TEACHING ETHICS IN A POSTMODERN WORLD

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The intellectual ferment surrounding postmodernism raises questions on many fronts, especially for those teaching ethics. For some it is a sign of the end of things, for others it is a reason to hope. It is probably a little of both. Any easy dismissal of postmodernism will prove to be a grave error. Yet, an uncritical embrace of it is equally ill advised. The purpose of this brief essay is to come to a clearer understanding of postmodernism and assess its significance for teaching ethics.

The following remarks will fall into four categories. First, an attempt will be made to define in as simple terms as possible the parameters of postmodernism. Second, we will look at the way in which postmodernism affects ethical reflection. Third, we will look at the postliberal critique as one specific example of how ethical reflection is done in light of postmodernism. Fourth, a few suggestions will be made for the impact that postmodernism has for teaching ethics.

The Shape of Postmodernism

Postmodernism has challenged those within and without the church to re-think paradigmatic commitments. Postmodernism is a wide-ranging discussion that includes

many disciplines and points of view. It affects not only philosophical and theological reflection, but also biblical studies, historical studies, and even practical ministry. In order to understand postmodernism it is essential that its diversity be recognized. Yet, it is this very diversity that makes postmodernism so difficult to define. Perhaps, postmodernism is more of an attitude[1] in the sense that it is a loosely defined movement touching a number of intellectual and social concerns. According to Lawrence Cahoone, "When most philosophers use the word 'postmodern'; they mean to refer to a movement that developed in France in the 1960s, more precisely called 'poststructuralism', along with subsequent and related movements".[2] Jean- Francois Lyotard defines "postmodern as incredulity toward metanarrative".[3] Stephen Toulmin thinks that Walter Lippman summarizes much of the postmodern attitude in the following comment, "To every human problem there is a solution that is simple, neat, and wrong".[4] A definition, which is inclusive of all members of the postmodern family, does not seem to be a live possibility. In fact, it might be appropriate to use a Wittgenstein term to describe the diverse group called postmodern - - family resemblance. The use of this term suggests that the best way to talk about postmodernism is through the way in which the members of the diverse family tend to resemble one another. Looking at the postmodern family is an activity devoted to seeing these traits in sometimes widely different individuals.[5] It is in this spirit that we will look at resemblance in the family of postmodernism.

Postmodernism denies the possibility of objective knowledge. It is a rejection of the idea that any universal norms can be reliably justified. Hassan notes the constant revision, which is for him "evidence of Postmodernism".[6] Baudrillard talks about the annihilation of referential value, which gives "the structural play of value the upper hand".[7] Lyotard talks about this in relation to legitimization of knowledge, through

parology which is "a move played out in the pragmatics of knowledge".[8] Knowing is, in process, always conditioned by the historical praxis. There is no certainty for the postmodern thinker.[9]

The universal meaning of words and texts is called into question by postmodernism. As Lyotard says, "The grand narrative has lost its credibility..."[10] Derrida questions the idea of the book, which "is profoundly alien to the sense of writing".[11] For him, "writing itself, in its nonphonetic moment, betrays… life".[12] Taylor looks to deconstruction, as a way of dealing with this loss, which is "irrevocably liminal and marginal. Its liminality marks an unstable border along which marginal thinkers wander".[13] Foucault pushes this to the disappearance of the author, "we can say that today's writing has freed itself from the dimension of expression. Referring only to itself, but without being restricted to the confines of its writing is identified with its own unfolded exteriority".[14] The postmodern thinker has no stable, unitary system of truth or texts by which to navigate life. They are left to wander amid the ashes of modernity's conclusions.

Postmodernism casts doubt on the unity of the self. This can be seen at the edge of the evolution of consciousness in Hegel. For it is here that the self as "thinking thing" gave way to the self as "acting thing". The postmodern thinker simply does not see the, spiraling evolution of the consciousness suggested by the high point of German Idealism. Rather it looks to the marginal, the seams of this evolution and as such-is captured by nothingness. Taylor sees an "irrevocable loss and incurable fault. This wound is inflicted by the overwhelming awareness of death - a death that 'begins' with the death of God and 'ends' with the death of ourselves. We are in a time between times and a place, which is

no place. Here our reflection must begin".[15] So it is without the simple and neat evolution of the self/consciousness that the postmodern wanders/errs.

Postmodernism denies the cogency of the distinction between rational inquiry and political action. Reason does not exist outside the normal means of power. Foucault says, "The important thing here, I believe, is that truth isn't outside power, or lacking power ... Truth is anything of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint".[16] This relates back to the doubt cast on universals, which is untouched by the historical factors of knowing. This is why Foucault looks to genealogy, that is descent and emergence, instead of history as the means of knowing.

