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TOWARD A GLOBAL, HUMANISTIC THEOLOGY: CONSTRUCTING
MORAL CONCEPTS OF GOD

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Although it certainly sounds questionable, it is in no way reprehensible to say that every human being makes a God for himself, indeed, he must make one according to moral concepts.

- Immanuel Kant

[T]he idea of God...enables us to face most directly the question of whether human life should be oriented primarily on men's desires and value intuitions, or whether these must be relativized by something beyond them.

- Gordon Kaufman

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Part I

Introduction

Ch. 1

GOD IN A TIME OF VIOLENCE, GLOBALIZATION, AND UNCERTAINTY

This dissertation advances a theological method whose starting premise is the following question: How may theists construct a concept of God such that this concept is personally meaningful and validly moral? The question is motivated by the humanistic assumption that there are consequences to the kind of God in whom theists place their trust—when individuals turn to God for guidance with values, ideals, and norms, including care of the environment and of non-human animals, a moral concept of God is more likely to engender a moral life. For theists, God serves as an absolute reference point against which to gauge actions, choices, and goals.¹ Just as sailors rely on the North Star to navigate uncertain seas, theists rely on their concept of God to help them steer an ethical course through life. However, unlike the existence of the North Star, the existence of God is not scientifically demonstrable. Thus, the dissertation focuses, not on God *per se*, but on the concept of God that theists

¹ I will use the terms God-construct, God-symbol, concept of God, conception of God, or available God, interchangeably.

construct for themselves, and takes as a given that the contents of this concept remain uncertain and contestable.

The notion that the moral quality of one's God is related to the moral quality of one's behavior is far from new. During the Enlightenment, influential thinkers were convinced that religious beliefs wielded a powerful influence; they believed that they had, in religion, "a powerful means for improving human conduct everywhere."² Today, some people argue that concepts of God, no matter how moral, exert no detectable influence over often prideful and cruel humans. Almost daily, news reports describe the body- and soul-destroying violence inflicted by religious extremists on innocent men, women, and children. Armed with ever more sophisticated and destructive weapons, fighters and terrorists invoke religion to justify torture, kidnappings, executions, human trafficking, and brutal oppression. These attacks, their perpetrators claim, are commanded or sanctioned by a version of God, which they defend as moral. And yet, great acts of heroism and altruism are motivated by deities calling for social justice and love of one's neighbors. Since strong empirical evidence is not yet available to prove or disprove claims about the causal relationship between moral ideas about God and ethical behavior, this dissertation merely posits that a validly moral God is *more likely* to foster a humane and humanized life.

² Robert B. Louden, *The World We Want: How and Why the Ideals of the Enlightenment Still Elude Us* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 22.

The dissertation's global, humanistic theological method is, in part, a response to the fact God can be conceived in anthropocentric ways and used to justify violence and inflict suffering. With increasing globalization and growing exposure to various religious teachings come the opportunities and the risks of 'mix-and-match' or 'cafeteria-style' concepts of God. As people in the West, for example, are encountering previously unfamiliar religious practices, images, symbols and texts—regardless of their sources or contexts—many are incorporating fragments that appeal to them into their personal theologies. While such cobbling-together is not new, what is new is that it has become socially acceptable and commonplace. Charles Taylor has dubbed this phenomenon 'expressive individualism'.³ Individuals whose freedom of thought and powerful imaginations gives them the license and ability to construct bespoke person-like deities that are meaningful to them, risk creating and embracing concepts that include moral failings, ethical confusions, or character deformities. Such renderings of God lack the ability to call believers to greater moral responsibility.

The goal of this dissertation, then, is to develop 1) a theological method to assist theists—whether expressive individualists or not—to re-construct their concepts of God into demonstrably moral concepts that are person-like in compelling and comforting ways, and 2) to provide a set of global, non-relativistic moral directives to

³ Charles Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 88.

test concepts of God and identify those that are anthropocentric or immoral. These directives identify the God-concepts that harm life and undermine human flourishing; they also assist the method's users produce moral replacements. The method is designed for theists who are aware that a connection exists between their worldviews, their understanding of themselves, and how they conceive of God. It assists users to align their worldviews and their self-understandings to their concepts of God; users are encouraged to repeat this process of alignment on a regular basis. Although the method could be adapted for groups of people who wish to engage in cooperative theological construction, it is designed for single-person usage. It operates at a conceptual and logical level but preserves the possibility of individuals to generate a God that incorporate personal experiences, religious backgrounds, religious and cultural resources, spiritual predilections, social contexts, specific embodiments, etc.

Briefly described, the method's steps: 1) test the content of one's concept of God against a particular set of moral principles, 2) adjust the content until it meets this set of principles, and 3) modify one's worldview and concept of self (if necessary) to reflect the concept of God produced in step 2.

I. Why Kaufman's Theological Method?

The method that I advance is based on the theological method developed by Gordon Kaufman during the Kantian, middle phase of his career.⁴ Kaufman's method includes several distinguishing features that I incorporate into the method advanced in this dissertation.

First, during this phase, the fundamental stance that undergirds Kaufman's theology is epistemological agnosticism on the question of God's reality. Kaufman accepts Kant's argument that the existence of God must remain a matter of speculation because it can neither be proven nor disproven. As a result, Kaufman considers talk of God to be talk of concepts that are constructed by human beings. The method advanced in this dissertation is based on the same assumption.

Second, Kaufman embraced Kant's insistence that theology is a practical endeavor with a significant impact on day-to-day decisions. Kant, in his *Religion Within the Bounds of Mere Reason* and *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*, provided Kaufman with a model for a human-focused approach to theology and to the concept of God. Kant warned, on moral grounds, against outright acceptance of any concept of God: "even if such a being might appear to him in person (if this is possible)." He also wrote: "a human being must yet confront this representation with his ideal first, in

⁴ Gordon D. Kaufman (1925-2011), an American Mennonite, can be categorized as a liberal Protestant philosophical theologian. I argue in my dissertation that, during his decades-long career, his theology can be divided into three phases. My dissertation focuses on the second phase.

order to judge whether he is authorized to hold and revere this being as Divinity.⁵

That Kaufman turns to Kant is not surprising since they were committed agnostics as to the question of God's existence, but also a focused on ethical theology.

Like Kant, Kaufman held that certain claims about God help persons orient themselves in the world and adhere to ethical principles.⁶ A basic premise of Kaufman's method is this: Since theists are guided by God-concepts that provide them with absolute reference points, such individuals are more likely to lead moral lives if their reference points are moral. Though a given concept of God may meet the approval of one's religious community, culture, and society, the possibility remains that this concept may not be moral. Determined to secure *validly* moral concepts, Kaufman built an assessment into his method to verify that they provided suitable moral orientation. He developed a set of norms, which he called the "criterion of humanization." The practical, life-enhancing commitments of Kaufman's theology similarly motivate this dissertation's efforts to identify strong moral directives to test concepts of God.

⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason And Other Writings*, trans. and ed. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni, vol. of *Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy*, ed. Karl Ameriks and Desmond M. Clarke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 165.

⁶ Gordon D. Kaufman, "My Life and My Theological Reflection: Two Central Themes," *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 22 (January 2001): 17.

Third, Kaufman gave cultural and religious pluralism a prominent place in his theology. An interest in pluralism led him to focus on the God—a concept common to, and at the center of all theistic theologies. Once God's content has been worked out, related concepts such as evil, eschatology, and creation can be specified and adjusted accordingly. Kaufman's theological method provides a coherent and consistent approach to constructing concepts of God and prepares users for the next step—reflection on subsidiary ideas. Like Kaufman, the theological method that I advance focuses uniquely on God.

Fourth, Kaufman is sensitive to the importance of meaningful and comforting concepts of God. To secure meaningful and comforting concepts, his method offers the possibility of, and even encourages, generating a person-like God. Many theists long for a deity who hears their prayers, cares about their struggles, and loves them unconditionally. In some ways, they wish to interact with God as they might with another person. Kaufman, during his mid-career phase, was attentive to this commonplace desire and his theological method made it possible to create such concepts of God. The method that I put forward remains Kaufman's commitment to providing users with wide latitude when choosing accessible and relevant features to incorporate into their concepts of God.

His method includes four steps, which are explored at length in Part I of the dissertation. The first step asks users to develop an account of their historically-rooted and context-dependent identity. This account provides these users with the basis from which to reflect on the role that their particular identity plays in the other three steps.⁷ Kaufman expects users to ponder their identity only once. In the second step, which Kaufman calls a moment, users construct a concept of world, elaborating the context of their experiences and activities. In the next, third, step, they construct a concept of God. Once the content of this concept has been elaborated, users are, in the fourth step, to adjust their concept of world to their concept of God until 'world' is under 'God.' For example, if the user conceives of God as a being who reveals specific plans for human beings through textual passages in sacred scripture, then, in step four, the user will set aside some of the scientific explanations about the world that interfere with her ability to perceive the plans that God communicates.

In contrast to the first step, the three other steps of Kaufman's method can be tackled in any order and revisited on an ongoing basis. I devote Part I of the dissertation to assessing the principal strengths and weaknesses of that method.

⁷ This step, a late addition by Kaufman to his method, reflects his increasing awareness of identity, especially the role of gender, sexual orientation, and other features of human embodiment, on worldview. Because he wedged it into his theology toward the end of his mid-career phase, it remained underdeveloped.

II. Why the Declaration Towards a Global Ethic?

Though embracing person-like concepts of God includes the benefits described earlier, a risk is anthropocentrism. Out of concern for this possibility, Kaufman introduced the criterion of humanization into his method. He wanted to undermine the tendency of human beings to assume that God holds them in special esteem and grants them special dispensation with regard to arrogant and selfish behavior. However, the set of moral constraints developed by Kaufman to undermine tendencies toward anthropocentrism is too vague to function as he intended. Moreover, Kaufman did not look beyond the Christian norms that were familiar to him because he considered these the most adequate norms for all time and for all people.

One of my contributions is to introduce a better safeguard into the global, humanistic theological method that I advance—the *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic*, to which I will refer as the *Global Ethic*. It was ratified in 1993 by the Parliament's Trustees and approved by assent by thousands of the religions' representatives who attended the Parliament of the World's Religions that year. Originally drafted by Hans Küng, it integrated the input of hundreds of ethicists and leaders from the world's religions. In the method—that I will describe at length in Chapter 8—the *Global Ethic* serves as a test for concepts of God to determine whether they are *validly* moral. Like Kaufman (and Kant), I assume that many concepts of God, although described by their

followers as moral, fail to qualify as such. Part II of this dissertation explores the history of the *Global Ethic*, its principal strengths and weakness, and its theoretical framework.

The *Global Ethic* is comprised of four directives based on the principle of reciprocity—often called the Golden Rule by Christians and Jews—and the notion that human life has supreme value. These directives are an attempt to express the irrevocable, unconditional norms for all areas of life and for all peoples whether religious or not. The experts in religion and ethics who contributed to drafting its directives and the Parliament representatives who verbally assented to them held that the directives articulate the moral principles already shared by the world's religious and cultural traditions.

These directives are:

1. Commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life
2. Commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order
3. Commitment to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness
4. Commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women

The integration of the directives of the *Global Ethic* into the dissertation's global, humanistic theological method improves the method because, contra Kaufman's criterion of humanization, they capture the norms that the religious and secular traditions hold in common and because they are formulated in a way that is formal, strong and precise, they are capable of serving as a test against anthropocentrism.

Though they are formal, I show that the notion of human flourishing embedded in the directives are consistent at an overarching level with the indicators developed and used by the United Nations' (U.N.) Development Programme to measure the ability of people to secure decent, self-actualized lives. These indicators are based on data about life expectancy, education, and per capita income. The significant correlation between the *Global Ethic*'s directives and the U.N.'s human development indicators signals that these directives reflect, in the words of Kant, the world's "experienced wisdom" about which moral requirements contribute to the well-being of human beings.⁸

Based on Kaufman's method, the theological method that I advance facilitates the construction of concepts of God that are tested against the *Global Ethic* to ensure that they are validly moral. The method accommodates (and advocates for) continued engagement with the *Global Ethic* and anticipates revisions by individuals and groups. In Part III of the dissertation, I advance the outlines of a humanistic, global method that integrates the *Global Ethic* into a method based on Kaufman's but with several significant additions and refinement.

⁸ Immanuel Kant, "On the Proverb: That May be True in Theory, But Is of No Practical Use," *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays on Politics, History, and Morals*, trans. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983), 63.

The discussion thus far raises several more questions about the commitments and assumptions on which the global, humanistic theological method are based. These questions and answers appear below.

III. Why Focus on the Concept of God?

Kaufman observed that, for many people, concepts of God remain central for orientation and devotion, and continue to serve as “essential constructs without which we [in the West] could not live or act” (ETM 35). While metaphysical arguments about the existence of God are of interest to a few, they are of little interest to the billions of theists for whom God is a living reality. A 2008 Pew Research Center survey showed that 92% of Americans believe in God or a Universal Spirit. Millennials are as likely to believe in God with absolute certainty as the previous generation of Gen Xers.⁹ Though an increasing number of individuals describe themselves as “Nones”—because they check the “None” box on survey forms asking them to identify their religious affiliation—there is a common but mistaken assumption that “Nones” are atheists. In fact, many “Nones” believe in God but reject religious institutions because of the conservative political agendas these institutions frequently support. According to the research of sociologists Robert Putnam and David Campbell, “few [Nones] claim to be

⁹ “Religion Among the Millennials: Introduction and Overview,” Pew Research Center, February 10, 2010. Accessed September 9, 2016. <http://pewforum.org/Age/Religion-Among-the-Millennials.aspx>.

atheists or agnostics. Most of them express some belief in God and even in the afterlife, and many of them say that religion is important in their lives.”¹⁰ Empirical evidence, then, indicates that in the United States, some form of theistic orientation remains the dominant religious commitment regardless of a person’s age. God remains at the center of this orientation and thus remains a question that deserves to be taken seriously. Since there can be no doubt about the socio-cultural force of religion, I set aside metaphysical arguments or proofs of God’s existence and focus instead on the content of ‘that’ which theists call God.

IV. Why Focus on Moral Concepts of God?

Some reject the notion of God because of the evil committed in God’s name. Such skeptics might point to the theists who insist that their concept of God is moral but consider violent attacks on LGBTQ people to be warranted because, in their God’s eyes, LGBTQ people are sinners who should be punished. On the flip side, when a number of theists offer a litany of wrongdoings during ritual confessions, they demonstrate their laudable understanding of the kind of moral behavior God expects. These theists likely describe themselves as obligated “to live up to the standards of a

¹⁰ Robert Putnam and David Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), 126.

higher authority” or power.¹¹ Every religious tradition includes specific rules about moral conduct: Judaism’s ten commandments are believed to have been given by God to His prophet, Moses; Christianity’s double-love command—love of God and love of neighbor—is ascribed in the New Testament to the second person of the Godhead, Jesus; Islam’s third pillar, *zakat*, reminds Muslims of God’s demand that they give a proportion of their wealth to charity.

Most likely, a complicated relationship exists between concepts of God and moral behavior. Still, it is reasonable to suppose that a validly moral God may inspire moral behavior. I emphasize validly in “validly moral” since certain concepts of God, held to be moral by apologists, would fail to meet the test of morality imposed by the *Global Ethic*.

V. Why the Global Ethic to Test Concepts of God?

While I argue in this dissertation that the directives of the *Global Ethic* have always existed, they have been identified, codified, sometimes honored, often rolled back, ignored, and distorted for thousands of years. Nonetheless, the impact on human life of some of these directives have become clearer over time and lessons learned have found their way into many different kinds of wisdom-writings, including sacred texts.

¹¹ Alan Wolfe, *The Transformation of American Religion: How We Actually Live Our Faith* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 132.

Küng designed the *Global Ethic* to undergo regular public review and possible adjustments. A process of review, he held, was necessary to produce successive formulations that captured ever more accurately the shared moral principles of the religious and secular traditions. Though the *Global Ethic* should continue, as Küng stipulated, to be revisited and critiqued regularly by institutions and individuals, it is, for now, the only set of normative directives that purports to distill the principles shared by religious and secular traditions into a single document. It is the only set of normative directives that sought input from hundreds of scholars and religious leaders. It is the only ethic that has been ratified by a significant number of representatives of the world's religions.¹² It is the only ethic with a strong correlation to the U.N.'s indices of human development.

VI. Clarifying Key Terms

Because many of the terms that I have used so far have different meanings attached to them, several definitions follow to specify how I am using these terms.

¹² On the advantage of external critique for community discernment, see Stephen Fowl and Gregory L. Jones, *Reading in Communion: Scripture and Ethics in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 110-134.

humanistic

In broad terms, the adjective ‘humanistic’ refers to an orientation or worldview that is human-focused and concerned with the advancement of human flourishing. A human-focused orientation takes as foundational the notion that unique levels of creative, imaginative, and reasoning abilities set human beings apart from non-human animals. It assumes that with these significant abilities come significant duties and responsibilities regarding the planet and other creatures—e.g. humans are the only animals capable, on the one hand, of developing and deploying nuclear weapons and, on the other hand, of choosing to refrain from using them. Humans are capable, on the one hand, of clear-cutting hundreds of acres of land and, on the other hand, making them off-limits to exploitation by their own species.

When humans recognize that their future is intimately tied to the well-being of the planet and of other creatures, they are more likely to be attentive to the impact of how they live and of the governmental policies they support. Like Shakespeare’s Hamlet, a humanistic view proclaims: “What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty...” yet harbors no illusions about the gap between the ideal ‘piece of work’ and the actions and decisions of imperfect individuals.¹³

¹³ William Shakespeare, “Hamlet, Prince of Denmark,” Act II, Scene II. Bartleby.com. Accessed November 3, 2016, <http://www.bartleby.com/70/4222.html>.

To be humanistic is also to recognize that the thriving of persons is not limited to physical needs. A humanistic orientation seeks to secure the emotional, intellectual and spiritual welfare of the self, of family members and friends, and of entire peoples. Certain expressions of human life are worthy of protecting and enhancing; these include learning a trade, contributing to one's governance, creating a household with a partner, raising a family, exploring personal interests, reflecting on meaningful ideas, practicing loving-kindness through charitable work, collaborating with others who share similar goals, etc. A humanistic perspective is committed to helping individuals develop these capacities by identifying and providing them with opportunities to do so.¹⁴

humanizing

For Kaufman, humanizing or humanization refers to a means of contributing to culture, symbols, practices, values, ideologies, and institutions in ways that enhance human life (GDM 93). I use these terms similarly, but also to indicate the distance and resulting

¹⁴ Due to the evolution of humanism in the United States over the past century (e.g. the twentieth-century's three versions of the Humanist Manifesto) some treat "humanistic" as code for "non-theistic." While contemporary "neohumanist" thinkers like Tzvetan Todorov are "secular," thinkers throughout the history of the idea of humanism, from the ancient Greeks through the medieval scholastics to the Renaissance humanists and to the Enlightenment philosopher at the heart of this dissertation, Immanuel Kant, were either working out of a religious tradition or took interest in the religious dimensions of human life.

tension between the ‘real’ and the ‘ideal.’ To note this distance is not necessarily to advocate a project of perfection calling for the constant striving of a person or institution to become what that person or culture or institution has identified as the ideal. Rather I use the terms humanizing or humanization to indicate the fostering of attention to the different choices and actions that are possible, some of which are more humane, more loving, and more honorable than others. In essence, then, these terms denote creating or increasing the awareness—and the discomfort and pull this awareness engenders—of the relative distance between what a person or institution is and what it ought to be by its lights.

imagination

Kaufman defines the “theological” imagination as a creative activity that constructs and works out “new and significant structures of meaning.” The products of this activity help persons to orient themselves in the world and in life by providing a “picture” of the world and of the human’s place in that world. For Kaufman, religious beliefs, myths, and dogmas arise from the theological imagination rather than from revelation. A given religious tradition is essentially a repository of the imagination’s creative efforts and the history of revelation can be considered the history of self-interpretation by human

beings.¹⁵ Monotheism's symbol, God, according to Kaufman, is imaginatively constructed, providing the absolute reference point that orients and humanizes believers (TI 11-12).

Though I do not explore the workings of the imagination, I assume that this faculty contributes to the process of constructing concepts of God by actively binding the existential components of the concept of God into a whole. 'Imagination,' here, does not imply 'pretense,' 'fabrication' or 'falsification,' but rather refers to notions of 'building,' 'creation' and 'inventiveness.'

construction

This dissertation assumes that the human mind constructs concepts of God—the concept at the center of the dominant religious commitment in the United States. These concepts are theoretical ideas which are not objects of knowledge but which have a regulative function in the sense that they provide practical orientation to life. The mind, as it constructs a concept of God, combines complex experiences, memories, goals, values, texts, symbols, and more into the singular content that it associates with the word, God. Childhood religious education, communal views on God, spiritual propensities, interpretations of sacred and other texts, norms, questions

¹⁵ Gordon Kaufman, "Is There Any Way from Athens to Jerusalem?" review of *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* by Karl Rahner, *Journal of Religion* 59, no. 3 (July 1979): 346.

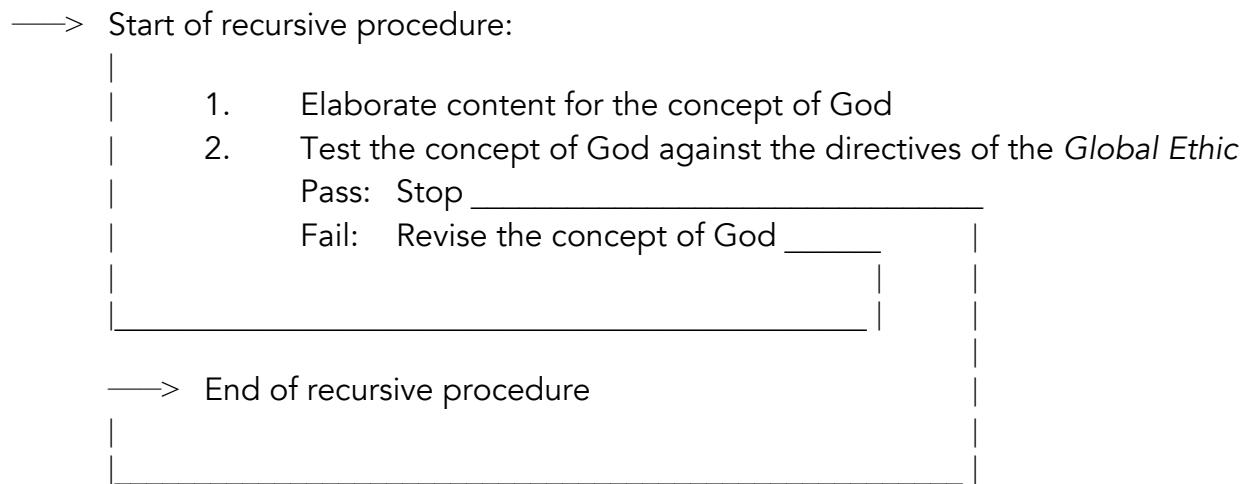
about life and death, and more come to bear in the version of God produced. While ‘world,’ like ‘God,’ is a concept with a regulative function that provides practical orientation to life, it is also, at least in part, an object of knowledge. ‘World’ unifies the findings of science and a person’s phenomenological experience of reality.

recursion

Recursion is a term generally used in computer science and mathematics to indicate the repeated application of a particular function or procedure. After a recursive procedure is completed, the procedure invokes itself, starting again from the beginning but acting upon the parameters that were altered in some way during the previous pass-through. The procedure repeats in this manner until a certain condition is met. I use the term recursion somewhat loosely but deploy it to underscore the repetitive and iterative nature of the theological method that I advance.

The method can be described as recursive because it expects users to reconstruct their concepts of God repeatedly until those concepts are validly moral--they pass the test of the *Global Ethic*. By the end of each cycle, the latest version of God produced includes some of the “old” content along with some “new” content. Once its norms align with the norms of the *Global Ethic*, recursion ends and the concept of God shifts to a mode of dynamic stasis.

The chart below illustrates recursion.



concept

In the dissertation, the expression “concept of God” refers to the collection of associations and ideas that an individual or religious community attaches to the word “God.” For most, the concept of God includes images, but some prefer to conceive of God in purely abstract terms (no images associated with the deity). Others will prefer a concept of God understood in terms of one or more metaphors; for example, Kaufman’s one-time doctoral student, Sallie McFague, explored the metaphor of “mother” and “friend” for God and the metaphor of “world” for the “body of God.” Throughout the dissertation, I use the words “idea,” “construct,” and “conception” as interchangeable synonyms for “concept of God.”

VII. The Dissertation In Brief

part I

In Part I, I focus on Kaufman's theological method. I take a special interest in analyzing the method that he developed during the middle phase, or what I call Phase II, of his career. I trace the arc of all three of his phases and explore the reasons given by Kaufman for the significant shifts that he made between each. I explain why his Phase II method is helpful for those who long for God but who embrace epistemological humility and limit God-talk to human-constructed concepts of God.

An attractive feature of Kaufman's Phase II method, I argue, is its openness to person-like concepts of God. Such a possibility is absent from Phase I because Kaufman had not yet concluded that concepts of God are constructed through and through—God is to be found in the person-event of Jesus Christ. In Phase III, he eliminated the possibility of person-like concepts because he decided that human beings could be trusted to resist the urge to conflate their concepts of God with the 'real' God rather than treat God as a construct to be revisited and revised. I evaluate the strengths of person-like concepts of God and explore some of the difficulties that accompany such concepts. In spite of these difficulties, as Kaufman repeatedly emphasized during Phase II, to connect with the divine in a meaningful way, most theists conceive of God as person-like. The global, humanistic theological method that

I advance respects this human drive by preserving the ability of users to generate anthropomorphic concepts of God.

I then turn to the moral dimension of Kaufman's Phase II theological method and analyze the mechanism he developed to ensure that concepts of God are humane and humanizing. Kaufman strongly recommended that God include person-like characteristics to model the kind of humane behavior that contributes to the well-being of persons, cultures and societies. His method also required that God include abstract dimensions such as good or just or merciful to provide the absolute reference point needed to promote humanized conduct. This abstract component relativizes and undermines anthropocentrism by calling into question human projects, goals, and values, including concepts of God themselves. I contribute to scholarship about Kaufman by showing how the criterion of humanization that he developed to test concepts of God is not fine-grained enough. Because this criterion is vague, weak, and Christocentric, it cannot serve, I claim, as the universal, unequivocal test that he advocated.

part II

After having argued that the humanization criterion in Kaufman's theological method must be set aside, I propose replacing it with the *Global Ethic*. I investigate, in Part II,

the *Global Ethic* as its substitute. I clarify some of the issues related to any global ethic and to explain why I recommend using the *Global Ethic* in particular to determine whether concepts of God are validly moral.

I trace the history of the *Global Ethic* and discuss its origins. Commissioned by the Council charged with preparations for the 1993 Parliament of the World Religions, it was largely written by Küng. He sought to identify the norms held to be true and shared by all of the world's religious and cultural traditions. These norms, he expected, were embedded in the traditions' texts, beliefs and practices. Küng and the Council consulted with more than two hundred scholars and religious leaders from the world's religions, soliciting input on the evolving draft. The majority of representatives attending the Parliament in 1993 ratified the resulting document. These three factors—the effort to identify already-shared norms, the number of scholars and religious consulted, and the vote of support by representatives of the world's religions—make the *Global Ethic* unique.

I explore the four directives of the *Global Ethic* and briefly investigate the sub-directives. I then address the main critiques that have been launched against the *Global Ethic*—e.g. too Western, too secular, and too formal. To the first of these, I respond that the *Global Ethic*, even if it were “too Western” (which I dispute), need not be taken less seriously for this reason. The protections included in the U.N.'s Universal

Declaration of Human Rights, although criticized on similar grounds, are currently held in high regard (even if they too often disregarded) by many of the world's nations. To the second, I point out that the *Global Ethic* intentionally does not refer to God in order to remain inclusive of all of the world's religious traditions including non-theistic ones, as well as inclusive of the world's secular traditions. To the third, I argue that the *Global Ethic*'s formal nature is an asset because its abstraction makes it possible for each of the world's religions to identify particular texts, beliefs, and practices within its own tradition that correlate to the directives. It also does not identify an associated metaphysic, thereby allowing traditions and individuals—whether secular, non-theistic, polytheistic, and monotheistic—to ground its norms in ways meaningful to them.

For the first time since the *Global Ethic* was written and ratified, I analyze this document to determine the kind of ethic it expresses. I argue that it is an *objective constructivist-real* ethic. Intended by its authors and contributors to remain a "living" or recursive document, the *Global Ethic* should, ideally, remain open to a process in which scholars and religious leaders develop drafts of moral norms that are ratified (a top-down procedure) but then opened to input from all religionists (a bottom-up procedure). This feedback could be discussed and potentially incorporated into a revised draft. After a draft has been ratified, it is expected that it will eventually be subject, once again, to discussion and contestation. This top-down, bottom-up process

of emendation is the constructivist component of the *Global Ethic*. I also argue that the *Global Ethic* is objectively true. For this reason, I hold, the religious and philosophical traditions have integrated the norms identified in *Global Ethic* and have, independently, over the course of time, integrated these directives into their respective texts, beliefs, and practices. Though they are formal, they are not divorced from human life; indeed, the directives offer moral guidance for a wide variety of practical decisions and quandaries. To demonstrate their regulative function, I turn to the Human Development Index (HDI) developed by the U.N. Human Development Programme (UNDP) and compare its metrics to the dimensions of wellbeing embedded in the *Global Ethic*. These dimensions bear a striking resemblance to the UNDP's metrics, lending credence to the claim that the *Global Ethic*'s directives, though abstract, remain intimately connected to lived experience.

part III

In Part III, I bring together observations and arguments from previous sections to advance the basic structure of a global, humanistic theological method. This method includes provisions for concepts of God, of worldview, and of self- to be subject to public critique. To combat the tendency by individuals to distort concepts of God and exempt themselves from moral norms that they expect others to follow, the method

includes a public dimension. Such vetting can take the form of meeting a friend at a coffee shop or engaging with theological experts through social media; it is designed to encourage users to discuss their concepts openly with others and benefit from feedback by wise interlocutors. Though it is well established that groups of people can become deluded about what constitutes right and good, trusted persons or groups invited to provide critique may be able to identify some gaps, oversights, or distortions in a given concept of God. Input should be sought from a diversity of persons, especially those familiar with exclusion, suffering, and discrimination since individuals who have experienced transgressions in the name of God are the ones best equipped to identify failings in God concepts.

The proposed theological method is recursive and is comprised of two moments, each with subsidiary steps, which are also recursive. The first moment is dedicated to the construction of a validly moral concept of God. The second moment focuses on the construction of concepts of world and of self. Kaufman's writings on the world and self, though limited and unsystematic, provide a helpful starting point. Like God, he considers 'self' to be a construct (IFM 157).¹⁶ I develop the concept of self—since the global, humanistic theological method is primarily designed for individual persons, a

¹⁶ Paul Byron Rasor, "Creative Interchange, Intersubjectivity, and the Social Self: A Contemporary Reexamination of Henry Nelson Wieman's Empirical Theology," Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, November 1998, 191.

sturdy and well-developed concept of self is needed to ensure that God-constructs generated from the method are not mere projections of their creators. Fundamental to the method is the commitment that God is an independent concept while world and self are concepts dependent on God.

Though designed for use by individuals, the method is *global* and *humanistic* because any concept of God, even if self-generated, must meet the globally valid, moral test of the *Global Ethic*. Concepts of world and self, aligned to validly moral concepts of God, are, by extension, humanistic. Theists whose concepts of God are generated by this method will align their day-to-day activities and choices to validly moral constructs and are more likely to lead moral lives. Like Kaufman's, the method that I advance offers a great deal of flexibility with regard to the imaginative range of concepts it can produce while constraining their moral range. It intentionally preserves the possibility of creating person-like concepts of God but, by insisting that they must be tested by the *Global Ethic*, it undermines any tendency to construct concepts of God that are mere reflections of the self. Such concepts are not objects of knowledge but they play an orienting, regulative role in human life—for some people, the most important orienting, regulative role in their lives. By making the ethical dimension of these concepts primary, the method ensures that they provide valid moral orientation and guidance.

Part II

Gordon Kaufman's Answer to the Problem of God

Chart 1

ABBREVIATIONS FOR KAUFMAN'S MONOGRAPHS

- CD *Context of Decision* (1961)
- ETM *An Essay on Theological Method* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1975, 3rd ed, 1995)
- GMD *God—Mystery—Diversity: Christian Theology in a Pluralistic World*
(Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996)
- GP *God the Problem* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972).
- IBC *In the beginning...Creativity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004).
- IFM *In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard
University Press, 1993)
- JC *Jesus and Creativity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004).
- RKF *Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press,
1960)
- ST *Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective* (New York: Charles Scribner's
Sons, 1968)
- TI *Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God* (Philadelphia: The
Westminster Press, 1981)
- TNA *Theology for a Nuclear Age* (Manchester: Manchester University Press;
Philadelphia, Westminster, 1985)

Chart 2

PHASES OF KAUFMAN'S THEOLOGY (MONOGRAPHS ONLY)

	1960-1971	1972-1992	≥ 1993
Kenneth Nordgren ¹	Early	Later	Latest
Thomas James ²	-----	Earlier Proposal	Later proposal
Yang Sun Choi ³	Early	Mature	Latest
Myriam Renaud	Historicist/Phase I	Personalist/Phase II	Naturalist/Phase III
	RFK	GP	IFM
	CD	ETM	GMD
	ST	NR	IBC
		TI	JC
		TNA	

¹ Kenneth Nordgren, *God as Problem and Possibility: A Critical Study of Gordon Kaufman's Thought Toward a Spacious Theology* (Uppsala, Sweden: Uppsala Universitet, 2003).

² Thomas James, *In Face of Reality: The Constructive Theology of Gordon D. Kaufman* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011).

³ Yang Sun Choi, "A Critical Study of Gordon D. Kaufman's Theological Method" (Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 1995).

Chart 3

KAUFMAN'S MONOGRAPHS ARRANGED BY THEOLOGICAL PHASE

PHASE I 1960 – 1971 (HISTORICIST PHASE; GOD-KNOWN-THROUGH-CHRIST-EVENT)

- RKF *Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960)
CD *The Context of Decision: A Theological Analysis* (New York: Abingdon Press 1961)
ST *Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968)

PHASE II 1972 – 1992 (PERSONALIST PHASE; IMAGINATIVELY-CONSTRUCTED-AGENT-GOD)

- GP *God the Problem* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972).
ETM *An Essay on Theological Method* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1975, 3rd ed., 1995)
NR *Nonresistance and Responsibility and Other Mennonite Essays* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1979)
TI *The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981)
TNA *Theology for a Nuclear Age* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985)

PHASE III 1993 - 2011 (NATURALIST PHASE; STEPS-OF-FAITH-PROCESS-GOD)

- IFM *In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993)
GMD *God—Mystery—Diversity: Christian Theology in a Pluralistic World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996)
IBC *In the beginning...Creativity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004)
JC *Jesus and Creativity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004)

Ch. 2

KAUFMAN'S GOD: AN IMAGINATIVE CONSTRUCT

The global, humanistic theological method that I advance in this dissertation is based on Gordon Kaufman's (1928 - 2005) mid-career theological method. To explain my choice of Kaufman's work as a foundation for my method, this chapter describes and explores his theological method and the three phases that spanned his decades-long career. My analysis places the phases in context by discussing the relationship between them and includes an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of each phase. I also discuss and assess the reasons that Kaufman himself offered to explain his shift from one phase to the next.

Charts B and C (provided on the previous two pages) show the years and length of Kaufman's phases and list the monographs that he wrote during those phases. For the sake of clarity, I have assigned Roman numerals to each phase, although, at times, I refer to them by their central theme. For example: I designate Kaufman's mid-career phase as "Phase II," or as his "Personalist Phase" because he makes space for—and even encourages—users to conceive of God as a person-like being.

Though Kaufman notes several problems associated with conceiving of God as person- or agent-like, Phase II is of particular interest, I argue in this chapter, because it conforms to the way that most theists already think and behave—they turn to God in times of celebration and grief just as they might turn to friends or family members. In addition, most theists already speak to God and assume that God can hear them; they go about their daily lives confident that God watches over them and that God takes an interest in their affairs; they picture God as person-like even when they do not believe that God “actually” looks like a person. Well-suited to the way in which many theists actually conceive of God, Kaufman’s “Personalist Phase” emphasizes a God Who makes decisions and acts in the world.

Also, in this age of pluralism and globalization, Western theists increasingly craft bespoke concepts of God that pull elements from different religions including from sources unrelated to religion. Thus, another attractive feature, I argue, of Kaufman’s Phase II theological method, is that it is well-suited to such non-sectarian, border-crossing theism because it lends itself to integrating a variety of metaphors, ideas, norms, and experiences from a multitude of sources including sacred scriptures, religious traditions, and ordinary life. Kaufman’s method allows users to decide what, for them, counts as important and to incorporate those elements into their concepts of

God, offering maximum flexibility and creativity. The resulting concept may range from an abstract, clockmaker God to a complex Trinitarian-Christian God.

Though flexible, however, Kaufman's Phase II method places several important constraints on concept of God. It is designed to help reflective theists "ferret out what is contained" in their notions of God. It insists that theists attempt to understand better the "meaning and implications" of their notions while remaining in conversation with a variety of theological, religious, and secular perspectives, science included (GTP 9). More importantly for this dissertation, Kaufman's method provides mechanisms for moral critique from within and from without the concept in order to secure a humane and humanizing concept of God (I describe and analyze the moral dimension of Kaufman's Phase II method at length in Chapter 3).

Hence, Kaufman's Phase II is of special interest as a basis for the global, humanistic theological method that I advance in Chapter 8 because it accommodates and even encourages the agent-like God-constructs currently sought by theists; because it is well-suited to the wide-ranging and open approach to constructing God that theists have already adopted; because it provides those theists with tools and concrete steps to bring coherence and moral accountability into the chaos of much contemporary theologies.

I. Phase I of Kaufman's Theology

agnosticism: the only prudent view of God's existence

During Phase I (1960-1971), in his best-known work of this phase, the 1968 *Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective*, Kaufman called attention to the difficulty of describing, with certainty, the content to which the term 'God' refers. God, he wrote, is "unique" and "incomparable" and although human beings may provide an explanation of what they mean when they use the word 'God' in rituals or in prayers, they cannot conceive of a divine, infinite Being Who surpasses what they know and experience, and Who "has his being beyond [their] limits." Like Kant, Kaufman argued that 'God' is not a word like 'chair' whose referent is visible and available for empirical examination. "God is not an object of experience," Kaufman argued, because "There is no place in experience to which we can point (literally or figuratively) and say this is what we mean by the word 'God.'"⁴ Though theists may wish it otherwise, he held that a "direct inspection" of finite objects—the sole dimension to which humans have access—cannot serve as a source of knowledge about God (ST 127).

⁴ Gordon D. Kaufman, "Two Models of Transcendence: An Inquiry into the Problem of Theological Meaning," in *The Heritage of Christian Thought: Essays in Honor of Robert Lowry Calhoun*, edited by Robert E. Cushman and Egil Grislis (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1965), 184.

Thus, according to Kaufman, when theists reflect on the content that they associate with the word, God, they will, or should, wonder “by what right” anyone can speak of “the nature or even the existence of reality” outside the limits of what human beings can know with certainty. “Limit means *limit*,” he asserted. Thus, in his view, “sheer agnosticism,” or the acceptance by theists that they merely have contingent, speculative knowledge, is not merely the prudent stance to adopt toward God but the only “honest” stance.⁵ Speech about God, for Kaufman, can be traced to the disquieting and painful awareness of limitations whether these are due to the confines of epistemology, bounded lifespans, weak wills, lack of courage, and difficulty resisting wrongdoing alongside ever-present questions about the meaning and value of life. The “details of the analysis and elaboration of this awareness” differ depending on the religious and cultural traditions from which people hail, but the awareness itself, in Kaufman’s view, is common to all persons.⁶

Hence, Kaufman described theists as believers who locate God at the existential, outermost limit of their being and of their ability to exercise power in the world. While understandings of God such as “shepherd” or as “vengeful” may no longer be apt or acceptable, contemporary people continue to be afflicted by the anxiety and suffering

⁵ Gordon Kaufman, “On The Meaning of ‘God’: Transcendence Without Mythology,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 59, no. 2 (April 1966): 113.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.

that gave rise to those understandings. Whether in the past, today, or tomorrow, hardships propel human beings to the edge of what they can know and experience.⁷ Disease, death, oppression, war, violence, joy, celebration, and more—as long as individuals struggle to make sense of them, God, Kaufman argued, will remain meaningful.⁸

analogies for the transcendent God

He insisted that when people speak of God they point to the known realm and, at the same time, point to a transcendent realm—a realm “outside” or “beyond” the known world. Indeed, Kaufman wrote, this duality of language is evident in the *Oxford English Dictionary*’s whose definition of God reflects the shared, basic view of God in the West: “A superhuman person...who is worshipped as having power over nature and the fortunes of mankind” (ST 6). Kaufman pointed to two crucial motifs in the dictionary entry: 1) a transcendent motif and, 2) a personalistic motif (which I will discuss at greater length in Chapter 4). The transcendent motif signals that God is not an ordinary being, but greater than human. As such, God is not part of the world—not ‘in’ the world—but rather, in a significant way ‘outside’ the world (ST 6). Kaufman insisted that

⁷ Ibid., 112.

⁸ Ibid., 129-130.

if God is to be God, God must transcend everything finite.⁹ He noted, however, that when transcendence is “conceived in terms of directly experienced and experienceable realities,” language about God becomes mythological (ST 7). Caution, he warned, must be exercised to avoid this mistake:

...as the proper object of ultimate loyalty (faith) to which one can and should give one’s whole being and whole life, God is to be distinguished from every proximate and penultimate value or ideal or being, for the latter are always related to particular interests or desires or needs of the self or society, and thus are only of relative and transitory interest and meaning.

How can human beings understand a cognitive term like ‘transcendent’ to God if it has no corresponding experiential component, Kaufman asked. He formulated this answer: even if it were possible to dispense with the transcendent motif associated with the word, God, it is crucial to retain it for two reasons. First, the transcendent motif enhances the theological significance of God by making it possible to conceive of God as universal rather than as a deity limited to a particular community. Second, it signals that God, by standing ‘outside’ the world, is related to every material feature and living creature within the world without being “reduced” to or “equated” with them (ST 7).

Difficult theological words or concepts like God and transcendence, Kaufman argued, can be understood without undermining the motifs that place them ‘outside’

⁹ Gordon Kaufman, “Two Models of Transcendence: An Inquiry into the Problem of Theological Meaning,” in *The heritage of Christian thought;: Essays in honor of Robert Lowry Calhoun*, ed. Robert E. Cushman and Egil Grislis (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1965), 185.

the world. Both share important *similarities* with certain ordinary words or concepts. Such ordinary words or concepts, because they are familiar and meaningful to people, can serve as helpful analogies.¹⁰ If, by virtue of such analogies, theists succeed in making correlations between the immanent and transcendent realms, then the concepts of God and transcendence become intelligible.¹¹ Kaufman was convinced that the most effective analogies came from personal life (ST 128).

God manifested God's self in person-event of Jesus Christ

In Phase I, his historicist phase, Kaufman's theology was strongly rooted in his Protestant Christian tradition. For this reason, he sought analogies in the vocabulary and experiences of the Christian community. He wrote that God revealed himself to humanity "in and through" the "personal life" of Jesus, a "personal being." Thus, he concluded, it became possible to conceive of God in and through the personal symbols and analogies associated with Jesus the Christ, symbols and analogies Christians could identify in their own lives (ST 128). He acknowledged, however, that the "panorama of human experience" from which Christians could select personal symbols and analogies to make sense of 'God' was vast. This vastness, he cautioned, required triage. Confronted "with the chaos of human opinion," Christians faced the

¹⁰ Kaufman, "Two Models of Transcendence," 186.

¹¹ Ibid.

overwhelming task of separating “the significant and the valid” from “the trivial and the spurious.” Without criterion, even the well-intentioned could confuse the misleading or even the “simply meaningless” for God’s nature and will (ST 116).

Kaufman admitted that simply because the Christian community believed in the person-event of Jesus Christ did not constitute “sufficient ground” for holding it to be true (ST 178). There is a possibility, he wrote, that “Christian faith may be simply a historical continuation of the illusions of a few first-century Jews.” Nonetheless, the Christian community, Kaufman held, was bound together and set apart from other religious communities by the conviction “that in some decisive fashion” God had manifested God’s self in the person-event of Jesus the Christ (ST 179). Hence, Kaufman argued, for Christians, an *authentic* criterion for analogies of God must come from a theological understanding grounded in this belief (ST 9). For Kaufman, Jesus Christ offered “the source of norms” to which Christians were to “orient” their existence (ST 22). According to Kaufman, Jesus Christ did not *reveal* the “effective criteria of the meaningful and the real” through his crucifixion and death on the cross but rather through the example of his life, especially by demonstrating authentic and responsible “power in human relations” (ST 22-23).

Only if Christians looked to God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ and “what is made known there,” Kaufman argued, would they find decisive “lines of interpretation”

between ordinary concepts and symbols and beyond-the-known-world theological concepts like God (ST 116). Though he insisted on the impossibility of proving one's deepest convictions, he insisted on the "absolute presupposition" that one's thinking and actions could nonetheless be assumed to be "valid and significant" as long as they were "defined and measured by reference" to Jesus Christ (ST 22). Most people were guided by inconsistent and sometimes even incoherent hierarchies of values, but God, revealed in the person-event of Jesus Christ, provided a center around which to order one's life and a focal point by which to orient one's self with respect to day-to-day decisions (ST 20).

The work of theology, Kaufman argued, was not "simply the work" of Christians independently and without restraint thinking whatever they wish; on the contrary, this work is properly carried out only by those who "seek deliberately to subject their thinking to the authority of God's revelation." (ST 68). This revelation, Kaufman insisted, was to be found in the person-event of Jesus Christ and not in a literal reading of the Bible (ST 21). Though he granted that for many Protestant Christians the Bible was the dominant source of authority, in his opinion, it was a "miscellaneous collection of materials written in various times and often from quite different points of view" (ST 66). Human beings had written the various texts organized into sacred books and collected in the whole known as the Bible. Though many individuals or groups would claim

otherwise, Kaufman protested that the Bible had never been, and could never be, taken as theologically authoritative..." (ST 66). "Since it is Jesus Christ, and not the biblical words, that is God's revelation, it is misleading to refer to the text itself as 'inspired,' Kaufman insisted (ST 67).

Like other events in the past, this person-event was not directly accessible to contemporary Christians. According to Kaufman, it could only "be appropriated through *imaginative reconstruction* on the basis of critical analysis of documentary materials" (ST 67, italics mine). At best, Kaufman wrote, the person-event of Jesus was accessible as a *mediated* event. This 'mediation' required historical reconstruction of the event; it also required faith that God had revealed God's self in that event (ST 67). Kaufman reiterated, "there is no final or coercive proof of theological knowledge; it rests, rather on the *decision* to believe, on an act of faith" (ST 176, italics mine). Thus, the ultimate theological authority was available "only through these two removes of mediation:" historical reconstruction and faith (ST 67): Rather than treat these words as the final authority, Kaufman beseeched Christians to read the Bible with "historico-theological understanding" and, from the act of reading, to allow an image of Jesus to emerge. Kaufman insisted that it is "in and through this image," constructed and reconstructed by reading and by historical work, that God reveals God's self (ST 69).

Religious authorities, in his opinion, had usurped the absolute authority of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. While Protestants had ascribed this authority to the written words of the Bible, Roman Catholics had relied on a notion of living tradition and accorded authority to papal pronouncements, and spiritualists had trusted the "inner conviction of truth." For Kaufman, each of these views was idolatrous (ST 71). There could be no responsible Christian theology apart from "continuous historical reference" (ST 72).

The Christian community...is that community which inevitably, whether consciously or unconsciously, turns back to those particular events [of two thousand years ago] for the fundamental analogies and symbols which give meaning and content to its understanding of ultimate reality." (ST, 179).

Nonetheless, even when Christians relied solely on the one unimpeachable source of authority—the person-event of Jesus Christ—for analogies and symbols to provide standards and norms for daily life, Kaufman anticipated that personal reconstruction of those events and formulations would be at odds with those of other individuals. Each theist, according to him, offered a "particular interpretation of the evidence, a particular attempt to grasp these events as God's acts" (ST 72). Christians must turn to the historical person-event of Jesus (for Kaufman—the *historical norm*) to assess a given position or claim. They must also turn to personal experience (for Kaufman—the *experiential norm*) to determine whether the given position or claim "makes sense" (ST 76). Because Christian doctrines often address issues of human

existence, Christians have the additional task of bringing these doctrines into a systematic and coherent whole (for Kaufman, the *systematic norm*) and with “the vision of God’s act” (ST 78).

Since belief or faith involves a decision, the options must be clear. Indeed, Kaufman wrote, “faith ‘is never completely abstract and empty. It is always faith in something,’ in some content” (ST 176). Kaufman did not pretend that theological work bounded by these three norms led to uniform judgments on the concepts and doctrines of Christian faith. No unanimity on these matters should be expected—indeed, he anticipated “sharp divergence and disagreement” (ST, 79). However, Christians should not be embarrassed or alarmed by such diversity or clash of theological views. Rather, Kaufman held, this diversity and clash indicated “the fullness of God’s revelation.” This revelation, in Jesus Christ, was “so rich and meaningful that no human interpretation—or synthesis of human interpretations—can hold it” (ST 79). Though diversity and clash should not result in anxiety, any analogy or symbol that a Christian chose to think or speak of God, Kaufman counseled, “must be constantly tested and corrected” against God’s revelation in the person-event in Jesus Christ. In Kaufman’s view, an analogy may be “regarded as useful and true” only if it enabled

Christians better to align their personal norms and standards to norms and standards that God revealed in Jesus Christ (ST 128).¹²

Also, it was desirable, Kaufman argued, to retain concrete language when speaking of God and of the person-event, Jesus Christ, even though this language sometimes veered into the “quaint or overdramatic” because it imbued religious and theological claims with “psychological force” (ST 190). Christians, Kaufman insisted, needed personalistic symbols. When clarifying the meaning of God’s transcendence, they relied on the “aid of various concrete human analogies, such as lord, judge, creator, father.” Without such aids, the nature of God’s being remained outside the limits of human understanding (ST 191). All possible knowledge of God is analogical or symbolical, Kaufman held, and symbols and analogies for God are limited to those drawn from human experiences especially of relationships with other persons, with other creatures, and with the natural world. Christians were not the only ones whose symbols and analogies for God were limited to those drawn from experiences and relationships—this was the case for all theists. Regardless of religious persuasion or faith, one’s immediate “realm of existence is given preferred status,” Kaufman wrote.

¹² Because he insists that the “supreme clue to ultimate reality” is the *analogia Christi*, Kaufman notes that his approach “is in some respects similar to, though by no means identical with Karl Barth’s” notion of *analogia fidei* as Barth elaborated it in his *Church Dogmatics* (ST 128, n15). *Analogia fidei* captures Barth’s view that whatever is believed or said about God in Christian faith is inseparably connected with the person-event and person of Jesus Christ.

As such, one's immediate real of existence possesses "special power or facility to furnish symbols" for the transcendent God (ST 176).

II. Kaufman's Critique of Phase I

concepts of God are grounded in human experience

After he wrote the *Systematic Theology*, whose central points are described in the preceding section, Kaufman's theological views took some significant turns. In the preface to his next major work, *God the Problem*, a compilation of essays written between 1965-1971, Kaufman acknowledged as much. The essays in the *Problem of God* abandoned the Christ-centered foundations of Phase I and attempted to show what Kaufman had rejected—"how the concept of God is grounded in ordinary human experience" (GP xii). In the *Systematic Theology*, Kaufman had warned against relying on the vast panorama of such experience. The "chaos of human opinion," he had held, was a territory whose only trustworthy chart was provided by God's revelation in Jesus Christ and the criterion that emerged from reading and reflecting on the Christian Scriptures. But, by 1977, the year that he wrote the Preface for the third edition of the *Systematic Theology*, Kaufman had abandoned Scripture and the Christ-event as the grounding for theological work.

In Phase I, he took for granted that theological terms like revelation and God were “appropriate and illuminating;” by Phase II, he had concluded that these assumptions were no longer warranted. He described what he now deemed the complete breakdown of these supposedly rock-bottom assumptions on the basis of which the Christian theological enterprise had heretofore proceeded. This means that theological method can no longer be formulated on the basis of God’s revelation...; it must now explore, criticize, and reconstruct or reconfirm that basis itself... [Indeed,] theology is one among men’s [sic] intellectual activities, and it must be able to justify what it does and how it does it before the bar of ordinary human reason (GTP, 24).

revelation in scripture and tradition is a fallacy

The fatal flaw in his own, earlier theological enterprise in the *Systematic Theology*, he argued, had been its claim about God’s revelation in the person-event of Jesus Christ. His previous assumptions about this event as “the light of life and the ultimate source of all saving truth” and about revelation as “vouchsafed in scripture and tradition” had proven to be a “fallacy” (ST xvi). He had granted “too easily and uncritically” that God’s revelation was a reality to which Christians must “subject” themselves (ST, xvi). Further study of the question, he explained, had led him to conclude that divine revelation can never be present as an “objective reality”—a “directly accessible” or “inspectable” reality (ST xvi). What Christians call God and God’s revelation can be known *only* through the imagination—the symbols and images constructed by the human mind (ST xvii).

In the 1979 Preface to the second edition of his *Essay on Theological Method*, Kaufman argued that “much confusion is introduced into theological work by the failure to recognize that the notion of God...is an imaginative construct built up in quite a different way than the conception of objects known in and through experience” (ETM, xviii). He had written the *Essay*, he acknowledged, because he had realized that “it is only through the mind’s own ‘imaginative constructive’ activities that a symbol with the logical and dialectical peculiarities of ‘God’...can be generated” (ETM, xi).

“Theology,” he now asserted,

is a deliberate human activity directed towards criticizing and reconstructing the symbols by which faith lives and to which faith responds...theology is clearly human work, and we must take full responsibility for it. But it is human work that emerges out of faith’s own need for more adequate orientation and symbolization (ETM xx).

Kaufman set about reworking his entire project. If he were to rewrite the *Systematic Theology*’s chapters, he told would-be readers, he would eliminate “the heavily objectivist talk of God found in this text” (ST xviii). Once he had set aside the criterion provided by the revelation of God in Christ, however, the need for criterion to sort through the chaos of human opinion reasserted itself. To sort through this chaos, Kaufman advocated “a more open and public situatedness:”

Central to theological method, therefore, must be the development of (public) practices, disciplines, and criteria in terms of which theologians can order and direct these imaginative constructive powers effectively, as they generate,

critically reflect upon, reconstruct, and otherwise employ the symbol "God" (ETM, xi).

Kaufman had also come to understand theology as the attempt to understand how concepts like God or revelation function in human life. Theology's role, for him, was "to criticize and reinterpret" such concepts, "sometimes radically," to ensure that they achieved "their purpose" of providing standards and norms capable of "adequately" orienting the thoughts and actions of the faithful. In the *Systematic Theology*, he had plumbed Scriptural passages for metaphors about God, justifying his choices, even when he objected to these terms, by insisting that they were merely being used analogically (ST xviii). However, his growing awareness of the patriarchal nature of certain metaphors and symbols led Kaufman to insist, in the *Essay*, that God "can no longer be understood as 'Father,' or 'Lord,'" or even as "he" (EMT xxi).

By Phase II, Kaufman had concluded that individuals "of very different persuasions" engaged in theological activity that, in a general sense, resembled his. If so, he decided, this activity could likewise "be analyzed and described" (ETM xx). He hoped to persuade theists to become "self-conscious" about these rules and procedures so that they would choose to engage in the work of theology with greater insight and care (ETM xx). Kaufman was, by then, intentionally developing a theological method open to a plurality of religious and secular traditions. He no longer presupposed the essential truth of the person-event of Jesus Christ and went so far as

to advocate dealing “with distinctively Christian contentions only where these are clearly of more than merely parochial interest” (ST xix).

To summarize, Kaufman identified at least four issues as especially problematic in his *Systematic Theology*—issues which he sought to rectify in later works:

1. He made unwarranted assumptions about revelation and God. He had not yet realized that theology consisted of imaginative construction through and through.¹
2. He drew on Scripture for metaphors about God without attention as to whether these might be harmful or problematic.
3. He lacked adequate criterion to differentiate sound theological claims from mere opinion. Rather than rely on Scripture for norms, he decided that *public* practices, disciplines, and criteria were needed to carry out critical reflection on concepts of God.
4. He adopted a theology that was “narrow in its vision and parochial in its appeal.” He pledged to forego a Christocentric orientation in preference for attention to fundamental human problems (ST xix).

III. Phase II of Kaufman’s Theology

God as imaginative construct orienting human life

The principal texts that Kaufman wrote during Phase II of his theological method are:

God the Problem -> *Essay on Theological Method* -> *Theological Imagination*

1972

1975

1981

In *God the Problem*, a collection of essays published in 1972, Kaufman reflected, initially in a tentative manner, on what he increasingly came to view as the “highly

problematic status" of God in "modern intellectual culture" (TI 11). Each essay was an attempt to respond to the various factors that he perceived to be contributing to this problematic status. Some of the essays, for example, focused on the Christian community and proposed a variety of ways that Christians could interpret talk about God in more meaningful ways. Though, in Kaufman's view, these essays did not develop a continuous argument or investigate questions to their natural end, they offered, nonetheless, "an orderly and logical development of ideas" (ETM xi). He was, in essence, thinking out loud, working his way toward a new theological method and a new understanding of God.

The most significant threat posed by modern intellectual culture, for Kaufman, was its erosion of God's distinctiveness from world. However the relationship between God and world were understood, Kaufman held, it was crucial to maintain a distinction between the two lest they collapse one into the other. Speech about God presupposed, then, "an understanding of reality as distinguished into two fundamental" dimensions (GP 230). The distinctive but related character of both realms relied on "the development of some (accepted) view of how each order or level [was] perceived, experienced or known" (GP 230). Older understandings of human perception and knowledge allowed them to be assigned to different realms. Primitive man had been

content to locate God in a heavenly realm, a realm ‘other’ than the one that they inhabited, but contemporary people no longer found such separation intelligible.

The latest scientific data required the development of new theories about how God could be known (GP 231). Kaufman took seriously the demand that theology rethink itself based on an empirical picture of the cosmos. For today’s individuals who had learned to view nature as an “impersonal order or structure,” an empirical picture meant that the “notion of a God who continuously performs deliberate acts in and upon his world, and in and through man’s history, has become very problematical” (GP, 120). Kaufman responded to this difficulty by seeking to retain an understanding of God as a single, unified ultimate center of orientation without resorting to traditional views about God.

