response is, perhaps, despair. Despair has the air of permanency, its characteristic paralysis of the will seemingly requiring the intervention of some outside agency for release.) From where comes the will to move along such a continuum toward hope? If there are discontinuities here, rather than a continuum, then does this mean that optimism (a teachable trait) is of no use in the search for hope, is perhaps a snare rather than a steppingstone? Does an absolute hope that cannot be lost have any meaning in the world? That is, if there is no risk, is there meaning? Marcel (1962) says that hope must be absolute, that any hope that is *for* something or *in* something is a contract with despair, yet Heschel tells me (1955: 125) that, "...an idea of the absolute--devoid of life, devoid of freedom--is an issue for science or metaphysics rather than a concern for the soul or the conscience."

Is hope a necessary part of our humanity? Do some actually continue to exist without hope? How small can the spark be, without going out? Is there some biological drive that is less than hope which moves us when hope is gone? Can those who have fallen that far be brought back? How? (c.f. Turnbull's *The Mountain People* (1968)) Is millenarianism in lieu of hope: a fierce joy at the world's just ending?

How do we come to hope? What is the relationship between "knowing" and hope? Do we come to hope on the basis of experience or despite it? What does it mean to lose hope? Why doesn't what we claim to know lead us to behave in ways that might contribute to the realization of what we claim to hope? How does an individual's hope relate to his/her concept of human nature, and is it possible that the intentional use of cognitive processes, aimed at changing a dark concept of human nature, might engender hope? Is something more than human effort required? Can such an inquiry be sustained if confronted by an unspeakable mystery, a mystery in Heschel's sense that it is "...not a synonym for the unknown, but rather a name for a meaning which stands in relation to God (1955: 74)"? In that event, can we, as he requires, "...celebrate the mystery, rather than to penetrate or to explain it (1995: 185)"?

How might we engender hope in others, and may we, if we can? How can I speak each of these questions to a frightened child, to a student, or to a weary friend, so

that such a one leaves my presence with more hope than before? If that should happen, *what* has happened?

Where Are We Going?

In the next chapter, I shall introduce several new sources and call again on others already mentioned, in order to support and enlarge upon several themes introduced in this chapter: the dialectic relationship of my apology and pedagogy; the virtues of optimism, as well as its limits; the discontinuity which implies a radical foundationalism that absolutizes hope; the knowledge claims of spiritual experience, and my questions concerning the transmissibility of hope. In keeping with the method described above, it is my intention to relate the story of my encounter with these themes and sources, rather than to present an analytical recital.

From there, I shall attempt to illustrate, by mirroring the works of iconoclasts and mystics, how two seemingly opposed views of our way home might rather be seen as complementary and mutually supporting. This is to be followed by a synthesis intended to prepare the way for the promised Credo.

Chapter II.

THE CHASM

This chapter (along with the next) attempts to integrate some important members of the intellectual and spiritual company that has shaped the development of my concern with hope and in which I travel upon my quest, with my explication of the themes which were begun in *Chapter One*. These chapters are to be less a survey of the literature or an attempt to represent the positions of this company with such brief excerpts than they are to be a description: of how encounters with each member of this company have fed the spark of hope in my life, and of how each of these encounters has shaped my questions and prepared me to respond. Although the work of many of these sources spans several fields, I shall introduce them among their most widely recognized peers. Among scientists, I shall draw upon: the sociology of Peter Berger; the psychology of Ornstein, Deikman, Maslow, and Seligman; the anthropology of Hall and Turnbull. Modernists (and their heirs) will include Adam Smith, Freud, and Marx; while the representatives of postmodernism, critical theory and prophetic pragmatism will be, respectively, Harvey, Shapiro, and West. Aesthetic sources, which, in these cases, are for me explicitly spiritual, will include: Walt Whitman, Henry David Thoreau, Dag Hammarskjold, and Doris Lessing. Among Christian theologians, there will be Moltmann, Cobb, Marcel, Fox, Brueggemann and Solle. Characterized as

pragmatic mystics will be Idries Shah, Franklin Merrell-Wolff, Thomas Merton, and Beatrice Bruteau. The fourth of these divisions of the spiritual, prophets in the tradition of Abraham Heschel, will acknowledge David Purpel.

It is to these encounters and to the work of this company that I shall now turn, both in enlarging upon one of the themes introduced in the first chapter and in redeeming several promises for further development of positions provisionally taken. *Chapter Two* confronts the discontinuity which I perceive between hope and the means our culture advocates for its attainment, a discontinuity which I name *the chasm*. Some of these sources speak at great length on this issue, while others will be more helpful in later chapters, with other themes. As a result, the organization of what follows is a matrix of the contributions of individuals with efforts to report my own experience, which sometimes requires returning several times to an author.

In addition to this main theme of the chasm, many of the other themes from *Chapter One* will recur to a greater or lesser extent in this chapter (and all will be revisited by the conclusion of *Three* and *Four*). To spare the memory of the reader, they are recapitulated here, with the principal theme of this chapter being the second listed. Thus far, I have demonstrated, or asserted, or called attention to:

• The condition of our world, which is such that it cannot, and should not, endure unchanged, with pain and meaninglessness as its defining characteristics.

• My perception, growing our of that pain and meaninglessness, of a chasm which seems to interrupt the paths to hope prescribed by our cultural repertoire and which calls me to the search for a bridge across that chasm. Some preliminary findings in that search: the sometimes helpful but always incomplete nature of what we can know intellectually (e.g., optimism), and of many traditional formulations (e.g., religions, democratic governance); the failure of critical rationality; and the failure of many of our best minds to find a way past the chasm of despair, as exemplified by the compensatory glorification of greed in the marketplace, of despair in the Academy and of cynicism in popular culture.

• The conviction that, as a response to the condition of our world and the inadequacy of our generally accepted means for dealing with it, my path to meaning lies in finding a ground for hope (my quest) and sharing it (my pedagogy) in a form which is sustainable within such a world of despair. My hope that such meaning would contribute to the lessening of pain, of the vast sea of unnecessary suffering which we inflict upon ourselves.

• The discovery that my quest has become an effort in apologetics, because, in searching, I have found within myself a reservoir of hope that I had not previously

acknowledged. My awareness that, despite the hope which is in my heart, I am confronted by the paradox of not knowing how to defend its presence (apologetics), or how to describe to others how it might be attained (pedagogy).

• The hope that a path may lie in a return to Wisdom as the goal of education. The paradox of a creature defined by its language arguing for (apologetics) and teaching about (pedagogy) that which is generally portrayed by its best practitioners as inaccessible through language. The issue of special knowledge and the way of skillful means.

Expecting a Continuum and Finding the Chasm.

The dogma of early modernism, still preserved in the stasis which is our political discourse (as well as at Epcot Center), asserts that our system of trade, our system of governance, our technical capacities and our intellectual cleverness will inevitably create for us, through progress, a better world. Having succeeded the older religions and the various idealisms, these beliefs have provided the ground of certainty and hope for several generations. The Great American Modernism asserts that the continuum for which I sought in *Chapter One* exists in these dogmas. Given the proper reverence for, and application of, critical rationality and hard work, all things are held to be possible (and some even hold, inevitable). Answers and success are considered to lie along a linear projection of what is

known and believed, a continuum along which we may move, assured that hope is justified.

It is apparently the case that we can sustain ambiguity in only a small portion of our lives; thus, as events have begun to present an increasingly unarguable case against this modernist faith, the consequent removal of our previous grounding and the absence of any credible alternative in our cultural repertoire has caused us to behave with a seldom acknowledged inconsistency--we seem to renounce this faith, while continuing to behave in ways that show us to be devout believers. Our self-deception in refusing to acknowledge this inconsistency leaves us with the worst of both cases: by denying that there is a problem, we continue to suffer the consequences yet can give no conscious attention to their cause. For example, although this faith has been effectively deconstructed by the Academy and is generally patronized as naive among its intellectuals, because it remains the dominant structure of our society, it is still the organizing force in the personal lives of its members--few readings of Foucault are strong enough to result in the refusal of an offer of tenure, no matter how convincingly the offering institution incarnates oppression. Similarly, the compensatory glorification of greed in the marketplace, although demonstrably inadequate to its assigned task of replacing hope and clearly culpable in much of our suffering, is unchallenged in any promising way--it continues to exacerbate our problems and to absorb the energies of many of those who might have served in better ways. And the skepticism with which we

modernists sought to free ourselves from old tyrannies has itself become a prison, in the shape of the cynicism of popular culture. This generalized cynicism, which is seemingly able to corrode and destroy anything except itself, supports and is supported by that daily litany in which we each have some level of complicity, by saying in some fashion, "All politicians are corrupt; no one acts from any motive but self-interest; if I refrain from taking personal advantage, someone will get ahead of me by doing so; I'm sorry, but 'business-is-business' and must stand apart from any constraint except competitive survival." Thus, the tools with which we thought to rule our world have instead proved to be a bag-of-tricks, empty of substance, yet still powerful in diverting our attention. Such a culture with only emptiness at its core seems unlikely to find any other end than despair; still denying the exhaustion of our cultural repertoire, we seem destined to awaken without warning upon a precipice, staring without hope into an unbridgeable chasm.

I wish to reexamine this terrain, hoping that in the process I might find some opportunity to turn aside from that ending. In this process, I am willing to stipulate (in the legal sense of agreeing to an opponent's points without contest) the success of the deconstruction both of modernism and of the various equivocations, such as dogmatic religion and less-than-radical deconstructionism, by which we have sought to shelter our constructed selves. However, this chapter offers what I consider to be an alternate path to the conclusions of the

deconstructionists, one which, as a result of having traveled by a different way, allows for a way past their limitations. Similarly to the "reconstructive postmodernism" of Suzi Gablik (1994: 209), I propose that the worst of their limitations is that, while offering us the freedom associated with the knowledge that our socially constructed world is only one of many possible worlds, their very effectiveness at demolition has left the deconstructionists (and the rest of us) with unacknowledged burdens at least as great as those from which we seem to have been freed:

> Yet the freedom that comes with such insights and awareness carries with it a paradoxical burden—"an unbearable lightness of being." Into what are we being freed? In a world that is shown more and more to be arbitrary—one among many possibilities, where reality is always and only the illusory effect of images and symbols and where all such realities are undergirded by power—emancipation seems only to offer more of the same. Freedom becomes nothing more than the endless task of doubting—and challenging—the veracity of whatever "regime of truth," as Foucault calls it, we find ourselves living in. Freedom offers little more than the never-ending opportunity of deconstructing the beliefs, assumptions, commitments, and ideologies that structure our world. A kind of freedom that formats what Peter McLaren calls "the restless subjectivities" of those with "broader identities." Yet such emancipation without grounding, freedom without anchorage, surely offers a nightmarish prospect. Endless doubt about what we see, hear, feel, and know is surely the royal route to what the contemporary German scholar Peter Sloterdijk calls "cynical consciousness" (the dominant consciousness, he asserts, in the modern world). It as a consciousness without conviction about the possibilities of a truly different and better world and without the commitment to struggle for it. Freedom brings with it only the possibility of being different from what we are today—but for what reason and to what benefit....It is, of course, into this emancipatory cul-de-sac that conservative commentators have so effectively injected themselves....with a call to the epistemological order of yesteryear (Purpel and Shapiro, 1995:xx-xxi).

Much of the uncertainty of our postmodern lived world can be related to the price of this freedom: subjective detachment and the consequent changability of our identities. In fact, as Rosenau (1992) tells us, to the postmodernists of the most skeptical persuasion, that which we assume to possess an identity, the subject, is less than necessary, merely an "effect of discourse:"

> The skeptics question the value of a unified, coherent subject such as a human being, a person, as a concrete reference point...The subject, they contend, is fictitious, in the extreme a mere construction..., "only a mask, a role, a victim, at worst an ideological construct, at best a nostalgic effigy."....They argue that personal identity of this sort, if it ever existed, was only an illusion, and it is no longer possible today, in a postmodern context (p. 42-3)

In a less radical, but none the less disturbing view, while analyzing the mechanism by which individuals are convinced to labor in industrial environments for the financial benefit of persons other than themselves and their families, David Harvey talks about forces that act upon the identity of each of us, buffeting our self-concepts and emphasizing how we might conclude that the aforementioned cynicism and despair has come to be perceived as required by our environment, simply to survive:

> Education, training, persuasion, the mobilization of certain social sentiments (the work ethic, company loyalty, national or local pride) and psychological propensities (the search for identity through work, individual initiative, or social solidarity) all play a role and are plainly mixed with the formation of dominant ideologies, cultivated by the mass media, religious and educational institutions, the various arms of the state apparatus, and asserted by simple articulation of their experience on the part of those who do the work (1990: 124).

Regardless of the need for such flexibility, Harvey recognizes the costs of such a strategy. He suspects that we are approaching a time where the general state of the metaphors of "self-in-context (Fitzgerald, 1995)" used by individuals in our society will be non-adaptive, "There is an omni-present danger that our mental maps will not match current realities (Harvey, 1990: 305)." Speaking of street "cultures" in the contemporary city, Harvey uses language that might easily be generalized to be what he foresees for much of our society:

> Dazed and distracted characters wander through these worlds without a clear sense of location, wondering "Which world am I in and which one of my personalities do I deploy?"....Our postmodern ontological landscape, "...is unprecedented in human history--at least in the degree of its pluralism (1990: 301)."

It is this panorama of ruined possibilities, subjective dislocation, and cultural chaos, in the absence any apparent opportunity for further progress, which allows us to perceive the outlines of my chasm, yet the chasm is something more than the sum of those problems, which are only its symptoms. These symptoms tell us of the chasm, in much the same way that we may perceive a magnetic field with a sprinkling of iron filings. They are radical discontinuities where life-ways, once trusted and sure, fail. One who travels the various paths to hope which our culture prescribes, will at some point suffer such symptoms, in finding each of those roads to end at a precipice. This precipice, this exhaustion of the possibilities inherent in a particular path is the edge of a chasm unbridgeable by the means at hand.

I assert here that the radical discontinuity between relativist optimism and the absolute nature of hope with which I was contending in the previous chapter is this very chasm, whose symptoms extend across our entire cultural landscape, interrupting every path upon which we are accustomed to rely. I acknowledge that such a position implies a radical and unfashionable foundationalism, a "skepticism about skepticism" that is no more comfortable with the solipsism implicit in yielding the field to this gadfly than to the deconstructionists (see *Chapter Three* for an expansion of this position on the absolute nature of hope).

At the same time, I have chosen to stand in the agentic tradition, wanting to affirm that human agency is both efficacious and meaningful, and thus am disposed to seek to build bridges over such a chasm, and willing to attempt to build them in the face of an unresolved paradox. I gave some general shape to that paradox in the last chapter, it now appears, in the light of the preceding discussion of the unacknowledged inconsistency in our culture's relation to faith and action, that it (my own inconsistency, if you will) consists more specifically of affirming the absolute nature of the chasm (thus suggesting the impossibility of bridging it) while insisting that choices about the path one follows make a critically important difference in one's chance of building a bridge over what Kierkegaard would leap! To compound the problem, I acknowledge that the tool of skepticism is invaluable in making those choices, that the obstructions of dogmatism can often be removed in no other way. Although the burden of formulating my response to that paradox

falls primarily to *Chapter Four*, it would only be fair to forewarn the reader that it will hinge upon a defense of the noetic quality of ineffable spiritual experience.

Another presumption critical to the quest for hope is that outcomes other than despair can be associated with perceiving the chasm. How one comes to the edge shapes one's options before the chasm: the path one chooses shapes the destination. One element which seems to me to predispose any path to despair is a lack of humility: if a path claims that its dogma is exhaustive, then when it *is* exhausted, the adherent appears to be devoid of further possibilities--beyond hope. Among the multitude of such hubristic paths which have made these claims, become exhausted and then left their adherents in such a desperate state, some of the more popular are: scientism, dogmatic Christianity, TV-psychic mysticism, fossilized schools of spirituality looted from other cultures, naturalism, and free-market economics. Such hubris may consist of taking, intellectually, a spiritual position that one has not yet grown enough to support. Simply put, believing that one knows Truth, when that is not the case, is a denial of possibility that is likely to lead to despair when that belief fails. In other words, if one comes by way of disillusionment or cynicism to feel that all our cultural responses are exhausted, one's options at the edge of that chasm would seem to be considerably more truncated than if one reached the same point as the result of a search informed by a world view which, for example, sees such an exhaustion both as a necessity, and as a waystation, rather than as a terminus. To retain the possibility of a

positive outcome in the discovery of the chasm, it may well be critical to remember how well humility serves here, in retaining the willingness to let go of the means that are so important in freeing ourselves of illusions, once they have served their purpose, and in helping to make sure that claims about how to find the edge of the chasm do not escalate into claims about the unlanguagable other side.

Attempting to maintain certainty on the basis of an exhausted means in the face of the chasm presents the opportunity for the cynicism previously discussed, for helplessness and despair. This is the point where one has the opportunity to make one of those critical choices-in-the-face-of-paradox which was mentioned earlier: the decision to seek the edge of the chasm, rather than to attempt to evade the knowledge of its existence. It is certainly fair to ask to begin, why we should have any interest in bothering with such a choice at all? It might seem that the most prudent choice one might make would be to simply "stay home," to avoid any encounter with such precipitous edges; after all, fear of falling is one of our few well documented "instincts." Surely whatever method we might find to limit our anxiety over the issues we have discussed would be preferable to engaging them? By "staying home" one may avoid this problem for much of a life, perhaps even managing to die without acknowledging the pointlessness of traveling a road to nowhere. Flight from anxiety, or its suppression, is the function of a large part of popular psychology and religion. To offer an explanation for my own decision to

seek the edge, I shall turn to the existentialists' consideration of *Angst*. As David

Cooper (1990) says:

> It is the very nature of *Angst*, hardly a pleasing feeling, that people should generally endeavor to avoid it by "fleeing" into bad faith and the comforting embrace of the "they."....In the first instance, *Angst* is the disturbing and "uncanny mood which summons a person to reflect on his individual existence and its "possibilities." It is this which people are more than ready to pass off as a "funny turn," returning with relief to the "tranquilizing" ways of the "they." But suppose that a person faces up to his *Angst*, accepting the truths about his existence which it intimates. Then a number of options appears, including modulation into that resolute, sober and joyful *Angst* to which Heidegger refers (p. 128)....Jaspers describes metaphysical fear ["metaphysical fear" is Jasper's translation of *Angst*] as "the vertigo and trepidation of freedom facing a choice." Vertigo requires the presence of an abyss, the absence of a supporting ground. *Angst* likewise is the experience of groundlessness....It is then the appreciation that none of the exigencies, values, and commitments with which we find ourselves embroiled in everyday life furnishes sufficient grounding for the attitudes, interpretations and behavior we adopt (p. 130)....The usual meanings of things and actions fade as the everyday framework within they have their slots become "uncanny" (p. 131).

How very much we resemble, in our worlds of business, education and popular

culture, those whom Cooper says are "fleeing into bad faith." The self-contradiction

of our disavowing the modernist faith while claiming its rewards is clearly reflected

in those who turn away from their *Angst*. Yet this sketch of Cooper's description

gives us no ground for finding that engaging *Angst* is preferable to evading it. For

that ground, I prefer Walter Davis' (1989) argument, which, although complex and

extensive, generally takes the form that anxiety (his translation of *Angst*) requires

(and enables) us to take responsibility for Being. He says:

...anxiety calls us back from our involvement in practical matters to a deeper and prior concern...anxiety restores our contact with that which is indefinite (p. 129)....Anxiety reveals my subjectivity as something that is fully at issue and for which I am totally responsible....However tranquilized we may be, anxiety has the power to tell us how things stand with respect to a humanity from which we are never delivered....The deepest lesson anxiety teaches us is not that we exist, but that we must act (p. 131)....From Aristotle through Wittgenstein the general assumption has been that if there is no answer it isn't a question. Existentialism argues, in contrast, that the "correct" relationship with the fundamental questions is to keep them alive and deepen our relationship to them as questions. A question is a great hole in being, a rupture with positivity, an experience of nothing as prior to and more profound than something (p. 138)....The existential focus on nothingness suggests, in fact, that our responsibility extends to being in general or "the whole of things" (p. 139).

Thus we encounter another paradox (a seemingly indispensable symptom of a useful question): what we claim to find intolerable about our world and what is so easily blamed for our condition--the dawning of a perception that our cultural means are failing us--is an indispensable step along our way home. We must *choose* to encounter the nothingness that underlies the verities upon which we have for too long grounded our hopes; now we must stand upon the edge of the chasm--in the hope that our anxiety points the way to our salvation.

Opportunities to encounter that nothingness are increasingly frequent. In a terrifying account of the social disintegration of the Ik, a tribal group which, confined to an inadequate reservation, collapsed into the utmost depths of barbarism, Colin Turnbull delivered a picture of an entire culture which has been

swept along by inexorable forces, has unexpectedly encountered and gone over the edge, and has demonstrating the fragility of the structures which we seek to understand. He has also demonstrated the price which may be extracted from us if we fail to encounter the chasm consciously and intentionally. He argues that what we consider human virtues are social constructs which we must strive to maintain, not ineradicable characteristics of human beings. He assures us that, "Most of us are unlikely to admit readily that we can sink as low as the Ik, but many of us do, and with far less cause (1972: 12)." In his conclusion he deals plainly with the question of our prospects as we approach the chasm at the end of our own cultural repertoires:

> If we grant, as the evidence indicates we should, that the Ik were not always as they are, and that they once possessed in full measure those values that we all hold to be basic to humanity, indispensable for both survival and sanity, then what the Ik are telling us is that these qualities are not inherent in humanity at all, they are not a necessary part of human nature. Those values which we cherish so highly and which some use to point to our infinite superiority over other forms of animal life may indeed be basic to human society, but not to humanity, and that means that the Ik clearly show that society itself is not indispensable for man's survival, that man is not the social animal he has always thought himself to be, and that he is perfectly capable of associating for purposes of survival without being social. The Ik have successfully abandoned useless appendages, by which I refer to those "basic" qualities such as family, cooperative sociality, belief, love, hope and so forth, for the very good reason that in their context these militated against survival....Such interaction as there is within this system is one of mutual exploitation. This is the relationship between all, old and young, parent and child, brother and sister, husband and wife, friend and friend. That is how it already is with the Ik. They are brought together by self-interest alone, and the system takes care that such association is of a temporary nature and cannot flourish into anything as

> dysfunctional as affection or trust. Does that sound so very different from our own society? In our own world the very mainstays of a society based on a truly social sense of mutuality are breaking down, indicating that perhaps society itself as we know it has outworn its usefulness, and that by clinging to an outworn system more proper to the neolithic age we are bringing about our own destruction. We have tinkered with society, patching it up to cope with two thousand years of change, but it shows signs of collapse almost everywhere, and the signs are more violent where the society is more "advanced" (1972: 288-93).

The culture of the Ik doesn't sound unfamiliar at all. In fact it sounds much like a rational projection of our own postmodernity, where Harvey's "dazed and distracted characters" are the citizens. As Turnbull sees it:

> Family, economy, government and religion, the basic categories of social activity and behavior, despite our tinkering...are no longer structured in such a way as to create any sense of social unity involving a shared and mutual responsibility between all members of our society....It is the world of the individual, as is the world of the Ik....We pursue...trivial, idiotic technological encumbrances and imagine *them* to be the luxuries that make life worth living, and all the time we are losing our potential for social rather than individual survival, for hating as well as loving, losing perhaps our last chance to enjoy life with all the passion that is our nature and being (1972: 293-95).

Unfortunately, we do not need to search nearly so far afield to find what might become further evidence that, as Turnbull said above, "by clinging to an outworn system...we are bringing about our own destruction." If we have thus far been able to fend off the conviction that our society is on the brink of discovering the chasm involuntarily, even the most cursory reading of Cornel West on "Nihilism in Black America" should put us over that edge:

we must delve into the depths where neither liberals nor conservatives dare to tread, namely, into the murky waters of despair and dread that now flood the streets of black America. To talk about the depressing statistics of unemployment, infant mortality, incarceration, teenage pregnancy, and violent crime is one thing. But to face up to the monumental eclipse of hope, the unprecedented collapse of meaning, the incredible disregard for human (especially black) life and property in much of black America is something else...The liberal/conservative discussion conceals the most basic issue now facing black America: *the nihilistic threat to its very existence* (1993: 12).

What is this nihilism? Is what West is talking about some intermediate stage between the collapse of the Ik culture and the dis-ease of those still privileged in America?

The proper starting point for the crucial debate about the prospects for black America is an examination of the nihilism that increasingly pervades black communities. *Nihilism is to be understood here not as a philosophical doctrine that there is no rational grounds for legitimate standards or authority; it is, far more, the lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and (most important) lovelessness.* The frightening result is a numbing detachment from others and a self-destructive disposition toward the world. Life without meaning, hope, and love breeds a coldhearted, mean-spirited outlook that destroys both the individual and others (West, 1993: 13-4).

Can any of us, in the present climate of down-sizing and recision of entitlements, assert that our own lived-worlds are proof against a future similar to the present which West describes?

Black people have always lived in America's wilderness in search of a promised land. Yet many black folk now reside in a jungle ruled by a cutthroat market morality devoid of any faith in deliverance or hope of freedom. Contrary to the superficial claims of conservative behaviorists,

these jungles are not primarily the result of pathological behavior. Rather, this behavior is the tragic response of a people bereft of resources in confronting the workings of U.S. capitalist society. Saying this is not the same as asserting that individual black people are not responsible for their actions--black murderers and rapists should go to jail. But it must be recognized that the nihilistic threat contributes to criminal behavior. It is a threat that feeds on poverty and shattered cultural institutions and grows more powerful as the armors to ward against it are weakened (1993: 16).