The most obvious family resemblance of postmodernism is that it defies a simple explanation. There is very little that could be said about it without dispute. This is, in part, because postmodernism touches disciplines as diverse as psychology, architecture, sociology, philosophy, theology, literature, etc. It is also because postmodernism is shaped by the profound diversity of a world, which has expanded beyond imagination. Postmodernism has challenged the very fabric of Western civilization. Should we lament or celebrate? This question illustrates the possibilities and challenges of postmodernism. Part of how we answer this question relates to the effect of postmodernism on the moral reflection.

Postmodernism and Moral Reflection

The four themes noted above have obvious significance for moral reflection. The denial of objective knowledge, universal meaning, unity of the self, and the distinction between rational and political action can be linked in specific ways to the shape of ethical

reflection. How these themes combine to shape our capacity to make moral judgments as well as teach ethics requires an understanding of modern and postmodern moral reflection.

Because of the many voices and the complexity of the analysis we will only be able to look at the basic contours of the discourse. In fact, Bernstein uses the word "constellation" in order to define the shape of postmodern ethical reflection. He feels that this indicates the necessity of juxtaposition rather than integration. He explains that this seems more appropriate because "our 'modem/postmodern' situation or predicament is one that defies and resists any and all attempts of reduction to a 'common denominator, essential core, or generative first principle'".[17] Therefore, our purpose is not to define a set of common themes or convictions, but to look at a fundamental mood that seems to weave itself through much of what might be called postmodern.[18]

Richard Bernstein locates the two extremes present in the "basic ethical-political norms of critique . . ."[19] which characterize modernity/postmodernity. First, he points to those "who tell us that we must frankly acknowledge that there is no-and cannot be-any rational grounding of the basic ethical-political norms".[20] This can be linked in basic terms with what Tilley calls a postmodernism of dissolution. Second, he points to "those who claim that the project of rationally grounding norms is not only a viable one but can be carried out".[21] This corresponds to what Tilley calls a postmodernism of completion. Bernstein does not suggest that these are the only possible options, but they represent the outer limits of the modem/postmodern constellation of ethical reflection.[22]

Power is one clear theme in postmodern ethical reflection. For example, Luce Irigaray treats female sexuality entirely within a power struggle between men and women. She

says, "Female sexuality has always been theorized within masculine parameters".[23] She goes on from this to make the case that until the woman asserts herself in the midst of this struggle there is no hope of hearing any "other meaning".[24] Susan Bordo argues, "The ideal of absolute intellectual purity and the belief in a clear and distinct universe are passing, though not without protest, out of the discipline".[25] This makes the currency of ethics to be violence, oppression, repression, and it links politics and ethics.[26] This relates back to the doubt cast on universals, which are untouched by the historical factors of knowing. This is why Foucault and others look to genealogy, that is descent and emergence, instead of history as a way of knowing.

Alasdair MacIntyre, professor of philosophy at Notre dame University, suggests that moral inquiry comes down to three broadly based options: encyclopaedia, genealogy, and tradition. It might be worthwhile to examine his basic argument:

> The encyclopaedist's conception is a single framework within which knowledge is discriminated from mere belief, progress towards knowledge is mapped, and truth is understood as the relationship of knowledge to the world, through the applications of those methods whose rules are the rules of rationality as such.[27]

This perspective, which sees morality as rule following, is dependent upon a compartmentalization of life. There is also an emphasis upon "duty, obligation, the right, and the good…"[28] which present themselves as genuine advances. It is also true that the encyclopaedist "aims at providing timeless, universal, and objective truths…"[29] Kant with his categorical imperative is a good example of this form of moral reflection. Clearly, this reliance upon rationalism to suggest a universal foundation upon which to make moral judgments represents much of what postmodernism seeks to refute.

The second version of morality suggested by MacIntyre is genealogical:

> So the task of the genealogist more generally was to write the history of those social and psychological formations in which the will to power is distorted into and concealed by the will to truth, and the specific task of the genealogists of morality was to trace both socially and conceptually how rancor and resentment on the part of the inferior destroyed the aristocratic nobility of archaic heroes and substituted a priestly set of values in which a concern for purity and impurity provided a disguise for malice and hate.[30]

This perspective, which is championed by Nietzsche, rejects the encyclopaedist as a thinly veiled attempt to provide "an unwarranted privileged status to those who identify their own assertions and arguments with the deliverances of reason thus conceived".[31] This version of moral inquiry can be linked to those in the postmodern camp who see no rational grounding of ethical reflection: postmodernisms of dissolution.