Kaufman remained convinced that the concept of God, “properly demythologized and rightly constructed and defined,” could continue to assist human beings properly focus their “energies and affections toward the realization of a more humane society” (TI 51). For millions of people, God continued to serve as the “principal focus of devotion and affection and service” and thus could orient theists toward activities with “truly humanizing effects” (TI 51). Indeed, God was key to such activities, Kaufman argued, when conceived as “a divine Person who has created us, who sustains us, who loves and cares for us, and who is seeking our full realization (our

salvation)." God imagined as this kind of divine Person could in a powerful and meaningful way recall believers to 'that' to which they should devote themselves if they hoped to realize their full potential (TI 51)." When present in human consciousness, such a concept of God kept, in focus, all 'that' which was required, inspiring and supporting efforts to achieve a "fully" human existence (TI 50). For Kaufman, theology was "fundamentally an activity of construction (and reconstruction) not of description or exposition, as it has ordinarily been understood in the past; and the failure to grasp this fact has led to mistaken expectations for theology and to the use of misleading criteria both in doing theology and in assessing its conclusions" (ETM xiii).

Against the charge that God, as an imaginative construct useful for orienting and guiding life and the world, is a "far cry from the 'living God' of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" Kaufman argued that the comparison was a false one. The important dimension to consider, he insisted, when comparing his purportedly "bloodless" God-construct and the traditional Abraham-Isaac-and-Jacob-God-construct, or for that matter, when comparing any differing God-constructs, was the content of the construct, "not the manner in which that notion is created and shaped in human consciousness" (GP 113). The content mattered because it played a key role in developing and sustaining moral sensitivities. Not every conception of God, not even every Christian conception, Kaufman warned, provided the basis "for a vision of the world as a moral universe, an order within which...humane and humanizing action is not only right but

ultimately reasonable" (GP 112). He himself interpreted God in ways that implied a thoroughly moral conception of the universe, and he understood the resulting concept of God as "living and active at every point in reality." To a God such as this one, he vouched, human beings can "pray with conviction...cry to him in their hour of need...throw themselves on his mercy in their despair...[and] give themselves to him with full devotion" (GP 113).

In any case, Kaufman pointed out, the 'living God' of Abraham-Jacob-and-Isaac was equally open to criticism. The work of feminist theologians had made Kaufman aware of the harm caused by the male-gendered metaphors, 'father,' and 'lord' on which so much Christian theology was based, including his own Phase I writings. As a result, he had concluded that the Bible was a major source and perpetrator of misogyny and male dominance (TI 15). For these reason, among others, Kaufman argued against privileging biblical depictions of the God-of-Abraham-Jacob-and-Isaac when constructing concepts of God and warned against incorporating "traditional or biblical imagery" into those concepts without subjecting it to critical assessment (GP 112).

does God exist? concepts of God exist

During Phase I, Kaufman assumed that God had revealed God's self in the Christ event. Phase II captured Kaufman's effort to develop a new approach to theology, one that conceived, as its foundation, a commitment to "the anthropological bases of man's awareness and thought God as located in imagination and cultural tradition" (GP 114). Thomas James characterized this shift in Kaufman's theology as a move from an abiding concern in the "adequacy of description" of the concept of God, to concern for the "appropriateness of [its] function."¹³ In the mature formulation of his Phase II theology, the *Theological Imagination*, Kaufman reiterated that the concept of God was the "sole" and "proper object of unqualified human devotion and service" (TI 34). "Faith in God," for Kaufman, was not merely the acceptance of the truth of an idea or set of ideas; it meant "committing one's whole self" to a clearly defined kind of life and to "a particular way of construing the world."

Indeed, faith in God, in his view, indicated a resolve to invest oneself in a highly responsible "form of life and to regard the world as a fundamentally moral universe in which such a life is both intelligible and reasonable" (GP 110, n29). A "decisive" commitment to a God-construct and to living one's life oriented around this construct required the believer to "imagine" God as "independent and real," not as a "mere human creation" (GP 114). Awareness that God is a human construct need not erode

¹³ Thomas A. James, *In Face of Reality: The Constructive Theology of Gordon D. Kaufman* (Bend, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2011), 53.

faith or ‘decisive’ commitment to God, Kaufman argued. Rather, this awareness had the positive effect of encouraging believers to recognize that theological notions were constructed and contested. It prevented faith from being “bound up with literalistic mythology” (GP 115). It also undermined religious dogmatism and the violence inspired by dogmatism. Regardless of how decisively they committed themselves to their concepts of God, theists who understood the constructed nature of those concepts could not be seduced by certainty, Kaufman held, nor would they seek to impose their contingent concepts on others by force. Such theists were also more likely to resist the impulse to reify God’s attributes themselves or to accept God-constructs reified by tradition (TI 35). Problematic for Kaufman, once reified, God’s attributes or content were no longer questioned, whereas to embrace a willingness to critically reassess and re-construct was at the core of Kaufman’s theological approach.

the proper business of theology

In his 1975 Essay on Theological Method, Kaufman worked to develop an approach to theology that reflected his conclusion that concepts of God were not revealed by the Christ-event but were constructed by the human imagination. Ideally, reflective people engaged in theological construction, or more likely reconstruction, and took “a greater measure” of control and responsibility over this work. For Kaufman, exercising control

and responsibility over one's God-construct entailed employing a method that relied on rational analysis, clarity about the options chosen, and coherent concepts and metaphors. Whereas in the Systematic Theology, he had explicated a Protestant Christian perspective and related doctrines, in the *Essay*, Kaufman broadened his approach, setting aside what he had come to view as "a parochial or idiosyncratic activity" of interest only to a particular community (ST ix).

In Phase II, he preferred to focus on developing a theological method of interest to the global community, carried out with universal "public standards" (ETM xix). He wanted this theological method to be of help "to theologians of all persuasions, liberal or conservative, Whiteheadian or existentialist or liberationist, Protestant or Catholic or Jewish" (ETM xix). While he himself granted that, as a Protestant Christian by upbringing and by choice, the major tenets of his religious tradition likely influenced him, he also held that it was possible to stand apart from one's tradition. By virtue of being intentional about trying to "abstract" from familiar "material theological considerations," Kaufman argued, his method would "prove illuminating" for theists with widely differing commitments (ETM xix).

Satisfied that, in the *Essay*, he had developed a "coherent and compelling position...on the meaning and function" of the concept of God, and that he had provided a plausible account for constructing this concept in light of the operations of

the human imagination, he wrote the essays collected in *The Theological Imagination* (TI 12). Each took up a specific issue to which Kaufman applied the theological method whose contours he had sketched in his earlier *Essay* (TI 12-13). According to the book's preface, he was satisfied that, as a whole, the essays in *The Theological Imagination* developed a systematic position and offered a clear understanding of the promise and of the limitation of his approach to theology (TI 13).

Kaufman's theological method had at least three "Moments" as he called them.

1. First Moment: construction of a concept of "world."
2. Second Moment: construction of a concept of "God."
3. Third Moment: adjustment of the concept of "world" so that it aligns with the concept of "God."

Kaufman introduced his method with a disclaimer—he would not present a "full program" or criteria and procedures, nor would he illustrate how the method could function by presenting "examples of actual constructive theology" (ETM 52). His intent, he wrote, was to "open up these theological questions by making a few tentative suggestions" (ETM 52). Not surprisingly, then, Kaufman's method was somewhat vague. He did observe that two moments could be distinguished, namely, 1) the conception of the whole of reality (world), and 2) the conception of the ground of that whole (God) (ETM 55). For theists, he wrote, it is not "logically possible to develop the concept of

God without some notion of world" since God counts as the ultimate point of reference "for understanding life and reality" (ETM 55). When the concept of God is introduced, then world is "no longer conceived as self-sufficient or absolute"—instead, it is seen as "derivative from and dependent on God" (ETM 55). In the West, God is often conceived as Creator, a relationship that affects the concept of world in three principal ways:

1. The relationship between God and the world is radically asymmetrical.
2. God determines both the being and character of the world.
3. The world must be grasped in terms of God's purposes and action "which determine and shape it" (ETM, 54).

He suggested proceeding with theological work by reconstructing a concept of world in the first Moment of his method, proceeding in logical order to reconstructing a concept of God in the second Moment, and then adjusting the concept of world to the concept of God in the third Moment. After completing the third Moment, the procedure could be repeated as many times as necessary to achieve, between world and God, a relationship of "harmony and balance, consistency and contrast" (ETM 54).

moment 0: who is the 'I' doing the constructing?

Kaufman added an appendix to the *Essay* four years after the first edition was published explaining that he had come to realize that "no one does, or could proceed" in the manner that he had initially advocated. Rather, he had realized that only

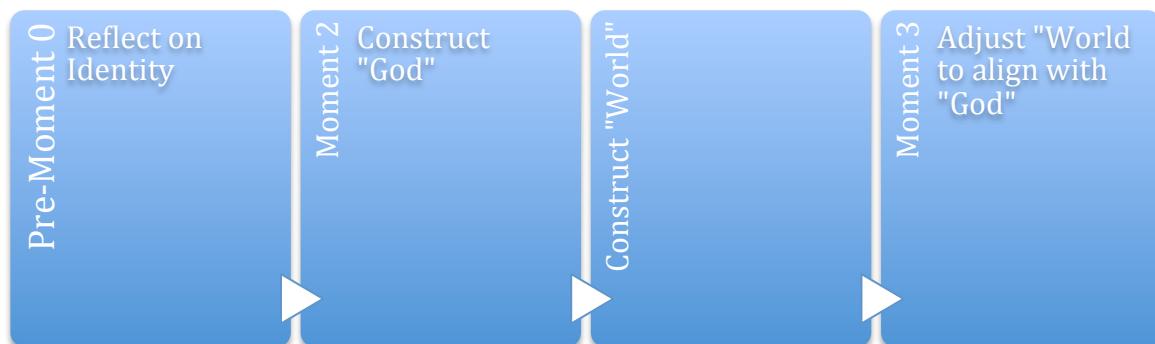
individuals who deem that God is “in some way significant for, powerful in, or relevant to contemporary life”—and thus has already engaged in reflection about God—would take an interest in theological work (ETM 91). Theological work begins with trenchant questions about God and the world—the third Moment described in the *Essay*. While it may seem that the third Moment, then, and not the first Moment was the appropriate place to start systematic thinking about God, this inference, according to Kaufman, was “quite misleading” (ETM 92).

Logically, Kaufman insisted, one should move through the three Moments as they were presented in the *Essay*. Psychologically, though, he recognized that the three Moments did not take into account the order through which “constructive activity” actually proceeds (ETM 92). To accommodate the psychological factors that motivate theological work without jeopardizing the logical order of the method, Kaufman proposed adding another Moment, which he called “Moment 0.” This Moment took into account the troubled “consciousness” that initiated “theological reflection, analysis and construction” (ETM 92). Moment 0, Kaufman asserted, invited the method’s users to take stock of who they were before launching into the next three Moments. This added Moment also invited users to reflect on how their autobiography might influence their reflection, analysis, and construction. Kaufman asked that they consider factors like gender, ethnicity, country of origin, theological stance, sexual

orientation, class, etc.—in other words, any and all factors that could impact their theological starting point. Once Moment 0 has been incorporated into Kaufman's theological method, the user was ready to proceed—logically—from Moment zero to Moments one, two, and three.

Kaufman's theological method, amended to include Moment zero, appears below:

0. The precursor Moment involves acknowledging the social, personal, religious context out of which theists carries out their work
1. The first Moment involves constructing a concept of "world."
2. The second Moment involves construction a concept of "God."
3. The third Moment adjusts the concept of "world" so that it aligns with the concept of God."



moment 1: what is 'world'?

'World,' for Kaufman, "does not represent a reality directly given in or to experience;" it is the label that human beings attach to the broad context of life—the context of all their experiences and activities (GP 207). Whereas 'tree' or 'man' can be an object of experience, 'world' is an imaginative construct, a device used by the mind to bind together and organize the content that it associates with 'reality.' As a construct, 'world' doesn't map directly onto something "out there" to which a person can point (ETM 29). Nonetheless, Kaufman insisted, "it is difficult to see how we could think of ourselves or of our experiences without conceiving them as falling within some context of the whole, i.e., without some concept of world" (ETM 53).

'World' is what he called a 'regulative idea' because, while it can never be directly experienced or perceived, it helps human beings make sense of what they experience and perceive. The goal of theological construction, Kaufman wrote, is "to produce concepts (and world-pictures and stories)" such as 'world' to "make possible adequate orientation in life and the world" (ETM 39). For this reason, a better starting point than one's experience when it comes to understanding how one grasps and conceives of the world—"the structured or unified totality of all that is"—is a consideration of "the purpose or function of the concept 'world'" (GP 166).

In ‘world,’ the multiple components of an individual’s experiences are brought together into “a unified whole;” or, put more simply, ‘world’ is “the idea of the *whole*” of reality (ETM 52, italics are Kaufman’s). Drawing on Kant’s description of the mind’s synthetic tendencies, Kaufman argued that human beings unify reality into a “whole;” even when the “parts” are “quite diverse, even mutually inconsistent” (ETM 53). In a certain sense, according to Kaufman, the work of theologically constructing the concept of ‘world’ is similar to the work of an artist because it relies on the imagination to unify and order reality, an activity that “is to some extent controlled by aesthetic considerations of harmony and balance, consistency and contrast.” However, the work of theology does not limit itself—as the work of an artist sometimes does, to a particular segment of experience, “attempting to set it forth clearly and distinctly”—but rather takes an interest in all of reality (ETM 39). Indeed, the concept of world must remain dynamic; it constantly requires reconstruction, “as new experience and further reflection on experience show earlier conceptions to be inadequate or misleading” (ETM 54). While the metaphor of the ‘whole’ captures the *formal* character of ‘world,’ Kaufman emphasized that ‘whole’ expresses the relationship between the “items and dimensions” of ordinary experience and thus offers no information about what, empirically, “the world is like” (ETM 56).

Whatever approach the users of his theological method chose, Kaufman stipulated that they should strive for “universality and comprehensiveness” as they constructed their concept of ‘world’ so that this concept might find “a kind of public acceptance as a proper home in which to live” (ETM 41). As such, the concept of ‘world’ should take into account “the terrors and joys, the triumphs and failures, the striving and the repose, the loves and hatreds...” of ordinary existence. It should range from the complex political and economic conditions of the present day to the “intimacy of personal communion.” It should deal with and “be relevant to problems of conservation of the environment on this planet, but also address “personal crises of despair and meaninglessness...” Because theological work, for Kaufman, must attempt to be empirically sound and “objective,” ‘world’ should also integrate data from “the natural and social sciences, and history” (ETM 40).

In addition, additional metaphors “or models of a more descriptive sort” were needed to ensure that the final version of the construct more accurately described the world that human beings experienced. According to Kaufman, metaphors or models are available to elaborate a specific view of the whole of reality and its parts. “Some of the models emphasize more our physical experience...others, our moral or religious upbringing,” etc. (ETM 57). In all cases, the user should attempt to generalize one or more of these models so as to make possible consistent and coherent thinking about a

conception of the whole “that does justice to all elements and dimensions of experience.” Though choosing appropriate models may strike some as a “mere speculative game,” it counted as much more for Kaufman—it was, rather, “an attempt to articulate an intuition or understanding of what, finally, is *real*” (ETM 57).

Contemporary culture, “in all domains,” he held, offered a wealth of “categories and concepts” helpful for “grasping various dimensions of experience and the world.”

Contemporary culture also offered a wealth of “intuitions and visions of what the structure and meaning of whole might be” (ETM 57-58).

Helpful categories and concepts, according to Kaufman, could be found in these contemporary sources (ETM 58):

1. Astrophysics’ description of the cosmos
2. Atomic physics’ theories about the fundamental building blocks of matter
3. Biology’s conception of life as a complex evolutionary structure
4. Psychology’s and sociology’s interpretation of the self and of society
5. Poets’, artists’, novelists’ and prophets’ illuminations of experience and life

Since all conceptions of God presuppose notions of the world, whatever scheme theists chose to characterize ‘world’ must be fully rendered in order to achieve a “completely articulated theology.” And since theological concepts must bear a relationship to the ordinary experiences of human beings and reflect what we perceive as real, this point of contact provides a test for the validity of theological work. It becomes possible to ask whether the concept of world—that of an individual or of a

religious tradition—does “justice to all the multifarious features of experience.” It becomes possible to ask whether the “operative metaphors and images” included in its content cohere and come together in “genuine” unity (ETM 58).

moment 2: who is ‘God’?

The second Moment of Kaufman’s theological method involves imaginatively constructing a concept or image of God (ETM 70). In a theistic understanding, the world described in Moment 1, Kaufman held, is not interpreted as merely neutral about the fate of creatures but as the intentional creation of an active and beneficent God. Hence, he concluded, “the theologian’s proper business is not so much to develop a concept of the world as to construct an adequate concept of God” (ETM 59). The world, “seen as the appropriate ‘home’ for human beings,” is pervaded and ordered by a “purposiveness” and love which make possible “genuine human fulfillment” (ETM 37-38). These assumptions enable theists to invest the world “with the deepest possible humane meaning and value.” Human life, endowed with consciousness and intentionality as well as with a “longing for genuine understanding, love, and communion,” can be understood as grounded “in a hospitable cosmic order, an order symbolized in terms of the purposes, love, and care of a fundamentally personal God” (ETM 38).

In Moment 2, Kaufman insisted that God and world not be collapsed one into the other in a Spinoza-like manner. Only in comparison with, and in relation to a separate and distinct concept of world can a concept of God be constructed. Kaufman offered two reasons for this requirement: First, the "fundamental reason for introducing talk about God" would be jeopardized. Second, an important role for the concept, God, as the ultimate reference point, is to limit and relativize 'world.' Thus, in order to limit and relativize 'world,' God must remain distinct from the world.

To introduce the concept of God is to propose an ultimate other than or beyond the world...who...alone is an appropriate object of our full devotion. Such an emphasis effects a profound relativization of the concept of world: it can no longer be regarded as the last point of reference in terms of which life is to be oriented and understood (ETM 60).

Crucial for Kaufman: All dimensions of finite reality or 'world', including human beings (who are part of finite reality or 'world') along with their hopes, aspirations, goals, values, moral principles, and relationships, are to be "relativized and limited by God." Hence, the God-construct, impinging as it does upon the world and "every feature and dimension" of existence, must be taken into account "at every turn." As the ultimate relativizer, the concept of God imposed itself, "not simply as the fulfiller" of wishes and hopes as God is often imagined, but also as constraint—as a God who diminishes or even destroys (ETM 61). In this sense, the concept of God, in its

relativizing function, pointed to a more common theological and religious understanding of God—that of mystery with its attendant awe and fear.

The abstract features of the God-construct enabled Kaufman to link this relativizing and constraining God to traditional understandings of God. Kaufman called attention to these abstract elements because the God-construct shared them with the God of tradition who “always transcends and escapes our grasp.” He pointed to the relativizing God described in the Book of Job and to the book’s struggle to understand “humanity’s littleness and ignorance before God;” he also pointed to the ‘negative way’ developed in the work of Pseudo-Dyonisius, to Thomas Aquinas’ parsing of the use of analogical language when speaking of God, and to the God that Anselm defined as “‘that than which nothing greater can be conceived’.” Perhaps to reassure more traditional users of his method that it did not constitute a radically different approach, Kaufman insisted that the abstractness of the God-construct was not a novelty. Rather, the practice of ascribing formal elements to God had long been recognized as important in the tradition of theology. Indeed, this element, in Kaufman’s view, was sometimes “concealed in formulas which appear to give a description of what God is, but in fact only state *rules* to guide” the construction of God (EMT 61-62). These various approaches, for Kaufman, relied on comparisons between what humans could know and the mystery that was God.

While the relativizing function specified “the structural relation between the concepts of God and world” and thus had practical effects, it remained an abstract or formal way to understand God. Thus, the second Moment of Kaufman’s method is not limited to specifying God’s relativizing attributes because, the concept of God, he wrote “plays a much more concrete and existentially significant role in human life” than relativizing ‘world’ (EMT 62). Besides God’s abstract or formal dimension, the other important dimension, Kaufman held, is this concept’s “human meaning,” or that “which most persons have in mind when they speak of him [sic]” (ETM 64). In addition to the formal and highly metaphorical features that relativize the world, the God-construct must have, Kaufman argued, material and concrete features to give God a “humanized and humanizing quality” (ETM 65). Such a quality is lacking in abstract elements like light, truth, or “the great Relativizer of all things finite” (ETM 67). For this reason, God’s person-like dimension of “human meaning” provided a crucial counterpart to the formal features or relativizing dimensions discussed above. If God, Kaufman wrote, was to be relevant to the deepest needs and longings of human beings and capable of providing existential “fulfillment,” then this concept must be “filled out materially and concretely” with images, concepts, and metaphors drawn from everyday human life (ETM 65, 70-71).

For Kaufman, a God with no relationship to the actual contours of ordinary existence did not count as God. Indeed, Kaufman wrote, this sort of construct was, for all practical purposes, a “failure” (ETM 70). Since, over its arc, human life is plagued with crises and terrors, God must serve as a center of orientation on which theists can rely (ETM 64). Kaufman emphasized that theological work was not a speculative competition in which every theologian tried to outdo the other by imagining a God more baroque than the last. Rather, theology was “the attempt, through hard thinking and imaginative construction, to present the Real with which humans have to do” (ETM 70). However, because the concept of God relied on human terms, concepts, and metaphors, it would likely include anthropomorphic and objectifying terms. Indeed, Kaufman asserted, a humanly significant concept of God will almost inevitably be person-like in certain respects in order to be grasped and understood. When God was approached as one who loved and cared for us like a parent, especially in times of need or crisis, then

‘God’ is seen to designate the ultimate ground for and security of human life, that which is continually working to help ‘make human life more human’ (Paul Lehman). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that such metaphors as ‘merciful father’ or ‘powerful savior’ were from very early on prominent in talk about God and that they remain among those which are most existentially meaningful to many (EMT 64).

However, the resulting concept, Kaufman worried, was susceptible to the Feuerbachian charge that theological work merely creates pictures of God in the image of perfected human beings. Thus, Kaufman insisted, no concept of God should be a simple extension of the human. Though God is “in certain respects an idealization of the human,” the finite limits of persons cannot substitute for God’s ‘beyond’ limits, Kaufman wrote, nor can the idealization of the human be “given license” for unlimited expansion and development. History showed that if such idealizations were reined in, the resulting concepts of God were capable of guiding the self to “stretch and grow in new directions, transforming itself, and its understanding of itself.” It was these concepts of God that had facilitated the long arc of human improvement (ETM 67).

Hence, while God’s abstract or metaphorical features enabled God to serve as the ultimate point of reference, the great Relativizer also called into question the cherished values and meanings of human beings. Indeed, Kaufman argued that God’s abstract dimension even called into question the adequacy of the God-concept itself. God, Kaufman held, relativized all the activities, goals, norms, and hopes of human beings, but also destabilized attempts to grasp God definitively either “in concept or image” (ETM 67). Because the concept of God relativized everything, including itself, no concept of God—regardless of how carefully thought out—could be regarded as complete or final. God’s “absoluteness” as Relativizer, Kaufman wrote, also

undermined the “idolatrous” tendencies of theists to justify their personal “wants and programs” by ascribing them to God’s will (ETM 67).

A balance between the formal and the material dimensions of God must be sought, Kaufman insisted. On the one hand, the formal dimension, by itself, was “abstract and empty,” divorced from the trials and triumphs of human life except in the sense of serving as an ultimate point of reference and providing a relativizing role (ETM 67). On the other hand, God must be filled out “materially and concretely” if this concept was to be meaningful and humanizing. The humanizing dimension, however, when “overemphasized,” could lead to an undesirable anthropocentrism (ETM 68). For this reason, Kaufman insisted on constructs that included and preserved tension between God’s relativizing function and humanizing function. Each of these elements was necessary, in Kaufman’s view, “to qualify and correct the other.” Ideally, they remained “in uneasy balance” (ETM 68):

The genius of the word “God” is that it unites the relativizing and the humanizing motifs and holds them together in one concept. Thus, that which serves to call into question everything we do and are and experience is at the same time apprehended as ultimately humane and beneficent... (ETM 68).

In *The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God* (1981), Kaufman demonstrated how to use the method described in *An Essay* to construct a concept of God. Though he warned that the result was little more than a sketch of a “critical modern theistic position,” the God that he sought to construct must include a

"powerful internal dialectic" between 1) the "quasi-human or anthropomorphic images" whereby God is understood as a "humanizing center of orientation" and 2) the formal or abstract elements of mysteriousness and unknowability whereby God is understood as "the relativizer of everything human and finite" (TI 35). At stake, for Kaufman, is what he called reification—taking particular images, metaphors, or concepts of God and raising them to the level of absolute. When the internal dialectic of a God-construct was out of balance, "attraction in diverse directions of incompatible values" pulled adherents in irreconcilable directions and could result in "intemperate subservience to particular values" (TI 32). When, by contrast, the internal dialectic was in proper balance, the concept of God provides a relativizing and humanizing frame of orientation capable of bringing

true fulfillment and meaning to human life. It sums up, unifies, and represents in a personification what are taken to be the highest and most indispensable human ideals and values, making them a visible standard for measuring human realization, and simultaneously enabling them to be attractive of loyalty and devotion which can order and continuously transform individuals and societies toward fulfillment (TI, 32).

I will assess this dimension of Kaufman's theological method at great length in Chapter 3. Kaufman also argued that being aware of the constructive and imaginative nature of the image/concept of God protected theologians against the "destructive heteronomy" of traditional images (ETM 69). The Bible, he pointed out, included many

images of God—some depicted God in a way that legitimized “the lowest of human instincts;” other passages encouraged “renewal and reform” (ETM 68). A few of these images could, and had, been used to underwrite horrible acts of violence against individuals or communities. Kaufman’s second Moment gave users of his method greater freedom to entertain, *on their own merits*, various models for constructing the concept of God, and to embrace or reject these models without regard for their scriptural or traditional validity. At the same time, because of the two important functions performed by the concept of God, this Moment did not give users license to choose these models “arbitrarily;” they must take into account the motifs of relativization (abstract elements) and humanization (concrete elements) when selecting them (ETM 69).

Kaufman summarized the theological work performed by the second Moment by identifying five major considerations to be taken into account when developing a concept of God (ETM 69):

1. Formal requirements

The relativizing requirement in relation to the First Moment (the “world”) means that either images and metaphors will meet these requirements or they will only be used with “the greatest caution.”

2. Human significance

The concept’s humanizing “religious power and moral implications...must be carefully examined.

3. Logical considerations

The metaphors chosen must have logical consistency and coherence both internally and in relation to each other.

4. Aesthetic considerations

Metaphors and models should be appropriately balanced over and against each other; they should also be synthesized “into a harmonious and elegant whole” capable of attracting affection and devotion.

5. Contextual considerations

The concerns, problems, and needs underlying concrete situations play a role since the concept of God must be relevant to actual human beings and their unique religious and other commitments—a Christian, for example, might develop a concept of God using, as normative, important creedal definitions or the figure of Christ, or a concept “of special significance to the poor...” However, theists should limit the number of such considerations that they include lest their concept devolve into one that represents “merely parochial and partisan interests” (ETM 69-70).

God-constructs, as products of the human imagination, suffered from the limitations of this faculty, Kaufman warned, but taking the guidance provided by the five considerations listed above could improve the outcome. More importantly, attention to those considerations should yield a ‘real’ God-construct—a God-construct that can be “grasped as the center of orientation” in life and can be “acknowledged as the one” worthy of worship and service (ETM 70). When Kaufman describes a concept of God as ‘real,’ he is not referring to God’s actual existence but rather to the real God who is “grasped as the center of orientation for life” and who is “acknowledged as the one to be worshipped and served” (ETM 70).

moment 3: adjusting world to God

Since the way in which world was understood depended on the way in which its center of orientation was understood, a third Moment was required. This Moment returned to the concept of world and secured its alignment to the concept of God. It was, Kaufman argued, “indispensable” if the God-construct was to be “viable” as an ultimate reference point to the world-construct (ETM 70). Thus, whenever a change was made to the concept of world in Moment 1 or to the concept of God in Moment 2, the concept of world needed to be reformulated so that it fit the concept of God “intelligibly.” The purpose of the third Moment of Kaufman’s theological method was to adjust the concept of world, so that, although world was generated independently from God, world always cohered with God. Because the imaginative God-construct was, of the two concepts, the one that limited and relativized the world, it had priority, Kaufman insisted, over the concept of world. As a result, whenever adjustments were made to God, world could require adjustments (EMT 71).

If the concept of God included only formal motifs, the task of securing a seamless fit between God and world would be a straightforward affair. However, material images and metaphors were often introduced into the concept of God to give it “sufficient concreteness to evoke human devotion.” The introduction of these

material qualities, Kaufman argued, made it “probable” that tensions could arise between world and God. The theological task, then, of aligning these two concepts meant trying to understand the significance or value that certain constructs of God could have on human life.

Kaufman’s Critique of Gustafson’s Concept of God

In his 1988 essay, “How Is God to Be Understood in a Theocentric Ethics?”¹⁴ Kaufman analyzed the two-volume *Theocentric Ethics*, focusing on religious ethicist James Gustafson’s understanding of God (GTE 14).¹⁵ Kaufman’s comments on the strengths and failures of Gustafson’s efforts are helpful in identifying the components of God-constructs that Kaufman deemed important if, in his view, these concepts were to count as properly dialectical. Of note: his intense engagement with Gustafson’s ideas in all likelihood contributed to Kaufman’s eventual decision to abandon significant parts of his Phase-II theology and shift to the religious naturalist direction in Phase III—a phase whose positions he articulated five years later in his 1993 *In Face of Mystery*.

Late in Phase II, he already found much that was commendable in Gustafson’s writings. He agreed, for example, with Gustafson’s accusation that “traditional”

¹⁴ Gordon D. Kaufman, “How is God to Be Understood in a Theocentric Ethics,” review of *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*, by James M. Gustafson. See below for the rest of the citation.

¹⁵ James M. Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*, Vol. 1 and 2: *Theology and Ethics*, Reprint Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1983).

Christianity is generally human-centered and utilitarian, an orientation that “is not helpful in dealing with the central problems of modern life.” Kaufman also agreed with Gustafson’s view that theological work needed to be based on “the theocentric strands of the Christian tradition” when “attempting to construct a viable framework for the orientation of life today” (GTE 24). ‘Theocentric,’ on Kaufman’s interpretation of Gustafson, meant a “particular way of ‘construing’” the order found in human experiences and in the world. The way in which we construe this order offers the possibility of adopting a non-human-centered perspective on experience and on the world. Adopting such a perspective helps “us” overcome the all-too-common “provincialism and narrow vision in our thinking” (GTE 19-20).

However, Kaufman mostly reacted negatively to Gustafson’s writings. The reasons are instructive for those who want greater clarity about what Kaufman considered positive and negative features of God-constructs. Kaufman was critical of Gustafson’s conception of God on two counts: 1) he failed to provide “adequate justification for moving beyond talk of nature or the world to talk about God,” and 2) he failed to provide “adequate justification for characterizing God in the way he wishes” (GTE 24). I will discuss these two counts in turn.

1. **Gustafson’s Problem #1: failing to provide reasons for moving beyond talk of nature or the world to talk about God**

Kaufman expressed frustration that Gustafson's theological views merely (in his estimation) reflected Gustafson's personal attachment to his Reformed Protestant tradition. Gustafson's theism was unacceptable on the grounds that it was based on a "sentimental attachment to God-talk." Kaufman reached this conclusion partly based on what he viewed as Gustafson's failure to provide solid reasons why "ethics should be conceived theocentrically rather than naturalistically," Also objectionable—the absence of a public dimension to Gustafson's theology (ETM 23). Because Gustafson could not offer "publicly convincing reasons," his views struck Kaufman as pious and confessional (ETM 23). At times, Gustafson seemed to acknowledge that religious experiences alone do "not provide sufficient grounds for construing everything theistically," and that theology must be understood as imaginative construction—two views that matched Kaufman's. However, Gustafson, Kaufman argued, did not take the next step of considering "the grounds and procedures for...constructive work" (ETM 23-24). Instead, Gustafson assumed, according to Kaufman, that because his central claims about God emerged from "a sort of simple and direct 'reflection' on 'experience,'" nothing further was required to ground them (ETM 24).

Also problematic, for Kaufman, was the way in which Gustafson embraced his Reformed Protestant tradition's emphasis on the reality, majesty, and power of God. Kaufman faulted this emphasis for Gustafson's disregard for the dialectic on which

Kaufman's theological method rested. Instead, Gustafson flattened God to a single-dimension—that of transcendence. Gustafson's God was both "completely independent and free of all other beings" and "the source and foundation of all else that exists." In contrast to his self-existent God, Gustafson, Kaufman reported, understood the whole of the natural order, including humanity, as entirely sustained by God's activity and, as such, dependent on God in all respects (GTE 25). The ascription of God's absolute independence from humanity and of humanity's absolute dependence on God, Kaufman charged, reflected Gustafson's Calvinist roots with its "heavy emphasis on God's radical otherness from humanity" (GTE 26).

As a result of his "zeal for God's utter independence from everything human," Gustafson's "totally impersonal" version of God appeared "to have no special concerns for human well-being." Without intelligence and intentions, this God, Kaufman held, could not be meaningful in people's lives. Gustafson's concept of God was problematic, according to Kaufman, since it served "neither a moral reality nor a guarantor that we live in a moral universe" (GTE 27). Given Gustafson's understanding of God, Kaufman questioned why, for reasons other than a sentimental attachment to his Reformed tradition's God, Gustafson was unwilling "to use a straightforward ecological naturalism as the basic framework" for his theocentric ethics (GTE 27). Gustafson "dehumanized and depersonalized" God, Kaufman wrote, to the point

where God did little more than secure the “structure of natural powers, processes, and events.” This ‘structure,’ Kaufman argued, is generally the role human beings associate with ‘nature’ (GTE 27). Why not call Gustafson’s God, ‘nature,’ he asked, since Gustafson was essentially describing “the structure and order of an inanimate being and of life” (GTE 27).

Though Gustafson was right, Kaufman acknowledged, to “give a certain primacy to naturalistic metaphors” because he “rightly sees” that “it is a mistake to maintain that God is chiefly concerned with our distinctly human interests,” Kaufman also argued that Gustafson (or any other theist) must distinguish the concept of God from the concept of nature (GTE 30). Just as God must remain separate from world in order to remain a cent, only by remaining separate from nature can a concept of God be given “that special significance for humans that nature (of itself alone) can never have” (GTE 30).

2. Gustafson’s Problem #2: failing to provide “adequate justification for characterizing God in the way he wishes”

For Kaufman, it was not clear how the structure described above by Gustafson could be, “without very important additions...understood as the source and ground” and sustaining power of what is “*distinctive to our humanity...*” (GTE 28). By “*distinctive to our humanity*” Kaufman meant that which “distinguishes” human existence “from other modes of life and reality.” Unique to human beings, Kaufman

held, was self-consciousness, intentionality and choice, language, imagination, creativity, accepting responsibility, making and keeping promises and other commitments, love and loyalty and forgiveness for others, and the capacity to live together in communities governed by freedom and justice (GTE 28). These qualities, abilities, and capacities, Kaufman argued, were the ones which human beings, “cherish above all others as those things ‘that make life worth living’” (GTE 28). Because, for him, God-constructs were intelligible only if they correlated in some way to actual experience,¹⁶ he objected to Gustafson’s concept of God because it lacked metaphors, images, and experiences drawn from ordinary life and thus lacked humanness and the ability to “sustain us in our distinctively human ventures” (GTE 29).

IV. Kaufman’s Critique of Phase II

constructing world and God is a gradual process

When he began to work on his 1993 *In Face of Mystery*, Kaufman intended to “proceed in terms of the method” he had worked out in the *Essay*. However, as he attempted to use his Phase II method, Kaufman decided that it needed “significant alterations and adjustments” (ETM xi). Some of his readers had criticized the *Essay*, he reported, because it seemed to place “considerable emphasis” on a sequential order

¹⁶ James, 131.

of construction. While he had described the method's three Moments as if one Moment followed the other, Kaufman had also emphasized that this order was not required. Indeed, he had used the term "Moment" instead of "Step" to emphasize that each of the method's components could be engaged separately and in any order. Nonetheless, when he himself tried to deploy his Phase II method, he decided that, rather than an independent relationship, a "dialectical" relationship between Moment One (construction of 'world') and Three (adjustment of 'world' to 'God') was required. He no longer held that one could make changes to 'world' in Moment One and leave it at that. Since 'world,' for Kaufman, must remain 'under' God, changes to 'world' required engaging Moment Three to make certain that it remained aligned with 'God'; if not, it should be adjusted to restore alignment. By the time he completed *In Face of Mystery* Kaufman had altered his Phase II method to bring these two moments together in "direct interdependence" which, in the earlier *Essay*, he had not expected would be "possible or appropriate" (ETM xii).

Kaufman also decided that constructing 'world' in Moment One of the *Essay*'s method involved "elements of faith-commitment as well as concerns about cognitive cogency" (ETM xii). These faith-commitments, as formulated in Phase II, had a significant impact on the possibility, he asserted, of moving from Moment One to the construction of a concept of God in Moment Two (ETM xii). He found that rather than

proceed to the second Moment—the construction of the concept of God—and eventually to the third Moment, he needed instead to make provisions for a “single gradual process within which...a picture of humanity in the world” could be constructed.¹⁷ Kaufman Phase III theological method retained some of the basic features of Phase II’s Moments but reconceived the construction of the concept of world and of God “as a step-by-step movement of faith and imagination” (ETM xii).

no neat distinction between ego-self and world

Kaufman also criticized his previous Phase II work for assuming the existence of a strong distinction between the ego-self and the world (ETM xiii). In his view, theological construction may be carried out in one of two distinct ways. One way focuses on God’s relation to the world—the “cosmological approach;” the other focuses on human struggles and human crises that elicit a turn to God—the “existential approach” (ETM xii-xiii). His *Essay* relied on a cosmological approach although he had acknowledged that more existential ways of doing theology were also “appropriate and valuable” (ETM xiii). When he reconceived the *Essay*’s three-Moment scheme as a step-by-step movement of faith and imagination in Phase III, he no longer relied on the contrast between “the somewhat more objectified ‘world’-concept of the *Essay* and the strong individualistic ‘ego’-concept of more existential and pietistic” approach. In his view,

¹⁷ Ibid., 478, n1.

these distinctions are whittled down in Phase II and are nearly undetectable. Kaufman “tackled” the contrast by developing a conception of the human as biological and historical; doing so allowed him to overcome the tidy division between the ego-self and the world on which he had believed the *Essay* depended.

In Chapter 8 of this dissertation, I discuss and evaluate the changes that Kaufman advocated to Phase II of his theological method—changes of great enough substance that those familiar with his work agree that his *In Face of Mystery* phase (from 1993 until his death in 2011) constituted a new phase.¹⁸ I will analyze these changes and discuss why his Phase III approach to constructing God is inferior to that of Phase II, in part because he abandoned his concerns about the difficulty of humans to transcend their desires, projects, and goals. Convinced of this difficulty during Phase II, he expected users of his theological method to associate, with God, a set of standards capable of relativizing and calling into question their individual desires, projects and goals. During Phase III, Kaufman’s God became so abstract that there was no possibility of integrating moral constraints into this construct; his own, earlier warnings forgotten, Kaufman merely integrated ethical reflection into his theological

¹⁸ Kenneth Nordgren calls Kaufman’s Phase II and Phase III methods, the “later” and the “late” method respectively. See Chart 2 at the start of this chapter for other schemes of categorization. These classifications indicate that scholars familiar with Kaufman decided, probably on their own, that changes in the direction of his work warranted making distinctions and could be organized into phases.

anthropology. By doing so, he opened his concept of God to the critique that he had launched against Gustafson; God, so conceived, could serve neither as “a moral reality nor [as] a guarantor that we live in a moral universe”.

V. Phase III of Kaufman’s Theology

world must be intelligible to science and history

During Phase II, Kaufman focused on the importance of God as the concept indicating that which offers “proper orientation in life” and providing courage and comfort when faced with life’s “severe crises” (IFM 27). The word God, he wrote, invoked that

which is absolutely trustworthy and unfailing, that to which we can turn in an hour of great confusion or dire need, that to which we can give ourselves without reservation. Putting this in more familiar religious language: only God...is the proper object for our unqualified loyalty, devotion, and worship. (IFM, 27)

However, in Phase III of his theological method, Kaufman rejected a person-like understanding and reconceived God in purely abstract terms—as “serendipitous creativity”—thereby placing benison-conferring happenstance and creativity at the center of his conception of God. For him, this God more successfully captured the underlying reality of ultimate mystery, a reality that could be discerned throughout the cosmos.

During his naturalist phase, Kaufman replaced Phase II's moments with steps, which he calls Steps of Faith. The first step, Step of Faith 1, involves reflection about whether to embrace and be guided by a God and a commitment to "do" theology. The next three steps, Steps of Faith 2-4, involve taking additional steps of faith and making choices related to describing the world. For Kaufman, Steps of Faith 2, 3, and 4, taken together, describe World as an evolutionary-historical process permeated with serendipitous creativity. These three steps map onto Phase II's Moment 1, but for Kaufman, they show how the first moment, parsed into three finer-grained decisions, becomes capable of providing an account of World "which is intelligible in relation to modern scientific and historical knowledge." This account, he warned, "must leave some openness, some space for developing an image/concept of God for today" while also remaining attentive to the manner in which the symbol God has become a problem for contemporary people (IFM 301).

imaginative concepts are unreliable representations of God

The next Step of Faith, step 5, is dedicated to the symbol, God. (Step of Faith 6, which I will not discuss, is dedicated to the symbol, Christ.) In this step, Kaufman argued that, to formulate a concept of God capable of providing a proper focus of human devotion and orientation requires abandoning the traditional imagery and concepts associated

with God. Indeed, he insisted, theists must give up any notion that imaginative metaphors and concepts, whether traditional or self-generated, are reliable representations of God. They must also resist reifying traditional images and concepts associated with God, or reifying the images and concepts that they have themselves chosen for God. Kaufman means, by reification, "taking the content of a symbol (or image or word" to be a proper description or exact representation" of God, or, he explained, "in Kant's phrase, it is 'treating our thoughts as things'" (IFM 330). Metaphors like "creator" and "lord" and "father" may be drawn from everyday experience to describe God but if they are inappropriately reified, "we take them to mean that God really is a creator/lord/father" (IFM 330).

Kaufman bemoaned his observation that humans have long struggled to maintain a distinction between the cognitive images and concepts that they value and material objects in the world; for this reason, he was not surprised that the early history of Christian thought records the appearance of reification: "From early on the creator/lord/father was taken to be an objectively existing powerful agent-self, a supernatural character" (IFM 331). But these creations of the human imagination, reified and objectified through the ages led to thinking "about God as an arbitrary, imperial potentate, a solitary eminence existing 'somewhere' in a glorious transcendence of all else." It is "a serious mistake" to confuse God for such a being

because received traditions like this one undermine rather than enhance human agency (IFM 332). However beloved it may be, if a tradition is “inadequate to or destructive to human life and the environment within which “it emerged, then it must be transformed or eliminated. Kaufman predicted that:

As we give up literalization and reification of the traditional imagery and concepts, some things dear to traditional pieties will be undermined. God will no longer be pictured or conceived as a personal being in the heaven above who...devised a detailed divine plan that included a special place and task for each of us; and we will no longer, therefore, be able to imagine ourselves as in direct personal interaction with this divine being, as we seek to learn and do ‘his’ will. Much of the intensely personalistic flavor of the relationship of individuals to God, which traditional piety cultivated and enjoyed, we can now see was the product of a rather literalistic reading of the metaphors which dominated the tradition (IFM 332-333).

Kaufman recommended that theists choose to equate the evolutionary process at work in the world as a “kind of serendipitous creativity pervading the cosmos, bringing into existence new modalities of being in and through temporal evolutionary processes” (IFM 290). Contemporary science taught that “serendipitous evolutionary” processes “create and sustain human life,” and contemporary historical understandings taught that historical and cultural processes provided the context for life. If people sought a “theological-perspective,” they “should connect” these processes to the word, God.

Determined to understand God in this way, Kaufman set aside most, if not all, terms, concepts, and metaphors from ordinary experience. The relationship between

the contours of day-to-day life and the God of serendipitous creativity was tenuous at best. Why did Kaufman shift from imagining God as *that* to which we can turn at times of confusion or need, to insisting on the idea of God as serendipitous creativity and the source of evolutionary and cultural changes over time? Kaufman left Phase II behind because he was looking for a concept of God to which contemporary persons could fully commit in light of scientific discoveries. Kaufman was certain that if individuals reflected on what they knew about *this* world, they would note, as his friend and colleague Gustafson insisted, the “biological, historical and other changes” that affect all of human life (IFM 290). Likely swayed by Gustafson’s insistence that a concept of God ought to conform to the empirical constraints of science, imagining a divine being outside the limits of human knowing became unacceptable to Kaufman. Contemporary people, he was now convinced, no longer found a transcendent God to be intelligible. He came to believe that it was absurd to assign God to a realm “beyond” human experience when doing so defied the purview of empirical data. Instead, Kaufman insisted, today’s science reveals what people a century ago did not yet know—the universe is observable across hundreds of millions of light years. Any attempt to defend the claim that God can be found somewhere beyond this vast universe, Kaufman held, was no longer an option.

Metaphors for God such as “ground of being, first cause, creative event, power, life, [or] a vague ‘cosmic love’” were an improvement over traditional metaphors like ‘Creator,’ ‘Lord,’ and ‘Father’ and better suited, Kaufman argued, to today’s scientifically-informed context. Nonetheless, in his view, even such metaphors represented unsuccessful attempts at rescuing something of the original meaning associated with the word “God.” They were little more than watered down versions of the original Creator/Lord/Father metaphors on which they relied for their religious power (IFM 306-7). However much theists wished to rehabilitate traditional images of God, Kaufman rejected the attempt to dress the “old” God in new garb. The desire for a concept of God that resonated “more directly” with modern “experience and understanding of the world” could not be sated, he was convinced, by arbitrarily “attaching the name ‘God’” to a process or power that can be observed in the cosmos even if the process or power is a plausible candidate. Whatever process or power theists chose, Kaufman insisted, they “must be able to give good reasons” for characterizing it as God (IFM 307). To this end, theists should attempt to clarify their conceptions and images of God. For Kaufman this meant that they should “try to speak only in terms of *this* world, of the realities of *this* life—making it as clear as possible in what respects” conceptions and images have “a firm basis in...experience and

knowledge" and how they have been imaginatively elaborated and interpreted (IFM 326).

Kaufman no longer addressed his theological work to theists who sought to be more systematic and coherent when speaking of God, a concept of foundational value for the proper and guidance orientation that it provided them when they faced difficult moral decisions, and for the courage and comfort that it offered them when they faced life's crises. Instead, he addressed kindred spirits who, as he now did, treated science as the final arbiter in questions of ultimate reality. One might wonder why Kaufman kept a notion of God (as he himself had wondered with regard to Gustafson), given the thinness of the metaphor of serendipitous creativity that he developed and defended. The succinct answer is that Kaufman was convinced that a concept of God (rightly conceived) remained necessary to ground and enliven humanistic commitments. Far from arguing that human beings abandon God, Kaufman held that only this concept could "take up and hold together" the "vast and complex processes" of the cosmos "in a distinctive and powerful symbol that accent[ed] their meaning for human existence" (IFM 322). To abandon God, he wrote, "is to say that this world is all there is, and therefore we must simply live within it as best we can" (IFM 326). This atheistic option must be rejected, Kaufman explained, because without the ability to carry out an assessment and critique of values, goals, and projects guided by a transcendent

reference point, the sole orientation with which human beings are left with “our own standards, criteria, and dreams” (IFM 326).

Individuals must retain a concept of God, even if only as ‘cosmic order’ to remind them always to contrast their inadequate and not-yet-just and state of affairs with a sought-after state of affairs most conducive to the full expression of their humanity. People with a concept of God, Kaufman insisted, benefited from a call outside of themselves to situate themselves properly in the tension between an ‘is’ and a ‘could-be-better-for-more-people’. A concept of God is a prod to remaining aware of, and attempting to reduce, the distance between dehumanizing values, goals, and projects and those that contribute to human well-being and a meaningful life (IFM 350). God, Kaufman was convinced, could provide, like no other concept, a focus for the “reordering of human affairs in a more humane and ecologically responsible direction” (IFM 351).

God as serendipitous creativity

Although Kaufman preferred to conceive of God as serendipitous creativity and provided several reasons to justify why this metaphor best captured the cosmic order, he also realized that a person-like God remained, more often than not, the kind of God that humans sought. He understood that despite the shortcomings of a more traditional concept of God based “on the model of the self-conscious and dynamic

human agent," this concept continued to demonstrate, "in many quarters," great effectiveness in guiding and orienting human life (IFM 272-273).

Nonetheless, he identified four problematic features associated with the kind of person-like concept of God that he advocated in Phase II. First, there was the empirical hurdle mentioned earlier—belief in a person-like God was unsustainable in light of what science revealed about the universe; God as creator/lord/father, Kaufman argued, failed to reflect the evolutionary-historical trajectory that grounded and sustained humanity in the world and in relation to which contemporary faith needed to define and understand itself. Second, this concept was prone to distortion and error; God was too easily imagined as white and male, etc.; a white and male God was too easily used to legitimate and sanctify male-dominated misogynistic and racist social institutions, customs and practices. Third, a person-like God was prone to reification—a literalistic understanding of the God-construct that confused the available God with the actual God. When reified, God could be described as a creator/lord/father and then upheld as the power that existed in this form (IFM 334-335). Fourth, a person-like God often reflected, Kaufman found, an overly optimistic view of "interpersonal relations" since, for many, relationships with other human beings were too often disappointing, inconstant, fair-weather, or violent. Even in the Personalist Phase of his theological work, Kaufman acknowledged as much:

...our knowledge of human finitude and failure, of sin and death, makes it impossible for us to rest absolutely secure in any of our human attachments....For no human being or community of human beings, after all, is able—physically or psychologically—to be absolutely dependable (TI 61).

For theists who were determined to preserve something akin to the metaphor of “father” in spite of its demonstrated tendency to underwrite sexism and paternalism, Kaufman advised that they choose the metaphor of “parent” instead. Moreover, they should conceive of God not just as any “parent” but as a loving parent who seeks “fulfillment and happiness” for the ‘children,’ who is “merciful and forgiving,” and who works toward those childrens’ “full maturity and freedom” (IFM 338). Parenting metaphors would, *if* rightly conceived, capture, in a more conventional manner, the core dimension of the meaning conveyed by the concept of God as creative serendipity. Although creative serendipity fostered, in Kaufman’s view, more responsive and responsible choices by focusing the attention and devotion of human beings on the ecological and communal dimensions of life, parenting metaphors, when properly construed, could also encourage more responsive and responsible lives by focusing attention and devotion on moral values and virtues like mercy, love, and justice (IFM 340).

While Kaufman insisted that contemporary people retain a concept of God, he remained primarily interested in identifying a concept that could sustain the critique of science and motivate theists to embrace more responsibility toward other human

beings, fellow creatures, and the planet. Kaufman understood that a person-like view of God “provided a kind of ultimate security in life, profound consolation in moments of deep sadness, healing in situations of despair,” yet he had come to believe that “the kind of symbol or concept needed to orient men and women in life today is a symbol which draws upon both our understanding of the world and our awareness of the ultimate mystery of things...” (IFM 307). Kaufman’s fundamental project, then, in Phase III was to identify those features of the traditional God that remained “important, or even indispensable to human life.” The re-conceived concept of God must retain sufficient continuity with the God of the past, Kaufman held, to warrant the use of this term and it must also be shown to “contribute significantly to guiding and orienting human life today” (IFM 306).

VI. Across the Phases of Kaufman’s Theology



Many themes persisted across all three phases of Kaufman's theological work. Among them: a focus on the importance and value of a concept of God to foster a humane and humanizing life. Also: a warning that theists should not erase the distance between world and God. Only in comparison with, and in relation to a separate and distinct world can God be understood, otherwise, talk about God is jeopardized and God's critical role, to limit and relativize 'world,' is undermined and possibly negated altogether. In this dissertation I focus on the second phase of Kaufman's theology. I have described two principal reasons for doing so. First, during this phase, Kaufman designed his theological method to facilitate the construction of God-concepts ranging from a sparse God to a person-like God. This method is of special interest to theists who seek to construct, or more likely re-construct, a concept of God that is existentially meaningful, comforting in times of suffering, and capable of offering them guidance in life. For the theists I have in mind (as did Kaufman), the word, God, "stands for" or "names" the "ultimate point of reference or orientation for all life, action, devotion, and reflection" (ETM 17).

Second, Phase II of Kaufman's theological method is well suited to the hybrid theologies that have become a fixture of the pluralist religious landscapes that characterize this globalizing world. His method, during this phase, is not only open to diverse religious and theological perspectives but also to perspectives that reflect

scientific findings and dangers to the environment. Though imaginatively constructed, God played a central role for theists. But, for those who incorporated a variety of concepts, teachings, texts, and philosophical ideas from multiple religious and cultural traditions or from non-traditional sources to create individualistic theologies, Kaufman's personalist phase provided checks to reduce the risk of producing Feuerbachian—or human-writ-large—God-constructs. And as users of his method constructed or reconstructed their concepts of God, his method included *criteria* to help them identify and select humanizing and relativizing terms, concepts, and metaphors drawn from among the plethora of possible options. For Kaufman, theology was above all a practical discipline (GP 101).

During the personalist phase of his theology, Kaufman recommended that "God" include anthropomorphic characteristics though he did not require them. However, Kaufman argued, unless we conceived of God as person-like, God can't be existentially meaningful to human persons since "the human person is the only reality we know" for which our "concerns are of significance" (ETM 65). It is true that by Phase III, he had decided that theists were unable to resist 1) giving God-constructs ontological status and 2) reifying the anthropomorphic attributes of God-constructs. The only reliable way to deflate these impulses, he decided, was to make an *impersonal* God the proper object of devotion. For these reasons, Kaufman abandoned his personalist phase. Yet,

even in his naturalist phase, Kaufman recognized that many theists continue to opt for a more traditional person-like God. Despite the shortcomings that he came to associate with such a concept, Kaufman granted that it "has been (and still is in many quarters) of great effectiveness in the ordering and orienting of human life" (IFM 272).

A world picture with an person-like God at its core, he wrote in *In Face of Mystery*, continues "to function in important ways, not only among the traditionally pious but also in shaping ideals and goals in society at large" (IFM 273).

This dissertation, as Kaufman agreed during his personalist phase, insists on preserving the capacity, in a theological method, to construct person-like concepts of God for the reasons described above. In Chapter 3 I assess, at length, the benefits and downsides of embracing a person-like concept of God.

Ch. 3

PERSON-LIKE CONCEPTS OF GOD: STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

The contention that divine revelation is the ultimate ground of theological knowledge is not...entirely misguided. For with certain constructions of the concept of God, specifically those based on the model of the human person or agent, knowledge of God will quite properly be understood as depending upon his [sic] act of disclosure: our knowledge of finite personal beings depends heavily on their self-revelatory actions; and knowledge of a God constructed on the basis of such models would also likely to be so conceived...no other way of understanding the knowledge of God would be consistent with the notion of God as fundamentally active being. This point, however, does not stand in opposition to the claim that our theological ideas, particularly our ideas of God, are constructs of the imagination: it means, rather, that it is precisely through the constructive work of the human imagination that God—ultimately reality understood as active and beneficent, as “gracious”—makes himself known.

- Gordon Kaufman

The previous chapter emphasized the originality of Kaufman's work throughout his career, especially his Phase II theological method for constructing concepts of God. During this phase, he assumed that the 'available' God—the God of whom people speak—was an imaginative construct that could provide individuals with a sense of meaning and orientation in life (ETM 29). This chapter delves more deeply into Kaufman's Phase II, focusing on the details of his method whose goal, according to him, was not to explore "various avenues for the knowledge of God" since such epistemological avenues led to dead ends or to unwarranted leaps of faith, but rather "to provide reasons why one should construct the concept of God in one way rather than another." Though exploring whether a given concept of God conforms to Scripture, revelation, or religious experience may be of interest to some theists, for Kaufman, the more important question was whether this concept "facilitates or inhibits humane forms of life" and "what possibilities" it placed within reach of men and women (ETM 30).

Kaufman anticipated that his method would yield God constructs with similarities to human persons who act in the world, rendering it compatible with the basic beliefs of those who trust God to hear their prayers and take an interest in their wellbeing. (NOTE: Just as I use terms like God-construct, concept of God, conception of God, or available God interchangeably, I will also often use the terms

anthropomorphic and person-like interchangeably.) Person-like constructs of God are in keeping with theism's central tenets but they lead to questions about God's agency. Kaufman insisted on a transcendent God to whom it was also possible to ascribe detectable and thus real effects. To explain the intelligibility of such a God, Kaufman drew on "the model of human freedom and agency as experienced within society and culture." At first glance, Kaufman's theological method may give the impression that it simply yields a projected version of human beings that theists then call God. Though Kaufman's Phase II method yielded a transcendent, person-like concept of God about which traditional theological language is appropriate, he also stipulated that the concept should be tested for its humaneness and ability to humanize and that this language should be hedged by self-aware use of contingent metaphorical and symbolic language.

In this chapter, I analyze and assess Kaufman's approach to constructing existentially meaningful and life-orienting God. Though Chapter 2 described Kaufman's Phase II theological method in significant detail but in the discussion that follows, I delve more deeply into his commitment to conceiving of God as transcendent yet also active in the world. I then explore two critiques of Kaufman's conception. I also identify several additional potential difficulties that may result from using Kaufman method. One of those is the risk of reifying one's concept of God. The other potential downside,

mentioned in the previous chapter, but discussed at greater length in this chapter, is the method's openness to constructing anthropomorphic concepts of God. Such concepts are standard for theists especially if they are to be meaningful; hence, Kaufman, during Phase II, was determined to develop a method that took this drive into account. Nonetheless, as Kaufman understood all too well, such concepts easily devolve into anthropocentrism. To counter this possibility, of which Kaufman was well aware, Kaufman recommended public vetting of one's imaginatively constructed God. In the next chapter, I offer an extended analysis of the ethico-humanization criterion, another counter-measure to anthropocentric concepts of God, and describe how this criterion operates to secure valid moral God-constructs.

I focus on critiques of and conceivable difficulties with Kaufman's theological method because the theological method that I advance in this dissertation is based on his. For example, my method assumes, as he does, that most theists embrace person-like God-constructs; my method, like his, encourages and supports the construction of such concepts of God. Hence, by evaluating the limits and liabilities of Kaufman, I concomitantly identify areas that, in my theological method, I will need to eliminate, thwart, or indicate are inherent, but not fatal issues.

I. God: Transcendent and Compatible with Science

Because, Kaufman warns, certain knowledge of God is not available, the symbols, metaphors, concepts, and models that theists necessarily deploy when they wish to talk about God are drawn from the finite world and integrate some person-like traits. Persons, or agents—terms used interchangeably by Kaufman—are understood by him as capable of assuming some control over their existence and of directing it toward certain purposes.¹ Likewise God-constructs who are person-like:

The notion of God...as an agent characterized by freedom and purposiveness and love, is based on the model of human freedom and agency as experienced within society and culture.²

In his Phase II theological work, Kaufman is committed to grounding his constructive efforts in “contemporary terms” by which he means up-to-date scientific data. Since this data, Kaufman argues, is “widely accepted” as giving reliable and reproducible information about the details of the world, it provides “a reasonable point of entry into” theological work (IFM 242). Hence, Kaufman, during Phase II, focuses on developing a coherent account of the transcendent God’s power to act of the world that is compatible with the latest scientific findings.