Within the unexamined assumptions of our popular culture, armor against the nihilism which West describes is a tragic necessity. Those who lose it no longer find even a minimal safety-net in our society, which is now stripped down "to compete and win in a global economy." But, is maintaining and increasing our individual armor our only choice? Why do we not consider other possibilities? Why do we continue to allow our fellows to fall individually into the chasm, attending seriously to their plight only when their absence makes us the next in line? Why do we not choose to behave differently?

CONSCIOUSLY CHOOSING WAYS TO THE EDGE.

What is it that causes us to cling so tenaciously to formulations which have so clearly failed the least advantaged; which seem to be preparing for immanent failure for the middle class; and which, if judged by any standard higher than barbarism, have already failed us all? Isn't it the case that we humans are supposed to be the evolutionary incarnation of adaptiveness? Have we, as Turnbull said, already sulk as low as the Ik? In an earlier citation, Purpel and

Shapiro (1995) warned of the risk of making simplistic and fundamentalist responses to the postmodern "emancipatory cul-de-sac," a piece of rhetorical topography which is probably analogous to what I am calling "the edge of the chasm." Certainly our culture has generally erred in the direction of such simplistic responses. I propose that the reason we have so frequently done so, placing ourselves in the present non-adaptive situation, is our tendency to consistently underestimate the strength of what I shall refer to in various contexts (and using terms whose authorship is to be credited as we proceed) as either *false consciousness*, the *commanding self*, or *the ego* (in the pejorative sense). Under the influence of this construction, it is not possible to be *right* (except possibly by accident)! The quite appropriate reverence we have for human beings is transferred to this false consciousness; we honor what is basically a parasite upon the human spirit, instead of the spirit itself. We are almost all similarly disabled by such parasites; however, such a confession does not serve to mitigate the problem. We still face the problem of disengaging enough from this false consciousness to be able to be able to perceive the chasm, to see that our cultural means have failed us and to see that in a way that does not result in paralysis. Somehow we need to find a way to separate them (the person and the construction) without falling into dogmatism and despair (or fascism). As discussed in the previous chapter, such ways have frequently been described as *skillful means*.

Although skillful means have been said to require a Teacher to construct them, many of the things which we have come to know about ourselves, such as the concepts of learned optimism and the methods of the deconstructionists, might serve to bring us to a point of readiness (perhaps even to the edge of the chasm), can prepare us to learn, by bringing to our awareness the effects of false consciousness, an awareness which might serve to overcome the unacknowledged strength of this construction. In effect, such preparations, such "learning how to learn" may be considered as intermediate constructions, between the existing false consciousness and some not yet encountered skillful means. To presume that such might be the case is, of course, an expression of the quest of which I spoke at the beginning, to be undertaken on the basis of accepting this proposal as a working hypothesis, with hope, without dogma or certainty of success.

I believe that examples of such intermediate constructions, as well as arguments which lead to an intentional apprehension of the edge of the chasm, are to be found in Peter Berger's social construction, Martin Seligman's learned optimism, Robert Ornstein's multi-mind hypothesis, the evolving self of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and in Arthur Deikman's observing self, among many others. Paul Ricoeur creates such an intermediate means, in his description of false consciousness, naming it *illusion*, "...a cultural structure, a dimension of our social discourse (1978:214)." His integration of illusion as understood by Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche, is, along with the others mentioned, to be the focus of this section.

I suggest that the trap of illusion, which yields the dogma of despair, is a trap from which we may develop the cognitive capacity to free ourselves. following the model of the "Moses and the Shepherd" story, without falling into the simplistic solutions cautioned against by Purpel and Shapiro. Thus the balance of this chapter is devoted to the praxis of the "edgefinders," those whose proclamation of the failure of our current means is made in the context of such intermediate constructions, such that we see the cultural failure not as a cause for despair, but as a release from illusion, a preparation for learning. One of the critical things which I hope we have already learned from the unfortunate Ik is that this is not an individualistic path but a social one; we find our way in the company of our brothers and sisters, or we die alone. Therefore we need to understand something of the way in which we construct that social world which the Ik have lost and which we are in the process of losing in our own culture.

Social Reality: As you no doubt understand from the foregoing, much of what follows is to be a critique of what we generally call our everyday reality. The hope is that we are going to find ways to stand in the midst of our own situation and see ourselves with some of the clarity we claim to have when looking at the Ik. The work of Peter Berger is foundational to such a critique and it is to him that I look to "define" that upon which this effort is to operate, although in this defining, I acknowledge the brackets of phenomenological analysis which Berger uses, saying in *The Social Construction of Reality* that:

> The phenomenological analysis of everyday life, or rather of the subjective experience of everyday life, refrains from any causal or genetic hypotheses, as well as from assertions about the ontological status of the phenomena analyzed...Common sense contains innumerable pre- and quasi-scientific interpretations about everyday reality, which it takes for granted. If we are to describe the reality of common sense we must refer to these interpretations...but we must do so within phenomenological brackets (1967:20).

In that context, he offers some insight into the difficulty, mentioned earlier, of the inaccessibility of much of our daily life to our intellectual convictions. It would not surprise Berger that our radical deconstructionist, although bereft of "personal subjectivity," still seeks tenure; nor that a cynical businessman would comfort himself with a religion founded by a revolutionary prophet; nor would he have difficulty in understanding the origin of the confusion occasioned by expressing religious experiences in everyday language:

> The reality of everyday life is taken for granted as reality. It does not require additional verification over and beyond its simple presence. It is simply *there*, as self-evident and compelling facticity. I *know* that it is real. While I am capable of engaging in doubt about its reality, I am obliged to suspend such doubt as I routinely exist in everyday life. This suspension of doubt is so firm that to abandon it, as I might want to do, say, in theoretical or religious contemplation, I have to make an extreme transition. The world of everyday life proclaims itself and, when I want to challenge the proclamation, I must engage in a deliberate, by no means easy effort....[for example, in the theater, the] transition between realities is marked by the rising and falling of the curtain. As the curtain rises, the spectator is "transported to another world," with its own meanings and an order that may or may not have much to do with the order of everyday life. As the curtain falls the spectator "returns to reality," that is, to the paramount reality of everyday life by comparison with which the realty presented on the stage now appears tenuous and ephemeral....Aesthetic

and religious experience is rich in producing transitions of this kind...finite provinces of meaning(1967:23-5).

All finite provinces of meaning are characterized by a turning away of attention from the reality of everyday life....A radical change takes place in the tension of consciousness. In the context of religious experience this has been characterized as "leaping." It is important to stress, however, that the reality of everyday life retains its paramount status even as such "leaps" take place. If nothing else, language makes sure of this. The common language available to me for the objectivization of my experiences is grounded in everyday life...Typically, therefore, I "distort" the reality of the [finite province of meaning]...I "translate" the non-everyday experiences back into the paramount reality. This...is typical of those trying to report about theoretical, aesthetic, or religious worlds of meaning (1967:25-6).

Although one who would hope for change must be grateful to Berger for his concept of the social construction of this everyday reality, which of course implies that what is constructed may be renovated, it is important to recognize that this is not, for Berger or for this author, an exercise in solipsism:

Man is biologically predestined to construct and to inhabit a world with others. This world becomes for him the dominant and definitive reality. Its limits are set by nature, but once constructed, this world acts back upon nature. In the dialectic between nature and the socially constructed world the human organism itself is transformed. In this same dialectic, man produces reality and thereby produces himself (1967:183).

Renovation of our social reality is both possible and difficult: possible because of its constructed nature, difficult both because of this dialectic (which most often constructs false consciousness) and because of what occurs when we peer over the edge of the chasm. In *A Rumor of Angels*, Berger, discussing a dichotomy

between the middle ground of everydayness, "...and various marginal realms in which the taken-for-granted assumptions of the former realm are threatened or put into question," opens a door that one is inclined to shut very quickly; he offers one of those moments, rare in the normally dry environment of intellectual discussion, where one may be detracted from the argument by the feeling that the hair on the back of one's neck is rising:

> ...[that] which we take for granted as normality and sanity, can be maintained (that is inhabited) only if we suspend all doubt about its validity. Without this suspension of doubt, everyday life would be impossible, if only because it would be constantly invaded by the "fundamental anxiety" caused by our knowledge and fear of death. This implies that all human societies and their institutions are, at their root, a barrier against naked terror (1990: 83).

In the light of the earlier sections on postmodernism, existential *Angst* and the chasm, we are now in a position to more readily appreciate why our popular culture supports and demands a marketplace of selves to conceal the terror that follows an unexpected view of the chasm's edge:

> A society in which discrepant worlds are generally available on a market basis entails specific constellations of subjective reality and identity. There will be an increasingly general consciousness of the relativity of all worlds, including one's own, which is now subjectively apprehended as "a world," rather than "the world." It follows that one's own institutionalized conduct may be apprehended as "a role" from which one may detach oneself in one's own consciousness and from which one may "act out" with manipulative control (Berger, 1967: 172-73).

As a member of this society one's "knowledge" thus comes to include the information that any culture one inhabits is composed of elements upon which one may, at will, exercise "subjective detachment." Unfortunately, as we have already seen in another context this knowledge has its costs:

> It is such socially shared, socially taken-for-granted "knowledge" that allows us to move with a measure of confidence through everyday life. Conversely, the plausibility of "knowledge" that is not socially shared, that is challenged by our fellow men, is imperiled, not just in our dealings with others, but much more importantly in our own minds(1990: 7).

Those who would see their world from another perspective are not only subject to the obvious perils to which dissidents are always exposed, they also become what Berger calls a cognitive minority:

> By a cognitive minority, I mean a group of people whose view of the world differs significantly from the one generally taken for granted in their society. Put differently, a cognitive minority is a group formed around a body of deviant "knowledge." The quotation marks should be stressed here. the term "knowledge" used within the frame of reference of the sociology of knowledge always refers to what is taken to be or believed as "knowledge" (1990: 6).

With such terrifying forces acting to maintain our consensus about what is "real," and with Berger's acknowledgement of the brevity of our capacity to hold that consensus in doubt, our question seem to have been transformed from "Why (and how) would one seek to look over into this chasm," to become, "How could we possibly turn away from the means of our culture, failed or not, to believe anything else?"

The work, on cult-like behavior in our society, of another contributor to our understanding of social reality, psychiatrist Arthur Deikman, offers insight into that question, through acquainting us with the characteristics of cults and with the parts of ourselves which predispose us to such involvement.

> Usually the word cult refers to a group led by a charismatic elder who has spiritual, therapeutic, or messianic pretensions, and indoctrinates the members with his or her idiosyncratic beliefs. Typically, members are dependent on the group for their emotional and financial needs and have broken off ties with those outside. The more complete the dependency and the more rigid the barriers separating members from non-believers, the more danger the cult will exploit and harm its members (1990: 2).

As a member of a research seminar at the University of California Berkeley on new religious movements, he studied these groups and their effect those who fall under their sway. Speaking of his clinical work with these people, he said:

> I began to see that cults form and thrive not because people are crazy, but because they have two kinds of wishes. They want a meaningful life, to serve God or humanity; and they want to be taken care of, to feel protected and secure, to find a way home. The first motives may be laudable and constructive, but the latter exert a corrupting effect, enabling cult leaders to elicit behavior directly opposite to the idealistic vision with which members entered the group (1990: 7).

This understanding of the psychological processes leading to cultic behavior would not be outside the experience of the well informed; it is his conclusions and insights as to the sites of such behavior that may surprise:

> behavior qualitatively similar to that which takes place in extreme cults takes place in all of us, despite our living in an open society, uncoerced, free to select our sources of information and our companions. We need to

understand the cult behavior that operates unnoticed in our everyday life (1990: 2).

Eventually, we in the seminar were unable to maintain the belief that cults were something apart from normal society. The people telling us stories of violence, cruelty, and perversion of values were like ourselves. After listening and questioning we realized that we were not different from nor superior to the ex-cult members, that we were vulnerable to the same dependency wishes, capable of the same betrayals and cruelty in circumstances in which our sense of reality was manipulated (1990: 7).

Just as Turnbull cautioned us about the Ik which waits within each of us, Deikman's own honesty about his professional experience is a challenge to each of us in our own praxis: we often offer insightful critiques of others; can we be so honest, putting our own profession and our own personal lives under such a lens? I assure you that the first instance of such a venture will yield more than discomfort. Part of that "something more" certainly includes the opportunity to see that Deikman, exposing yet another instance of the chasm, not only proposes a path to the edge; but it also illuminates one of the main pitfalls along that way: becoming mired in a dependency masquerading as spirituality.

As I studied the psychological mechanisms that made cult experience possible, I began to recognize uncomfortably familiar processes. a little reflection provided many specific instances of my own compliance--conscious and unconscious--with the values and preferences of my peers, compliance that I had rationalized or ignored because I preferred to think of myself as very independent. Since no radical change or disruption of my life occurred and I was not acting at the behest of a charismatic leader or occult group, it had not occurred to me that I might be behaving like one who had been captured by a cult. Nevertheless, I now realize that the motivations and manipulations constituting cult behavior are present in

varying degrees in my own life and that they play a role in the lives of most of us as they operate in our educational systems, the business world, religion, politics, and international relations. Just as many of the more notorious cults have proven to be costly and destructive, so ordinary cult behavior is damaging and harmful to some degree wherever it occurs, no matter how normal its outward appearance....I believe that we need to bring into awareness the unconscious motivations and excluded information that influence our behavior and thought at the personal, national, and international levels. This requires that we first understand the dynamics of obvious cults and then address similar processes in ourselves and in ordinary society....Although it is important that we study such groups to avoid being caught in them, it is even more important that we study such groups to become aware of the hidden cult thinking operating unnoticed in our daily lives. Cults are mirrors of ourselves (1990:7-10).

The tragedy of allowing the substitution of cultic behavior for spirituality is that often the seeking stops with that substitution, because members assume that they have already attained all that is possible. That is a recurrence of the situation which we discussed earlier, of ending in despair, because we uncritically accepted an unfounded claim of exhaustiveness from some cultural means. To put that more baldly, when Deikman cautions us of the danger of behavior that meets these criteria, "no matter how normal its outward appearance," I argue that he is providing us with a challenge to test our own religious pretensions, to see if we are accepting a "bowl of porridge" in lieu of our spiritual birthright. Although that test is for each person to make in his/her own heart, I suspect that almost none of the social realities bearing the name religion within our culture would pass.

The anthropologist Edward T. Hall, discussing "culture as an irrational force," is also assuring us that we should not be reassured by unexamined constructions:

> Experience has taught me not to trust logic and certainly not to use my culturally patterned way of thinking to make a point to someone of another culture. The core of the problem may be that Western philosophies and beliefs are pictures in men's minds as to the nature of what is. Because of extension transference, the pictures are taken for reality when all they are is an idea or explanation. Such pictures and explanations are real in one sense, because they are constructions of the human mind and they tell us a lot about how that mind works as a product of a given culture. But they are *not* the mind and they are not the real world either. They are, in Poincare's term, "conventions." Such conventions are nevertheless essential models on which some behavior can be based. If however, one treats them as reality, they are impossible to transcend or even examine, except in their own terms. Also, Western philosophies are restricted to working with words, and if one is to use words wisely and with validity, it is essential to know what the particular word system itself does to men's thought processes. To do this, you must know how language structures thought, as elucidated clearly by Whorf....In these terms, what we conceive as logic is rational only in very limited contexts in the West (1976: 214).

And, in discussing the difficulty of overcoming cultural misunderstandings, he touches upon yet another barrier to finding a path to the edge:

> There is, as far as I know, no way out of the dilemma of the cultural bind. One cannot normally transcend one's culture without first exposing its major axioms and unstated assumptions concerning what life is all about-- how it is lived, viewed, analyzed, talked about, described, and changed. Because cultures are wholes, are systematic (composed of interrelated systems in which each aspect is functionally interrelated with all other parts), and are highly contexted as well, it is hard to describe them from the outside....This brings us to a remarkable position: namely, that it is not possible to adequately describe a culture solely from the inside or from the outside without reference to the other....The task is far from simple, yet understanding ourselves and the world we have created--and which in turn

creates us--is perhaps the single most important task facing mankind today
(Hall, 1976: 222).

Our continued failure to observe these warnings from Hall, Deikman, Berger and Turnbull against treating our constructions as reality insures that we will find ourselves subject to a false consciousness, "impossible to transcend or even examine," and in need of the services of an iconoclast of the first order.

Our Iconoclasts: In the light of those understandings of how we fabricate and protect the illusions which keep us from apprehending our situation near the precipice, I propose that the critique of our social reality requires a great idol-breaking hammer, on several fronts at once. It is necessary to offer a vision of the chasm's edge in many different paradigms, if one is to contend successfully with our demonstrated capacity to maintain illusions. Paul Ricoeur points to a new path through our edge country, in his attempt at integrating the thought of three of our most formidable iconoclasts, confronting and seeking a way through the powerful "critique of religion" which they have offered, in his attempt to analyze the function of *suspicion*, "and attempt to understand what it signifies at the heart of our culture":

> If we are to succeed in understanding as a unity the theory of ideologies
> in Marx, the genealogies of ethics in Nietzsche, and the theory of ideas
> and illusions in Freud, we will see the configuration of a problem--
> hereinafter posed before the modern mind--the problem of *false-consciousness*. Therefore, it is to illuminate this problem of false-consciousness that we engage in a common rereading of Marx, Nietzsche,

and Freud. The term "false-consciousness" appears especially in Marx. But, I think that it can be applied usefully to Nietzsche and Freud, for it is a specific problem. It is a problem which is not concerned as such only with the individual as if he were in error in a purely epistemological sense, or a falsehood in a purely ethical sense; illusion is a cultural structure, a dimension of our social discourse. From here on, with Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, a new type of critique of culture appears

To be sure, Marx could not conceive of this illusion other than as a reflection of the class struggle. Nietzsche could not grasp false-consciousness other than as vengeance, or the resentment of the weak against the strong. And Freud could not experience this same problem apart from what I will call the semantics of desire, a history of human desire entrapped by cultural prohibitions.

These are the reasons why the approach to the problem of false-consciousness differs from one to the other; but each of them, disengaged from his narrowness, cooperates in a *general exegesis* of false-consciousness, and belongs by this fact in a hermeneutics, in a theory of interpretation, under the negative form of demystification. But with Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, beyond their economism, biologism, and psychiatrism respectively, demystification is characterized in the first place as the exercise of *suspicion*. I call suspicion the act of dispute exactly proportional to the expressions of false-consciousness. The problem of false-consciousness is the object, the correlative of the act of suspicion. Out of it is born the quality of doubt, a type of doubt which is totally new and different from Cartesian doubt (1978: 214-5).

This doubt, which differs in that the consciousness which doubts is brought into question along with the contents of that consciousness, raises the possibility of a masked consciousness which, "calls for a specific reading, a hermeneutics....uncovering what was covered...unveiling what was

veiled...unmasking what was masked (1978: 215)." In discovering how the critique of each is not only specific to the concerns of each of these man, but is also a far more general cultural critique, he says of his subjects:

> Marx is interesting, not when he accuses the capitalists as men [a moral critique], but capital as a structure which is ignorant of itself as a false creation of values. It is this history of the great money fetish which is the most important work of Marx. The denunciation of the religious implications of the great fetish is the point of the Marxist critique of religion. We can surely apply this critique to ourselves; we must appropriate it to ourselves as a task of truth and authenticity (1978: 216).

> In the same manner, the Nietzschean genealogy of morals must, I believe, be understood as a certain hermeneutics of our will--the willing will that Nietzsche tried to look for behind the "willed" will in its limited objectives....it was he who first had the insight that philosophy, as philosophy of culture, was a hermeneutics, an analysis of significations. Nietzsche was the first to see that hermeneutics is not simply a reflection on the rules of exegesis--exegesis limited to texts whether the texts be tests of classical antiquity or of biblical antiquity--because culture itself is a text; consequently, philosophy is exegetical in the degree to which it is the deciphering--behind the masked signs--of the intentions and the implied significations in a strong will and in a weak will....(1978: 216).

> And in order to speak of Freud in a few words....I think he would be much better understood if we would discern his place in a critique of culture. It is through psychiatry that he exercises his critique, but at the bottom it is a critique of the ideals and of the values of this culture, to the extent that they no longer pertain to a genealogy of the will, as in Nietzsche, but a genealogy of desire. The interest of Freud is always to wonder, faced with a cultural phenomenon, how this phenomenon pertains to a history of human desire....This critique concerns religion as far as it is effectively for us a compensation stemming from fear or a substitute for prohibited pleasures. It is obvious this "as far as" which will be the object of our [later] study...(1978: 217).

While we are more accustomed to thinking of the destructive aspects of each of these critiques, Ricoeur calls us to see the affirmations of each of these thinkers. These affirmations, while allowing for a future, arguably a better one, certainly bring the modernist to an unobstructed view of the edge of the chasm, plain and without equivocation:

> I think one would understand the affirmations of Marxism if one also understood the affirmation which also inhabits the great enterprise of Nietzschean destruction. Because the great problem of Nietzsche, and in this sense he was less naive than Marx, if I can say so, is that God is dead, and since He is dead, culturally, man cannot survive.This is why the problem of Nietzsche concerns itself with the afterman, the superman. And Nietzsche saw very well that the great *affirmation*, which Marx believed attainable by revolution through a political-social process, demands in truth a veritable new birth of man. One can only attain and anticipate this rebirth through three broken myths: the Superman, the Eternal Return, and Dionysus--triple myths of the future and of the will to power.

> To tell the truth, and Nietzsche knew it well, we do not have, we no longer have, we do not yet have, the key to decipher this new myth. But perhaps this is the myth of modernity par excellence. Modernity is becoming its own myth. What Marx called "understood necessity" moving to the transparency of consciousness to itself [the end of false-consciousness], becomes with Nietzsche the innocence of becoming--*Unschuld des Werdens*; this innocence of becoming would ultimately be the kingdom of necessity having become freedom.

> Such is the key also to the work of Freud. You know how at the end of his life Freud had remythologized all of his work....But this kingdom of necessity, this *ananke'* as it is called in his last works, can only be understood in the struggle between Eros and death, between the life and death instincts. One would understand the one work by the other if one could understand that this relation, this wager for Eros against Thanatos, has with Freud the same meaning as the myth of Dionysus for the late Nietzsche. It is difficult to understand fully these three myths of the

classless society or the understood necessity, of the eternal return, and of the reality principle. What they have in common, perhaps, is a certain way of blessing reality for what it is, a sort of celebration of the liberating power of necessity (1978: 218).

If we can follow them this far, we will understand the positive function of the dispute with religion by all three. Because what they have in common first of all is iconoclasm, the fight against idols, that is, against the gods or the God of men....the critique of religion as a mask, a mask of fear, a mask of domination, a mask of hate. A Marxist critique of ideology, a Nietzschean critique of resentment and a Freudian critique of infantile distress, are hereafter the views through which any kind of mediation of faith must pass (1978: 219).

And it is just that battle against idols, against "the gods of men," whether religious or economic, in which each of our edgefinders is engaged. This is certainly what Deikman is asking of us when, in my interpretation, he offers us the opportunity to examine structures which we are unaccustomed to examining because they have been labeled as religious or professional, when he offers us the same opportunity that Ricoeur has, the "critique of religion as a mask."

Robert Ornstein brings that same critique to our secular world view, the view which many who are critical of attempts at spiritual insight like to think of as the "real world." The work of Ornstein will figure importantly in several sections of this paper; here I want to delve briefly into how he offers us a particularly interesting opportunity to see the edge of our chasm, to tickle our *Angst*, if you will, as he

hammers away at the institutions of our society, in his most recent book, with

James Burke(1995):

> The culture we live in, based on the sequential influence of language on
> thought and operating according to the rationalist rules of Greek philosophy
> and reductionist practice, has wielded tremendous power. It has given us
> the wonders of the modern world on a plate. But it has also fostered beliefs
> that have tied us to centralized institutions and powerful individuals for
> centuries, which we must shuck off if we are to adapt to the world we've
> made: that unabated extraction of planetary resources is possible, that the
> most valuable members of society are specialists, that people cannot
> survive without leaders, that the body is mechanistic and can only be
> healed with knives and drugs, that there is only one superior truth, that the
> only important human abilities lie in the sequential and analytic mode of
> thought...(p. 311).

Those very forces and ideas in our society which seem the most useful and most

strongly supported by the pragmatics of power and "success" are turning out to be

non-adaptive! The very behaviors, which we are now helping to spread into the few

corners of the planet which had thus far managed to avoid our culture by hiding

in various forms of the Middle Ages, are cornerstones of our corporate false

consciousness. Burke and Ornstein describe how our heritage as a species has

contributed to this condition:

> Up to 30,000 years ago, human mental processes had evolved in large
> part to deal with immediate problems: deciding what berries to eat, how to
> survive the winter, how to avoid dangerous animals, and when to find
> shelter. These were the mechanisms with which blind evolution had
> prepared us to handle the world. our mental predispositions, like that if
> every other animal, were circumscribed by the immediate horizon and by
> short-term problems. This was in every sense "natural," because there

would have been little point in worrying about the long term if immediate threats such as tigers and winter were not dealt with.

Our ancestors also never had to deal with all of humanity as a factor in their daily lives....There was never the need to consider the entire planet because it was too big for us to have any meaningful impact....[however] Humanity is now a monster, producing many more people in a month than were alive just before the first agricultural revolution and in aggregate weighing more than any other land species.

Because our lives have changed since those primeval times, it is imperative above all that we revise our out-of-date perception of the world, so that our ancient, small-scale, small-time mind can be expanded to consider more distant horizons and more frequent changes. Many commentators on current problems seem to suggest that a logical or psychological alteration in the way our minds work will, alone, do the trick. But we are so mentally separated from the natural world around us by [our technology, which has] over millennia, shaped every aspect of our lives that both the [technology itself] as well as a change of consciousness need to be parts of the resolution.