The third version MacIntyre calls tradition. This possibility challenges the universal rationalism of the encyclopaedist and the genealogist's reduction of everything to power and domination. It places great emphasis upon the history, culture, and tradition. It is critical of any attempt to disembody moral reflection, as the encyclopeadist tends to do. It is equally suspicious of the attempt to be critical of the liberal/encyclopeadists version of morality, while at the same time operating within conventional academic settings. This version is linked in MacIntyre's thinking to Thomism and it corresponds generally to Tilley's designation: Postliberal theology. According to MacIntyre:

The Thomist is therefore committed to the writing of a type of history, as yet never more than sketched in outline. Embodied in that history would be the claim that, as a result of that disruption through which morality became distinct and largely autonomous, morality was rendered vulnerable to the genealogical critique. But, nonetheless, what that genealogical critique successfully impugns belongs to the same distinctively modem modes of thought and practice, as does genealogy itself. And the Thomist is thereby committed to resisting the view that the same type of genealogical critique can be applied to the thought and practice of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas as that which Nietzsche and his heirs have successfully deployed against Kant and the utilitarians.[32]

This comment by MacIntyre is crucial for an adequate understanding of teaching ethics.

So here we have it, the three broad categories of postmodern ethical reflection. The first two, universal encyclopedic and genealogical are linked to modern assumptions. The third, tradition, includes a return to the historical, narrative shaped understanding of moral reflection. Each represents a serious attempt to "go on"; each has strengths and limitations. Does one provide a more faithful accounting of moral reflection? MacIntyre asks a similar question and makes an observation that provides a clue:

Is there any way in which one of these rivals might prevail over the others? One possible answer was supplied by Dante: that narrative prevails over its rivals which is able to include its rivals within, not only to retell their stories as episodes within its story, but to tell the stories as of the telling of their stories as such episodes.[33]

MacIntyre's comments provide a new trajectory for postmodern moral reflection superior to the other options. This trajectory includes several theorists working in fields of narrative theology/ethics, Thomism, radical orthodoxy and postliberal theology. Collectively they suggest a broad category of postmodern ethical reflection, which is superior to the other options. This category, which begins in the postliberal critique, finds its fullest expressions in a constructive re-narration of a Christian moral imagination more true to the claims of Radical orthodoxy.

The Postliberal Critique

One particular form of postmodernism is the postliberal critique.[34] It represents a positive direction for postmodernism. Three individuals, MacIntyre, Hauerwas, and Milbank can be generally associated with the postliberal critique of modernity. They each represent unique perspectives they share a suspicion regarding the encyclopeadists/liberal version of things.[35] Together they point to a way version of moral reflection which might allow Wesleyan-Holiness theologians to "think-again' about the most fundamental aspects of the Christian faith and specifically moral reflection.

MacIntyre, as already noted, is a relentless critic of the failed Enlightenment project. His many books and articles contribute to a reconsideration of modernist ethical theory. Early in After Virtue, he says, "A central thesis of this book is that the breakdown of this project [Enlightenment] provided the historical background against which the predicaments of our own culture can become intelligible".[36] His critique centers on modern attempts to secure morality in universal/rational principles. Such principles separate morality from culture, occasion, history, etc. This kind of separation leads to an unhealthy climate in which to make important moral choices. It has lead some to

conclude that the only possible form of moral theory is emotivism. He argues that this kind of moral thinking has in fact failed as a viable theory.

MacIntyre offers an alternative theory through a beginning premise, "man is in his actions and practice, as well as his fictions, is essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth".[37] This suggests that morality emerges from those habits and practices which guide life through its many twists and turns. The disembodied principle, which has nourished the individualism of modern ethics, cannot be finally justified according to MacIntyre. If he is right, then another account of moral theory must be suggested. He argues that habits and practices offer such a pathway.[38]

Stanley Hauerwas is one of the most provocative voices in the church today. His energy and insight have unquestionably changed the theological landscape of the church. Hauerwas, who teaches at Duke Divinity School, is also a vigorous critic of theorists who have unconsciously or carelessly incorporated the assumptions of liberal/democratic society. He expresses this very sentiment in one of his many books, "to make the metaphysics of liberation central or overriding as a description of the nature of Christian existence, as is done in much of liberation theology, is a mistake, given the background of much of our recent intellectual and political history".[39] He doubts these assumptions will be of much service to the church, they may in fact, be quite dangerous. He looks instead to the underlying narratives of the Christian community for the formation of character. He talks about the importance of a truthful narrative that will help engender the kind of character capable of freedom, justice, compassion, and liberation.[40] The truthfulness of Christian claims about such things as compassion is not dependant upon rational justification, but the kind of character emerging from

Christian community. Compassion emerges from the character of a person formed by truthful narrative. This is the task of the church as a community of character.