¹ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 2.

² Gordon Kaufman, “A Problem for Theology: The Concept of Nature,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 59, no. 2 (April 1972): 346.

Kaufman acknowledges that there are plausible alternatives to placing one's trust in a science-compatible person-like God. He numerates several of these and argues against each because, he insists, they pale in comparison to the role that God can play in people's lives:

The word "God" is ordinarily used to indicate or invoke that which will supposedly provide us with proper orientation in life and adequate motivation in face of the most severe crises of life. That is the idea of God is the idea—whatever it might be—which is absolutely trustworthy and unfailing, that to which we can trust in an hour of great confusion or dire need, that to which we can give ourselves without reservation (IFM 27).

Granted, there are skeptics who subscribe to what Kaufman described as a "modern, empirical, secular, and pragmatic temper" and who are "increasingly dubious" about "whether it is either reasonable or necessary to believe in...a transcendent Reality."

The cause or source of human life *can* be attributed to nature itself, Kaufman granted, and the meaning of existence *can* "be found in the cultural values produced by man's creative genius," as well as in "social interaction" whose highest form, he said, is love (GP 8). Nonetheless, the concept of God, for Kaufman, though diminished in "use and vitality" continues to have sufficient force in the lives of people today to serve as the ultimate reference point whenever they need to "distinguish the important from the unimportant" or "the superficial from the significant." Whether made consciously or

not, such distinctions always involve, Kaufman argued, “scales of value or reality” which theists elected to call God (TP 260).

Unwilling to abandon the attempt to conceive of a God who, paradoxically, is both unknowable and yet whose activity in the world is real, Kaufman refuted another option that, like the one described above, he considered unacceptable. This option makes a “sharp division between everyday common experience and religious convictions and experience.” It does so in order to set God apart because once God has assigned a zone that is exempt, and thus “safe” from the kind of scientific scrutiny to which other knowledge claims are subjected, it becomes possible to assert that God exists. Kaufman rejected this fideistic embrace of God—a stance he found among many modern theologians starting with Friedrich Schleiermacher, the “Father” of liberal theology, and continuing through Karl Barth, the founding figure of neo-orthodox theology.³ In contrast, Kant earned Kaufman’s praise and admiration because, although Kant understood that the problems of metaphysics could not be resolved, he nonetheless held that individuals must “never cease struggling with these issues” (Kaufman pointed to Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, A849/B877-A851/B879 as evidence). Indeed, Kaufman wrote of Kant: he “was much the wiser than many of his latter-day (positivistic, existentialistic, and fideistic) followers” (GP 59n).

³ Gordon Kaufman, “Reading Wittgenstein: Notes for Constructive Theologians,” *The Journal of Religion* 79, vol. 3 (July 1999): 420.

Another threat, for Kaufman, to God-constructs that can serve as a source of meaning and as an ultimate point of reference are post-modern questions about the kind of certainty conferred by one's social context. A close reader of Ludwig Wittgenstein, including Wittgenstein's treatise, "On Certainty," Kaufman concluded that in today's globalized world with societies characterized by many religions and cultures, the conditions identified by Wittgenstein as necessary for religious certainty no longer existed. Whereas Kant had taken an interest in identifying the conditions for the possibility for epistemological certainty, Wittgenstein had focused on the conditions for the possibility of socially-conferred certainty. Wittgenstein had argued that one's certitude about what a society considered facts is largely "a function of the convincingness" of that society's "overall world-picture;" moreover, traditional religious knowledge remained convincing and maintained its "givenness" only as long as it continued to fit coherently within that society's "interconnected-whole."⁴

In an earlier age, Kaufman held, claims about God had been an integral part of the unquestioned picture of the world held in common by entire societies and, as such, had conveyed a quality of absolute certainty.⁵ In contrast, today's societies are pluralistic and, every day, people are exposed to and navigate a multitude of world-pictures. Because of diversifying populations, Kaufman deemed that claims in the West

⁴ Kaufman, "Reading Wittgenstein," 418.

⁵ Ibid.

about the Bible and about traditional versions of the religions, previously taken for granted as knowledge, had been called into question by modern scientific findings. Whereas one might continue to find, for example, that God's "salvific activity through Christ for humans" is an important matter, this activity is being re-imagined, Kaufman wrote, to reflect the contemporary view that the miracles ascribed to God in scripture or the "literal 'last judgment' of 'hell'" are "implausible and dispensable."⁶

A globalized social context had undermined socially-conferred religious certainty; it had also led many contemporary believers to resist "any simple straightforward acceptance" of a *single* world picture. In addition, Kaufman found, Westerners enjoy exploring a variety of religious resources and at times integrate the features that they find of interest into their world-pictures. Though those Westerners, including significant numbers of so-called "Nones," continue to believe in God, their God-constructs are often more vague and abstract than the God described in Scripture.⁷ The traditional religious traditions, in Kaufman's view, and the "belief- or knowledge-claims" that some continue to uphold and teach no longer meet the conditions enumerated by Wittgenstein as necessary to foster certitude; as a result, they no longer "provide an unquestioned grounding for all of life in the way they once

⁶ Ibid., 419.

⁷ Ibid.

did.”⁸ Theists, Kaufman insisted, now deemed it important and “appropriate” to distinguish between persuasive and defensible beliefs and those that are “clearly erroneous.”⁹

Skepticism, atheism, fideism were live options for Westerners aware of the limits of epistemological certainty, and globalization and pluralism had led to loss of certainty in the tenets of one’s inherited or adopted religious tradition(s). Nonetheless, Kaufman argued, this state of affairs did not mean that every theist wanted to or should “give up everything.” He intended for his Phase II theological method to help those who accept science’s empirical picture of the world remain theists. Even if their task had been reformulated, theologians like him still had a task to accomplish, he held. This task was to help theists identify and systematize their “implicit” beliefs about God. The resulting God-constructs, Kaufman argued, though lacking epistemological certainty or the “kind of certainty that Wittgenstein spoke about,” preserved enough of the contours of the traditional concept of God to provide theists with the orientation and sense of meaningfulness they sought.

Kaufman was convinced that a “larger ‘interconnected system’” of beliefs about humanity, the world, and God could be identified. The depth of several commitments held in common by many of today’s believers, even if those commitments were largely

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

inchoate and often muddled, pointed to areas of basic agreement. They revealed, Kaufman argued, “some of the remaining, interconnected ‘value-certainties’ of our common life.” For example, “we,” he held, share complexes of “value-certainties about the evil of cruelty and injustice, about the necessity to build community among all humans, about values like truth, justice, goodness, and so on.” If individuals worked together, Kaufman was convinced, to explore these “value-complexes”¹⁰ and bring them into relationship with a basic set of theistic “meaning-complexes,” a God-construct could emerge with a basic content of “sufficient weight to orient and motivate significant moral and religious action and life in today’s world.”¹¹

II. Public Vetting to Combat Anthropocentric God

Throughout Phase II of his theology, Kaufman remained aware of his method’s susceptibility to constructing a God resembling an idealized human instead of a person-like, ultimate point of reference capable of calling into question a theist’s every decision, project, value, and goal. In addition, scholars of religion like Linell Cady, Francis Schussler Fiorenza, and Wayne Proudfoot argued that the subjective turn had had the effect of relegating religion to the privacy of personal life and to the dismissal

¹⁰ Ibid., 420.

¹¹ Ibid.

of theology as “subjective and unargued proclamation.”¹² To reduce the risks of concepts of God as subjective human-writ-large, and of God as unargued-subjective-proclamation, Kaufman advocated public discussion of one’s theological ideas as an aid to developing “clearer and more adequate formulations” (IFM 8-9). Indeed, he himself relied on the critical analysis of his own ideas by his academic colleagues to bring serious problems to light (GP 15-16). For Kaufman, the reflexive task of re-evaluating and re-thinking one’s theology should not be limited to solitary work—most people’s constructions benefitted from responses and suggestions from others.

Imaginative failings, logic problems, incoherent ideas of various kinds were often painfully obvious to interlocutors who were not vested in the God-construct under discussion; thus these ‘others’ could be helpful in identifying theological difficulties.

For his part Kaufman valued and even relied on the written and oral, public and private feedback he received from fellow scholars about his various theological proposals. He reflected deeply on their criticism; when he deemed it was valid, he responded by making changes. In the preface to *God the Problem*, he praised Michael McLain, a colleague, for his detailed critique of the model of interpersonal transcendence (discussed below) and explained why he dropped some of his arguments as a result.

¹² Sheila Greeve Davaney, ed., *Theology at the End of Modernity: Essays in Honor of Gordon D. Kaufman* (Norcross, GA: Trinity Press International, 1981), 5.

Though he anticipated that his theological method would most often lead to person-like God-constructs, his method intentionally remained open to producing abstract, deistic constructs as well as more traditional ones even if, in his opinion, non-person-like constructs are irrelevant to daily life and scripturally-based constructs have been “subject to demonic uses” (GP 58). To obviate the possibility of “demonic,” reified autocratic and misogynistic concepts of God by theists who remained committed to more traditional understandings of God, Kaufman insisted on public purview and commentary regarding constructs of God. The more individuals who have themselves been subject to oppression are present, the more likely such a public vetting would identify concepts of God capable of harm. But Kaufman did not merely rely on open reviews. He also developed an ethico-humanization criterion to provide a standardized moral test, which I discuss at length in the next chapter.

III. A Transcendent God Who Acts: Kaufman’s Defense for most theists, God is person-like and acts in the world

In Phase II of his theological method, Kaufman took seriously the conviction among most theists that God is person-like and acts in the world. He often described God as an agent—although he provides no precise definition of this term, the following definition can be surmised based on a synthesis of Kaufman’s comments: An agent has

a will, may be autonomous and self-sufficient, and may act with deliberation and purposiveness. The act of an agent, Kaufman wrote, is:

...something done or performed, a deed; it is particular and, generally a specific event brought about by an agent...in all cases a particular act has a certain unity and specificity; it is some particular thing achieved, a definite deed done. It is not mere activity, but activity bound together and given a distinct order and structure by the intention of an agent to realize (GP 126).

To conceive of God as carrying out specific deeds or bringing about certain events is important to many theists if God is to qualify, in the words of Thomas Tracy, as "a decisively important actor within a drama that embraces the whole of [the] world and each of us in particular."¹³ For this reason Kaufman insisted not only that any theological method must remain open to ascribing, to God, anthropomorphic attributes like character but also the ability to act in history. This ability, according to Kaufman, figures prominently in religious traditions that have given rise to theological reflection. There is no denying, Kaufman asserted, the power of the "primary language of religious life—the language of prayer and praise, exhortation and encouragement" based on images of God who is depicted as having a personal will. God reveals God's self, theists believe, through what God does.¹⁴

¹³ Thomas F. Tracy, *God, Action and Embodiment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), x.

¹⁴ Ibid., ix.

For thousands of years, Kaufman wrote, successive generations have addressed God as the creator of all things who gave life to humans and intended their lives to “be fulfilled in relation” to God’s self.¹⁵ The theologian who ignores the assumption that God is an important actor in the world and in people’s lives risks developing a theology that is irrelevant since it fails to take into account one of the (if not *the*) foundational tenets of theism. Appropriately attentive to this tenet, Kaufman developed a theological that could accommodate a concept of God capable of bringing “the solace of a superhuman helper who loves each individual,” and to whom anyone could readily pray in his or her own manner.¹⁶

God is autonomous and self-sufficient

Thus, he insisted that God was a dynamic God—a “God who acts” in history. However, a person-like God who acts in history “requires some way of accounting for how God can act” in historical processes (IFR 115). Kaufman simultaneously argues for God’s real activity in the world while also clinging to 1) God’s transcendence, 2) agnosticism about the existence of God. And, “Whatever else the word ‘God’ might suggest,” he wrote, “it emphatically does not denote a reality in this (or any other) way under human

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Van Austin Harvey, “Feuerbach on Religion as Construction,” in *Theology at the End of Modernity: Essays in Honor of Gordon D. Kaufman*, ed. Sheila Greeve Davaney (Philadelphia, Trinity Press International, 1991), 250.

control.” After all, for Kaufman, “in order for God to be God—he cannot be available to man’s every beck and call” (GP 87).

Kaufman conceives of God as having “acted intentionally” to bring the world into being, as an artist works to bring forth his masterpiece.” For him, without God’s “deliberate and purposive activity,” the world would not exist (GP 91). Creator of the world, Kaufman’s God is “an autonomous and self-sufficient Agent on which all else depends.” Because “artist, Creator, and autonomous and self-sufficient Agent who acts with deliberation” are experiences, concepts, and images that are personally meaningful to Kaufman, he incorporates them into the content of his own God-construct. He also includes several common, Western theological understandings—not only that God is creator of the world—a notion he shares with many theists—but also that God provides “the order or structure of all that has meaning” (GP 92).

Moreover, for Kaufman, the manner in which we conceive of God and of the world are linked. If we reflect on them separately, we discover that each is entangled with the other. God, who possesses ultimate cosmic Agency, pervades “the cosmos to its deepest roots,” offering to human beings, *qua* agents, an evocative “view of the world as a universe of action” (GP 106). Because nature—the environment in which we live—is itself the expression of God’s activity, Kaufman concluded that human beings

feel “at home in the world” (GP 92). He was determined to associate agency with God in order to:

- 1) Protect God-talk “in the face of modern knowledge about the unbroken web of natural cause and effect.”
- 2) Retain “talk about God grounded in God’s ‘acts’ without turning to language about ‘being’” (IFR 117).
- 3) Maintain God’s transcendence which could remain intelligible only if “act” language remained in force.
- 4) Preserve Biblical ascriptions of divine love and mercy.

To speak of God’s acts preserves, for Kaufman, the notion that God intends to do certain doings; these doings, when we can identify them, offer us clues about the order and structure that God has chosen and willed.

Maurice Wiles, a friend and interlocutor of Kaufman, opened his 1986 series of Bampton Lectures with the following questions about God: “Does God act in the world? Does he [sic] affect what happens to us in the varied experiences of our daily life? If so, in what ways, and by what means?” Wiles noted that events, whether international, national, or personal unfailingly call these questions to the attention of the “general” public.¹⁷ When discussing possible answers, he mentioned Kaufman’s work in particular and spoke approvingly of Kaufman’s decision to ascribe agency to

¹⁷ Maurice Wiles, “Where Does God Act?” in *God’s Action in the World: The Bampton Lectures for 1986* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1986), 1.

God since such agency is central to theism. Wiles then asked this follow-up question:

"Does speaking of the world as a whole as a single act of God inhibit our use of the language of God's agency in relation to more specific occurrences within the world?

And if we are to speak of God as agent in these other more limited respects also, how are those actions of God to be understood in relation to the one overarching action of God of which they form a part?"¹⁸

God's master act and sub-acts

Kaufman understood the process as a whole, as God's one complex act or what he called God's "master-act."¹⁹ By this, Kaufman meant a complex or comprehensive act that could be parsed into a set of "elements and subelements" or into a set of "phases." Some of these elements are "simpler acts" such as "biological or physical processes or motions"—they "are always secondary and derivative." Secondary and derivative acts count as such because they are not performed only for their own sake but rather as one step toward the larger, master end. Indeed, their purpose and character, Kaufman argued, are tied to the master act. Only when viewed in light of the master act can they be understood. The master act unifies and orders various sorts of "behavior and otherwise disconnected stretches of time." It is the master act, Kaufman

¹⁸ Wiles, 29.

¹⁹ Wiles, 96.

wrote, “rather than each simple act taken by itself, that renders any given piece of activity intelligible” (GP 136). God’s “sub-acts,” on the other hand, are “performed by God as he works out his purpose.”²⁰

To illustrate the relationship between God’s complex act and God’s sub-act, Kaufman turned to metaphors. Although like “agent,” he did not define the term “metaphor,” I will do so for the sake of clarity. His use of this linguistic category aligns well with the work of Janet Soskice who defines metaphor as a “trope, or figure of speech, in which we speak of one thing in terms suggestive of another.” Soskice offers an example of how a trope or figure of speech can be used to speak of something in the human realm in terms that are suggestive of God. Although God is not a farmer, we may describe God, metaphorically, as engaging in the work of a farmer. Soskice writes: “when we say of [God] that he plants his seeds, nurtures the young shoots, separates the wheat and the tares, we are speaking metaphorically.”²¹

When Kaufman explained the distinction between God’s complex acts and sub-acts, he describes a “carpenter hammering nails” (a metaphor for God’s subact) and the “carpenter nailing boards together to construct a house” (a metaphor for God’s

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 54.

complex act).²² In other words, “the nail is not hammered simply to get it into the board” (a subordinate objective) but to build the house (GP, 136). While natural events like storms and balmy weather, or historical events like the Arab Spring or the end of the Cold War could be ascribed to God, Kaufman rejected such ascriptions of causality. Only occurrences, he insisted, that “move the creation forward a step further toward the realization of God’s purposes” can be considered sub-acts of God.²³

Kaufman used the phrase ‘God’s master act’ to mean “the whole course of history, from the initiation in God’s creative activity to its consummation when God ultimately achieves his purposes.” God’s all-encompassing master act, for him, is the “whole complicated and intricate teleological movement of all nature and history,” an act that will not reach its conclusion until the eschaton (GP 137). In the meantime, Kaufman admitted, science has demonstrated that it is mere poetry to consider the universe as “somehow developing in unidirectional fashion in and through temporal processes” (GP 138). However, Kaufman argued that scientists have come “to think of nature, in all her levels and forms, as in historical process, as moving and developing and evolving in time.” They observe a “kind of natural evolution.” Granted, there is no empirical evidence “of teleological or purposed order in this movement” but, Kaufman

²² Wiles, 96.

²³ Vernon White, *The Fall of a Sparrow: A Concept of Special Divine Action*, (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1985), 123.

countered, he was not claiming "that the cosmic process provides evidence for believing in a God active through it." He was merely choosing to comprehend the whole cosmic movement as a single 'act' through which God is achieving some ultimate purpose is consistent with the modern understanding of nature as in process of evolutionary development" (GP 139-139, n18).

This component of Kaufman's Phase II concept of God is a precursor to his Phase III concept of God as creative serendipity. He carried into Phase III his interest in the evolutionary changes that science has detected in nature and associates, with this process, a creative cosmic movement that he chooses to call God. However, in Phase III, he overreached by ascribing evolution to the transcendent God even though, as he acknowledged, he has no evidence to support this claim. He linked his concept of God to empirical features of the natural world, and read God's will and God's intentionality into an evolutionary arc that scientists describe as happenstance or accidental. Thomas James pointed out that if the "final causality" on which Kaufman insisted were "bracketed off from efficient causes," his theology would resemble Kant's more closely. If he had remained focused on efficient causes like Kant, Kaufman would not have needed to invest effort in developing the sort of "cosmological innovations" required to support his claims about God's "ultimate purpose."²⁴

²⁴ James, 108.

Kaufman's understanding of God's activity in the world aside, the manner in which he defended his claim about God's acts illustrates the metaphorical approach to theological work that he advocated. He drew on metaphors based on ordinary human life—his imagination allowed him, and his readers along with him, to conceive of God's activity in the world in terms suggestive of the activity of a carpenter, a human agent who hammers nails into boards and constructs houses. This commonplace metaphor permits Kaufman to propose (with epistemic qualifications) that God, like a carpenter, does not act randomly but has a will (God chooses to drive the nail into the board or not), intentions (God wields a hammer for the purpose of pounding the hammer through the board), and prudential reasoning—e.g. the ability to develop and carry out a plan (God hammers boards together for the larger purpose of building a house). Just as an activity that proceeds from a single agent and is ordered toward a single end is considered one act “no matter how complex,” God also acts.

human agent as model for God's transcendence and activity

While Kaufman approves of causal language to describe God's effect on the world, such language must, in his view, be understood as metaphorical. If theists insist that God, in order to be intelligible, must be grasped as *actually* acting on the world, “Kaufman's theology refuses to meet that standard on the grounds that it would

inappropriately reify talk about God.”²⁵ Still, even without making claims about the reality of God’s acts, Kaufman wanted to find a way to understand the conundrum of a God conceived as both transcendent and active in the world. To make sense of such a God, Kaufman turned to models drawn from ordinary life as well as to metaphors. Though the terms “model” and “metaphor” are sometimes used interchangeably, Kaufman made a distinction between them. However, he did not make explicit how, for him, one differs from the other. Soskice’s work again proves useful—her description detailing the separate roles of models and metaphors captures the manner in which Kaufman employed them. According to Soskice, “an object or state of affairs is said to be a *model* when it is viewed in terms of some other object or state of affairs.”²⁶ P. F. Strawson’s definition of a model also reflects Kaufman’s use of this term; for Strawson (and Kaufman), a model is “an expository framework” that can be “discarded when its purposes are served.”²⁷

In addition, Soskice writes: “Talk based on models will be metaphorical, so model and metaphor, though different categories...are closely linked.”²⁸ She defines metaphor as a “trope, or figure of speech, in which we speak of one thing in terms

²⁵ Ibid., 109.

²⁶ Soskice, 54.

²⁷ P. F. Strawson, *Bounds of Sense: An Essay on Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Methuen & Company, 1966), 174.

²⁸ Soskice, 55.

suggestive of another; so that when we speak of God," using the model of farmer, "and say of him that he plants his seeds, nurtures the young shoots, separates the wheat and the tares, we are speaking metaphorically."²⁹ Models and metaphors, though each has its own meaning, are correlated in important ways because, one chosen, the model controls the particular metaphors that may then be invoked as illustrations. The model chosen for God has the effect of limiting the kinds of metaphors used to describe the deity. For example, if the traditional model of "fatherhood" is chosen as the preferred model for God, "fatherhood" becomes the "frame" or "basis" on which God-constructs are to be built or expanded. Once the model of "fatherhood" has been selected, it becomes the "controlling" model for God—thereby constraining which metaphors can, in turn, be chosen when describing God—namely, only metaphors associated with "fatherhood." When it comes to God, the model "fatherhood" may give rise to metaphors like "loving concern for his [sic] children." In contrast, the model, "fatherhood," is unlikely to give rise to metaphors depicting God condemning shopkeepers who cheat their clients.

The question for Kaufman became: which model from ordinary human life has the capacity to illustrate how God can be, on the one hand, transcendent mystery, and on the other hand, active in the world? In his paper, "Two Models of Transcendence,"

²⁹ Ibid., 54.

Kaufman explained the unique difficulty that this model must resolve: "When we assert God's 'transcendence' we are asserting *something specific* about God's relation to the world of our experience, but without a model in terms of which this can be grasped, there would be no way of distinguishing it from a bare 'X.'" For this reason, Kaufman held, a model of transcendence drawn "directly" from, and directly apparent to "ordinary finite experience" was needed.³⁰

The model of finite transcendence to which Kaufman turned was that of the human agent. Based on the model of agent, God can be viewed as having "intentions and purposes that he [sic] realizes in and through creation" and God's "creative, providential, and redemptive activity can be rendered intelligible in fairly straightforward terms" (GP 125). This model for God has the advantage of drawing on everyday experiences and knowledge of inter-agent relationships to elucidate how God remains unknowable but nonetheless enters into direct relation with the world. Like an agent with motives and intentions, God's activity "is 'bound together'"—it has order and structure (GP 126). And, like an agent's, God's motives and intentions remain mysterious in certain ways. Kaufman underscored how, when human beings observe or experience the actions of other persons, even if they are familiar enough with those persons to venture a guess about the motivations and intentions for their actions,

³⁰ Kaufman, "Two Models of Transcendence," 187.

ultimately, those motives and intentions can never be fully known. Individuals may have theories, based on past history, as to why long-time friends or close family members behaved a certain way, but unless those friends or family-members offer an explanation or in some other explicit manner comment on what they had in mind, their motives and intentions remain uncertain (GP 126).

Kaufman held that while “[i]t is often supposed that our knowledge of other persons, like our knowledge of ‘things,’” is based on “sense data,” this supposition is inaccurate, because “a moment’s reflection will show” that although “certain aspects of our knowledge of others are so rooted, the most important knowledge that we have of...persons as persons...is derived from” what they reveal or unveil about themselves when talking to us (GP, 73). According to Kaufman, the other’s self somehow appears to inhabit the body whose physical motions can be observed but as long as *only* the body and the body’s motions are visible, the “dynamic self” remains hidden. The other’s ‘dynamic self’ is merely open to conjecture and guesswork. It is in a real sense “inaccessible” (GP 74). We sense that there is something ‘more’ to that person, something more than what we know, something to which we will never have access.

Viewed through the model of human agents, just as *knowledge* of their intentions remains out of reach of the limited cognitive abilities of fellow humans, so, too, *knowledge* of God’s intentions is out of reach. To understand God “as an active

being in this quasi-personal sense” makes it possible to reconcile God’s transcendence—thereby preserving God’s radical independence and aseity—while also making it possible to understand God’s activity in to the world (GP 125). As with human agents, Kaufman argued, although theists may observe actions that they ascribe to God, God is not completely predictable or understandable. Kaufman, interpreting God’s transcendence through a model of human agency, was able to explain how God’s intentions remain hidden even when God acts in the world. God’s otherness, Kaufman wrote, “or being-beyond-reach is analogous to that of purposeful beings we experience. Neither God nor neighbor is fully explicable in terms of observation, however acute. Each may therefore be said to ‘transcend’ our own perspectives.”³¹

Kaufman further explored the correlation between the human-agent model and the conundrum of God’s mysteriousness-versus-activity by carrying out a “local analysis of the concept of action.”³² This example illustrates their correlation: an individual opens the door to city hall in the late afternoon. Those who observe her entering the building cannot know whether she does so because she is returning to collect an umbrella that she left in her office, or because she has an appointment with a city official, or because she is hoping to find a public toilet before heading home for the day. What larger purpose this agent intends to accomplish can be the subject of

³¹ James, 122.

³² Ibid., 119.

educated or even of wild speculation but cannot be known definitively until she shares her reasoning. Likewise God whom Kaufman analyzed in terms of subacts and master act—the subact of a human agent stepping into a government building is a discernable component of her larger purpose or master act which is unknown; the acts or subacts in the world that are ascribed to God are merely perceived components of the God-construct's larger master act which remains a mystery.

The human-agent model, Kaufman wrote, provides "the most fundamental way of describing divine action."³³ According to him, when "'act' language is used in this way to interpret ultimate reality," then "freedom and creativity are given significant place on the metaphysical ground floor, in contrast with cosmologies that make either causal or teleological order (or some form of chance or indeterminism) fundamental" (GP 125, n6).

IV. Critiques of the Human Agent as a Model for God

God: modeled on an introverted or opaque human agent

Kaufman settled on the model of the human agent to make sense of a transcendent God who acts in the world but he would likely have agreed with Vernon White's assessment that God's activity is "an opaque and much disputed notion which may

³³ James, 119.

never be settled into a single satisfactory theory.”³⁴ The human-agent model, as developed by Kaufman, and chosen by him to provide a helpful analogy, qualifies as one coherent theory. However, like God’s acts in the world, the acts of human agents are also opaque and contested. Indeed, several kinds of human-agent models exist. According to White, Kaufman’s version belongs to the so-called “introvert” tradition.³⁵ Found in the work of Jacques Descartes, David Hume, and William James, this tradition holds that “far from having access through action to another’s subjectivity, we merely infer from it to an antecedent intention and so can hardly claim to ‘know’, only to surmise; intention is thus posited as some antecedent cause of the purposiveness of the action.”³⁶ Kaufman’s agent-model recalled the ‘introvert’ tradition when he argued that “interpersonal knowledge depends on the other’s act and not simply on my observation, that is, on something *intrinsically inaccessible* to me...”³⁷ For him, just as the partly, or perhaps mostly opaque human agent is an active force in the world, so too an opaque, transcendent God.

³⁴ White, 98.

³⁵ In contrast to the introvert tradition, the ‘extrovert’ tradition claims that we *can* legitimately know (not merely tentatively infer) something about the intentions of other agents by observing their actions. The ‘extrovert’ tradition undergirds the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein, J. L. Austin, and Gilbert Ryle. A qualified version of the ‘extrovert’ tradition has been advanced by White who argues that “it is important to make clear that intention is not...simply reduced to the ‘outer’ event of the action.” See White, *op. cit.*, 99, 194 n7-9.

³⁶ White, 98.

³⁷ Kaufman, “Two Models of Transcendence,” 190.

Michael McLain, whose critique of Kaufman's human-agent model I explore next, granted that it was "not difficult to see why this model has been taken as a forceful analogy" for God. According to McLain, Kaufman was not the only twentieth-century theologian to deploy this model even if other theologians did not use the human-agent model in quite the same manner. They include Rudolf Bultmann, Emil Brunner, Karl Barth, and H.R. Niebuhr.³⁸ Kaufman's concept of a transcendent God who acts in the world—a God about whom, metaphorical-language is based on the model of the human agent—was analyzed by several contemporary theologians. Two critiques are of special relevance: 1) the so-called "residual Cartesianism" advanced by McLain, and 2) the so-called "uniformitarianism" advanced by White.

Michael McLain's critique: residual Cartesianism

McLain argued against certain features of Kaufman's "effort to press human agency as a model of divine transcendence."³⁹ In his article, "On Theological Models," McLain analyzed Kaufman's claim that interpersonal transcendence could serve as a helpful model for understanding how God may be transcendent and active in the world. This model, McLain argued, relies on Kaufman's observation that persons 'transcend' what

³⁸ F. Michael McLain, "On Theological Models," *The Harvard Theological Review* 62:2 (April 1969): 158.

³⁹ James, 122.

others understand and experience of their actions—at least until they decide explicitly to communicate their purposes and intentions. There is always something “more” to human agents, according to Kaufman, some component perennially out of reach, unknown to and unknowable.

McLain interprets Kaufman’s theory as claiming that “the constitutive feature of selfhood is ‘non-objectifiability’” thereby rendering the self inaccessible to science’s standard analytic procedures such as sustained observation, data gathering, and hypotheses testing, etc. According to McLain, Kaufman portrays the dimension of the human available for study as limited to the ‘body’ or outward appearance—i.e. the describable, phenomenological aspects of the self.⁴⁰ Kaufman, for McLain, treats the physical sights and sounds of a person’s acts as if these visible expressions were unrelated to ‘inner’ purposes and intentions. But, McLain counters, people usually assume that the actions they are able to observe reveal something about the other person’s ‘inner’ self.⁴¹

The split between cause (the self) and effect (the body’s actions) on which Kaufman’s bases his interpersonal model of God represents, McLain argues, a “residually Cartesian” understanding of the self.⁴² By residually Cartesian, McLain

⁴⁰ McLain, 158.

⁴¹ McLain quoting P. F. Strawson, 163.

⁴² McLain, 161-162.

means a model that makes a sharp distinction between the mind or self and the body.

Kaufman's model, then, McClain holds, is based on the notion that it is possible to understand the actions of agents—not by observing those actions—but by learning something of their inner state, intentions, ideas, goals, past experiences, and grasp of the situation. Only the agents themselves are capable of explaining their intentions, ideas, goals, etc.; anyone else is likely to be off the mark to some extent (GP xiii). By extension, McLain writes, the behavior of the person is "conceived impersonally" since, if Kaufman is right, "'external' physical sights and sounds emanating from other bodies cannot serve as the ground for personal meaning" unless accompanied by self-revelation.⁴³

McLain also concludes that Kaufman fails to develop an accurate representation of human knowledge. The philosophical work of P.F. Strawson showed, to McClain's satisfaction, that at its most primitive, the concept of the person is of an embodied subject with physical traits and consciousness.⁴⁴ Kaufman, according to McLain, ignored this basic notion of human agent as embodied subject, a notion expressed linguistically when mental and corporeal characteristics are attributed to the same grammatical subject, 'I' and 'she'.⁴⁵ Thus, for McLain, persons are not accessible only

⁴³ Ibid., 166.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 162.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

through self-disclosure while, in his view, for a purported “disclosure” theorist like Kaufman, those persons remain transcendent as long as they don’t self-disclose. McLain deems that Kaufman treats observations about the states and behavior of persons as observations on a par with ordinary observations of physical things and processes.⁴⁶ Kaufman, according to McLain, treat the states and behaviors of persons as similar to the states and behaviors of things and processes thereby attempting to separate scientific (empirical) modes of knowledge from human self-disclosure modes of knowledge. Doing so, McLain charges, belies the fact that humans view their own behavior and those of others as “expressive of, and imbued with thoughts, feelings, and intentions.” Indeed, for McLain, it is “logically adequate” to perceive an act as related to the agent’s internal state.⁴⁷

Because, on his reading of Kaufman, McLain deems that Kaufman did not provide “accurate” or “persuasive” account of persons, the model of the human agent, for him, is inadequate to the task of serving as a model for radical transcendence.⁴⁸ While McLain agrees that “persons are independent centers of life and consciousness,” the view of the agent human advanced by Kaufman falls short of a full and accurate understanding and thus, in his opinion, falls short of providing an analogy for God’s

⁴⁶ McLain, 166.

⁴⁷ McLain, 166-167.

⁴⁸ McLain, 166.

transcendence.⁴⁹ Is McLain's critique of the human-agent model advanced by Kaufman warranted? Overall, it relies on a mischaracterization of Kaufman's work and overlooks the nuance of Kaufman's position. McLain misses key elements of the model proffered by Kaufman; it does not, McLain argues, rely on the notion that the inner workings of persons are only "hidden unless self-disclosed" or completely "unknowable from the observer's perspective."⁵⁰

To return to the previous example of the woman entering city hall late at night, Kaufman does not insist that the person observing her resist attempting to explain her intentions and motives. The woman may be the observer's partner in which case he has reliable information on which to draw to help him formulate an account of her thoughts, feelings, and intentions. While, to a certain extent, he is likely to be accurate in his assessment, Kaufman insists that, because he is not privy to his partner's first-person perspective, a full understanding of her internal state will elude him. In fact, Kaufman argues, it will elude him in every instance that he observes her actions. No person knows another so thoroughly that he can anticipate every thought behind every action; no person knows another so thoroughly that their interiority is thoroughly open to them. Hence McLain's charge is inaccurate on several counts: Kaufman does claim that it is impossible to deduce something about the reasons for an agent's act; Kaufman does

⁴⁹ McLain, 165-166.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

not consider people as objects whose intentions are inaccessible nor does he reject their embodiment as a source of information about their state of mind. He does argue that some component of their interior life is opaque to an observer—some portion of their interiority is unreachable. Since some portion of the inner forces at work behind their outwardly visible activity is unknowable, the observer must rely on agent whose activity he witnesses to disclose those forces explicitly. Even so, the complexity of people's interior lives means that even explicit self-disclosure is unlikely to reveal the entirety of their intentions. Kaufman thus preserves the ability to ascribe, to the concept of God, willful and intentional activity in the world similar to that of a human agent. The human agent's opaque, unreachable interior life can serve as a model for God's transcendence.

Kaufman thus attempts to develop an account—frought with difficulties—for how God, whose transcendence is modeled on that of a human agent, can act in the world. Kaufman develops this account without developing a causal-hinge to explain how God can cause effects in the empirical world described by science. One solution is to put God's transcendence in more positive terms by comparing it the ways in which a human agent transcends all possible knowledge we can have or any empirical statement we can make about him or her. However much we devote to attempting to analyze, measure, assess physically, mentally and emotionally, interview, befriend, love

another person, there is some part of him or her we will never fully know. They act, yet even if they tell us why they acted the way they did, not all will be divulged—they probably don't fully comprehend why they did what they did themselves. A human agent transcends what we, and perhaps they themselves, know about their purposes and intentions—hence are, in a significant sense, unknowable—a mystery—like Kaufman's transcendent God.

Vernon White's critique: uniformitarianism

White critiques Kaufman's attempt to model the transcendent God actions in the world on human-agents on the basis that God *qua* God, according to Kaufman, has no constraints regarding when and where to act—indeed, the scope of God's activity is universal. As a result, any and every event “in the natural or historical order,” however simple or complex, may be attributed to God, at least in principle.⁵¹ This is a problematic, White argues, because if any and every event can be conceived as an act of God, how can we distinguish the manner in which these various events relate to God's larger intentions? God's acts, White points outs, do not have to be sorted out from non-divine events or activity to be meaningful. Nonetheless, theists take an interest in identifying the kind of relationship various events.⁵² While God's purpose

⁵¹ White, 125.

⁵² Ibid.

need not be determined for each event, it should be possible for the relationship between events and God's intentions to be "intelligibly described."⁵³ If this relationship cannot be made coherent, events will, at times, appear unpredictable, erratic, meaningless, morally unfair, and hostile to human goals.

Since every event in the natural or historic order *could* be an act of God, some theists will assume that when life-damaging events occur, God's good purposes have been frustrated. According to White, there are two approaches to understanding the relationship between God's purposes and the events occurring in the world including life-damaging ones. Which approach a given theist endorses rests on the weight that she places on contingency versus predictability in nature and life.⁵⁴ One approach ties a specific event to God's greater, overarching purpose—"an end which lies beyond the event itself."⁵⁵ Though this approach introduces a reluctance to talk "about God's special activity in relation to particular events," it need not lead to a full-scale abandonment of the notion that God is responsible for particular events. Nonetheless, it does encourage speaking of God's acts in general terms rather than specific ones. Indeed White wrote that Kaufman was "cautious and grudging about God's specific

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 125.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 126.

actions toward individuals.”⁵⁶ This restraint is difficult to square against Kaufman’s concomitant claim that when concepts of God are properly conceived, they provide a sense of ultimate meaning and purpose to anyone. Such a view, dubbed uniformitarianism, is defined as the “reduction of divine interaction with the world to a single, uniform action.”⁵⁷

In his critique of Wiles’ views of divine action—views that bear a strong resemblance to those of Kaufman’s—White highlights how a sense of purpose and meaning can be tied to a particular event, implying that each event is associated with “a particular or ‘special’ activity of the divine will.”⁵⁸ However, White argues, a sense of purpose and meaning is *not* uniformly available to everyone—it is contextual and assumes various forms and intensities. White finds these variations to be appropriate and desirable because human beings are “finite” and particular “experiencing” selves, the sense of purpose and meaning with which a theist is sometimes graced is likewise bound to be particular.⁵⁹ For each individual, the features of an event, and the purpose and meaning that emerge from that event are unique. According to White, Kaufman moved from the purpose and meaning experienced by an individual in a specific context “to a notion of universal and uniform divine purpose” without warrant.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 126-127.

⁵⁷ James, 120.

⁵⁸ White, 64.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Moreover, White holds, this move was “not logically necessary.” White points out that the ancient and powerful religious traditions resist the notion of uniform divine purpose—they consider certain events and experiences to be “special acts” of God.⁶⁰

What is clear is that when a finite model like a human agent is used to illuminate the conception of a transcendent God, the model does, at some point, founder on the sharp prongs of sustained analysis. Critical analysis of the kind carried out by McLean and White highlight the limits of Kaufman’s, or for that matter, any theologian’s reliance on human agents to understand and illustrate God’s transcendence. These difficulties need not be considered fatal, however. Instead, as Kaufman insisted, they may be appreciated as checks built into any approach that relies on ‘available’ human models for analogies of the divine who is beyond reach; such checks ensure that human beings are never confused with or mistaken for deities. On the one hand, Kaufman consistently and continuously inveighed against hypostasizing (assuming ideas are objective) any concept of God. On the other hand, he worried that some of the difficulties introduced by adopting a human model for God would discourage self-reflective theists from attempting thought experiments similar to his. Still, Kaufman insisted, those theists must not abandon the work of theology “for the imaginative

⁶⁰ Ibid.

constructs with which [they are] concerned are believed to be a (or perhaps even the most) significant clue that man [sic] has to the Real" (GP 88).

The limits of the model of human-agency duly noted, Kaufman would likely argue (in Phase II) that the notion of God based on the model of the human-agent should be retained since this notion has profound significance for how human beings view the world. If people view themselves and the world in the context of the "personal, purposive" activity of God—then they view themselves as shaped by this activity and oriented towards its goals. From a theistic perspective, human life is understood as unfolding within God's "personal, purposive" order, which "underlies and undergirds and expresses itself through all other forms of order in the world" (GP 105). For good or for ill, the "image/concept of [God] who is not only transcendent, omnipotent, and glorious but also loving, merciful, and forgiving—the creator/lord/father—is the core notion," Kaufman wrote, "out of which most western thinking about God has evolved and to which it always returns for nourishment" (IFM 304).

V. God: A Thought Experiment

In Moment 2 of Kaufman's Phase II theological method (see Chapter 2), he invites the method's user into a thought experiment. What would a God who could serve as an ultimate point of reference and who could provide a sense of meaning and purpose be

like? One of the roles of Kaufman's method is to remind theists that a fully developed concept of God requires a number of reflective choices on the part of the believer and requires that some choices are more life-enhancing and helpfully decision-guiding than others. Kaufman's concept of God is, at its most basic level, formal and lacking in demonstrable content. Though he favors the model of the human agent for God, his method is open to other models or none at all. Non-negotiable for Kaufman, however, is that God should not to be linked to any single object in the world or identified with any single dimension of experience. God, often described as the "Creator or Source of all that is," according to Kaufman, and who serves as the "proper object of ultimate loyalty or faith," is not to be confused with any "proximate or penultimate value or being" (GP, 7). Non-negotiable also for Kaufman is that God remain a mystery—any concept, he wrote, "must remain always an unknown X, a mere limiting idea." The question arises, then, about what theists may contingently ascribe to God (GP 85). Or, as Kaufman wrote, the question arises about the referent of the word God:

...the referent of the word "God" cannot be indicated ostensibly in any ordinary way. We are never able to point to this or that object or quality of experience and say, "That is what the name 'God' denotes." Any such direct identification of God with a particular in the world would be idolatrous (GP 82).

Kaufman was aware that most theists are not able "to live with a blank, empty Void." As a result, he found, individuals create "pictures of what they think the world is like,

pictures of what they imagine are the ultimate powers or realities with which they must deal" (IFM 29).

To what, then, can the word "God" refer? What positive content can this concept have?

Kaufman's responses to these questions invoke several of the terms without defining them explicitly. These terms are: symbol, analogy, and image. For precise definitions that reflect Kaufman's usage, Soskice's work again proves helpful:

Symbol can be "distinguished from metaphor as a category which includes the non-linguistic." Examples: "the cross is a symbol for Christianity, Rosa Luxemburg is a symbol for the revolutionary movement."

Analogy is "a term commonly used to describe a form of argument, or a type of relation; hence one says that there exists analogy of structure between a model aeroplane and the full-scale one."

Image, like symbol and analogy, includes the non-linguistic; it "is used to designate mental events and visual representations."⁶¹

Kaufman's Phase II theological method (described in Chapter 2) is designed to assist reflective theists select appropriate (the question of appropriateness will be discussed at greater length shortly) pictures to associate with the word "God." His method invites theists to select personally-relevant concepts, metaphors, and analogies, evaluating which to attach to their conceptions of God. The method encourages the

⁶¹ Soskice, 55.

construction of concepts that are meaningful with respect to preoccupations and tragedies and that are orienting with respect to goals and a virtuous life.

Whether one relies on Kaufman's theological method or not, Kaufman advocated experimenting with the models and images that one associates with the concept of God. The meanings attached to God-constructs are not usually random or accidental in nature; rather, Kaufman held, one inherits a system of signification from one's community (or, more likely, in this age of globalization, one inherits a *plurality* of system-s from one's communit-ies). Each system, likely the product of centuries of thoughtful engagement, consists (even if this is not always evident to the outsider) of an internally coherent set of symbols.

Many theists integrate theological ideas into their concepts of God or embrace already extant concepts unaware of the matrix of already-made choices undergirding them. But, *if* a conceptually sound and religiously satisfying concept of God is desired, Kaufman asserted, then clarity and self-consciousness about the content of the God-construct demands a solid understanding of those choices and their ramifications. Kaufman cautioned against accepting or settling on any system as-is, whether received without modification from one's community, or tailored to one's sensibilities. He advocated continuously exploring and adjusting one's inherited or reconceived God-

construct and trying to understand the consequences, as best one can, of the construct's meaning-making and life-orienting dimensions.

The stance of experimentation and contingency that Kaufman advocated with respect to God means that theists should never commit themselves absolutely to the positions they are exploring. Their commitment, Kaufman insisted, must remain tentative. He recommended that theists devote themselves to a concept of God—at least sufficiently “to determin[e] what is contained or implied in it, while simultaneously recognizing that there are other ways of doing theology.” The experiments of others were worth observing for their own sake but also because they could include valuable ideas and teachings. As a result, they could “turn up conclusions requiring the abandonment of one’s own position” Or they could turn up conclusions in support of continued commitment to that position (GP 7).

Kaufman recommended that Individuals who take up the work of constructing or reconstructing concepts of God adopt a “pluralistic and experimental orientation” and appreciate the diversity of the current theological options available. This appreciation sometimes came with a cost—or a benefit—depending on one’s perspective, because engaging with a variety of theological and religious systems often put even the most cherished views to the test. As second-order reflection, it is the role of theological work, Kaufman argued, to assess God-constructs critically and to reconstruct them if needed

so that they promote greater humane-ness and humanization. By analyzing our concepts of God, Kaufman wrote, theology may compel us to alter them, sometimes radically (ETM xx). In his view, a positive feature of theology was its sensitivity to the difficulties and problems underlying the formation and implications of such concepts. For theists willing to take the risk and prepared to test their views regardless of outcome, the struggle to articulate better and more clearly a theological position, and to revise those views that were inconsistent or harmful to human striving had the potential, Kaufman held, to lead to partial insights and to win "some new truth" (GP 7).

VI. The Inevitability of Person-Like Concepts of God

anthropomorphism: the core of religious experience

When one imaginatively develops a concept of the unverifiable God, the concept that one constructs, Kaufman held, is usually person-like. This process of imaginative construction is unrelated to his reliance on the model of the human-agent (discussed earlier) to demonstrate how God can be transcendent and active in the world at the same time. Kaufman is persuaded that when one sets out to conceive of the divine, the most compelling images are almost always anthropomorphic. Data collected by cognitive scientists like Stewart Guthrie confirm Kaufman's intuition. For Kaufman, the fact that the notion of God is "shot through and undergirded at every point with

anthropomorphic or personalistic overtones..." is absolutely natural (GP, 269). Indeed, throughout Phase II of his theology method, he insisted that without these "overtones," a God-construct would fail to serve as an ultimate reference point capable of "giving us sufficient perspective on this world and its goods" to help us succeed in ordering our priorities (GP 269).

Scientific findings show that when gods are depicted in ways that are drastically different from us humans, we find these gods incomprehensible.⁶² Guthrie explains: when nonhuman or animal forms are associated with God-constructs, or when God is granted "no visible form" at all, we conceive of God as interacting symbolically with us either "through language or an allied system of symbols, or both." Kaufman, during Phase III, came to believe that human beings could not be trusted to differentiate as between their anthropomorphic, available God and the actual God.

Anthropomorphism, is, by definition, mistaken even if it is "reasonable and inevitable."⁶³ Though he had good reasons to worry, the greater worry is an irrelevant theology—irrelevant because it no longer addresses the most common forms of lived religion. However, based again on empirical evidence, Guthrie marvels that even when theologians and others agree that anthropomorphism is inevitable to religion, they

⁶² Stewart Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 7.

⁶³ Ibid., 204.

deem it “inessential” or “as an unfortunate limitation of human thought and peripheral to religious experience.” In contrast, Guthrie, after spending time with believers and tabulating their responses, concludes:

I hold that anthropomorphism is the core of religious experience. I claim that anthropomorphism springs from a powerful strategy and pervades human thought and action, and that religion is its most systematic form.⁶⁴

What is this powerful strategy? Relationships are at the core of religion, but, Guthrie argues, relationships depend on the ability to communicate. People who speak different languages succeed in making themselves understood when their gestures are based on what they share. Mutual comprehension depends ordinary human behaviors such as “smiling, frowning, eating and breathing.”⁶⁵ Since, individuals use language or a system of symbols or both as the basis of communication with each other, either they conceive of God as able to interact with human beings via language or symbolically (and vice-versa), or they and God will be unable to understand each other.⁶⁶ A God-construct “worth talking about,” Guthrie argues, is a God with whom theists can converse, and to do so, that God must be enough like them that God understands their language and its context. The shared language and context of a God

⁶⁴ Ibid., 7.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 199.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 177.

"worth talking about" is enough to render God extra-ordinary, Guthrie notes, since the ability to understand all languages is more than any human possesses.⁶⁷

Detractors of anthropomorphism's importance in God-constructs argue that emotions, rather than the drive to communicate with God, are the source of anthropomorphism. Guthrie, however, finds that emotions are as much a consequence of anthropomorphism as its cause.⁶⁸ Detractors also argue that physical form rather than symbolic communication is the characteristic that human beings share with God-constructs. According to Guthrie, for theists, what counts as most important when it comes to God, is how God behaves not God's physical appearance. "Symbolic action," he reiterates, or "communication through conventional systems of signifiers and conceptions," is the key to human-God relationships.⁶⁹

Many theologians equate anthropomorphism with anthropocentrism because they assume that anthropomorphism necessarily leads to anthropocentrism. While this correlation may exist, it is far from absolute. Simplistic assumptions about cause (anthropomorphism) and effect (anthropocentrism) overlook the fact that some person-like conceptions of God threaten punishment or demand penance, or become unresponsive to certain self-serving choices or activities of human beings—as such,

⁶⁷ Ibid., 199.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 77.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 193.

these God-constructs resist the charge that they are anthropo-centric. Theists too often ignore or refuse to honor some conceptions of God, which call for, or model humane and humanizing choices and acts. During Phase II, Kaufman did not confuse anthropomorphism with anthropocentrism. He took into account the indications later borne out by Guthrie's data: "...religion is anthropomorphism"⁷⁰ and designed his theological method with lived religion in mind, encouraging person-like God-constructs but including checks designed to undermine anthropocentrism (I discuss these checks at length in Chapter 4).

Kant on the role of the imagination

Stated several times, Kaufman grounds his theology in an agnostic worldview which, in his opinion, is the only intellectually defensible position that he can adopt given his endorsement of Kant's argument with respect to God's existence. He agreed with Kant that theoretical or cognitive knowledge, because it is confined to objects to which human beings have sensory access, is not available to resolve the question of existence one way or the other. Hence, Kaufman, like Kant, focused on God as a concept. Kaufman's debt to Kant is clear through Phase II—he often mentioned Kant in his writings during this phase but may have assumed that readers would be familiar with

⁷⁰ Ibid., 178.

Kant's work because he rarely elaborated Kant's arguments. The texts by Kant most often mentioned by Kaufman were his three critiques—*Critique of Pure Reason*, *Critique of Practical Reason*, *Critique of Judgment*—and *Religion Within the Bounds of Mere Reason*.

An analysis of Kant's works reveals the following. Briefly stated (I will discuss these findings at greater length): On the question of the source from which the idea of God emerged, the two adopted different positions. On the question of the human tendency to anthropomorphize God, the two agreed. They also agreed on the need to impose moral restrictions on concepts of God. What follows is a longer explanation.

Kant allowed that anthropologically, there are several sources of objects and ideas that do not correspond to empirical objects. Two of those sources are:

1. Imagination:
Produces pictorial representations, whether based on an actual object or not (*imaginatio plastica*), links together associated ideas and unifies representations as if they shared a single source (*imaginatio associans*).⁷¹
2. Theoretical (i.e. cognitive) reason:
Produces regulative ideas.

For Kant, God counted as a regulative idea—reason gave rise to this idea in order to explain the antinomy of how human beings would be granted happiness in accordance with their level of virtue. Since happiness was beyond the control of persons and did

⁷¹ Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Practical Point of View*, trans. and ed. by Robert B. Louden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), §31.

not always match virtue in this life, God emerged from practical reason's insistence that God exist in order to correct the happiness-virtue balance after death. God, according to Kant, derived from the interest of practical reason, meaning that reason did not attempt to determine whether this concept was objectively valid. Though reason had sufficient ground to assume God's existence, it had "no right to assume it absolutely."⁷²

Kaufman on the role of the imagination

In contrast, for Kaufman, God was an imaginative construct. Kaufman does not define or describe the operation of "imagination" in precise terms—perhaps assuming that 'imagination' and 'imaginative construct' are terms all speakers use in generally the same manner. Based on his use of the term, 'imagination,' Kaufman seems to mean the ability of theists to take their experiences, concepts, images, norms, humanity's "bad" qualities, their "best" qualities, elements from their religious tradition that they want to retain, elements from other religious traditions that they want to incorporate, and weave these together into a perfected, more abstract version of a person-like being.

His focus remained on the imagination's role in creating a God-construct that is meaningful in times of hardship and capable of providing moral orientation. He trusted

⁷² Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. revised 2nd ed., trans. Norman Kempt Smith (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), A 676/B704.

the imagination to serve theists well when deployed in a systematic way during with the Moments of his theological method and if kept in check, morally-speaking, by his ethico-humanization criterion.

Theists are, for Kaufman, always involved, at some level, in the on-going task of imaginatively constructing concepts of God. While they may be aware of their thoughts about God, they may not be aware of how their imaginations and cultural traditions are implicated in the content of those thoughts. Kaufman's method is designed to help theists step back and survey the work of their imagination, which has been engaged without their being conscious of it, and to make explicit and systematic what are often times implicit and inconsistent constructs of God. Still, his method is not designed to lead to the conclusion that God is *merely* imaginary because such a conclusion eliminates would eliminate what is, for Kaufman, the all-important distinction between human beings and the transcendent God. In Kaufman's words, to regard God as merely a product of the imagination "is to collapse the double-layeredness of the notion of God entirely into the available God." To eradicate this difference leads to atheism "but it is just as much a falsification of what is meant by 'God' as the naïveté which identifies the available God too easily and directly with the real referent of the name" (GP 114).

The imagination is foundational to theology, for Kaufman: "man's awareness of thought about God" is grounded in our anthropology and "located" in our "imagination and cultural tradition." Kaufman insisted on the impossibility of constructing a concept of God from scratch; he wrote, "it is clear that we cannot fabricate a concept of God simply out of whole cloth" (TI 30). In his view, no one created an artificial framework of life experiences and adopted it because it appealed to them; some basis in reality from which to start picking and choosing always existed. Human beings inhabit and operate out of one or more world-pictures; thus, when they engage in theological construction, Kaufman held, they respond to meanings of the term 'God' already extant in their culture and in their language (TI 31). Though enmeshed in these world pictures, people may nonetheless metaphorically step back far enough to become aware of those pictures within which they are living and acting. This exercise enables them to gain critical distance and, to a certain degree, evaluate their stances; once they have engaged in this exercise, they may discover that they can reconstruct the concept of God "significantly" (TI 31).

Though some might wonder whether locating thought about God in the imagination and in cultural tradition called into question the existence of the "actual" God, Kaufman explained that doing so is no more likely than "to speak of seeing as located in the eye and nervous system argues that the trees and flowers are all illusory"

(GP 114). More important than the question of whether a correspondence exists between the real God and the imaginatively constructed, actual God, is whether this concept helps theists adopt a productive and creative approach to life and whether it provides support as they work to conduct themselves in ways aligned with its demands. If the answer is affirmative, 'God' serves as an important and valuable concept even if its "precise truth-value is unknown or even unknowable" (GP 108, n26). Kaufman wrote:

If human life, character, and growth are sustained by metaphysically construing the world theistically, that is, having personal and purposive meaning, rather than some other way, then it is justifiable or right to do so, even though we do not, and in principle cannot, know whether God exists (GP 108-109, n108).

If theists attempt to ground their sense of "purpose, meaning, and value" in the "natural" or material order, they discover, Kaufman was convinced, an uncaring and unyielding order. He distinguished between nature, the material order, and 'world,' a metaphysical concept. The concept, 'world, to which Moment 1 of Kaufman's theological method is dedicated, is not a concept grounded in experience; rather, it is a concept used to order and organize our scientific and phenomenological knowledge. As such, 'world' unifies the whole of what we know and experience. Gathered, then, within 'world,' everything has its own proper place" (TI 242-243). 'World' unlike God cannot offer a sense of purpose or meaning.

Kant and Kaufman: person-like God concepts are inevitable

Was Kaufman influenced by Kant on the question of the imagination's role in generating concepts of God? Kant argued that the imagination is not as powerful or creative as some might like to believe. For example, Kant noted, when visual artists fashion an imaginary creature, they usually borrow physiological parts of animals with which they are familiar including wings, claws, or hooves. Moreover—although Kant was not making an explicit argument about the human proclivity to anthropomorphize God-constructs—he drew attention to the fact that when those artists depict an angel or a god, they generally drew or paint a person-like form. In his view, they did so because no creature other than a human being can be part of the “structure of a rational being.” In other words, when artists try to conjure a ‘rational’ angel or God, their imagination brings to mind the sole being whom they know to be rational—the human.⁷³

Thus, Kant, like Kaufman granted that theists may ‘think’ God in analogy with objects of experience. Also like Kaufman, he held that “we may freely, without laying ourselves open to censure, admit into this idea certain anthropomorphisms which are helpful to the principle in its regulative capacity.” Why? “For it is always an idea only,” Kant asserted, “which does not relate directly to a being distinct from the world, but to

⁷³ Kant, *Anthropology*, §32.

the regulative principle of the systematic unity of the world." This unity gave rise to "the schema of a supreme intelligence which, in originating the world, acts in accordance with wise purposes."⁷⁴ Not only may theists introduce certain "subtle" anthropomorphisms into the regulative idea of God, Kant proposed that they might have no option but to do so. In his view, without anthropomorphisms human beings could not think anything whatsoever about God. He assumed, then, that theists would assign to God characteristics that they associate with fellow human beings, and conceive of God as having the same sort of "understanding, feelings of pleasure and displeasure, and desires and volitions." This description of a person-like God recalls Kaufman's description of the human agent. Recalling also Kaufman's insistence that, though theists may conceive of God in terms resembling those of agents, God transcends the human person and remains ever mysterious, Kant ascribes to God "a perfection which, as infinite, far transcends any perfection that our empirical knowledge of the order of the world can justify us in attributing to it."⁷⁵

Kant was of the opinion that anthropomorphisms are harmless as long as they do not compete or undermine one's understanding of moral duty. In contrast, although he did not use the term anthropocentrism, Kant described self-serving ideas of God as "highly dangerous" to morality. He worried that because human beings developed

⁷⁴ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 697/B 725.

⁷⁵ Ibid., A 700/B 728.

their own ideas of God, they could be tempted to construct those ideas in a way that allowed them easily to “win” God over to their “advantage.” Able to win God over, theists could exempt themselves from what Kant described as the critically important “arduous and uninterrupted effort of affecting the innermost part of our moral disposition.”⁷⁶ To stave off the temptation to exempt one’s self from such effort, Kant insisted that theists with an anthropomorphic God must shape this God in line with moral precepts and create an “ideal,” perfectly moral God.⁷⁷

Like Kant, Kaufman worried about the possibility of anthropocentric God-constructs and addressed this issue by advocating the use of his ethico-humanization criterion to test all concepts of God regardless of whether they were generated with his method or not. Similarly to Kant, he held that no construct is to be exempt from meeting a minimal set of moral standards.