The difficulty is that modern human beings no longer directly perceive the world they live in and whose condition affects them. As Chernobyl showed, the world is too big and complex for that. And it is not the case that we can somehow throw away all modern technology and return to a simpler, Arcadian life. Even if such a world ever existed and even if some of us could survive in that kind of environment, the vast majority of the population (who cannot farm) would not want to. (p. 281)

We have to carry our house along with us, we have grown so dependent upon what we have built that we must save not only ourselves, but our creation.

Another who sees this one-way ("you can't go home again") aspect of our situation is Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who argues that the evolution of reflective self-

consciousness produced an incredible quantum jump in the way the brain functions, so that consciousness becomes, like any other organism, centered upon its own survival, creating the situation that Ornstein and Burke have just described:

> An animal without a conscious self only needs to reproduce the information in its genes. A person with a self will want to keep and spread the information in his or her consciousness as well. A self identified with material possessions will drive its owner to accumulate more and more property, regardless of consequences for anyone else. The self of Stalin, built around the need for power, did not rest until everyone who might challenge his absolute rule was dead....It is for this reason that the fate of humanity in the next millennium depends so closely on the kinds of selves we will succeed in creating....If the selves of our children and their children become too timid, too conservative and retiring, and try to stop change by retiring into a safe cocoon, eventually they will be overcome by more vital life-forms. On the other hand if we just forge ahead blindly, taking what we can from one another and from the world around us, there is not going to be much left to enjoy on the planet (1993: 23-4).

Another source calling attention to such an ethic of "taking what we can from one another and from the world around us," is Svi Shapiro's description of the conservative agenda of "back to basics" as a survivalistic ethic. No part of our society seems more important to those who would hide the views of our iconoclasts from us than does education, where education, in this case means schooling of a special sort. Once again, the shadow of the Ik seems to fall upon us:

> The "basics" imbued curriculum is connected not with matters of awareness, insight, or imagination, but with supplying a set of skills and knowledge needed to simply (if not easily) "get by" in the world. Its utilitarian emphasis is on the ability to cope with, or adapt to, what appears to exist in the immediate present, and in the immediate vicinity. In its

fragmented and highly circumscribed concerns it mirrors the survivalist mentality....The assumption is of an individual's accommodation to, or acceptance of, social reality. The development of individual capacities through the acquisition of appropriate knowledge or skill at school becomes, in short, the vehicle for human survival in contemporary American society. The perspective of "basic skills" and "minimum competencies" asserts, ultimately, the individualistic world-view in which personal effort and ability, not structural change, becomes the means to deal with the present harsh reality....From this perspective the individual enters a Hobbesian world of unmitigated agency, a world in which, through the appropriate education, one may be prepared to cope with a deteriorating struggle for survival....The result [of a conservative view which while reifing the present, wishes to return to the past] is the conservative inability to see the moral and spiritual crisis of American society as rooted in its fundamental historic structures, especially those related to capitalistic institutions. The disintegrative effect on traditional values of a consumption-oriented system, and the pervasive commodification of human activity, with all its dire effects on moral and spiritual life, is not easily attributed to these core institutional influences....[to maintain the conservative romanticization] The moral rot must be seen as an unnatural interruption, an aberration from what is the fundamental nature of the society (1993: 297-8).

I hope that, as more and more of our paths are seen to go over the edge of the chasm, the possibility of adapting a strategy such as "retiring into a safe cocoon" is coming to seem not only untenable, but also unattractive. To that end, in assailing the idol of the marketplace, I have called upon one more instance of support for these positions, from what may well be an unexpected quarter. The patron saint of our age, Adam Smith is generally known only for his discovery (documented in *The Wealth of Nations*) of the "Invisible Hand," that force in our market economy which is supposed to yield a greater good from the aggregation of actions taken in pursuit of individual self interest. Understandably absent from

the bibliography of those who most appreciate *that* discovery is Smith's other major work, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1966), which provides the moral context within which I think that Smith expected his later work to be considered. Speaking of the superiority of the virtue of beneficence over that of justice, he said:

> Actions of a beneficent tendency, which proceed from proper motives, seem alone to require a reward....Beneficence is always free, it cannot be extorted by force, the mere want of it exposes to no punishment....There is, however, another virtue, of which the observance is not left to the freedom of our own wills, which may be extorted by force, and of which the violation exposes to resentment and consequently to punishment....Though the mere want of beneficence seems to merit no punishment from equals, the greater exertions of that virtue appear to deserve the highest reward. By being productive of the greatest good, they are the natural and approved objects of the liveliest gratitude. Though the breach of justice, on the contrary, expose to punishment, the observance of the rules of that virtue seems scarce to deserve any reward....We may often fulfil all the rules of justice by sitting still and doing nothing (1966: 112-7).

Even though his last great work does not even mention the concept of human sympathy which was the cornerstone of his moral philosophy (Edwards, 1967, V.7: 463) it seems to me that Adam Smith would agree that we owe each other more than the unintended benefit rendered by the "invisible hand" of capitalism, having argued during a decade of teaching at Oxford:

> Those whose hearts never open to the feelings of humanity, should, we think, be shut out in the same manner, from the affections of all their fellow-creatures, and be allowed to live in the midst of society, as in a great desert, where there is nobody to care for them, or to enquire after them....The man who is barely innocent, who only observes the laws of justice with regard to others, and merely abstains from hurting his neighbors, can merit only that his neighbors in their turn should respect his

innocence, and that the same laws should be religiously observed with regard to him (Smith, 1966: 118).

The idol of the marketplace, which holds that competition between unrestrained self-interests has some moral standing that sets it above mere greed, is thus denied by its founder, and its proponents are shut out from the human community by their patron saint.

Iconoclasm Shading into Visions of Bridges: There are others who would gladly speak to these points, calling our attention to the inappropriate and ineffective nature of our cultural idols, but I suspect I have offered enough testimony to try the patience of even those who have an interest in being convinced. I would like to turn somewhat in the direction of the next chapter, and explore the margins of this chasm with a discussion of an educator who has sought to employ one of our cultural means in a skillful way: Martin Seligman, the Director of Training in Clinical Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, and an authority in the study of motivation. Because his work in psychology would be so obviously useful in the "healing" of *Angst*, a brief encounter would most likely yield the impression of someone less interested in uncovering the limitations of our cultural repertoire than in healing those who have recoiled from that edge; one might expect one of those "ego repairmen" whom our existentialist friends would be quick to denigrate. As we shall see, this is far from the case. The capacity which I think Seligman exhibits, to be both an edge-finding iconoclast and one who at least dreams of

bridges over the chasm, is certainly not unique among those discussed in this chapter; however, since his work speaks directly and in a highly accessible manner to the questions of the origins of despair and of hope in our society, it is with him that I will close this chapter and introduce the next.

Seligman has been credited with being the first experimental scientist to offer evidence that substantially reduced the credibility of the Skinnerian behaviorists, through his development of the concept of "learned helplessness," where failure resulting from the inability to control painful stimuli produces "giving up." This work has been widely replicated and applied, offering insights into many aspects of the human condition, especially depression, as a function of optimistic and pessimistic explanatory styles. In an elegant conceptualization of the explanatory styles characteristic of pessimism, in explaining a test instrument that measures "hope", among other things, he tells us:

> Whether or not we have hope depends on two dimensions of our explanatory style: pervasiveness and permanence. Finding temporary and specific causes for misfortune is the art of hope: temporary causes limit helplessness in time, and specific causes limit helplessness to the original situation. On the other hand, permanent causes produce helplessness far into the future, and universal causes spread helplessness through all your endeavors. Finding permanent and universal causes for misfortune is the practice of despair (1991: 48).

After twenty-five years of research into these states and their associated explanatory styles, Seligman reports:

The defining characteristic of pessimists is that they tend to believe bad events will last a long time, will undermine everything they do, and are their own fault. The optimists, who are confronted with the same hard knocks of this world, think about misfortune in the opposite way. They tend to believe defeat is just a temporary setback, that its causes are confined to this one case. The optimists believe defeat is not their fault: circumstances, bad luck, or other people brought it about. Such people are unfazed by defeat. Confronted by a bad situation, they perceive it as a challenge and try harder.

There two habits of thinking about causes have consequences. Literally hundreds of studies show that pessimists give up more easily and get depressed more often. These experiments also show that optimists do much better in school and college, at work and on the playing field. They regularly exceed the predictions of aptitude tests. When optimists run for office, they are much more likely to be elected than pessimists are. There health is unusually good. They age well, much freer than most of us from the usual physical ills of middle age. Evidence even suggests that they may live longer (1991: 4-5).

Rather than suggesting that one is predestined to fall forever into whichever of these categories life has thus far assigned, he says:

Pessimists can in fact learn to be optimists, and not through mindless devices like whistling a happy tune or mouthing platitudes...but by learning a new set of cognitive skills...discovered in the laboratories and clinics of leading psychologists...[to] undo lifelong habits of pessimism and its extension, depression (Seligman, 1991: 5).

At this point Seligman justifies my assertion that he is not of the "ego-doctor" school, with a societal critique of what he styles an "age of personal control." Just as others have suggested, Seligman, with his co-authors Peterson and Maier,

argues that such emphasis on personal control in our society as is exemplified by cognitive techniques, although founded upon real psychological needs, has unexamined costs, "Something about modern life seems to have greatly multiplied the likelihood of depression, and it may be our glorification of the individual (Peterson, 1993: 209)." They suggest that :

> Modernity has raised our goals and expectations that we can achieve them ("all problems have a solution") beyond any fit with reality. It has increased the sheer number of helplessness experiences, of failures....Finally, to the extent that modernity supports and sanctions internal, stable, and global explanations of why we fail, it enhances a depressive explanatory style. Because we as a people take individual control seriously, it follows that when an individual fails, self-blame--about stable and global faults--is a plausible explanation (Peterson, 1993: 211).

In fact, they ascribe profound societal consequences to this aspect of modernism, because it has occurred in concert with the "waning of the commons":

> There may well be less obvious manifestations of this emphasis on personal control, such things as the rise of materialism and cynicism about politics and social institutions. Generally speaking, the incredible selfishness of the American people can be phrased in terms of personal control....We have become ensconced in technological cocoons....[which] Rather than allowing us to get to the substance of life in a more efficient way...have become the substance itself, crowding other matters...out of the scene....The problem is that the outcomes over which they give us such exquisite control may be trivial (Peterson, 1993: 307-8).

They are quick to point out that this is not the only model for social organization. Several differing cultures are offered as counter examples, among which are:

> [The Amish] are an agrarian society, with limited individual goals and limited personal choice. "Control" lies with their society and with their God.

With more modest individual goals comes a much greater chance of achieving them. And if they do fail, they may have an explanatory structure that does not place all the blame on the individual. Failure is seen in terms of unstable and specific causes (an afterlife and God's plan) (Peterson, 1993: 211).

In a society where we are socialized to have the boundless expectations characterized by the "every child has a chance to grow up to be President of the United States" palaver, these authors are not surprised to find such a heavy toll taken by the intrusion of reality into the age of personal control. They suggest that:

Our task as a society is to find better ways of dealing with control, so that we end up with fewer casualties. We should help people satisfy their desire for control in less egocentric ways as well as encourage them to value additional goals (Peterson, 1993: 308).

Suggesting several means to that end, including more responsive social institutions, they conclude with a call for a retreat from the pathological form of individualism that they have ascribed to this "age:"

More profoundly, we should inculcate an orientation to the common good in our society. We need to make the interdependence of people something we value. Only when we start to take other people's welfare seriously will they start to do so for us. This seems to be a prerequisite for creating a world that is responsive, one that will encourage efficacy on the part of all. When we stop competing against one another in destructive ways, we all can be satisfied about our accomplishments.

Perhaps at one time such a vision more clearly characterized the United States. Perhaps not. In any case, it does not now. Special interests abound in our society, and their agendas become more narrow each year. Unity has been replaced by diversity. Let us raise the politically unpopular point

that increased attention to differences among our people will not make this society a better place in which to live.

We do not wish to gloss over the past, the fact that racism and sexism have excluded many individuals from the mainstream of our society. But a further split between people today is not a solution to past injustices; bringing them together in a true coalition is. This sounds like a moral argument, but we have arrived at it from our research. Our only assumption is that depression, demoralization, underachievement, and illness are bad. We think the lack of an orientation to the commons--the incredible selfishness that so abounds in our country--is in no small way responsible for these ills (Peterson, 1993: 309).

Similarly, arguing from his research which links depression with an overcommitment to the self and an undercommitment to the common good, Martin Seligman (1990) prescribes service to others:

If you engage in activity in service of the commons long enough, it will gain meaning to you. You may find that you get depressed less easily, that you get sick less often, and that you feel better acting for the common good than indulging in solitary pleasures. Most important, an emptiness inside you, the meaninglessness that rampant individualism nurtures, will begin to fill (p. 290).

Seligman's understanding of this abandonment of the commons has a focus characteristic of what Bellah and his associates has termed the "utilitarian individualism," which is, Bellah maintains, pervasive in our culture and which comprises, "...an understanding of life generally hostile to older ideas of moral order. Its center is the autonomous individual, presumed able to choose the roles he will play and the commitments he will make, not on the basis of higher truths, but according to the criteria of life-effectiveness as the individual judges it (1986:

47)." This is a limitation which Seligman recognizes in his own work, and which I would suggest is characteristic of the entire range of such social pragmatism—an association of radical individualism with despair:

> But our epidemic of depression is not merely a matter of the paultry comfort we get from society at large....The growth of [individualism], for example, means that failure is probably my fault—because who else is there but me? The decline of the commons means that failure is permanent and pervasive. To the extent that larger, benevolent institutions (God, nation, family) no longer matter, personal failures seem catastrophic. Because time in an individualistic society seems to end with our own death, individual failure seems permanent. There is no consolation for personal failure (Seligman, 1991: 286)

Seligman does not make the reductionist error of confusing what his psychology can accomplish with the hope which I specified in the first chapter as the one which Heschel grounds in mystery. As he acknowledges, although the efficacy of human agency does allow change to take place, it is efficacious only in an appropriate context:

> Optimism is just a useful adjunct to wisdom. By itself it cannot provide meaning. Optimism is a tool to help the individual achieve the goals he has set for himself. It is in the choice of the goals themselves that meaning—or emptiness—resides (1991: 291).

As I quoted him earlier, Seligman said in speaking of the explanatory style of pessimists, "[Ascribing] permanent causes produce helplessness far into the future, and universal causes spread helplessness through all your endeavors. Finding permanent and universal causes for misfortune is the practice of despair (1991:

48)." I suggest that his description of this "practice of despair" reveals quite starkly one of our "edges," while at the same time offering a quite credible argument that there are choices at that edge other than despair.

Holding this Inquiry Before My Questions

Where have we come thus far in seeking a pedagogy of hope? What can the work cited contribute to our quest? It would seem that we have firmly engaged some of our initial questions, having spoken at length on the nature of hope, and of the consequences of its absence. Our description of the discontinuity which we have named the chasm has set before us a stark picture of our condition, yet that picture is one which, by its attempt to remove the veil of illusion concealing the systemic failure of our cultural means reveals that this exhaustion is a necessary, if painful preparation, one which eventually brings us to see the edge of the chasm as a waystation on the path, rather than as a terminus, and one which intends to offer a hope that consists, in part, of a path which leads to finding more "skillful means" in a new cultural repertoire.

Where are We Going from Here?

In the next chapter, I will continue my approach to the possibility that there might be something we can say about the chasm, beyond acknowledging its existence. I will consider, from the viewpoint of my theological sources, some of the bridgeheads which strike me as most compelling, and attempt to defend my affirmation of the absolute nature of hope. Following that, the fourth chapter will attempt the perilous task of discussing the claims of special knowledge which I believe are unavoidable in founding hope upon wisdom, in the context of my earlier discussion of apologetics.

Chapter III.

MIGHT THERE BE BRIDGES?

Having declared our accustomed behaviors interrupted, short of hope, by this chasm, on what basis might I propose that bridges exist which might take us across that chasm to some ground for hope, a ground more sure than that which has failed us here at the end of modernity? And, if such bridges do exist (and if they go somewhere), in what ways might they be accessible to human agency? Surely many of the "answers" which have been foisted upon us in the past are the greater part of the problems discussed in *Chapter One*, and I have no wish to contribute to those. Rather, I will offer here several views from the Christian theological realm, which strike a chord in me, not as answers to our questions, or as prescriptions for others, but as attempts to make a difficult point: trying to metaphorically point toward an affinity for truth which seems to occur with great frequency among persons of respectable capacity and apparent good-will, while acknowledging the lessons learned from our edgefinders about illusion and false-consciousness. These reports seem to me, even when they take the form of systemizing or grand theory, to represent narratives of the sort of search in which I am engaged. Just as the previous chapter offered differing views which, juxtaposed began to have (at least to this author) some common thread, some "edge" found in each, so here I will be looking at several disparate individuals

whose work speaks to me across their differences to a deeper commonality: from each, I sense a hint of possibility, stronger in some but common to all, that there might just possibly be bridges.

For that reason, I have chosen their help in the initial approach to the 'quest' portion of my third theme, which the reader will recall from its initial listing in *Chapter Two*, along with several others:

> • The conviction that, as a response to the condition of our world and the inadequacy of our generally accepted means for dealing with it, my path to meaning lies in finding a ground for hope (my quest) and sharing it (my pedagogy) in a form which is sustainable within such a world of despair. My hope that such meaning would contribute to the lessening of pain, of the vast sea of unnecessary suffering which we inflict upon ourselves.

In this chapter, we will be dealing with intimations of this ground, dispatches from the front, narratives and reports from explorers of the edge; further development of the quest for a ground of hope is the theme of *Chapter Four*, as is my pedagogy. As befits persons assigned such a task, the work of the authors who are the focus of the current chapter have at their core a relationship with the absolute which, while necessary in my opinion, makes them difficult for those who have studied under our iconoclasts who led us through the previous chapter.

Although such a relationship must inevitably be characteristic of theology (a "discourse concerning God"), because of a consequent association with the historical records of religions and oppressions, paths which refer to the absolute have become more aversive to many of us than the abyss of despair. Visions of inquisitors, abusive patriarchs, conversions by the sword, and indoctrination into cultic belief systems all cloud our capacity to consider that there might be more to such traditional approaches. Yet, our language is already deficient in its capacity for discussion of meaning; bereft of the words which are the property of theology, it becomes virtually disabled. We must reclaim that language for the entire community of seekers if we are to have the means to proceed. I have selected these authors because I believe they offer us the opportunity of understanding their traditions in the light of the understanding which our edgefinders offered us, and of freeing the insights of the founders of these traditions from the subsequent accretion of "illusions" which have transformed many of these insights into either ossified stultifying idols or lifeless linguistic deserts. This deconstruction-from-within might make it possible to acknowledge not only the negative aspects of such traditions, but also their strengths. It is possible that their understanding might not only reclaim these traditions as skillful means, but also render them less dangerous to bystanders. I believe that the sources which I draw upon in this chapter are not only engaged in such a task, but are, in varying degrees, exhibiting success.

As an illustration of both the benefits and difficulties of one such approach to this process of reclaiming the language of our traditions from these accretions of false consciousness, I would ask the reader to be self-observant in conducting a small thought-experiment. Consider how much better prepared for life's developmental tasks (including spiritual tasks) a student might be if told what we have already discussed about this problem in the preceding chapters--suppose our hypothetical syllabus began by saying:

> 1. If you want to become human, the first step is to learn to behave as if you accepted the moral and ethical constraints on self-interest that are proposed by *whatever* tradition is your own. Even the most crassly fundamentalist versions of our traditions usually offer more humane guidance for living one's life than does our skeptical-to-the-point-of-cynicism popular culture, an assertion to which the litany of horrors in the preceding chapters stands witness. Consider that the behavior which our traditions ascribe to saints is, rather, a minimum human duty, to be superseded by capacities that can only be attained after such duties are observed.

> 2. At the same time, in choosing such a means, you are undertaking an obligation to remember the historical costs of fanaticism, cultism, and the abandonment of critical faculties, which have allowed the perversion and selective application of these moral, ethical, and

religious systems to support the interests of governance and commerce at the expense of the community and human prospects. Remember that every one of us has that same capacity (predisposition even) to become enrapt in cultic beliefs and behavior, a potential against which understanding is our best armor. In addition, to minimize the danger to oneself and to others, you must understand and remember the instrumental nature of these systems of belief, which have all originated as "skillful means" designed by Teachers for specific times, places, and persons and which are intended to be set aside when their transformative purpose is accomplished. A modern exemplar of one of the traditions has suggested that our tendency of ignoring that understanding has led to the abandonment of religion as a means by his school, "...because we lost so many students when it came time to move on to the next step."

Of course, such a proposal eventually requires a resolution of the highly contested issue of the possibility of the existence and derivation of that "special knowledge" said to be required to construct skillful means and to capitalize *Teacher*. I shall offer my personal resolution of that issue in the next chapter; however, in the meantime, taking as given the appropriate disclaimers about the constraints of language, and because the ground I will propose for hope lies there, I assert:

firstly, that we may (in fact must) yield our customary exclusion of the transcendental and the absolute from our educational discourse in order to move forward in our search for hope, and secondly, that with the perspective I have proposed, we may do so while avoiding (or remedying) invoking those demons of "the epistemological order of yesteryear" against which Purpel and Shapiro (1995) warned us, without an undue risk.

Discoursing About God.

As I indicated in my introduction to this chapter, it is necessary for me and for many of my colleagues to go through a process of forgiving Christian theologians their history, before being able to hear their voices. Although I have not yet matured enough in that process to offer a general amnesty, I have been able to listen with sympathy to those who follow, and as generally seems to be the case, the true beneficiary of forgiveness is the one who, however haltingly, had thought of him/herself as bestowing it.

I want to emphasize that what I wish to present here is not an exercise in Christian apologetics; although, I want, through offering crumbs from their generous table as samples, to show that these theologies speak to the questions which concern us here, and that for those who find their path here, the possibilities are truly profound, contrary to the tarnished image of simplistic fundamentalism which many intellectuals have undeservedly generalized to all of their faith. Rather than

apology, I want to demonstrate that the search for the edge of our cultural chasm, and the hope of passing beyond it, extends into the center of their discourse; these are not *Grand Inquisitors*, but fellow seekers.

In this Christian "discourse about God" (i.e., theology) there is a willingness to talk about hope that is absent from many other conversations. The varieties of that hope are as broad as those discussed in the first chapter, ranging from the get-rich-with-God televangelist to the most sublime. Obviously my preference in this variable has been one of the main factors in choosing who would follow here. I shall look at two sub-themes in this company: the absolute nature of hope and the visions that these sources bring to hoping absolutely while living creatively within the world; and close with a transition from these views, by way of some critique, into the more specific search for bridges that will concern *Chapter Four.*

About Holding to the Absolute Nature of Hope While Hoping Within the World: In the preceding chapter, I acknowledged that my assertion of the absolute nature of hope implies a radical and unfashionable foundationalism, a "skepticism about skepticism" that is not comfortable with the solipsism implicit in yielding the field to criticism alone. These theologians are powerful voices for such a position, and they give it voice in such a way that I do not feel shut out as I would by the exclusivistic eschatology characteristic of many of their peers. Their capacity to bridge this division between heaven and earth, expressed by their concern for

hope *in* the world as well as *after* it, is an ally to me in the struggle to resolve my own paradox: an absolute hope which also needs human agency (and pedagogy).

While my sources offer many profound statements of the absolute nature of hope, I would like to begin with that of Gabriel Marcel, perhaps because of his being doubly credentialed, both as a Christian theologian and as one of the founders of existentialism (although he denied the label (1967: 60)). In his *Homo Viator: Introduction to a Metaphysic of Hope* (1962), he describes the only type of hope that is not eventually a contract with despair, framing a distinction between a hope that can stand against the awfulness of our world and a pragmatic (or illusionary) confidence in a particular outcome, where confidence is finally just a calculation, a 'p-value' in the statistics of fate. His distinction rests upon the difference between "to hope" and "to hope *that*." He says, "in so far as I make my hope conditional, I myself put up limits to the process by which I could triumph over all successive disappointments...I own implicitly that if my expectations are not fulfilled in some particular point, I shall have no possibility of escaping from...despair (p. 46)." Discussing how hope and despair hinge upon our will, either to set within our minds conditions beyond which we are determined to fail, or else to:

> conceive...of the inner disposition of one who, setting no condition or limit
> and abandoning himself in absolute confidence, would thus transcend all
> possible disappointment....This is what determines the ontological position
> of hope--absolute hope, inseparable from a faith which is likewise absolute,
> transcending all laying down of conditions, and for this very reason every
> kind of representation whatever kind it might be. The only possible source
> from which this absolute hope springs must once more be stressed. It

appears as a response of the creature to the infinite Being to whom it is
conscious of owing everything that it has and upon whom it cannot impose
any condition whatsoever without scandal (1962: 46-47).

Such absolute hope must stand against, "Unhope which is opposed to hope as
fear is opposed to desire, is truly a death in life, a death anticipated. No problem
is more important or more difficult than determining how we can overcome
it...(1964: 54)."

Marcel frames our paradox of the world and the absolute in the terms of the basis
for values, exploring the dilemma inherent in ascribing the origin of values to either
society or the individual. He says (1967: 36-7) that to the extent philosophers have
accepted the contention that values have no independent reality, but are the
construction of the self (in the smallest sense of *self*--perhaps even our
commanding self from the previous chapter) then we are confronted with an,
"atomization incompatible with the intention or the exigency implied in the very
idea of the good....[which] cannot help but engender a state of war to which only
victory can put an end" And with regard to "the society being substituted for the
self," he contends that we will not "be able to escape a ruinous relativism" by that
means, since, to do so we must find some ground upon which, "the individual
conscience...[as] the bearer of universal values can rise against the collectivity and
oppose genuine justice...to the false."