Hauerwas writes eloquently regarding his understanding of the church:

> the truthfulness of Christian convictions resides in their power to form a people sufficient to acknowledge the divided character of the world and thus necessarily ready to offer hospitality to the stranger. They must be what they are, i.e., and the church, exactly because the story of God that has formed them requires them to understand and acknowledge the divided character of the world. The task of Christians is not; therefore, to demonstrate that all possible positions are false though critical questions…but to be a witness to the God that they believe embraces all truth.[41]

This should suggest the alternative epistemology embraced by Hauerwas. Rational grounds do not justify compassion; rather the lives of those people who are formed by the truth are the justification. The church is the community called into being by the Holy Spirit and the preaching of the Word; and the church is nourished by the habits and practices of the faith in order to form the character of those willing to embrace the adventure.

John Milbank, a former lecturer in theology at the University of Cambridge and now Professor at the University of Virginia, moves with ease through theology, philosophy, and sociology. Milbank not only echoes concerns in the postliberal critique, he also suggests a new, constructive, approach re-narrating the Christian moral imagination in theological rather than secular assumptions.

Milbank argues that there is an "ontology of violence" which lies at the root of secular reason. Many theologians, in particular those shaped by liberalism, have brought into the assumptions of secular reason, making contemporary moral reflection problematic since it mirrors modern, violent, secularity. As an alternative, Milbank calls for the theologian to perform the task "of redeeming estrangement; the theologian alone must perpetuate that original making strange which is the divine assumption of human flesh, not to confirm it, but to show it again as it surprisingly is".[42] He asks a question later in the book, which seems deceptively simple, "Can morality be Christian"? He answers in the following way, "Let me tell you the answer straightaway. It is no. Not 'no' there cannot be a specifically Christian morality. But no, morality cannot be Christian".[43]

While this response is shocking, it is linked to his general critique of liberalism, evident in his earlier book entitled, *Theology and Social Theory*. Milbank's concern it that all approaches to modern moral thinking (ethics) fail because these approaches are grounded in the same violent presuppositions as other forms of secular reason. It is not possible to trace the many nuances of Milbank's theological critique at this point. It is only possible to look at his analysis in the broadest possible terms. His point comes through clearly in the last chapter of his *Social Theory* where he says; "The task of such a theology is not apologetic, not even argument. Rather it is to tell again the Christian *mythos*, pronounce again the Christian *logos*, and call again for Christian *praxis* in a manner that restores their freshness and originality. It must articulate Christian difference in such a way as to make it strange".[44] This means that theology must have the courage to tell the Christian story in spite of all its strangeness to secular ears and even to some within the church. It also means that the very logic of the Christian faith must shape every aspect of

our thinking and practice. Finally, it means that we must seek to embody those historic practices of the faith, which have sustained its message and life for millennia.

Milbank continues by advocating a "Counter-Ethics," in which he argues for an Augustinian point of view. Stated in the most basic of terms this suggests moral reflection will take place in light of the distinction between two cities: the City of Man and the City of God. This suggests that at the center of the City of Man is the kind of love that ultimately sets person against person, it is based on strife and self-love. On the other hand, the City of God is at its core founded on the model of the triune life of God. It is not that earth is forgotten, it is that earth is placed within its proper context. Therefore, virtue is the celebration of the love of God for creation. Milbank can make this claim because, "it implies both that the part belongs to the whole, and that each part transcends any imaginable whole, because the whole is only a finite series which continues indefinitely towards an infinite and unfathomable God".[45]

These three important philosophers and theologians reveal obstacles that stand in the way of moral reflection. Their analysis also points to the way in which the search for an adequate moral theology within the church can attempt to find an approach that is more faithful. First, the church always runs the risk of making moral reflection a liberal notion of universally established ideals; these men also suggest that often our ethical reflections can rest upon rational justification. Instead they call for moral reflection emerging out of Christian habits and practices, which finally engender virtue. Second, these men also question the autonomous self, which is assumed by modem ethics. They, however, point to the socially formed self and the accompanying need for Christian community to sustain personhood. Finally, they question the tendency of the church to make sense of the world, to cast moral reflection in secular terms as a form of ethical apologetic. They

wonder if such a task is a worthy goal at all, instead positing a theologically rich moral imagination shaped by theological rather than secular categories. These guiding "family resemblances' of the postliberal critique and practice provide the framework for establishing a new means of teaching "ethics' (actually fostering moral imagination) in contemporary classrooms.

The Postmodern Challenge of Teaching Ethics

The emergence of postmodernism presents a special challenge for teaching ethics. For example, the denial of objective knowledge may seem to leave relativism as the only option. Equally the denial of the universal meaning of words and texts can lead some to the conclusion that ethical reflection has lost its moorings. The denial of the unity of the self can seem to cast doubt on the meaning of moral agency. The denial of the cogency of the distinction between rational inquiry and political action seems to undermine the presumed objectivity of reason. All of these challenges are important considerations for teaching ethics. The students who will sit in our classrooms will not always be able to name the philosophical sources of their ideas, but they will be affected all the same. The task of teaching ethics involves above all else fostering a moral imagination in the minds and lives of students. The real issue is how a moral imagination can be engendered amid the intellectual ferment suggested by postmodernism. This raises several questions. First, what are the sources of a moral imagination? Second, do those who come to our campus come for an education or for confirmation of previously held views? Third, will the contingency represented by our students be able to tolerate ethical questions raised in class? Fourth, how will instruction in class enable students to face the many personal moral questions that inevitably emerge during their time on campus? Fifth, how does the very form of life embodied on our campuses frame moral questions for our students?