VII. The Decision to Believe

God: most Westerners have a range of options

Kaufman recognized that when it comes to belief in the divine, most Westerners have a range of options. For theists, one option involves a simple affirmation of “(what are regarded as)” traditional claims about who or what God is (IFM 242). In this case,

⁷⁶ Kant, *Religion*, 6:168-6:169.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

individuals embraces dogmatic claims and eschews investigating what, for Kaufman, constitute problematic questions and controversial issues (IFM 243). A second option entails a “positivist insistence” that all metaphysical issues should be set aside or ignored in favor of focusing on the practical problems of everyday life (IMF 250). A third option is steadfast resistance to adopting a single position—in other words, a thoroughgoing agnosticism with respect to metaphysical questions. A fourth option rejects conceptions of reality in which God has a significant place (IFM 242). This option includes “God is dead” theologies (IFM 242-243). Those who ascribe to such theologies may retain an attachment to Jesus whom they regard as “an exemplary human being.” As a humane model or standard of what is truly best in human beings, Jesus can assist individuals orient their lives “in terms of love of neighbor and enemy” (IFM 242). Kaufman conceded that one could “continue to use the symbol ‘God’ rather freely without seriously concerning oneself about its implications for one’s understanding of life and the world.” “In order to orient one’s life,” he writes, “It is not essential...to make a move beyond metaphysical agnosticism” (IFM 243).

However, Kaufman insisted that, if one desires a *theology*—whether Christian or not—then a decision is unavoidable. If one wishes to engage in *theological* work, then one must elect, self-reflexively, to abandon metaphysical agnosticism and take the risk of trusting or believing in God. Since theology, in Kaufman’s view, is “talk about God,”

then moving “toward a more self-critical faith” demands a willingness, “in face of the ultimate mystery of life,” to make a decision to reflect critically on what God *is* (IFM 243). This step toward trust or belief is not a psychological or genetic step that requires confidence in the “legitimacy and importance of metaphysics” (IFM 244). Rather, the first step, for Kaufman, is a movement of engagement and of committing to the ordered activity of theological construction. It is a movement toward exploring the meaning of the concept of God. In taking this step of faith, Kaufman held, one advances “*toward faith*” in God (IFM 244).

why human beings bind themselves to a thought experiment

A question arises as to *why* human beings would choose to bind themselves to God-constructs that are thought experiments. Kaufman’s short answer: they do so because those thought experiments help them determine the appropriateness of ““a way of life’ or of a ‘stance in the world’” and guide them as they seek answers to questions such as: “What ought I to do?” or “How ought I to comport myself in this given situation?” (GP 100). Any formulation, Kaufman emphasized, of the available God is constructed *by* human beings *for* human beings. Indeed, he understood theology not as “devotion to the symbols of faith” so much “as the attempt to understand those symbols and the way they function in human life (IFM 8-9). Though unable to prove God’s existence,

theists may choose to embrace faith in a particular concept of God. More important than the fruitless quest to eliminate all doubts as to this God, Kaufman held, is the practical tension that God-constructs impose on everyday life—a tension prodding those who place their trust in those concepts of God to reach beyond their current insights and understandings (IFM 8-9). Indeed, Kaufman wrote, the most serious uses of the word, God, imply an underlying search for orientation in life (IFM 9).

Why make the decision to engage in the work of theology, other than out of a desire for a more coherent and consistent set of beliefs? Because. Kaufman suggested, for those who seek to find a “proper place” in the world, metaphysical explorations and construction can lead to “more adequate orientation” (IFM 248). Such explorations and constructions can have

important practical applications for the everyday lives, and the exceedingly difficult problems of women and men today. If in and through these metaphysical explorations we are successful in developing a picture of the world which illuminates our human position within it, and which, therefore, enables us to say something about that which grounds and calls forth human—and (we can properly hope) humane and ecologically responsible—existence (as we understand these matters today), we will be well on our way toward constructing a contemporary conception of God—the real God...whom we today can and should worship and serve with unqualified devotion, respect and love (IMF, 249).

Kaufman mentioned his indebtedness to Kant for having reached this understanding. Kant had clarified for him the priority of the practical questions over speculative or theoretical ones (an elucidation to which I will return in Chapter 7),

especially in the section of the *Critique of Practical Reason* entitled, "On the Primacy of Pure Practical Reason and Its Linkage with Speculative Reason," in which Kant argued that, in essence, all human interest is practical (GP 101, n21).⁷⁸ Following Kant, Kaufman asserted that when one attempts to determine the "appropriateness of a 'way of life' or of a 'stance in the world,'" one is asking a fundamentally *practical* question, not a speculative one (GP 100). With the term 'practical,' Kant and Kaufman underscored their observation that human beings are continuously faced with moral questions. Even when individuals make an effort to step out of life as far as they are able and then reflect on speculative questions about the 'nature' of the world and of human beings and of God, for Kant, practical interest assumes the highest priority. Metaphysicians are not exempt, he wrote, they are to assume "(not for speculative use, which they must abandon, but for practical use only) the existence of something that is possible and even indispensable for the guidance of the understanding and of the will in life." For Kant, God was the "indispensable guide" for one's understanding and for one's will.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 155.

⁷⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward as Science*, 2nd Edition, trans. by Paul Carus, revised by James Ellington (New York: Hackett Publishing Company, 1977), 20.

Following Kant, Kaufman deemed that a theist should begin with a practical point of view and assess, when deploying the concept of God during the course of everyday events, whether a given God thought-experiment serves as an appropriate and helpful action guide. No doubt, like everyone else, they are curious about the sorts of symbolical schemes that make life meaningful and curious about “how things are” metaphysically-speaking. But, they are less curious, Kaufman insisted, about those schemes and how things are, than they are about frames of orientation able to assist them become more virtuous. According to Kaufman, the most pressing questions asked by theists day-to-day, revolve around the sort of life that these individuals are leading and want to lead, and about the sort of persons they are and want to be (GP 107). For answers, they look to God. This God, for Kaufman, was the “ultimate point of reference,” or the principal “site of normative turmoil” because God called into question projects, aspirations, and values in order to increase the humane-ness of theists (IFR 141).

God orients and motivates to do the right and the good

By design, the word God indicates ‘that’ which provides proper orientation in life whether believers are faced with mundane irritations or a severe crisis, and which provides motivation to do what is good and right (IFM 27). When properly construed,

Kaufman argued, God serves as *the* reference point for all decisions, significant or not, giving life focus and direction (GP 92). From this perspective, Kaufman wrote, God is “the most objective or real element” of the phenomenological world (GP 92). It is partly for these reasons, according to Kaufman, that theists give themselves over to a thought experiment—the concept of God—without reservation (IFM 27). “To say I believe in God,” Kaufman wrote, is more an expression of the “life policy one has adopted, an expression of how one does, or ought to comport oneself, than it is an expression of what one believes factually to be the case” (GP 108, n26). Kaufman avers that the life policy persons adopt reflects some of the decisions they make about God—whether these decisions are explicit or not.

Before theological construction can begin, Kaufman held, a decision is required—a decision to commit one’s self to “seeking, or at least to exploring the possibility of,” a conception of God (IFM 245). This decision does not demand a proverbial leap of faith across the abyss, but, rather entails an initial “metaphysical move and claim.” Subsequent moves and claims eventually coalesce into a well-developed understanding of reality and set the theist on a path that culminates, if followed to the end, in a “theocentric world-picture” (IFM 243). Alternatives to God remain an option, Kaufman granted; for instance, individuals can construe the world as completely determined. Those individuals see themselves, at most, as mere spectators,

"never as actors in or on" the world (GP 104, n24). In this unalterable order, values and meanings have no relevance, Kaufman held, no decision or action has an effect, any position is nonsensical, and there is no point to putting personal projects in motion or to engaging in social-justice work to influence the contours of life (GP 104, n24). For those who adopt such a worldview, Kaufman's anticipates practical despair—unless persons believe in the possibility of making plans and in the possibility of their efforts having a positive impact and making a difference, they abandon them.

For anyone faced with those possibilities come the questions, "What ought I to do?" or "How ought I to comport myself in this given situation?" Theists, as described by Kaufman, turn to their God-constructs for guidance when trying to choose the appropriateness of a way of life or of a stance in the world. Kaufman went as far as to argue that even atheists and religious skeptics perceive the powerful meaning and connotations of the practical meaning of the word, God, because, in the West, God is "the foundation on which the whole structure of [cultural] meaning rests." No one, then, including atheists and skeptics has difficulty "empathetically" understanding the way that life is experienced by persons whose ultimate reference point is God (GP 92).

From the standpoint of the images or paradigm(s) chosen to construct the concept of God Kaufman advocated few limitations (except for moral ones as we will

see in Chapter 4). However, Kaufman recommended that the constructed concept include the following three features:

1. *sharpness and clarity* (to assist with devotion and orientation)
2. *plausibility* of the claim that this concept of God is a significant reality, not an illusion or mere fabrication
3. *persuasiveness* that this concept can be properly regarded as metaphysically ultimate because it orients human beings toward the fulfillment of their potential (TI 155)

VIII. Person-Like God Has Greater Impact on Moral Acts

God may be most effective way to defeat anthropocentrism

In Phase II of his theology, Kaufman sought to understand how the transcendent God acts in the world of empirical human experience because these are two of theism's basic assumptions. To this end, he turned to the model of interpersonal transcendence. Kaufman also encouraged users of his theological method to give content to their concepts of God such that God would serve as a source of meaning and of practical orientation. He assumed that a person-like God has greater, practical impact on the choices that theists make as long as that God is not anthropocentric. Kant, to whom Kaufman turned frequently as a resource during Phase II, also held that human beings naturally generates anthropomorphic ideas of God. For Kant, God is "the supreme lawgiver" who "must be represented" as his moral "commands" as well as "the one

who knows the heart, in order to penetrate to the most intimate parts of the disposition" and "give to each according to the worth of his actions."⁸⁰ In Chapter 4, I argue that person-like God-constructs, when properly conceived—may, in fact, be the most effective theological approach to defeating anthropocentrism and the excesses associated with such concepts of God.

Since, in this dissertation, I develop a theological method integrating portions of Kaufman's Phase II theological method, I take seriously the two critiques (residual cartesianism and uniformitarianism) launched against his conception of God. However, I do not adopt a model for God, whether that of the human-agent or some other model. As a result, I need not provide an explanation, as Kaufman does, of how one might conceive of a God who is transcendent but who may act in the world. For theists like Kaufman, who develop concepts of God with the attributes of transcendence and the ability to act in the world, it is helpful to remain aware of the two difficulties that beset those concepts. While there may be no way to work-around the critiques of such concepts, they need not derail the constructive work of developing them. Any concept of God brings with it a certain number of difficulties, which, while they should be acknowledged, in this case, are not fatal.

⁸⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, ed. by Alan Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1998), 6:99.

an impersonal God is unlikely to succeed at orienting lives

It bears mentioning that Kaufman did not neglect the theodicy issue, the *logical endpoint* of selecting—in his case—the human agent as a model for God’s transcendence. He included theodicy in the list of reasons that he abandoned, in Phase III of his theology, a commitment to a person-like God. He had concluded by then that the “the massive evils experienced in the twentieth century—the terrible suffering, destruction, and death in two world wars...present[ed] overpowering counter-evidence to the myth of the God who cares for each person in even the tiniest details of life” (IFM 305). While this conception of God had become problematic for him, he believed (inaccurately), that it had similarly “become problematic” for other “moderns” (IFM 304). He came to hold that, God, described metaphorically as serendipitous-creativity, devoid of agent-like intentions and purposes, could survive the kind of scrutiny prompted by our awareness of evil and suffering.⁸¹ An austere God (like his Phase III God) who is not person-like and does not act in the world with something like the

⁸¹ Kaufman claims that he began to grow alarmed at the embedded anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism of God embedded in traditional Christian thinking in 1972 before he wrote *Essay on Theological Method*. He had identified a “fundamental tension” between the personalistic understanding of God and of God’s relationship to human beings, and the growing awareness that human beings are constituted by and cannot exist apart from “the complex ecological ordering of life that has evolved on planet Earth...” Gordon Kaufman, “My Life and My Theological Reflection: Two Central Themes,” *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 22, vol. 1 (Jan 2001): 22.

purposes of an agent, cannot, for Kaufman, contribute to evil and suffering (IFM 305). Nonetheless, as with any understanding of God, an inherent (albeit different) set of deficiencies accompany Kaufman's serendipitous-creativity God. Kaufman himself was the first to admit that this God does not provide the "kind of focusing of the mind...needed" by most men and women to orient their lives today (IFM 307).

Ch. 4

KAUFMAN'S HUMANE AND HUMANIZING GOD¹

Any view, no matter how authoritatively rooted in some religious tradition, is open to serious criticism if it portrays God as, for instance, morally repugnant and if devotion to him would be dehumanizing (ETM 80).

- Gordon Kaufman

Anthropomorphism, which is hardly to be avoided by human beings in their theoretical representation of God and his being, but is also harmless enough (provided that it does not influence concepts of duty), is highly dangerous with respect to our practical relation to his will and to our very morality; for, since we are making a God for ourselves, we create him in the way we believe that we can most easily win him over to our advantage, and ourselves be dispensed from the arduous and uninterrupted effort of affecting the innermost part of our moral disposition.

- Immanuel Kant

¹ Much of this chapter is drawn from the journal article: Myriam Renaud, "Gordon Kaufman's Humanizing Concept of God," *Zygon* 48:3, 514- (Sept. 2013).

KAufman drew on the ordinary-language, nontechnical terms *humanize*, *humanizing*, and *humanization*, and applied technical meanings to them. He used the word *humanizing* to denote ‘that’ which brings moral orientation, well-being, and genuine fulfillment to human beings, and enables them to create and maintain loving and humane communities (TI 106). This definition is intentionally vague because Kaufman wanted the term to have broad applicability. For him, an individual who is thoroughly *humanized* is “truly humane.”

With respect to God, a God who *humanizes* is a *humanizing* God. A “properly” conceived concept of God, Kaufman held, is a humanizing God. Such a God contributes to *humanization* by guiding theists toward loving and self-giving lives that contribute to the building of what Kaufman dubbed a “new humanity” characterized by the virtues of “love, freedom, reconciling forgiveness and openness, and creativity” (TI 46). Hence, a humanizing God promotes a new humanity and secures genuine human fulfillment, which—for Kaufman—represents salvation (TI 151-152). Kaufman, committed to “a universalistic and humane ethic,” often used the terms *humanization* and *salvation* interchangeably, although he favored ‘*humanization*,’ possibly in an attempt to be inclusive of non-Christian theists who may associate the term ‘*salvation*’ with the Christian tradition (TI 45). Likewise with the expression ‘*new humanity*,’ which

he favored over ‘kingdom of God,’ a term that Kaufman increasingly associated with ‘traditional mythology’ (TI 40).

Kaufman developed his Phase II theological method to help theists secure humanizing concepts of God since “an appropriate object of devotion for our time, one who truly mediates to us salvation (humanization)” requires, in his view, a systematic approach to critiquing and reconstructing those concepts along with strong checks against anthropocentric, inhumane, and dehumanizing ‘idols’ (TI 188). Since God-constructs play a central, practical role in guiding everyday decisions and long-term goals, they have an unmatched potential for inspiring and sustaining a moral life. Compared to the “True God,” idolatrous concepts fail to provide adequate guidance and are wont to lead believers astray, away from moral decisions and actions. Hence, explicit moral constraints, Kaufman held, are necessary to hamper the construction of “idolatrous” or false, anthropocentric concepts.

Kaufman had little patience with theologians who continue to speculate about the superiority of God-constructs that have failed to attract the interest or devotion of significant segments of the population. Attempts to assess the practical value of non-existent worldviews was, for him, pointless. Only metaphysical and theological perspectives already embraced by significant numbers of people, Kaufman held, along with the “customs and institutions that perpetuate and extend” these perspectives

prove helpful and transformative. However, these existing perspectives must be tested, Kaufman held, "in the only way open to us with regard to such notions"—namely, by studying the kind of effects they have on the quality of human life (TI 258-259). The relationship between "theological beliefs" and "actual" human well-being and fulfillment are, ultimately, what counted for Kaufman. Hence, theists are to reject, according to him, any calls to abandon the difficult work of theological construction in favor only of "'practical' human service." The one, he wrote, should not be set aside to make way for the other because human fulfillment "cannot be gained apart from the liberating and humanizing effects of theological and metaphysical" understandings (TI 262).

In Chapter 3, I discussed Kaufman's three *desirata* with regard to images or paradigms integrated into concepts of God. These are 1) sharpness and clarity, 2) plausibility, and 3) persuasiveness. Kaufman's Phase II theological method also stipulated two requirements—not *desirata* as for images or paradigms—but moral requirements to secure a concept of God that could serve as a 'True,' or absolute, reference point for human life.

To count as 'True,' for Kaufman, God must:

A. *Relativize*

by calling into question all human projects, goals, values, norms, and decisions, and by calling into check any tendency toward anthropomorphism, hubris, and self-aggrandizement.

B. *Humanize*

by fostering a more humane kind of life and by helping individuals fulfill their human potential (TI, 151-152).

This chapter focuses on those two requirements. To this end, it analyzes the approach followed by Kaufman during his Personalist Phase to secure relativizing and humanizing concepts of God, whether generated by his theological method or not.

I. God: Absolute Reference Point Providing Guidance

Besides Kant's work on the limits of human knowledge with respect to God's existence, most significant for Kaufman's conclusion that concepts of God are contingent and lack the force of certain knowledge was Ludwig Wittgenstein's theory describing the conceptual frameworks out of which human beings operate. These frameworks, Wittgenstein argued, are grounded in the thought worlds of the community to which particular individuals belong. Based on his study of Wittgenstein's writings, Kaufman concluded that no one fully grasped the life-orienting character of God-constructs until Wittgenstein became aware of the function and logical status of language, including religious language. However, with the new awareness provided by Wittgenstein of how

thoroughly the thought-worlds of humans are shaped by communities, comes the burden (for some), and freedom (for others), to engage in theological reflection as a critical and self-conscious activity. Kaufman argued that when theists recognize their own role and their community's role in the 'making' of the available Gods to which they devote themselves, they must adopt a thoughtful and proactive approach to the construction process. A thoughtful and proactive approach matters, he insisted, because as objects of devotion and everyday guidance, the concepts of God 'made' by theists, in turn 'make' them (TI 31). If God is to be "an appropriate object of devotion for our time, one who truly mediates to us salvation (humanization)," critique would be required, and then, most likely, reconstruction of the concept (TI 188). Kaufman rejected any theological enterprise based on the notion that the human and the world are stable and well-understood points and which treats God as a variable. Rather, "we," humans, and the world, he wrote, "are functions of God, not God a function of us and our needs" (ETM 33).

Many theists, in Kaufman's opinion, accept the views about God proffered by their religious communities; as a result, they may eschew analysis of those images and concepts. He held that uncritical acceptance of the teachings of one's religious tradition about God or of one's personal concept of God may lead to uncritical acceptance of the violence, oppression, and other evils that some of these concepts

may underwrite. Besides such theists, others developed for themselves, and embraced personal understandings of God; comfortable with those understandings, they feel no compunction to assess them. These bespoke God-constructs are unlikely, Kaufman worried, to move beyond anthropocentric concepts—concepts that fail to motivate their human creators to look past their own wants and desires. As for atheists, by definition, they reject God, or an absolute reference point outside of themselves. For this reason, Kaufman argued, atheists set moral goals for themselves and are thus unlikely to aspire to objectives above and beyond their narrow self-interests (TI 187). Whether tradition-bound theists, contented self-expressive theists, or atheists, none of these individuals seek, in Kaufman's view, a theological method because none seek to construct or re-construct their concepts of God. Whereas Kaufman did not find these approaches to God problematic from the point of view of existential meaning and comfort in times of suffering, he did find these choices problematic from a moral perspective.

Kaufman assumed that if God serves as an ultimate point of reference for human life, it is plausible to assume that a *moral* concept of God is more likely to orient the believer to a *moral* life.² He offered the following example to illustrate what he perceived as the relationship between a moral God and a moral life: God construed as

² In Chapter 6, I will explore cognitive science's findings on the relationship between a moral concept of God and a moral life.

a loving and forgiving God fosters the sort of gratitude and devotion that is capable of breaking “the circle of self-centeredness and opens the self to wider moral and humane demands upon it” (TI 186). When the concept of God is based on a picture of supreme goodness, beauty, and glory, theists, Kaufman was convinced, respond by giving themselves—as they should—to that concept “without reservation” (ETM 27).

II. Kaufman’s Criterion of Humanization

With increasing globalization and consequent growth in pluralism, humankind is moving toward what Kaufman hoped would become an ever more inclusive universal community; hence, he rejected “relativistic and parochial idols” and challenged theists to expand their concepts of God by drawing from as wide of a scope as possible (GMD 28). He also challenged them continually to qualify and balance the set of complex factors selected for those concepts. Any effort to conceptualize God, Kaufman held, should include features relevant to the problems of the times in order to provide individuals with guidance germane to the contemporary era. God, properly conceived, should orient persons, society, and indeed, humankind in general, allowing them to exist “fruitfully, meaningfully, creatively, freely” anywhere in the world (ETM 33).

Kaufman held that those engaged in the work of theology benefit from significant encounters with unfamiliar ideologies, religious or non-religious. Encounters with diverse perspectives and truth-claims, he argued, provide opportunities to

evaluate those perspectives and claims. Kaufman also called for normative criteria to help theists identify the most humane and humanizing symbols, rituals, and texts among the plethora of options introduced by such encounters. Complying with his own demand for normative criteria, Kaufman formulated a set that he called, as a group, the *criterion of humanization*. He intended this criterion—a universal, pragmatic moral test—to be applied, not just to concepts of God, but to every dimension of individual and communal life. For Kaufman, ‘humanization’ includes culture, symbols, practices, values, ideologies, institutions, and any other dimension that plays a role in fostering humane communities (GMD 38-39). Hence, he designed his criterion to assess the most diverse aspects of human life and culture: family patterns and child-rearing practices; social institutions and class structures; methods of socialization and processes of social interaction; patterns and conceptions of community and of individuality; political and economic and educational institutions and practices; scientific and technological developments and institutions; moral, religious, and aesthetic values, institutions, and ideologies; and so on (GDM 93).

With respect to concepts of God, the criterion of humanization serves as a test to identify constructs that promote human fulfillment and well-being communities. Kaufman took for granted that human fulfillment and wellbeing are clearly understood and uncontested states of affairs because he did not elaborate their meaning. The vagueness of the criterion limits its usefulness but, based on the manner in which Kaufman deployed it in his theological method, it is clear that he was primarily

concerned with identifying the features of God that advanced what he understood as the proper moral orientation, the wellbeing, and the genuine fulfillment of human beings. The criterion ascertains whether a given feature sustains loving and humane lives. If yes, the feature, for Kaufman, counts as "justifiable and good." If, in contrast, the feature fails to meet his criterion's standards, it is to be rejected "judged negatively" and judged as dehumanizing (TI 184).

Throughout Phase II, then, Kaufman focused on evaluating the various dimensions of life and culture, including concepts of God, to determine whether they affect human potential positively or negatively. He was convinced that the concepts and worldviews embraced by theists underpin the way in which they take responsibility for their actions and lives. By becoming more aware of their personal concepts and worldviews, theists understand their responsibilities better and took a more active role in shaping their actions and lives in a positive way (TI 256). Hence, he asked:

How well does the metaphysical interpretation in hand broaden and deepen human consciousness about its most comprehensive presuppositions, thus enhancing human freedom and enabling greater human responsibility for the character and quality of existence? (TI 257).

Kaufman acknowledged that "the breadth and abstractness of this question is immense" and that assessing various worldviews with respect to it is challenging. Though challenging to carry out, this assessment, he insisted, is not impossible. For theology, "pragmatic validation" is of the utmost importance since claims about the content of

God-constructs cannot be tested in the same way as empirical claims. Instead, practical “proof” of a given theistic position is to be found, Kaufman argued, in its tangible impact—the quality of life of individuals and societies. Hence, Kaufman’s criterion of humanization focuses on identifying ‘that’ which promotes the creation of a new humanity. When theists are properly oriented by their concepts of God toward the criterion’s values and virtues, they are eventually transformed, Kaufman insisted, into persons “who love and serve each other.” Though concepts of God that meet the test imposed by the criterion do not necessarily solve humanity’s many pressing problems, they “mobilize our energies and intelligence to attack those problems.” These concepts, Kaufman wrote, combat the “ego- and ethno- and anthropo-centric tendencies” that hamper theists from embracing a committed benevolence toward their fellow human beings. Such commitment, he argued, is necessary if the world is to become “truly orderly” and “genuinely humane” (TI 46).

moral relativism is no longer appropriate

Because humanization, or rebuilding the human world into a genuinely humane order, constituted for Kaufman, the central problem of the current era, he deemed that relativistic moral positions are no longer tenable. For him, clarity and steadfastness about what counts as genuine human fulfillment is crucial to the survival of the human species and the planet (TI 184, 196). The world’s current state of pluralism and

globalization means that we are no “longer a group of relatively independent great cultures.” It is a pointless exercise, in Kaufman’s view, to attempt to restore the previous status quo with its institutions, ideologies, and values. The coming into proximity of previously homogeneous cultures is rapidly transforming them. The world is transitioning to an ever-more interdependent and interrelated civilization, “the many constituent parts of which are culturally and socially and spiritually” linked in countless ways (TI 196). It is bound to continue to modernize as ever-faster modes of communication and transportation connect remote reaches.

The time is long past to wonder whether this growing interdependence is good or bad, Kaufman argued, and whether it should be encouraged or resisted. During this period of transition to a thoroughly interconnected humanity, human beings would do well, Kaufman insisted, to make appropriate adjustments. They should participate in the process of modernization by sweeping away “outmoded values and institutions” that can now be perceived as “seriously” dehumanizing. Kaufman did not intend for these adjustments to serve as a pretext for further Western colonialism—whether cultural or economic or religious—but neither did he “deplore, out of some romantic notion,” either “the glory and integrity of every human culture” or the destruction of institutions and practices that stand in the way of more humane social orderings. The criterion of humanization expressed his commitment to be “discriminating and

selective" for the purpose of advancing that which furthers humanization and opposing that which is dehumanizing (TI 196-197). As such, the criterion is

directed toward the true fulfillment of all human beings and all societies no matter what their cultural or religious traditions and commitments. It is centered on the humans concerns and their needs, and is not the imperialism of an ideology (TI 198).

By recognizing that every position, including every God-construct, is a *human* position serving certain human needs and promoting certain forms of life, one gains the possibility of evaluating these positions based on whether they serve these needs and improve human fulfillment. Because every religious tradition promises humanization or salvation in some form, every religious tradition implicitly evokes a "human or humane criterion to justify its existence and its claims" (TI 199). Kaufman insisted that he merely made humanization an explicit criterion for evaluating the promised salvation at the core of every tradition.

Kaufman noted that there is little agreement among religious traditions about theological anthropology or about what constitutes human fulfillment. However, he argued that, at the very least, his criterion of humanization provides a starting place for debate and discussion. Partisans of different criterion are invited to defend those criterion based on demonstrable experience or other evidence. Partisans are expected to offer persuasive reasons as to why their interpretations of the human best capture the realities of life, and thus are most deserving of allegiance (TI 199). Each tradition,

Kaufman wrote, should be prepared to explain its unique perspective on human existence in terms that are familiar and publicly available to all, rather than in terms steeped in its ideology or “some supernatural or otherwise hidden reality.” By insisting on this-worldly interpretations, Kaufman held, he was merely identifying the rules without which a fruitful debate or discussion could not proceed.

expressive individualism and pic-n-mix theologies

Charles Taylor, a trusted and perceptive commentator on public life in the contemporary age, describes the current age as one of “widespread ‘expressive’ individualism” with significant moral repercussions.³ Though Taylor finds the origin of this kind of expressiveness in Europe’s Romantic period, what is new, he argues, is that it has become a “mass phenomenon.”⁴ Heidi Campbell who has more recently studied religion in internet-savvy and computer-networked societies, echoes Taylor’s findings and reports that “mixing multiple sources of spiritual expression” is growing “more visible to the wider culture.”⁵ In their autonomy, she writes, Westerners practice what she dubs “lived religion.” By this, she means that they pluck religious symbols and narratives out of traditional and non-traditional structures and dogmas—some of them

³ Charles Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 107.

⁴ Taylor, 80.

⁵ Ibid.

religious, some of them not—and recombine them into new theologies. Like Taylor, Campbell finds that “pic-n-mix” (her expression) religiosity, once private and rare, has become common and mainstream.⁶

Taylor and Campbell thus agree that theists, in growing numbers, rely on their personal predilections to make selections from the wide range of religious and non-religious symbols and narratives to which they are exposed and with which they are becoming acquainted as a result of increasing globalization and growing pluralism. As they make their selections when re-constructing their bespoke concepts of God, the moral principles that they choose to integrate into those concepts are also likely to reflect their personal predilections and self-interests. Problematic is that some (perhaps even many) individually generated, impressionistic concepts of God would likely fail to satisfy Kaufman’s criterion of humanization. For example, he wrote, a concept resting on an exclusive appeal to “(mythic) sanctions or esoteric revelations or some other privileged authority” would not meet the criterion’s standards. Kaufman argued for normative guidelines for this very reason—to help theists establish which ‘pics’ from the mix promote further humanization and which ‘pics’ are to be rejected as dehumanizing (TI 191).

⁶ Heidi Campbell, “Understanding the Relationship between Religion Online and Offline in a Networked Society,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80, no. 1 (2012): 79.

Kaufman, intent on securing for each God-construct, concepts, metaphors, and images capable of inspiring humane, loving, and fulfilled lives, designed his humanization criterion to enable theists, regardless of religious tradition, to adjudicate between symbols, ideals, images, and artifacts as they pondered which to incorporate or remove. The criterion of humanization, according to Kaufman, is needed to provide the normative guidelines needed to secure the construction or reconstruction of moral concepts of God whether by pic-n-mix theists or more traditional religionists. Though the encounters between theists that Kaufman advocated are likely increase the diversity of ‘pics’ in pic-n-mix theologies, he encouraged these encounters in order to increase the likelihood of discriminating and informed judgments about what is humanely significant. If these encounters were to impel a movement toward a new humanity, Kaufman argued, participants must be prepared to identify authentically humanizing features—including in their own theologies. While he implored theists to be “open to all, in conversation with all,” he inveighed against thoroughgoing relativism. He warned theists against being uncritically receptive to their own claims or to those of others. No claim is exempt from scrutiny, in Kaufman’s view, whether advanced “by perspectives strange to us or by the traditions we ourselves hold dear.” No concept of God is above evaluation; each concept is to be examined in light of the criterion of humanization (GDM 38-41).

Hence, Kaufman's Phase II theology prominently includes a moral gauge—the criterion of humanization—enabling theists to ascertain whether concepts of God, theirs included, are humanizing. Against the relativistic view that all God-constructs are equal, Kaufman's criterion tests any and all concept of God, identifies the features that fail to humanize, and suggests adjustments that promote human fulfillment and humane communities. Service to a God whose demands reflect the criterion of humanization, Kaufman insisted, is key to furthering the humanization of "today's troubled world" (TI 148).

is Kaufman's criterion of humanization Christian?

Kaufman believed that his criterion of humanization reflected moral principles already embraced throughout the world. The criterion of humanization could be identified in every tradition and society because, Kaufman speculated, "human disaster or failure and human well-being and fulfillment seem to be the points of reference in terms of which the configurations surrounding 'evil' and 'salvation' first get generated." Since disasters and failures have affected and continue to affect all peoples regardless of location, age, gender, ethnicity, etc., every human society has notions of evil. In contrast to disaster and failure, wellbeing and fulfillment are considered salvific. Thus, the categories of evil (dehumanization) and salvation (humanization) have, throughout

human history, reflected ‘that’ which fulfills and ‘that’ which frustrates human existence and projects (TI 159).

Kaufman acknowledged that his criterion emerged from his personal understanding of his own faith tradition: “Though this criterion has a Christian heritage and background,” he wrote, “it may have very radical consequences when applied seriously to the central traditional Christian claims themselves” (TI 191-192). The criterion of humanization corresponds, he granted, to a “secularization and universalization” of a certain number of themes central to Christianity. Still, he was convinced that the notions of wellbeing and fulfillment at the core of this faith tradition reflected the humane and humanized way of life sought by people across the globe. In no way is “interest in this criterion...limited to Christians,” he insisted, because there is a shared, “worldwide demand for more humane institutions, for greater economic justice and equality, for liberation from every sort of oppression.” An “emerging consciousness” of, and growing support for this demand “in many different settings” lent credence, in his view, to his claim regarding the universality of the criterion of humanization (TI 168-169). He argued that in spite of this widespread demand, too often merely tacit, among increasing numbers of people, his criterion has rarely been stated *explicitly* or *clearly*. Nonetheless, because it is already embedded in the

traditions and institutions of much of the world—Western or not—all traditions and institutions are tasked with promoting it.

Thus, in Kaufman's view, in spite of its Christian provenance, the criterion of humanization articulated already-extant and prevalent normative guidelines; as such, it can be deployed with relative seamlessness by the world's religious and secular traditions. Reluctant individuals, who protest that it is being foisted upon them or that it does not reflect the norms of a particular tradition or population, distort if not obfuscate reality. Indeed, Kaufman insisted, wherever "bondage to structures of authority and power" can still be found, there is a "cry for humanization." As for those who continue to support inhumane institutions and practices that interfere with human potential, Kaufman challenged them to recognize the valid demands of oppressed people and to open the structures of their oppression to impartial inspection and genuine critique (TI 200). Not only did Kaufman insist that his criterion expresses humanity-wide norms, but he also insisted that, to combat moral relativism most effectively, his universal criterion must be given unilateral priority over the particular and parochial claims of any given tradition (TI 191-97). He wrote:

I have argued that the very idea of God itself is to be criticized and reconstructed in the light of the requirements of this humanistic criterion. All claims to truth made simply on the grounds of religious authority are in question: theological truth-claims are to be assessed strictly in terms of our

present needs and our present moral insight...

Though the criterion of humanization may be of Christian provenance, Kaufman anticipated that when used to test central traditional Christian claims, the findings will have radical consequences. This is the case because many of those claims will fail to conform to the criterion's norms (TI 192). Key, widely-cherished Christian doctrines will be refuted in their entirety or essential components called into question; assumptions about their truth will be shaken or shown to be unwarranted. As a result, those doctrines will either be set aside or new or novel interpretations will be required to bring them into alignment with the criterion of humanization.

evaluation of the criterion of humanization

A literature survey shows that Kaufman's criterion has been criticized on two fronts: 1) some argue that its purview is limited to human needs and welfare and fails to take into account non-human animals or environmental concerns and, 2) others argue that it simply represents one ideology among competing ideologies. I find it problematic for two additional reasons: 3) it is open to charges of parochialism, and 4) it is too vague to provide the strong test for concepts of God that Kaufman intended.

Against the first critique, Kaufman observed that every theistic tradition focuses on the human longing for humanized lives—salvation “in some form or other”—and promises to deliver it more effectively than its competitors (TI 199). Humanized or

salvific life is intertwined with the welfare of non-human animals and the environment. The wellbeing and fulfillment of human beings are linked to the health of non-human populations, and the health of the planet. Indeed, in Kaufman's view, "true" human wellbeing and fulfillment requires non-human animals to thrive and ecosystems around the globe to flourish. Hence, he asserted, clarity and steadfastness about what counts as true human wellbeing and fulfillment is crucial "to the survival of our species and of our planet" (TI 184, 196). The opposite also applies for Kaufman.

As for the second critique, Kaufman held that it was simply misplaced. Though, for him, there are different ways of "being human" and various directions in which individuals and communities may grow, the models and images humans accept as their own—and which, if they serve as the focal point of their frame of orientation, they may call God—have a significant influence on their mode of life. Since this is the case, an important question arises: "Are there some styles of life in which human possibilities come to fuller realization than others?" In Kaufman's estimation, few would argue that every form of human life has been equally conducive to the realization of human "potential." Some worldviews, he argued, are "exceedingly frustrating" and even "abortive" of this potential, while others, in contrast, have opened a wide "range of values and meanings." Self-consciousness, love, and freedom are possibilities for human life—possibilities that, for Kaufman, are "ultimately normative" (TI 48-49).

Hence, the criterion of humanization is not an ideology. Rather, Kaufman held, because it describes the inter-human relationships most conducive to the humanized life for which all individuals long—tacitly or explicitly—the criterion’s norms apply to all ideologies; hence it serves as a proper test to ascertain whether ideologies meet its standards.

In addition to these critiques, I argue that because Kaufman is its sole author and because it is based on the assumption that Christianity’s norms have been embraced by persons all over the world, the criterion remains open to two charges: they are Kaufman’s own (hence subjective) and they are Christian in character (hence not universal). Kaufman insists that “we not be uncritically receptive to every claim that is made, whether by perspectives strange to us or by the traditions we ourselves hold dear. Each must be examined and assessed in light of the criterion of humanization” (GMD 40-41). Yet, it is his criterion emerges from his own perspective and the traditions that he himself held dear.

My final critique is that Kaufman’s criterion of humanization is designed to help secure a place for humanizing religion in the modern world, but it is not adequate to the task. Its aim, Kaufman asserted, is not to prove the truth of any particular religious or theological doctrine including that of God; rather, it is intended to bring into being a humane and humanized civilization worldwide. Kaufman acknowledged that his

criterion will “undoubtedly be regarded as very spare” (TI 201). It is so spare, however, that it cannot accomplish the aim he has in mind because it cannot resolve most debates over what counts as a “good” or humanized existence. Any effort to conceptualize God, Kaufman held, should yield a set of ideas addressing the problems of the times and provide theists with the means to orient their lives as a whole. Yet, while he insisted that such a set of ideas should orient on a personal level, social level, and indeed, humankind level, he merely specified that it orient persons to exist “fruitfully, meaningfully, creatively, freely,” and move them toward a universal community that includes all peoples (ETM 33). Even supporters of Kaufman’s vision of universal community will agree that he has failed to identify the moral principles at the core of such a community. What explicit norms are needed to regulate the interactions between members of this community? What specific norms are required to secure fruitful, meaningful, creative, and free relationships? Perhaps Kaufman held these to be self-evident. In any case, he does not state these norms outright, leaving them undeveloped. As a result, his criterion of humanization is of limited usefulness as a test for concepts of God.

Though Kaufman entreated theists to receive critically all religious and cultural claims, whether familiar or strange, and to bring those claims to the “bar of the criterion of humanization,” the criterion is too vague to provide a meaningful normative

bar. It is possible to affirm Kaufman's stated goal of defeating relativistic, anything-goes concepts of God that fail to promote fulfilling lives, or humane and loving communities, and still conclude that the criterion of humanization is of limited help in its current form. It is possible to agree with Kaufman's claim regarding the universality of the criterion yet deem that its lack of precision renders it of little practical value.

III. Checks and Balances Internal to Kaufman's Method

Kaufman developed his criterion of humanization to serve as a test for all concepts of God, whether produced by his method or not. He did not stop there. Determined to secure concepts of God capable of providing moral orientation and guidance, he also added two criteria or motifs into his method to ensure that every God-construct produced by the method qualifies as a "True God" instead of an idol. These motifs are:

1. Motif of relativization
designed to help *relativize* by calling "into check our tendencies toward anthropocentrism, hubris, and self-aggrandizement, our tendencies to make ourselves into gods instead of accepting our proper place within the creaturely order" (TI 151-152).
2. Motif of humanization
designed to *humanize* or enable the fulfillment of human potential.

Hence, risking confusion, Kaufman introduced the term "humanization motif," into his technical lexicon—a term similar to "criterion of humanization." These terms are *not*

equivalent. They designate independent, though related ideas. The criterion of humanization is a stand-alone test applicable to all concepts of God. In contrast, the “humanization motif” is integrated into his method. It is designed to help users of the method produce person-like concepts of God, which, when tested against the criterion of humanization, will meet its normative demands. The humanization motif is based on a conception of the ideal human being who is genuinely humane and has achieved full human potential.

IV. God: The Motif of Humanization

When using Kaufman’s theological method, it is the humanizing motif that introduces person-like features into the concepts produced by that method. Kaufman asserted, during Phase II, that person-like features must be included into a God-construct if that construct is to adequately *personify* humanity’s highest and most important goals and values (TI 32, 41). These anthropomorphisms are, in his view, essentially to “idealized human characteristics” (IFM 317). Properly humanizing concepts of God, Kaufman wrote, are familiar to those who hold them dear. They also emphasize “the goodness of creation as a whole and specifically of human existence.” They highlight the value of living in community and of just social institutions. They place a premium on “morally

responsible selfhood,” especially virtues like “mercy, forgiveness, love, faithfulness, and the like...” (GDM 94).

Because other persons are “the only reality” for whom the everyday concerns of human beings “are of significance,” most concepts of God, Kaufman held, draw on concrete experiences and images to make them person-like lest those concepts remain so formal and abstract that they cannot provide guidance and orientation in life (TI 155).

These experiences and images, taken together, constitute God’s humanizing motif. Chinese feminist theologian (and former student of Kaufman’s) Pui-Lan Kwok offers two examples from the Christian tradition that illustrate Kaufman’s point: “Black theology has imaginatively constructed Christ as Black, and Latin American theology has constructed Jesus as the liberator.”⁷ A well-conceived humanizing motif humanizes theists by serving as a well-drawn model on which to pattern life (IFM 316). The motif, however, only counts as “well-conceived” for Kaufman if it helps theists transform themselves into “genuinely humane beings” and enables them fulfill their “human potential” (TI 32, 41).

To provide his own example of a well-conceived humanizing motif, Kaufman described the motif that he integrated into his personal God-construct. Drawn from his

⁷ Pui-Lan Kwok, *Beyond the Pale: Reading Theology from the Margins*, ed. Michel A. De La Torre and Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 224.

Christian heritage, Kaufman's God is a "creator, sustainer, and perfector of our humanity through love and forgiveness." Kaufman describes this humanization motif as "a very powerful and significant object" of devotion (IFM 314-15). The creator/sustainer/perfector God rendered him (Kaufman) more humane, Kaufman explained, because true devotion to such a God required him to break "down the walls" that separated and segregated him and his religious community from others and then join the "universal community" encompassing everyone. This humanizing motif helped Kaufman overcome "self-centeredness, "ethno-centeredness," and "anthropo-centeredness." As a result, his concept of God offered, as nothing else could, Kaufman wrote, "a center of devotion outside the self, a center powerful enough to draw the self out of its own narcissism" (TI 187).

While some theists resist associating anthropomorphic characteristics with God because they fear that this could lead to anthropocentrism, Kaufman insisted that a God like his—with a properly-constructed motif of humanization—has quite the opposite effect. Not only is a person-like God more likely to inspire devotion, but a stronger connection with God (resulting from a greater ability to relate to God because God listens and cares) induces a stronger commitment to look beyond one's self and attend to the fulfillment of others. Kaufman's insistence on preserving, in his theological method, the possibility of incorporating person-like features into concepts

for God may have been influenced by observing the effect of the concepts embraced by friends and family members on those friends and family members. His insistence may have been tied to his awareness of scriptural passages describing God in anthropomorphic terms, or it may have reflected the importance of Jesus, both divine and human, to Christianity's doctrines and way of life.

What may have been, in Kaufman's part, mere intuition, has nonetheless been borne out by empirical science. Stewart Elliott Guthrie's theory of religion, based on the findings of sociologists, issues a call similar to Kaufman's to retain an openness to anthropomorphic concepts of God even at the risk of anthropocentrism:

...most people see anthropomorphism as a superficial aspect of religion, not central to it...Religious anthropomorphism, in their view, consists of attributing humanity to the gods. My view is roughly the opposite: that gods consist in attributing humanity to the world.⁸

For Kaufman, then, God, rightly construed, can inspire human beings to be better than they are. As such, the humanizing motif, introduced into God concepts by his theological method, cannot, under any circumstances, be understood apart from a conception of the ideal human being. The powerful person-like images introduced into these concepts must personify humanity's highest and most important "ideals and values" (TI 32,41)

⁸ Stewart Elliott Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3-4.

the “ideal” human model for God

Kaufman believed that if he could develop a theological anthropology encompassing the human species and show that it correlates to the aspirations revealed by the humanization motif, then he would have gone a long way to establishing this motif's contours in universal terms. He argued that, God, to properly orient the lives of theists, must be conceived as an ideal person—the personification of humanity's highest and most important values. But, what kind of person counts as “ideal?” (TI 155). Kaufman recognized that all religions and cultural traditions identify certain human capacities as normative. Based on their particular understanding of these normative capacities—an understanding that's often only implicit—members of a given tradition educate their children in ways intended to “inculcate and heighten” the normative capacities “while at the same time devaluing and diminishing others.” In addition, Kaufman noted, while the various religious and cultural traditions foster, as normative, a set of human capacities, philosophy and the biological and social sciences also offer perspectives about the human that should be taken into consideration.

Theists must nonetheless attempt to identify explicitly what counts as the ideal human because, he argued, the images, concepts, ends, and motivations of this human, when integrated into the humanization motif, have the power to pull them forward. They are confronted with a profusion of images and conceptions of the human,

however. Kaufman insisted on triaging them to determine which “are to be preferred, which are to be discouraged, and which (if any) are to be forbidden” (TI 129). To this end, he analyzed the concept of God as it developed over human history. He approached his analysis in a generically theistic manner to increase the universal applicability of his findings, avoiding incorporating religion-specific content such as that attached to his own Christian tradition. As a result, theologian Hans Frei describes Kaufman’s theology as “a philosophical discipline” that takes priority over “Christian self-description.”⁹ The most common humanization motif that Kaufman found in concepts of God, as he studied the evolution of the theistic religious traditions (mostly in the West), was that of “humaneness.” Moreover, God’s humanization motif often expressed a “concern for and active promotion of human well-being and fulfillment (TI 39-40). If he was correct, the ideal human being—personified in concepts of God—is concerned about and actively engaged in promoting the wellbeing and fulfillment of others.

God’s humaneness is also manifest, Kaufman held, in the empirical tendencies and forces at work in the “movement of cosmic history.” These tendencies and forces, he argued, are evident 1) in the evolutionary trajectory that led to the “creation” of the human species and, 2) in the development of values and institutions that support the

⁹ Hans Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, ed. by George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 28.

personal and social spheres of individual's lives, sustaining them and moving them ever closer to achieving genuinely just, loving communities. Because he found them creative and sustaining, Kaufman characterized these tendencies and forces as *humane*. He thus defined God as the concept holding together these tendencies and forces, unifying them into a person-like image "suitable for devotion, meditation, and the orientation of life" (TI 40-41).

Kaufman's own humanizing motif: the suffering Jesus

Kaufman focused on identifying the person-like features of God's humanization motif incorporated the ideal, moral features of humanity—features general enough that they could properly guide and orient any theist. In addition to integrating the generic, movement-of-cosmic-history humanization motif described above into concepts of God, Kaufman insisted that a theological interpretation of the humanization motif must take into account the individual who "grasps and articulates" the motif's ideal, moral features (TI 162). Each motif, he held, should not only include features that reflected the best of humanity, but should bear the imprint of the individual who develops the motif.

Kaufman described the humanization motif that he used for his own concept of God. By doing so, he provided an example of a motif that takes into account a

particular set of experiences, images, religious history, context, goals, etc. To his motif, he added features native to his Protestant Christian tradition, especially those of the "suffering" Jesus. His discussion of the suffering Jesus constitutes his most substantive treatment of the motif of humanization. Instructive even for non-Christians, Kaufman warned against understandings of Jesus that, for him, "have little to do with establishing a more humane order." If Christians subscribe to the view that Jesus was "humble, meek, and mild" but hold, at the same time, that "overthrow, possibly including violence, of the oppressive powers of evil" is necessary for a humane order to emerge, then the humanizing motif of Jesus is not, in the end, humanizing. This understanding of Jesus, Kaufman asserted, fails to do what it must—put Christians in relation with the divine power that "is moving us toward authentic human existence." Similarly, if Jesus is depicted as a divine being sent "to attract our devotion and loyalty away from the 'things of this world,'" the humanization motif based on this view of Jesus offers little incentive to struggle against "the structures of evil and oppression here on earth." A Jesus more focused on the after-life than on the current life fails to move Christians, Kaufman held, in the direction of "establishing a more humane order" and should be rejected as a humanization motif (TI 150-151).

According to Kaufman, Christians have not always been fully aware of the implications of the central tenets of their faith. Instead of constructing God's

humanization motif from images and models of the suffering Jesus, they chose images and models linked to the worship of a “God of power and glory.” Kaufman rejected might and glory as features of God because, he wrote, it was in the service of this God that “the worst horrors of Christian history were committed” (GDM 29). Besides calling into question the moral implications of traditional tenets about Jesus, when Kaufman explored humanization motifs based on images and models of Jesus, he asked whether commitment to Jesus was in itself idolatrous. This is the case, he held, unless the Christian’s commitment is ultimately directed toward the ‘true’ God, which for Kaufman, is the “creator of humanity” in the sense that God is the ground of the human drive pushing “us toward a fuller realization of humanness” (TI 150). Hence, Christians who wish to ascertain whether they are devoted to the true God must ask whether a) ‘their’ Jesus corresponds to “that which is truly or authentically human,” and 2) whether devotion to this Jesus brings about and fosters a “genuinely humane order” in their lives and community (TI 150).

Any images or models of Jesus serving as humanization motifs must be subjected to questioning and assessment. Yang Sun Choi, in his dissertation on Kaufman, writes: “[I]ike Kant, Kaufman views the Jesus of the Bible as one who

exemplifies what is ‘truly or authentically human’.”¹⁰ The suffering Jesus, for Kaufman, is the only God whom Christians “can afford” to worship because only this Jesus can “further our humanization” and contribute to “the creation of a universal and humane community.” This God does not react with violence when opposed, but rather “lovingly and patiently suffers the evil men and women inflict.” Moreover, this God suffers evil “in the hope of thus winning a free and loving response” and then, having elicited love, endures crucifixion to secure, among “truly free and autonomous spirits,” a new community “of love and forgiveness” (TI 190). Based on the motif of humanization that he finds in the suffering Jesus, Kaufman describes his humanizing God as

a God who seeks to build community among humans...by evoking a spirit of free vicarious suffering for others...[It would be a God]...who recognized that community among such spirits is possible only if they manifest self-giving and love toward each other and a willingness to forgive and suffer for each other (TI 190).

This God guides “truly free and autonomous spirits” to work together in “productiveness and love,” Kaufman wrote, and help each other fulfill their principal goals. They would move forward with faith and hope that such fulfillment is possible and that a “new and universal community—with new and better men and women to make up that community—can be created” (TI 190-191).

¹⁰ Yang Sun Choi, “A Critical Study of Gordon D. Kaufman’s Theological Method” (Ph.D. dissertation, Drew University: 1995), 279.

critiques of the humanization motif

The suffering-Jesus humanization motif has been sharply criticized by fellow Christian theologians. Though the humane, fulfilled community described by Kaufman offers an inspirational vision of the future, some reject his positive portrayal of the willingness of Jesus to suffer and his call for fellow Christians to embrace a willingness to do the same. For Rebecca Ann Parker and Rita Nakashima Brock, laudatory accounts (such as Kaufman's) about the value of suffering are complicit with violence. Both of these feminist theologians discuss the nefarious consequences of such accounts—they deem that neither Jesus' suffering nor their own, imitative, personal acts of self-sacrifice have been salvific or "fulfilled" them. Hence they reject all images and models based on the suffering Jesus. They do not deny that, at the center of Christianity, stands the story of Jesus' crucifixion and the importance of the cross. But, how does a motif of humanization based on the model of the suffering Jesus, Parker and Brock ask, secure salvation for those afflicted by violence and abuse? How does this Jesus as role model offer fulfillment to those whose "exposure to war has limited their capacities to feel, whose internalization of messages of hate and disrespect has led to self-destruction and injury to others?"

Parker and Brock call for communities much like the one imagined by Kaufman but without self-sacrifice or suffering for others: "We know that, at their best, healthy communities practice the right use of the powers of life and lead people to experience wholeness, right relationship, and beauty."¹¹ Like Kaufman, they seek a theology that fosters "ways of being with another that enable life to flourish" and which is rich with meaning. Unlike Kaufman, Parker and Brock develop a new, "lived" theology that affirms life by resisting suffering and violence at the hand of others.

Additional critique of Kaufman's humanization motif has come from several quarters. Kwok, for one, identified several blind spots when she evaluated Kaufman's theological method and his theological anthropology from her perspective as a racial and ethnic minority. Operating out of this perspective, Kwok argues that the theological subject in Kaufman's work is conceived in terms of a "unified self" which is "largely undifferentiated."¹² Kaufman, when describing "the human" and what counts as the "ideal human being," she writes, "has paid little attention to fragmented subjectivities and fractured consciousness, discussed in critical race theory and postcolonial criticism." In contrast to the unified "white, middle-class, liberal subject" assumed and depicted by Kaufman, she argues that the "racialized and/or postcolonial

¹¹ Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and The Search For What Saves Us* (Boston, Beacon Press, 2001), 1-9.

¹² Kwok, 221-222.

subject has to negotiate cultural and social worlds that are much more complex.” Kaufman, in her opinion, flattens the role of the imagination by pretending that the self is free to imagine God and that human beings have a great deal of latitude to act in the world—morally and otherwise. He also ignores the “multiple levels of discourse” about theology found among racial and ethnic minorities.¹³

In Kaufman’s defense, he himself acknowledged that it is not possible to know “in what respects or to what degree” traditional Christian doctrines will need to be modified when other points of view and insights are taken into account. For this reason, he argued that any conception of the human “must build into itself an openness” to the unfamiliar—whether of experiences or of other conceptions. It must, for the same reasons, be willing to be “self-critical at any and every point” (TI 164). Kaufman attempted to step back from his own Christian worldview to adopt a “meta-position” that will allow him to examine and assess “traditional Christian metaphors, images, and notions, alongside others” (TI 164). His assessment led him to conclude that what counts as humanization or salvation cannot be understood apart from an understanding of what “is” the human. For the time being, he argued, an adequate conception of the human remains an open question. Until progress has been made toward some sort of consensus on the matter, it is nonetheless important, he wrote, “to

¹³ Ibid.

press forward with such provisional concepts and hypotheses as are available to us.” It is also important, he suggested, to remain open to critique and at-the-ready for corrections by partisans of other positions (TI 166). Kaufman was confident that openness and a self-critical approach could “advance the effort to work out” what he believed is possible—“a truly universal conception of the human.” In his view, this effort is gradually emerging as the “several great cultures and civilizations converge toward one worldwide humanity” (TI 164-165).

Kaufman renounced his insistence on the importance of person-like concepts of God and thus of a humanizing motif in Phase III. He did so for several reasons. Among these, his revised theological anthropology; ever-more aware of the sexist, racist and oppressive worldviews integrated into many God-constructs (which, in turn, legitimize these worldviews), he focused on the harms caused by these constructs. More often than he could countenance, God is assumed, as Kwok pointed out, to be white, male, and an all-powerful ruler. Kaufman lost faith in the ability of theists to grant or to remain aware of the distinction between their imagined, “actual” God-constructs and the unknowable, “real” God. As a result, some (perhaps even most) theists reify their constructs and treat them as if they were objectively real. Rather than treat the available God as a contingent concept to be revisited and reconstructed on a regular basis—as Kaufman insisted—these theists no longer (if they ever did) grant that their

personal concepts are constructions or show interest in engaging in the work of critique and of public vetting.

Many of these concepts are anthropocentric and fail to call on their “makers” to transcend their self-focused values and move out of settled self-focused patterns.

Untenable for Kaufman was the complacency that, in his view, such concepts underwrite; they do not redound to the good but rather, reduce human possibilities and undermine human potential. Moreover, such certainty about God-constructs, Kaufman decided, can result in dogmatic claims about the nature of the deity. It can pit believers in one construct against the believers in another as they argue about which is the “true” God. Violence sometimes ensues. War, too. Kaufman concluded that the traditional God, whose authority too often remains unquestioned, “has often been taken by believers as authorizing and legitimating highly destructive forms of human activity.” Among these: “‘holy’ wars, persecutions, inquisitions, crusades, torture” (IFM 272).

Kaufman set aside, in Phase III, the drive that he so clearly recognized and continued to recognize—the importance to theists of a person-like God for meaning and orientation. He did not desist from granting that the traditional agent-God remains (as opposed to his Phase III, serendipitous-creativity God), “even today,” at the center of a religious world-picture that continues to function in important ways—“not only

among the traditionally pious but also in shaping values and ideals and goals in society at large" (IFM 273). Though dedicated, in Phase III, to being of service to "lived religion," he set aside the opprobrium he expressed during his Personalist Phase for theologians whose work is divorced from the "actual" commitments of religionists.

Several of Kaufman's interpreters were not persuaded to follow suit; they criticized his late-career decision to favor *impersonal* concepts of God. Kenneth Nordgren, whose dissertation focused on Kaufman's work, writes: "The later [Phase III] Kaufman thinks an anthropomorphic conception of God is both defective and disastrous in many respects, but...it is inaccurate to reject all personal God-talk...since a case can be made that [it] leaves space for other complementary ways of speaking about God."¹⁴ Sheila Davaney, a doctoral student of Kaufman's, wonders whether his Phase III impersonal God can achieve his aim of humanizing the world since "it jettisons most of the material images and metaphors that have shaped Western theism. Such emptying of a concept of its concrete meaning undoubtedly raises questions concerning its pragmatic efficacy."¹⁵ Thomas James, who, like Nordgren, wrote a dissertation on Kaufman's oeuvre, writes: "orientation in the actual world requires reference to its experienced realities, not to abstractions. God's relation to the world,

¹⁴ Kenneth Nordgren, *God as Problem and Possibility: A Critical Study of Gordon Kaufman's Thought toward a Spacious Theology* (Uppsala, Sweden: Uppsala Universitet, 2003), 225, 228.

¹⁵ Davaney, 174.

therefore, must be specified in terms of some tangible model drawn from human experience.”¹⁶

V. God: The Motif of Relativization

With respect to the attempts of theists to become more humane and to create more loving communities, Kaufman held, the concept of God also serves as the ultimate reference point against which to assess goals, projects, concepts, and values—a “limiting idea.” In contrast to ordinary objects of experience, concepts of God function asymptotically in the sense that they can only “be approached but never actually reached, certainly not surpassed.” God, as God, is not one more ‘thing’ among other ‘things,’ nor is God restricted or limited by any ‘thing’—‘beyond’ all, God relativizes every ‘thing,’ including human beings. To function as *the* reference point, not as one among many, a given concept of God must, in logical terms, be *thought* to transcend everything else since “it cannot gain its meaning or being by reference to anything else” (TI 81-83). Recalling St. Anselm’s ontological argument, Kaufman suggested that God be understood as that beyond which nothing greater can be thought.