> We can only get out of this inextricable situation by declaring that the
> prophetic individual is the bearer of a certain message which translates a
> transcendent truth....From this moment on it seems that there is no mean:

one will either waive all evaluation to shut oneself up in a radical subjectivism, but there can then no longer be a question of progress in any sense—or else one will maintain a value judgement, but this will only be possible by calling in the other dimension (1967: 39).

It is exactly the wish to avoid that radical subjectivism, implicit in our otherwise useful postmodern "pluralism," that I have come here to the theologians, to tread with care between two errors, "the one leading to a fatalism which destroys freedom, the other to solipsism and delirium (Marcel, 1967: 56)." And finally, speaking of the hope for peace, Marcel orders his ontology for us, describing his path along that edge, and the place of the self:

It is perhaps simply by always making a point of seeing the present reality...as objectively as possible, that we can struggle the most effectively for peace....I will not fail, on the other hand, to recall that there is another plane, that of faith, of hope, of charity, that of prayer, which is perhaps the only one on which one can serve peace by establishing it first of all in oneself....I will be still more explicit, at the risk of shocking certain of my readers. At the same time as we struggle for peace by human means, we have, I think, always to assure ourselves more intimately of the reality of the invisible world (1967: 142).

Similarly, the systematic theology of Jurgen Moltmann argues that it is "God's self-sacrificing love" which is the only ground for hope. If that sounds as if we are bound for a discussion of 'angels on the head of a pin', please reserve judgement while we hear not only his own discussion of hope and death, but expansions of the basic premise of love as the ground for hope and "hope for a just society" into discussions by Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel of women's issues. In his contribution

to *Love: The Foundation of Hope*, Moltmann (1988) offers a twenty-year perspective on his widely acclaimed *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (1993), and raises immediately one of the key questions concerning a spiritual grounding of hope:

> When I wrote *Theology of Hope* more than twenty years ago, I started with the assumption that Christian hope since Augustine had been reduced by the Church to saving the soul in a heaven beyond death and that, in this reduction, it has lost its life-renewing and world-changing power. In our theological tradition, eschatology has always been limited to *individual eschatology*. It actually dealt only with the personal question of human beings about eternity: What will happen to me in death and the judgement of God? How will I become saved?....If, however, in God there is only hope for the individual soul, then the human community becomes irrelevant, as also do the body and the earth....But what is Christian hope good for then?....Is [it] supposed merely to give us comfort for all the pain of life?....Hope for eternal life that is only private and that has reality only in the beyond deprives people of emotions and the ability to love here on earth. People so deprived can pass by the suffering of others, for they anticipate something better for themselves....I tried to present the Christian hope no longer as such an "opium of the beyond" but rather as the divine power that makes us alive in this world (1988: 3-4).

From this excerpt, one might quickly pigeonhole Moltmann as a liberation theologian; however, he maintains that both liberation theologians and their opponents are missing the point by creating a false dichotomy. In his view, when the liberation theologians quote his work to support the conclusion that "our expectations must be turned into present realities," they are creating:

> nothing else than a *theology of secularization*. Out of the "not merely, but also" in my statement they have made a "not, but." ....Those who see this-worldliness and the beyond in Christian hope as an "either/or" destroy the

two sides of eschatology and rob Christian hope of the courage to live and the comfort in dying....When Pope John Paul II visited Nicaragua...he demanded the three Roman Catholic priests in the government "not" participate in the liberation struggle of the people, "but rather" prepare people for eternal life.

All my life, I have fought against those two erroneous alternatives, the one secular and the other pietistic....We will only be able to overcome the unfruitful and paralyzing confrontation between personal and cosmic hope, between individual and universal eschatology, if we reject the pietistic path of placing the soul at the center of things and also the secular way of making this world central and instead focus on God, God's Kingdom, and God's glory....What do we really hope for?....Those who think that God exists only for the sake of their soul have not thought God but rather an idol. In the same way, anyone who thinks that God exists only for the sake of liberating the oppressed has not thought God but only an idol (1988: 5).

The resolution of that dichotomy is perused by a progression from, "personal hope...to the communal and cosmic hope...to end with the glorification of God for God's sake. The first effect of eschatology is personal faith. Then follows obedience in this world. From this originates the hope for redemption of the body and the expectation of the transformation of the entire world into the kingdom of God (1988: 6)." Yet, the church as an institution in our society is seldom an agent of transformative change. In his criticism of the conservative stamp placed upon the church by the Confession of Augsburg XVI (see also Brueggemann, below), he says it "...declares that the gospel brings no new laws and ordinances into the world, and does not dissolve the political and economic orders (1993: 331)," a situation which led the reformers to, "neglect the call to discipleship...and to concentrate on the concern for order and its preservation. The new idea of calling

was transformed into a doctrine of the two kingdoms, in which it was more and more a matter of adjusting questions of competence as between the divine institutions of church, state, business and home (1993: 331)."

Moltmann finds the church embedded in subjectivism, in danger of losing social relevance, and in need of reclaiming its transformative role. He says that the social institutions are "means on the way" by which we shape our world as we expend ourselves in love. To see love *only* as transcendent and absolute is to fall into the mold that our social structures would prescribe to safely isolate religion:

> If Christianity, according to the will of him in whom it believes and in whom it hopes, is to be different and to serve a different purpose, then it must address itself to no less a task than that of breaking out of these its socially fixed roles. It must then display a kind of conduct which is not in accordance with these. That is the conflict which is imposed on every Christian and every Christian Minister. The God who called them to life should expect of them something other than what modern industrial society expects and requires of them, then Christians must venture into an exodus and regard their roles as a new Babylonian exile....Only when their resistance shows them to be a group that is incapable of being assimilated...can they communicate their own hope to this society...to resist the institutional stabilization of things, and by "raising the question of meaning,' to make things uncertain and keep them moving and elastic in the process of history. This aim--here formulated to begin with in very general terms--is not achieved simply by stirring up 'historicality', vitality, and mobility in the realms which are socially unburdened but have been brought socially to general stagnation. It is achieved precisely by breaking through this social stagnation. Hope alone keeps life--including public, social life--flowing and free (1993: 324).

He is quite clear that this means more than what the church does now, sitting quietly in its assigned place and avoiding prophetic challenges to the secular practices of even its own members. Moltmann's congregation might not be permitted the firewall between confession and business which shelters the conscience of many:

> The Church lays claim to the whole of humanity in mission. This mission is not carried out within the horizon of expectation provided by the social roles which society concedes to the Church, but it takes place within its own peculiar horizon of the eschatological expectation of the coming kingdom of God, of the coming righteousness and the coming peace, of the coming freedom and dignity of man. The Christian Church has not to serve mankind in order that this world may remain what it is...but in order that it may transform itself and become what it is promised to be....This means in practice that Christianity takes up mankind--or to put it concretely, the church takes up the society with which it lives--into its own horizon of expectation of the eschatological fulfillment of justice, life, humanity and sociability, and communicates in its own decisions in history its openness and readiness for this future and its elasticity towards it (1993: 327-8).

And how does one see the world within such a horizon? I see someone else walking along Marcel's ridge between errors, contending with the vertigo at the chasm's edge:

> the hope of resurrection must bring about a new understanding of the world. This world is not the heaven of self-realization, as it is said to be in Idealism. This world is not the hell of self-estrangement, as it is said to be in romanticist and existentialist writing. The world is not yet finished, but is understood as engaged in history. It is therefore the world of possibilities, the world in which we can serve the future, promised truth and righteousness and peace. This is the age of diaspora, of sowing in hope, of self-surrender and sacrifice, for it is an age which stands within the horizon of a new future. Thus self-expenditure in this world, day-to-day love

in hope, becomes possible and becomes human within that horizon of expectation which transcends this world (1993: 338).

As I discussed at the beginning of this section, because of the history associated with these ideas, there are still many who rightfully have great difficulty with engaging them. Certainly there is no group for whom this history is more difficult than it is for women. Asking, "what can the Christian God offer women today?" Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel says:

> Women, more and more, suffer because of the images of God as governor, judge, warrior, and see their views of life and their visions of a new society, of peace within and friendship with nature, obstructed by these images: the angry, Warring Yahweh of the Old Testament; the judge, lord, master who sacrifices his son, who demands compensation and sacrifice. Expressed in these images is women's own suffering, caused by society, by systems of education, by men and fathers, and also by mothers who were brought up in patriarchy. It seems to me that those images are a mirror of our own alienation, of our lack of identity, self-esteem, and self-acceptance, of our self-hate....Where are other God images we can refer to that are integrating and liberating, healing and reconciling, that can teach us to accept and love ourselves (1988:23-4)?

She finds hope in a response to this question from two streams of church tradition: Wisdom, and the unconditional love of Reformation theology:

> Wisdom is a new and helpful image of God. Wisdom is a female figure who originated in the Egyptian goddess tradition and shaped the Israelite theology from the third century B.C. on. With Wisdom, a whole range of new, embracing, saving, healing conceptions of God broke into Israelite thinking, all overlooked in our patriarchal tradition....The God of the Sermon on the Mount, who lets the sun rise on the evil and the good and who sends rain on the just and the unjust, is such a matriarchal, all-embracing, unconditionally loving God. The Jesus who dines with tax collectors,

> sinners, and prostitutes acts and speaks like Wisdom, and the oldest Christology actually seems to have been Sophialogy!....In my view, this picture of God would yield consequences for a new understanding of salvation that would look like this: Those who live out of the power of this matriarchal God are accepted with their whole existence, with skin and bones, with inner and outer, with the so-called negative and positive. All who live in this realm of God should be able to say today, "I am good, I am whole, I am beautiful. (p. 24-5)"

The recognition of the Wisdom of the matriarchal God would free women to attend to their own spiritual needs; rather than being compelled to an agenda related to suppressing pride, characteristically a failing of the patriarch, they would be freed to attend to the self-hate which has been their birthright in a masculine church:

> The American Valerie Saiving Goldstein has spoken of the "female" sin as the "underdevelopment or negation of the self." Different from the male sin of hubris, of wanting to be like God, women are alienated from themselves and from God by not even being able to be themselves. By being able to say   I am good.
>   I am whole.
>   I am beautiful.
> women create a bit of self-affirmation out of self-love. Self-love, which Calvin called "the most damaging plague," which Tillich also described as "paradoxical self-acceptance" or natural self-affirmation, comes back to its biblical right in women's experience: love your neighbor as yourself....God needs us as ones who are beautiful and who can break through the vicious cycle of self-hate and contempt for others....In the Judeo-Christian tradition there are experiences of God in which love encompasses everybody and everything and thereby goes beyond patriarchy (1988: 36-38).

As I had indicated parenthetically above, the issues of concern to the Moltmanns also find expression in the work of Walter Brueggemann, who, in *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile*, relates the world of three prophets to our

present situation. Much of his work directed to those in the ministry is also of particular value in addressing a moral quandary encountered by educators who know that our lived world is in need of criticism and change; yet who are perceived by many (often including themselves) as charged with the transmission of its values: in discussing Jeremiah's articulation of the ending of the known world, he says, "...a pastoral model that reassures and provides certitude and tries to keep the old world credible is likely a disservice and a misreading of historical reality (1986, p. 17)." He condemns the Enlightenment model of "control through knowledge" (scientific, economic, political, psychological) as one that is now ending, "...lacking the discernment that permits well-being." He speaks of the "disease of autonomy" which suggests that one may "...live an un-called life, one not referred to any purpose beyond one's self (1986: 19)."

In discussing Ezekiel, he points out the energy that churches spend avoiding the sense of the mismatch, "...between the God we profess...and the actual reality of our world. That mismatch is covered over by our various practices of utilitarianism (1986, p. 59)." And to my topic, once again as true of education as of ministry, he says, "The final test of vitality in ministry is to articulate concrete hope just when the community decides upon hopelessness (1986: 66)."

Foreshadowing a discussion at the end of this chapter, he speaks of the difficulty of refuting Ludwig Feuerbach who is said to have argued that, "...faith in God is

a projection of our best hopes and our best selves, that God has no real independent existence. but that God talk is projection and therefore idolatry (1986: p. 85)." As I, and many others, have observed, opposing that position, "...is something of an affront to our situation, for it appears as intellectually primitive (1986: 85)." He goes on to reflect Seligman's critique of radical individualism, opposing Maslow and the humanists as contributors to the problem of narcism productive of a "social utilitarianism" toward God (1986: 86).

Brueggemann is, of course, well aware that his views are widely opposed, especially by the currently advantaged, either within the church, "...the ministry most often exists in congregations that are bourgeois, if not downright obdurate, and in which there is no special openness to or support of prophetic ministry (1978: 110)," or within the church's cultural matrix, "...the church is so fully enmeshed in the dominant values of our culture that freedom of action is difficult (1986: 7)," or, more generally:

> The world does not believe in newness. It believes that things must remain as they are. And to those of us well off, it is a deep hope that things will remain as they are. Every new emergent is quickly domesticated; and if it cannot be domesticated, it is outlawed or crushed (1982: 123).

Once again, with the substitution of the appropriate nouns, these paragraphs would serve quite well as a description of the plight of educators. The moral quandary, mentioned earlier, returns once again for the educator who feels charged with the transmission of societal values whose results have proven to contradict their

admitted aims, as Brueggemann talks about the parts of our traditions which the advantaged would have us forget. Speaking of amnesia for the "dangerous" prophetic memories of the faith, he says, "The American value system is of such overriding and visible force among us that the story of this community is forgotten (Brueggemann, 1986: 127)," both on the left and on the right:

> ...with liberal Christianity...we...want the ethical and political spinoffs of the memory, but without the concrete particularity of the memory itself. As a result, liberals incline to sound like social scientists who have lost confidence in the memory and who have reached a value commitment on quite alien grounds....But the conservative backlash in the church tends to be no more honorable. For all the pious sounds of conservative urgency, this religion also does not permit itself to be illuminated by the core tradition (1986: 128).

Brueggemann's description of a society which has thus forgotten is strikingly reminiscent of Seligman's description of learned helplessness and of Moltmann's critique:

> We will, unlike Noah, come to believe that the present guards against chaos are the only ones available...We will become docile, passive, submissive subjects of the empire, glad to have our life world contained in the imperial system which is the solution....The combination of taking...[imperial] definitions of reality too seriously and the loss of the peculiar memories of the faith community leads to one life-destroying result: despair....For those who yearn for the world to be different, but dare not hope, the outcome must be destructive self-hatred or destructive violence...The two parties of despair serve each other, the one bent on destructiveness, the other committed to repression and defense at any cost (1986: 129).

He is clear about the cost of our accepting our society's pressures for such amnesia. Speaking of the present condition of religious faith, Brueggemann finds that what the texts make clear our society contravenes:

> ...that the full, hoped-for self is a self who will live in full communion with God, enjoying God's presence, being utterly safe, at home, at peace in God's presence. This affirmation may strike us as odd and offensive, but it belongs to the core of our faith. It is clear, in my judgement, that modernity has almost completely talked us out of this hope. We fear that such an affirmation sounds mystical, or romantic, or otherworldly, or only for those with a particular "spiritual aptitude."....hope that leans toward God in desperate urgent expectation that God will indeed liberate the world from its terrible decay and bondage....cannot be easy to utter in a technological society (1993: 44-5).

Although the prophetic tradition offers us a way to read our situation that leads us to "hopeful imagination," Brueggemann understands the point which Berger raised in the last chapter about the difficulty of being a 'cognitive minority', saying that, "Serious believers are indeed an alien community in American culture (1986: 131)." He proposes that the theological metaphor of exile and homecoming in these three prophets provides a resource for a faith which, "...contradicts dominant cultural perspectives that *deny grief, co-opt holiness* and *nullify memory* in the interest of the absolute present (1986: 132):

> The holiness of God becomes the ground for serious hope, for no hope will
> be found as long as it is reduced to things useful, short of God's
> Holiness....Holiness is proclaimed against conventional theology that never
> quite faces the otherness and always hopes for and forms a *utilitarianism*
> that links God's holiness to some historical purpose (1986: 131).

The "creation spirituality" of Matthew Fox is a similar effort to reclaim tradition from the dominant paradigm, one that "faces the otherness" of Holiness that Brueggemann requires and at the same time is able to meet Brueggemann's challenge: to join hope with "things useful" without being reduced to them. He proposes that our "quest for wisdom" must pass through a transformation of social and religious structures, "a letting go of certain forms of religion, those based on fall/redemption theologies....Religion can and must let go of a dualistic tradition and be transformed into that tradition which is more ancient, more celebrative, more justice oriented, and more like the tradition Jesus himself lived and preached (1983: 305)." Of creation spirituality and hope in the world, Fox says:

> Erich Fromm once wrote, "Those whose hope is weak settle for comfort or for violence." The comfort of consumerism and the violence of militarism which dominate our times would suggest that we are a people with little or no hope. Have we lost or are we rapidly losing hope? One reason for this pessimism that leads to cynicism and lack of caring is a fall/redemption religious paradigm that begins its theology with original sin....To teach original sin and never teach original blessing creates pessimism and cynicism....The creation-centered tradition is not optimistic; it is too much in touch with the pain and tragedy of existence for that. But it is hopeful, and it is cosmically passionate about the blessing that life is (1983: 18-9).

Seeking to understand why this doctrine of original sin has been so dominant for the last sixteen centuries (since its origin with St. Augustine), Fox has decided that the reason is basically political:

> an exaggerated doctrine of original sin, one that is employed as a starting point for spirituality, plays kindly into the hands of empire-builders, slavemasters, and patriarchal society in general. It divides and thereby

conquers, pitting one's thoughts against one's feelings, one's body against one's spirit, one's political vocation against one's personal needs, people against earth, animals, and nature in general. By doing this it so convolutes people, so confuses and preoccupies them, that deeper questions about community, justice, and celebration never come to the fore. Blessing is politically dangerous; the art of savoring is politically suspect; pleasure is too often a route to sharing the pleasure—which is justice making. And Justice making conjures up passionate criticism of what is. As W.H. Auden put it, "As a rule, it was the pleasure haters who became unjust."....It paid and paid well and is still paying well (witness for example the financial success of fundamentalist preachers on television) to keep guilt going and self-doubt going and distrust going, all in the name of an avenging God (1983: 54-5).

As an indispensable part of this effort for social justice, Fox calls for an inner transformation, for a "psychic justice" wherein, "mysticism—what philosopher Joseph Pieper defines as 'affirmation of the Whole' and what Rabbi Heschel defines as 'radical amazement'—must be included as part of any valid social change (1995: 158)." And the quest for wisdom, which he proposes that we undertake through the transformation that is possible in creation spirituality, this quest which he says is the ground for both justice and hope, is subject to pedagogy, is to be undertaken in "wisdom schools," which, "would honor the heart and body, the right brain of awe and wonder, as much as it would the analytic....would pay attention to people's pain, grief, and anger as well as their dreams and desires (1995:170).

The theology of Dorothee Solle has not only a concern for hope-in-the-world that is reminiscent of Matthew Fox, but also a powerful social critique. As a founding feminist liberation theologian, Solle might be expected to be susceptible to Moltmann's criticism of that view as reductionist and secular; however, as with many of her persuasion, that criticism does not apply. It is not that she lacks the fire that characterizes those whose concern with the world is revolutionary; indeed, her opinion of the failure of liberal theology to address these problems is scathing:

> It seems as though the liberal paradigm has lost the power to communicate the confidence of faith and the hope of faith; it still affords consolation in difficulties in personal life, but that too remains in the superficial realm of individualistic psychology. A combative hope (and there is no other kind) for the preservation of creation, an end to militarism and the vision of a justice other than the murderous economic 'order' under which we now live--none of these things seems to grow within the liberal paradigm (1990: 32).

And her position with regard to the attempt of the church to 'have it both ways', attempting to serve two masters, is reminiscent of the prophetic Brueggemann at his best:

> One of the basic problems of a Christianity which has been corrupted and become spiritless is that the churches have continually sought to unite the *Pax Christi* and the *Pax Romana* as though they could enjoy both together. Even today, many Christians think that one can live by bearing inwardly in one's heart the peace of Christ which comforts us as individuals and relying outwardly on the *Pax Romana* and the order which it imposes by force (1990: 160).

She too speaks of another way to approach the paradox of immanence and transcendence, suggesting that they have been held apart by hierarchical thinking.

She proposes that we see a different relationship between them, see that: "Transcendence is radical immanence," a view which is to free theology from a. "thousand year old burden of doctrines...which start from the notion that human society is basically incapable of ordering itself rightly (1990: 190)." With this new understanding, if, "in what we experience and do, we really enter into the radically of love, then our immanence contains transcendence," and:

In that case, what we call 'God' appears in our everyday affairs. The compassionate man from Samaria finds God and is found by God on the road....the mystics have always said that God is as it were lying in the streets, if only we could learn to see. They have said that there are more possibilities than the experiences mediated in cultic religious terms in which we become sure of God. God condenses and hallows what is around us, so that we catch sight of it in God's radical immanence of God....Radical immanence means that God hallows our everyday life, that God is 'in' our this-worldliness if we have not destroyed our commitment through hatred--disguised as normality and indifference (1990: 192).

Questioned about where people in the peace and liberation movements, "get the courage and power to fight and hope in the face of the gigantic superiority of weapons and technologies, capitalism and corrupted science," Solle replied that there was no "explanation in terms of this world" and quoted St. Paul concerning "powers and principalities." At that point, she spoke directly to my concern for grounding hope beyond human failure while at the same time holding to the importance of our duty to try:

I think that one danger in our lives is that we often confuse the meaning of life with success. In this way we remain at the spiritual level of capitalism, which regards success as the supreme value. It is also conceivable to the

believer that the enemies of God will succeed in destroying this creation. In that case the truth of Jesus would end in tragedy. But would it be destroyed as truth? In that case God would sit on the ruins of this radioactive planet, weeping. Faith does not mean living without anxiety. If we are serious about understanding God's being in social terms, thinking of God as the power at the beginning, the power of relationship, then the continuation of creation depends on the strength of love among human beings. Whether or not the nuclear winter comes depends upon how many people rise from the death of unrelatedness and are converted. God lures anew every day, to repent (1990: 195).

A Language for Critique and Apologetics.

Here at the chasm's edge, it might have seemed that such concerns as we have just been sharing were doomed to be relics of a former time, when "God-Talk" was more current coin. Yet these are obviously living faiths, beliefs which are life-giving and strong. How is it that in the face of all that has gone before, the critique of these ways has not eliminated them from our culture? It may be because the popular cynicism which I described as so highly destructive is not having its effect here; perhaps the criticism which is meaningful here is a higher form of skepticism, which has a deserved place in our discourse, a skepticism familiar to our iconoclasts. Richard Popkin (1967), addressing the value of such criticism in philosophy has it that:

> The historical skeptics did not say that they personally regarded everything as doubtful. They distinguished believing various matters from having sufficient reasons for believing them...[they] followed Huet's view that it is one thing to philosophize and another to live....From Greek times onward, skepticism has functioned as a gadfly to dogmatic philosophy....Thus

skepticism has been a major dynamic force in intellectual history....Without skepticism, we probably could not distinguish enthusiasm, prejudice, or superstition from serious or meaningful beliefs....Each age is able to assess the views which are valuable to it only if they are subjected to the same challenge (1967: 460).

Much of our 'God talk', especially to the extent that it is represented as truth claims about 'the real world', is subject to such a criticism by Wayne Proudfoot:

> Theology must somehow reconstitute itself as genuine inquiry. The most common protective strategy in Protestant thought since Schleiermacher has been to stress the autonomy of religious and theological language, to decouple it from nonreligious beliefs and practices and to leave inquiry about the world to the sciences, broadly considered. That decoupling has permitted scientific inquiry to flourish without ecclesiastical interference and has served apologetic purposes in the short run. The cost, however, has been to remove theological reflection from the actual inquiries in which we continually engage, and to court the risk of irrelevance (1993: 113).

Speaking specifically of the noetic claims for religious experience growing out of that position Proudfoot says, in his conclusion to *Religious Experience* (1985):

> The program that Schleiermacher inaugurated with his portrayal of religious belief and practice as expressive of an autonomous moment of human experience has been extremely influential for both religious thought and the study of religion...The felt quality of an experience from the subject's point of view is considered to be the only legitimate account that can be given of that experience, and the result is a protective strategy that serves apologetic purposes. We have seen that the central thesis of Schleiermacher's program cannot be sustained. Religious experience cannot be identified without reference to concepts, beliefs, grammatical rules, and practices....We have seen that such limitations [of inquiry] are unjustified. The experience to which Schleiermacher appeals assumes certain concepts and beliefs. The authority of religious experience rests upon certain judgements about how that experience is to be explained. The

noetic quality cited by James is not given in the experience, but assumes a tacit judgement about the kind of explanation appropriate for that experience. The authority of religious doctrine or of the religious form of life cannot be disconnected from other concepts and beliefs. Each of these attempts to restrict philosophical or theological reflection to internal analysis and elucidation fails because the doctrines and experiences to be analyzed assume concepts and beliefs that are not distinctly religious, and because the authority of the doctrine or experience assumes a tacit explanatory commitment (p. 228 & 236).

Proudfoot argues that, "One cannot identify the logical status of religious doctrine or of the word 'God' in such a way that it remains invulnerable to our changing beliefs and desires (1991: 101)." I suggest that in a sense he is contending with a 'straw man', since none of those who seem to me to be credible representatives of mystical traditions are dependent upon the "logical status of doctrine" or word definitions, except possibly in their overly generous efforts to find a language in which to communicate with those who are. Of course, there is another possibility. Perhaps, regardless of how effective or ineffective such a position as Schleiermacher's is as a protective strategy, it also happens to refer to something 'really real'? Perhaps the failure of Schleiermacher's program before Proudfoot's criticism (rightly, I believe) is for my inquiry yet another example of edgefinding, another public service by a careful thinker to use skepticism creatively, to point once again to the failure of our current constructs, so that we may be encouraged to seek farther, lest we pay with despair.