There are, of course, other questions, but these are at least suggestive. Each of these questions is connected to the postmodern situation already characterized.

The next several paragraphs will attempt briefly sketch a response to each of the questions raised above. While there is much more to framing a full response to each question, it is possible to look at the broad contours of possible responses to these questions.

First, what are the sources of a moral imagination? From the Christian point of view the obvious and most important source for the moral imagination is the scripture. We find within its pages the story of Israel, the life of Jesus, and the emergence of the church. It is a profoundly important and singularly authoritative source for the moral imagination. The church itself with its traditions and practices is a source of the moral imagination. Within the Wesleyan-holiness tradition many can remember the immense moral importance of testimony meetings, small group Bible studies, Sunday School, and preaching. The Church fathers and Christian mystics are also a source of the moral imagination. One could do well to look toward great literature for the moral imagination engendered by the prevenient grace of God. There is much more, but these will serve as an indication of the rich heritage of the Christian faith for the moral imagination.

Second, do those who come to our campus come for an education or for confirmation of previously held views? Those who teach in liberal arts colleges work with students who for the most part range in age from eighteen to twenty-one, while those in Bible College and Seminary education work with older students. The challenge of education is to find a way to present the more mature and reflective views of the instructor without communicating disdain for the student. The point of an education is to challenge

uncritical perspectives, but this must be done in the context of respect for the student. Ultimately, it is only the transforming work of God that re-narrate the classroom from a battlefield into a sanctuary of understanding. Truthfully, the way students are recruited to small Christian liberal arts colleges is often with the hope that previously held views (or traditional views) will be reinforced. This may unwittingly disrupt the educational possibilities of the years spent in college. Yet, it is not the purpose of an education to carelessly destroy the convictions of a student. Engendering a moral imagination will require that both the student and the instructor join in the mutual adventure of education which will undoubtedly be uncomfortable at times.

Third, will the constituency represented by our students be able to tolerate ethical questions raised in class? The response to this question is related the second question. Many Christian liberal arts colleges and seminaries are conservative. The recent battle between the Southern Baptist Convention and its colleges/seminaries is adequate witness to this fact. The smaller battle between trustees, administrators, and college professors in Wesleyan-holiness schools is no less important for those affected. Teaching ethics is inherently dangerous and controversial because it goes to the question of action and value. Students are not generally tolerant of artificial responses to these issues. On the other hand, trustees and administrators are charged to hold faculty accountable to the college/seminary educational mission. Therein lies the dynamic of possible conflict. Teaching ethics will require that these issues be faced creatively and faithfully. A moral imagination cannot be engendered in an environment of distrust. Yet, those who teach must be accountable to a larger community of discourse. Finding a balance between the need for intellectual space for genuine moral reflection and the legitimate concerns of the church is the challenge and possibility of engendering a moral imagination.

Fourth, how will instruction in class enable students to face the many personal moral questions that inevitably emerge during their time on campus? The years of college and seminary education are immensely important. During these years careers are chosen. Basic decisions about lifestyle are made, i.e. sexual behavior, church attendance, consumption of alcohol and drugs, etc. For some the question of abortion will become a personal decision. Therefore, it is important that those charged with teaching ethics will engage students in a conversation, which will enable them to face these issues with the resources of a Christian imagination. Ethics is certainly speculative, but at its most profound level it is practical. The excitement of teaching ethics is the opportunity it gives to enable students to face personal moral issues in an environment of Christian conviction.

Fifth, how does the very form of life embodied on our campuses frame moral questions for our students? Since ethics is a practical discipline it will not be easily compartmentalized in a classroom. It will to the extent that it is responsible to the content and practices inherent within it raise the attention of the student to what is going on in the institution as a whole. In fact, one could argue that ethics is taught most effectively by its embodiment in persons and institutions. It is not possible to talk one way and act another without merely pretending to engender a moral imagination. Put more positively, the postmodern situation opens the door to the possibility of making the entire institution a classroom for teaching ethics. In fact, it just may require it.

The five issues raised above point to the need to more clearly define the moral imagination. The first task for teaching ethics in a postmodern world is engendering a community capable of imagining a world from a theological point of view. This point of view is evident in the work of Hauerwas and especially Milbank. This means above all

that teaching ethics in the Christian context is about a theological construal of the world. In order to do this it is essential that we overcome the purely reactionary, utilitarian, and pragmatic inclinations of our time. The reason for this seems evident in that it leads to a reductionistic ethics. Such an ethic is finally inadequate for facing the challenges presented in a postmodern world. What seems to be called for is a practical rationality born out of the forms of life engendered by the moral imagination. One clear appeal of such a practical rationality is the native home of the "plain person" for morality is finally a task not just for the academic.