¹⁶ James, 142.

abstract metaphors establish God's transcendence

Kaufman also suggested that, although God is often taken to mean that reality which is ultimately salvific of the human”—a reality captured by the motif of humanization—there is also, when speaking of God, an attempt to identify the point of reference “in terms of which all else (including the human) can be assessed and judged” (TI 159). Kaufman used the term, *relativizing motif*, to refer to this key component of the God-constructs produced by his theological method. To explain what he had in mind with the relativizing motif for concepts of God, Kaufman turned to the Bible for examples. In a number of passages, this motif, he held, appears in the form of “profoundly abstract metaphors.” These abstract metaphors are distinctive and important because they confer on God a “sense of utter difference from the human,” and a “sense of overwhelming authority and power.” Abstract metaphors establish, Kaufman argued, God’s transcendence and absolute mystery. In contrast to passages devoted to God’s person-like qualities (God’s humanization motif), some Biblical passages portray God as saying, “I am the first and I am the last.” God is also described as the reality “in [which] we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28), as the “Most High,” and as “the ultimate source of all that is.”¹⁷

¹⁷ Francis Schussler Fiorenza and Gordon Kaufman, “God,” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. by Mark C. Taylor (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 138-139.

On Kaufman's analysis, by serving "entirely objective" point of orientation with respect to the human, God relativizes. By serving as an "absolute standard of comparison," the concept of God makes it possible to discern the distance between its standards and "the whole world and everything in it," including the self. When theists contemplate the ultimate reference points that are their God-constructs, they gain perspective on the differences between themselves and those points and, through this comparison, gain focus and orientation. In addition, Kaufman held, the concept of God provides a constant reminder of human finitude and limits—an awareness that is key to helping theists adopt and maintain an attitude of humility and open-mindedness. By contrast to the relative-ness of human existence, God symbolizes "*the absolute limit, the limit of all limits*" (TI 82).

The gap between human decisions and actions, and the radically transcendent God cannot be eliminated. However, Kaufman argued, theists can decrease this gap if they respond to God's relativizing motif, which, if properly constructed, challenges them to examine and revise their actions, decisions, values, and norms. By virtue of its abstractness, the content of the relativizing motif directs "*the feelings, thoughts and activities*" of believers toward God, whom they "regard as ultimate reality, power, and meaning."¹⁸ The relativizing motif, for Kaufman, is *the reference point against which all*

¹⁸ Fiorenza and Kaufman, 139.

human “action, consciousness, and reflection” can be compared. It secures God’s unique ability to call into question every goal, project, relationship, and value. It secures, Kaufman insisted, God’s unique ability to provide a gauge that reveals the distance between the actual standards and the ideal ones (TI 80-81).

Hence, God, for Kaufman, must not restricted or limited by human experiences, relationships, aims, or values if it is to retain the ability to call them into question and to relativize them. In logical terms, as ultimate reference point, the concept of God is conceived as “beyond everything else” such that it cannot “gain its meaning or being by reference to anything else” (TI, 81-83). Kaufman’s Phase II method thus includes, in the humanization motif, a movement toward absolute ‘beyondness.’ Just as the humanizing motif incorporates meaningful and inspiring person-like features into God-constructs, the relativizing motif secures God’s transcendence and ability to relativize. The relativizing motif, Kaufman wrote, is most likely to be invoked during times of reflection upon the “deepest human problems, about catastrophe and triumph, about human misery and human glory.” It generally emerges during conversations about “what is really important in life, how we are to live, how to comport ourselves, which styles of life are truly humane and which [are] dehumanizing.”

reminders of God's beyondness: key to moral orientation

Expressive of God's relativizing function are images and metaphors that are only vaguely associated with concrete relationships, experiences, and images, but are relevant instead, to existential needs. Examples offered by Kaufman include descriptors for God such as "'absolute,' 'unconditioned,' 'infinite,' 'necessary being,' 'perfect being,'" etc. (TI 81, 83). In the Bible, Kaufman held, the motif is invoked when God is referred to as "Father in heaven" or as "'Lord' or 'King' to whom all devotion is due; as the 'Creator of the heavens and the earth,' 'the Maker of all things visible and invisible'; the 'Judge of all the earth' who will effect a final separation" between the good and the bad (TI 81-83). In the case of "Father in heaven," Kaufman continued, theists have an understanding of actual fathers from their own lives and are likely to be familiar with human lords or kings or creators. They have no direct experience or knowledge, however, of a Father in *heaven*, or of a Lord to whom *all* devotion is due, or of a Maker of *things invisible*. The impossibility of direct experience or knowledge of God's relativizing motif, for Kaufman, serves as an important reminder of the 'beyondness' that is key to the motif's effectiveness in the lives of believers.

Though he noted the way in which Biblical images and metaphors signal the relativizing function of the God concept, Kaufman did not, in the end, approve of those images or metaphors. He rejected them as "traditional Augustinian/Calvinistic/Puritan

images and symbolism.”¹⁹ Such images and symbols are suspect—inside “Christian churches as well as outside”—because, in his view, they have come to be viewed as “archaic, or unintelligible, or unfashionable.” Worse, Kaufman argued, they are “oppressive and destructive.” Linked to this symbolism, for him, is the traditional God’s paternalism, sexism, authoritarianism, “its Christian triumphalism and tendencies toward imperialism, its easy subversion by racists and nationalists...”²⁰ In addition, while Kaufman expected routine implicit references to God’s relativizing motif, he was alarmed that theists too often (in his view) confuse the characteristics of their God-constructs with those of the *actual* God. They did so in spite of the fact that the actual God is unknowable, an impenetrable mystery given full expression in the relativizing motif.

Kwok agrees with Kaufman’s assessment that it is no longer fitting to seek a world and the place of the human being in that world in terms of traditional Christian “political symbolism” such as the “kingdom of God,” or “divine governance.” She argues that “structures and institutions that perpetuate White hegemony, sexism, neocolonialism, militarism, and other forms of oppression” are to be roundly and permanently rejected. *Traditional* “anthropomorphic and personalistic metaphors for

¹⁹ Gordon Kaufman, “Response to Hans Frei,” in *The Legacy of H. Richard Niebuhr*, Harvard Theological Studies, no. 36, ed. Ronald F. Thiemann, 25-32 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 31.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

God—such as creator, lord, king, father,” she insists, “are no longer adequate for a new world picture.²¹

new metaphors must replace traditional ones

Consistent with Kwok’s objections, Kaufman urged Christians to abandon such traditional metaphors. He recommended that they (and by extension, all theists who rely on similar words and phrases to describe God) identify metaphors, images, and concepts consistent with the “ecological, evolutionary and social” dimensions that reflect “modern understandings” to integrate into concepts of God.²² Such images, metaphors, and concepts remain key to preserving the orienting function of God’s relativizing motif (IFM 317). Hence, new metaphors, images, and concepts for God must replace the ones with “tendencies toward arbitrary authoritarianism and despotism...sexism...[and] openness to both pietistic and political abuses” (TI 274-275).

At times, Kaufman uses the “motif of absoluteness” as an alternative term for God’s “relativizing motif,” since comparing the finite to the absolute also reveals the ways in which the finite falls short and brings into relief the distance between them. No part of human existence is to be spared scrutiny. Theists may attempt to set aside areas of their lives from purview, at a remove from evaluation with respect to the

²¹ Kwok, 223.

²² Ibid.

ultimate reference point. Eventually, Kaufman warned, those theists construct other points of reference because they are driven to gauge the finite elements of their existence against the absolute. They create new reference points when no reference point exists or because they are unwilling to extend the one(s) they already have. If God, whom Kaufman calls the “loving One who alone is absolute,” is to function as the ultimate point of reference then this concept, he argued, must call into question, without exception, all “contemporary forms of experience and life—personal, social, moral, aesthetic, [and] scientific” (TI 274-275, 277). For Kaufman, attempting to negotiate life with multiple reference points undermines the ability of God—who is to serve as *ultimate* reference point—to guide and orient decisions and actions effectively. Multiple reference points are likely to conflict with each other and to induce confusion. They diminish the power of the single God-construct, Kaufman held, by dispersing the norms that should rightly inhere in a single concept. A diminished concept of God has a restricted range of purview and is less effective in calling theists to moral account.

motif of relativization as a test of self and society

At the very least, the concept of God is to serve, in its relativizing function, as a test of the self and society. In essence, then, Kaufman integrated, into his theological method and into the God-construct that it produces, an attitude of critique. This attitude asks

probing questions of every part of existence, imposing a “tremendous” and inescapable demand to humanize the structures of the world, insisting on the work of freeing “those who are in bondage to degrading and depersonalizing institutions and practices.” If properly constructed, God serves, according to Kaufman, as a constant reminder and goad against the corrupting anthropocentric idolatries that masquerade as true Gods, and the degrading inhumanities that are “destroying” contemporary human beings (TI 276). Kaufman wrote:

“Our awareness of God’s absoluteness will show every point of view, every custom, every institution, every style of life, which we find in our world, to be finite and limited and relative, and we will be enabled to recognize how often we and others have falsely absolutized one or another of these into idols before whom we have fallen down in worship” (TI 276).

The modes of life into which human beings are born, the educations they receive, the norms and values that they convey to their children are to be subjected, Kaufman insists, to continuous assessment or, in a “postmodernist” sense, to a hermeneutic of suspicion (a term which Kaufman himself did not use).²³ For theists, one of the vital

²³ In his foreword to *Theology at the End of Modernity: Essays in Honor of Gordon Kaufman*, Kaufman questions whether Modernity had come to an end and asks whether we have entered a “genuinely new historical era.” In his view, one of the key understandings that emerged during the Modern period was a “growing critical consciousness.” This critical consciousness “led, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to the discovery of our radical historicity, the historical embeddedness and relativity of every dimension of human existence including our rationality.” This critical consciousness is, for Kaufman, the most important intellectual product of Modernity. He argues that the commitment to “profound reevaluation” and to “thorough

functions of the God-construct is a continuous critique of the modes of life, ideas and values taught by families and learned in school, and of the standards and attitudes passed on to the next generation.

The relativizing motif requires that users of Kaufman's method step back inasmuch as possible to examine and evaluate any and all metaphors and images and determine whether they "merit close scrutiny and possible adoption" (TI 164). Kaufman's insistence that God must be capable of providing such scrutiny was one of the reasons that he advocated remaining open to diverse religious and theological viewpoints as well as to perspectives from science and non-theist humanism. Kaufman assumed that encounters between a believer's traditional or deeply-held beliefs and other worldviews can result in dissonance. As a result questions arise. Those questions provoke exploration and assessment, leading, perhaps, to more discriminating and informed judgments about what is humanly significant.

Indeed, for Kaufman, sustained critique remains the central issue for theology because, he argued, taking full responsibility for one's decisions requires, above all, sustained critique of "the overarching patterns" of one's religious and secular

questioning and reassessment" typical of the Modern period remained strong in 1991 though many scholars considered that Modernity had been displaced by Postmodernity. The insight and understanding gained from Modernity's "thorough questioning and reassessment" was, in Kaufman's opinion, "gaining in influence and strength" rather than dying away. By extension, the work of questioning and reassessment performed by the relativizing motif remain timely.

symbolisms. Since “the symbolic contexts within which all our experiencing, thinking, and worshipping occur” shape human life, for theists, the concept of God must serve as the basis for such critique. The importance of consistent and continuous questioning must not be under-estimated, Kaufman held, especially in light of the pluralistic (and possibly contradictory) “character of all human life, culture, and religion” (TI 165). No doubt, adherents of some religious traditions might reject the kind of self- and social- assessments that Kaufman demanded from God’s relativizing motif, proposing alternate meta-notions of God. Kaufman welcomed such proposals because, in his view, they could only help to advance the constructive work of individual theists. For him, it was important to press forward with provisional concept of God while also remaining “open to criticism and correction by advocates of other positions” (TI 165).

VI. Motif of Humanization vs. Motif of Relativization

Kaufman intended for God’s humanizing and relativizing motifs to balance each other. He held that if a God-concept is properly constructed using his theological method, the two motifs should operate dialectically, preventing one from dominating the other. Equal tension between the motifs is crucial. The equilibrium between them must be monitored and preserved, Kaufman asserted, because it gives “the symbol much of its

power and effectiveness as a focus for devotion and orientation in human life" (TI 41).

Each motif is as important as the other.

On the one hand, as long as a given God-construct's demand for continuous self-criticism (relativization) is honored, it cannot be "converted into an idol" that is conveniently and self-interestedly focused on one's own projects. God's relativization motif ensures that the self adopts "a posture of humbleness in its claims" (TI 87).

However, Kaufman worries that the relativization motif, if "developed one-sidedly in terms" of "overwhelming power" or excessive absoluteness may become destructive (Kaufman 1993, 314). One response has been to highlight God's transcendence.

However, just as a focus on God's absoluteness can be taken too far, a focus on God's transcendence or wholly-otherness can place "an extreme emphasis on...mysteriousness and unknowability." Such an outcome compromises the effect of the relativizing motif—the concept of God's function of calling into question all of our goals, projects, and values. If God is emptied of all content and meaning, God becomes a "completely unknown 'X.'" While God may remain "the ultimate Mystery which [binds] all our experience and knowledge," God becomes so abstract that we can no longer discern this concept's relevance to our day-to-day concerns. Having become, for all practical purposes, irrelevant, it becomes possible to safely ignore or neglect God (TI 275-277).

On the other hand, unlike the continuous self-critique imposed by the relativization motif, the God-construct's humanization motif provides clarity about the sort of human being which one should aspire to become. In other words, God includes a model of the ideal human so that this model might orient the believer toward the wellbeing and fulfillment of humanity not as it is, "but as it might and should be." To humanize believers, Kaufman maintained, God must offer a concrete image or model on which they can attempt to pattern their lives (IFM 316). Compared to the abstract, relativization motif of God whose role is to call one's choices, goals, desires, values into question at every moment, the humanization motif of God may be conceived in concrete terms such as "creator, sustainer, and perfector of our humanity through love and forgiveness" (IFM 314-315). By virtue of being person-like, God serves as an idealized human being to which theists can strive to conform. The humanization motif makes theists more humane, according to Kaufman, because this God inspires them to be better than they are.

The absence of such balance led Kaufman to object to the way in which his former student, Sallie McFague, countered the traditional Trinitarian formulation of God as father, son, and holy spirit by developing an alternative Trinitarian formulation of God as mother, friend, and lover. While, in his view, McFague properly attended to the humanizing dimension of the God-construct by providing a humane, person-like

construct of God to emulate and to which to aspire, he also found that she neglected the relativizing dimension by failing to include an absolute, abstract concept beyond the limits of thought capable of calling human activities, goals, norms and values into question as well as the concept of God itself. In spite of McFague's interest in identifying concrete images with which to equate God, her constructive attempt, in his view, was not adequate to the task. He approved of McFague's commitment to proposing a non-patriarchal, non-authoritarian, nurturing concept of God, but in order to enable a concept to orient and guide human lives appropriately and effectively, he insisted that it must be reconstructed with both the humanizing and a relativizing motif that he prescribed (IBC 35).

VII. Strengths and Weaknesses of Kaufman's Method

A strength of Kaufman's Phase II theology is its ability to accommodate "how things are," by which I mean an ever more common pluralistic, globalized state of affairs. Rather than adopting an approach grounded in nostalgia for a past that no longer exists, Kaufman's method provides a systematic approach well suited to the contemporary situation of exposure to, and interest in a variety of religious worldviews. It does so while also providing a normative test—the criterion of humanization—to ensure that the product of his method—a God-construct—is conducive to human

fulfillment and potential. Another strength of Kaufman's method is that it treats contact with the world's wide-ranging religious traditions as well as to perspectives from science and non-theistic humanism as opportunities. For him, collisions of worldviews—unavoidable in today's increasingly globalized societies—are not to be feared but welcomed because they generate helpful questions about one's own religious and theological ideas, including about one's concept of God. In addition, Kaufman's insistence that no individual or single religious tradition has a proprietary right to define God serves as a reminder of the contingent and provisional nature of those constructs and undermines the possibility of dogmatic claims, which, all too often, lead to violent conflict between believers with different God-constructs.

Finally, because Kaufman assumed, as Kant did, that a relationship between moral concepts of God and moral behavior exists, he integrated normative motifs within his method and developed a criterion of humanization to test concepts, whether produced by his method or not. Though he believed this criterion to be strong and its principles to be self-evident, it merely offers vague notions of well being and human fulfillment. As a result, it fails to provide the rigorous and strong test that Kaufman intended. Kaufman himself was aware of the criterion's limited usefulness; he anticipated a "fuller discussion" to show how a "desirable" concept of God could promote genuine human fulfillment especially since different individuals and

communities sometimes embrace conflicting understandings of what counts as fulfillment. He hoped, nonetheless, that he had provided enough of a framework to suggest lines of thought suitable for “further elaboration” (TI 46). In Section III, I take up Kaufman’s expectation of further elaboration of this framework. I propose and explore a candidate to replace his criterion of humanization—the *Global Ethic*—a universal and humane ethic, which, like Kaufman’s criterion of humanization, promotes well-being and human fulfillment.

The *Global Ethic* purports to express the understanding shared by the world’s religious and secular traditions, avoiding the charge of Kaufman-centrism or Christian-centrism to which Kaufman’s criterion is sometimes subjected. In support of the *Global Ethic*’s claim that the world’s religious and secular traditions hold its directives in common, I compare the *Global Ethic*’s implicit account of human well-being and fulfillment to the United Nations’ empirically-based metrics for human possibilities or human potential and find much overlap. Also in support of the *Global Ethic*’s claim that it expresses already-shared principles, I discuss the collaborative process used to generate the final version of this document. That more than two hundred scholars and religious leaders were consulted by the *Global Ethic*’s authors and by the Parliament of the World’s Religions lends further credence to the universality of its norms. To replace the criterion of humanization with the *Global Ethic* offers a way to preserve a strength

of Kaufman's method—its attention to securing a moral concept of God—but overcome the vagueness and provincialism of his criterion.

III The *Global Ethic*'s Shared Moral Directives

Ch. 5

THE *GLOBAL ETHIC* AND THE 1993 PARLIAMENT OF THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS

[T]here are some issues on which it is possible to mobilize action by drawing together different interests around “global” ideals of social responsibility, even if they are not always uniformly endorsed or applied...there are after all some moral nonnegotiables and some clearly identifiable injustices to which all cultures and religions should be responsive for humanistic reasons.¹ – Lisa Sowle Cahill

In Chapter 4, I explored the moral-pragmatic humanization criterion developed by Kaufman as a test for identifying moral God-constructs. Such a test, Kaufman argued, is important since the moral characteristics and demands ascribed to God play a crucial role in orienting agents toward virtuous choices and behavior. If, as Kaufman explains, God “is typically taken to stand for or name the ultimate point of reference or orientation for all life, action, devotion, reflection” then believing in God “means practically to order all of life and experience in personalistic, purposeful, moral terms” (ETM 17; GP 107). Kaufman’s assumption that moral concepts of God are more likely to

¹ Lisa Sowle Cahill, “Toward Global Ethics,” *Theological Studies* 63, no. 2 (2002): 328.

orient us toward moral lives than immoral ones reflects the commonplace intuition that a relationship exists between God and the ways in which people lead their lives.² And, if, as sociologist of religion, Hans Joas, argues, what is unique about the twenty-first century is contingency—"the experience of our own freedom of decision and action and its consequences"—the manner in which we orient ourselves as we exercise this freedom is more relevant than ever.³

Kaufman designed his theological method for maximum flexibility with regard to the kinds of God-concepts that it could produce while also attempting to place moral restrictions on the resulting concepts.⁴ Because, for Kaufman, God's role is so key to orienting, guiding, transforming and correcting human life, he insists that "the problem of developing criteria for choosing among [concepts of God] is among the most difficult and urgent facing contemporary theology" (ETM 14). Attention to moral criteria makes Kaufman's theological method especially relevant in light of the

² Recent survey data shows that worldwide, people continue to see a link between belief in God and morality. See the Pew Research Center's "Worldwide, Many People See Belief in God as Essential to Morality," March 13, 2014. Accessed May 26, 2014. <http://www.pewglobal.org/2014/03/13/worldwide-many-see-belief-in-god-as-essential-to-morality/>.

³ Hans Joas, *Do We Need Religion? On the Experience of Self-Transcendence*, (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2008), 24-25.

⁴ Kant wrote: "Although it certainly sounds questionable, it is in no way reprehensible to say that every human being makes a God for himself, indeed, he must make one according to moral concepts..." See *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, eds. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1998), Section 6:169, 165, emphasis mine).

increasing hybridity, eclecticism of sources, and plasticity of contemporary concepts of God—any of which can result in self-serving projections.

Kaufman relied on his criterion to triage all God-constructs whether generated by his method (or not). Though inspiring and laudable, Kaufman’s criterion offers sweeping guidelines of limited usefulness. The concept of God, the criterion of humanization specifies, should promote “moral orientation, well-being, and genuine fulfillment in loving and humane communities” (GMD 40-41). This criterion remains too vague and underdeveloped to provide the kind of check capable of identifying the moral concepts of God on which Kaufman insisted. In this chapter, I evaluate a possible replacement for Kaufman’s criterion.

The quote on the title page of this chapter comes from an article written by ethicist Lisa Sowle Cahill. At the end of the passage, Cahill inserted a footnote in which she described the efforts of the 1993 Parliament of the World Religions to bring the religions together on questions of ‘identifiable injustices’ and ‘moral nonnegotiables.’ Indeed, one of the 1993 Parliament’s most lasting contributions is a document known as the “Initial Declaration Toward a Global Ethic.”⁵ For brevity’s sake, I refer to this document as the *Global Ethic*. It is a collaborative expression of what its authors and

⁵ Hans Küng and Karl-Josef Kuschel, eds, *A Global Ethic: The Declaration of the Parliament of the World’s Religions* (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 1993), henceforth designated as *A Global Ethic*.

endorsers identified as four moral directives shared by the world's religious and secular traditions. I propose to replace Kaufman's humanization criterion with the *Global Ethic*.

My critique of Kaufman's criterion in Chapter 4 hinged on two issues: 1) it purports to represent the basic and shared moral criteria to which all of the world's people subscribe regardless of religious or cultural tradition but it is open to the charge that it represents a single individual's (Kaufman's) vision of the 'good' and the 'right,' and 2) it is too vague to be helpful in situations of practical choice.

The *Global Ethic* is a strong alternative to Kaufman's humanization criterion for the following three reasons. It

1. Qualifies as a *global ethic*
2. Emerges from a consultative process that reflects input from a significant number of representatives of the world's religions
3. Offers criteria with enough specificity to allow users to separate moral God-constructs from non-moral ones

As part of my investigation, I explore the following:

1. The need for a global ethic to test concepts of God
2. The history behind the development of the *Global Ethic*
3. An overview of the content of the *Global Ethic*
4. The purpose of the *Global Ethic*
5. The process by which the *Global Ethic* was ratified by the Parliament of the World Religions
6. The Golden Rule as an already existing consensus at the core of the *Global Ethic*
7. The impact of the *Global Ethic* since 1993

I do not take up the question of whether the *Global Ethic*'s purportedly shared moral principles exist independently of the religious and cultural traditions (the realism question) in this chapter. I return to this question and explore answers at length in Chapter 7.

I. A Global Ethic for a Globalized World

For religious ethicist Max Stackhouse "valid ethical criteria" cannot be based on what is sanctioned by a particular religion or culture as 'mine' or 'ours.' Rather, those criteria must "find ultimate sanction in what is truly universal and enduring."⁶ Without "critical principles," he warns, theological ethics is "little more than an idiosyncratic folkway." As for theology, it devolves into an "ideological megaphone for what a group [already] believes or practices."⁷ In contrast, a *global* ethic would help those who hold dear certain concepts of God to face questions and dilemmas posed by an increasingly "interconnected, pluralistic, and contingent world."⁸

Globalization and pluralism can encourage moral relativism. When individuals observe that certain moral norms appear limited to specific communities, they can become timid about the norms that they personally hold dear, unsure whether these

⁶ Max L. Stackhouse, *God and Globalization*, vol. 1: *Religion and the Powers of the Common Life*, ed. by Max L. Stackhouse and Peter J. Paris (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark: 2009), 7.

⁷ Stackhouse, 8.

⁸ Ibid., 7.

norms hold universally. As a result, they may refrain from proclaiming and defending strong moral positions. But, as professor of philosophy and political science, Carol Gould, insists, this relativistic stance is problematic because it leaves persons unable (and perhaps unwilling) to respond when they fundamentally disagree with the norms of others, or when others “act in ways that [they] judge to be oppressive.”⁹

Also worried about relativism, Joerg Rieger, a theologian who specializes in issues related to social class, calls into question the tendency of postmodernist and postcolonial thinkers to reject moral dualities. To illustrate his point, Rieger describes the views of the postcolonial biblical scholar, R.S. Sugirtharajah, who argues against presenting clear-cut choices between right and wrong, truth and untruth because these bear little relevance to the experience of those whose lives are “inherently untidy and...marked by messy and mixed-up realities.”¹⁰ Rieger agrees with Sugirtharajah’s that, for the poor and working class, life is often messy and mixed-up but he argues that a strong sense of what is right and wrong can be helpful. Indeed, this strong sense is especially important for the poor and working classes, Rieger holds, since their

⁹ Carol Gould, “The New Global Ethics and its Three Faces,” in *Ethics in an Era of Globalization*, ed. by M.S. Ronald Commers, Wim Vandekerckhove, and An Verlinden (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008), 19.

¹⁰ R.S. Sugirtharajah, Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings, quoted in Joerg Rieger’s “Instigating Class Struggle? The Study of Class in Religion and Theology and Some Implications for Gender, Race, and Ethnicity,” in *Religion, Theology, and Class: Fresh Engagements after Long Silence*, ed. by Joerg Rieger (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 195.

members are most vulnerable to the negative consequences and “harsh realities of top-down class struggle and other differentials of power.” Rieger emphasizes that, for members of these classes, survival may depend on a sense of what is right and wrong.¹¹ Without the possibility of reaching the categorical conclusion that an option being pressed upon them by the powerful is wrong, the often-powerless will not explore resistance as a response and will remain susceptible to abuse and unfair treatment.

Kaufman assumed that theological claims and normative claims are related. Stackhouse agrees. He finds that “theology and ethics are mutually supportive, even necessary to each other” while also being distinctive enough call the other into question and to serve as correctives. Like Kaufman, Stackhouse deems ethics “indispensable” when people are weighing the relative merits of various religious claims about how the best way to lead their lives.¹² In support of Kaufman and Stackhouse’s views, a growing body of empirical research points to a link between religious beliefs and day-to-day choices. Studies show that religious worldviews influence areas of human life as wide-ranging as “education, income, female labor

¹¹ Joerg Rieger, “Instigating Class Struggle? The Study of Class in Religion and Theology and Some Implications for Gender, Race, and Ethnicity,” in *Religion, Theology, and Class: Fresh Engagements after Long Silence*, ed. by Joerg Rieger (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 195-196.

¹² Stackhouse, 7.

force participation, careers, and many other important individual and family outcomes.”¹³ Because concepts of God can affect the practical decisions made by theists in many areas of life, if those concepts include morally regressive features, they need to be identified and rectified.¹⁴

Traditional ethics grew out of rigorous analysis and theorizing. Leading approaches such as rights-based, consequentialist, and communitarian rules and practices were primarily developed as frameworks that could be used to assess and make recommendations about the behavior of residents of particular nations rather than between individuals trans-globally.¹⁵ These and other approaches run into difficulty when used to theorize and analyze interactions and relations between individuals across borders. For example, although purchasing cheaper products may make it easier for a family to meet its budget, heads of household face a moral decision: To pay lower prices, are they willing to take advantage of the forced labor of Chinese prisoners working in sub-human conditions, or of the cheap wages of Bangladeshi citizens working in unsafe, polluting factories? Globalization has profoundly restructured human life and widened the scope of ethical challenges.

¹³ Lisa A. Keister, *Faith and Money: How Religion Contributes to Wealth and Poverty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 5-6.

¹⁴ Gould, 19.

¹⁵ Ibid., 15.

Due to dilemmas such as the one described above, political philosopher Will Kymlicka finds that, as globalization increases, "ethics must itself become globalized."¹⁶ If ethics takes the inter-connected nature of the contemporary world into account, which Kymlicka insists must be the case, a trans-religious, trans-cultural ethic—in other words, a *global* ethic—is needed. Theological ethicist, William Schweiker, agrees, describing the "compression of the world" that has resulted from increased globalization as the "new problem" of ethics. Pluralism engenders new problems when it is "seen to rise internal to a culture and the interactions among cultures are expanded." A global ethic, he asserts, is needed to respond to this new problem.¹⁷

To avoid charges of Euro-American-centrism and parochialism, however, a global ethic must undergo a vetting process that includes public conversation between representatives of the worlds' religions and cultures. This is the recommendation of Nigel Dower, an academic philosopher and past President of the International Development Ethics Association. In his view, "if a global ethic is an ethic widely shared

¹⁶ Will Kymlicka, "Introduction: The Globalization of Ethics," in *The Globalization of Ethics: Religious and Secular Perspectives*, eds. William M. Sullivan and Will Kymlicka (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1.

¹⁷ William Schweiker, *Theological Ethics and Global Dynamics: In the Time of Many Worlds* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), 27.

across the world," then this global ethic will be "the product of negotiation, consultation and transnational dialogue..."¹⁸

Religious studies professor, Rebecca Todd Peters, likewise argues that since, in part, the task of a global ethic is to provide a set of "reasonable standards" necessary to "adjudicate" between competing moral visions, the process of choosing these standards requires impacted communities—including scholars, businesspeople, religious leaders, and elected officials—engaging in public debate to develop a set of negotiated moral norms.¹⁹ A better global order, these thinkers agree, "cannot be created or enforced by laws, prescriptions, and conventions alone"—globalization calls for a global ethic.²⁰ Several versions of a global ethic have been formulated over the past two decades, but more often than not, they are advanced by a group of people who would like to see their particular version of an ethic globalized.²¹

The sole global ethic currently in existence that is a product of significant negotiation, consultation, and transnational conversation is the *Global Ethic*, which purports to articulate (not develop) the *already existing* "fundamental consensus" of

¹⁸ Nigel Dower, "Cosmopolitanism and Community," in *Ethics in an Era of Globalization*, 127.

¹⁹ Rebecca Todd Peters, "Justice in a World Gone Mad: Assessing the Ethical Landscape of Globalization," in *Ethics in an Era of Globalization*, 70.

²⁰ Küng, *A Global Ethic*, 20-21.

²¹ Christien van den Anker, "Bridging the Gaps in Global Ethics: Grounded Cosmopolitan Praxis," in *Ethics in an Era of Globalization*, 41.

the world's religious and cultural traditions on values, standards, and "personal attitudes."

II. The Redaction and Ratification of the Global Ethic

In the late 1980s, the Swiss Catholic theologian, Hans Küng,²² presented a paper at several conferences in Europe, the United States, and Canada arguing that no peace could exist among the world's nations until there was peace between the religions.²³ Invited to give a lecture at the University of Chicago, he took the opportunity to call on the leaders responsible for planning the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions to proclaim "'a new ethical consensus' of the religions."²⁴ His lecture had the desired effect. In April, 1989, he received an invitation, by members of the Council charged with preparations for the Parliament, to draft a global ethic in time for the upcoming

²² Hans Küng is a Swiss Roman Catholic priest and theologian who has devoted much of his career to questions about the role of religion and of the religions in achieving world peace. A tenured professor at the University of Tübingen, some of his writings ran counter to official Church doctrine and, in 1979, his license to teach as a Catholic theologian was withdrawn. He retained his status as a theologian but became the director of the Institute for Ecumenical Research at Tübingen (see Richard Morgan's "Peace Among Religions: Hans Küng's Analysis of Christian and Muslim Paradigms of Social Justice in Search of a Global Ethic," *Forum on Public Policy: A Journal of the Oxford Round Table* 7, no. 3 (2011): 2.)

²³ David Cheetham, "The 'Global Ethic': criticisms and the Possibilities of Post-Secular Thinking," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 18, no. 1 (2007), 20.

²⁴ Küng, *A Global Ethic*, 45.

Parliament scheduled to convene in September of 1993.²⁵ He agreed in principle but further planning meetings did not work out.

Nearly three years later, in February 1992, Daniel Gómez-Ibáñez, Executive Director of the Parliament, travelled to the University of Tübingen where Küng served on faculty to ask him personally to write the global ethic for which Küng himself had been calling. Though already over-committed to other projects, Küng agreed to make space in his schedule to work on the *Global Ethic*. He understood that the Parliament was a unique opportunity to focus attention on a global ethic that could help address what he—and many other religious leaders as well as international agencies and organizations—viewed as the basic ethical problems of the world. These problems, though “not easily susceptible to political force,” would benefit from the “kind of standard” that could emerge from bringing to bear “the moral and spiritual resources of all the religions and ethical groups.”²⁶

Küng’s choice of the word, ‘ethic,’ as opposed to ‘ethics,’ is deliberate. He equates ethics with theory, or a “uniform ethical system.” An ethic or ethos, on the other hand, points to an inner moral disposition, or attitude. It has to do “with value orientations, patterns of interpretation and criteria for action, and thus most of all—directly or indirectly—also with religious convictions, with religious education, positive

²⁵ Ibid., 48.

²⁶ Ibid., 47.

or negative religious experiences.” I will return to the Global Ethic’s focus on changing what Küng calls “the inner moral dispositions of agents,” or what some religious ethicists call “moral consciousness” (see, for example, Schweiker, 2007, and Barnhart, 2002).²⁷ Key to the present discussion is the fact that Küng added the adjective, global, to ethic to indicate that this ethic is “a necessary minimum of shared ethical values, basic attitudes and criteria (‘ethic’) to which all regions, nations and interest groups can commit themselves” (GP 26).

The Parliament’s ‘Council’ requested that Küng develop a one-page Declaration and stipulated that it should be brief and to the point.²⁸ The initial plan was for the Parliament’s Board of Trustees to approve Küng’s draft of the global ethic before the Parliament convened in Chicago. Küng ignored the Council’s request for brevity because, he explained, a document of that length could serve “a casual ‘poster’” but nothing more.²⁹

²⁷ William Schweiker, “Whither Global Ethics: Moral Consciousness and Global Cultural Flows,” in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 42:3 (Summer 2007): 425-430; Michael Barnhart, *Introduction to Varieties of Ethical Reflection: New Directions for Ethics in a Global Context*, “Studies in Comparative Philosophy and Religion, No. 1,” ed. Michael Barnhart, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002): 1-17.

²⁸ Jon Bloch, “A Whisper Toward Peace: A Theoretical Analysis of the Council for a Parliament of the World Religions,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 47, no. 4 (2008), 615.

²⁹ Küng, *A Global Ethic*, 48.

Over a period of several months Küng developed a long version, seeking input from religious and theological ethics scholars who 1) were part of the personal consultative network that he had developed over the years, and 2) he encountered as he “canvassed” the idea at an inter-religious colloquia which he taught and at lectures he attended throughout the world. He sent the resulting long paper to the Council in Chicago whose members circulated it further, requesting commentary from religious ethics scholars and religious leaders representing a wide array of religious traditions. At each step along the way, Küng received additional suggestions and corrections both to the content and style of the *Global Ethic*. He estimates that more than one hundred individuals, representing the great religions, participated in this collaborative process.³⁰ Thus, from the start Küng honored the plurality of communities whose representatives he asked to examine his evolving document, to reflect on its contents from the perspective of their own religious tradition, and to offer well-informed and nuanced reactions and proposals for changes. By all accounts, he appears to have engaged in this cooperative effort until the *Global Ethic* reached a stable formulation.

As Küng worked on the *Global Ethic*, he followed the guidelines below:

1. It should not give the impression of having been generated by a committee
2. It should not attempt to duplicate the Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, but attempt to go beyond rights to articulate an ethic for individuals while also providing a moral basis for the UNDHR.

³⁰ Ibid., 52.

3. It should focus on the moral dimensions of life rather than attempting to also encompass civic-political-legal dimensions
4. It should not include any specific casuistic prescriptions lest it become overly complex (here, I am drawing on Cheetham, and on Küng's comments)

Though Küng integrated some of the offered suggestions and corrections, authorship continues to be, on the whole, attributed almost exclusively to Küng. This is an appropriate assumption because, as Küng explained in later writings, the basic structure and language of the principles of a *Global Ethic* remained consistent throughout its redaction phase. The main changes concerned the details of the text, which, as a result of the extensive review process, in his view, "been considerably improved."³¹ Of note as well: Gómez-Ibáñez insisted that the document retain Küng as its principal author in order to secure an overarching consistency of voice. Under his leadership, the Council and the individuals who made changes to the document, remained attentive to preserving Küng's themes and style and secured his approval of the final version.³²

When Küng's long paper reached the Council of the Parliament, several individuals affiliated with the Parliament criticized it as too Western in tone and focus (it continues to be criticized on this basis). To address these charges, the Parliament's planning Council sent out a call inviting scholars to write a shorter version, and one

³¹ Ibid.

³² Thomas Baima and Daniel Gómez-Ibáñez, telephone conversations with author, 2017.

more inclusive of "Asian religious thought structures and manners of presentation."³³

One of the four individuals who responded was a vice-president of the 1993 Parliament, Thomas Baima, a Catholic priest and professor of ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, and theology of religions.³⁴ Baima found Küng's long paper highly problematical:

The four universal precepts in Dr. Küng's text...are four of the Ten Commandments. Some had the feeling that our declaration would then appear to be an abbreviation of Western morality that would play very negatively in the U.S. Press. We envisioned headlines like 'God gives ten commandments, Parliament accepts four, rejects six.'³⁵

Baima enlisted the assistance of Dr. Daniel Gómez-Ibáñez, the Executive Director of the Parliament, and together, they wrote the short paper, which was eventually accepted by the Council of the Parliament. They did not remain its sole contributors, however. Like Küng's long paper, their short paper underwent a process of refinement. Indeed, to address the concerns of those to whom it was circulated, it was rewritten eight times.³⁶ For the final draft, see Appendix B.

Küng's long paper was allowed to stand, but with an important caveat. Though it was to have been presented to the Parliament as *The Declaration Toward a Global Ethic*, Baima and Gómez-Ibáñez's paper was inserted in front of Küng's, thus bundling

³³ Thomas A. Baima, quoted by Jon Bloch, 615.

³⁴ Short biography of Thomas A. Baima. Accessed 19 July 2013.
http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/index_print.cfm?n=1&sn=14.

³⁵ Baima, quoted by Bloch, 615.

³⁶ Bloch, 615.

the two papers into one *Declaration*.³⁷ They were treated as a single document by the Council and given the title of Baima and Gómez-Ibáñez's short paper. The subheading, "The Principles of a Global Ethic," differentiated Küng's paper.³⁸ In this chapter and the chapters that follow, I explore what is consistently referred to, in scholarly and lay writings, as the *Global Ethic*—namely, Küng's long paper unless noted otherwise.³⁹ To read the text in its entirety, see Appendix A.

The Council of the Parliament, just as anxious as Küng to ensure that the final draft of the *Global Ethic* accurately reflected the moral principles shared by the world's religions, circulated the draft to their own, large network of scholars and spiritual leaders. The Council's members wanted to solicit additional feedback and garner

³⁷ Initially, the papers had different titles; the short paper was known as "The Declaration of a Global Ethic" while Küng's longer paper was known as "The Principles of a Global Ethic."

³⁸ Bloch, 615-616.

³⁹ In *A Global Ethic: The Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions* (GE), which he co-authored with Karl-Josef Kuschel, Küng labeled the short paper, "Introduction." As I did initially, many readers are likely to treat the 'Introduction' as just that, an introduction, and will read it quickly (if at all), anxious to engage the 'actual' Global Ethic. Scholars, who have relied on the information provided in this paragraph, rather than on the Parliament's Executive Summary, have unwittingly propagated Küng's headings. Thus, Richard Morgan described the Declaration: "Originally an Introduction which was tended [sic] to be a brief, evocative presentation of the Larger declaration was issued as well for the sake of public proclamation. The first part of the actual Declaration sets forth the need for a Global Ethic which follows along the lines of Küng's argument..." (emphasis mine). See Morgan's "Peace Among Religions." This article is available from the Free Library:
<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Peace+among+religions%3A+Hans+Kung's+analysis+of+Christian+and+Muslim...-a0317588299>.

broad support for the text before putting it to a vote by the Parliament's Board of Trustees. This process took longer than anticipated—months passed as the selected scholars and leaders took time to study and comment. A draft was then sent for review to the members of the Parliament's Board, many of whom, according to Gómez-Ibáñez, "had no experience or academic training in ethics, not to mention interreligious ethics." By then, the trustees understood the importance of the document they were being asked to approve and they created several subcommittees to review and revise the working draft.⁴⁰ They forwarded their findings to Küng in June 1993 and he quickly

⁴⁰ According to the "Executive Summary of the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions," (undated), pages 3-4, the 1992-1993 Board of Trustees included thirty-seven individuals: Rev. David Ramage (Chair; President of McCormick Theological Seminary), Ms. Maria Svolos Gebhard (Vice-Chair), Mr. Jim Kenney (Vice-Chair: Director of Common Ground), Mrs. Robert W. Renecker (Vice-Chair), Ms. Helen Spector (Vice-Chair: President of Spector & Associates, Inc., California), Ms. Yael Wurmfeld (Vice-Chair and Secretary: Director of the Office of Pioneering, National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States), Dr. David Breed (Treasurer; President of Maximum Entropy, Inc.), Dr. Daniel Gómez-Ibáñez (Executive Director), Dr. Ghulam Haider Aasi (Chair of Islamic and History of Religions, American Islamic College), Fr. Thomas A. Baima (Director, Office of Ecumenical and Inter-religious Affairs, Archdiocese of Chicago), Dr. Gerald O. Barney (Executive Director of Millenium Institute, Virginia), Dr. Arthur M. Brazier (Bishop of Pentecostal Assemblies of the World; Pastor, Apostolic Church of God), Rabbi Herbert Bronstein (Senior Rabbi of North Shore Congregation Israel), Reverend Dr. Joan B. Campbell (General Secretary of National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., New York), Mr. M. Blouke Carus (President and CEO of Carus Corporation), Reverend Dr. Leon D. Finney, Jr. (Pastor of Christ Apostolic Church and Community), Reverend Dr. Clay Evans (Pastor of Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church), Dr. Ray Hart (Professor of Religion at Boston University, Massachusetts), Dr. Asad Husain (President of American Islamic College), Dr. Irfan Ahmad Khan (U.N. Office of Muslim World League), Mr. P.V. Krishnayya (Project Director of Lever Brothers,

made the requested changes. His final version was appended to Baima and Gómez-Ibáñez's 'short text'. In late July 1993, the Council's trustees signaled their support with a yes vote. On that day, the *Global Ethic* was officially ratified as a document of the Parliament of the World's Religions.⁴¹ Though Küng had hoped to have enough time to solicit endorsements through signatures from well-known religious figures around the world before the start of the Parliament, with only two months left, this proved unfeasible. The formal presentation of the declaration would have to wait for the Parliament itself.

Inc.), Mr. Amrish Mahajan (President of Capital Funding Investment Corporation), Imam Wallace Deen Mohammed (Muslim American Spokesman; Member of World Supreme Council of Mosques), the Very Rev. James Parks Morton (Dean of the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine, New York), Dr. James S. Nelson (Professor of Biblical/Theological Studies, North Park College), Mr. Charles Nolley (Director of Media Production, National Spiritual Assembly of the Bhhá'ís of the United States), Achahn Dr. Chuen Phangcham (Vice-President of American Buddhist Congress and Vice-President Wat Dhammaram Temple), Dr. Krishna P. Reddy (Past President of Hindu Temple of Greater Chicago), Mr. Rohinton Rivetna (President of Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America), Most Reverend Placido Rodriguez (Auxiliary Bishop of Chicago), Rabbi Herman Schaelman (Emanuel Congregation, Emeritus), Mr. R. Leilani Smith (External Affairs Secretary of the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís), Rev. Charles Spivey (Pastor of Coppin Memorial A.M.E. Church), Dr. Howard Sulkin (President of Spertus College of Judaica), Sir John M. Templeton (Founder of The Templeton Prize, Lyford Cay, Bahamas), Swami Varadananda (Vivekananda Vedanta Society), Rev. Addie Wyatt (Co-Pastor of Vernon Park Church of God).

⁴¹ Gómez-Ibáñez, 6.

III. The Endorsement of the Global Ethic

One hundred years after the first Parliament of the World Religions convened in Chicago in 1893 on the occasion of the World's Columbian Exposition, the Parliament of the World's Religions was held in Chicago from 28 August to 4 September.

According to the Executive Summary, representatives from 55 countries and 60 religions attended.⁴² Typical of conferences, though more than 8000 individuals preregistered, about 5500 people attended (Küng incorrectly places that number 6500⁴³). The number of participants is often inflated in the literature about the Parliament because authors are unaware that the number of participants who attended was significantly lower than the number who preregistered. Of the 5500, the highest percentage (57%) of attendees came from the United States and described themselves as Christian. Hence, American Christianity was disproportionately represented at the parliament. Hindus, Buddhists, Baha'i's, and Muslims also attended but in decreasing numbers.⁴⁴

Theologian of culture and of interreligious dialogue, Karl-Josef Kuschel, who worked with Küng on the *Global Ethic*, analyzed and compared the 1893 and 1993

⁴² Numbers provided by Bloch based on the "Executive Summary: 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions" (Chicago: Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions, undated), 616.

⁴³ Küng, *A Global Ethic*, 8.

⁴⁴ Bloch, 614.

Parliaments. Kuschel notes that the Parliament in 1893 was held at a time when Christianity remained the dominant religion in the West. Themes of modernity preoccupied the planners and participants—namely, the “universal idea of the ‘brotherhood of religions’.” The Parliament in 1993, on the other hand, took place under different circumstances; Christianity retained the greatest number of adherents in the West but shared the religious landscape with numerous other world religions. The “brotherhood of religions” was no longer an abstract idea, but a reality which preoccupied the planners and participants with practical questions about peaceful coexistence and interreligious cooperation.⁴⁵ Especially in the largest cities of Europe and North America, Kuschel highlights that previously “large monocultural” societies with a “European Christian stamp” had been replaced by “multi-cultural, multi-religious” ones.⁴⁶

The “Declaration Toward a Global Ethic,” was offered for discussion during the Assembly of Religious and Spiritual Leaders held during the Parliament. These leaders met separately from the rest of the Parliament attendees during the afternoons of the final three days (September 2-4) to discuss the issues and challenges facing the global

⁴⁵ Küng, *A Global Ethic*, 94.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 92.

community.⁴⁷ The list of leaders confirmed as of August 26, 1993, included 212 participants. Among them, H.H. The Dalai Lama, the Ven. Thích Nhát Hanh, Rev. Dr. James A. Forbes Jr., Prof. Diana Eck, Sir John Templeton, His Grace Bishop Job, Brahma Kumari Dadi Prakashmani Ji, Rev. Thomas Berry, Prof. Hans Küng, Brother Wayne Teasdale, Prof. Farid Esack, and Prof. Seyyed Hossein Nasr.⁴⁸

To give the conversation a focus, the leaders were asked to read and discuss the Global Ethic. Because there had not been time enough to contact them individually before the start of the Parliament, now that they were conveniently on site, they were asked to sign the document—an endorsement that could then be shared with the public. The version offered to the leaders was the final draft—the version approved by the Parliament's Board of Trustees—and thus the official version. Nonetheless, confusion about the purpose of the conversation ensued and the leaders set about critiquing the text.⁴⁹ I explain some of the sources of this conflict later in the chapter. A few leaders, in spite of voicing concerns about some of moral commitments on which the text insists, agreed to sign it. They also recommended continued post-Parliament dialogue to broaden agreement about the *Global Ethic*'s directives and to encourage

⁴⁷ "Executive Summary of the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions," (Chicago: Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions, undated).

⁴⁸ "1993 Parliament of the World's Religions, The Assembly of Religious and Spiritual Leaders: List of Participants, The Art Institute of Chicago, September 2, 3, & 4," (Chicago: Parliament of the World's Religions, undated).

⁴⁹ Thomas Baima, phone conversation with author, July 7, 2017.

wider adoption by religious and spiritual persons and organizations.⁵⁰ They also requested that the title be changed from “Declaration of a Global Ethic” to “Towards a Global Ethic, An Initial Declaration” to reflect the tentative nature of the declaration, the intention to revisit the directives in the future, and the possibility that these could evolve as a result of continued engagement. Once this suggestion was accepted, Kuschel notes, that an “overwhelming majority of the delegates supported the text without change.”⁵¹

On the last day of the Parliament, September 4, 1993, the first part of the recently renamed “Towards a Global Ethic, An Initial Declaration” the “Declaration of Global Ethic”—the ‘short text’—was read out loud to the participants who had gathered in Chicago’s Grant Park for the closing ceremony. Though the majority of the religions’ representatives likely assented to the Declaration, as had the religious and spiritual leaders who had participated in the earlier Assembly, it is likely that their reactions matched, to some extent, the reactions of those leaders.

controversies during the 1993 Parliament

The 1993 Parliament was not immune to the challenges that undermine peaceful coexistence and interreligious cooperation. Difficulties plagued the Parliament. Several

⁵⁰ “Executive Summary 1993 Parliament of the World’s Religions.”

⁵¹ *A Global Ethic*, 96.

conservative religious traditions refused to participate, ignoring the assertion, in the *Global Ethic*, that “religions are credible only when they eliminate those conflicts which spring from the religions themselves, dismantling mutual arrogance, mistrust, prejudice, and even hostile images, and thus demonstrate respect for the traditions, holy places, feasts, and rituals of people who believe differently.”⁵² Moreover, Kuschel tells of traditional Christian denominations, which, after taking note of the groups represented, accused the Parliament of syncretism.

Ethicist and political philosopher, J. Budziszewski, explains the reasons for such fears—fears he himself shares—from the perspective of those who declined to attend the Parliament on their basis. Though, in his view, the conservative Protestants who steered clear of the Parliament generally accommodate themselves to contemporary realities to a greater extent than they are willing to grant, they dread syncretism. For them, Budziszewski writes, syncretism turns the “Christian birthright” into a “mess of pottage.” In an effort to win agreement for “glib platitudes,” the Gospel’s teachings are twisted or set aside. An example of this sort of glib platitude, according to Budziszewski, is the Parliament of the World’s Religions’ “dictum” in 1993 that every human being be treated humanely.⁵³ By embracing this ‘dictum,’ the Parliament

⁵² Ibid., 22.

⁵³ J. Budziszewski, “Diplomacy and Theology in the Dialogue on Universal Ethics,” *Nova et Vetera* 9, no. 3, English Edition (2011): 719-720.

fostered the impression that all of the religious and secular traditions agree regarding the demand to treat human beings humanely—a demand treated as foundational and enshrined in the *Global Ethic*'s principles. Budziszewski's characterization of such a demand as a glib platitude implies that, for him, the Gospel does *not* unequivocally call for the humane treatment of every human being. Given the Gospel's powerful and well-known message of love for neighbor and of God's love for humankind, it seems unlikely that Budziszewski rejects this 'platitude' as part of the 'Christian birthright.' More likely, he is highlighting the worry that the unique teachings of Christianity (and by extension that of any religious traditions) may be obscured or undermined by claims of agreement between the religions—in this case, a commitment to treat human being humanely.

That some traditional churches deemed syncretism problematic enough that they elected not to send representatives may explain why Küng and Kuschel, in *A Global Ethic*, attempted to neutralize this concern quickly by addressing it in the second paragraph of their Preface to their book (similar language also appears in the *Global Ethic* itself):

Here a global ethic means neither a global ideology, nor a single unified global religion transcending all existing religions, nor a mixture of all religions. Humanity is weary of unified ideologies, and in any case the religions of the world are so different in their views of faith and 'dogmas', their symbols and rites,

that a ‘unification’ of them would be meaningless, a distasteful syncretistic cocktail.⁵⁴

In this paragraph, Küng and Kuschel emphasize that the goal of the *Global Ethic* is not to create a single religion across the world. They agree with those who fear syncretism: a single, amalgamated religion would be an unacceptable mish-mash and, lacking specific and unique teachings and rituals, would be meaningless to its practitioners. Like Budziszewski they reject such an outcome and wish to avoid this possibility. The *Global Ethic*, they state, does not

seek to replace the high ethics of the individual religions with an ethical minimalism. The Torah of the Jews, the Christians’ Sermon on the Mount, the Muslims’ Qur'an, the Hindus’ Bhagavadgita, the Discourses of the Buddha, the Sayings of Confucius—for hundreds and millions of men and women all these remain the foundation for faith and life.⁵⁵

Besides syncretism, conflict at the Parliament ensued over the inclusion of certain groups. For example, as early as the planning stage, hostility to neo-pagan groups, for example, led “evangelical and fundamentalist church groups,” among others, to withhold their participation. When a neo-pagan group held a drawing down the moon ritual in Chicago’s Grant Park (with the approval of the Council of the Parliament), the Greek Orthodox of Chicago group, previously committed to sending representatives, decided against taking part in the Parliament. The Greek Orthodox of

⁵⁴ Küng, *A Global Ethic*, 7.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Chicago may have wished to avoid being tarnished by association with what it considered strange, and even downright bizarre forms of religiosity.⁵⁶ This hostility, described by Kuschel as “antipathy to inter-religious activities,” generally focused on newer, smaller spiritual traditions. Four Jewish groups left the Parliament to protest the presence of the Nation of Islam and Louis Farrakhan because, they explained, Farrakhan and the Nation were anti-Semitic.⁵⁷

Some conflicts occurred because, to honor a commitment to peaceful coexistence and interfaith cooperation, the Parliament’s Planning Council decided to admit any group that asked to participate. These groups included Muslims, Zoroastrians, Jains, several branches of Buddhism including Tibetan, as well as Native Americans. They also included a variety of cults, spiritual groups, and religious movements. Documents describing the Opening Plenary illustrate this variety. The Parliament began with a procession of delegations featuring, alongside the better known and bigger traditions, groups like the International Society of Divine Love whose

⁵⁶ Though the Unitarian Universalist religious tradition welcomes neo-pagans and counts a significant number as members, in private conversations with me, several Unitarian Universalist ministers who attended the 1993 Parliament of the World Religions mentioned the “over-the-topness” of certain religious groups and the “weirdness” of dances by participants like the “high priest of Isis.” As a result, they intimated, they had difficulty taking either the Parliament or the Global Ethic seriously. Rather than an opportunity for dialogue, they remembered the Parliament as a week-long-pageant of “bizarre” and “fringe” religions.

⁵⁷ Küng, *A Global Ethic*, 95.

founder, Prakashananda Saraswati, was convicted by an American court in 2011 of twenty counts of child molestation. Saraswati then jumped bail and fled to India to avoid serving time in prison), the Lyceum of Venus of Healing (an incorporated company created in April 1993 which, though it still has an online business listing, has no dedicated website or other internet presence. Another group, the Sserulnia Foundation, no longer exists; an internet search of the Foundation on July 9, 2013, yielded no results.⁵⁸ Some groups, consisting of only a handful of adherents, "by their dress, ceremonies and presentation and themselves...attracted attention which was often in inverse proportion to their true significance"⁵⁹

Still, not all of the long-established religious groups with a well-regarded institutional presence were deterred by the seemingly outsized attention given to fringe groups. Several participated fully in the conference. Of note: the Federation of Jain Associations in America, the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Spertus College of Judaica, Catholic Theological Union, the Archdiocese of Chicago, the Orthodox Church of America, the Native American Community of Chicago, etc.

agreement on need for common ethical teachings

⁵⁸ Ibid., 109-118.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 95.

The abstention or resistance of some conservative groups to engage in joint activities or conversations with other religions before and during the 1993 Parliament need not lead to the conclusion that the *Global Ethic* itself is irrelevant or unnecessary. Moreover, the disapproval or hostility of certain strands of the religious and spiritual traditions for the *Global Ethic*'s claim that it expresses the moral principles already shared by the world's religions does not necessarily undermine this claim. Though they acknowledge that locating its directives in authoritative scriptural sources is not always obvious or straightforward, the contributors to the *Global Ethic* are convinced that they can be found in every religious and secular tradition's teachings and key texts. The multi-religious, interfaith, and collaborative nature of the *Global Ethic*'s redaction is evidence of significant agreement. Moreover, though some members of conservative religious groups like evangelical Christian Elliot Miller (then Editor in Chief of the *Christian Research Journal*) criticized the Parliament for its "unacceptable" emphasis on "unity and communion" among the world's religions,⁶⁰ Miller included the *Global Ethic* in his rather brief list of what he considered "good" about the Parliament. He argued that multi-religious and multi-ethnic societies are here to stay. Given this reality,

⁶⁰ Elliot Miller, "The 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions (Part Two: The Fundamentalism of Tolerance)." Accessed September 30, 2017. <http://www.equip.org/article/the-1993-parliament-of-the-worlds-religions-part-one/>. Miller's criticisms of the Parliament were based on the following claims: "all faiths worship the same God is factually indefensible" and the "unity advocated at the Parliament would violate the integrity of many of the religions represented there."

common ethical teachings (e.g., the Golden Rule) in the world's religions...can serve as a framework for interreligious relations. They can also provide a base for a united response to many of the crises of our time. Thus, the Declaration of a Global Ethic is a praiseworthy product of the Parliament.⁶¹

IV. The Content of the Global Ethic

Succinctly described, "Towards a Global Ethic, An Initial Declaration," or the *Global Ethic*, is made up of four sections.

- Part I serves as an introduction and describes the pressing need for a global ethic.
- Parts II and III contain the bulk of the *Global Ethic*. Part III presents the ethic's four irrevocable, unconditional, ethical directives based on the Golden Rule and on the fundamental demand that all human beings be treated humanely, both of "which one finds in every great religious or ethical tradition" (GE, 54).
- Part IV serves as an epilogue calling for people of the world to change their consciousness by accepting the *Global Ethic* and abiding, to the best of their ability, to its four irrevocable principles.

The directives are deemed *irrevocable* in the sense that they represent "concrete standards," and *unconditional* in the sense that all human beings are called to "hold firm" to them.⁶² The four directives are:

- Commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life
- Commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order
- Commitment to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness
- Commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Küng, *A Global Ethic*, 24.

The greater part of the *Global Ethic*'s text is dedicated to elaborating these irrevocable, unconditional directives because the directives are abstract and may be difficult to apply in a clear and consistent way to a variety of particular situations.⁶³ For example, the first directive, demands "Commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life," begging the question about what non-violence entails (Is cosmetic surgery acceptable? What about education, which often entails coercion?), and what it means to have respect for life.

To help secure decisions aligned with the directives, five guiding principles are provided to explicate each of the directives. The first directive, for example, is elaborated by the following five guiding principles:

Directive (general of abstract principle): Commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life

- a. All people have a right to live. (Guiding principle)
- b. Conflicts should always be resolved nonviolently. (Guiding principle)
- c. Young people must be taught nonviolence. (Guiding principle)
- d. Individuals must respect other species of living things.(Guiding principle)
- e. People must always be ready to help each other. (Guiding principle)

The guiding principles provide greater specificity as to how to apply the *Global Ethic*'s directives. They offer more concrete interpretations of the directives to enable compliance in a given situation in a particular context. The sociologist, Jon Bloch has

⁶³ Sean McKeever and Michael Ridge, *Principled Ethics: Generalism as a Regulative Ideal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 201.

noted that “key phrases and themes are repeated across each directive.”⁶⁴ For example, the third guiding principle always calls for the education of young people. Thus, above—for the first directive—the third guiding principle is: “Young people must be taught nonviolence.” The fifth guiding principle always begins with the phrase: “To be authentically human...” Reliance on this phrase has given rise to one of the more important, and difficult critiques of the *Global Ethic*, which will be explored later in this chapter. In addition, the first guiding principle (above: “All people have a right to live”), in Bloch’s view “is always a slight paraphrase” of the Hebrew Bible’s and the Old Testament’s Decalogue-commandments 6-9 which are concerned with one’s behavior toward the neighbor.