The very conversation about the use of experience to resolve such issues is in itself a highly instructive and interesting example of such a pursuit. In that conversation, two groups of voices have, for me, risen above the babble to clearly pose, if not resolve, this question. These are the voices of Steven T. Katz and Robert K.C. Forman (and their respective supporters), philosophers whose work over several years culminates, in my opinion, in an exchange centered around two recent books, one of which each of them has edited on the topic: *Mysticism and Language* (Katz, 1992) and *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy* (Forman, 1990).

I was initially attracted to Forman by his effort to defend the positions on the noetic qualities of mystical experience taken by those whom he describes as members of the "perennial philosophy school" (such as William James, Evelyn Underhill, Mircea Eliade, and W. T. Stace) against, "...the recent 'received view' on such questions, which may collectively be called 'constructivism,' the view that mystical experience is significantly shaped and formed by the subject's beliefs, concepts and expectations....That a person's language constrains, determines, and informs the judgements one makes about oneself and others (Forman, 1990: 3&5)." In an era which Forman sees our discourse dominated by this constructivist model, not just in relation to this topic, but in all of the humanities and social sciences, it is not difficult to understand why there would be widespread criticism of the perennialists, who, "...maintained that mystical experience represented an immediate, direct

contact with a (variously described) absolute principle (Forman, 1990: 3)." As

Forman says:

> Insofar as it seemed to deny that the linguistic background played a role in the shaping and perception of the mystical experience (during, not after) perennialism seemed to deny this "self-evident" truth....One question then that this book poses: Is this broad constructivist picture of things plausibly and convincingly applied to mysticism? Has it been conclusively established that mysticism,indeed, is like most other experiences in the sense that it results from a process of introducing, imposing, or entertaining one's beliefs, expectations, judgements, and categories?....Are there some experiences, or some specifiable aspects of human experience, that are not "constructed" by our language and belief (1990: 5)?

Katz, like Proudfoot, is eager to answer this question in the negative:

> It is my view...that mystical reports do not merely indicate the postexperiential description of an unreportable experience in the language closest at hand. Rather, the experiences themselves are inescapably shaped by prior linguistic influences such that the lived experience conforms to a preexistent pattern what has been learned, then intended, and then actualized in the experiential reality of the mystic....this *contextual* model will be presumed in the present essay (1992: 5).

It should be noted that Katz (1992: 34) rejects Forman's labeling of him as a

"constructivist," preferring the description of a "contextualist," in the sense of the

"contextual model" just quoted.

Given the assemblage of theologians and assorted perennialists we have

discussed thus far in this chapter, there can be little doubt as to where the

sympathies of the present author lie; therefore it may be somewhat surprising that

it is not my intention to pick and choose from among the arguments of these philosophers a favorable polemic for Forman's position, so much as it is to examine the usefulness of their entire discourse.

That issue is apparent in the case made by Stephen Phillips (1992), one of Katz's contributors, as he asks, "Can nonmystics understand mystic claims and reports?" He begins his chapter by describing the view which his exploration of this question supports:

> The view of mystic language and communication that emerges reinforces the skepticism of those who would resist attempts to "read off" from mystical experiences detailed religious doctrines of individual traditions. But it also suggests that there is room for theoretical accommodations within a religious or "spiritual" domain, as have been attempted by such "universalists" as William James (p. 123).

Phillips asserts that, "traditional spiritual metaphysics (Buddhist, Christian, and so on) loses the advantage of its claims to mystically experiential foundations because of its squabbling with other views that also claim such foundations (1992: 133)." and that it is the frequent incapacity of mystics to offer "higher tier" interpretations of their experiences in appropriate words which produces such squabbling. He brings himself into clear conflict with the requirements which mystics place upon their understanding when he says:

> To take seriously the possibility that mystical experiences may provide significant support for spiritual beliefs, one needs to know what the experiences are like. This means that the "peculiarly mystical" *has to be put into words* [emphases added]. And these words, we have seen, must

for nonmystics be irreducibly figurative, involving invariably open-ended analogies. Thus there would appear to be much room for theoretical accommodations. Open-ended analogies, unlike credos, are not set in stone (1992: 133-4)

Phillips' "theoretical accommodations" seems to me to be an offer to engage in interesting intellectual dialogue (and subsequent loss of any noetic quality) about the context in which mystical experience is reported; however, it evades what mystics actually say about their experiences in two critical areas, missing one point and bypassing another. Firstly, the concept of "reading off" doctrines directly from these experiences is even more foreign to the mystics of my acquaintance than Phillips claims it is to his skeptics. It is a common claim made by mystics that only experience can convey truth, a claim which has often rendered them martyrs at the hands of the masters of doctrine. It is the ecclesiastical equivalent of Phillips' work which translates records of others' experience into doctrine suitable for squabbling over, a practice frequently condemned by mystics as futile and foolish. And secondly, it seems to me to be generally true that those who report mystical experience are interested in it only to the extent that it represents a truth claim; whereas Phillips is perfectly happy to discuss such an experience as "a psychological event" and to postpone (apparently indefinitely) the crux of the issue, as when he himself says: "It is, of course, the crucial question whether the experience is indeed revelatory in the way the mystic takes it to be, but this is not our immediate topic (p. 123-4)."

A contributor to the Forman book, Anthony Perovich, makes an interesting case for seeing the current debate as being centered around a misunderstanding of Kant, by the "Kantians", among whom he includes Katz. He ascribes, to the uncritical acceptance of the universal applicability of the Kantians epistemology to all of experience, Katz's position, which Perovich quotes as, "This 'mediated' aspect of *all* our experience seems an inescapable feature of *any* epistemological inquiry, including the inquiry into mysticism (1990: 244-5)" and says:

> Therefore, it seems to me the recent "kantian" philosophy of mysticism rests on a mistake, the mistake of assuming that mystical experience is narrowly "human" experience and, so, is subject to the same treatment as is "human" experience generally. But the mystics insist that their experiences result from ecstasy, that their knowledge is gained as the result of employing faculties which are not the ordinary "human" ones. At the very least, these claims translate as denials of the validity of "Kantian" epistemology in the mystical sphere. By studying their reports, we can also hope to learn something about the sort of epistemology that *is* appropriate here, given that we have once learned to avoid the pitfalls of a "Kantian" analysis of mystical experience. This last lesson—of course the point is not without its irony—could easily have been learned form Kant himself (1990: 250).

And, in the same vein, rather than Phillips' reference (above) to William James' universalism, which refers to a discussion of the speculative differences which arise with the attempts of the "various theologies" to perform their intellectualization of these experiences, I much prefer to simply acknowledge (rather than dispute, as Proudfoot would) that divide which William James described so well for us in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*:

I have now sketched with extreme brevity...the general traits of the mystic range of consciousness....My next task is to inquire whether we can invoke it as authoritative. Does it furnish any *warrant for the truth*...? In brief, my answer is this...

1. Mystical states, when well developed, usually are, and have a right to be, absolutely authoritative over the individuals to whom they come.

2. No authority emanates from them which should make it the duty of those who stand outside of them to accept their revelations uncritically.

3. They break down the authority of the non-mystical or rationalistic consciousness, based upon the understanding and the senses alone. They show it to be only one kind of consciousness. They open out the possibility of other orders of truth, in which, so far as anything in us vitally responds to them, we may freely continue to have faith (1990: 381).

Such questions are much on the mind of Cornel West in establishing the context

for his own position:

Like Kierkegaard, whose reflections on Christian faith are so profound yet often so frustrating, I do not think it possible to put forward rational defenses of one's faith that verify its veracity or even persuade one's critics. Yet it is possible to convey to others the sense of deep emptiness and pervasive meaninglessness one feels if one is not critically aligned with an enabling tradition. One risks not logical inconsistency but actual insanity; the issue is not reason or irrationality but life or death. Of course, the fundamental philosophical question remains whether the Christian gospel is ultimately true. And as a Christian prophetic pragmatist whose focus is on coping with transient and provisional penultimate matters yet whose hope goes beyond them, I reply in the affirmative, bank my all on it, yet am willing to entertain the possibility in low moments that I may be deluded (1989: 233).

That may be as much as one can say in the terms of the rules of discourse which

we observe. In fact, my suggestion that Proudfoot contends with a 'straw man'

would be more fairly lodged against me for so summary a presentation of his

argument and my judgement of it; in any case, I am comfortable with Proudfoot's skepticism. so long as he lets me see it as the variety which Popkin described. I suggest to anyone who wants to take Cornel West's intellectual position with regard to their faith and hope, that they must engage not only Proudfoot, but also Levinson's *Santayana* (1992), Feuerbach (1957), Whorf (1956), and the questions of mysticism and language upon which I will touch in the next section. I certainly do not urge that journey upon the fainthearted, I simply acknowledge that, while I include in my personal experience having survived it with whatever you see here, I, imitating West, make no claim to answering it *in its own terms.*

There are those who do. Among them is John B. Cobb, Jr., who in the following, puts Alfred North Whitehead's position into a postmodern context:

> Whitehead and the majority of his theological followers extended his realism to the affirmation of a real God. There can be no question but that this cuts against the grain of modern sensibility, whether idealist, materialist, or relativist, and that it has put off many who might otherwise have been attracted to Whitehead....Whitehead judged that what he called the Principle of Limitation was what had been called God by some and other names by other religious people. This claim led to the complex development of the doctrine of God by Whitehead and some of his followers. Whitehead stated that what more was to be said about God must be learned from religious experience, and although philosophical and religious considerations are intertwined throughout his development of the doctrine, this point should be kept in mind. In Whitehead's view, religious experience has not been pure projection but is highly conditioned by cultural and historical factors. His own interpretation of the evidence of religious experience and his formulation of what God is in light of this evidence is also highly conditioned....he appeals to the exceptional experience and develops an argument for what may be. He understands

much of this process as more poetry than hard philosophy, if there really is such a thing as the latter. There is no reason for anyone to follow him unless her experience and religious sensibility correspond somewhat to his....[and] there is no reason to reject Whitehead's speculations simply because they go so far beyond what most moderns are willing to acknowledge. We should be skeptical of making skepticism into a primary virtue (1991: 197-8).

There is obviously a world to be said about this question, as when Whitehead says of religious experience, "This intuition is not the discernment of a form of words, but of a type of character. It is characteristic of the learned mind to exalt words. Yet mothers can ponder many things in their hearts which their lips cannot express. These many things, which are thus known, constitute the ultimate religious evidence, beyond which there is no appeal (1974: 65)." We will return to it again in the next chapter, in the company of the promised attempt at addressing "special knowledge" arising from mystical experience.

This conversation, and the many other opportunities which we might have chosen to use to explore this question, seem for me to invariably terminate with this question of the presence or absence of faith; and, these questions of faith, in turn, seem to have similarly been resolved on the basis of some individual experience of a transcendent nature, or in the negative, in the basis of an absence of such experience, rather than upon the cleverness of argument. While there are certainly many who might claim to be intellectually convinced of their faith, I have yet to encounter any such argument which could compel the assent of that hypothetical

rational person whose good opinion the logician so values. These arguments, at their best, seem designed to narrow the range of propositions for which we must pay the intellectual price of faith (a cost perhaps measured in units of hubris). Similarly, I have not found an argument of sufficient force to dissuade a person from a faith founded upon confidence in such experience.

As I indicated at the beginning of this section, Katz and Forman have illustrated, if not defined, the limits to which I believe their discourse can pursue the topic. What they have illustrated is not the boundaries of their soughtafter quarry, but rather the limitations upon the capacities of their method. Their own assumptions, their faith if you will, in the usefulness of rational discourse has kept them focused upon the verbal medium within which the traditions have been communicated, have kept them from listening to the content of the claims. Thus, the concept of "skillful means," so clearly annunciated in the materials which they have studied, has not been of help to them: that a person of sufficient understanding might intentionally craft an instrumental piece of literature to have an effect upon a reader which was not explicit in that literature--such a concept finds no home among such philosophers. As a result, they are confounded in their search by their own literalism. In the next chapter, I will address my experience of accepting the claim of the authors of skillful means as a working hypothesis, studying their material in the manner in which its authors claimed it must be studied.

As a bridge to that discourse, the work of Michael Sells has provided me with an opportunity to move past these self-imposed limits by offering an amendment to the "modernist and postmodernist construction (1994: 1)" through which we have seemed constrained to view mystical discourse. Sells, by means of his critical exploration, provides that opportunity for understanding how the dilemma arises, and how it serves those who struggle with it. As I hope to show in the following discussion of his view of the language of mystical discourse, his examination of this dilemma can be seen in the terms of the current paper to provide an insight (at least at the psychological level) into the creation and functioning of some types of "skillful means."

Sells (1994) discusses three responses to what he considers to be "...the *aporia*-- the unresolvable dilemma--of transcendence. The transcendent must be beyond names, ineffable. In order to claim that the transcendent is beyond names, however, I must give it a name, 'the transcendent.' Any statement of ineffability, 'X is beyond names,' generates the *aporia* that the subject of the statement must be named (as X) in order for us to affirm that it is beyond names (1994: 2)." The three categories of response which he recognizes are: silence; an equivocation, such as distinguishing between God and "God" (the latter supposedly indicating the defects introduced into the concept by the human mind); and finally, the approach which he chooses, often called negative theology, which:

begins with the refusal to solve the dilemma posed by the attempt to refer to the transcendent through a distinction betweens two kinds of name. The dilemma is accepted as a genuine *aporia*, that is, as unresolvable; but this acceptance, instead of leading to silence, leads to a new mode of discourse....It is negative in the sense that it denies that the transcendent can be named or given attributes...however, the formal statement of ineffability turns back on itself and undoes itself....As I attempt to state the *aporia* of transcendence, I am caught in a linguistic regress....The authentic subject of discourse slips continually back beyond each effort to name it or even to deny its nameability. The regress is harnessed and becomes the guiding semantic force, the dynamis of a new kind of language...*Apophasis* is the common Greek designation for this language....its etymology suggests...the discourse in question: *apo phasis* (un-saying or speaking-away). The term is commonly paired with *kataphasis* (saying, speaking-with) (1992: 2&3).

Such language does not serve those whose interest is the advocacy of an exclusivist doctrinal position. In fact, the turning back on itself which Sells says characterizes such a discourse is nicely illustrated in his catalogue of possible views toward its nature:

> Classical *apophasis* has been viewed as religious and as anti-religious; as theistic, pantheistic, and atheistic; as pious and libertine; as orthodox and heretical. At its most intense, apophatic language has as a subject neither divine nor human, neither self nor other. It can be read as a relentless critique of religious traditions or as a realization of the deeper wisdom within such traditions. It can be read as grounded in the intimate specificities of particular traditions or as an opening onto intercultural and inter-religious conversation. These possibilities may not be mutually exclusive (1992: 12-13).

It is, in fact, in "...the tension between the two propositions [*apophasis* and *kataphasis*] that the discourse becomes meaningful. That tension is momentary.

It must be continually re-earned by ever new linguistic acts of unsaying (1994: 3)."

Thus *apophasis*, as Sells proposes to use the term, is seen as a *performance* of unnameability, a writing wherein each assertion of ineffability or transcendence must lead to a retraction, which must in turn be withdrawn. He says that if taken out of the context of this performance, individual assertions, isolated from the performance, must take on unintended meanings. He suggests that the intensity of such a performance can be highly variable, ranging from a mild disclaimer before and after a chapter which then "freely employees names and predications of the transcendent," to the highly paradoxical exchanges of which the Zen masters are likely to be the most widely known example. Sells takes the position that such paradoxes are real contradictions, not merely apparent ones; however, he claims that such contradiction does not mean that the discourse is illogical. Rather, eliminating the tendency to want to "correct" such contradictions to comply with a current model is precisely the renovation to the "postmodern construction" to which I referred above:

> For the apophatic writer, the logical rule of non-contradiction functions for object entities. When the subject of discourse is a non-object and no-thing, it is not irrational that such a logic be superseded. Of course, *apophasis* is not the only discourse that cannot directly name its subject. Poetry, drama-
> -almost any form of art—risks being trivialized when its meaning is defined and paraphrased discursively. Anyone who has attempted to explain discursively the humor of a joke knows how the humor disappears when removed from its performance. Apophatic texts have suffered in a particularly acute manner from the urge to paraphrase the meaning in non-apophatic language or fill in the open referent—to say what the text really meant to say, but didn't (1994: 4).

Just as apophasis is not unique in not-naming, so it is not uniquely Sells' alone. In fact this is a field with many entrants: it is the difficulty of the texts, rather than their rarity which have made them unfamiliar to a broad audience. Referring to Sells' discussion of the various levels of intensity to which this process of negation might be pursued, I would suggest as an upper limit of intelligibility the intensity in a discussion by Mark Taylor (1993) of Derrida's agony over this double negation, his struggle to stand in "Heidegger's Temple," by reading Heidegger with "two hands at once." Taylor (1993: 53), commenting on how Derrida's questions can be turned back upon his own texts, says, "Is Derrida saying nothing once again? Saying nothing by what he is not saying? Isn't his nonsaying nonetheless a saying? A denegation? Isn't his avoidance of speaking the only way he has to speak about that which he knows he cannot speak about?" Similarly, Lawson (1985: 108) describes her experience, "The reflexive whirlpool that Derrida has lead us into he calls an aporia, a paradox that is not to be avoided but which is unfathomable." Such difficulties in powerful intellects are adequate warnings to the prudent to take great care in apophatic discourse. While the authors might escape unscathed, the average reader might as easily find him/herself in need of the therapeutic philosophy of Wittgenstein, whose philosophy, like those of Heidegger and the sages of many ancient traditions, is claimed to be a battle against the, "seduction and bewitchment of language (Cooper: 22)." Of course, it must be apparent that I have every intention of ignoring my own advice, since this discourse seems to offer the only means at hand to frame my search. In

concentrating upon Sells, I am selecting the path which seems most accessible to me, acknowledging the omission of innumerable "roads not taken."

Critical to understanding the implications of Sells' work for our search is the concept of the "meaning event." Both because his definition of this key concept involves an analogy with "mystical union," and because such union is central to many mystical reports, I will attend first to an apophatic view of that state. Sells describes how the hierarchies generated by speaking (kataphatically) of intentional creation are:

> unsaid from within. At the heart of that unsaying is a radical dialectic of transcendence and immanence. That which is "beyond" is revealed or reveals itself as most intimately "within"....When the transcendent realizes itself as the immanent, the subject of the act is neither divine nor human, neither self nor other....Conventional structures...the distinction between reflexive and nonreflexive action...[is] broken down. This moment in which the boundaries between divine and human, self and other, melt away is commonly called mystical union (1994: 7).

A central issue in taking a critical approach to such a discourse is obviously whether one can understand it without being a mystic, without the personal experience of the mystic, an issue whose problematic nature is indicated by the previous discussion of the article by Steven Phillips (1992). To allow for continuance with, "...no presuppositions concerning mystical experience on the part of the writer or reader," Sells sets himself a different goal: "to identify the distinctive semantic event within the language of unsaying, what I will call the

'meaning event' (1994: 9)." His effort to clarify this term involves contrasting it with the distinction generally drawn between, "meaning (as sense and reference) and event (as predication. Meaning event indicates that moment when the meaning has become identical or fused with the act of predication. In metaphysical terms, essence is identical with existence, but such identity is not only asserted, it is performed (1994: 9)." Recalling his earlier reference (in the definition of *apophasis*, as a *performance* of unnameability) is useful here in getting the sense of dialectic necessary to, "identify the semantic location of this performance, and the manner in which the identities of meaning and event, reference and predication, essence and existence, are fused (1994: 9)." In seeking a way to avoid the other two choices in the face of the *aporia* (silence or equivocation), Sells has brought us to consider how language might offer to understand to this otherwise inaccessible "X":

> The meaning event is the semantic analogue to the experience of mystical union. It does not describe or refer to mystical union but effects a semantic union that re-creates or imitates the mystical union....The mystical writers discussed below claim a moment of "realization"--a moment in which, again, the sense and reference are fused into identity with event. In contrast to the realization as an instance of mystical union which entails a complete psychological, epistemological, and ontological transformation, the meaning event is a semantic occurrence (1994: 9).

This new term is to be used by Sells in contrast to the modern concept of experience, so as to avoid the presuppositions which that concept entails: a grammatical object of experience, mediation, and a constructed nature. While

acknowledging the likelihood that the use of evocative language will be criticized as a "protective strategy" (see Proudfoot, above), he claims that his readings of apophatic language of mystical union allow him to:

> focus upon how such language displaces the grammatical object, affirms a moment of immediacy and affirms a moment of ontological pre-construction, as in the paradoxical refrain that in mystical union the soul reverts "to where it was before it was." The meaning event is transreferential. Rather than pointing to an object, apophatic language attempts to evoke in the reader an event that is, in its movement beyond structures of self and other--subject and object--structurally analogous to the event of mystical union (1994: 10).

This talk about union raises the question of what Sells calls "God-language" and what many of the postmodernist persuasion call with condescension (or worse) "God-talk." Sells ascribes much of the difficulty encountered by such critics with these terms to the confusion generated by carrying our current constructions of a capitalized, generic "God" into the medieval discourse, "It may be that the modern 'God' is a form of property, allowing an easy purchase on the meaning of religious traditions, a purchase that can be used to stake out positions and mark off boundaries (1994: 12)." In any case, it is clear that, for example, in Sells' reading of Eckhart, *both* the soul and the deity have to give up their properties to be born into mystical union. Such confusions also are common in relation to what Sells calls the "what:"

> Much discussion of mystical union and comparative mysticism has been based upon substantialist language of whatness or quiddity. Do adherents of differing traditions "worship the same God," "believe the same thing," or "experience the same thing"--i.e., is *what* someone from tradition X

experiences or believes the same or different from that experienced or believed by someone from tradition Y. The question of whatness shades into the question of conditioning: is "what" the mystic experiences conditioned or unconditioned?....The nonsubstantialist understanding of the transcendent common to apophatic mystics does not fit the premises of such questions....In the words of Eriugena, the transcendent is nothing, i.e., no-thing, beyond all entity and quiddity. The apophatic language of disontology, in continually moving toward a removal of the "what" (a removal that is never achieved, always in progress) suggests a different mode of comparison (1994: 11).

The reader will remember the warning which Sells has given about, "rephrasing apophasis into single-proposition assertions about a substantialist deity (1994: 12)." Such abstraction must be misleading, since, "Apophasis is a discourse in which any single proposition is acknowledged as falsifying, as reifying. It is a discourse of double propositions in which meaning is generated through the tension between the saying and the unsaying (1994: 12)." In a similar vein, he discusses the temptation to explain away the "anarchic moment" (without *arche*, or first principle) which is a component of the meaning event in apophatic language, "To attempt to interpose discursive distinctions by claiming that the mystic doesn't *really* mean "nothing," when she says nothing...is to explain away the anarchic moment...to turn apophatic language into conventional theology (1994: 209)."

Yet such anarchic moments have significant risks. The abandonment of self suggests giving up will, ethical direction, and rationality--risking madness. The

hierarchies upon which moral and intellectual distinctions depend are continually challenged by the apophatic anarchic moment. The threat of chaos is quite real. However:

> for the apophatic mystic, within his or her kataphatic religious or philosophical context, the risk of the anarchic moment is worth taking. The moral alternative, continued enslavement to the subtle forms of self-will within the will to do or be good, is ultimately (to use the nutritor's language) the death of the ethical spirit. The intellectual alternative, the worship of images constructed from beliefs, is ultimately the death of the rational spirit (1994: 213).

The passing away of the ego-self which is generally acknowledged to be antecedent to union, since it involves abandoning will and knowing, renders such union unintentional. Thus Proudfoot's contention that religious experience has content and is intentional leads Sells to construct a syllogism concluding that mystical union is not an experience:

> All experience must have a grammatical object, but the prime motivation of apophatic language is to subvert or displace the grammatical object. Similarly, the notion of the unmediated at the heart of apophatic mysticism...contradicts the common opinion that all experience is mediated. If it is true that all experience is constructed, it is equally true that the concept of experience is a modern construct...[He has chosen] to bracket the concept of experience and choose a concept that fits apophatic language but opens that language onto a field of critical inquiry (1994: 214).

Sells claims for apophatic discourse the perquisites of poetry: the right to resist paraphrase, protection from the insistence on express meaning ("if the meaning could be expressed discursively, it would not have required a poem"), and

immunity to the insistence upon a common agreement on meaning. Despite our general willingness to grant these protections to poetry, "...what has been commonly accepted for poetic discourse--a resistance to semantic reduction--is frequently viewed as a form of mystification in apophasis (1994: 216)."

Having attempted to refrain "apophatically" from a definition of the event with which we have been concerned, Sells finally relents, saying that we might call the event, "the evocation of a sense of mystery:"

> This sense of apophatic mystery is not a mystery in the sense of a secret known only to an initiated few. It is not a doctrine that is to be accepted as true but which is held beyond rational explanation. Rather it is a basic human response--at least among apophatic writers and their appreciative readers--to the nothingness in which being is situated (that what is might not have been). It is a sense of wonderment..., bewilderment..., that is rediscovered not outside of, but within our cultural, religious, theological, and philosophical world views at the horizon where they point beyond themselves....To evaluate mystical union as an experience of mystery is a kataphatic judgement. The experience has a grammatical object (mystery). From the apophatic perspective, such analysis is partial, even misleading, if left without the apophatic complement. Mystery would then become reified into another name, another God of belief. the category of mystery is useful insofar as writer and reader turn back upon it to...unsay the name (1994:216-7).