It is easy to see that the extreme threat perceived by postmodernism can lead some to look for sure signposts which secure value. Part of this point of view is the idea that everything can be neatly separated between the "good guys" and the "bad guys" or perhaps "pro" and "con". For example, just recently Timothy McVeigh was put to death by the federal government. He was found guilty of a terrorist bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City. A crime he admitted to without remorse. I am not interested here in determining whether it was vengeance or justice. What concerns me is whether we want to educate men and women to the point that it is possible to think of the issue more complexly than the alternatives of vengeance and justice, such as through the lenses of redemption or reconciliation. This same concern could be extended to any number of ethical concerns. Does the world look different from the perspective of the cross? Can we think, pray, talk together in such a way that it is possible to begin to see the world and envision creative possibilities through such practices as baptism, Eucharist, forgiveness, charity, hospitality, etc?

In other words the moral imagination speaks far more profoundly about a way of life than it does about good decisions based on time-honored principles. A moral imagination is

less about some calculus for confronting problems than it is about beginning to envision the kind of life capable of truthfulness. This brings me back to the issue of worldview or the horizon from which we begin to see life. Without such a horizon it is very easy to lose sight of what is important, because we lose sight of who we are in the sight of God. We begin to make God in our image instead of trying to understand ourselves as made in the image of God. Therefore, a moral imagination is only possible when one's worldview is opened up to embrace the "Father almighty creator of heaven and earth". Such a move is not easily co-opted for some immediate agenda. It resists being reduced to a voting card or a sexual ethic. I am not here to say that such theological claims as "God created the world", "God is holy", or "God was in Christ reconciling the world" have no moral significance. Clearly they do have great moral and even metaphysical significance. I think that the challenge we have is to engender the forms of life that will allow us to explore together the moral significance of our faith.

This is where we will see both the possibilities of our classroom and its limitations. I have long ago dispensed with the idea that everything important on campus happens in the classroom. I do not think that the curriculum committee holds the only hope for engendering a moral imagination. Yet, I do not want to diminish the importance of curriculum either. After all I believe learning to read great books and entertaining large ideas are essential to a moral imagination. While defining these great books and large ideas will not lead to total agreement most will accept the proposition that a moral imagination is about a life saturated in such things. Learning to think and write are essential skills, dare we say virtues for the moral life.

The capacity for friendship is also important. I tend to think the quality of one's life is tied up with the kind of friends we make. Do our friends call us to virtues worthy of

emulation? One way to teach ethics is help students to reflect on the kind of friends. The kind of life that arises from these kinds of friendships is a clear indication of the socially formed self. These friendships point to a larger agenda of moral reflection.

It is as we learn to worship together that the hope of a moral imagination comes into focus. When I say worship I mean to suggest that we learn to order our lives by the grand reality of the triune God. We learn to mark time through the Christian faith. John Milbank insightfully remarks, "Since God is not an item in the world to which we might turn, he is only first there for us in our turning to him. And yet we only turn to him when he reaches us; herein lies the mystery of liturgy – liturgy which for theology is more fundamental that *either* language *or* experience, and yet is both linguistic and experiential.[46] Worship takes us away from the mistaken idea that it is all up to us and those we rise each day to make the world a better place. It reminds us that we are God's own people called to discern through Word, Spirit, and sacrament the life to which He calls us. It is joyous, painful, filled with risk, and deeply gratifying all at the same time.

Postmodernism calls us to take ethics beyond the decisionistic parameters that modernity seemed to suggest. It forces us to see moral agency in broader terms than the 'Myth of Sisyphus' suggests. It may also point back to the local and the particular where the moral life is finally played out. Perhaps, postmodernism will cause us to re-think the attempt bind moral reflection to concepts of pure reason. Yet, it also suggests that moral reflection is more than just a situation-controlled enterprise. The challenge of postmodernism leads those who teach ethics to recover a practical rationality capable of engendering character.

Teaching ethics amid the currents of postmodernism presents many challenges. The first move will require that attention be given to the moral imagination. Such a move will help to engender the capacity to envision creative possibilities in the face of moral dilemmas. Another dimension of teaching ethics will be to call again for Christian practice. Here baptism, Eucharist, forgiveness, and hospitality engender the kind of character that is capable of moral decision -making. A third aspect of teaching ethics is the call to form the kind of friendships that will embody virtue. Such an emphasis will lead us beyond the lonely moral agent who must entertain conflicts of duty as a purely personal trial. Finally, worship opens the moral agent to the possibilities of virtue. These suggestions give us a perspective on the task of teaching ethics, even in a postmodern world.