- Decalogue Command 6: Thou shalt not kill
- Decalogue Command 7: Thou shalt not commit adultery
- Decalogue Command 8: Thou shalt not steal
- Decalogue Command 9: Thou shalt not bear false witness

Not everyone agrees that there is a correlation between the directives and their guiding principles, and the Jewish and Christian Decalogue. Commands 6-9 are such general and such basic norms of human conduct that one wonders what culture or society would omit any of them from their fundamental moral principles. They are perhaps stated plainly in the Decalogue because they are a requirement for the proper functioning of human groups. In this case, one would expect that they would also

⁶⁴ Bloch, 617.

appear in any global ethic. The putative relationship between the *Global Ethic*'s directives and the Decalogue has given rise to one of the more important, and difficult, critiques of the *Global Ethic*, which will be explored in greater depth later in this chapter.

Having provided a brief, preliminary description of the contents of the *Global Ethic*, I will now delve into each section at greater length.

Preamble

This brief section explains the world's need for a single, shared ethic. A global ethic is essential because the contemporary world is in the throes of fundamental crises: economic, ecological, and political. As a result, millions of persons suffer all over the globe. These crises, the preamble explains, are caused, or exacerbated by an absence of vision, complex problems without easy or quick solutions, the inability or unwillingness of governments to act, and weak leaders or corrupt ones. In addition, religions throughout the world are used as pretexts for hate, violence, and war. A better world is possible. A remedy to some of this suffering exists. The solution lies, in part, in an ethic that requires no committee to develop because this ethic "already exists within the religious teachings of the world." Religious people who have truly committed themselves "to the precepts and practices of the world's religion" are aware that this ethic exists for the simple reason that there is, and has always been a

"minimal fundamental consensus concerning binding values, irrevocable standards, and fundamental moral attitudes." This minimal fundamental consensus is no cure-all, but it offers, as no other partial solution can, "the moral foundation for a better individual and global order." It also offers a unique vision that is currently lacking—one able to lead all "women and men away from despair, and society away from chaos."⁶⁵

Part I. No global order without a global ethic

This section emphasizes that women and men from religions and regions of the world agree on the shared convictions described in the *Global Ethic*. In turn, the *Global Ethic* is framed in a manner intended to be inclusive of non-theistic religions and to leave an opening for non-religious individuals to embrace its directives. God, it explains, is not mentioned in the Principles, only an "Ultimate Reality." Since visions based on "hopes, goals, ideals, and standards" do not yet hold sway over the planet, the religions of the world have a responsibility to stoke these visions, keep hope alive, and inspire all people to turn them into reality. The religions can reach hearts and minds in a way that laws, prescriptions and conventions alone cannot. Though rights are addressed in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations, "rights without morality" lack proper grounding and fall away. Without a "fundamental

⁶⁵ Küng, *A Global Ethic*, 18.

consensus on an ethic," chaos, tyranny, and despair will continue to reign.⁶⁶

Part II. A demand that all human beings be treated humanely

Human beings are fallible and have "limitations and defects." For this reason, a global ethic is required, not only for individuals, but also for communities, organizations, states, and the world's religions. This section implies, then, that the world's religions are in need of a global ethic, while also being the source of that ethic: "our often millennia-old religions and ethical traditions provide an ethic which is convincing and practical for **all women and men of good will**, religious and non-religious."⁶⁷ Because of the absence of a perfectly good will—or, what Jeffrey Wattles prefers to call 'minimal sincerity'⁶⁸—among fallible and imperfect women and men, the already shared commitments expressed in the *Global Ethic*, though convincing and practical, meet with resistance. The religions can't completely resolve the problems that plague the world since they cannot provide economic plans, political platforms, or legal systems. However, they can engender a change in orientation, in perspective on the world, altering the 'hearts' of people and guiding them away "from a false path."⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Ibid., 18-21.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 21.

⁶⁸ Jeffrey Wattles prefers the expression "minimal sincerity." See his *The Golden Rule*, 1st edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁶⁹ *A Global Ethic*, 22.

For the past “thousands of years,” religious and ethical convictions demand that “**every human must be treated humanely.**”⁷⁰ The *Global Ethic* insists that every human being “possesses an inalienable and untouchable dignity.”⁷¹

Ancient religious and ethical convictions also include the principle of reciprocity, or the so-called Golden Rule, “What you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others. Or, in positive terms, “What you wish done to yourself, do to others.”⁷² People may pursue worldly rewards, but “self-determination and self-realization” remain legitimate only as long as they take into account responsibility for the welfare of other human beings and of the earth. This section, then, identifies the moral ground that unifies the religious and ethical traditions of the world.

To recap: the shared, irrevocable directives of the *Global Ethic* are based and derived from a common ground of convictions that has persisted for ‘thousands of years.’ This common ground is:

1. Every person must be treated humanely
2. The Golden Rule (also called the principle of reciprocity)

⁷⁰ Ibid., 23.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 23. Künig, aware of his reliance on a Kantian moral framework, wrote that, for him, the importance of the Golden Rule was the unconditional nature of this norm: “a norm which is not just hypothetical and conditioned but is categorical, apodeictic and unconditioned—utterly practical in the face of the extremely complex situation in which the individual or group must often act.” See Hans Künig, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1991), 59.

Part III. Four irrevocable directives

The *Global Ethic* identifies four directives. Each directive is given in the positive and negative forms putatively found in most, if not all, of the world's religious and secular traditions. The four directives, taken together, comprise the core of the *Global Ethic*, stipulating which human actions are to be encouraged, which to be avoided. The majority of Part III elaborates on the directives.

1. Commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life

This directive appears in the "great ancient religious and ethical traditions of humankind" as "**You shall not kill!** Or in positive terms: **Have respect for life!**" It focuses on the rights of all people to "life, safety, and the free development of personality in so far as" the exercise of these rights does "not injure" other people's rights. The guiding principles offer greater precision on these rights. Individuals do not have "the right physically or psychically to torture, injure, must less kill, any other human being." More broadly, peoples, states, races, or religions, do not have the right "to hate, to discriminate against, to 'cleanse', to exile, much less to liquidate a 'foreign minority which is different in behavior or holds different beliefs."⁷³

⁷³ Ibid., 25.

2. Commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order.

This directive appears in the “great ancient religions and ethical traditions of humankind,” as “**You shall not steal!**” Or in positive terms: **Deal honestly and fairly!**” For example, “No one has the right to rob or dispossess in any way whatsoever any person or the commonweal.” Although the Global Ethic has been accused of setting aside environmental concerns in favor of persons, the directive specifies: “no one has the right to use her or his possessions without concern for the needs of society and Earth.” To advance a just economic order, “We must utilize economic and political power for service to humanity...” And to foster a culture of solidarity, “We must cultivate mutual respect and consideration, so as to reach a reasonable balance of interests...” We must also learn to value “a sense of moderation and modesty...”⁷⁴

3. Commitment to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness

This directive appears in the “great ancient religions and ethical traditions of humankind” as “**You shall not lie!**” Or in positive terms: **Speak and act truthfully!**” It advocates a fully transparent way of life in which no one, whether an individual, a religious community, an institution, or a state permits themselves to lie.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Ibid., 27, 29.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 30.

4. Commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women

This directive appears in the “great ancient religions and ethical traditions of humankind” as “**You shall not commit sexual immorality!** Or in positive terms:

Respect and love one another! Its guiding principles insist that “No one has the right to degrade others to mere sex objects, to lead them into or hold them in sexual dependency.” Moreover, patronizing behavior and exploitation are not acceptable; “the relationship between women and men” should be characterized “by love, partnership, and trustworthiness.” Here, the *Global Ethic* can be accused of heteronormativity, underscoring the wisdom of Hans Küng and his fellow contributors who not only expected but recommended that the *Global Ethic* be perpetually discussed and revised. The guiding principles also stipulate: “Human fulfillment is not identical with sexual pleasure. Sexuality should express and reinforce a loving relationship lived by equal partners.”⁷⁶

Part IV. A transformation of consciousness

History has shown that social and individual change cannot occur without the transformation of social consciousness and individual consciousness. While transformations have been achieved in certain areas of life, transformation in the area

⁷⁶ Ibid., 32-33.

of ethics and values remains elusive. The work of reminding the peoples of the world of the importance of this transformation “is the special task of religion.”

Disputed ethical questions such as those tied to scientific advances in DNA manipulation or LGBTQIA rights are not directly addressed in the *Global Ethic* but the possibility of extension inheres in the four directives. Finding common ground on many, such controversial questions exists as long as solutions are sought “in the spirit” of the directives.⁷⁷ Indeed, at the time of this writing (September 2017), the *Global Ethic* is in the process of being expanded—a process described in this dissertation’s Afterword.

V. Two More Ways the Global Ethic Can be Helpful

The religions of the world are urged to “formulate” their own “specific ethic” because each religious tradition has its own particular understanding of “the meaning of life and death, the enduring of suffering and the forgiveness of guilt, about selfless sacrifice and the necessity of renunciation, about compassion and joy.” Though the religious traditions have particular understandings, the directives and guiding principles of the *Global Ethic* are “already discernible” in the world’s religious communities. Embedding them in the traditions’ rich and compelling worldviews is certain to “deepen” them.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Ibid., 35-36.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 35-36.

moral support for the U.N.'s Declaration of Human Rights

The *Global Ethic* is not a declaration of human rights, and was never intended to serve as such. For Küng, the text closest to the *Global Ethic* in function is the 1776 U.S. Declaration of Independence, *not* the U.N.'s 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Though Küng himself does not elaborate the reasons for this connection, there could be two reasons for his preferred tie-in to the Declaration of Independence. First, both documents served as the beginning of a process intended to inspire and to change "the behavior of men and women...in the direction of understanding, respect and cooperation." Second, both documents were conceived as steppingstones to later documents that would elaborate the desired change in behavior in a concrete and precise manner; this step occurred when the United States ratified the Bill of Rights in 1791; it remains illusive for the *Global Ethic*.⁷⁹

The *Global Ethic*, nonetheless, refers explicitly to the U.N.'s Declaration as follows: "We are convinced of the fundamental unity of the human family on Earth. We recall the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations. What it formally proclaimed on the level of rights we wish to confirm and deepen here from the perspective of an ethic." Hence, the *Global Ethic* emphasizes that its goal is not to duplicate the work already done by U.N.'s Declaration, but rather to focus on the

⁷⁹ Ibid., 8.

morality that undergirds human rights since “rights without morality cannot long endure.”⁸⁰ Küng hoped that a later, more precise, and illustrations-rich declaration would eventually be produced to “provide moral support” for the U.N.’s Declaration on Human Rights which is “so often ignored and cruelly violated.”⁸¹ To reiterate: Küng never intended the *Global Ethic* to be treated as a final statement. It was developed in the spirit of a work-in-progress, a living document intended to be revisited and amended.

Why has the *Global Ethic* remained in the form ratified by the Parliament in 1993 in spite of Küng’s wishes? A process of adoption at top religious, institutional levels is not available to the global ethic because, unlike nation-states, few religions have leaders or elected bodies which speak, represent, or vote for the entire tradition. Only the leaders or elected bodies of conservative religious traditions have the ability to make decisions for all members of their given faith tradition. In one sense, though, this is a strength of the *Global Ethic*; it maintains its ability to cross borders and to be embraced by individuals all over the world regardless of whether their religious tradition’s leadership approve of it.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 21.

⁸¹ Ibid., 9.

religion's partner in changing moral consciousness

An important dimension of the *Global Ethic* that has been neglected is its focus on changing social and individual moral consciousness, an unseen force at work in our inner lives.⁸² Theological ethicist, William Schweiker, insists that "for anyone concerned to develop a global ethic, the root question becomes how, if at all, global forces can be rendered accountable to norms and values aimed at respecting and enhancing the integrity of human and nonhuman life."⁸³ In order for global forces to be "rendered accountable to norms and values," it is necessary to have identified those norms and values; otherwise no evaluation is possible. The *Global Ethic* offers four directives that capture the norms and values by which such an evaluation is possible. These directives, stripped of traditional religious language, capture what is held in common by traditions both secular and religious. Tie-ins to philosophical and ethical approaches can be identified and explored. Connections to the narrative, liturgical, symbolic, literary, scholarly resources of the religions can likewise be found—because these resources are rich and vivid, they are especially powerful when it comes to shaping the moral commitments of adherents and to strengthening their resolve to live up to those commitments.

⁸² Schweiker, "Whither global ethics?" 425-439, 428.

⁸³ Ibid.

The religions may be more effective at fostering moral transformation than the secular traditions since these traditions often rely on diffuse, ad hoc practices, which are potentially contradictory and ineffective. They also rely on an agent who possesses a well-developed conscience and rationality (which may not actually exist) to guide him or her to the best moral decisions. Absent a divine call to perfect his or her moral consciousness or to strengthen his or her commitment to act rightly, well, and justly, efforts to self-overcome and to improve are left to the discretion of the individual. Such individuals, however, may or may not be interested in, or even aware of the moral "tenor and direction"⁸⁴ of their inner being. In contrast, the "world's religions have exceedingly complex practices," Schweiker maintains, "for examining and shaping self and community and, thereby, moral consciousness." They take a great interest in the tenor and direction of people's inner lives, and they have developed, over centuries of trial and error, well-honed spiritual practices capable of engendering and improving moral awareness. This interest, coupled with complementary practices, has assumed ever-growing importance in light of globalization and its associated clash of civilization. Indeed, as a result of globalization, the central moral challenge of this age, according

⁸⁴ Ibid., 428.

to Schweiker, is “[t]he shaping of our awareness of others, the world, and human communities.”⁸⁵

The religions’ perspectives on the moral life, Schweiker asserts, “are always set within some picture of encompassing reality and its powers.”⁸⁶ These powers demand sacrifice and self-discipline to shrink the distance between the choices one makes and the choices one *ought* to make. Human beings are, at least in part, formed by their social context. And while the religions also have, at least in part, a social dimension, they do not neglect the interiority of the self. Schweiker explains that, for Muslims, *jihad*, or struggle occurs within the self; for Buddhists, enlightenment is to be attained for oneself; and for Protestant Christians, the faith in Christ by which one is saved is an individual faith.⁸⁷ The religions “do not efface, but in fact highlight, the particularity or spiritual freedom of the person.”⁸⁸ The *Global Ethic* acknowledges and affirms the religions’ distinct and life-changing dimension by taking into account their importance in shaping, encouraging, and sustaining moral commitments.⁸⁹

VI. Finding the Global Ethic in Sacred Texts

⁸⁵ Schweiker, “Whither global ethics?” 433.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 429.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Küng, *A Global Ethic*, 35.

The effectiveness of the religious traditions grows out of their ability, for example, to turn to particular sacred texts to promote and develop consciousness of the *Global Ethic*'s principles. People often remember evocative stories better than lists of rules like the Ten Commandments. Moreover, individuals are not limited to reaping moral benefits only from "stories set in fairly familiar environments." Moral "dividends" can also come from unfamiliar and even fantastical scenarios.⁹⁰ According to moral philosopher David MacNaughton, the Buddha, Jesus, and other "great moral teachers of the past," have offered parables, stories, and paradoxes that help human beings "see the world in new and revealing ways."⁹¹ Though offering lessons about a good and right life, this mode of learning need not invoke principles explicitly. McNaughton (a particularist) argues that one may receive moral benefits from engaging a variety of scenarios in scriptural accounts, these benefits are not limited to "the acquisition of new moral knowledge." Engagement with scriptural scenarios "can also function to deepen our appreciation of familiar moral norms."⁹² Grappling with fictional situations can expand one's understanding of why certain reasons are good or are bad ones for reaching a decision, and can increase (or decrease if this is appropriate) a commitment to familiar norms.

⁹⁰ McKeever and Ridge, 150.

⁹⁰ Schweiker, "Whither global ethics?" 436.

⁹¹ David McNaughton, quoted by McKeever and Ridge, 149.

⁹² McKeever and Ridge, 149.

Philosopher Robert Audi emphasizes that moral principles appear in one form or another in scripture and that a dynamic, and mutually beneficial relationship exists between moral principles and scripture. While moral principles, he writes, may be "clarified by comparison with scriptural narratives;" some scriptural narratives may be clarified or "better interpreted" with respect to principles.⁹³ An individual may hold dear the principle that torture is wrong but his or her depth of commitment to that principle may increase as a result of exposure to graphic narratives depicting the torture of a person—guilty or not. In addition, engagement with the textual resources of religious traditions may: 1) deepen appreciation for the force of a norm and, 2) increase confidence in the rightness and goodness of the norm.⁹⁴

When the world's religious traditions turn to their particular scriptural resources to narrate the shared principles of the *Global Ethic*, they may identify these principles in three ways: 1) in explicit terms, 2) in implicit terms thereby requiring an additional step to make them explicit, or 3) in contradictory terms requiring a hermeneutic move to re-interpret the resource in a way that renders it congruent with the *Global Ethic*.

⁹³ Robert Audi, "Ethical Naturalism as a Challenge to Theological Ethics," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 34, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2014): 33.

⁹⁴ McKeever and Ridge, 149.

I propose two methods to find support for the *Global Ethic* in scriptural passages: 1) selective choices of passages, and 2) strategic hermeneutics. (Other methods are possible but I leave these to others to explore and develop.)

selective choice of passages

Since *the Global Ethic* purports to identify already existing shared moral principles, the religious traditions will be able to locate, within their own resources—narratives, symbols, liturgies—that explicitly or implicitly reflect those principles.

- a) If these resources explicitly reflect the *Global Ethic*'s principles, the religious tradition can then highlight these resources and give them priority, setting aside, inasmuch as possible, resources at odds with the *Global Ethic*'s principles.
- b) If these resources implicitly reflect the *Global Ethic*'s principles, it is the task of the religious traditions to make them explicit.

An illustration of this approach, using Christian scriptures is provided by Schweiker when he turns to the book of Acts, chapter 2, where Peter, an apostle of Jesus, has a vision that challenges commonly-accepted distinctions between those who are ritually pure and those who are not. Peter, Schweiker explains, is subsequently invited into the home of Cornelius, a righteous gentile, forcing Peter to reconsider the distinctions he has made, until then, between Jew and gentile. Upon entering Cornelius' home, he proclaims: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him." In this passage, Peter asserts that, for God, distinctions between us versus them, and Jew

versus gentile are irrelevant; the only distinction recognized by God is the difference between those who struggle to live justly and those who do not. As result, according to Schweiker, Peter re-envisioned his life and community: "Religious particularity explodes and points toward a human possibility that is open to everyone."⁹⁵

A religious tradition is not limited to its sacred scriptures; thus, the selective use of scripture alone is not a sufficient approach in support of the *Global Ethic*—whether one is seeking moral resources within the Christian tradition or another tradition. The point, Schweiker writes, is that it is possible to isolate, in the sacred scriptures of one's own tradition, "an opening to the expansion and vivification of imagination and conscience needed to turn the resources of this particular tradition toward its most humane, [humanizing,] and global expression." Schweiker's example from the Christian scriptures demonstrates the possibilities for religious ethics and how these might interpret the home tradition and yet find resources for contemporary global thought."⁹⁶

strategic hermeneutics

The religious traditions can re-interpret their resources—such as narratives, symbols, liturgies—in light of the principles found in the *Global Ethic*. This strategy, or hermeneutical move, entails undertaking the exegesis of already-existing revelation to

⁹⁵ Schweiker, "Whither global ethics?" 436.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

develop a persuasive and compelling gloss that harmonizes with the principles of the *Global Ethic*.

Kant, who advanced a strategic hermeneutics to align scriptural texts with his categorical imperative, demonstrates how to proceed. Such an interpretative move may, as Kant acknowledged, appear may appear “forced” upon a text which is not, at first glance, amenable to this interpretation. Indeed it may “be often forced in fact.” Still, “if the text can at all bear it,” this approach should be given preference over a literal interpretation at odds with valid moral principles (I distinguish between moral principles and *valid* moral principles because violent and morally repugnant actions described in sacred texts are sometimes presented as “moral”). This strategic move should not force an interpretation upon a text to the point of dishonesty. Nor should it claim that the new meaning given “to the symbols of a popular faith, or even to holy books, is exactly as intended by them.” Rather, an interpretation offered through a strategic hermeneutics is most likely to earn respect if it leaves open the issue of intended meaning and merely assumes “the possibility that their authors may be so understood.” After all, Kant argued, “the final purpose or even the reading of these holy books, or the investigation of their content, is to make better human beings...”⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Kant, *Religion*, 6:110-112.

In his *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Kant offers an illustration of strategic hermeneutics. The prayer in Psalm 59, verses 11-16, if read literally, describes a law giving a plaintiff the right to seek satisfaction in court against an overlord who has insulted him; the judge gives the plaintiff permission to propose any punishment he deems suitable although the judge himself may not approve of the plaintiff's desire for revenge. This prayer, Kant points out, stands in sharp contrast to a passage in the New Testament where Jesus enjoins his followers to love their enemies and to bless those who curse them. Given that these two biblical passages are at odds—how, Kant asks, are we to make sense of the contradiction? He recommends a symbolic interpretation of the prayer. It is to be understood as a prayer for vengeance against *invisible* enemies, not against actual persons. This understanding, he argues, is superior to one based on a literal reading because invisible enemies are more pernicious; they are the evil inclinations which moral agents wish (or should wish) to bring under their control.⁹⁸

If this understanding of the prayer's meaning seems overly forced or unacceptable, Kant suggests yet a different interpretation. The verses in Psalm 59 need not be read through a moral lens but "in terms of the relation that the Jews considered themselves to have toward God as their political regent." Hence, "landlord" can be

⁹⁸ Ibid.

given a broader meaning and taken to refer, not simply to the property owner who collects money from a renter every month, but to God. To likewise give “tenant” a broader meaning, the renter is no longer simply the resident of a leased property but all of Israel. Kant defends this move by citing another Biblical passage, Romans 12:19: “Vengeance is mine; I shall repay! Saith the Lord.” God’s proclamation, while reminiscent of the call for vengeance in Psalm 59, is typically read as a divine warning against the urge for personal revenge. Thus, in Kant’s view, it is not a stretch to interpret the plaintiff’s prayer against his overlord as the same kind of cautioning: Israel (the tenant) demands vengeance from God (the landlord) since vengeance belongs to God and only to God—not to individuals.⁹⁹

Kant’s strategic hermeneutics, whose aim was to interpret scriptural passages in ways aligned with the categorical imperative, provides a helpful model for a strategic hermeneutics that correlates sacred texts with the *Global Ethic*. With the *Global Ethic* as the “supreme principle of all scriptural exegesis,” scripture can be interpreted in accordance with its directives. Kant’s strategy of selective hermeneutics seeks to exegete scriptural passages in such a way that these passages become *moral* resources. A similar strategy can be employed for the directives of the *Global Ethic*. Religious traditions are to test their sacred scriptures to assess whether and how they guide

⁹⁹ Ibid.

moral effort; passages are to be understood in ways that conform to the moral commitments expressed in the directives. When the traditions find within their particular sacred texts, phrases or sentences or narratives whose plain sense underwrite behaviors that are destructive to the self and to others, they are to be re-interpreted. Individuals too are to test scriptural passages and to remain ever alert to those passages' moral content. Like the religious traditions, believers are to re-interpret problematic passages creatively with the goal of converting them, if they justify or call for harm, into helpful resources for the work of self-reflexively shaping moral consciousness.

VII. Other Global Ethics: How Do They Compare?

Though I list the alternative declarations and statements of a global ethic developed by other organizations and individuals, I have chosen to focus on the *Global Ethic* in my dissertation because 1) it was drafted collaboratively with input from a significant number of leaders and scholars representing the world's religions, 2) it does not seek to replace or to replicate the Declaration of Human Rights; rather, it seeks to provide ethical and moral support to the Declaration, and 3) it seeks to express the norms, values, and principles shared by the religious and cultural traditions rather than remaining a purely "secular" endeavor. For these reasons, twenty years after the

drafting and ratification of the *Global Ethic*, none of the alternatives offer, in my view, a viable replacement. The Charter of Compassion was drafted by one individual—Karen Armstrong. The Earth Charter was drafted collaboratively but has a narrow focus.

I explore other options in Appendix B for the sake of thoroughness and transparency. Comparison between these and the Global Ethic confirms a crucial difference, which is, in Sallie King's words, "its ability to point to a small but important area of claimed overlap in the area of ethics only, while stressing the uniqueness of the various religions in other respects."¹⁰⁰ The resistance by some religious traditions to participate in the Parliament itself may cast doubt on the existence of this area of claimed overlap. Nonetheless, leaders and scholars from all of the world's largest religious traditions were consulted in the drafting of the Global Ethic. A decision to eschew the gathering of the religions at a convening of the Parliament is a decision that is separate from one to reject the Global Ethic. My analysis of Budziszewski's charge, earlier in this chapter, that the *Global Ethic* rests on 'glib platitudes' claimed, inaccurately, by its authors as shared by the world's religions—for example, the 'dictum' that every human being must be treated humanely—demonstrated the difficulty of sustaining such a charge. Another charge—about the possibility of syncretism—level

¹⁰⁰ King, *Explorations in Global Ethics*, 131.

by Budziszewski and other members of conservative religious traditions, was a worry shared by Küng and Kuschel who explicitly rejected this as a goal of the *Global Ethic*.

Budziszewski's worries about efforts to win agreement by twisting or setting aside the Gospel's teachings is more difficult to counter. I have suggested selective choice of passages and strategic hermeneutics as two defensible approaches to identify and develop scriptural support for the *Global Ethic*. Granted, however, strategic hermeneutics, may force moral meanings onto textual passages that run counter to a tradition's customary understanding. Such objections cannot easily be dismissed. Nonetheless, every tradition's understandings are subject to critique—including from within. Little is beyond contestation, however muted or successfully suppressed this contestation may be for a time. Challenges may range from silly to fundamental, but demands by religious leaders or theologians that sacred texts are to be read only in the prescribed way have proven unstable in the long-term. Internal, interpretative debates occur with varying intensities and draw on different objections, but rival understandings always coexist and compete with each other no matter how monolithic the tradition may appear from without. It is not a stretch, then, to claim that at least one strand of all the religions finds the *Global Ethic* an accurate expression of its moral commitments even if this strand does not carry the greatest weight within that

tradition. Nonetheless, the *Global Ethic* serves as a reminder that talks between liberal and conservative factions within and between religions continue to be crucial.

Indeed, several leaders who participated in the Assembly of Religious and Spiritual Leaders at the 1993 Parliament expressed doubt about their traditions' commitment to a culture of non-violence and even stronger doubt about their traditions' commitment to a culture of equal partnership between men and women. According to Gómez-Ibáñez, this stance made a few religious leaders "uncomfortable."¹⁰¹ Objections were also raised to the ethic's seemingly unequivocal call for non-violence, which, especially for Muslim leaders, seemed to contradict Quranic passages authorizing war in self-defense and punishment of wrongdoers in equal measure to the injury they cause. I will explore this prohibition at greater length in Chapter 6; my conclusion, upon a careful reading of the *Global Ethic*, is that a more flexible interpretation is possible. In spite of such objections, the leaders decided to endorse the *Global Ethic* by signing it because, they said, the world "desperately" needs "evidence of an ethical consensus."¹⁰² It serves as a reminder that if 'our'

¹⁰¹ Daniel Gómez-Ibáñez, "Toward a Global Ethic," paper presented at the Fifth National Conference on Ethics in America, Long Beach, CA, March 10, 1994, 8.

¹⁰² Ibid.

morality overlaps with that of the ‘other,’ then ‘we’ must conclude that the ‘other’ is not as entirely ‘other’ as ‘we’ might have assumed.¹⁰³

VIII. The Impact of the Global Ethic Since 1993

Ignored for decades, the U.N.’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights is presently recognized by peoples all over the world as articulating the rights that they hold dear. In addition, it has been integrated into the constitutions of several nation-states. Is such a hope for the *Global Ethic* warranted—that it, too, may eventually be recognized by peoples all over the world as articulating the moral values, commitments, and principles that they hold dear? Given that 86 percent of the world’s population is religious, the *Global Ethic* could be a valuable resource for discussions linked to religious ethics, especially shared norms, values, and principles between the religions—albeit mostly the more liberal strands. To date, Block notes, “these documents appear to have acquired little social currency outside of Parliament circles. For examples, online Google searches as of May 2008 list only 599 postings for the Declaration.”¹⁰⁴

Küng has been credited with creating a “widely-recognized platform for interfaith dialogue” about shared moral commitments. The *Global Ethic* inspired other initiatives such as the 1997 Declaration on Human Responsibilities and the UNESCO

¹⁰³ King, 138.

¹⁰⁴ Bloch, 612.

Universal Ethics Project.¹⁰⁵ However, unless the *Global Ethic* is integrated, or adopted in a formal way by the U.N. or some other official institution, it will most likely remain a topic of conversation among a few scholars and a small number of religionists, most of them American Christians. This may explains why Küng has sought institutional support in Europe by creating a Global Ethic Foundation and why he has called (rather desperately) for an institution dedicated to the *Global Ethic* to be created here in the United States. For Protestants, the organization that most resembles the U.N. is the World Council of Churches, which has, like the U.N. with respect to its member nations-states, limited “power” over its member churches. Thus far, however, it has not demonstrated an interest in the *Global Ethic*.

Ideally, future discussions of the *Global Ethic* will incorporate more points of view. Philosopher of religion John Hick, who played a leading role in thinking through issues of religious pluralism, cautioned against inviting non-Western religious and cultural traditions to debate the *Global Ethic*, and recommended instead inviting these traditions to submit their own drafts, bringing the plurality of drafts together and then seeing “what comes out of the interaction between them.” Hick was of the opinion that the *Global Ethic* was “too” Western and the project, he warned, remained open to the

¹⁰⁵ Martin Robra, “Affirming the Role of Global Movements for Global Ethics,” *The Ecumenical Review* 52, no. 4 (October 2000): 472.

charge of “Western imperialism.”¹⁰⁶ However, Hicks’ proposed fixes rely on the premise that leadership and consulting networks within each of the world’s religions and cultural traditions exist. This does not appear to be the case. Sallie King reports that, to her knowledge, no “major alternative has yet been generated by any group.”¹⁰⁷ Moreover, her research stands in stark contrast to Hick’s view that the *Global Ethic* is “too” Western and open to charges of Western imperialism. King, a scholar of Buddhism, drafted an alternative to the *Global Ethic* based on this tradition’s Five Lay Precepts entitled “Principles of a Buddhist Proposal for a Global Ethic.” The result is, in her words, “remarkably close in content to Küng’s draft.”¹⁰⁸ Moreover, contra Hicks’ proposal, the example of the UDHR demonstrates the willingness of non-Western cultures to embrace a Declaration as their own—even when it is perceived as a product of the West—if it accurately reflects their points of view. According to King, “from a political point of view, the *Global Ethic* is seen to support the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights and so far has been generally welcomed by politically oppressed groups. It is those who oppose international monitoring of human rights abuses who have reason to fear whatever power this document may someday wield.”

¹⁰⁶ John Hick, quoted by Sallie King in *Explorations in Global Ethics*, 127.

¹⁰⁷ King, 128.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., n4, 139.

Based on its reception thus far, it appears that, politically, the *Global Ethic* has mostly avoided the perception that it is “a tool for oppression.”¹⁰⁹

For now, the kind of reception given to the *Global Ethic* seems to depend on whether a given strand of the world’s religious and cultural traditions accepts the *Global Ethic*’s basic premise: “We all share a core of the same morality.” An analysis of the *Global Ethic* shows that it accurately captures “widely-occurring similarities in recommended moral conduct” among the liberal and progressive wings of the religions, and their commitment to similar principles and ideals. Though the *Global Ethic* proclaims that theological differences can be set aside to reveal shared basic moral principles, not all of the religious traditions have shown a willingness to do so. For the most part, the conservative wings of the world’s religions have refused to participate in interreligious conversation, including about the *Global Ethic*’s directives.

Nonetheless, even for those who deem that the *Global Ethic* does not represent a final codification of morality, it represents a sturdy starting-place for the religions to continue to work together and make progress in expressing a manageable, shared set of moral principles. At the very least, it serves as a forceful and compelling plea encouraging dialogue about what principles count as “moral” and about the role of the religions in promoting these principles. The goal remains increasing the likelihood

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 128.

that the followers of the religious traditions will, "in situations of potential common moral concern, adjust their own intentions so as to identify these with those of others holding different ultimate beliefs."¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Peter Donovan, "Do Different Religions Share Moral Common Ground?" In *Religious Studies* 22, nos. 3 & 4 (September/December 1986): 374.

Ch. 6

THE *GLOBAL ETHIC*: STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

The goal of the previous chapter was to identify a set of ethical norms with which to test concepts of God to determine whether these concepts are *validly* moral.

The sacred texts of the religious traditions describe many concepts of God and, implicitly or explicitly, believers make decisions about which one or ones (a single concept may be a composite or it may be multi-faceted) they prefer.

Having concluded that Kaufman's self-generated criterion of humanization was too vague to serve as the sort of moral check that he had in mind, I evaluated, as a replacement for Kaufman's criterion, the *Global Ethic*, produced through a wide-ranging, collaborative process, and ratified by the majority of the attendees at the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions. I described the contents of the *Global Ethic* and the history of how this document came into being. It was intended, in part, to serve as the moral component of the U.N.'s Declaration of Human Rights, and as a partner to religion in changing individual moral consciousness throughout the globe.

The *Global Ethic* consists of four moral directives:

1. Commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life
2. Commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order
3. Commitment to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness
4. Commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women

The previous chapter noted several problems with the *Global Ethic*. Its directives, though present in the religions, are not always obvious. I explored two approaches to scriptural passages that can help exegetes to foreground the shared directives through 1) selective choice of passages, and 2) strategic hermeneutics. I also provided examples of the ways in which these strategies can identify the directives and highlight them in already-existing textual resources within religious traditions.

Building on the analysis that I began in Chapter 5, I evaluate, in this chapter, the strengths and weaknesses of the *Global Ethic* and its directives. The collaborative process by which the *Global Ethic* was drafted and ratified has been perceived, by some, as favoring a Western perspective and as integrating unequal structures of power. I also address questions about the level of endorsement for the *Global Ethic*. And then I investigate the Golden Rule, one of two underpinnings of the *Global Ethic* (the second: every human being must be treated humanely), to assess whether it is as ubiquitous and fundamental to the world's religious and secular traditions as the *Global Ethic*'s authors and contributors assumed. A close study shows that, in spite of

this common assumption, the Golden Rule is not foundational to all of the religions. Nonetheless, it can be located in sacred scripture even if, in some traditions it only appears in relatively minor texts. I evaluate challenges with practical applications of the Golden Rule: Some find it too vague to be useful; for example, Kant dismissed it as a trivial example of the Categorical Imperative. I conclude that, certain problems notwithstanding, the Golden Rule is an important and valuable moral guide. As such, it provides a solid, albeit contestable, foundation for the *Global Ethic*. Finally, I explore other concerns about the *Global Ethic*. For many of the same reasons that some critics have questioned the utility of a formal and abstract rule like the Golden Rule, questions have arisen about the *Global Ethic's* formal and abstract directives.

I. Challenged: The Draft-to-Ratification Process

a way to preserve the West's privileged structures of power?

For some commentators on the Parliament, such as theologian of pluralism, Paul Knitter, the fact that the majority of the attendees were North American and Christian raised red flags. Knitter describes the West as neocolonial—a “new” world order in which the “old” world order has been “cleaned up, focused,” and “given a new face.” Protestant Christians from the developed world are too often unaware, Knitter warns, that their new faces may serve as masks for their privileged positions of political and

economic power. They engage others with what they believe to be “the language of civil discourse and religious dialogue” but such language can serve as a means—not necessarily with the intent to deceive, but as a means nonetheless—to preserve the structures of power of the new world order.¹

Knitter accuses Küng (and Leonard Swidler whose global ethic I summarize in Appendix B) of forgetting that economic status, national origin, class, gender, sexual orientation, and race affect the way in which individuals participate in interreligious discussions like those organized at the 1993 Parliament. Such forgetfulness is “naïve and dangerous,” Knitter argues because pretending that these interests are peripheral to the work of exploring a text together or of engaging in a meaningful conversation merely leads, in his opinion, to self-interested rhetoric or to a focus on local concerns. Leaders from the developed world who wittingly or unwittingly promote and seek opportunities for interreligious interchanges, including about a global ethic, may convince others to join them. However, they are creating a scenario, which, while appearing pluralistic, is designed to “neutralize[s] opposition by seeming to accept it.”² To neutralize this tendency, Knitter recommends giving the voices of the oppressed a primary role in conversations focused on a global ethic. Without these

¹ Paul F. Knitter, “Pitfalls and Promises for a Global Ethics,” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 15 (1995): 226.

² Ellen Rooney, quoted by Knitter, *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, 224.

voices, he insists, participants from the developed world are incapable of sustaining "hermeneutical suspicion of [their] own tradition or of [their] own contribution to the dialogue."³ He is not alone in making this argument. The Catholic apologist, John O'Brien, agrees. While O'Brien does not claim that the poor and oppressed have "moral superiority," their perspective, he holds, gives them the "therapeutic" ability to "diagnose and remedy" the ideological distortions of those in political and economic power.⁴

Human Rights Declaration: no longer "too Western"

Several counter-arguments are possible to the worries of Knitter and of others about the Western-heavy demographic of the Parliament. Charges of Western-centrism have also been leveled at the language of the *Global Ethic* and the values reflected in its normative principles. One counter-argument is based on the circumstances in which a similar but better-known document was drafted—the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). A committee wrote the UDHR although its authorship is often attributed to Eleanor Roosevelt because she served as Chair of the Drafting Committee. Like the *Global Ethic*, the UDHR fell under criticism because its focus on civil and political rights were perceived as classical "Western" concerns; its additional focus on

³ Knitter, 226.

⁴ John O'Brien, quoted by Knitter, *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, 226.

social and economic rights, widely held to have been championed by the Soviet bloc, is nearly as problematic since that bloc's member nations are included in the umbrella term, the "West."

According to the *Britannica Encyclopedia*, several individuals contributed to the drafting of UDHR. A "Westerner," John Humphrey, a Canadian Professor of law and the U.N. Secretariat's Human Rights Director, authored the first draft. Besides Eleanor Roosevelt, the Chair of the Commission tasked with overseeing the UDHR project, several other individuals were instrumental to the writing process: Chang Peng-Chun, a Chinese playwright, philosopher, and diplomat (Peng-Chun attended American universities—he earned a B.A. from Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, and a Ph.D. from Columbia University where he focused on the American philosopher, John Dewey), and Charles Habib Malik, a Lebanese philosopher and diplomat (Malik was educated at Lebanon's American Mission School for Boys, attended the American University of Beirut, studied at Harvard University with philosopher Alfred North Whitehead and at Freiburg University with philosopher Martin Heidegger, eventually receiving his Ph.D. in philosophy from Harvard University). The French jurist, René Cassin, also actively worked on drafts of the UDHR during the Commission's three sessions and those of subsidiary drafting sessions. Thus, while a first glance at the make-up of the Commission may give the impression that the draft included a variety

of perspectives—Western and non-Western—a closer look shows the immense influence of “Euro-American” ideas. This did not prevent fifty U.N. member-states from voting to ratify the UDHR (the others abstained).⁵

At the time, representatives of several countries argued that human rights are not absolute. Those rights, some representatives held, are a product of culture. The West’s assumption about the inherent nature of universal human rights “was just another example of neo-colonial domination.”⁶ In spite of such criticisms, according to the *Guinness Book of Records*, the UDHR has become the “Most Translated Document” in the world. Today, it is treated as customary in international law and held in high political and moral esteem. Indeed, the UDHR has been used to pressure governments when they violate its articles. It also serves as the foundation for two binding U.N. human-rights covenants, and its principles have been elaborated in several international treaties. Portions of the UDHR have been incorporated into the constitutions of several nation-states including South Africa’s.

While Knitter’s cautionary point about the importance of including, and even of privileging non-Western voices is well taken, the fact that Küng, of Swiss origin, drafted

⁵ George J. Andreopoulos, “Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR),” Britannica.com, accessed October 14, 2013.
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/618067/Universal-Declaration-of-Human-Rights-UDHR>.

⁶ Gómez-Ibáñez, 1.

the original version of the *Global Ethic* and the fact that it was approved by the Parliament's Board of Trustees (somewhat weighted toward an American, Christian perspective) need not be considered fatal. Clearly, the world continues to be plagued by abuse of persons, marginalized communities, intra- and inter-religious violence, and intolerance. But, most participants in interreligious conversations come together because they are sincerely seeking ways to address the question of how to respond, and even solve, these problems. They wish to contribute to new moral understandings and practical approaches, and to incorporate, into these approaches, valuable insights from the other world's religious and cultural traditions.⁷

Given the urgency of the world's problems and the readiness of concerned people to cooperate in solving them, even a questionable start (although it is questionable whether the *Global Ethic* constitutes merely a *questionable start*), is better than no start at all. Hick expressed this sentiment when he wrote: "It cannot be a legitimate criticism that the search for a global ethic has originated in the West; for it had to originate somewhere!"⁸ Nor is it legitimate to assume, *a priori*, that simply because a global ethic originates in the West, it merely focuses on "Western" concerns, is ideologically distorted, and fails to take into account the perspective of the poor and the marginalized.

⁷ Grelle, 35.

⁸ John Hick, quoted by Sallie King, *Explorations in Global Ethics*, 127.

Knitter raises another concern about the kind of feedback that was solicited from religious thinkers from the world's different religions and its impact on the current version of the *Global Ethic*:

...one must be aware, as First World theologians generally are not, that, whenever the language of civil discourse and religious dialogue comes forth from those who are in political or economic power...the discourse [can become] 'managerial'—it manages what will be discussed, the method for discussion, and the goals of the discussion, what does not fit these determinations is judged, in the political discourse, as a disruptive 'interest group'; in the religious dialogue it might be called a *closed* or *primitive* or *fundamentalist* or *polytheistic* or *feminist* perspective.⁹

Based on her research on the *Global Ethic*, Sallie King confirms that Küng's drafts underwent "extensive interreligious debate and consultation" before he sent his 'final' version to the Parliament's Planning Council. Gómez-Ibáñez reported that after receiving Küng's version of the Declaration, the document was sent to yet another "consulting network" at least as large as Küng's (over a hundred scholars and religious leaders from the world religions). After "further consultation and numerous changes," the *Global Ethic* was presented to the Parliament's representatives.¹⁰ The manner in which the *Global Ethic* was presented to the representatives of the Parliament may, for Knitter and others, raises questions about whether discourse regarding the Declaration was "managed." If the Parliament's Planning Council elected to allow little or no

⁹ Knitter, 224.

¹⁰ King, 119.

discussion during the Parliament itself, its members were likely daunted by the difficult logistics of facilitating feedback sessions for over five thousand representatives. This decision may not have been well understood by the representatives and, even when understood, may still, have struck some as anti-democratic or oppressive.

The Trustees of the Parliament invited more than 200 leaders from the world's religions to meet privately during the last three days of the Parliament and introduced them to the *Global Ethic* and its "supporting Principles."¹¹ The leaders, selected with care by the Trustees, represented a more balanced cross-section of the world's religions than found among the Parliament's attendees. Those who met during the special three-day assembly were drawn from the Baha'i faith, Brahma Kumaris, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Indigenous religion, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Neo-Paganism, Sikhism, Taoism, Theosophism, Unitarian Universalism, Zoroastrianism, and more.¹² The special assembly provided the leaders with the opportunity to study the *Global Ethic* closely, reflect upon it, and to indicate their support by signing it (or not). As discussed in Chapter 5, the leaders voiced several concerns but the Trustees, who, having already voted in favor of the document, allowed only one revision. The title was

¹¹ Parliament of the World's Religions' website, "The 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago," accessed December 26, 2015.
<http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/content/chicago-1993>.

¹² Religious Tolerance blog, "Morality and ethics: The Declaration of a Global Ethic," Accessed December 26, 2015. <http://www.relioustolerance.org/parliame.htm>.

changed from “Declaration of a Global Ethic”—the title that Küng retained in his book about the *Global Ethic*—to the more tentative “Towards a Global Ethic (An Initial Declaration).” The Trustees welcomed the new title because it more accurately reflected the open-ended nature of the *Global Ethic* and its authors’ and contributors’ desire that it remain a living document open to further engagement. Though the ‘as-is,’ ‘done-deal’ approach to sharing the *Global Ethic* with the religious and spiritual leaders may have caused resentment, resistance to the document itself may have been mitigated by the fact that the *Global Ethic* had already been subjected to careful deliberation and wide-ranging discussion between scholars and leaders from their traditions.

In order to garner media coverage and draw wider public attention to the *Global Ethic*, the Parliament’s Planning Council invited the media to the ceremonial signing of the *Global Ethic*. For some dignitaries, media scrutiny may have created extra pressure to sign. In the end, 143 leaders signed.¹³ On the last day of the Parliament, during the Closing Ceremony, the document was introduced to all of the attendees for their assent. Whatever reservations about the *Global Ethic* some leaders may have harbored, the majority chose to sign the document, and the majority of representatives chose to assent to the document. To question the authenticity of the

¹³ Ibid.

support expressed by the signatories and other Parliament participants is patronizing and counter-productive to the task of producing a global ethic with wide consensus.

The absence of subsequent requests for feedback may also have contributed to the impression of “managed” discourse. According to King, the Parliament, “lacking staff, funding, and facilities,” has not organized or facilitated further meetings on the *Global Ethic*. King was perhaps too charitable in her appraisal of the Parliament’s desire to foster further conversation about the *Global Ethic* as Küng had intended; she may not be aware that for several years, some of the upper-tier leaders of the Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions seemed to have been swayed by characterizations such as Knitter’s about Küng’s and the 1993 Parliament’s “neocolonial” agenda. Council staff members intentionally avoided scheduling sessions on the *Global Ethic* in subsequent gatherings of the Parliament. They exercised their personal preference for the sort of interreligious interchange that asks participants to share personal stories. Though laudable, this conflict-averse approach is unlikely to engender authentic engagement around controversial views or identify areas of commonality. Participants in Parliaments, then, have not been given further opportunities to discuss

deeply held moral norms and principles—discussions vital to the project of the

*Global Ethic.*¹⁴

In 2013, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the *Global Ethic*, the Parliament's Chair of the Board of Trustees, Imam Dr. Abdul Malik Mujahid, wrote a reaffirmation of its early supporters' vision. Imam Mujahid called the *Global Ethic* "well ahead of its time." He lauded the fact that "[f]or the first time in history, representatives of the world's religions agreed on the shared ethics that are grounded in their own religions and traditions." According to him, these shared ethics are:

- The principle of shared humanity
- The Golden Rule of reciprocity
- A commitment to peace and justice

He noted that since the signing of the *Global Ethic* by religious leaders and its ratification by the representatives attending the 1993 Parliament, "people have collected more than 700,000 pieces of content on this topic." Moreover, several organizations, he underscored, were established to support the mission of the *Global Ethic*:

- The Global Ethic Foundation
- The Institute for Global Ethics
- The Global Ethics Network

¹⁴ This characterization is based on the answer given by Dirk Ficca, then Executive Director of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions, to a question asked by the author at the end of a presentation he gave on the Parliament of the World Religions at a Niagara Foundation luncheon, Chicago, IL, September 22, 2011.

And, topics advanced by the *Global Ethic*, according to Mujahid, serve as the basis of ongoing campaigns such as

- The Charter of Compassion
- The Charter of Forgiveness
- A Common Word Between Us and You
- Campaigns to promote the Golden Rule¹⁵

II. Does the Global Ethic Express a Shared Ethic?

Some critics of the *Global Ethic* question whether any moral agreement between the religious and secular traditions has or will ever be possible. The *Global Ethic* claims that it identifies the intersection of the moral norms and principles embedded in the religious and cultural traditions of the world. It did not construct these, and does not propose them, but holds that this area of unity exists, and has always existed among the traditions. The *Global Ethic* has merely stated outright what, for many religions, is sometimes merely implied or overshadowed by better-known teachings. The disregard by many religionists for these moral norms and principles does not call their validity into question but merely attests to their sometimes-esoteric formulations and to the difficulty of abiding by them.

¹⁵ Abdul Malik Mujahid, "A Preface," Parliament of the World's Religions Blog, December 11, 2013. Accessed December 26, 2015.
<http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/content/towards-global-ethic-reaffirming-our-commitment-interfaith-harmony-parliament-anniversary>.

Is it true, then, that the *Global Ethic* has captured moral principles that are shared? Besides claims regarding its putative ‘overly Western’ character addressed earlier in this chapter, four other concerns have been raised: 1) the emphasis on non-violence, 2) the commitment to the equal status of men and women, 3) the inability of the *Global Ethic* to convince conservative religious traditions to participate in interreligious dialogue during the Parliament, and 4) the focus on authentic/inauthentic and valuable/non-valuable. I shall address these in turn.

an unacceptable emphasis on non-violence?

The first of the four irrevocable directives of the *Global Ethic* calls for a commitment to a culture of nonviolence, claiming that in the “great ancient religious and ethical traditions of humankind,” the directive appears: “You shall not kill!”¹⁶ Some religious leaders criticized the use of Judeo-Christian “biblical images in places where it says ‘You shall not kill’”¹⁷ and seemed to have interpreted this phrase as a reference to the first of the Jewish and Christian Bibles’ Ten Commandments. However, the stance of other religions about nonviolence, such as Buddhism and Islam, can be understood as aligned with those of Christianity and Judaism. The first of Buddhism’s precepts is non-harmfulness (*ahimsa*), a precept taken as essential by all Buddhists. The Buddha’s

¹⁶ *A Global Ethic*, 25.

¹⁷ “Religious leaders sign ‘Global Ethic’ but document faces refinement process,” Associated Press, *Cincinnati Post* (Cincinnati, OH), September 6, 1993, 8B.

actions and teachings are held up as illustrations of the importance of non-harmfulness since he spoke out against armed conflict and intervened to stop a war. In contrast, while Islam values peace, it also considers war acceptable and, in some cases, necessary. The Prophet Muhammad, according to the Qur'an, led his followers into many battles.

Given Buddhism's resistance and Islam's openness to war, how can the *Global Ethic* claim that its directive about respect for life expresses commitments shared by the world's religious and secular traditions on violence? Indeed, "How can it be said," Sallie King asks, "that the views of these two religions on the use of violence are the same? They certainly are not the same in their fully developed forms."¹⁸ Still, King argues that this is not what the *Global Ethic* is tasked with demonstrating. The *Global Ethic* is merely tasked with establishing whether the religious traditions, including Islam and Buddhism, share some language about nonviolence that they can affirm.

In the case of Islam, Muhammad treated war not as an end in itself but as a means of securing peace and justice. Peace and justice, then, are the ultimate goals of war. Accordingly, several Muslims told King that they had concerns about the *Global Ethic*'s provisions for nonviolence but that they would be prepared to sign it if these

¹⁸ King, 131.

provisions were explicitly tied to the necessity for justice.¹⁹ In the case of Buddhists (and other strict pacifists) whose stance on nonviolence is categorical, they could be satisfied with the *Global Ethic's* call to a "commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life." Those who are not absolute pacifists but who argue for restraint in the use of violence could accept the *Global Ethic's* charge that: "Persons who hold political power must...commit themselves to the most non-violent, peaceful solutions possible."²⁰ The non-violence directive contains enough leeway to be acceptable to absolute pacifists and to persons (and groups) who consider, that under certain circumstances, violence is permissible.

Nonetheless, this begs the question: Has the *Global Ethic* identified a shared normative principle at the core of every religious and cultural tradition or is it obfuscating the reality of serious differences by relying on clever linguistic manipulations? Can the *Global Ethic* claim to have captured commonly held values, norms, and principles if it has done so by choosing words with such wide ranges of meaning that its directives can be understood in a multitude of irreconcilable ways?

For King, choosing language with some flexibility is justified. In her view, the *Global Ethic* confirms the existence of a core, common morality: "lying, stealing, and

¹⁹ King, 132.

²⁰ A *Global Ethic*, 25.

killing are generally held to be wrong.”²¹ Because less clear moral norms exist—e.g. “white lies, property rights, and euthanasia”—skilled wordsmiths and ethicists must, in her view, carefully choose their words when attempting to capture areas of truly shared moral norms.²² The *Global Ethic* is the product of such skilled wordsmiths and ethicists, King holds, and may legitimately claim to have identified shared directives using language on which the various traditions can agree. The religious and secular traditions do not hold commitments that are identical in every detail, but their *fundamental* commitments bear a family resemblance; they have enough similarity that, with care in word-choice, these commitments can be captured with a single statement. The *Global Ethic* succeeds, according to King, in identifying this family resemblance without relying on such insipid and meaningless words that its directives no longer succeed in capturing the moral principles affirmed throughout the world.

Perhaps because the *Global Ethic* aims for a certain amount of flexibility, a few critics accuse it of being overly abstract. Sources report that some of the Parliament’s attendees considered it “imprecise about its ethical goals.”²³ No doubt, the *Global Ethic* rides a fine line between abstractness and precision in its attempt to capture the moral principles common to the religious and secular traditions. Either, as King holds

²¹ King, 132.

²² Ibid.

²³ *Cincinnati Post*.

(and Adams claims is possible), the *Global Ethic* succeeds by virtue of just enough “vagueness” to accommodate a narrow range of principles, or, as a number of critics hold, it has become so general that it can be read to mean anything. The issue of vagueness deserves further elaboration and I will revisit it in a later section.

resistance to the equal status of men and women

The use of words that can be assigned a range of meanings (albeit within a constrained range) has raised red flags for Khalid Duran, a Muslim historian of religion. One of the *Global Ethic*'s directives calls for a commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women. This directive condemns “patriarchy, domination of one sex over the other, exploitation of women” (GE, 32). Duran argues that while many Muslims would support the *Global Ethic*, it leaves room for fundamentalists to “hijack” its moral vision to serve their own ends. In Iran, for example, “no has proclaimed in words so loudly in favor of the emancipation of women as the mullahcracy” and yet, Duran points out, “[t]here in the name of the Islamic Republic and its emancipation of women women are sprayed with acid because a single lock of hair slipped out a little from under the required head covering.”²⁴

Even if one sets aside the possibility of fundamentalists and extremists distorting the language of the *Global Ethic*, one must concede that, even among liberal and

²⁴ Khalid Duran, quoted by King, 129.

progressive wings of the world's religions, equal rights and partnership between men and women do not yet fully exist. Patriarchy, domination, and exploitation continue. Some critics, such as sociologist Jon P. Bloch have argued that the *Global Ethic* cannot claim to represent shared moral ground since it failed to improve the behavior of the individuals and traditions who worked on it:

"In sum, the very processes by which the Declaration engaged the question of religious ethics demonstrated that shared religious values do not overpower deeper differences of opinion, nor do these shared values provide a straightforward way to answer complex world dilemmas. In this context, at least, what is 'shared' would seem to be of relatively little consequence."²⁵

The *Global Ethic* addresses this conundrum: "We affirm that this truth is already known, but yet to be lived in heart and action" (AGE, 14). Ethicist and political philosopher, J. Budziszewski agrees: "...there are two universals, not one. Although the law is written everywhere on the heart of man, it is everywhere entangled with the evasions and subterfuges of men."²⁶

This directive, then, reveals the tension in the *Global Ethic* between the 'is' and the 'is not yet.' Of the *Global Ethic*'s four directives, the one focused on the relationship between partners met with the most resistance during the Parliament's Assembly of Religious and Spiritual Leaders. King diagnoses this resistance as the result of the "incoherence between the two ambitions of the framers:" 1) to identify

²⁵ Bloch, 616.

²⁶ Budziszewski, 720.

where there is “already” agreement, and 2) to identify standards not yet treated as the core moral norms that they are. Thus, in the case of the partnership between men and women, King writes, the *Global Ethic* has not only expressed today’s common ground but also common ground that will be acknowledged in the future.²⁷

Though, some, like King, detect a “tension” between “is” and “is not yet,” the *Global Ethic* expresses shared principles, including those focused on the equal rights of men and women and the equal partnership between them, that already inhere in the core directives of the world religions. These shared principles are identified in the *Global Ethic* even if, as this document forthrightly states, they are yet to be lived.

conservative traditions did not help draft the *Global Ethic*

As discussed in Chapter 5, several religious groups dropped out during the week that the Parliament met. Kuschel deemed, however, that the Parliament’s deliberations were, overall, not harmed. The disputes, in his view, merely underscored the difficulties of bringing the religions into conversation. He wrote that the Parliament reflected “what is actually taking place in the world;” it is “a microcosm which reflects the macrocosm.”²⁸ Still, these difficulties demonstrate how, the Parliament’s planners, committed as they were to a global ethic that explicitly called for an end to exclusion

²⁷ King, 132-133.

²⁸ Kuschel, 96.

between the religions, proved unsuccessful at convincing several conservative strands of the religious traditions either to participate in the Parliament or to prevent protests-by-walk-out.

Some conservative Christians, worried about their beliefs being undermined, have gone as far as forming “their own para-church networks” in order to safeguard themselves from the “humanistic tendencies” of ecumenical organizations like the World Council of Churches.²⁹ Religious pluralism remains of particular concern to them because, while participants may perceive such organizations as giving rise to “the flowering of creativity,” conservative Christians understand them as resulting from “the disintegrating effects of sin.”³⁰ Only an act of God in Christ, religious studies scholar Kate McCarthy explains, rather than unaided human attempts, can reconcile divisions between communities. For example, many evangelical Protestants, McCarthy discovered, believe that the only ‘legitimate’ reason to participate in interreligious dialogue is for the purpose of proselytization—to proclaim the gospel and to convert others.

McCarthy’s findings match those of an anecdotal study conducted by international human rights experts Geoff Dancy and Brian Calfano. Dancy and Calfano

²⁹ Kate McCarthy, “Reckoning with Religious Difference,” *Explorations in Global Ethics*, 75-80.

³⁰ Lyle VanderWerff, quoted by McCarthy, 78.

interviewed representatives from three Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) to ascertain whether they were applying the directives of the *Global Ethic*, perhaps not by design, but nonetheless in keeping with its spirit. They spoke at length with the Assistant Superintendent of the Assemblies of God (AOG), the President of the Global AIDS Interfaith Alliance (GAIA), and the Communications Director for the Baptist World Alliance (BWA). Two reasons led Dancy and Calfano to take this approach. First, the *Global Ethic*, they had concluded, "is the very type of pragmatism that would make an organization more able to stay engaged" with social issues.³¹ Second, the religious traditions of the FBOs that they chose had sent representatives to the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions and had signed onto the World Council of Churches' commitment to abide by the *Global Ethic*'s "initiatives." This suggested to them that these FBOs would take a greater interest in using these initiatives to guide their decisions and activities.