Recalling the similarities which Sells noted between this language and the language of poetry and humor, I would close this chapter and point toward the next by returning once again to Paul Ricoeur, who says of poetic discourse that it, "calls into question the reduction of the referential function to descriptive

discourse and opens the field to a nondescriptive reference to the world (1995: 222)," who distinguishes the special character of that poetic discourse which is religious language by its, "naming of God....the poetics of the name of God...is not abolished but intensified through paradox, hyperbole, and all primary expressions that give rise to the 'negative way' at a higher degree of conceptuality (itself only conceivable in relation to the analogical way for which it is the complement and the corrective) (p. 234)," and who, speaking of the function of the parable, seems quite at home in our present discourse, saying that it:

> combines a narrative structure, a metaphorical process, and a limit-expression. In this way it constitutes a short summary of the naming of God. Through its narrative structure, it recalls the original rootedness of the language of faith in narratives. through its metaphorical process it makes manifest the poetical character of the language of faith as a whole. And finally, in joining metaphor and limit-expression, it furnishes the matrix for theological language inasmuch as this language conjoins analogy and negation in the way of eminence: "God is like..., God is not..." (1995: 230).

Holding this Inquiry Before My Questions.

This chapter began with one of the central elements of my quest: seeking a ground for hope. In this chapter I have attempted to share my experience of theologians who have supported me in my quest, both intellectually and in those intimations from faith which hint at bridges across our chasm. With their aid, the questions of the absolute nature of hope and of the indispensability of the transcendent element in hope as well as the implications which that has for the

remainder of this quest have been raised and addressed to the extent that their nature and my capacity allow. My opinion of the place of skepticism in such an inquiry has been offered, as well as a model for a discourse to frame the personal experiences upon which *Chapter Four* will hinge.

Where Are We Going from Here?

In the first section of the next chapter, I shall discuss my own experience of the themes which we have been pursuing, culminating in the experience of unexpectedly finding hope within my own heart. In that context, there will be a discussion of the difficulties of dealing with the question of that "special knowledge" which rests its truth claims upon the noetic quality of mystical experience--this is to be the culmination of the exercise in apologetics promised in the first two chapters. In the second section, my encounters with some specific examples of "Paths to Wisdom" will be examined, and the argument made that such paths comprise both our surest way across our chasm of despair, and our pedagogy of hope. Concluding the chapter, a mirroring of the paths of mysticism and prophecy will lead to my synthesis and Credo.

Chapter IV.

HOPE IN AND FOR WISDOM

Thus far this paper has been generally analytical and critical in form; however, it would be disingenuous to suggest that these efforts were the sort of inexorable rational progression from observation to conclusion which our modernist friends were once so fond of finding in the "scientific method". No, these efforts are unabashedly intended as supporting structures for my own experience, as efforts toward giving form to turns in my life for which my previous education and socialization had provided no behavioral repertoire. What follows is an attempt to place my own history in the context of the analysis which I have offered thus far, and to share with the reader how this experience has supported the forgoing apology, and will produce the Credo with which this work is (temporally) suspended at its end.

My own edge: seeing into the chasm.

The convoluted process of arriving at this point may have made it less than apparent to the reader where we now stand in the quest upon which I embarked in *Chapter One*: a quest which I said sought an explanation, suitable to both myself and to others, of what might ground the hope which I had found in my heart (my apology) and sought to find a means by which I might share that hope

professionally (my pedagogy). To offer a chance for reorientation, I shall reflect briefly on the stages of that journey through which I think we have passed since that initial chapter.

In *Chapter Two*, I examined the exhaustion of our cultural repertoire, finding that the paths to which our popular culture suggests that we entrust our hope all seem to lead instead to a seemingly unbridgeable chasm of despair. I considered the benefits and hazards of deconstructing those belief systems without giving consideration to their replacement; and assigned the job title "edgefinders" to a fine assortment of iconoclasts who have served me in illuminating a small portion of the chasm's edge, as it slices across our accustomed lifeways. While acknowledging the pain and difficulty which accompany such corporate self-examination, I suggested that absent some effort toward intentional consciousness, we risk awakening without warning at a precipice of meaninglessness. I proposed that these same edgefinders can also be seen as the harbingers of hope, in that the work of each also suggests possibilities beyond those accustomed lifeways, beyond the limits of our exhausted repertoires, beyond what we commonly acknowledge as human possibility.

In the process of *Chapter Three*, that critique and a sense of those possibilities led me to an assertion of the absolute nature of hope, and of an attendant consideration of the transcendent as requisite to my search. The work of several

Christian theologians assisted me in that process, to both give voice to this absolute nature and to help me in an affirmation of the "worthiness of the world:" an affirmation which justifies and requires that we attend not only to the transcendent, but also to the immanent. In the second part of that chapter, I gave attention to some of those who feel that such discourse is misleading and should be subject to the sort of critique and deconstruction to which I have recently subjected other aspects of our culture. Concluding that section, I offered an example of the kind of discourse one might use to avoid some of those problems, suggesting that one might view a negative theology of mysticism as an outline of a process crudely analogous to the creation of a "skillful means."

Now, with *Chapter Four*, I propose to illustrate the foregoing by offering a few details of how my own journey thus far has followed that general model: how I struggled in my early life to find hope in the ways my culture had provided; recalling the process of exhausting these "easy" options and catching a glimpse into the chasm from my own edge; and how my struggle to be an iconoclast--without cynicism--in the chaos attendant upon that exhaustion led me to my current search. I shall recall how I was sustained during the early stages of this journey by intimations of hope from some whom I now regard as old friends, to that time much closer to now, when I experienced from someplace deep within my heart the intervention of an unreasonable assurance, of hope, seemingly founded somewhere other than in my intellect or in my emotional life.

That hope has seemed to resonate with the work of those whom I have mentioned previously, seeming not to be derived from their work, but rather to have originated from some common source; and it has a special affinity for those discussed in this chapter, among whom are exemplars of traditions which I shall characterize by saying of them that they have the capacity to contain and appreciate simultaneously the prophetic, pragmatic and mystical. As I intend to show in my recollections of these exemplars in the last half of this chapter, the natural reluctance which one might have to accepting the attribution of that range of capacities to a tradition derives not from its impossibility, but from our experience having been limited to an exhausted culture.

Each of us has a story about our struggle for meaning, in the world which I described in *Chapter One*. This narrative of my own struggle, which (I feel) has been kept mercifully brief, comes to me from my memory in related but distinct streams: my struggle to find a meaningful education, my religious search, and issues of conscience in both my business career and my political views. In the course of this narrative, these streams of memory will flow into and intertwine with the themes just annunciated. Lest this emphasis on struggle be taken as an unrelenting lament, I hasten to express gratitude for the fact that this narrative need not include the travails of fractured relationship so endemic in our time, a fact which I can only attribute to the blessing of having in my wife Margaret one of those rare souls who has simultaneously the capacity for compassion necessary

to tolerate and support one whose fate is to pursue this quest, as well as the fortitude and strength of character to grow and thrive as her own person at the same time.

Just as it has been central to this paper thus far, the theme of exhaustion of the cultural repertoire was central to my early life, and nowhere more so than in education. My memories of life as a young student are almost entirely of social issues--the academic content of the thousands of school hours to which I was sentenced as a child are recalled only as a background cloud of triviality. I was acknowledged by the system to be highly competent at manipulating that cloud, but with the exception of one great soul, my eighth grade English teacher Mrs. Bradbury, who demonstrated to us daily that compassion and intellectual discipline belonged together, I came to regard the process of schooling with contempt rather than with love.

Apart from that one year in Mrs. Bradbury's class (and sustained by the memory of it), the important intellectual content of that time derived from fortuitous accidents while browsing libraries, from serious conversations with parents and friends, from interests pursued on my own initiative, apart form formal schooling. I struggled with Greek classics from my father's library, studied biology in my backyard, mistook Voltaire's skepticism and wit for cynicism, was fascinated and repulsed by Dante's *Inferno*, and worshiped Henry David Thoreau. Any who have

shared my youthful fascination with Thoreau, know the difficulty of passing an old pond without suffering a pang of loss. Yet what I become most nostalgic for at those times is not the life in the woods, but the intimations of what he learned there:

> We are all sculptors and painters, and our material is our own flesh and blood and bones. Any nobleness begins at once to refine a man's features, any meanness or sensuality to imbrute them.

> John Farmer sat at his door one September evening, after a hard day's work, his mind still running on his labor more or less. Having bathed, he sat down to re-create his intellectual man. It was a rather cool evening, and some of his neighbors were apprehending a frost. He had not attended to the train of his thoughts long when he heard some one playing on a flute, and that sound harmonized with his mood. Still he thought of his work; but the burden of his thought was, that though this kept running in his head, and he found himself planning and contriving it against his will, yet it concerned him very little. It was no more than the scruff of his skin, which was constantly shuffled off. But the notes of the flute came home to his ears out of a different sphere from that he worked in, and suggested work for certain faculties which slumbered in him. They gently did away with the street, and the village, and the state in which he lived. A voice said to him,--Why do you stay here and live this mean moiling life, when a glorious existence is possible for you? Those same stars twinkle over other fields than these,--But how to come out of this condition and actually migrate thither? All that he could think of was to practice some new austerity, to let his mind descend into his body and redeem it, and treat himself with ever increasing respect (1960: 150-1).

Certainly for me there can be no more clear cut symptom of a despairing world than to say that the call, "out of a different sphere" is silent there; and no more hopeful sign than when many hear it. Among the voices which this time brought to me another also taught me to dream of transcendence--the science fiction of

Arthur C. Clark's *Childhood's End*--as when the emissary from that consciousness

which was evolving by uniting incipiently conscious species spoke to the last

parents on Earth:

> We do not know how it is produced--what trigger impulse the Overmind
> employs when it judges that the time is ripe. All we have discovered is that
> it starts with a single individual--always a child--and then spreads
> explosively, like the formation of crystals round the first nucleus in a
> saturated solution. Adults will not be affected, for their minds are already
> set in an unalterable mould. In a few years it will all be over, and the
> human race will be divided in twain. There is no way back, and no future
> for the world you know. All the hopes and dreams of your race are ended
> now. You have given birth to your successors, and it is your tragedy that
> you will never understand them....For what you have brought into the world
> may be utterly alien, it may share none of your desires or hopes, it may
> look upon your greatest achievements as childish toys--yet it is something
> wonderful, and you will have created it (1953: 184-5).

In that time, and often since, such thoughts and feelings seem most at home in

poetry. It may have been in reading *Leaves of Grass* (1955) as a high school

student that I initially experienced that sudden addition of dimension to language

which is poetry. There can be no doubt that it is the bestowal of a blessing, a

grace, a Gift, to be shown that a reality lies behind our efforts to describe a visit

of the Muse. Almost all of Walt Whitman's work spoke then, and still, to me of

what I seek; almost at random (yet surely not), I recall "A Persian Lesson:"

> For his o'erarching and last lesson the graybeard sufi,
> In the fresh scent of the morning in the open air,
> On the slope of a teeming Persian rose-garden,
> Under an ancient chestnut-tree widely spreading its branches,
> Spoke to the young priests and students.

"Finally my children, to envelop every word, every part of the rest,
Allah is all, all, all—is immanent in every life and object,
May-be at many and many-a-more removes—yet Allah, Allah, Allah is there.

"Has the estray wander'd far? Is the reason-why strangely hidden?
Would you sound below the restless ocean of the entire world?
Would you know the dissatisfaction? The urge and spur of every life;
The something never stilled—never entirely gone? the invisible need of every seed?

"It is the central urge in every atom,
(Often unconscious, often evil, downfallen,)
To return to its divine source and origin, however distant,
Latent the same in subject and in object, without one exception." (p. 413)

Because of the hints of "something more" which such glimpses offered, I came to

expect (to hope!) that the triviality and the deadly dreariness that I associated with

my early schooling would disappear at some higher level. These voices sustained

me in the meanwhile, comforting me with stories uncommon to that time. And, in

fact, that expectation of positive change was being encouraged at the same time

by the modernist doctrine, which promised us perfectibility through study and

rationality. Temporarily shocked (but never humbled) by the appearance above our

horizon of a Soviet moon, my generation was swept forward on a stream of

renewed commitment to hope in science and hard work.

Yet, by the time I left high school a year early to enter college, I could no longer

take seriously the contention that the process which constituted my schooling held

any such prospect of meaning for me. The hope for transcendence awakened by

the earlier work began, through disillusionment, to be transformed into an attraction for apocalypse: although we never spoke of it. I wonder now how many of my classmates who sat with me before dormitory lounge televisions, watching to see if Cuban missiles were the beginning of the end, held within their hearts a similar ambivalence as to what would be the best outcome. Later, the assassinations and war and racial conflict seemed almost to resolve that ambivalence, to say that an earlier end would have been better. During this same time, a similar rupture of my relationship with my early religious beliefs was characterized by what I perceived to be the refusal or incapacity of my church to respond to what I saw in the world-- absent any theodicy, the services came to resemble, in their effect upon me, those dry and irrelevant lost days locked in classrooms, beclouded with trivia, falsely assured, intent upon being sheltered from any perception of the edge.

And yet, as one might expect, these storms abated with time. As a young husband and parent, my life came to resemble that stage of development which many spiritual disciplines characterize as the "householder" and which Daniel Levinson (1978: 139) would call the "settling down period"--preoccupied with the needs of a family and comfortable in the role, a decade of my life passed in achievement and contentment. Unlike the preoccupations of schooling, the issues were not trivial; love and nurturance, responsibility and citizenship, identity and sense of place; all were welcome themes for that time. For that time, this role sheltered me from the questions which had tormented me earlier, but did not resolve them. As

I approached my early mid-life, those questions returned to demand attention, as Levinson (1978) would have predicted, brought back at least in part by my confrontations with the fault line, which our culture attempts to ignore, between our ideals and our marketplace.

As my responsibilities in my work-world grew, I could no longer ignore the dissonance between, on one hand, what I (and almost everyone else) claimed to believe about equity, justice, and compassion, and on the other hand, the practices of everyday commerce, wherein it was necessary, in order to be rewarded and appreciated, to contravene each of these virtues, in small ways or large. The limitations of this path became increasingly clear as I watched senior friends and associates willingly throw themselves over the edge of this chasm in pursuit of our quarry, and as I considered doing the same. Certainly it might have been more from faintness of heart upon seeing their fate than from any virtue on my part that I decided I must attempt to find another way. With a sense of desperation born of looking into a chasm of hopelessness, I returned to serious reading, beginning what I now regard as the initial stages of my quest.

One author whose work has been central to my search from that period to the present is Robert Ornstein, whose theme of conscious evolution--beginning with the concept of expanding kinship altruism to all of humanity--instantly reminded be of my childhood fascination with *Childhood's End*. With an urgency that reflected

my own concern, he insisted that our current situation does not allow us time to continue to depend on the slow progress of biological, neural, and cultural evolution. Although from a later work, the following captures the sense of both crisis and possibility which his work held (and still holds) for me:

> We are no longer tribes living with a small horizon; our minds need to encompass a view that has been limited to an elite group; a truly modern reconciliation of the scientific and the spiritual. I believe it can be done, since both spheres, understood best, are about the same animal--us. We don't want a world of 15 billion people in the next century if 75 percent of them are going to starve. We don't want a world where gangsters have nuclear weapons. We don't want a world where people don't know how their minds work, or know about major new facts of life, their identity, their society, the fate of the earth. This is an era of reeducation, a time when we will either take our evolution into our own hands or do far worse than we can imagine (1991: 12).

During this period I first encountered two figures whom I feel have been especially important to my development--Dag Hammarskjold and Doris Lessing--each of whom played critical roles in offering me a path away from cynicism toward the variety of iconoclasm which I have previously praised. Aside from, and in addition to, that rationale for the inclusion of these two authors, they are, like the others in this narrative, also here because I now honor them as old friends, friends who have given me heart in dark times, who certainly have played their parts in the discovery of that hope for which I now attempt to learn apologetics. It is my impression of each of them that their capacity for analysis, had they chosen to exercise it (or where they have), would not have been inferior to the very best, yet for the work which has nurtured me they have chosen novels and poetry and

storytelling; because, I believe, they found this a more effective way of coaxing meaning into and out of language. If that is a correct presumption of their intent, then the idea of performing analysis upon their language, in fact of addressing their work in any way other than citation in a proper context, is highly problematic. Thus, here even more than in other instances where this may be the case in this paper, what follows is not so much an effort to delimit the work of those authors as it is to describe the state of this one, by noting and sharing portions of their work which have been formative in my experience. If you have never encountered some of these pieces, then I may need to ask your patience for some rather overlong citations, a patience for which I think you will be rewarded with priceless jewels.

Dag Hammarskjold heard that call which Thoreau answered in an earlier citation; in response he wrote *Markings* (1966), a journal, "for myself, not for the public." While a life of public service, culminating with his death while Secretary General of the United Nations, presented to that public an image of confidence and accomplishment; his journal revealed to me a fellow pilgrim, much further along his path than I, but still subject to self-doubt, as well as hope:

> Do not seek death. Death will find you. But seek the road which makes death a fulfillment....The arete that leads to the summit separates two abysses: the pleasure-tinged death-wish...and the animal fear arising from the physical instinct for survival. Only he can conquer vertigo whose body has learned to treat itself as a means. No choice is uninfluenced by the way in which the personality regards its destiny, and the body its death. In

the last analysis, it is our conception of death which decides our answers
to all the questions that life puts to us (p. 136).

The struggle with vertigo, balancing over the abyss, our live as a means: these are

primal elements of my search, and elements which dictated to Hammarskjold a life

of service to humanity. They came to me at a time when I had great need of them,

a service which I acknowledge and affirm:

> Courage and love: equivalent and related expressions for your bargain with
> Life. You are willing to "pay" what your heart commands you to give. Two
> associated reflexes, the sacrificial act, conditioned by a self-chosen
> effacement of the personality in the One. One result of "God's marriage to
> the Soul" is a union with other people which does not draw back before the
> ultimate surrender of the self (p. 136-7).

His own experience of hearing that call, lost to his memory and central to his life,

must surely stir within others a homesickness similar to that I felt when he said:

> I don't know Who—or what—put the question, I don't know when it was put.
> I don't even remember answering. But at some moment I did answer Yes
> to Someone—or Something—and from that hour I was certain that existence
> is meaningful and that, therefore, my life, in self-surrender, had a goal.
> From that moment I have known what it means "not to look back," and "to
> take no thought for the morrow."

> Led by the Ariadne's thread of my answer through the labyrinth of Life, I
> came to a time and place where I realized that the Way leads to a triumph
> which is a catastrophe, and to a catastrophe which is a triumph, that the
> price of committing one's life would be reproach, and that the only
> elevation possible to man lies in the depths of humiliation. After that, the
> word courage lost its meaning, since nothing could be taken from me (p.
> 169).

His life was a testimony to his answer and an invitation to others to seek the thread of their own Way. Just as this prayer was a testimony to the source of that call:

> Have mercy
> Upon us.
> Have mercy
> Upon our efforts,
> That we
> Before Thee,
> In love and in faith,
> Righteousness and humility,
> May follow Thee,
> With self-denial, steadfastness and courage,
> And meet Thee
> In the silence.
>
> Give us
> A pure heart
> That we may see Thee,
> A humble heart
> That we may hear Thee,
> A heart of love
> That we may serve Thee,
> A heart of faith
> That we may live Thee.
>
> Thou
> Whom I do not know
> But Whose I am.
>
> Thou
> Whom I do not comprehend
> But Who hast dedicated me
> To my fate.
> Thou—   (p. 176)

Like that of Hammarskjold, the work of Doris Lessing, entering my life at a time when I had great need of it, has influenced me so profoundly as to confound reporting. When I think that I understand a portion of her work so well as to take

it as intellectually obvious, I find myself ambushed by a new aspect, or am startled

by a sudden emotional impact from a piece being re-read for the tenth time. I will

try to capture a little of that experience with two pieces; the first is from an essay

in which she is discussing social change. I had often felt that, although we have

discovered a great many useful things--it might be maintained that we have in

hand the solutions to many problems that are the cause of great human suffering--

yet, these insights go unused; seemingly we lack the vision or will to change, or

more ominously, as Doris Lessing said in this piece, perhaps the very basis upon

which we attempt change may be fundamentally flawed:

> I think when people look back on our time, they will be amazed at one
> thing more than any other. It is this--that we *do* know more about ourselves
> now than people did in the past, but that very little of this knowledge has
> been put into effect...There is this great mass of new information...but our
> ways of governing ourselves haven't changed. Our left hand does not
> know--does not want to know--what our right hand does....[speaking of the
> human tendency to form groups based upon bigotry and
> intolerance]....such groups continually spring into existence everywhere,
> have periods when such beliefs are their diet, while they hate and
> persecute and revile anybody who does not agree with them. It is a
> process that goes on all the time and I think must go on, because the
> patterns of the past are so strong in us that criticism of a society and a
> desire to change it fall so easily into such patterns. I believe that we are in
> the grip of something very powerful and very primitive, and that we have
> not begun to come to grips with it. To study it, yes, that goes on in a
> hundred universities. But to apply it, no (1987: 5 & 28).

In the context of her work, this darkly prophetic view takes on the coloration of

hope, knowing that such insight is the beginning of consciousness, a look over the

edge. Later in that same essay, speaking of how difficult it is for young people to

have faith in their ability to change things, she struck a powerful chord in me. My own sense of frustration and futility desperately needed to hear her recollection and the hope which this next section brought to me:

> I remember very clearly how it seemed to me in my late teens and early twenties, seeing only what seemed to be impregnable systems of thought, of belief--governments that seemed unshakable. But what has happened to those governments like the white government in Southern Rhodesia, for instance? To those powerful systems of faith, like the Nazis, or the Italian Fascists, or to Stalinism? To the British Empire--to all the European empires, in fact, so recently powerful? They have all gone, and in such a short time.
>
> Looking back now, I no longer see these enormous blocs, nations, movements, systems, faiths, religions, but only individuals, people who when I was young I might have valued, but not with much belief in the possibility of their changing anything. Looking back, I see what a great influence an individual may have, even an apparently obscure person, living a small, quiet life. It is individuals who change society, give birth to ideas, who, standing out against tides of opinion, change them. This is as true in open societies as it is in oppressive societies, but of course the casualty rate in the closed societies is higher. Everything that has ever happened to me has taught me to value the individual, the person who cultivates her or his own ways of thinking, who stands out against group thinking, group pressures. Or who, conforming no more than is necessary to group pressures, quietly preserves individual thinking and development (1987: 72-3).

This essay, which speaks to me of the hope for transformation at the center of my work, also provides context for a scene from her novel *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1988: 78-9) which, for me says as much about the importance of individuals, while saying other things which would, I think, disappear if spoken more plainly. The novel is a woman's journal, set, as one of its reviewers said, in the midst of, "...a

beleaguered city where rats and roving gangs terrorize the streets, where government has broken down and meaningless violence holds sway." As she rests for a moment from a life so chillingly like what our world might be (and already is for many), she begins to experience another world, into which she periodically enters, as a wall of her living room seems gradually to dissolve into another view. You may read it as a dream, if you need to:

> Behind the wall I found a room that was tall, not very large, and I think six-sided. There was no furniture in it, only a rough trestle around two of the sides. On the floor was spread a carpet, but it was a carpet without its life: it had a design, an intricate one, but the colours had an imminent existence, a potential, no more. There had been a fair or a market here, and this had left a quantity of rags, dress material, scraps of Eastern embroideries of the kind that have tiny mirrors buttonhole-stitched into them, old clothes--everything in that line you can think of. Some people were standing about the room. At first it seemed that they were doing nothing at all; they looked idle and undecided. Then one of them detached a piece of material from the jumble on the trestles, and bent to mach it with the carpet--behold, the pattern answered that part of the carpet. This piece was laid exactly on the design, and it brought it to life.

> It was like a child's game, giant-sized; only it was not a game; it was serious, important not only to the people actually engaged in this work, but to everyone. Then another person bent with a piece chosen from the multicolored heap on the trestles, bent, matched, and straightened again to gaze down. There they stood, about a dozen people, quite silent, turning their eyes from the patterns of the carpet to the tangle of stuffs and back again. A recognition, the quick move, a smile of pleasure or relief, a congratulatory glance from one of the others--there was no competition here, only the soberest and most loving co-operation. I entered the room; I stood on the carpet looking down as they did at its incompleteness, pattern without colour, except where the pieces had already been laid in a match, so that parts of the carpet had a bleak gleam, like one that had been bleached, and other parts glowed up, fulfilled, perfect. I, too, sought

for fragments of materials that could bring life to the carpet, and did in fact find one, and bent down to match and fit, before some pressure moved me on again. I realized that everywhere around, in all the other rooms, were people who would in their turn drift in here, see this central activity, find their matching piece—would lay it down, and drift off again to other tasks. I left that tall room, whose ceiling vanished upwards into dark where I thought I saw the shine of a star, a room whose lower part was in a bright light that enclosed the silent concentrating figures like stage-lighting. I left them and moved on. The room disappeared. I could not find it when I turned my head to see it again, so as to mark where it was. But I knew it was there waiting; I knew it had not disappeared, and the work in it continued, must continue, would go on always.