Those who intend to teach ethics in the wake of postmodernism face significant challenges. Perhaps, the chief task will be to begin to envision a life shaped by the story of Israel and the life of Jesus. While this may not seem a likely goal in light of all the other voices that cry out for attention it is still the task of those who teach ethics to say again the Christian story, pronounce again its practical rationality, and call again for Christian practice.

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[1]See Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, Paul Rabinow, ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984). He speaks of attitude as "a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by people; in the end, a way of thinking a feeling; a way, too, of

acting and behaving that at one and the same time makes a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task. A bit, no doubt, like what the Greeks called an ethos. And consequently, rather than seeking to distinguish the 'modem era' from the 'premodern' and 'postmodern', I think it would be more useful to try to find out how the attitude of modernity, ever since its formation, has found itself struggling with attitudes of 'counter modernity ... (39). See also Richard Bernstein, *The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity.* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992, 1995). He offers another statement of this attitude, "It should be clear that I reject foundationalism in its multifarious forms. I not only reject that philosophy itself can be grounded on permanent foundations and that philosophy itself is a foundational discipline, an arbitrator for the rest of culture; I also reject the idea that history - in all of its forms - is or can be a foundational discipline, that answers the questions we ask in philosophy ... And this impulse and the task it sets for us - although it may be suppressed or repressed - has itself an uncanny way of reasserting itself, even when it appears most moribund" (7).

[2]Lawrence Cahoone, "Introduction" in *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology.* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1996), 2.

[3]Jean-Francois Lyotard, "The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge," in *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology*. Lawrence Cahoone, ed. (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1996), 482.

[4]Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden, Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 201. Toulmin points to the importance of the modem project for understanding the move to modernity. He points to four shifts which constitute

the movement to modernity: oral to written, particular to universal, local to general, and timely to timeless (30-34). He says, "These four changes of the mind ... were distinct; but, taken in an historical context, they had much in common, and their joint outcome exceeded what any of them would have produced by itself. All of them reflected a historical shift from practical philosophy, whose issues arose out of clinical medicine, juridical procedure, moral case analysis, or the rhetorical force of oral reasoning, to a theoretical conception of philosophy: the effects of this shift were so deep and long-lasting that the revival of practical philosophy in our day has taken many people by surprise" (34). He adds in the next paragraph, "It is no accident that diagnostics and due process, case ethics and rhetoric, topics and poetics, were sidelined and called into question" (34).

Diogenes Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World.- The Full Wealth of Conviction*. (Louisville, KY: Westminister/John Knox Press, 1989) makes four observations, which are relevant to our discussion. First, the modem challenge to belief in God is subverted by postmodernism. Second, postmodernism has challenged the attempt to ground morality in secularity attempted by the Enlightenment. Third, postmodernism has called into question the idea of inevitable progress. Fourth, postmodernism has questioned the idea that all knowledge is inherently good (3-5).

The point worth noting for both Toulmin and Allen is any examination of postmodernism requires a serious understanding of modernity. It is also clear that postmodernism is not necessarily the enemy of faith; in fact the reverse may be the case.

[5]Terrence Tilley, *Postmodern Theologies: The Challenge of Religious Diversity.* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995) says, "In a post-age, the future is interminable and

invisible, and the past paradoxically both dismissed and kept. Hence, ambiguity about where we've come from, uncertainty about whom we are, and suspicion of where we're going is connected in every post-age" (vii). He goes on to divide postmodernism into three groups. First, Postmodernism of completion, which includes Jurgen Habermas, Helmet Peukert, David Ray Griffin, and David Tracy. The issue, which confronts these people, is how to "extend and complete the modern project" (vii). Second, Postmodernism of dissolution, which includes Thomas J. J. Altizer, Mark C. Taylor, and Edith Wyschogrod. According to Tilley, "These theologians dissolve what is left of the humanly constructed cathedrals of thoughts which had once seemed eternal and immovable. In, through, and beyond the rubble which litters the ground, there remains an empty space for the light, no longer blocked by the human edifices; or perhaps it is just that the gaps, fissures, holes, and tears that are present (as emptiness and absence at the heart of every thing) may show the absence of the Other" (viii). Third, Theological postliberalism which includes Clifford Geertz, George Lindbeck, William McClendon, Stanley Hauerwas, and Hans Frei. Here the "point is neither to complete, reject, dissolve or resolve the modem world. The point is to see how to live in God's world and how all other 'worlds' fit or fail in the world God has made" (viii).

[6]*Ihab* Hassan, "POSTmoderrnISM: A Paracritical Bibliography," *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology*. Lawrence Cahoone, ed. (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1996), 389.