³¹ Goeff Dancy and Brian Calfano, "Global Ethics on the Ground: Do International Faith-Based Organizations Differ in their Interpretation and Programmatic Application of a Global Ethic?" A paper prepared for the International Studies Association Conference in Hawaii (March 1-6, 2005): 1:34. Accessed October 29, 2017. http://citation.allacademic.com//meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/0/7/0/1/6/pages70169/p70169-1.php.

To ascertain whether the test-FBOs were, at the very least, following the *Global Ethic*'s directives in spirit, they postulated that *Global Ethic*-friendly FBOs would come out on the positive side of two metrics:

1. Engage in a limited amount of proselytization in the countries where they operated—based on the *Global Ethic*'s commitment to maintain a neutral religious stance
2. Remain fairly hands-off with respect to oversight of their non-U.S.-based organizations and individuals carrying out the FBO's directives—based on *Global Ethic*'s commitment to subscribe to a limited few, core moral commitments

Their findings: When it came to metric #1, “engage in a limited amount of proselytization,” the AOG and the BWA FBOs failed. The representatives of these two FBOs revealed that their work was “tied directly” to their “denominational identity.” The primary goal of their global outreach was “to see the message of Jesus Christ broadcast to those receiving organizational assistance.”³² In contrast, GAIA’s Episcopalian representative exercised restraint in offering theological reflections. GAIA’s representative cited his religious tradition as the principal motivator for the work in which he personally engaged. He also expressed concern that groups lacking in such restraint risked alienating non-Christians, especially those who lived in countries receiving aid.

³² Ibid., 18-19.

On the question of human rights, Dancy and Calfano reported, there was truth to human dignity for the AOG's representative, but, for him, no truth could compare with the "truth of Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection for human kind." Though the BWA representative equated human rights with religious freedom, she seemed to assume that if local peoples were given religious freedom they would choose to convert to Baptist Christianity.

As for Metric #2—though sponsoring FBOs remained "fairly hands-off with respect to oversight of [their] non-U.S. organizations and individuals carrying out the FBO's directives"—the AOG's representative explained that *all* organizations and individuals were expected to maintain what the U.S.-based part of the organization considered "to be an acceptable theological identity." The BWA was more "hands-off" than the AOG. Though its representative revealed her personal "theo-political conservatism," she explained that the BWA had a policy of remaining neutral on potentially divisive political issues. Both the AOG and the BWA FBOs granted their non-U.S. representatives local control as long as their efforts honored the theological constraints described above. The AOG and the BWA were able to enforce theological alignment because they provided a large percentage of the financial support received by affiliated, non-U.S. organizations. Neither the AOG nor the BWA representatives showed themselves prepared to "mollify its Christian witness" even if this was required

"to placate the concern of governments, many of which are at least tacitly tied to Islam."³³

According to Dancy and Calfano, although the AOG's and the BWA's representatives could have played an important, "ameliorating role" by shifting to the common ground of "human rights and religious freedom," these opportunities were lost due to these representatives' unwillingness to set aside their strongly-held theological commitments. Thus, theological conservatism proved a divisive factor in Dancy and Calfano's study of FBOs because strong theological commitments retained priority over the search for common moral ground. The two researchers concluded that more moderate organizations, like GAIA's, whose mission does not include proselytization, prove to be the ones capable of participating in the world's quest for a global ethic focused on human rights.³⁴ Their report aligns with Kuschel's observation about the priorities of theologically conservative religious traditions and the reasons for which they refused to participate in the Parliament.

Can the *Global Ethic* claim to express shared moral principles if members of conservative religious traditions do not participate in its crafting? Members of these traditions have made clear the doctrines and commitments that drive their stance against interreligious dialogue. King asserts that the values of the *Global Ethic* are at

³³ Ibid., 24.

³⁴ Ibid., 24.

odds with exclusionary religious views and, as such, the *Global Ethic* is intended to challenge and displace such views. The *Global Ethic*, she writes, "cannot be other than a proponent for sincere tolerance and acceptance of religious diversity. It is clear that it has been composed in order to contribute to bringing into being a world based upon this value."³⁵ Given the *Global Ethic*'s stated goal of facilitating peaceful religious pluralism, it is perhaps not surprising, then, that conservative religions leery of syncretism, show little interest in supporting its directives. David Little, a scholar of religion, ethics, and human rights, argues that those who "utilize fundamentalistic ideology to justify state, group, or individual violence or oppressions" give up their right to participate in cooperative interreligious discourse.³⁶ Whether they give up their right or not, Dancy and Calfano's study demonstrates that some strands of religious traditions lack desire in exercising that right and that even when they have endorsed the *Global Ethic*, their theological commitments trump the directives' commitments.

The *Global Ethic*, in other words, is a document drafted to reflect unity of values, norms, and principles that are shared by "adherents" of the world's religions. In the end, however, the adherents who choose to abide by the values expressed by the *Global Ethic* may be limited to those who belong to more liberal strands of the religious traditions because their theologies align with its directives, or to those who,

³⁵ King, 130.

³⁶ David Little, quoted by King, 130.

for any number of reasons, are willing to grant priority to the directives over the commonplace teachings of their religious traditions even when the directives and these teachings conflict.³⁷

At the other end of the secular-religious continuum are those who grant priority to non-religious perspectives. Such persons could ask whether the *Global Ethic* has Kantian roots because it may seem to them that it grounds moral norms in the method of universalizing. Such a grounding gives precedence to individual freedom and autonomy, and continues to be associated, by many, with the Western tradition of thought (in contrast to privileging the relational ties and social norms of one's particular community, often associated with the non-West). Attempts to co-relate the *Global Ethic*'s principles with Kant's categorical imperative betray a serious misunderstanding of the *Global Ethic*. Its directives do not represent a Kantian attempt to ground morality in practical reason which, Kant held, was inherently present in human agents, rendering all persons capable of reasoning their way to a universal agreement about moral principles. Nor does the *Global Ethic* adopt the universalizing approach of Kant's first formulation of the Categorical Imperative by asking agents whether they would be willing to make its directives moral law for everyone. Rather the *Global Ethic* answers the perennial questions: "Ideally, how would others behave toward you? What kind of

³⁷ King, 130.

moral principles would secure that kind of treatment?" These answers, available always but, perhaps understood only inchoately, found their way into the sacred texts of all the religious traditions, even if sometimes overshadowed by non-moral content.

As to whether the *Global Ethic* is based on freedom and autonomy, and whether this is a problem which the *Global Ethic* must attempt to address and overcome is an issue to which I return in Chapter 7.

a problematical focus on "authenticity" and "credibility?"

The *Global Ethic* employs two problematic phrases—that of the “authentic” human and of “credible” religion:

1. “To be authentically human in the spirit of our great religious and ethical traditions...”³⁸
2. “Of course, religions are credible only...”³⁹

First, the *Global Ethic* makes strong claims about the sorts of persons who qualify as ‘authentically human.’ For example, it asserts that “[e]very form of egoism should be rejected: all selfishness, whether individual or collective” is to be eliminated; anything less prevents “humans from being authentically human.”⁴⁰ In other words, to be an authentically human in the spirit of the religious and cultural traditions, a person or a group must possess certain qualities—in this case, they must have eliminated

³⁸ See *A Global Ethic*, 26, 29, 32, 34.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

selfishness as a motive for action. Built into the *Global Ethic*, then, is an ontology—a requirement that, unless we meet certain requirements, we are somehow less than human—or at least, we don't count as 'authentically' human. Such a requirement, however, carries the risk of creating two groups; one 'superior' group in which people qualify as 'authentically' human; the other group containing those considered non-authentically-human. The label, 'inauthentically human,' whether assigned to individuals or collectives, could potentially exacerbate hatred or increasing the possibility of aggression against those individuals or collectives.

Second, the *Global Ethic* asserts that some religions are not *credible*—only religions that do not perpetrate harm qualify as *credible*. A religion labeled 'not' credible risks not being taken seriously rather than invoking a response appropriate to its immoral commitments and actions. In addition, the descriptor 'non-credible' can lead to two unpleasant results: 1) the group with a differing, but still moral viewpoint, could be labeled "non-credible" by the rest of the world, exacerbating hatred and the potential for aggression against that group, or 2) the "non-credible" group could feel compelled to abandon their own moral, but differing vision to avoid hatred and aggression.

Though, as King points out, the *Global Ethic* can be lauded for its "noble goal" of rejecting "ethical relativism," this effort would be better served if it set aside the

adjectives ‘credible’ and ‘authentic’. King thus proposes replacing ‘not credible’ and ‘not authentic’ with ‘immoral’ or ‘non-moral’.⁴¹ Rather than ‘not credible’, a religion more properly counts as ‘immoral’ if it perpetrates harm.⁴² Likewise persons. Rather than ‘not authentic’, a person more properly counts as ‘immoral’ if they perpetrate harm.

III. The Golden Rule: Help or Hindrance?

a version of the Golden Rule exists in every tradition?

Küng, describing the “essential insights” that he gained by participating in interdisciplinary discussions, spoke of his realization that two fundamental ethical demands are present in every religious and ethical tradition: 1) the “Golden Rule” and, 2) “Every human being must be treated humanely.” He also realized, he wrote, that these two fundamental ethical demands could be “made concrete” in the four irrevocable directives which eventually came to frame the *Global Ethic*.⁴³

An in-depth look at the Golden Rule as it has been variously integrated into philosophical and ethical systems of thought, and as it has been variously encountered

⁴¹ King, 124.

⁴² King, 129.

⁴³ Küng, *A Global Ethic*, 54-55.

in sacred texts and cultic practices, underscores the challenge of identifying principles held in common by all human beings. The *Global Ethic* acknowledges these difficulties:

...we know that our various religious and ethical traditions often offer very different bases of what is helpful and what is unhelpful for men and women, what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is evil. We do not wish to gloss over and ignore the serious differences among the individual religions. However, they should not hinder us from proclaiming publicly those things which we already hold in common and which we jointly affirm, each on the basis of our own religious or ethical grounds.⁴⁴

A few paragraphs later, however, the *Global Ethic* asserts:

There is a principle [the Golden Rule], which is found and has persisted in many religious and ethical traditions of humankind for thousands of years: **What you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others!** Or in positive terms: **What you wish done to yourself, do to others!**" This should be the irrevocable, unconditional norm for all areas of life, for families and communities, for races, nations, and religions.⁴⁵

Where the *Global Ethic* demands: "What you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others," some non-Christian religious leaders criticized what they perceived as "biblical images."⁴⁶ Did they map this version of the Golden Rule to Matthew 7:12 (NIV): "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets?" or to Leviticus 19:18 with its Great

⁴⁴ Ibid., 22.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 23-24.

⁴⁶ "Religious leaders sign 'Global Ethic' but document faces refinement process," Associated Press, *Cincinnati Post* (Cincinnati, OH), Sept. 6, 1993, 8B.

Commandment inveighing Jews, circa 1300 BCE: "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your kinsfolk. Love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD?" Nonetheless, a common claim made by admirers of the Golden Rule and those who emphasize the unity of religions—like Küng—is that comparable versions can be found in the sacred texts of every religious tradition. Scholars of religion like Greg Epstein argue that the "do unto others" notion of reciprocity "is a concept that essentially no religion misses entirely,"⁴⁷ and Simon Blackburn has found that the Golden Rule can be "found in some form in every ethical tradition."⁴⁸ For many people, one of the various formulations of the Golden Rule operates as an "abstract mandate to use an ethic of reciprocity as the fundamental guide to the way we consider, conceive, carry out, and assess our actions toward other people."⁴⁹

Philosopher Steven Pinker agrees: "the interchangeability of perspectives" which is the basis of the Golden Rule, he writes, has "been rediscovered in so many moral traditions."⁵⁰ It is widely recognized as the most commonly shared ethical dictum

⁴⁷ Greg Epstein, *Good Without God: What a Billion Nonreligious People Do Believe* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 115.

⁴⁸ Simon Blackburn, *Ethics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 101.

⁴⁹ William Scott Green, "Parsing Reciprocity: Questions for the Golden Rule," in *The Golden Rule: The Ethics of Reciprocity in World Religions*, ed. by Jacob Neusner and Bruce D. Chilton (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009), 2.

⁵⁰ Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2011), 695.

by the worlds' religions and cultures. Religious and ethical traditions alike cite it and it has figured large in the thought and writings of both religious sages and secular philosophers throughout the ages. Indeed, the adjective "Golden" was attached to the Rule in mid-sixteenth century Europe to signal its "inestimable" value.⁵¹ Pinker describes the Golden Rule as a "moral principle" of reciprocity. Philosopher Jeffrey Wattles, who has written extensively about the Golden Rule, suggests that the meaning of "moral principle" has changed over time. Currently, Wattles argues, moral principles refer to propositions "more general than the particular rules that exemplify them in a given system of thought." In addition, he writes, principles, "unlike particular moral rules, apply in every case."⁵² As a basic statement, the Golden Rule instructs us, without exception, to treat others as we, ourselves, would want to be treated.

It emphasizes reciprocity as the basic structure within which we interact with other human beings and provides a context within which we may choose and evaluate our actions towards others.⁵³ It assumes that the goals of human flourishing can be made clear and justified by one person to another. It encourages finding strategies to overcome a turn to violence since the consequences of physical harm "should be

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Wattles, 122.

⁵³ For example, Confucianism's *Tao Tse Ching*, chapter 49, formulates the Golden Rule as follows: "The sage has no interest of his own, but takes the interests of the people as his own. He is kind to the kind; he is also kind to the unkind: for Virtue is kind. He is faithful to the faithful; he is also faithful to the unfaithful: for Virtue is faithful."

purpose enough for anyone” to desist.⁵⁴ It is non-specific in the sense that it offers no guidance with respect to particular situations; it is non-consequential because it is silent on the question of “what’s in it for us” and does not guarantee rewards or punishments.

Rule’s ubiquity is not as straightforward as is often claimed

But is the Golden Rule as straightforward and unassailable of a principle as he and others assume? My research suggests that a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between it and the religious traditions is appropriate. Claims about the ubiquity of an ethic of reciprocity are open to challenge on several fronts. I will examine two of these challenges. My purpose in doing so is to highlight how the Golden Rule, though expressed in some form in most, if not all, of the sacred scriptures of the world’s religion, is neither given the same weight nor applied in the same way.

Since the *Global Ethic* claims the Golden Rule as foundational, but the content and scope ascribed to the Golden Rule by the world’s religions differs, I argue that the clear-cut trans-religious commitment of the Golden Rule assumed by the *Global Ethic* calls for greater nuance.

- Challenge #1: Because the Golden Rule is so general, it cannot guide choice in practical matters.

⁵⁴ Pinker, 695.

Kant, in a scything footnote to his *Groundwork for the Metaphysical of Morals*, summed up a problem with the Golden Rule as follows: "Let no one think that here the trivial '*quod tibi non vis fieti, etc*' can serve as a standard or principle. For it is merely derivative from our principle." The principle to which Kant refers is his second formulation of the Categorical Imperative: "others must always be treated as ends in themselves and never as means to something else." Kant then continues, "although subject to various qualifications," the Golden Rule, he writes, "cannot be a universal law since it contains the ground neither of duties to oneself nor of duties of kindness to others." Individuals, he elaborates, would readily agree that others need not help them but only if they also could be excused from helping others. Kant notes that the Golden Rule does not contain the ground "of strict duties towards others; for on this basis the criminal world would be able to dispute with the judges who punish him, and so on."⁵⁵ More recently, moral philosopher Bernard Gert has argued, along the lines of Kant, that "the Golden Rule is not really a very good guide to conduct." If followed to the letter, it, at times, seems to require actions that most people agree are not always required. And, sometimes it seems to require actions that are clearly wrong. Gert adds, perhaps elaborating on Kant's remarks regarding the criminal world and judges: the Golden Rule "requires all normal policemen not to arrest criminals, and all normal

⁵⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. H. J. Paton (New York: HarperTorchbook, 1956), 97.

judges not to sentence them." As a result, "the Golden Rule is pretty useless if you are trying to find out what you ought to do."⁵⁶ The rule appears to be vulnerable to counterexamples such as those of the judge tasked with sentencing a criminal, or of a police officer tasked with arresting a suspected offender.

Analytic treatments of the Golden Rule recognize its vulnerability to failure when the individual applying the Rule has distorted, wrong-headed, or evil desires: "Do evil to others as you wish others to do evil unto you..." Moral philosopher Marcus George Singer, in his work on the Golden Rule, developed the generalization principle to reduce the rule's susceptibility to failure. This principle begins with the Golden Rule in its positive form "Do unto others what you would wish them to do unto you." It then turns the positive form of the Golden Rule into the question, "What if someone were to do that to you?" and then generalizes the question into: "What would be the consequences of everyone's doing that?" If the consequences "would be disastrous (or undesirable), then 'you' should not do it." With respect to Kant's and Gert's judge, the generalization principle would lead to the question: "What would be the consequences of all judges refusing to sentence criminals?" In the case of the police officer, the generalization principle would take this form: "What would be the consequences of all

⁵⁶ Bernard Gert, quoted in Wattles' *The Golden Rule: the Ethics of Reciprocity in World Religions*, 3.

police officers refusing to arrest criminals?" The man who does not wish to help others would ask: "What would be the consequences if no one wished to help others?"

This generalization principle, however, does not apply in all cases. Additional qualifications are required to prevent its misuse. At times, it proves "invertible" and fails. For example, one can pose the question: "What would be the consequences of everyone becoming a judge?" The outcome is undesirable and, thus, according to the generalization principle, 'everyone' should *not* become a judge. However, if the question is inverted, it becomes: "What would be the consequences of no one becoming a judge?" Those consequences are also undesirable; 'everyone' should *not* not become a judge.

For moral philosopher Marcus George Singer, the Golden Rule is tied to the ideal society traditionally sought by people—a society based on principles of fairness or justice or impartiality. Singer finds that the Golden Rule "is more than a handy reminder" of such a society as long as it is not interpreted in the logically narrow manner illustrated in the paragraph above. He argues that "literal interpretations of the rule are undoubtedly misinterpretations of what was intended by it."⁵⁷ Singer defends the Golden Rule by pointing out that it yields undesirable results only in *particular* situations. If a potential action is tested at an appropriate level of generality, the

⁵⁷ Marcus George Singer, quoted in Wattles, *The Golden Rule*, 126.

Golden Rule succeeds. With proper attention to this caveat, it is, for Singer, "the most effective instrument of moral education."⁵⁸ A weakness in Singer's defense of the Golden Rule and his generalization principle, however, is the difficulty in determining the appropriate level of generality. Singer relies on the Rule-user's capacity to identify the best level. In spite of Singer's efforts to specify clear limits on the range of acceptable interpretations, he acknowledges that if users do not take into account the context in which a generalization of the Golden Rule is being applied, it may be difficult for them to identify the general question required to yield a relevant result.

Wattles describes this quandary:

The point is that a systematic application of the Golden Rule is helpful but that it cannot capture and organize every context, every situation, every quandary in a manner capable of leading to a moral answer. If the Golden Rule is reduced to a principle of consistency or universalizability, then an intuition implicit in the rule is sacrificed. The rule implies respect for persons, as Kant expressed in his second formulation of the categorical imperative, giving his philosophy a balance that we intuitively sense in the golden rule but which the universalizability principle taken in isolation lacks.⁵⁹

For Wattles, formal approaches like Singer's can sharpen intuition but they cannot replace intuition. Rather, Wattles holds, human beings need to hone their intuitions until they can appropriately adjust themselves to various contexts of moral decision and gauge when "something has gone wrong" in the application of a given

⁵⁸ Singer, quoted in Wattles, 125.

⁵⁹ Wattles, 139.

moral theory. In the case of Singer and his generalization principle, for example, human intuition must notice when an incorrect level of generalization has been selected.⁶⁰ Wattles recommends a cooperative relationship between intuition and theoretical approaches that rely on rational consistency. Intuition, prone to error, can be “corrected through argument;” theory, prone to failure when applied too narrowly, can be corrected by intuition. Both are needed: theory to sharpen, extend, build on, and clarify intuition, and intuition to monitor, confirm, offer evidence, and adjust theory. Ideally, in Wattles’ view, an unending recursive process occurs of “mutual correction of intuition by reflection, and of reflection by intuition.”⁶¹ The Golden Rule, applied with rational consistency, “functions properly” when it is functions, not as a stand-alone rule, but “within the context of a wider philosophy of living.”⁶²

Singer’s and Wattles’ writings highlight the uniquely helpful characteristics of the Golden Rule. It offers everyone, including children, an easy to understand, ethical rule of thumb, which is “intuitively accessible.” By virtue of its simplicity, it promotes a sense of confidence in users. Reassured, these users come to believe that, when they rely on the Golden Rule as a guide, they will find a good and defensible solution to their moral quandaries. Persons shaped by their childhood communities often

⁶⁰ Wattles, 139-140.

⁶¹ Wattles, 140.

⁵² Ibid.

understand the Golden Rule as a succinct expression of those communities' moral norms. It helps them remember to treat others with the same consideration and fairness they want for themselves and encourages them to recognize that others are like them in the sense that they, too, seek consideration and fairness. The Golden Rule expresses personal standards of conduct while ascribing, to the other, the same level of importance. It fosters a higher, third-person perspective from which to try to understand other people and their standard of conduct. From this 'third-person' perspective, shared moral concerns become evident. Indeed, Wattles describes the Golden Rule as a constant reminder to 'do unto others,' which, for him, is nothing short of "an expression of human kinship, the most fundamental truth underlying morality."⁶³

The Golden Rule, I suggest, although less straightforward to grasp and apply than the *Global Ethic* implies, invites thoughtful individuals, regardless of their religious or cultural tradition, to examine more closely the meaning of human kinship and to reflect on what this kinship demands of them. Indeed, the strength of the Golden Rule may be the fact that it is difficult to impose a static interpretation on the principle of reciprocity. As a result, it can compel reflexive agents to construe its demands generously, to shift from self-centeredness to empathy, to balance rational consistency with moral intuition,

⁶³ Wattles, 188-189.

and to abandon duty-bound attention to others in favor of compassionate service.⁶⁴

By extension, the *Global Ethic* offers similar possibilities for generous understandings of its directives if care is taken to resist static interpretations.

- Challenge #2: The Golden Rule specified in a sacred text is given greater precision by the context in which it appears; in some world religions it is applied in restricted ways and only applies to individuals who are part of a clearly delineated community

In my analysis of Challenge #1, I explored the challenges associated with the Golden Rule's application in a Western cultural context. This analysis called into question the putatively easy application of the Golden Rule. The *Global Ethic* also claims that the Golden Rule is a foundational commitment of the world's religions. My analysis of Challenge #2 will show that although the religions' sacred texts mention the Golden Rule in its positive or negative formulation, they apply the Rule in ways that do not, in all cases, extend beyond the boundaries of those religions. This limitation emerges when asking who counts as the "other" to whom one is to reciprocate, especially when the positive formulation of the Golden Rule is in force. Constraints become clearer when moral worldviews conflict: "To achieve reciprocity, does the rule

⁶⁴ Wattles, 188.

require or imply that we should respect moral positions we oppose and shape our actions around them?”⁶⁵

Though some take it as a truism that it is easier for members of religious traditions to reach agreement on moral issues than on doctrinal matters, believers may “respect moral commandments whose meaning might not necessarily be obvious outside of the faith.”⁶⁶ Adherents of a particular strand of a religious tradition could interpret the Golden Rule in ways that are not obvious to believers of another strand of that tradition. To illustrate such disagreement, religion scholar William Scott Green describes the nineteenth-century debates between Christian abolitionist and proslavery ministers. The abolitionist ministers argued that ending slavery would disrupt the social and economic order, harming more people than it would benefit. On their telling, the Golden Rule mandated that slaves endure their condition for the sake of non-slave ‘others.’ The Golden Rule, appropriated by both sides of the debate, was interpreted in ways that supported mutually exclusive viewpoints. Green agrees with Wattles and Singer that to use the Golden Rule properly, it is important to try to understand the

⁶⁵ William Scott Green, “Parsing Reciprocity: Questions for the Golden Rule,” *The Golden Rule: The Ethics of Reciprocity in World Religions* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009), 2.

⁶⁶ Joas, *Do We Need Religion?*, 30.

constraints "that focus its meaning and the circumstances to and in which it actually applies."⁶⁷

the religions interpret and apply the Rule in different ways

Difficulties also arise when comparing interpretations of the Golden Rule across different religious traditions. The meaning(s) of the Golden Rule in Islam illustrates these difficulties. According to professor of religion and Islam expert, Th. Emil Homerin, in the Qur'an, six Quranic verses—in the surah called "The Cheats"—contain an implicit statement of the Golden Rule. This passage warns merchants to stop cheating customers by adjusting the weights used to measure goods.

Accursed are those who give short measure, those who, when they receive their share among people, they take their full share. Yet when they measure or weigh the shares of others, they give less. Do they not imagine that they will be resurrected on an awesome day, a day when people will stand before the Lord of the Worlds? (Q. 83.1-6)

Based on this passage, the Golden Rule can be reformulated explicitly as: "Pay, Oh Children of Adam, as you would love to be paid, and be just as you would love to have justice!"⁶⁸ These Quranic verses can be further exegeted in light of the hadith, or the collected sayings of Muhammad. The hadith offer the "knowledge essential for the

⁶⁷ Wattles, 5.

⁶⁸ Th. Emil Homerin, "The Golden Rule in Islam," *The Golden Rule: The Ethics of Reciprocity*, 101-102.

proper worship of Allah and of life in society.”⁶⁹ Sunni and Shi'a Muslims rely on unique collections of hadith to supplement the Qur'an since this text is silent on many aspects of ordinary life. Knowledge of these collections is crucial to understanding how the members of various Muslim communities interpret the Golden Rule. The hadith collections considered the most trustworthy by all Muslims (regardless of whether they are Sunni or Shiites) reads as follows: “None of you believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself!” Two highly regarded collectors of Muhammad's sayings, Muhammad al-Bukhari (d. 870) and Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj (d. 875), cite this hadith in the chapters they wrote on “faith” or “belief.” The Golden Rule, then, in its implicit form (the Qur'anic command to treat people equitably in commercial transaction) in tandem with the Golden Rule in its explicit form (the popular and widely-shared hadith cited above) appears to extend to every human being.

However, the Muslim hadith scholar, Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani (d. 1449) argued that when Muhammed said: “None of you believes until he loves for his brother...,” he did not mean that those who fail to follow the Golden Rule are non-believers or infidels; rather, Muhammad meant that “faith is not complete” until a believer loves “for his brother what he loves for himself.”⁷⁰ Still, Ibn Hajar also cautioned that even if one

⁶⁹ David Waines, *An Introduction to Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 36.

⁷⁰ Homerin, 103.

loves "for his brother what he loves for himself," if one does not practice the Five Pillars of Islam, one's faith cannot count as perfect faith, or as "complete" faith. Ibn Hajar explored other variations of the Golden Rule in the hadith, including this version of the Golden Rule: "No worshipper believes until he loves for his Muslim brother what he loves for himself of good things." This hadith, Ibn Hajar argued, showed that the word "brother" used by Muhammad when he said: "None of you believes until he loves for his brother..." meant 'Muslim.' Ibn Hajar concluded that those who are to be loved are limited to fellow Muslims.

In his commentary on this Golden-Rule hadith, Ibn Hajar discussed the ethical implications and the moral conduct required to put the Golden Rule into practice. "The upshot of this position is to incite one to humility," he writes, "so that one does not want to be preferred over others." In Surah 28:83, Allah, His Most High, said of heaven, according to Ibn Hajar: "We will give that to those who do not desire to be exalted in the world." But one cannot abandon such desire "except by eliminating (from oneself) envy, malice, resentment, and deceit, for all of those are base qualities." For Ibn Hajar, then, the Golden Rule calls for self-examination and religious transformation with the goal of fostering humility rather than reciprocity. By acknowledging the humanity of the other person, the humility, selflessness, and altruism one seeks can be attained.⁷¹

⁷¹ Ibid.

Other writings by Ibn Hajar highlight how, for him, the Golden-Rule hadith “does not nullify all difference in a universal equality so much as it operates among groups of similar members.” More likely, for Ibn Hajar, as well as other important Muslim scholars, including Sufi scholar Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri (d. 1037 CE), the Sufi and theologian Muhammad Al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE), and Sufi theologian Muhyi al-Din Ibn al-Arabi (d. 1240 CE), there are “basic social, legal, theological, even ontological, distinctions and hierarchies that constrain the Golden Rule.” These hierarchical distinctions include the diads “God-humanity, Muslim-non-Muslim, free person-slave, ruler-subject, adult-child, and man-woman.” The issue, then, is not so much treating everyone in the same way, but rather treating each person in a manner appropriate to his or her place in the hierarchy.⁷² Thus, al-Qushayri, in his commentary on “those who give short measure,” extends the Qur'an's critique of business owners who cheat their clients to other situations when humans interact. Like Ibn Hajar, he calls upon Muslims to apply the Golden Rule when interacting with other Muslims but remains silent about situations when Muslims come into contact with non-Muslims.⁷³

Another interpretation of the Golden Rule hadith advanced by the Persian philosopher and ethicist, Ahmad Miskawayh (d. 963 CE), claimed that the Golden Rule described a rare, ideal friendship between equals. Influenced by Platonic and

⁷² Ibid., 108.

⁷³ Ibid., 105.

Aristotelian ideas, Miskawayh also argued that the Golden Rule provided the basis for a social contract intended to secure the greater good for everyone. Offering yet another interpretation, the Persian secretary to the caliph's court in Baghdad, Abdallah Ibn al-Muqaffa (d. c 756 CE), wrote that Islam's hadith of the Golden Rule provided advice to rulers, spurring them to treat their people with justice or face dire consequences in this world or in the next.⁷⁴ The Muslim community, then, has interpreted and applied the Golden Rule in several contrasting ways.

The *Global Ethic*'s assertion that it is based on a single meaning of the Golden Rule⁷⁵ proves, upon closer examination, to require "constraints of context and interpretations to achieve [its] inestimable utility." It is important to be mindful of the context in which the Golden Rule appears in sacred scriptures and to pay attention to how it has been interpreted by a particular tradition's key thinkers. Still, in reviewing the location and understandings of the Golden Rule in Islamic texts, we see that its norms are, at the very least, present in the Muslim community's resources. The Golden Rule applies not just to one's family and clan but also to larger social units which, depending on the exegete, most likely includes strangers. Ethicist Edward Westermarck has advanced a mechanism for generalization whereby norms that begin with the family and clan eventually expand to include the tribe." Westermarck argues

⁷⁴ Ibid., 114.

⁷⁵ Green, 3.

that experiences with outsiders, even when taking place within contexts regulated by group sanctions, foster expanding circles of relationships. "Gradually the sense of the in-group" widens to include a sense of identity and moral solidarity with others until "ethical awareness encompasses all humankind."⁷⁶

While it is important to pay attention, as Homerin and Davis warn, to the unique context in which the Golden Rule appears in the scriptures of the world's religions, and to study the way in which this rule has been interpreted by the principal thinkers in each particular tradition, it is also important to remember that the Golden Rule has been, and continues to be re-interpreted in light of the realities of contemporary life. A recent example is that of 125 Muslims clerics and scholars who, though scattered around the world, cooperated to pen, on October 13, 2007, an open letter to then-Pope Benedict XVI and other Christian leaders. In the letter, entitled "A Common World Between Us," they affirmed that Jews, Christians, and Muslims believe in common that "'the love of God, and love of the neighbor' should serve as 'a basis for peace and understanding.'" Central to their message was the Golden-Rule hadith discussed earlier: "None of you believes until you love for your brother what you love

⁷⁶ Wattles, 183. See also Robert N. Bellah's *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011).

for yourself!" The letter argued that the Golden Rule refers to human kinship and to compassion for all other human beings.⁷⁷

polyvalent and simple formulation is Rule's strength

For Wattles, the simple formulation and polyvalent meanings of the Golden Rule is its strength. Do to others as you want others to do to you, he writes, "is part of our planet's [sic] common language," because it is shared by persons with differing but "overlapping conceptions of morality." Only because it is flexible can this principle serve as "a moral ladder for all humankind."⁷⁸

The golden rule is a searchlight, not a map. A moral principle is not a system of ethics, nor is a system of ethics produced by the extension of an abstract principle. A moral principle is an expression of life; to understand a moral principle and to develop a wider ethics requires vastly more than deduction.⁷⁹

In an age of increasing and unavoidable contact between religions and cultures, norms requiring humane treatment of outsiders are of crucial importance. Esteemed, and still influential but divergent interpretations of the Golden Rule exist in the world's religions. In Islam a number of interpretations (such as Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani's) do not support an all-encompassing ethic of reciprocity. However, these interpretations, Westermarck predicts, may become marginalized in favor of other, perhaps currently

⁷⁷ Ibid., 115.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 188.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 165.

less well-regarded, interpretations calling for an ethic in which the faith of Muslims is considered complete if they love, for their “fellow human beings,” what they love for themselves. It seems plausible that the Golden Rule, understood as calling for reciprocity on a global scale, will assume a primary place in the traditions. Given this possibility, the *Global Ethic* may, at some future point, rest on a monolithic Golden Rule.

The *Global Ethic*’s strength, like that of the Golden Rule’s, is that it supplies a barebones framework from which religionists can participate in *intra-tradition* conversations about how its directives can operate in light of the communities’ moral commitments. Furthermore, its barebones framework renders it capable of engendering productive, *inter-tradition* exchanges. As Wattles suggests with respect to the Golden Rule—instead of highlighting differences between cultural and religious traditions at the expense of the global applicability of the *Global Ethic*, and instead of highlighting claims about the common core shared by each tradition at the expense of a nuanced understanding of how the *Global Ethic* might operate differently in individual traditions, I suggest taking a middle way when assessing the *Global Ethic*.

IV. Are the Global Ethic’s Directives Too Vague?

Like the charges of vagueness sometimes leveled against the Golden Rule, a common critique of the *Global Ethic*’s directives is that they are too abstract and too general to

help with practical decisions. An adequate response to this charge requires an exploration of its usefulness for individual agents and for global social thought.

too vague for individuals to use?

At the level of the individual agent, the level of primary interest to this dissertation, some of the analysis that I offered earlier with respect to the Golden Rule is applicable to the *Global Ethic*'s directives. Like the Golden Rule, the *Global Ethic*'s ethical directives are easy to understand and "intuitively accessible." By virtue of their simplicity, they promotes a sense of confidence in users who can trust that if they rely on the *Global Ethic* as a guide, they will find a good and defensible solution to their moral quandary. Persons shaped by their childhood communities can understand the *Global Ethic* as a succinct expression of those community's moral norms.

Principles ride a fine line between overly general (too broad to be helpful) and overly particular (too specific to be helpful except in circumscribed situations). To return to the Golden Rule as an example of a principle, part of the debate over the Golden Rule is whether it is of help at moments of actual decision-making. In spite of this debate, agents who subscribe to the Golden Rule—or more accurately, in this case, Golden Principle—are usually aware of times when they have not lived up to its demands or, alternatively, when they have succeeded in fulfilling its mandate (although they could be mistaken). Moreover, people can usually detect changes in other

people's behavior indicating that they have switched to a different principle. For example, individuals may refuse to bring their cars to a full stop at crosswalks while also consistently berating drivers and pedestrians who fail to stop for them. Though they themselves are not honoring the Golden Rule, they expect others to do so. Such persons, if they are rational, would concede, when it is pointed out to them, that they are failing to comply with the Golden Rule.⁸⁰

To follow even abstract and general principles like the directives of the *Global Ethic* is an improvement over what religious ethicists, Sean McKeever and Michael Ridge, call "unprincipled sensibility," in which decisions are based on the dispositional aspect of our sensibility. If we prefer to be guided by unprincipled sensibility, we are more likely to make decisions based on our self-interests. We may not realize that we are giving our personal wants and desires priority. Such special pleading does not usually involve an intentional violation of moral requirements, nor overt claims that moral requirements are invalid. Rather, our desires can distort our sense of what counts as moral.⁸¹ The advantage of principled guidance is that it enables us "to counteract our all too human tendency" to make exceptions for ourselves."⁸² We can reflect on these principles and then choose to adopt and internalize them well in advance of

⁸⁰ This example is based on one described by McKeever and Ridge, 209.

⁸¹ McKeever and Ridge, 202.

⁸² Ibid., 209.

situations” when they could conflict with our desires or demand sacrifices of us. As a result, we may be more likely to choose what is moral over what is self-serving.⁸³

The directives of the *Global Ethic* can prove overly flexible at times because qualifications and exceptions can always be found. Still, like the Golden Rule, they provide helpful guidelines. Evidence suggests that when we make moral decisions, we rely on simple principles more often than we may realize. An example provided by McKeever and Ridge illustrates how simple rules can impact practical decision-making. At considerable personal and professional cost, corporate whistleblowers make public their employers’ questionable or illegal activities. One might predict that they pondered their decisions at length and weighed many factors before contacting authorities. Yet when actual whistleblowers are asked how they reached the decision to ‘go public,’ they simply say: “Deceiving people and misusing their money is wrong.” General principles against lying and against misusing other people’s money is, no doubt, subject to a significant number of qualifications and exceptions. Circumstances abound that justify ignoring these principles. Still, they are compelling and sturdy enough to lead whistleblowers to choose the high moral ground over the safety of silence.

⁸³ Ibid., 203.

It is possible that whistleblowers are “unconsciously aware” of other factors that play a role in their decisions. Nonetheless, such factors are unlikely to be present in every instance. McKeever and Ridge find that even if one “supposes that someone like the whistleblower” is unconsciously guided by “a more nuanced principle,” this does not change the fact that he or she may, at the same time, be “consciously relying” on simple principles. According to McKeever and Ridge, “moral agents seem regularly to be guided by shockingly crude” rules and principles.⁸⁴ Furthermore, based on their work with whistleblowers, McKeever and Ridge offer two observations. Whistleblowers

1. understand the simple principle to be a moral one
2. recognize themselves to have acted morally

McKeever and Ridge conclude that a person who has internalized a set of principles, even if these are crude, “quite regularly and indeed systematically seem to succeed in acting well by following them.” The relationship between principles and the situation at hand becomes “systematic” in the sense that the principles “pick up on features which are in some sense morally relevant.” Hence, whistleblowers are able to identify the connection between their personal commitment to honesty and the salient features of their employer’s deception and theft.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Ibid., 197.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

too vague for global change?

Though some have criticized the *Global Ethic* for being too general or too abstract to serve as a helpful guide to moral decision-making on a global scale, such reproaches overlooks the opportunities that the *Global Ethic* has created for wider public discussion about the way that free agents would prefer to live with others. It makes such opportunities possible by inviting religious people into the conversation. The *Global Ethic* encourages participation by all agents, including those influenced by their religious commitments. It thus offers “unexpected” opportunities for “reflection on global affairs by representatives of the world religions.”⁸⁶ The conditions for “building up” to global policies becomes possible.⁸⁷

As a member of the World Council of Churches team on Justice, Peace, and Creation, Martin Robra argued that by codifying the ethical “minimum” that unites civilizations, the *Global Ethic* serves as a “basis for rational dialogue” between them. It also makes the “misuse” of religion to underwrite violence and oppression more difficult to justify. Though religious differences—as history demonstrates, and current events continue to underscore—often fuel conflicts, if adherents of religions at odds with each other turn to the set of moral directives they hold in common and decide to

⁸⁶ Robra, 472.

⁸⁷ Konrad Raiser, quoted by Robra, 472.

honor them, the *Global Ethic* may “become an instrument for a more peaceful and just world.”⁸⁸

Another critique of the *Global Ethic* with respect to global policies is that its directives are silent on the issues of non-human animals and the environment. This putative “oversight” was intentional on the part of Küng and other contributors to the *Global Ethic*. They chose to focus on identifying moral issues about which there was agreement and to set aside contested issues about which little consensus seemed to exist. As Küng observed, the work of identifying *the necessary minimum* of common moral values, standards, and attitudes was set in motion by the observation that “there can be no better global order without a global ethic.” The goal of formulating the *Global Ethic* was (and continues to be): to bring the religions together by identifying areas of agreement on basic moral values and convictions.⁸⁹

Because common ground remains elusive, the work of identifying the necessary minimum for the *Global Ethic* did not permit retreating from the world, however enticing, to fabricate its shared norms. Since it cannot compel the world’s many religious and cultural traditions to agree that its directives articulate “the ethical sphere” they already share, it is limited to persuading them that it does so accurately.⁹⁰ The

⁸⁸ Robra, 472.

⁸⁹ Küng and Kuschel, 7-8.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

Global Ethic thus formulates these directives in a way designed to foster recognition on the part of agents, religious or not, that its principles are ones they learned and integrated. If individuals who encounter the *Global Ethic* find it coercive, this may occur because, for any number of reasons, they have not yet embraced the minimum moral ground that it expresses.

On the global level, as on the personal one, the *Global Ethic*'s attempt to identify general or abstract directives is not a time-wasting "academic" exercise. Political philosopher John Rawls wrote that this kind of work "is a way of continuing public discussion when shared understandings of lesser generality have broken down." When we encounter deep conflict at the level of particular details, we must ascend, Rawls held, seeking a higher level of abstraction from which we can get a clear and uncluttered view of the causes for this conflict.⁹¹ The *Global Ethic* is a valuable and helpful attempt to articulate directives at a high enough level of generality that moral

⁹¹ See John Rawls for an analogous discussion of the usefulness of abstract conceptions in political philosophy: "In political philosophy the work of abstraction is set in motion by deep political conflicts...No political conception of justice could have weight with us unless it helped to put in order our considered convictions of justice at all levels of generality, from the most general to the most particular...Political philosophy cannot coerce our considered convictions any more than the principles of logic can. If we feel coerced, it may be because, when we reflect on the matter at hand, values, principles, and standards are so formulated and arranged that they are freely recognized as ones we do, or should, accept," in *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 44-46.

people can recognize them as their own regardless of their religious or secular traditions.

Ch. 7

WHAT KIND OF ETHIC IS THE *GLOBAL ETHIC*?

A global ethic is nothing but the necessary minimum of common values, standards, and attributes; in other words, a minimally basic consensus relating to binding values, irrevocable standards, and moral attitudes, which can be affirmed by all religions despite their “dogmatic” differences and should also be supported by nonbelievers.¹ – Hans Küng

One can presumably find in all cultures condemnations of genocide, murder, torture, and slavery, as well as of, say, “disappearances” and the shooting of innocent demonstrators.² – Charles Taylor

The profound differences in moral outlooks and convictions make everyone skeptical about whether a global ethics is really possible.... And yet without some such shared moral convictions, it is not at all clear how we might escape the destruction of future life or the fires of hate and violence.³ – William Schweiker

¹ Hans Küng, “A Global Ethic in World Politics: The Middle Way Between ‘Real Politics’ and ‘Ideal Politics,’” *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 13, no. 1 (1999): 5.

² Charles Taylor, “A World Consensus on Human Rights?” *Dissent* 43 (Summer 1996): 15-16.

³ Schweiker, *Theological Ethics*, 13.

IN the two preceding chapters, I touched upon, but did not develop, several questions which call for further elaboration. These questions are: what is the grounding and legitimacy of the *Global Ethic's* purportedly shared moral principles? What is the source of these shared principles? Are the principles in some sense necessary? Are they deservedly authoritative? Do they fit a recognizable theoretical framework?

In Chapter 5, I argued that tests based on traditional Euro-American ethical theories are no longer sufficient to determine whether the constructs of God that serve as foundations for various theistic theologies, beliefs, and doctrines are *validly* moral. The globalization of human life requires a test that stretches across a panoply of worldviews. In an increasingly pluralistic world, moral issues such as "the treatment of women, sharing of wealth and income, respect for the environment, the spread of democracy and human rights, economic globalization, the pervasive influence of information technologies such as the Internet, and the onward march of biotechnological progress...must be confronted multiculturally."⁴ Kaufman put forward such a test—the "criterion of humanization"—as a universal check on concepts of God, but I evaluated and rejected it as inadequate. In Chapter 6, I surveyed some of the other global ethics in existence and identified the *Global Ethic* as the best candidate to

⁴ Barnhart, 1.

serve as the sort of moral test Kaufman had intended to provide with his “criterion of humanization.” The *Global Ethic*, I argued, is uniquely suited to this task, in part because 1) it is the product of extensive trans-religious and trans-national consultations between religious leaders and religious ethicists, and 2) it was endorsed by acclaim by thousands of representatives of the world’s religions during the 1993 Parliament of the World’s Religions.

In this chapter,⁵ I advance the following claim: the directives of the *Global Ethic* comprise a *real* ethic. The directives are real (true) in the sense that they have always existed. The *Global Ethic* has been inscribed in human life since its beginning—it does not construct but articulates the shared, normative dimension underlying all of the religious and secular traditions. By doing so explicitly, it makes us aware of this dimension. Because the *Global Ethic*’s directives have always existed, they were integrated into sacred and secular writings throughout the ages, intuited and understood by some, perhaps by many—although not always fully. Unfortunately, they were often recorded and handed down in obscure, garbled, or implied forms. Moreover, agents and communities who were aware of them seldom honored them. When religious leaders and ethicists participated in the drafting of the *Global Ethic*

⁵ A portion of this chapter appeared in “Moral Concepts of God in an Age of Globalization and Contingency,” *God and the Moral Life*, ed. by Myriam Renaud and Joshua Daniel (London: Routledge Publishers, 2018).

through a lengthy process of open-ended consultations, they produced the clearest and most accurately formulated set of directives available thus far in history. The novel process by which these directives were identified by the group of leaders and ethicists led by Küng in the early 1990s, a process which continues as people and organizations around the world apply the directives and participate in ongoing conversations about them, requires a new theoretical designation. I characterize it as a *constructivist-realist* ethic.

The *Global Ethic* itself is silent on its grounding and legitimacy. The authors and endorsers of the *Global Ethic* assume that “religious people will look to their own faiths for explanations” about the objective status of its principles. They are confident that its directives are embedded in all of the world’s religious and cultural traditions and that, for this reason, “the empirical observation of shared moral ground” (in the words of Sallie King) will pass “the test of time.”⁶ Perhaps they took its given-ness for granted, or they may simply have been convinced that the directives’ force and authority needed no explanation. Or, satisfied that they had successfully expressed the religious and secular traditions’ shared moral principles, the authors and representatives who ratified it were content to leave the task of identifying the sources from which these principles spring to those who insist on identifying sources. Alternatively, this could

⁶ Sallie King, 125.

have been a strategic move on their part since some religious traditions understand God as the source of the *Global Ethic*'s directives—the absence of divine attribution allows theists to impose this understanding without placing the *Global Ethic* beyond the reach of non-theists. Moral philosophers are welcome to develop a theory to ground and legitimate the *Global Ethic*, Sallie King wrote, though they may have to "declare the matter insoluble by their own methods." Regardless, even if religious explanations do "satisfy" philosophers, "religious people will look to their own faiths for explanations."⁷

If the *Global Ethic* is a *real* ethic, as I argue, then it has no identifiable grounding. The distinctive marker of a "real" ethic is its self-evidence—it simply *is*. Its aseity could explain why its authors and those who ratified it treated it as a given. They implicitly or explicitly understood its reality perhaps because the force and authority of the *Global Ethic*'s directives becomes evident as soon as these directives are violated. As philosopher Jürgen Habermas explained, individuals who have experienced exclusion, suffering, and discrimination, have, at the very least, a "background intuition" of the wrongness of what has been done to them. This intuition may lead to the conscious realization that explicit checks against such wrongs ought to exist. Once the need for categorical directives is understood, the next step is to formulate and elaborate them

⁷ Ibid.

conceptually into a set of clear moral codes,⁸ or recognize them as already set forth in the *Global Ethic*.

As I explore the *Global Ethic*'s theoretical framework, its grounding, and its legitimacy, I argue its directives are real (true). If this were the case, then one would expect a significant number of approaches and arguments to lead to the same or recognizably similar directives. In this chapter, such a phenomenon occurs—several approaches and arguments lend support to the claim that the *Global Ethic*'s directives are real. In brief, I focus on the following approaches and arguments:

1. The *Global Ethic* as an expression of an emergent-universalist ethic, the term used by Michael Barnhart to describe “bottom-up universalism.” On this analysis, the *Global Ethic* that “emerges from the bottom-up” is universalistic—its commitments apply to everyone
2. The *Global Ethic* as an expression of David Cheetham’s “coincidence of views,” or, based on Cheetham’s understanding of John Rawls’ term in a general way, as an “overlapping consensus.” On this analysis, the *Global Ethic* is an expression of the overlapping consensus that results when views about moral commitments coincide
3. The *Global Ethic* as an expression of a constructivist ethic and a realist ethic. For this exploration, the work of Stephen Engstrom and David Copp proves helpful. A constructive ethic is a kind of ethic often identified as an alternative and competitor to realist ethics; David Copp argues that an ethic can be both. I argue that the *Global Ethic* qualifies as an example
4. The *Global Ethic*'s underlying assumptions as an expression of a liberal account of the human “good” or “flourishing,” an account that Paul Ricoeur held was

⁸ Jürgen Habermas, “Concept of Dignity and Human Rights,” *Metaphilosophy*, 41:4 (July 2010): 468.

neglected in ethics. I show that the *Global Ethic* is grounded in implicit values that are compatible with the UN Development Programme's account of the maximal development of human capabilities and its ethics of maximized agency for all peoples. On this analysis, the *Global Ethic* receives empirical support; its understanding of the human "good" is corroborated by a respected, international agency's empirical studies

5. The *Global Ethic* as an expression of a middle way between moral universalism and particularism, eschewing particularism's moral relativism in favor of an unyielding stance on its commitments, and eschewing universalism's sweeping generalities in favor of religious and cultural expressions of unbending stances against murder, torture, slavery, "disappearances," the shooting of innocent demonstrators, and more

I. A product of a bottom-up, 'emergent universalism'?

linkages: Western vs South and East Asian religions

Any ethic that aspires to be a *global* ethic must address some of the disagreements that arise as different religious and cultural traditions respond to contemporary moral dilemmas. This age's widening pluralism has led to greater awareness that, when individuals or religious groups working out of a variety of commitments reflect on similar practical problems, they may reach non-compatible decisions and offer divergent solutions. According to Michael Barnhart, an expert in Buddhist ethics, the South and East Asian traditions represent the "most systematic philosophical challenge" to the Anglo-American and European moral theories that "have reigned dominant in

ethical discourse.”⁹ If these cannot be, at some level, “reconciled” to each other, then the project of developing a *global* ethic is compromised from the start.

There exists, Barnhart finds, a “family resemblance” between Buddhist, Hindu, Confucian, and Taoist traditions that “emphasizes elements of ethical discourse” significantly different from those of the Anglo-American and European tradition. He also detects a “family resemblance” between the Jewish, Christian, Islamic, “and even African traditions which feature prominently” in contemporary Anglo-American and European ethical theory but they “only weakly correlate with those” of South and East Asia.¹⁰ The reason, Barnhart writes, is that during Europe’s Enlightenment, “autonomy and personal freedom emerged as dominant considerations in the cultivation of a moral sense.” As a result, Anglo-American and European ethical theories tend to emphasize “that one that can prescribe duties to oneself.”¹¹

Chris Brown, whose research focuses on the diversity of moral practices and social arrangements around the world, agrees with Barnhart’s assessment. Brown notes that persons who embrace Anglo-American and European ethical theories usually have no difficulty accommodating diversity as long as these moral practices and social arrangements “are freely chosen” and as long as the cost is “born by the individuals.”

⁹ Barnhart, 2.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 10.

He notes, however, that they may balk at so-called “Asian values” because those values center “on the family and the community” rather than on the individual.

The question then arises: Can members of societies whose values center on the individual accept social arrangements that violate the freedom of individuals even if these arrangements are “based on a moral code that seems to be widely accepted” in South and East Asian societies?¹² Barnhart observes that a typical reaction to pluralism is to look for “linkages” between traditions. These linkages, he asserts, are philosophical and may be capable of guiding “our reflections toward reasonable consensus.”¹³ In his work, Barnhart looks for such linkages and he has found, as I will explore later at greater length, that they do occur even between the seemingly irreconcilable moral codes of the West and of South and East Asia. Hence, his findings suggest that a *global* ethic is possible.

Though Barnhart emphasizes the notion of ‘consensus,’ some scholars support, as I do, the more plausible possibility of ‘convergence’ across religious and cultural traditions. Convergence does not insist, as consensus does, that persons (and religious traditions) reach an agreement based on the same reasons. Individuals are likely to have their own reasons for endorsing a particular set of moral directives. Though they

¹² Chris Brown, “Liberalism and the Globalization of Ethics,” in *The Globalization of Ethics: Religious and Secular Perspectives*, ed. by William M. Sullivan and Will Kymlicka (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 162.

¹³ Barnhart, 14.

may be guided by potentially incompatible reasons, they can, and do converge on moral norms. Convergence occurs, to return to a previous point, because persons have an interest in working together to elucidate ethical principles that can pre-empt or end the harm, suffering, and oppression they have experienced. Just as experiences of harm, suffering, and oppression, transcend religious and cultural traditions, so, too, ethical principles.

Some critics of convergence theories suggest that convergence regarding moral principles cannot occur because, while persons may have an interest in identifying norms, they are unlikely to agree about which norms are best. Still, to use the example of the *Global Ethic*, the process of consulting and collecting feedback from hundreds of scholars and religious leaders gave rise to a single set of directives. The directives met with the support of the Parliament's Board of Trustees who voted to ratify the *Global Ethic*; they also met with the support of the majority of religious leaders and lay people who attended the Parliament's international conference and signed the document or gave their vocal assent. Though these individuals, including Buddhists, Hindu, Confucian, and Taoists, may have been motivated by different, perhaps even conflicting reasons, the point remains that they backed the norms expressed in the *Global Ethic*.

Convergence and the sorts of linkages described by Barnhart are thus possible. To return to his work on the relationship between Buddhist ethics and the seemingly distinct Anglo-American and European moral theories, when he assesses the “general” Buddhist attitude toward bioethical dilemmas such as assisted suicide, he identifies a difference that appears to undermine the possibility of a (in his words) desirable consensus. Human life, in Buddhism, is understood as “capable of mundane rebirth, and perhaps most importantly, without any identifiable essence” like that of those theories’ “soul” or “personal ego.” Such an understanding seems incompatible with attitudes towards life and death commonly held by persons who subscribe to Anglo-American and European moral theories. Scholar of Buddhism, Damien Keown, defends the conventional stance that “Buddhist bioethics involves a generalized respect for life” and thus forbids euthanasia. For Buddhists, Keown argues, nature, not persons, settles questions of life and death and, if human beings intervene, they act out of hubris.

Nonetheless, though Keown describes a widely accepted interpretation of Buddhist teachings on bioethics and, on the basis of this interpretation, argues that Buddhism forbids euthanasia, Barnhart’s plausible and even elegant, though perhaps not standard, way of interpreting Buddhist values helps bridge the distance between those values and those of the West. Against Keown, Barnhart calls for what he considers a “more ‘liberal’ view” of Buddhism. Based on this ‘liberal’ view, Barnhart

holds that certain kinds of actions, including assisted suicide, are compatible with the Buddhist values of enlightenment and compassion. Barnhart labels his approach ‘liberal’ because he favors “tolerance” for a “wide range of individual choices” and wishes to increase the range of those choices. Instead of insisting on one particular interpretation of Buddhist principles, he prefers to defer to the “judgments of individuals in regard to their practice of Buddhist values.”¹⁴

When Barnhart applies a ‘liberal’ view to the question of assisted suicide, he focuses on Buddhism’s emphasis on the value of mindfulness. In some cases, acute suffering, or an imminent, permanent loss of consciousness threatens one’s capacity to practice mindfulness. Assisted suicide may make it possible for a dying individual to remain mindful to the end. To deny this option to the dying, Barnhart holds, when one has the power to provide it, inflicts “a grave injury.”¹⁵ Here, Barnhart is referring to what human-rights scholar Charles Beitz calls “existential loss,” or the “diminishment or effacement of the capacity for independent action (the ‘effacement of personhood’).” Existential loss expresses the idea that choice can be undermined or constrained, both of which constitute harm. In the assisted-suicide scenario described by Barnhart, existential loss occurs when persons who are teetering at the edge of their ability to remain mindful are diminished or effaced by the unwillingness of others to end their

¹⁴ Ibid., 310-311.

¹⁵ Ibid., 311.

suffering or to provide release from life. In cases where the dying person's ability to engage in practices of mindfulness is negatively impacted, a categorical refusal by Buddhists to allow assisted suicide can engender existential loss by undercutting his or her personhood.¹⁶

different ethical systems are shared in a meaningful sense

No doubt, individual perspectives, Barnhart points out, influence responses to practical problems. Still, those responses tend "to endorse the autonomy of the moral voice," even when people lack the "theoretical vocabulary" to "define and legitimate [this voice's] sphere of authority."¹⁷ Barnhart, then, unlike Keown, finds a link between Buddhist values and Anglo-American and European values by interpreting Buddhist values in such a way that they respect individual Buddhists' legitimate authority to decide how they wish to die and authorize assisted suicide in certain situations.

Barnhart writes that he has identified a "similarity between Buddhist values and a liberal [Anglo-American and European] emphasis on responsible autonomy"—in the case of Buddhism, the autonomy to choose to remain mindful.¹⁸

¹⁶ Charles Beitz, "Human Dignity in the Theory of Human Rights: Nothing But a Phrase?" *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 41, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 280.

¹⁷ Barnhart, 14.

¹⁸ Ibid., 13.

Though Barnhart acknowledges and honors the moral pluralism of Buddhism and of the other religions, he “takes a step in another direction.” He identifies connections between Buddhism and other traditions and moves toward “consensus building.” So long as one is not grappling with the urgent, practical problems of an actual person, abstract answers and blanket pronouncements like Keown’s are suitable. However, Barnhart argues, being faced with the problem of assisted suicide or other dire circumstances requiring immediate action tends “to push us toward a form of moral reflection that leaves open the possibility of some sort of emergent consensus, if not outright moral universalism.”¹⁹ We can understand different ethical systems on their own terms, he writes, and appreciate that they are ethical “in some shared and meaningful sense.”²⁰

By universalism, he does not mean the kind that can “be divined as a principle of pure reason,” or the kind that emerges from “considerations regarding human happiness generally.” For him, moral universalism “would not exhibit Kantian or Aristotelian foundational strategies, nor would it be Utilitarian.”²¹ Rather, Barnhart concludes, because ethics is “practical and oriented toward human concerns,” it aims for “rough generalizations” and congruence of “basic attitudes and beliefs” between

¹⁹ Ibid., 14.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 15.

agents regardless of their traditions. Moral linkages occur as a result of reflecting on the practical application of various ethical principles, not as a result of brute and largely abstract comparisons of theoretical perspectives. Barnhart perceives a kind of universalism emerging even within philosophical ethics.²² Of this emerging universalism, he writes:

Because it would rest on dialogical consensus, it wouldn't insist on any universal calculation based on what was to everyone's advantage and imposed hegemonically from above. That is, it wouldn't be a "top-down" universalism but more the "bottom-up" kind; call it "emergent universalism." But rather than just representing strategic compromise, or mere agreement in regard to particular cases, agreement would extend to the level of values, in other words, in regard to principles and virtues.²³

Barnhart perceives, then, a moral universalism arising from the practical decisions that people are making to address the problems they confront every day. Because of increasing pluralism, more and more often, the situations they are compelled to negotiate require them to cross religious and cultural boundaries and to

²² See also Richard Falk, "Hans Küng's Crusade: Framing a Global Ethic," *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 13, no. 1 (1999): 64. Falk, an expert in international law, has observed the kind of shift Barnhart describes. In Falk's opinion, globalization, by bringing peoples together without regard for national borders, has resulted in the emergence of a universal ethic. He writes that, "integrative trends, often identified with 'globalization,' are by themselves pushing toward a unified world community for which a *global ethic could emerge as a consequence*" [italics mine]. Falk compares this process to that of the national ethics which have emerged, over the past several centuries, from democratic and sovereign states, in part, to uphold the rights of citizens.