Later in the novel (156-7), as terror and starvation draw closer, the awfulness of the city has intruded into the world behind the wall, just as *this* world had intruded into my youthful hopes, yet still she is sustained by her vision of what she encounters there:

And yet, with all these evidences of destructiveness, even now I could not move behind the wall without feeling something of the old expectation, hope, even longing. And rightly, for when the anarchy was at its height, and I had almost lost the habit of expecting anything but smashed and dirtied rooms, there was a visit when I found this: I was in a garden between four walls, old brick walls, and there was a fresh delightful sky above me that I knew was the sky of another world, not ours. This garden did have a few flowers in it, but mostly it had vegetables. There were beds neatly filled with greenery—carrot tops, lettuces, radishes, and there were tomatoes, and gooseberry bushes, and ripening melons. some beds were raked and ready for planting; others had been turned and left open to the sun and the air. It was a place filled with industry, usefulness, and hope. I walked there under a fruitful sky, and thought of how people would be fed from this garden. But this wasn't all, for I became aware that under this garden was another. I was able easily to make my way down into it along a sloping ramp of earth, and there were even steps of—I think—stone. I was down in the lower garden, which was immediately under the first and

occupied the same area: the feeling of comfort and security this gave me is not really describable. Nor was this lower garden any less supplied with sun, wind, rain than the upper one. Here, too, were the tall warm walls of weathered brick, and the beds in various stages of preparedness and use. There was an exquisite old rose growing on one wall. It was a soft yellow, and its scent was in all the air of the garden. Some pinks and mignonette grew near a sunny stone: these were the old flowers, rather small, but subtle and individual: all the old cottage flowers were here, among the leeks and the garlics and the mints. There was a gardener. I saw him at the moment I realized I was listening with pleasure to the sound of water running near my foot, where there was a channel of earth, with tiny herbs and grasses growing along its edges. Near the wall the channel was of stone, and wider: the gardener was bending over the stone runnel where it came into the garden from outside through a low opening that was green and soft with moss. Around every bed was a stream of clear water; the garden was a network of water channels. And, looking up and beyond the wall, I saw that the water came from the mountains four or five miles away. There was snow on them, although it was midsummer, and this was melted snow-water, very cold, and tasting of the air that blew across the mountains. The gardener turned when I ran towards him to ask if he had news of the person whose presence was so strong in this place, as pervasive as the rose-scent, but he only nodded and turned back to his duties of controlling the flow of water, of seeing that it ran equably among the beds. I looked across the mountains and at the plain in between, where there were villages and large stone houses in gardens, and I thought that what I was looking at was the underworld--and one just as extensive and productive--of the level to which I now had to return. I walked up to the first level again, and saw the old walls warm with evening sunlight, heard water running everywhere, though I had not heard it when I stood here before; I took small cautious steps from one solid but moist spot to the next, with the smell of apple-mint coming up form my knees and the sound of bees in my ears. I looked at the food the earth was making, which would keep the next winter safe for us, for the world's people. Gardens beneath gardens, gardens above gardens: the food-giving surfaces of the earth doubled, trebled, endless--the plenty of it, the richness, the generosity...

I have never read that selection without its invoking for me that sense of remembrance of a moment of primordial peace and of hope which it wrought upon our first encounter; yet, looking at these recent pages, it is obvious that such excerpts are like the pieces of Lessing's carpet, where there was only potential: the design is there, but separated from the organic whole of the story, the life that is imminent is not obvious. If it were not so, I would need not have set these works somewhat apart: for me the aesthetic is defined by its organic, indivisible quality, and I hope that my authors will forgive me bringing them into my house as cut flowers, for my own pleasure, and for that of my guests.

These voices and many others, quite a few of whom grace my *Bibliography*, had a hand in that mid-life struggle, a struggle which I gradually came to see as an attempt to go beyond the cynicism with which I had greeted each new disillusionment in my youth and which lay latent but unchallenged during my early householder phase. As years pasted, I gradually came to realize, not only in times of reflection, but especially in my daily life, that the uneasy truce between my conscience and my societal role, made possible by my cynicism, would end if I insisted on a life of meaning, a life which made space for that vision which these authors were offering me. To an even greater extent, I came to feel that only in the absence of meaning which my cynicism fostered could I fail to attend to the consequences and implications of the way in which I (and everyone else of my acquaintance) made my living.

Concurrently with these thoughts and readings, that living placed me in a managerial position entailing responsibility for hundreds of minimum wage employees, in an industry driven by fierce price competition. My internal conflict was equally severe: I was obedient to and rewarded by the values of our market culture; and I could find no peace with my conscience in doing what that obedience required, in doing the very things which other managers now face daily in the world of corporate downsizing. From today's viewpoint, I can see now that the very callousness and lack of concern for employees for which the chairmen of various large corporations have only recently begun to be excoriated have always been required of those managers who would succeed in industries peopled by employees who were powerless and poor. What I did not see at the time, and what few apparently did, judging from the very recent "discovery" of the moral dimensions of downsizing and other corporate behaviors, was the pervasiveness--the universality--of the problem. At the time I experienced this conflict, I was able to conceal from myself the systemic nature of the problem--I thought these faults lay only in the places I had seen; I failed to see at that time the exhaustion of our cultural repertoire to which I have now come to refer.

Even now the socialization which served to conceal the heart of the problem from me continues to render this narrative difficult. Even now I hear within me those same voices of rationalization which I also hear in what passes for public discourse. Only by suppressing the spontaneous occurrence of compassion for our

fellow human beings can I (and others) unquestioningly manipulate the lives and loyalties of employees (or citizenry) to the extent necessary to meet the ends which our culture defines. Among other things, this narrative is a struggle to be unashamed of compassion, to defeat a shame which our culture fosters by libeling any dissent from the predatory in present corporate (or political) behavior—naming any dissent as some combination of self-righteousness, incapacity, laziness, ignorance, or malice.

In the midst of the formative stages of those conflicts, and near the end of that truce which characterized my householder phase, I began to read even more voraciously, seeking some way to live that could accommodate these conflicts within a life. That period, which began my acquaintance with Ornstein and Lessing, also brought three others into my life: the philosopher Franklin Merrell-Wolff, the Cistercian monk Thomas Merton, and Idries Shah, the current exemplar of the Sufi tradition. Although starkly different in message and style, my collision with each struck a powerful and similar chord in me, one which still resounds in my heart and my work.

I must tell you about them; and, here is perhaps the most paradoxical task of all: to speak of that which cannot be spoken, and then to speak with others' voices, by means of excepting and condensing—omitting words, words which those who knew better thought should be said! Yet this is the only way available to me to

speak of what may not be said, by saying and unsaying, yet again; seeking to glimpse an intuition arcing the space between the two halves of the dichotomy. Here I turn to an attempt to point to "skillful means" as an instrumental function, a pointing toward which the effort expended in *Chapter Three* explaining the "meaning event" in Sells' version of negative theology was directed.

The value of finding Sells' work to be analogous to the means we shall be discussing here is that he has already made so many of the obviously necessary equivocations, qualifications, and cautions. He has introduced the concept of the instrumental nature of the "moment" held in tension between opposites. The most obvious difference at which the analogy begins to wear thin is that of time scale: the "meaning event" presents an affirmation in the immediate company of its retraction, whereas a skillful means might either do the same (e.g., a Zen master's stick) or might require decades unopposed in a student's consciousness (e.g., a formal religion) before being presented with a retraction in the form of whatever new path the Teacher has determined for the next developmental stage. In either case, I have come to suspect that the tension between the affirmation and its retraction is the point. In the moment when those parts of ourselves which we have come to describe as the emotional and intellectual faculties are enthralled by this tension, out of control, so to speak, a brief opportunity arises for the action of what we might choose to call intuition. And here the analogy breaks down, for, unlike systems based upon intellection or emotive response, in a skillful means the

specific content of the affirmation and retraction are important for only one reason: it must be the content suitable for bringing the specific student to the "moment." Claiming that there is an experiential source of the Knowledge of what constitutes the content appropriate for a particular person, at a specific time, place and circumstance, is the reason that one precedes "means" with the qualifier "skillful." It is this claim which, more than any other point in my experience, defines the difficulty upon which any purely intellectual approach to hope must founder: according to those who claim to have it, this Knowledge is not accessible through means current in our culture--you can't get there from here!

Browsing through a bookstore in Columbia, SC, yielded the first of these authors. At the time I had almost given up entirely on philosophers, concluding from my unguided study that their discipline was for me of a piece with chess or recreational mathematics--pleasurable but diverting, leading nowhere near whatever it was which drove me to search for meaning. So, more from habit than hope, I took down from a shelf a heavy text, filled with aphorisms, entitled *Consciousness Without an Object*, by Franklin Merrell-Wolff (1973b). (His works were generally written and privately distributed during the period 1935-1970; as a result, the publication dates are somewhat confusing.) To move quickly to the point, I bought that book, and his work is here because I thought that he succeeded, as far as is possible, in his self-imposed task of demonstrating, "...the actuality of noetic value springing from mystical or gnostic roots (1994: xii)", and

because, in so doing, his intended audience, like mine, was not limited to the one which might ordinarily be expected to care for the mystical: to those who are favorably inclined to mysticism. He spoke in one of his introductions in a voice I would hope to emulate in speaking of my own work:

> To him who has the poet's insight or the intuitive feeling of the unfettered religious nature, much of the critical part of the discussion will appear unnecessary and many modes of formulation unduly devious and recondite. To such I would say, "Be patient, and remember that I am not writing only for those who believe easily. Know you not that there are men of intellectual power and honesty in this world who view you patronizingly as little well-meaning, but credulous children? I would command for you respectful attention even though there may be much honest disagreement (1994, p. xii).

What I found there certainly served me in the way he intended. Remembering that my view of the world at the time varied across a rather narrow spectrum from cynicism through disillusionment to uncertainty (on good days), as I paged through his book, I almost certainly considered myself glad to be one of those *without* the "poet's insight," preferring the protection from appearing foolish which is conferred upon, "men of intellectual power and honesty...who view you patronizingly as little well-meaning, but credulous children." By the time I had struggled through my second reading of the two works then in print, I was moving beyond the minimum of honest disagreement which he sought to gain and was considering that it might just be possible that in the midst of all the confusion (and snake oil) attendant on these topics, there might truly be paths to Knowledge.

At almost every turn I found his early experience to be similar to mine, raising

hopes that I might approximate the fascinating later experiences which his journals

and his philosophy portrayed. Speaking of being forced, by a loss of childhood

faith, to pass thorough a period of atheism before being able to realize that Jesus

also carried the same Light of Wisdom he had, in the interim, found elsewhere, he

spoke directly to me:

> It is the old, old story of the followers of a Great Light mutilating and
> obscuring that Light through misunderstanding. It is, indeed, a question
> whether the great corporate religious organizations have not been more of
> a curse than a blessing with respect to the mission of the very Saviours in
> whose names they are formed (1994: 83)

Franklin Merrell-Wolff, by reference to his own mystical enlightenment, offered me

another way to conceptualize the problems of Truth which at the time stood

between me and a sense of meaning, while he also provided his own response to

Proudfoot (See discussion in Chapter Three) fifty years before the event:

> The Pragmatists...have generally sought to establish themselves, first of all,
> by a challenge of the validity of rational Idealism. William James gives as
> one of the primary postulates of Pragmatism the principle, "There is no
> difference of truth that does not make a difference of fact somewhere."....I
> submit my own Recognition as an instance which controverts this
> challenge. I mounted to the Moment of the Transition in the framework of
> rational Idealism, and the critical step hinged upon the isolation of the pure
> apperceptive moment of consciousness itself. Thus Truth, as conceived by
> rational Idealism of the monistic type, did effect a difference of fact for me.
> The difference of fact is a new relationship to the subject-object
> consciousness and a state of far greater peace and happiness than had
> been known previously. But the cause of this "difference in fact" was not
> an experience but the attainment of "Knowledge through Identity," which,

as I have already pointed out is neither experience nor formal knowledge,
but a third kind of knowledge (1994: 148).

Having made this point, he then provided me with one of the keys to my own

internal conflict by finding at least a partial reconciliation between these seemingly

incompatible views of the Idealist and the Pragmatist, albeit, a reconciliation certain

to enflame the passions of any other proponent of either position:

> The Pragmatists are right in that formal knowledge is not enough to
> determine effective or final Truth, but they are wrong in asserting that such
> Truth, or the knowledge of it, must depend upon experience. On the other
> hand, the rational Idealists are right in maintaining that the effective Truth
> must be absolute and, therefore, cannot be derived from experience, which
> of necessity must be finite. But they are wrong in so far as they claim to be
> able to establish this Truth by formal demonstration alone. The effective
> establishment of this Truth requires "Knowledge through Identity," i.e., a
> direct Recognition on the level of Infinity, which is never attainable by any
> expansion of experience alone. (1994: 148).

Here at last I had encountered someone who offered me an affirmation of the

absolute seemingly without extracting my intellect in payment. Rather than asking

that I forfeit intellect, he was telling me that I had the capacity to go beyond it.

Speaking of the radical difference between formal and empirical knowledge on the

one hand and Knowledge on the other, Merrell-Wolff says, "The result is that

intellectuality, *if not consciously or unconsciously united to Real Knowledge*, has

the effect of emptiness or 'thinness' which so impressed William James (1994:

65)." This knowing directly through Identity was a foundational concept to grasp

if I were to travel very far with Merrell-Wolff; at least he was not reticent about

being specific, even if it were sure to gain him few friends either among formal

religionists. or among the skeptical and the post-modernists:

> *God is either Known directly through Identity, or He is not known at all*....In
> contrast to formal and empirical knowledge, Real Knowledge is essentially
> wordless, for it does not deal with objects. This is Knowledge through
> Identity. Hence, it does not *represent* Substance, but *is* Substance Itself.
> So, it is true that "I"--the self or Atman--am not different from that
> Knowledge. The speech and writings of the God-Realized Men are not
> representations of external existences, but are the actual embodiments of
> the SELF...(1994: 65).

The last statement I take to be a reference to the instrumental nature of such

writings, of which previous mention has been made. Not unexpectedly, Merrell-

Wolff found ethics and morality to be similarly grounded. Like Marcel, he had no

sympathy with founding ethical behavior in humanism:

> In fact, I very much question whether without the mystical ground there
> ever could be developed a true morality, that is, a morality that was more
> than mere social expediency. The mystic's morality would be just as
> imperative for the last man in a dying world as for a man in the midst of a
> living society, while mere sociological morality would have no ground
> whatsoever in such a setting (1978: 223).

By offering an intellectually defensible position from which to do so, Merrell-Wolff

gave me the opportunity to reconsider the perennialist position, at a time when I

had followed the last of my cultural repertoire to its point of exhaustion, at a time

when I stood on the edge of my chasm. And now, in retrospect, I see his influence

when I say the same for hope that he said for morality--that the absence of the

experience of a mystical ground for hope in our culture is the reason for our

despair; that the "social expediency" in which we are told to ground our hope may serve here no better than Merrell-Wolff says it may for morality.

Encountered for the first time within weeks of my reading Merrell-Wolff, Idries Shah seemed to bring together in one body of work so many of the elements which I had previously seen as mutually exclusive. In his work the juxtaposition of the disparate was not only possible, but necessary: the most effective iconoclasm with a profound sense of the pivotal importance of mystical experience, a pragmatic commitment to "what works" for the student with a claim to Knowledge of how "what works" is to be constructed, and a challenge to our social constructs which asked to be entertained not as an uncritical belief, but as a "working hypothesis." He asserted that we must learn to refrain from approaching truly important things (like Knowledge and "God") with our commercial mindset, as commodities, to be bought and sold. It would be fair to say that this influence is pervasive in my current views, probably discernable by the reader in much of what has preceded this section of my narrative, and inextricable to the point where I cannot fairly credit or cite it.

Here my earlier reluctance to snip samples for the consideration of the reader meets a specific instruction to avoid such behavior, based upon the instrumental and organic nature of the works. Fortunately for this effort to give you a sense of the man and his work, I have available an introduction to one of his works (Shah,

1978), which I feel free to quote; and for the sake of the cohesiveness of the narrative, I am additionally fortunate that this introduction is by Doris Lessing:

> What I am sketchily, inadequately, outlining here is a whole series of blocks and impediments that amount to a mental prison. Well, the Sufis say we live in such a prison, and it is their concern to give us the equipment to free ourselves. We are all *conditioned*, as we now claim so trippingly; but perhaps being able to *say* that is not enough to enable us to see how....If we want to approach the Sufis, their ways of looking at life, at some point it is necessary to swallow the unpalatable fact that they think of us as backward, barbarian, ill-equipped, ill-informed, and primitive, with closed minds in areas where it is vital to our futures that we open them....Many words and concepts have fallen out of real use. Reading this book, we are forced to recognize that in our scientifically-oriented, materialistic culture, words like humility, pride, greed, love, idolatry, charity, tend to be disposed of into areas labeled "religion" or "ethics." Shah rescues them, strips them of sentiment and vague emotion, and re-introduces them—as tools....Abjure the *why* and seek the *how* as one Sufi, the explorer Richard Burton put it. Well, this book is about how we, individually and collectively, may learn to look at ourselves and our institutions differently. And if what we are being taught is unexpected and sometimes disconcerting, then that is in the great tradition too (pp. 11-13).

Immediately prior to my initial encounters with Shah and Merrell-Wolff, I had begun to read the works of Thomas Merton, primarily those which offered Western insights into Zen. It was only in the light of the work of the two previously mentioned that I was able to return to Merton as a Christian. They had convinced me that it was both futile and unnecessary to attempt to "remake myself as a Fourteenth Century Japanese" in order to seek truth, and offered me the beginnings of a long and painful return to my own heritage, one still in progress in the present.

Yet it was Zen, especially Thomas Merton's Zen, which was then foundational for my search. In his reading of that tradition, much of what I am (and hope to be) may be found. Certainly my metaphor of the chasm and its edge as a description of our cultural exhaustion might be seen to spring from that time and his work:

> Zen cannot be grasped as long as one remains passively conformed to any cultural or social imperatives, whether ideological, sociological or what have you....Zen implies a breakthrough, an explosive liberation from one-dimensional conformism....This means a totally different perspective than that which dominates our society--and enables it to dominate us....The point is that facts are not just plain facts, There is a dimension where the bottom drops out of the world of factuality and of the ordinary. Western industrial culture is in the curious position of having simultaneously reached the climax of an entire totalitarian rationality of organization and of complete absurdity and self-contradiction...But the majority persist in seeing only the rational machinery against which no protest avails: because, after all, it is "rational," and it is "a fact." So, too, is the internal self-contradiction....The thing about Zen is that it pushes contradictions to their ultimate limit where one has to choose between madness and innocence. And Zen suggests that we may be driving toward one or the other on a cosmic scale. Driving toward them because, one way or the other, as madmen or innocents, we are already there...It might be good to open our eyes and *see* (Merton, 1968a:140-1).

And in his Christian garb, in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (1968b), he spoke to me of my own condition and of the condition of the church in those times, giving voice to a failure which I had seen but not understood:

> Martin Luther King, who is no fanatic but a true Christian, writes a damning letter from Birmingham jail, saying that the churches have utterly failed the Negro. In the end, that is what the Black muslims are saying too. And there is truth in it. Not that there is not a certain amount of liberal and sincere concern for civil rights among Christians, even among ministers, priests, and bishops. But what is this sincerity worth? What does the "good will"

amount to? Is it anything more than a spiritual luxury, to calm the conscience of those who cultivate it? What good does it do the Negro? What good does it do the country? Is it a pure evasion of reality (1968b: 301)?

He reminded me in *Faith and Violence* (1968c) that my own tradition was no stranger to a larger view of reality, that, "Contemplative Wisdom is then not simply an aesthetic extrapolation of certain intellectual or dogmatic principles, but a living contact with the Infinite Source of all being (p. 222)" and that this contact was, "not only of minds and hearts, not only of "I" and "Thou," but a transcendent union of consciousness in which man and God became, according to the expression of St. Paul, 'one spirit' (p. 222)."

Having seen what you have of that almost young man we have been considering, you might imagine the interest (and comfort) I might have taken in meeting Merrell-Wolff's sentiments in this not-so-gentle monk. As Merton told me about the Wisdom tradition which I had not even known existed in my own faith, the congruence with the others whom I was studying gained another dimension of meaning for me. Speaking of "the true spiritual life," Merton said:

> It is a life of wisdom, a life of sophianic love. In *Sophia*, the highest wisdom-principle, all the greatness and majesty of the unknown that is in God and all that is rich and maternal in His creation are united inseparably...Faith is what opens to us in this higher realm of unity, of strength, of sophianic love where there is no longer the limited and fragmentary light provided by rational principles, but where the Truth is One and Undivided and takes all to itself in the holiness of...*Sophia* (1961:141).

This finding of things needed but unexpected has since that time become thematic in my life: in one case, my narrative seems to say that my motives might on occasion have been better than I knew, rather than worse, as seems more generally the case; my discovery of the ground of hope which had been unknowingly nurtured in my heart was certainly another. And, in looking for a path through the confusion of our culture, as I eventually came to feel that I needed additional resources to resume the struggle between my world and my conscience, both in the presence of external and internal critics, that feeling eventually sent me back to school as an adult student, first of psychology, then of business, and now of education. Those seeming eclectic choices in each case seemed at the time to be appropriate paths: as a psychologist I would have hoped to heal both my own divisions and those of others; as an MBA, I had expected that I might find a way to do business which was both sustainable and non-toxic; as an educator, I felt that I might be in a position to share whatever I might eventually come to understand.

Throughout that process of adult schooling my capacity for cultural criticism grew--I certainly developed a powerful habit of searching out and deconstructing unexamined initial assumptions in our discourse--but at the same time, I came increasingly to value the need for finding something in their place. As in the discussion, cited earlier, by Matthew Fox (1994: 209) of Suzi Gablik's

"reconstructive postmodernism", I discovered that I too, "must choose whether to follow a path of demystifying alone or a path of being instead [a] cultural healer "

I came to feel a certain confidence in the need to include the path of a "cultural healer" in my journey, and did not consider it a byway or a turning aside from my quest. In fact, it is probably fair to say that it was the other way round: I suspect that my personal history would say that it was this desire to "heal the world" which turned my attention initially to the question of hope, and eventually to the mystical bent which it has now taken. As should be clear at this point, I came to consider the process in which I have engaged to be not only a search for individual transcendence, but also an attempt to join with those who might hope to renovate-- to reinvigorate--our culture, so that it might nurture rather than obstruct the flowering of each of us, and all of us, into what we might be. My apologetics were to be addressed not only to myself, but primarily to my community; similarly and even more to the point, it was obvious that a pedagogy of hope could have no place to act unless it was within the context of a culture in the process of being transformed.

Yet holding to such views in the climate of skepticism which the flowering of our deconstructive skills has fostered, in fact holding such views while maintaining my fondness for my own skepticism, proved to be an undertaking involving considerable self-contradiction, a self-contradiction as striking and as difficult in its

own way as my earlier struggles of conscience in the workplace. My search also confirmed the obvious: if the

effort to effect individual change is heroically difficult, the process of intentional cultural change might serve to define "problematic." Despite this self-conflict over means and the problematic nature of finding specific workable remedies for cultural renovation, I eventually came to frame these issues in the terms which have come to characterize my quest. I came to see that my own frustration with my search for a way to live and my own difficulties with trying to change a small corner of the world so that I might live well while being good was once again being reflected in my experience, this time as both a student and a teacher of material containing a substantial moral and social critique. In both those roles, I found that there I had a strong tendency to come to a saturation point after a period of intense study of such materials, at which time a sense of moral outrage intervened: I wanted to cry, "Enough discussion! The problem is more than obvious. What is to be done about it?" And in practice, I both offered and received such a question as a criticism of pedagogy--my students repeated my student experience--they too came to react in anger and frustration at the perversity of our world, at the hypocrisy of a culture claiming the moral high ground attendant upon egalitarianism, while fostering in its heart a social darwinism productive of the most predatory elitism. While I came to believe that the absence of a proposed solution should not constrain one's right to "name the intolerable," I did (and do) accept this cry as a fair question to ask of those of us in a profession so dominated by praxis as is education, and a

necessary question for those concerned with the litany of horrors with which we began *Chapter One*. With all the opportunities--such as that litany--which our culture offers, there could surely be few who had not experienced something which caused them to feel "moral outrage;" and probably there are as many who have felt the need for some significant change in our world as a result.

Yet, wherever I looked for previous attempts to respond to these problems, there seemed to me to be a societal reflection of my internal conflict, a fundamental divide, even between persons of good will, which became apparent in examining both the framing of and the responses to the questions associated with the means for change--a dichotomy most difficult to resolve. For example, both my own mind and the public discourse seemed divided between those who would make a better world by structural social changes and those who counsel transformative changes in individuals as a prerequisite to any meaningful social change. The retorts were familiar and difficult to counter: the former would ask how one might transform any except the most exceptional individual apart from a nurturing interpretive community, while the latter would ask how one might fashion such an interpretive community from unregenerate persons.

Similarly, my own "moral outrage," while it energized me, at the same time reduced my capacity to engage powerful people in conversations about such change. And, similarly, in our public discourse, the inflexibility of opposing

positions, the shrillness of voices, came to stand in rhetorical gridlock. At a time when so much that we thought we had accomplished by confrontation was falling away, it began to seem appropriate to test pragmatically the results of such tactics over time. For example, there are certainly few who are not inspired by the non-violence of Dr. Martin Luther King, yet the political process that converted those ideas into social reality in the sixties was often fueled by (a quite justified) anger and frustration. I began to feel that it was not coincidental that many of the gains from those marches, protests and sit-ins were falling victim to the pent-up resentments of the conservatives, nor did I think that we should be surprised that a similar fate had overcome much of what the anti-war and campus reform factions of that period had hoped was accomplished. The more recent example of the Balkans also offered a lesson about the short-lived nature of the gains of acting upon even the most righteous anger. While I felt what I would have presumed to be a broadly held aversion to applying starkly utilitarian criteria in judging the outcome of moral issues, in the context of those failures I began to be inclined to feel that a treatment of the anger which has so often been the product of our critique serves to bring forward Doris Lessing's concerns about whether there might be some deep-seated flaw in our capacity to reform ourselves. In any case, there were certainly immediately obvious pragmatic difficulties: an angry, combative, blaming personality might certainly be very effective in capturing one's attention; unfortunately, such a personality also predisposes most people to oppose whatever agenda has inspired that unpleasantness.