[7]Jean Baudrillard, "Symbolic Exchange and Death," *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology.* Lawrence Cahoone, ed. (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1996), 438.

[8]Lyotard, 499.

[9]John Thiel, *Nonfoundationalism*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994) talks about the "Myth of the Museum" which "distributes its foundationalism throughout the idea of a conceptual scheme in which meanings are thought to have a mental life of their own apart from their use and applicability in language" (19).

[10]Lyotard, 489.

[11]Jacques Derrida, "The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing," *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology*. Lawrence Cahoone, ed. (Carnbridge: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1996), 349.

[12]*Ibid*., 356.

[13]Mark C. Taylor, "Erring: A Postmodern A/theology," *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology*. Lawrence Cahoone, ed. (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1996), 519.

[14]Foucault, *Reader*, 102.

[15]Taylor, 515.

[16]Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power" *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology*. Lawrence Cahoone, ed. (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1996), 379.

[17]*Ibid.*, 8.

[18]Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*. (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1993) describes the situation as follows, "At the time we face choices of unprecedented magnitude and potentially disastrous consequences, we no more expect the wisdom of the legislators or perspicacity of philosophers to lift us once for all from moral ambivalence and decisional uncertainty" (31-32). Two chapter headings in Bauman's book illustrate the tenor of postmodern ethics 'the Elusive Universality' and 'Elusive Foundations'.

[19]Bernstein, 7.

[20]*Ibid.*

[21]*Ibid.*

[22]According to Bauman, 'Postmodernity has two faces: the 'dissolution of the obligatory in the optional' has two apparently opposite, yet closely related effects. On the one hand, the sectarian fury of neotribal self-assertion, the resurgence of violence as the principal instrument of order-building, the feverish search for home truths hoped to fill the void of the deserted agora. On the other, the refusal by yesterday's rhetoricians of the agora to judge, discriminate, choose between choices: every choice goes providing it is one of many and does not exclude other orders"(238).

[23]Luce Irigaray, "The Sex Which is Not One," in *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology*. Lawrence Cahoone, ed. (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1996), 461.

[24]*Ibid*., 465.

[25]Susan Bordo, "The Cartesian Masculinization of Thought," *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology*. Lawrence Cahoone, ed. (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1996), 658.

[26]Bernstein says, "In 'Metaphysics and Violence' Derrida risks delineating the 'transcendental' conditions for, and the 'ideal' of, an ethical community, "To let the other be in its existence and essence as other means that what gains access to thought, or (and) what thought gains access to, is that which is essence and that which is existence; and that which is the Being which they both presuppose. Without this, no letting-be would be possible, and first of all, the letting-be of respect and of the ethical commandment addressing itself to freedom. Violence would reign to such a degree that it would no longer even be able to appear and be named (185).

[27]Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition.* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 42.

[28]*Ibid*.

[29] *Ibid*., 65.

[30]*Ibid*., 39-40.

[31]*Ibid*., 79.

[32]*Ibid.*, 194.

[33]*Ibid*, 80-81.

[34]I offer a fuller treatment of postliberalism and its implications for Wesleyan-Holiness theology in Henry Spaulding II, "Good Conscience or Good Confidence: A Postmodern Re-Thinking of Ethical Reflection in the Wesleyan Holiness Tradition*," Wesleyan Theological Journal*. 35:1 (Spring 2000).

[35]John Milbank says, "Hence Radical Orthodoxy's apparent moderation in distancing itself form the soi-distant 'conservatism' of revelatory positivism, or a high papalism, or a purely self-referential theological discourse, is actually a sign of an 'extremism' which removes itself from modernity in either its liberal or conservative guises" in John Milbank, "The Programme of Radical Orthodoxy," in *Radical Orthodoxy? A Catholic Enquiry*. Edited by Laurence Paul Hemming (Burlington, USA: Ashgate: 2000), 33. This comments seems to counter those who think of Radical Orthodoxy as a new way to be conservative. It suggests further that both liberals and conservatives use similar methods while reaching very different conclusions.

[36]AIasdair Maclntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory. Second Edition*. (Notre Dame: The University of Notre Dame Press, 1981, 1984), 39.

[37]*Ibid.* 216.

[38]Maclntyre says, "By a 'practice' I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of tying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended." *After Virtue*, 187.

[39]Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom? How the Church is to Behave if Freedom, Justice and A Christian Nation are Bad Ideas*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 55.

[40]Stanley Hauerwas*, Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World, and Living in Between.* (Durham, North Carolina: The Labyrinth Press, 1988), 29.

[41]Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic.* (Notre Dame: The University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 93-94.

[42]John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Culture, Language*. (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 1.

[43]*Ibid*., 219.

[44] John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*. (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1990, 1993), 381

[45]*Ibid*., 405.

[46]Milbank, "The Programme of Radical Orthodoxy", 43.