Along with many whom I have cited before, I came to hold that a critical element in the reduction of the risk of simplistic or fundamentalist solutions is to keep always before oneself the need to recognize the effects of our ego constructs, and I have held this awareness to be especially important in preparation for "working in the world." I understood this need to be widely apprehended; many of my sources made the argument that unenlightened efforts to improve the lot of others are frequently ineffective, or even counterproductive. Yet the prospect of remaining calm and detached in the face of suffering was anathema to my Western conscience, a conscience which most generally informs those of us who desire structural change: in that view, detachment is a psychopathological diagnosis, not a spiritual virtue. Certainly we are more comfortable with the voice of Jeremiah in such a circumstance than we might be with a voice which focused on conscious transformation, as a prerequisite for engaging such problems.

Thus my response of feeling moral outrage in the face of the intolerable societal conditions which we have discussed conflicted with this other part of my self. My anger was not at home in this alternate tradition; a tradition which might be mistaken for indifference, because it proposed a response which does not include anger. That tradition, in which many of my sources stand, might be exemplified by Cheri Huber's Zen Buddhism, which, "involves sitting still as we bring all our suffering to be embraced in compassion (1995: 18)." Of course, one must make haste to emphasize that her Buddhism is not about resignation, but about the

necessity of escaping suffering by means of overcoming an illusion such as those we discussed in Chapter Two, an illusion in this case which makes us think that we are individual egos, "...separate from all that is. If you do not believe that you are a somebody to whom things are happening, then nothing will happen to you (Huber, 1995: 17)."

In my initial stages of struggling with this internal conflict between moral outrage and a detached compassion, I took some comfort in noting with a smile that one widely proposed means for attaining the transformation necessary for the viewpoint which Huber represents is--service to others! I considered this difficulty to be an example of a paradox to be treasured, not to be resolved--in that time, I might have said that by the time we understood them, they would probably no longer be problematic. Yet as time passed, I came to see this problem differently, and in a way which would eventually affect my pedagogy. I began to listen to voices such as that of Gabriel Marcel, who, as cited earlier, asked us to consider that one might best, "serve peace by establishing it first of all in oneself (Marcel, 1967: 142)."

There have been other meaningful efforts to speak to these questions. Michael Lerner, in an early editorial which contributed significantly to the development of his "Politics of Meaning," struggled to bridge this same divide, saying: "A Neo-Compassionist politics will affirm the healthy part of the complex of reasons that

draws people into religion and will fight for a progressive politics that acknowledges the spiritual truths in the religious worldviews. even as it rejects sexism, national chauvinism, and the uncritical subordination of intellect to an irrationally constituted authority (1987: 12)." Yet Lerner left us with obvious and unresolved questions, as to who will choose which are the "healthy parts" of this complex of reasons and what is a properly constituted authority. We are stuck once again with the earlier problem of constituting the interpretive community. As Purpel and Shapiro have it, "Our discourse has its share of inner tensions and paradoxes--affirmation of both criticality and commitment, of firmness and flexibility, community and individuality, freedom and equality, harmony and diversity. As intellectuals, we cannot but be wary, skeptical, and critical of any creed, formulation, or manifesto; but as moral agents, we cannot be paralyzed by complexity and tolerance (1995: 156) ." It is to the question of how we are to avoid that paralysis, how we are to make the choices which Lerner proposed, and how my questions occasioned by "cultural healing" are to be engaged to which I now turn, attempting to speak of hope in and for the wisdom identified with transcendent experience.

Unreasonable Assurance and Transcendent Experience.

In the midst of these concerns, and at a point where I was myself once again at the edge of the chasm, there occurred what I have described as the intervention of an "unreasonable reassurance." The reader may recall the "fourth theme" from

Chapter Two, which described a significant turning point in my research—having originally set out in search of hope, my task was fundamentally changed by a discovery of pivotal importance:

> • The discovery that my quest has become an effort in apologetics,
> because, in searching, I have found within myself a reservoir of hope
> that I had not previously acknowledged. My awareness that, despite
> the hope which is in my heart, I am confronted by the paradox of not
> knowing how to defend its presence (apologetics), or how to describe
> to others how it might be attained (pedagogy).

This discovery, foreshadowed in much that I had written and thought over the course of this work, finally came to me in its greatest clarity in the midst of what I had intended as an intellectual, analytical discussion of the ground of hope. As a part of my effort to break out of a period of "writer's block," I was attempting to illustrate to my advisor why I had come to hold that there is something in the heart of every human being which gives us the sense of energy and possibility to carry on in the face of unspeakable things, intending to use a scene cited in the previous section of this chapter, from Doris Lessing. The following excerpt from my journal (October 13, 1995) offers a recollection recorded shortly afterward:

> No matter how many times I am presented with evidence of the truth
> of Ornstein's Multi-Mind hypothesis, I am still astounded anew. Just
> as I have many times noted that the intellect seems oblivious to the

wellness (or lack thereof) of the body, so too the condition of the heart, of the Spirit, seems veiled from the part of me that drives this keyboard. When I attempted to read the "garden vision" from Lessing's *Memoirs of a Survivor* to Dr. Purpel on Tuesday, I was overwhelmed [ambushed] by emotion: my voice failed and tears flowed down my face. It was only in this context that I was able to come to realize that there was an unexamined source of the malaise I had been suffering. After expressing a reluctance born of a fear of sounding grandiose, I told Dr. P. that, even though my personal life was in better shape than ever before, I still felt an incredible level of pain, seemingly as if I were sensing the anguish of the whole world as it suffered from the wounds we have inflicted upon ourselves. Those tears and that expression of feeling, of compassion for my fellows, granted me the first peace I had felt in a long while. Even though all the tasks still remained to be done, the veil between me and my hope had been lifted. Although I had not expressed that to Dr. Purpel, it must have been apparent to him. He said, "You are in the garden now."

Reflecting on that experience in other journal entries over the following month, I found the interpretation of that experience forming a larger and larger portion of my work:

Finding hope in my heart is the pedagogy. The hope I seek is hidden by the assumption that it rests in politics or criticism, or science or history, when it truly rests in God. As long as only the intellect is convinced, doubt will eventually win and establish despair. That must be the outcome if we insist that the outcomes of our work are limited to the "Seen."....Finding that there is something within each human heart that gives us the sense of energy and possibility to carry on even in the face of unspeakable things, one also discovers that that same something *requires* of us that we also seek to remedy however much of that awfulness might fall under our hand: if we have great power, we must change the world; if we are grievously oppressed and void of material resources, we must comfort a child and offer unrequired and unrequited civilities to our neighbors....Unconditional hope is sustained even when failure is certain. Standing in front of a friend's coffin and afterward contemplating one's own mortality, it is still undimmed, even if it may be temporarily veiled by my pain. Finding such hope includes finding the duty to persevere; certainty of failure does not excuse one from this duty--it makes it clearer. This is not to say that one should needlessly sacrifice oneself in useless causes. Strategy is appropriate and needed. But when one discovers something that is morally necessary, then continuance in the absence of cause for optimism is a task to be undertaken with

a good heart. This may well be some of what Doris Lessing meant....Hope is as vital for the person who draws the duty of "turning out the lights" as it ever is in the sunny days. If we fail, if the whole thing goes down in flames, we can and should tend to our tasks of hope until the end.

This insight into what I take to be a fundamental part of my self suggested to me that the absence of hope from much of our discourse and many of our classrooms had grown out of our abandonment of Wisdom as the goal of education. In raising the issue in those terms, I realized that many might take my position to be a *prescription* that we simply resume the claim that we have Wisdom in hand and ready to dispense to obedient scholars; however, what I wished was to offer a *diagnosis*: that through having not only failed to pursue Wisdom, but having even yielded the possibility of its existence, our culture has constructed a world in which only pragmatic goals are viable: a condition which I contended could only result in despair. The Wisdom to which I was referring is now familiar to the reader from the works recently cited; it is a truth claim in the most unrepentant sense, although not of the modernist stripe. As I began to envision it, Wisdom represented the fruit of the transformative experiences to which I was referring with increasing frequency, experiences that are in essence spiritual, whether or not they have a religious context. Each of the sources discussed thus far had contributed in some way to my version of that claim, even though they might not have made it themselves.

Within this paradigm, it became possible to see more clearly why the concept of "cultural healing" in general, and "moral outrage" in particular, produced such a quandary in my earlier period. There have been innumerable examples from the literature of spiritual traditions which stress that there is clearly a developmental sequence in this process of seeking wisdom. While this sequence certainly varies for each person, along with those variables of time, place, company, etc., which Shah (1978) describes, general outlines are clearly perceptible in the various traditions. I proposed that the root of the problem which we continue to confront in our own culture, whose repertoire I had repeatedly described as exhausted, was the absence of Wisdom, in concept as well as in substance. In my own case, since I, like most of my peers, had been trained to see myself as a highly autonomous individual--to the extent that Bellah (1986) diagnoses the trait as a pathology--I was expected, at maturity, to be self-directed, acknowledging no possibility of teachership. Thus, when I had come to the end of a developmental stage (i.e., had exhausted the developmental potential of a certain behavior or study) there was no tradition which assigned to someone the right and duty to observe that fact and prescribe a new and appropriate behavior or belief. And in the absence of the capacity to bring (capitalized) Knowledge to bear on the question, that could not be considered inappropriate: in a culture which denies the reality of such *gnosis*, those who claim it must, by definition, be either deluded, or frauds.

Thus, when I had progressed as far as I might with the concept and practice of "moral outrage," had derived and shared whatever developmental benefit that stage had for me and would have benefited from some other view of the problems, I was required to rely on good fortune, chance encounter, or age to prompt me to drop the methodology that no longer served me and to find an appropriate replacement. Similarly, in that search, since as I had previously discussed, it is widely maintained that means appropriate for any individual are highly specific, my unguided (could we say random?) search was almost certain to result in my adopting behaviors which would range from inefficient, through ineffective, to harmful, just as if I had broken into a pharmacy to seek a remedy for a cold. Not much of a pedagogy.

So, Where Do We Go From Here?

I must accept the probability that both the preceding contention and the capitalization of Knowledge will place the balance of this work beyond the pale for many readers (although probably not many who have bothered to read this far); but, I believe that this contention is critical, bringing us to the crux of our cultural bankruptcy. As I said at the beginning of this work, our problem revolves around a very difficult issue in the search for Wisdom: the claim by many (if not all) of those whom I find to be credible representatives of some degree of attainment in a spiritual tradition to have acquired in that process some "special knowledge" not available to those who maintain their prejudice toward a linear view of reality. As

the reader has seen, the original assertion of the claim that Knowledge rests upon the "radical experientialism" which mystics claim radically expands one's range of perception, can still produce great discomforts for us if we are happy in our current constructions, feeling otherwise secure from the traps and snares of credulity or the edges of chasms. The final chapter is for those who will do with smaller and more uncertain comforts

Chapter V.

PEDAGOGY & CREDO

Here in the last and shortest of my chapters I want to consider what the preceding analysis and narrative might tell me about how to be a teacher. What sort of pedagogy is implied in believing what I have asserted thus far? Has it any applicability to the conditions about which I have joined the chorus of complaint? Can it make any difference? Is there in this work any hope? Can I offer anything which can stand against the despair surrounding our cynicism, our critique-without-redemption to which so many of us have turned, to answer Abraham Heschel's (1965) challenge:

> The tragedy of this creeping self-disparagement is in the cultivation of the doubt whether man is worthy to be saved. Massive defamation of man may spell the doom of all of us....If man is contemptible, why be upset about the extinction of the human species? The eclipse of humanity, the inability to sense our spiritual relevance, to sense our being involved in the moral task is itself a dreadful punishment (p.27)....Just as death is the liquidation of being, dehumanization is the liquidation of being human. What qualifies a being to be called a human being?...To claim that the question is unanswerable...would be to surrender the hope of attaining knowledge concerning significant issues, since...the significance of all other questions we ask depends on the answer we are ready to offer to this one. (p.29)

I have repeatedly contended that our cultural repertoire has been exhausted in attempting to respond to such challenges, to no good effect; yet, I do not propose that we abandon that repertoire, only that we come to see it as incomplete. As I indicated earlier, I have no doubt that employing what we already know would solve vast numbers of our problems. I propose that what is at issue is that we lack the understanding necessary to know which means are appropriate and when to employ them. Certainly their heretofore random and piecemeal employment, done in good faith but without such understanding, has produced the present situation, in which "school reform" has joined with "business ethics" to comprise the definitive oxymorons of our time. As should be apparent by now, I have come to hold that the pivotal defect in our culture is its exclusion of the "special knowledge" derived from transcendent experience, a defect which deprives us of access to Wisdom and insures that our paths must lead only to despair. If at this point, the reader were unable to so much as entertain the possibility of such knowledge as a working hypothesis, then for that person I have even less to offer than those whose offerings have been unhelpful to me. On the other hand, if you would care to venture a little further out on this limb, feel free to join me, to hope for a moment that we might somehow repair our culture by rediscovering Wisdom.

Thoughts About a Bridge.

I said that I do not advocate discarding our cultural repertoire; rather I propose that we seek to learn how to use it in the light of Wisdom. Many of those whom we have already consulted have much to offer in that regard; for example, Martin Seligman and his co-authors offer a specific prescription for a pedagogy of hope:

> Our schools today are called on to do all sorts of things. Why not call upon them to educate people in the most basic way possible, to prepare themselves to live in the world as happy, healthy, and productive individuals? Teach them how to persevere, how to maintain hope, how to be realistic on the one hand and visionary on the other. Encourage them to care about others and society as a whole. Reward them for competence and achievement. Acknowledge failings and shortcomings as well. Worry less about self-esteem of students and more about the skills from which self-esteem will follow as a natural consequence.

> At our most utopian, we envision the creation of Optimism Institutes, centers in which basic research on personal control is conducted and then applied, to schools, to work settings, to society itself. Staff these centers with individuals who themselves are optimistic about the possibilities of enlightened change using the lessons of psychological research. Involve citizens in the planning and evaluation of this kind of research and its applications. Make public opinion count. Let society judge whether these ideas are preferable to those that pervade our current age of personal control (Peterson, 1993: 310).

His pedagogy thus makes use of the pragmatically justified elements of our cultural repertoire, yet it would also acknowledge the need for "something else," as seen in Seligman's disclaimer which I cited in Chapter Two, where he reminded us of the usefulness and the limitations of optimism:

Optimism is just a useful adjunct to wisdom. By itself it cannot provide meaning. Optimism is a tool to help the individual achieve the goals he has set for himself. It is in the choice of the goals themselves that meaning—or emptiness—resides (1991: 291).

This sort of cultural repair in the context of Wisdom is also at the center of the pedagogy of Robert Ornstein. Seeking to expand the growing scientific understanding of altruism as a base for creative adaptation to the world we have been describing, Ornstein (1991) talks about how bonding together in kinship groups follows from the process of learning in early childhood who is to be cared for. He asks if we might intervene to go beyond the current model, where children only learn concern for, "...their tribe, their company, their team, their army, their nation, their religion (p. 272)," to a larger view, wherein they would, "...consider their people to be all of humanity (p. 272)":

I hope that, by understanding that the survival questions that face us are much more collective than individual, we may be able to wire up the next generation of people in a very different way. They would be connected to this understanding simply by receiving the right kinds of information in infancy about who our "relatives" are....Within religious traditions, no matter how encrusted they are now, is a different perspective on life, could we but connect it with the rest of modern knowledge....For millennia individuals have been attracted to the idea of "higher knowledge" or "mystical experiences." We now need to be aware that these experiences are important for our future and recognize that they are within the range of all (p. 272-3).

I am proposing that we respond to the emptiness of our cultural repertoire by heeding Marcel's caution about facing the temptation toward nihilism in our own

lives and that we seek, through our personal quest, to become one of those exceptional persons whose work *does* foster hope, regardless of their field. The pedagogy that I propose for bringing hope into our classrooms is, simply put, to employ the personal journey of the teacher in search of Wisdom. Whatever curriculum employs the interests and capacities of the teacher *could* be employed as a "skillful means" by a teacher properly engaged in such a quest, although of course he/she might find some material more useful than others. It is our paradox once again: mundane means which are unimportant in themselves, utilized in a spiritual context, can have extra-mundane outcomes--the relative is interpenetrated by the transcendent. Paradoxically (naturally), I am not suggesting that we teach our own hope directly to our students; rather that we might take as an example the following advice from Arthur Deikman, who, although speaking to those in his own field, offers a perspective that I find highly applicable to the classroom. After his diagnosis of the meaninglessness that characterizes modern psychotherapy, he cautioned that it is not a task of the practitioner to burden others with a particular doctrine or ideology; but rather for the practitioner to first seek freedom from his/her own conceptional prisons and despair:

> We gradually come to understand that meaninglessness and the despair of "I am alone" are products of obscured vision and inappropriate extrapolation of rules covering objects, rules that are useful only for a narrow range of phenomena....To the extent that therapists understand this wider context, their work will be oriented by a basically positive and optimistic perspective, instead of covertly supporting meaninglessness and existential despair.

> Thus the value of mysticism for psychotherapy lies not in the application of its technical devices to patients, as if these devices were a mental antibiotic or a superior tranquilizer, but in the change that mystical science can bring about in the therapist's world view and concept of the possibilities of human life (1982: 173).

In a work previously cited in connection with our need for iconoclasts, Deikman paused to offer us an even clearer idea of his vision of what those possibilities are:

> The goal of religion should be to facilitate the direct experience of the spiritual dimension. Although human beings carry within them the potential for regressive dependency, they also contain the potential for the intuition of the spiritual--that perception, however dim of something that transcends the reality accessible to the senses and ordinary thought (1990: 90).

In order to add another piece to this model, allow me to redeem my promise to return to the thought experiment from *Chapter Three*, in the light of what we have shared since. I repeat it mostly as stated then; however, because of the larger context in which it is now presented, I can suggest that it now be read not as a thought experiment, but as a proposal for the first page of the *Owner's Manual* of a new curriculum, to be read at assembly on the first day of school, as the preface to my pedagogy of hope. Once again, consider how much better prepared for life's developmental tasks (including spiritual tasks) a student might be if told what we have already discussed about our problems in the preceding chapters--suppose we were to propose to that student the following:

> 1. If you want to become human, the first step is to learn to behave
>
> as if you accepted the moral and ethical constraints on self-interest

that are proposed by *whatever* tradition is your own. Even the most

crassly fundamentalist versions of our traditions usually offer more

humane guidance for living one's life than does our skeptical-to-the-

point-of-cynicism popular culture, an assertion to which the litany of

horrors in the preceding chapters stands witness. Consider that the

behavior which our traditions ascribe to saints is, rather, a minimum

human duty, a point of beginning to be superseded by capacities

that can only be attained after such duties are observed.

2. At the same time, in choosing such a means, remember that you

are undertaking an obligation to keep in consciousness the historical

costs of fanaticism, cultism, and the abandonment of critical faculties,

which have allowed the perversion and selective application of these

moral, ethical, and religious systems to support the interests of

governance and commerce at the expense of the community and

human prospects. Remember that every one of us has that same

capacity (predisposition even) to become enrapt in cultic beliefs and

behavior, a potential against which understanding is our first armor.

In addition, to minimize the danger to yourself and to others, you

must understand and remember the instrumental nature of these

systems of belief, which have all originated as "skillful means"

designed by Teachers for specific times, places, and persons and

which are intended to be set aside when their transformative purpose

is accomplished.

If we are not to discard our mundane and otherwise exhausted cultural means,

then we must find such Wisdom, so that we might employ these means in ways

which provide us with a bridge across the abyss, rather than an idol to divert us

from our quest. I believe that we must risk using science, engineering, philosophy,

the pursuit of our individual traditions, and the other tools at our disposal, which

by themselves are insufficient for hope, while maintaining the attitude of Chuang

Tzu (Merton, 1969, 154) towards such means and ends:

> The purpose of a fish trap is to catch fish,
>   and when the fish are caught, the trap is forgotten.
> The purpose of a rabbit snare is to catch rabbits.
>   When the rabbits are caught, the snare is forgotten.
> The purpose of words is to convey ideas.
>   When the ideas are grasped, the words are forgotten.
> Where can I find a man who has forgotten words?
>   He is the one I would like to talk to.

Over the Edge: My Credo as a Confession of Faith in Hope.

I said at the beginning of the last section that I wanted to avoid discarding our cultural repertoire, through learning how to use it with Wisdom. Yet to the extent that I have offered helpful and pragmatic equivocations which avoided the worrisome issue of needing to learn how to Know, I am guilty of obscuring the main point. Helpful or not, the trap which pragmatic means contain consists of the absence of the Knowledge of how, when, where, and with whom to apply them. This trap is the origin of our continued piecemeal *re*formations, which have proved to be ineffective paths to *trans*formation. It is therefore unavoidable that I assert once more that each of the things which I suggested above cannot ultimately succeed without the successful individual undertaking of the spiritual path by each of the participants.

It might also seem that I must, in the spirit of the preceding analysis, immediately retract all that has gone before, constrained by my analysis of negative theology and the work of Sells to simultaneously unsay so direct an affirmation. However, I feel no such need, because our culture, seen as I have seen it, now serves us by standing in itself as a great megalith of negation, needing no help from my small voice. Here in my *Credo* I am thus free to affirm what I wish to have stand against that other pole; I speak my theology to stand in tension with our world, hopefully to create a "moment" in the space between. I do consent to one

equivocation: this Credo is a report from my frontier, faithful to what I have just seen, and subject to amendment by what I hope to understand.

As I have said elsewhere (1996), I believe that as teachers, we should speak hope to our students, not though offering them some idol created from our own belief and experience, but through offering them the opportunity of witnessing the changes that are wrought in our lives by our own spiritual search. It is through the sense of energy and possibility associated with those engaged in the search for faith or enlightenment that I believe we may offer students the opportunity to "catch" hope. This can be done. I have been in educational settings (including classrooms) with Teachers where this happened, as I hope you have. I have heard Beatrice Bruteau--a doctor of Christian philosophy and a Vedantist, a scientist and the head of a Benedictine order--speak in one breath of both transcendence and of the worthiness of the world. I have heard her *Radical Optimism* at a level of which I did not know. She has taught me that I am not compelled to create joy and hope, that it is a fundamental error to think that they have to be caused, when in reality they flow from a universal, impartial and creative love. I have listened to David Purpel sharing his mystery, speaking at once with the ringing voice of the prophet and with the voice of compassion, calling us to the need to hold both in our hearts--wherever in the world we teach--balancing moral outrage with the possibility of redemptive action. I have cherished his assurance that even those of us who have "set out to save the world" can learn to draw a line between

humility and despair, by finding that redemption from the Faustian notion of being alone responsible for the righting the world is not only possible, but already accomplished. In my dark hours, I hear his amazement at the mystery of the persistence of hope, his faith that it is a sign of holiness when in the deepest despair, we still hear the call. And from both of these Teachers, I have, like the *Grand Inquisitor*, received what I could not believe I deserved.

In its application to the classroom, such a pedagogy does not require a complex strategy for reformation; any curriculum may be a vector for such contagion. Hope may simply arise (from wherever it arises) in response to that unhardening of the heart that comes with seeing a living exemplar. In fact, the absence of a specific agenda (a doctrine) is its protection from becoming a vehicle for ideology. And this pedagogy is not only for the classroom, it is for all of the paths we walk, in the marketplace, in the world of political discourse, in the task of healing our culture. Through our own hope, we would be saying to a client, to a student, to a classroom, to a generation, "Your personal future and your social future can be different from your past. Meaning is discoverable. You can rebuild your community and repair your world. You may not yet know how, but understand that coming-to-know-how is your life's work. Knowing and sharing with others that you are not helpless is the place of beginning."

I believe that it is the duty of those who would teach to find their own hope and to stand before their students openly affirming that hope; but in an atmosphere of safety, freedom and trust which invites diversity and nurtures students' own voices. This is vastly different from affirming nothing or everything. To affirm nothing (or everything), to deny Wisdom, is a pretence of moral and spiritual neutrality which is disingenuous, except in those victim to a primitive relativism born of despair. Not only my faith in the perennialist view, but also my experience with large numbers of persons of good will tells me that as more and more people are willing to take the risks of making such affirmations, the opportunities for justice, compassion and civility will abound.

But the risks are quite real. One of the questions which I receive most frequently from my students will form a critical element in the affirmation of hope and possibility with which I intend to approach my future work. Awash in the moral outrage which we have seen to be so frequent a part of our path, they ask me, "Where could I practice a pedagogy of hope, a pedagogy growing out of compassion, a pedagogy which reflects the love for children which our traditions require of us?" They ask this because they see the chasm without being told--they see that the contradictions between what our culture claims to value and what it actually values would be fatal to their job prospects, if they stand for the interests of children. They tell me with pained voices that they came to teaching because

they really cared about the nurturance of children and the spiritual fulfillment of adults, only to find that we have betrayed them by schooling for other ends.

A world in which those students could practice a pedagogy of hope would be a world quite different from the world we now have, *and* it is a world we may hope to have. I believe that we must keep these contradictions constantly but gently before ourselves, refusing to either allow them to sink out of consciousness or to present them with such anger that our reaction drives them away. Whether in the marketplace, politics, or a classroom, I believe that such an affirmation of the values which bring children to grow up wanting to become teachers will wear away our capacity to do the intolerable things which we now do under the cover of pretense. I believe that these pretenses, the personal and cultural divisions which keep us from hope, are constructions which can be consciously deconstructed; and that if we do so in the light of Wisdom, then our pedagogy will bear the fruit which our hearts have always told us should be the birthright of our students and of ourselves.

And so...

In gratitude for the great good fortune of living the life from which this work is drawn. I give thanks to that community of faith and struggle within which it stands: to all of the foregoing, to those with whom I have worked and studied, to all those who have gone before, to Margaret and Billy, to Alice and Mac, to Beatrice, David, Mushkil Gusha, *et al.* I thank each of you for teaching me how to find hope, on our path together......

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Over our bridge

Which is not a bridge

To an other side

Which is Not.

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