²³ Barnhart, 15.

do so by treating pluralism as a fact, not as a problem to be solved. As they identify linkages between familiar religious or cultural traditions and non-familiar ones, they identify agreement between principles and values. This universalism, Barnhart is convinced, is not super-imposed on pluralism, but is emerging from it.²⁴

Barnhart cautions that what he is calling “dialogical consensus” is not equivalent to “moral universalism.” He also insists that it is, as of yet, impossible to predict whether the attempt to reach consensus through dialogue is achievable. Still, he asks, why not try?²⁵ Though Barnhart concludes that universal moral norms are emerging, he writes that he does not know what they are. He does mention an example of a procedure he believes is capable of facilitating the kind dialogue and consensus-building he has in mind. This is John Rawls’ political notion of “overlapping consensus,” which Rawls developed in his late work, *Political Liberalism*.

Barnhart misreads the manner in which Rawls uses the term “overlapping consensus” however. In his later work, Rawls made a distinction between a comprehensive doctrine and a political conception. For him, “overlapping consensus” strictly refers to the consensus on *principles of justice* that can occur in a democratic and constitutional nation with a liberal *political* climate. Hence, Rawls uses the term “overlapping consensus” solely to designate a consensus reached on particular

²⁴ Ibid., 138.

²⁵ Ibid., 14.

principles (principles of justice) in a particular political context (democratic and liberal).

This consensus occurs in the public sphere. In contrast, Rawls no longer believes, as he did in his early treatises, that a consensus is possible with respect to comprehensive doctrines, which he now distinguishes from principles of justice. Religion, moral norms, and philosophy are examples of comprehensive doctrines. Rawls relegates them to the private sphere. Rawls changed his mind about the possibility of an overlapping consensus for comprehensive doctrines when he concluded that even "reasonable people will inevitably differ"—a situation he calls "The Fact of Reasonable Pluralism."²⁶ The free exercise of reason does not necessarily lead to the same conclusions about what counts as true. Persons, Rawls decided, do not always agree on comprehensive doctrines and they do not always approach each other's doctrines with "mutual understanding." Indeed, he postulates that reasonable comprehensive doctrines can be irreconcilable. Contra his earlier work, he argues that *conflicting* comprehensive doctrines are to be expected in a healthy "culture of free institutions."²⁷

Barnhart, then, like many non-philosophers familiar with the term "overlapping consensus" deploys it, not in Rawls' restricted, principles-of-justice sense, but in a looser, general way. For Barnhart, ethical universalism arises from the bottom up as

²⁶ Burton Dreben, "On Rawls and Political Liberalism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls*, ed. by Samuel Richard Freeman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 318.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 324.

people work together to address the complex issues they face in everyday life. As a result of this sort of conversation, overlapping moral principles emerge which have the support of all interlocutors. On the one hand, Rawls rejects the *necessity* of moral overlap between comprehensive doctrines and he expresses doubts as to whether such an overlap exists. On the other hand, Barnhart found overlap, based on his experience with inter-religious encounters, between segments of different religions' comprehensive doctrines about moral norms. Barnhart's generic understanding of the term, overlapping consensus, may be more helpful than Rawls since, as the quotes at the start of this chapter indicate, there is some agreement among religious ethicists that several moral norms are universal.

Barnhart, then, argues that practical questions that tackle difficult bioethics issues like abortion, assisted suicide, and euthanasia could lead to an "emergent consensus" especially if, as human beings seek answers, they look for philosophical linkages between traditions. Whether the *Global Ethic* succeeds in identifying and articulating philosophical linkages between traditions can be tested—its principles should be capable of providing moral guidance regardless of religious or cultural tradition. Does the *Global Ethic* succeed, for example, in providing the sort of "linked" guidance or moral universalism that Barnhart described with respect to assisted suicide in Buddhism? One directive and sub-directive that addresses this issue is Directive #1:

Directive #1: Commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life
e) To be authentically human in the spirit of our great religious and ethical traditions means that in public as well as in private life we must be concerned for others and ready to help. We must never be ruthless and brutal..."

When applying Directive #1 to assisted suicide, the phrase, "concern for others and readiness to help," is of special importance. "Concern for others" may take the form of concern for other people's ability to remain mindful even as they are actively dying. Similarly, "readiness to help" may take the form of helping such persons terminate their lives before they lose the capacity for mindfulness. The *Global Ethic*, then, includes at least one linkage of the kind that Barnhart expects to find in an emergent universalistic ethic. The presence of this linkage in the *Global Ethic*, along with the consultative, pluralistic process from which the document arose, indicates that the *Global Ethic* may be the emergent universalist ethic anticipated by Barnhart.

II. The Result of an 'Overlapping Consensus'?

When philosophical theologian David Cheetham discusses the *Global Ethic*, he also invokes Rawls' notion of overlapping consensus and does so in a manner reminiscent of Barnhart's. Cheetham uses the term incorrectly from a strictly Rawlsian perspective but deploys it fruitfully. He explains that Rawls' model invites all citizens to offer reasons for their views within each citizens' "own framework." Because this approach does not impose a "secularized common ground," it offers persons—whether religious or not—

the possibility of identifying a “sort of coincidence of views.” On the basis of this coincidence, those persons reach a consensus.²⁸

If one understands overlapping consensus in the loose, ordinary-language sense used by Cheetham, the draft of the *Global Ethic* introduced by Küng and the Council of the Parliament of the World Religions at the international conference in 1993 can be described as a “sort of coincidence of views.” The approach that they adopted to craft the *Global Ethic* was designed to identify the moral principles already shared by the world’s religions. One can assume that the scholars and religious leaders with whom they consulted would have identified terms and phrases in his working document that their religious traditions were likely to reject as contradictory to their tenets. They would also have suggested relevant changes to ensure that the *Global Ethic* expressed core principles. All non-overlapping norms would eventually have been winnowed until the only ones remaining were those that coincided. The fact that the majority of attendees at the international conference endorsed the *Global Ethic* by acclaim lends support to this characterization.

When William Schweiker, one of the scholars sought out by Küng and the Parliament of the World Religions, described the process used to draft the *Global Ethic*, he confirmed the assumptions above. Küng worked with the religious leaders and

²⁸ David Cheetham, *Ways of Meeting and the Theology of Religions* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 1988), 158.

scholars who were consulted, Schweiker wrote, to “isolate common values, standards and attitudes found among the religions.” Starting from the premise that pluralism was an asset, the *Global Ethic* emerged as a universal agreement at the level of values, principles and virtues. Some critics accused the *Global Ethic* of looking “suspiciously” like the Bible’s Ten Commandments (see Chapter 5); however, as Schweiker highlighted: “all of the religions endorse some idea of truth-telling, prohibitions of murder, sexual morality, and similar values and norms.”²⁹ Whether with their signatures or by acclaim, hundreds of religious leaders and thousands of lay members affirmed their support of the standards in the current version of the *Global Ethic* and confirmed that their religions already endorsed them. By doing so, Schweiker noted, they elected to “relativize” their traditions’ norms in favor of the “human commonalities” expressed in the document.³⁰

The directives of the *Global Ethic*, then, emerged from a multicultural, pluralistic effort to identify the norms already endorsed by the religious and secular traditions. Cheetham, based on his interpretation of overlapping consensus, finds that other strengths of the *Global Ethic* are its recognition of difference. It achieves its goal of serving as “a blank canvas” on which the religious and cultural traditions “can paint their own detail.” Here, Cheetham is referring to the abstract character of the *Global*

²⁹ Schweiker, *Theological Ethics*, 14.

³⁰ Ibid.

Ethic's directives. These directives, or principles, may be considered—using his term—the product of a coincidence of views articulated within a variety of religious and non-religious frameworks. The resulting principles are formal, Cheetham holds, enabling each of those traditions to establish how to highlight them or integrate them further into their texts, rituals, practices, and beliefs. By engaging a significant number of scholars and religious leaders in conversation, Küng and the Parliament created the necessary conditions for the possibility of identifying shared views. The earlier example of assisted suicide in Buddhism illustrates how the *Global Ethic*'s norms, though they contain no language specific to Buddhism (because they coincide with the norms of other religious and secular traditions), prove relevant to a moral quandary particular to Buddhism.

Both Barnhart and Cheetham observe, in the course of conducting their research, two factors that are key to this dissertation. First: as Barnhart writes, the South and East Asian traditions represent the “most systematic philosophical challenge” to the Anglo-American and European moral theories; nonetheless, he showed that, even in the case of assisted suicide, those traditions and moral theories can be “reconciled” at the level of principles and virtues. “Linkages,” using Barnhart’s term, or “a coincidence of views,” using Cheetham’s may be found, demonstrating the possibility of a global ethic. Second: Barnhart and Cheetham observe that when individuals or groups engage in a

process based on dialogue, they succeed in identifying overlapping, or shared norms and in reaching a consensus on those norms. While Barnhart, the expert in Buddhism, calls such an ethic an emergent ethic and Cheetham, the philosophical theologian, refers to it as a sort of coincidence of views, ethicists designate it a "constructivist ethic." The *Global Ethic*, then, seems to qualify as such an ethic. To establish whether this is the case, greater clarity about constructivism is needed.

III. A Constructivist Ethic?

moral facts are mind-dependent and identified by procedures

For some ethicists, moral judgments should be grounded in dogmatic rationalism that sees judgments "as exercises of a rational cognitive capacity," for others, in a skeptical empiricism that locates judgments "in the workings of human sentiment and desire."³¹ They hold that the human capacity to act on moral requirements is a different capacity than the one that understands these requirements. This ancient debate can be traced back to the Greek and Roman Stoics who advocated a dogmatic rationalism and the Epicureans who championed skeptical empiricism. Proponents of the skeptical empiricism school argue that while individuals may recognize an internal or external demand to meet a moral requirement this recognition does not necessarily translate

³¹ Stephen Engstrom, "Constructivism and practical knowledge", in *Constructivism in Ethics*, ed. by Carla Bagnoli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 37.

into motivation to act. Cognition, according to them, is rational, cool, and serenely observant. It stimulates none of the appetites and produces no heat to motivate persons to do something, especially if this ‘something’ strikes them as requiring sacrifices. In contrast, sentiment can motivate. Affections, shaped by communities and influenced by relationships with friends and family, color an individual’s sense of things and drive to act.

Which, then, serves as the basis of moral judgments? Cognition or emotion? And to what degree can universalistic cognition (universalistic because all human beings have cognition) trump particularistic sensibility (particularistic because sense-data about the world and experiences of the world are unique to each self and each community)?³² Rather than choose one over the other,³³ the moral philosopher, Stephen Engstrom refuses to treat the two as an either/or. In his view, each approach “begins with a positive insight,” even a “platitude.” The first focuses on the cognitive character of moral judgments, the second on their practical character. Both play a role in reaching a judgment. As a result, “no viable alternative can entail a whole rejection of either.” Along with others, Engstrom argues that there are viable third options. He

³² Ibid., 133.

³³ Ibid.

identifies constructivism as such an option, which he describes as "practical philosophy."³⁴

Several forms of constructivism exist but Engstrom focuses on the constructivism introduced by Rawls with the publication of his paper, "Kantian constructivism in moral theory" in 1980, and on the constructivist ideas Rawls shares with other Kantians such as Onora O'Neill, Thomas E. Hill, Jr., and Christina Koorsgaard. According to Engstrom, these thinkers preserve the best features of rationalism and empiricism while avoiding the difficulties associated with pure adherence to one or the other. Constructivism, as advanced by Engstrom, relies on procedures. These procedures are designed to lead to agreement between individuals regarding moral issues of judgment and conduct that affect them as a group. The question of what counts as a 'proper' procedure, however, is controversial and continues to be the subject of debate. Nonetheless, the principal feature that distinguishes one constructivist theory from another is the kind of procedure that it endorses. Both Barnhart and Cheetham, based on their observations

³⁴ Another option is William Schweiker's hermeneutical realism. Kevin Jung describes this form of realism as a middle position whose basic premise is that "human beings try to imitate reality by recreating it through multiple forms of discourse." In contrast to Schweiker's, the middle position that I advance does not rely on imitation, nor does it hold that interpretation is always necessary to access reality. My approach to the justification of moral judgments is grounded in epistemology, not hermeneutics. For a summary and assessment of Schweiker's hermeneutical realism, see Jung's *Christian Ethics and Commonsense Morality: An Institutional Account* (London: Routledge, 2014), 63-67.

of the tactics deployed by individuals working together to solve moral problems in situations of religious pluralism, identified a ‘constructivist procedure.’

Without delving at length in the details of Engstrom’s own constructivist project, suffice it to say that he makes the Kantian move of assigning to reason two different functions. Reason is usually defined as a cognitive capacity limited to acquiring knowledge of things that exist independently of it. However, this assumption, according to Engstrom, is the root cause of the opposition between rationalism and empiricism.³⁵ Constructivism moves past the either/or stumbling block by asserting that reason has two functions—one rational, the other empirical. The sort of reason that tracks what is known, epistemologically, about reality, Engstrom labels, following Kant, *theoretical reason*. However, reason, for Engstrom, also has another capacity. Following Kant again, he calls this other capacity, “practical” reason, to differentiate it from its “theoretical,” epistemological use. *Practical reason* refers to the self-conscious capacity for practical knowledge.³⁶ The problems that are *practical reason*’s proper area of operation are the “distinctive” problems “of securing standards or norms of conduct by which diverse persons can live together in freedom.”³⁷

³⁵ Engstrom, 150.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 138-139.

Engstrom then reveals his debt to Rawls by emphasizing procedure as the condition for the possibility of identifying standards or norms of conduct. A unique feature of constructivism, as conceived by Rawls, is its reliance on participation by parties to develop, together, an ethic to which each will all be expected to abide. In the procedural stage, the parties attempt to reach agreement (or consensus, or convergence, or coincidence, or congruence depending on one's theory of dialogue) about which judgments and conduct—i.e. an ethic—will count as validly moral. The chosen “ethic needs consent,” and the wider the consent the better as long as consent is “consistent with fidelity” to each individual’s starting own initial viewpoint.³⁸ Consent is necessary because it leads to a commitment to follow the standards and norms selected. Also, given the significant impact of moral norms on the lives and well-being of persons, Engstrom writes, “there is a need to devise ways of hearing from them directly” and of “giving them voice in the process.” For him, this procedure must, above all, reflect a “person’s practical-rational self-conception.”

The validity of constructivism’s procedures is not tied to how well these procedures track reality. Rather, their validity, Engstrom holds, is tied to the self-conception of the parties involved. The procedures succeed, in his view, when the parties perceive themselves as practical and rational and they likewise perceive the

³⁸ Schweiker, *Ethics in an Era of Globalization*, 127.

procedure is practical and rational. Otherwise, consent may be compromised and adherence undermined.³⁹ The procedure Engstrom has in mind results in an ethic that Barnhart would consider a top-down universalism. It is *universal* because it takes into account everyone's preferences, where 'everyone' means all persons with an interest in reaching an agreement. It is *top-down* because once agreement or convergence has been reached, it is imposed "hegemonically."⁴⁰

The constructivist procedure and the mechanisms described above to secure wide participation and representation "largely remain to be invented."⁴¹ Work in this area remains incomplete and disagreements over ways to frame the procedure, method of construction, and the self-conception of participants plague constructivist theories. As a result, such theories remain of limited help in adjudicating moral incompatibilities within and between traditions. Nonetheless, while scholars who favor constructivist theories remain divided over 'proper' procedures, non-scholars in need of practical guidance have not waited for recommendations. They have developed procedures for themselves such as the ones highlighted by Barnhart and Cheetham earlier in this chapter. Moreover, organizations have not hesitated to arrange occasions for conversations about a global ethic—sometimes thoughtfully, at other times, ad hoc.

³⁹ Engstrom, 140.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Gould, 21.

The Parliament of the World Religions is one such organization. The process of developing the *Global Ethic* by the Parliament represents an attempt to engage hundreds of people in a procedure whose goal was to articulate, in explicit terms, a universal ethic. Of particular interest for the purposes of this dissertation is the constructivist procedure adopted by Küng: 1) to develop a document and then circulate it widely requesting suggestions and revisions, 2) to turn over the resulting, revised document to the Planning Council of the Parliament of the World Religions, 3) to circulate the document further for suggestions and revisions, 4) to put the document to a vote by the Trustees of the Parliament, 5) to seek endorsements and signatures from religious leaders, and 6) to present the final version of the document to the attendees at the Parliament. Whether this is the best “procedure” or not remains open to debate; nonetheless, this procedure centered on cross-cultural and cross-religious dialogue involving a significant number of persons and a wide variety of religious and cultural traditions. It does not represent a merely strategic compromise but an agreement, to return to Barnhart’s terms, extending to the level of values and principles.

Nonetheless, a notable and appropriate worry about documents produced using the kind of procedure followed for the *Global Ethic* is that their contents reflect a mere conventionalism—in other words, the contents reflect the conventionally held beliefs of

the majority. Conventionalism is a type of constructivism in which, according to ethicist and moral realist, Russ Shafer-Landau, “subjectivists...fix moral truth by the (relatively) uncorrected actual attitudes of individuals or groups.”⁴² A common example of the problematic nature of fixing moral truth in this manner is WW II Germany, a period during which the “moral truths” of Nazis became so integrated into conventional attitudes that they were not questioned by the majority of Germans. Given the horrific results of this well-documented instance of conventionalism, the simple fact that a great number of people embrace a particular attitude as true does not mean that it should be accepted as definitive. As Shafer-Landau writes: “We don’t think that the most deeply held views of individuals or groups are infallible.”⁴³ Nonetheless, in the case of the *Global Ethic*, the persons who ratified its directives did not issue from a single community, but rather from a variety of religious, cultural, and national backgrounds. Though this fact cannot completely allay worries of conventionalism, it does mitigate against the possibility. And, in the opinion of a staff member of the World Council of Churches and part of its Justice, Peace, and Creation team, Martin Robra, the *Global Ethic* has made it “much more difficult to justify the misuse of religion on behalf of violence and discrimination.” It has “nurtured the hope that moral values held in common by people of faith can become an instrument for a

⁴² Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 41.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

more peaceful and just world, despite the prediction of a ‘clash of civilizations’ by Samuel Huntington and the religious differences which often seem to fuel violence between nations and ethnic groups.”⁴⁴

Another component of the *Global Ethic* that undermines the possibility of conventionalism is the fact Küng did not expect the constructivist process to end. Rather, he had intended the current version of the *Global Ethic* to serve as a starting place for further discussions and for expanded documents. “If all goes well,” Küng wrote, “in the not too distant future we shall have other declarations which make the global ethic of the religions more precise and concrete and add further illustrations to it.”⁴⁵ Though this may not have been Küng’s intention, continued engagement with and revising of the *Global Ethic* by large numbers of people and organizations throughout the world who can offer the widest possible diversity of points of view should, in principle, overcome tendencies to express the hermetic norms of a single society or culture. To offer helpful interpersonal guidance, the “people all over the world” who are vested in this guiding document will want to make sure that it “remains more than paper, that it is filled with life, that it inspires people to a life of mutual

⁴⁴ Martin Robra, “Affirming the Role of Global Movements for Global Ethics,” *The Ecumenical Review* 52, no. 4 (October 2000): 472.

⁴⁵ Küng, *A Global Ethic*, 9.

respect, understanding, and cooperation.”⁴⁶ Still, while the sort of engagement that Küng envisioned will, as discussed in Chapter 6, render the *Global Ethic* more precise, adding additional specific illustrations could also undermine its ability to assist “the religious of this earth.” One of the strength of the Global Ethic, as Cheetham writes, is the way in which it recognizes differences but “seeks to be a blank canvas upon which the different religions can paint their own detail.”⁴⁷ Cheetham finds value in the abstract character of the *Global Ethic*’s directives because it honors difference and invites the religious and secular traditions to identify the ways in which those directives are already integrated into its texts, practices, and beliefs. It also secures the ability, for each of the religious and secular traditions, to give the directives more particular and concrete formulations based on their respective narratives, rituals, texts, and teachings. A balance between generality and specificity—most likely tilting toward generality—is essential if the *Global Ethic* is to remain a document that expresses the convictions that the world’s religious and secular traditions hold in common.

IV. The Global Ethic: a Constructivist and Realist Ethic

the Global Ethic’s moral facts are real (mind-independent)

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Cheetham, *Ways of Meeting*, 158.

The Global Ethic qualifies as a constructivist ethic—with an important caveat. The individuals and organizations involved did not construct the moral directives included in the *Global Ethic*. They worked together to *identify* and *express* as clearly as possible, *already existing* and shared moral directives. Having shown that the *Global Ethic* can be characterized as the product of moral constructivism, I advance the further claim that its moral principles are not merely constructed, they are real in the sense that they are true.

Engstrom writes: “For the [moral] realist, who hankers after knowledge, talk of [moral] constructivism remains a source of unease.”⁴⁸ The source of this unease, according to ethicist and moral realist, David Copp, is that moral constructivism offers “an anti-realist alternative to moral realism” because it “avoids some of the difficulties” of realism. It also avoids the difficulties of error theory (which claims that there is no moral truth since all moral claims are in error), and of non-cognitivism (which claims that moral knowledge is impossible).⁴⁹ Though different kinds of moral constructivisms exist, though, Copp explains, constructivists agree that moral facts are mind-dependent and

⁴⁸ Engstrom, 141, n11.

⁴⁹ David Copp, “Is constructivism an alternative to moral realism?” in *Constructivism in Ethics*, ed. by Carla Bagnoli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 108.

that they are produced by the kind of hypothetical procedures described in the previous section.⁵⁰

Russ Shafer-Landau, also an ethicist and moral realist, agrees with Copp's characterization of constructivism. He writes:

Constructivists endorse the reality of a [moral] domain, but explain this by invoking a *constructive function* out of which the reality is created. This function has moral reality as its output. What distinguishes constructivist theories from one another are the different views about the proper input... What is common to all constructivists is the idea that moral reality is constituted by the attitudes, actions, responses, or outlooks of persons, possibly under idealized circumstances.⁵¹

Copp analyzes the definition above, and highlights Shafer-Landau's claim that constructivism endorses the *reality of a moral domain*. Copp also highlights that the differences between constructivism and realism become blurred when a constructivist claims that, in her view, the procedure used to construct the ethic "yields the same set of moral truths given any input of the right kind." If a constructivist theory claims that its constructive function, or procedure, yields moral *truths*, then this constructivist theory is, by all rights, objectivist, and, hence, realist.⁵² For Copp, then, constructivist ethics is not necessarily opposed to moral realism.

⁵⁰ Copp, 114.

⁵¹ Shafer-Landau, quoted by Copp, 114-115.

⁵² Copp, 115.

Copp describes two types of realism. Of the two, the first type is compatible with some constructivist theories. He calls this type of realism, "basic" realism. He calls the second type, "stance-independent" realism, because it holds that moral truths exist independently of anyone's opinion about those truths. For a realist, even if the entire population of human beings opposed the claim that moral truths exist, this would not alter the fact that moral truths exist. Shafer-Landau writes: "Realists believe that there are moral truths that obtain independently of any preferred perspective, in the sense that *the moral standards that fix the moral facts are not made true by virtue of their ratification from within any given actual or hypothetical perspective.*"⁵³ Basic realism, which is compatible with constructivist moral theories, has five doctrines. They are:

1. There are moral properties
 - The actions that are wrong are similar in that they are all wrong; in other words, they share the 'property' of being wrong.
2. Moral properties have the same kind of metaphysical nature as other metaphysical properties, including non-moral properties
 - For example, an American flag could be considered 'patriotic', a metaphysical property
3. Some moral properties are instantiated; in other words, there are moral facts
 - Some actions are wrong
4. Moral predicates are used to ascribe moral properties
 - Moral predicates indicate the ways in which things are morally similar and are used to describe those things in terms of their similarities

⁵³ Shafer-Landau, quoted by Copp, 120.

- Moral predicates do not work in special ways; they work like ordinary descriptive predicates
5. Moral assertions express ordinary beliefs that have the same nature as other beliefs⁵⁴

In contrast to basic realism, stance-independent realism—which is not compatible with constructivist moral theories—includes the five doctrines above plus an additional, sixth doctrine:

6. At least some moral facts are “stance-independent” and “mind-independent.”

Though most constructivist theories meet Copp’s five qualifications of basic moral realism, they do not meet the sixth qualification of stance-independence. The principal difference between constructivists and realists, then, is that constructivists rely on some kind of procedure in which agents work together to identify moral facts. Such procedures are always stance-dependent. For realists, however, moral facts simply ‘are;’ they are not affected by stance.

Many kinds of constructivist theories, Copp observes, can be paired with non-constructivist theories that would ordinarily be classified as realist. According to him, these constructivist and non-constructivist pairs, or realist-constructivist theories do not differ in ways that have major philosophical significance.⁵⁵ Constructivists who are uninterested in correlating their moral theories with realism need not embrace Copp’s

⁵⁴ Copp, 120-121.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 108

five ‘doctrines’, and some constructivists go as far as denying that moral facts exist although Copp finds it difficult to understand why they do so. Constructivists who refuse to pair their theories with realist theories, he argues, are forced to address problems of “semantics, metaphysics, philosophical psychology, and epistemology (e.g. Schroeder 2010).”⁵⁶ By adopting moral realism, constructivist moral theorists ask, like realists, whether moral judgments have robust truth conditions and what those conditions are. At the same time, the procedures that they champion are designed to identify the real moral domain. Like realists, realist-constructivists hold that moral truths exist. Unlike traditional realists, realist-constructivists hold that stance-dependent procedures are needed to identify stance-independent truths. Schweiker’s work provides an example of the pairing of constructivist and realist theories. This pairing, which he calls hermeneutical realism, is realist because it claims that some moral truths are mind-independent, and it is constructivist because it advances a procedure—the hermeneutical resources and practices of communities—whereby those moral truths are identified.⁵⁷

What about the realism of the constructivist *Global Ethic*? From the perspective of a realist theory, moral truths expressed by the *Global Ethic* include the following: no

⁵⁶ Ibid., 122.

⁵⁷ For “hermeneutical realism” see William Schweiker, *Responsibility and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

one should abuse, humiliate, or degrade their domestic partner. Analyzed using Copp's five doctrines of basic realism, this moral truth entails several sub-claims. Abuse, humiliation, or degradation of one's domestic partner are wrong (they have in common the property of being wrong). Abuse, humiliation, and degradation of one's domestic partner share the property of wrongness. Conduct that abuses, humiliates, or degrades instantiates the property of wrongness and thus *is* wrong. To assert that abuse, humiliation, or degradation of one's domestic partner is wrong is to ascribe wrongness to abuse, humiliation, or degradation and expresses the normative belief that abuse, humiliation, or degradation are wrong. A constructivist could elect, at this juncture, to "deny that moral properties, in that they are properties, have the same metaphysical status as other properties" but it does not follow that normative beliefs need differ metaphysically from ordinary beliefs. Hence, it is possible to argue that the normative belief that abuse, humiliation, or degradation of one's domestic partner are wrong need not differ metaphysically from ordinary beliefs.

Copp's five-doctrine description of basic moral realism and his discussion of how those doctrines can intersect with constructivism help pinpoint the realist features of the *Global Ethic*. The Global Ethic is constructivist due to the thoughtful and intentional process whereby, led by Küng, its four directives arose, and the *Global Ethic* qualifies, based on Copp's definition, as realist. Constructivist theories often focus on providing

reasons for the normativity of their principles. In contrast, the *Global Ethic*, like many realist moral theories, does not share this preoccupation. It expresses its directives as if they are self-evident, always already available for human beings to recognize as true.

V. Top-Down and Bottom-Up Versions Will Converge

For the time being, the *Global Ethic* remains a *fixed* document, meaning that its directives are no longer part of a formal and intentional process of engaged conversation, review, and revision. Until further discussion takes place and its directives are once again opened for revision, the *Global Ethic* is limited to serving as a *top-down* global (universal) ethic.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, though many persons will not realize that the norms they hold up as exemplary or identify as linkages are among the directives of the *Global Ethic*, these norms will continue to emerge from the *bottom-up* efforts described by Barnhart. The directives come into view, for example, whenever attempts are made to address difficult moral questions like assisted suicide from the perspective of two or more religious or secular traditions. Küng hoped that the *Global Ethic* would serve as the “basis for an extensive process of discussion and acceptance which we

⁵⁸ Such a process is currently under way. In the fall of 2017, a small working group at the Parliament of the World’s Religions developed preliminary language for a fifth directive addressing issues of sustainability and care for the environment. The process of soliciting feedback from over one hundred scholars of religion and ethics began in December 2017.

hope will be sparked in all religions.”⁵⁹ As a result of such engagement, individuals recognize in the *Global Ethic*’s directives their own religions’ foundational ethical principles.

If the *Global Ethic*, as I argue, captures, or nearly captures universal moral truths, then a bottom-up, constructivist procedure of recursively revisiting its four directives and subjecting them to further engagement, review, and revision, will eventually result in a stable version that no longer changes after additional cycles of engagement and review. Though it is possible that the current version *is* the final version, the fourth directive, for example, which addresses the relationship between men and women suffers from hetero-normativity and is likely to be modified in some way when the *Global Ethic* is revisited.

Does the process of reaching moral convergence—a sort of coincidence of views—require only a strategy of reflection on the practical problems of applying various principles or, as Barnhart asserts, does it also require a brute and largely abstract comparison of contrasting theoretical perspectives? Both, according to Kant, are needed. In his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant describes a “natural dialectic” that stems from the human drive to resist moral obligations. As a result, there exists a practical need for abstract or general representations of moral principles;

⁵⁹ Küng and Kuschel, *A Global Ethic*, 8.

guidelines are required to facilitate moral judgments. The *Global Ethic*, in its top-down, constructivist-realist-ethic mode, satisfies a practical need for general moral principles. After the current, top-down version undergoes bottom-up engagement, review, and revision, directives will “emerge” again and eventually stabilize. Once these directives become fixed, the *Global Ethic* will become a top-down ethic again. Ideally, this bottom-up, top-down cycle will continue until, eventually, the bottom-up version and the top-down version match regardless of how many times they are revisited. The more people contribute to this up-down, down-up process of engaging, reviewing, and revising the *Global Ethic*, the more perspectives its content will reflect and the more likely its directives will approach truth.

Rawls identified disagreement in modern democratic societies over the proper understanding of freedom and equality as the impetus for a constructivist approach—in his case, with regard to the principles of justice. The emergent universalism and constructivist realism of the *Global Ethic* are the product of growing religious pluralism and increasing sensitivity to moral linkages both intra- and inter-religiously. In the case of nations, governing institutions have led people to frame and then re-frame constitutions that align with the evolving vision of how they wish to live together; similar developments, at the global level, are leading people to frame and then re-frame a global ethic aligned with their vision of how they wish to live together. To

return to an oft-used example in this dissertation, a helpful analogy is the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights. The UNDHR began as a top-down document but it has been integrated into national constitutions like South Africa's through bottom-up procedures. The day may well come when every nation's constitution integrates some portion of the UNDHR, perhaps even the entire document. If this occurs, those bottom-up constitutions will "meet" the top-down UNDHR; one will perfectly match the other because the constitutions will have stabilized at the point of equivalence.

VI. Embedded Human Good vs. U.N. Human Development metrics

the Global Ethic's built-in assumptions about the good life

Embedded in the *Global Ethic*'s directives are assumptions about conditions conducive to a good life. This is not surprising because, as Schweiker writes, all persons orient their lives "with respect to some idea of goodness, some scale of better or worst."⁶⁰

When the *Global Ethic* is parsed, its idea of goodness and its scale of better or worst become evident. The question of what constitutes a good life or qualifies as human flourishing "elicits an extraordinary variety of responses," which, philosopher Thomas Pogge suggests, indicates that "there are not merely differences of opinion at work,

⁶⁰ Schweiker, *Theological Ethics*, 27.

but also different understandings of the question itself.”⁶¹ Before ascertaining what sorts of factors contribute to human flourishing, then, a definition of human flourishing is in order. Humans “flourish,” the *Global Ethic* implies, when communities respect life (human as well non-human animal life), embrace non-violence, economic justice, solidarity, helpfulness, tolerance, truthfulness, and subscribe to equal rights and partnership between men and women. These features are, the *Global Ethic* indicates, the *conditions for the possibility of flourishing*; they constitute the optimal features of a good life. Hence, the *Global Ethic*, though lacking a robust axiology, points to the state of affairs to which human beings—regardless of religious or cultural tradition—aspire.

Debates about the relationship between moral norms and the human good are centuries old. Moral philosophers during the Modern period, for example, focused on identifying norms available to all human beings by virtue of practical reason; they held the central conviction that we “can and must get along without making substantive ontological claims about the good.”⁶² Some contemporary thinkers likewise dismiss claims that a relationship exists between what is right and what is good. Nonetheless, other thinkers are confident that the distance between the two can be bridged.

⁶¹ Thomas Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights: Cosmopolitan Responsibilities and Reforms*, 2nd edition (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2008), 34.

⁶² William Schweiker, “Starry Heavens and Moral Worth: Hope and Responsibility in Theological Thought,” in *Paul Ricoeur and Contemporary Moral Thought*, ed. by John Wall, William Schweiker, and W. David Hall (New York: Routledge, 2002), 121.

Philosopher Paul Ricoeur was one such thinker; he argued against overemphasizing the opposition between a rule-based approach to moral norms with its insistence that certain directives should be followed regardless of the consequences, and a teleological approach with its focus on the good of human life.⁶³ Rule-based and teleological approaches to ethics, in his view, did not conflict in the basic texts of religious traditions; rather, any such conflict was “more or less a construction” of the traditions themselves. To overcome the distance between moral norms and understandings of the good life ‘created’ by the traditions, he encouraged ethicists to “deconstruct” this opposition.

With Ricoeur’s challenge in mind, I deconstructed the *Global Ethic* to identify its embedded assumptions about what counts as a good or flourishing human life. I identified thirty indicators of the good life.⁶⁴ Though my choices of indicators are open to contestation, and though I acknowledge that other choices are possible, perhaps even desirable, my claim that indicators do exist in the *Global Ethic* is a straightforward one. In the table below, I list each of the thirty indicators of a good life that I identified in the *Global Ethic* in the left-hand column. I also specify in which directive of the

⁶³ Paul Ricoeur, “Ethics and Human Capability: A Response,” in *Paul Ricoeur and Contemporary Moral Thought*, 284.

⁶⁴ Georgetown University Berkley Center for Religion, “Declaration Toward a Global Ethic,” September 4, 1993. Accessed January 18, 2016.
<http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/publications/declaration-toward-a-global-ethic>.

Global Ethic and, in some cases, in which sub-directive, the indicator appears. See Appendix A for the full text of the *Global Ethic*.

Table A: GLOBAL ETHIC'S IMPLICIT INDICATORS OF THE HUMAN GOOD BASED ON RENAUD'S ANALYSIS

INDICATOR OF THE HUMAN GOOD	ASSOCIATED DIRECTIVE
1. A culture of non-violence	1
2. Respect for life (including that of non-human species)	1
3. Economic justice	2
4. Solidarity	2
5. Helpfulness in private and public life	1e
6. Tolerance	3
7. Truthfulness	3
8. Equal rights	4
9. Partnership between men and women	4
10. Safety	1a
11. Free development of personality	1a
12. Conflicts resolved within a framework of justice whether for individuals or for states	1b
13. An international order of peace	1b
14. Protection, preservation, and care of animals and plants	1d
15. Protection and support of minorities whether racial, ethnic, or religious	1e
16. Authentic fulfillment of one's vocation	2
17. A spirit of compassion for those who suffer, with special care for the children, the aged, the poor, the disabled, the refugees, and the lonely	2e
18. Mutual respect and consideration	2e
19. A reasonable balance of interests	2e

Table A: GLOBAL ETHIC'S IMPLICIT INDICATORS OF THE HUMAN GOOD BASED ON RENAUD'S ANALYSIS (Continued)

20. Moderation and modesty	2e
21. Mass media's freedom and obligation to be objective and fair, and preserve human dignity	3b
22. Academic and artistic freedom for artists, writers, and scientists	3b
23. Support of politicians who speak the truth at all times	3b
24. Young people taught to think, speak, and act truthfully	3c
25. Young people given access to information and education	3c
26. Resistance to domination of one sex over another even in the name of religious conviction	4b
27. Sexuality viewed as creative and affirming	4c
28. Care and a sense of responsibility for other people's happiness	4c
29. Sexuality that expresses and reinforces loving relationships and equal partnerships	4d
30. Mutual support by families for all members whether spouses or children	4e

The table above illustrates one overarching understanding of human flourishing that can be discerned in the *Global Ethic's* directives. If this understanding is truly universal, these indicators, or ones akin to it, will appear in other formulations of human flourishing—whether philosophical, sociological, psychological, or empirical. To show that, as predicted, the *Global Ethic's* implied depiction of the human good is corroborated by other approaches to this question, I compare the indicators of the

human good that I identified in the *Global Ethic* to the metrics for the human good identified through data-driven studies by United Nations Development Program (UNDP). These metrics, used by this UN agency to measure and track human wellbeing, emerged, in part, from extensive studies of populations around the globe. In the early 1990s, the UNDP, working closely with the Indian economist and philosopher, Amartya Sen, and the Pakistani economist, Mahbub ul Haq, studied the link between economic growth and human development.⁶⁵ Before they began their work, economic growth and human development had been treated as equivalent. It became clear to the two economists, however, that economic growth and human development do not operate in tandem—economic growth can, at times, increase human suffering or negatively impact dimensions of human life that are associated with wellbeing.⁶⁶ A good human life is only partly linked to financial comfort; other factors play a role.

Once the UNDP “rediscovered” the “essential truth that people must be at the centre of all development,” it decided to focus on agents’ perceived quality of life rather than economic growth. In so doing, it takes a special interest in two metrics:

⁶⁵ M.S. Ronald Commers, “Global Ethics and World Citizenship,” in *Ethics in an Era of Globalization*, 79.

⁶⁶ See Joseph E. Stiglitz, Amartya Sen, and Jean-Paul Fitoussi, *Mismeasuring our Lives: Why GDP Doesn’t Add Up*, Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress (New York: The New Press, 2010).

freedom and capability.⁶⁷ What does the UNDP mean by *freedom*? Sen defines freedom (given his key role in the UNDP, it is likely that his definition is operative in its work) as a person's capability "to do things" that the person has reason to value. Freedom has two dimensions: 1) constitutive—it is valued in and of itself, and 2) instrumental—it is a means to a good life, to flourishing, and to a wide array of choices.⁶⁸ What does the UNDP mean by *capability*? A society may provide conditions for freedom of choice to its citizens, but if it fails to provide them with opportunities to develop their mental and physical capabilities, they are unprepared or unable to exercise their freedom, rendering their freedom meaningless. Studies have shown that investment in institutions that can help agents develop their capabilities through educational opportunities, improved health care, accessible job training, etc. are as important to a good life as decent roads, accessible airports and low-interest seed money for business start-ups.

According to the UNDP's 1990 report, the "basic objective of [human] development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy,

⁶⁷ *Human Development Report 1990*, pub. for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), iii.
http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/219/hdr_1990_en_complete_nostats.pdf.

⁶⁸ Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, reprint edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 56.

and creative lives.”⁶⁹ Currently, the UNDP measures and tracks human development using available “social and human data for each country.”⁷⁰ The indicators measured and tracked by the UNDP are: 1) life expectancy, 2) educational attainment, and 3) “command over the resources needed for a decent living.”⁷¹ From these three indicators, the UNDP calculates a composite measure that it calls the Human Development Index (HDI). The HDI uses the same three indicators to measure human development without regard for geographical area, ethnicity, gender, class, religion, etc. Hence, for example, the UNDP makes no distinction between human development in France or in China or Libya. Nor does it make a distinction between French Roman Catholic human development or French Protestant human development or French Muslim human development. This lack of differentiation is based on the UNDP’s conclusion that “different kinds of societies” do not “produce different kinds of human beings.”⁷² In other words, the world contains one kind of ‘human being’ and what counts as the human good and capabilities development takes the same, basic form for everyone.

⁶⁹ *Human Development Report 1990*, 9.

⁷⁰ Ibid., iii.

⁷¹ *Human Development Report 2013, The Rise of the South: Human Progress in a Diverse World* (Geneva: United Nations Development Programme Press, 2013), 23. http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/14/hdr2013_en_complete.pdf.

⁷² Brown, 160.

Like the UNDP, philosopher and ethicist M.S. Ronald Commers was also interested in developing indicators to assess human development. To do so, he studied several of the UNDP's reports and, based on these reports, identified twenty-nine indicators of human development.⁷³ In contrast, he relies on nine indicators, or as he calls them, signifiers, to evaluate economic growth. A comparison of Commers' twenty-nine human-development indicators with the nine indicators of economic growth highlights the important distinctions between the two. Commers' indicators are finer-grained than the UNDP's whose "Human Development Index" or HDI, is calculated using a mathematical formula with three variables: "life expectancy, literacy rates, and "command over resources needed for a decent living" measured by the International Price Comparison Project's purchasing-power-adjusted GDP estimates.

The UNDP relies on these three metrics because they can be measured and thus, using the same formula, can generate a value for each nation under study which can, in turn be compared to the values obtained for other nations.⁷⁴ Table B lists Commers' nine economic growth indicators on the left and nine indicators (chosen among the twenty-nine) of his human development indicators on the right.

⁷³ Commers: see Table 5.1 *Ethics in an Era of Globalization*, 81. Commers developed his list of signifiers based on UNDP Reports 1990, 1993, 1996, 2006, 2007.

⁷⁴ *Human Development Report 1990*, 109.

Table B: COMMER'S ECONOMIC GROWTH INDICATORS VS HIS HDI-BASED HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS

ECONOMIC GROWTH	HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
Dependable property rights	Democratic Institutions
Stable macroeconomic climate	Longevity
A business climate that is attractive for investors (e.g. favorable laws and tax rates)	Health
An open economy	Adequate nutrition
Availability of foreign and domestic investors	Access to knowledge and information and communication technology
Investment opportunities (for diversification)	Gender-based equality
Tangible investments	Decent labor conditions
Intellectual property	Child protection
Exchange-rate convertibility	Public accountability

the *Global Ethic's* human good correlates to UNDP metrics

To return to the *Global Ethic*, how thoroughly do the indicators of human flourishing embedded in its directives correlate to the UNDP's HDI? If the directives' implied requirements for a good life are an accurate reflection of the kind of life people all over the world desire, one would expect that they would correlate in a significant way with indicators like the UNDP's empirical HDI? To test the soundness of the *Global Ethic's* assumptions, I propose to compare the thirty embedded indicators for the "good" life that I identified earlier, and compare them to Commer's twenty-nine human development indicators. In Table C below, I list the *Global Ethic's* thirty implied

indicators for the “good” life on the left of the table. These appeared in Table A above with an description of their provenance in the *Global Ethic*. In Table C, Commers’ UNDP-based twenty-nine human development indicators appear on the right.⁷⁵ Some of Commers’ indicators appear more than once because, in many cases, more than one correlates to a particular *Global Ethic* indicator.

Table C: RENAUD’S LIST OF GLOBAL ETHIC ‘HUMAN GOOD’ INDICATORS VS COMMER’S ‘HUMAN DEVELOPMENT’ HDI-BASED INDICATORS

Renaud: <i>Global Ethic</i> ‘Human good’*	Commers: ‘Human development’‡
1. A culture of non-violence	Care; solidarity; social securization; common good
2. Respect for life (including that of non-human species)	Care; solidarity; corporate social responsibility; human rights
3. Economic justice	Corporate social responsibility; stakeholdership; common good; sustainability; embedding of market regulations
4. Solidarity	Solidarity
5. Helpfulness in private and public life	Care; solidarity; creative responsiveness; common good; opportunity enlargement: social, cultural, political
6. Tolerance	Creative responsiveness; solidarity; contextual adaptability; care
7. Truthfulness	Open source information; corporate social responsibility
8. Equal rights	Solidarity; human rights

⁷⁵ Commers: see Table 5.1 “Human development and economic development signifiers,” in *Ethics in an Era of Globalization*, 82. Commers advanced these signifiers based on UNDP Reports and *Macroeconomics* by Paul Samuelson and William Nordhaus, 18th edition, (New York: McGraw-Hill/Irwin, 2005), 555-579.

Table C: RENAUD'S LIST OF GLOBAL ETHIC 'HUMAN GOOD' INDICATORS VS
COMMER'S 'HUMAN DEVELOPMENT' HDI-BASED INDICATORS (Continued)

9. Partnership between men and women	Solidarity; self-determination in civil society and community life
10. Safety	Social securization; care
11. Free development of personality	Human capabilities; opportunity enlargement: social, cultural, political; contextual adaptability; education
12. Conflicts resolved within a framework of justice whether for individuals or for states	Common good; horizontal governance conception
13. An international order of peace	Solidarity; well being; human rights; common good
14. Protection, preservation, and care of animals and plants	Sustainability; social and environment; economy; duty centered
15. Protection and support of minorities whether racial, ethnic, or religious	Opportunity enlargement: social, cultural, political; solidarity; human rights; duty centered; education
16. Authentic fulfillment of one's vocation	Self-determination in civil society and community life; opportunity enlargement: social, cultural, political; human capabilities; education; knowledge access
17. A spirit of compassion for those who suffer, with special care for the children, the aged, the poor, the disabled, the refugees, and the lonely	Duty centered; solidarity; human rights; social securization; human capabilities; opportunity enlargement: social, cultural, political; life experience at the grass-roots level
18. Mutual respect and consideration	Reasonableness; solidarity; care; common good
19. A reasonable balance of interests	Self-determination in civil society and community life; common good; embedding of market regulations; stakeholdership

Table C: RENAUD'S LIST OF GLOBAL ETHIC 'HUMAN GOOD' INDICATORS VS
COMMER'S 'HUMAN DEVELOPMENT' HDI-BASED INDICATORS (Continued)

20. Moderation and modesty	Solidarity; sustainability; social securization
21. Mass media's freedom and obligation to objectivity, fairness, and preservation of human dignity	Knowledge access; opportunity enlargement: social, cultural, political; human rights
22. Academic and artistic freedom for artists, writers, and scientists	Knowledge access; common good; education
23. Support of politicians who speak the truth at all times	Knowledge access; reasonableness; common good
24. Teach young people to think, speak, and act truthfully	Knowledge access; education; solidarity
25. Information and education for young people	Education; opportunity enlargement
26. Resistance against domination of one sex over another even in the name of religious conviction	Human rights; solidarity
27. Sexuality as creative and affirmative	Care
28. Responsibility for caring for another's happiness	Solidarity; common good; care
29. Sexuality expressing and reinforcing a loving relationship by equal partners	Solidarity; common good; care
30. Mutual support for families whether to husband, wife, or children	Solidarity; common good; care; human rights; opportunity enlargement

* Renaud's metrics for the human "good" based on her analysis of assumptions embedded in the *Global Ethic*

‡ Commers' metrics for human development based on data provided in UNDP reports

Juxtaposing the implicit indicators of human "flourishing" that I identified in the *Global Ethic* with the indicators of human development that Commers advanced based on the HDI and the UNDP's reports highlights the substantial level of convergence between the two. Granted, this juxtaposition relies on these indicators being

understood in the same way. Commers seems to rely on commonplace meanings because he does not define his indicators. If the juxtaposition is justified—and it appears to be—the indicators of a “good” human life at the core of the *Global Ethic* and its directives (expressed through a process of trans-religious, trans-cultural, and trans-national engagement) map closely to the indicators of human development that Commers found in the UNDP (the result of global, empirical studies conducted by experts using transparent research methods). The extent to which the two sets reflect each other’s understanding of human flourishing is notable because these two understandings were developed independently, using different approaches. While other analysts may identify a different set of indicators than mine embedded in the *Global Ethic*, or perceive different connections between the *Global Ethic*’s indicators and those of Commers, I anticipate that, nonetheless, the two sets will correlate.

Whether such correlations will emerge consistently when the *Global Ethic*’s embedded indicators of the human good are compared to other empirical measures of the human good or of human flourishing remains to be explored. If, as I have argued in this chapter, the *Global Ethic*’s directives are real, they are grounded in perduring, universal conceptions of the human good and close correlations with other indicators are expected.

Also to be explored: at times, the directives of the *Global Ethic* may come into conflict with their embedded dimension regarding human “flourishing.” How are these conflicts to be adjudicated without, as Ricoeur pleads, overemphasizing the opposition between one and the other? Should the directives take precedence over the Global Ethic’s implied, teleological dimension? Kant’s thought, to which this dissertation has often turned as a resource, offers a helpful approach to navigating these potential conflicts. According to Kantian scholar, Allen Wood, Kant’s anthropology identifies two separate standpoints, which operate at the same time: 1) the moral standpoint and, 2) the natural-social standpoint.⁷⁶ Human beings adopt a moral standpoint when adjudicating decisions of a moral nature, and adopt a natural-social standpoint when adjudicating decisions related to wellbeing and to the good life. When conflicts occur between a moral standpoint and a natural-social standpoint, individuals are to put the demands of the moral standpoint first.

Applying Kant’s anthropology to the *Global Ethic*, the directives provide the moral standpoint, while the kind of life that the *Global Ethic* implicitly describes reflects the natural-social standpoint. The moral standpoint expressed in the directives has priority over the natural-social standpoint and its interest in pursuing the human “good.”

⁷⁶ Allen W. Wood, “Kant vs. Eudaimonism,” in *Kant’s Legacy: Essays Dedicated to Lewis White Beck*, edited by Predrag Cicovacki (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2000), 265.

The *Global Ethic* assumes that a central task of religious and secular people is to help create the conditions for a “good” life for everyone, as long as those efforts respect the moral constraints of its directives. For example: persons may not jeopardize human lives (doing so would violate the directive to respect life) to secure equal access to education (one of the conditions necessary for human flourishing). We must follow the *Global Ethic*’s directives, while its implicit description of a “good” life offers parameters that we may implement to improve our welfare and that of other people.

VII. The Global Ethic: A Middle Way Between Universalism and Particularism

The *Global Ethic*, in spite of the collaborative process from which it emerged, is the target of critique by moral particularists. These critics reject claims that the *Global Ethic*’s directives, or of any ethic for that matter, are shared universally. Moral particularists hold that no single set of moral directives can apply to every person.⁷⁷ When the internal norms of a community or society conflict with the norms of other communities, moral particularists give priority to the internal norms of a given community. In its extreme form, particularism leads to moral relativism, making communities the sole source of valid moral norms. Moral universalism, by contrast, in

⁷⁷ For example, R. A. Wilson and J.P. Mitchell (eds.)’s 2003 *Human Rights in Global Perspective*. Also Simon Critchley’s 1992 *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, and his 1999 *Ethics—Politics—Subjectivity*.

its extreme form holds that a community's norms are irrelevant when considering the validity of universal moral norms and principles—if the community's norms conflict with universal norms, the community is held to be in error. Disagreements persist over which—particular norms or universal ones—have priority over the other.⁷⁸

For particularists, claims that the *Global Ethic* expresses shared moral norms are problematic. Nonetheless, based on his research, Nigel Dower emphasizes that:

1. A global moral community already exists as demonstrated by “levels of agreement about core values and duties of mutual aid.”
2. “[M]any global organizations are made up of individuals” who, internal to the organization, share global ideas that they work together to promote.
3. When the people within a particular community share “concerns for the outside world,” these shared concerns “become part of the traditions” of that community.⁷⁹

In sum, according to Dower, individuals, states, and organizations whose relationships have a global scope already operate out of a shared set of values, duties, and ideas. His findings indicate that even if one takes a particularist approach to normal norms, one may, as Dower has, discover that some ‘particular’ norms are shared across communities.

⁷⁸ Kymlicka, 9.

⁷⁹ Nigel Dower, “Cosmopolitanism and Community,” in *Ethics in an Era of Globalization*, 124.

I argue that the *Global Ethic* formulates an ethic midway between a universalism whose extreme, totalizing manifestation flattens important differences, and a particularism whose extreme, totalizing manifestation leads to quietist moral relativism. The *Global Ethic* adopts a balanced approach that incorporates both universalist and particularist dimensions. Its universalist dimension consists of its four directives, and its particularist dimension consists of the expectation that these directives may be interpreted in unique ways by each religious or cultural tradition, expressed in a manner familiar to that tradition, and “embedded in [its] particular behavior and practices.”⁸⁰

Küng and fellow contributors formulated the *Global Ethic* as a shared, intentionally minimal, universalistic ethic. Its minimal formulation enables it to be identified in the world religions’ sacred texts, narratives, rituals, sources of authority, and, in constructive work, developed into a maximal ethic grounded in that religion’s particular resources and context. Compared to the religious-tradition-specific ethic of a given tradition’s sacred scriptures, the *Global Ethic* offers a ‘minimal ethic’, although this is not to be confused for an “ethical minimalism.” The *Global Ethic* constitutes a ‘minimal ethic’ in the sense, Küng explained, that it is “the minimum of what is now

⁸⁰ Van den Anker, 41.

already common to the ethic of the religions of the world and which hopefully can be extended and deepened..."⁸¹

In contrast to universalism, moral particularism risks underestimating the impact of exclusionary moral directives embedded in communal and cultural practices. The *Global Ethic* escapes this risk because its directives, already present in all religious and cultural traditions, provide a basis for critique of exclusionary moral directives. At the same time, the *Global Ethic* escapes the risk of an abstract universalism that fails to take into account the religious and cultural traditions' unique ways of negotiating questions about the meaning of life and death, the burden of suffering, and the inevitability of wrongdoing. The *Global Ethic*, by eliminating explicitly theological and religious language, respects moral practices that characterize particular religious and cultural contexts—theistic or not—and gives each religious and cultural tradition the opportunity to turn to its particular resources—rituals, texts, symbols—to re-present the *Ethic's* directives.⁸²

As a universalistic ethic, an important role of the *Global Ethic* is its ability to resist special pleading. Engstrom notes (as did Kant) the propensity, both at the individual, institutional, and even societal level to ignore or circumvent moral judgments in favor of self-interest. Moral demands remain in force even when they are

⁸¹ Küng, 73.

⁸² *Towards a Global Ethic*, 36.

not instrumental to satisfying personal desires. Obligations persist even they create difficulties in securing favored ends. However, agents are adept “at drawing on experience and on reputable theories from the empirical sciences to dress up [their] rationalizations and to soften moral requirements or to challenge the credentials of moral judgments.” At the level of societies, Engstrom finds that disagreements have attained a similar amount of “ideological sophistication” with the net result that our ability to reach “a common understanding about the principles of justice” is being eroded.⁸³ Unlike particularistic theories, which make the content of moral principles dependent on personal or social goals, the universalistic directives of the *Global Ethic* preserve the categorical nature of moral commitments. The *Global Ethic*’s directives are specific—they focus on particular areas of human life—but they are broad enough to encourage conversation and interpretation by religious and secular traditions.

VIII. The Global Ethic: An Expression of Shared Moral Imperatives

Barnhart, based on research into philosophical linkages between Buddhism and Anglo-American and European traditions, observed that universalistic, moral common ground may emerge from collaborative, pluralistic reflection on practical problems (a “bottom-up” approach). Such reflection may lead two or more religious traditions to agree on moral rules or compromises. The *Global Ethic*, can be described as having emerged

⁸³ Engstrom, 152.

from a cooperative process involving many months of consultation to identify already existing moral convergences between the traditions. Nonetheless, I argue, though it may appear to be an ‘emergent’ ethic, never emerged in the traditional sense because, as a real ethic, it has always already been true. Indeed, as a real ethic, one would expect that its commitments would ‘emerge,’ or—more accurately—be identified by efforts to find the kind of philosophical linkages Barnhart describes. These linkages, he asserts, are capable of guiding our dialogical reflections toward a reasonable consensus on moral codes that may, initially, have seemed incompatible. By virtue of their realism, the *Global Ethic*’s directives appear to ‘emerge’. In actuality, those who search for linkages merely discover the directives yet again.

The *Global Ethic* also lends itself to being considered a kind of constructivist ethic. One of the practical problems addressed by constructivism is the “distinctive” problem of “securing standards or norms of conduct by which diverse persons can live together in freedom.”⁸⁴ For Engstrom, in liberal-democratic cultures, the possibility of freely sharing one’s views leads to the possibility of “substantial disagreement” about normative principles. Disagreements in such cultures lead to the development of procedures to enable members to cooperate and identify standards of conduct. These procedures must be recognized as valid and authoritative; otherwise, the norms they

⁸⁴ Ibid., 139.

produce may fail to elicit general support and persons may refuse, in their freedom, to abide by them. The validity of constructivism's procedures lend validity to their judgments about how to live. The *Global Ethic*, using Engstrom's terms, was generated by a procedure that led to a 'coincidence of sorts,' a convergence negotiated between more than two hundred religious leaders and scholars initially, and affirmed by thousands of lay people. When a majority of the representatives who attended the 1993 Parliament in Chicago ratified the *Global Ethic*, they tacitly indicated that they recognized as valid the procedure developed by Küng and the Parliament of the World's Religions.

If, as I argue, the directives of the *Global Ethic* are real, one would expect them to 'emerge' from a valid constructivist procedure. Due to its self-evident nature, moral realism can be asserted but not—in the manner of a mathematical proof—be demonstrated to the satisfaction of everyone; as a result, endorsement rather than outright proof, of true moral principles is the best that one can expect. Though the possibility remains that the *Global Ethic*'s directives reflect conventional and particularistic mores rather than true moral imperatives, the participation of significant number of experts from different parts of the world in the process leading to its ratification and the assent of thousands of religious and spiritual people are not easily dismissed.

Copp's research provides additional support to my claim that the *Global Ethic*'s directives are real. While some ethicists may grant that the *Global Ethic* is a "bottom-up" constructivist ethic but nothing more, his demonstration that a constructivist ethic can also be a realist this opens the possibility that the *Global Ethic*'s moral commitments may also qualify as real. In the case of the *Global Ethic*, the procedure used to develop the directives of the *Global Ethic* focused on creating a public space for open conversation. Hence, its directives were identified under conditions of free expression. My analysis of those directives based on Copp's work does not definitely demonstrate, but it does permit the conclusion that the *Global Ethic*'s directives qualify as both constructivist and realist. A 'realist-constructivist' ethic, as I have designated the *Global Ethic*, indicates that it expresses moral truths. The term highlights that one can identify the ethic's directives by following either of two distinct approaches: 1) valid (free) constructivist procedures, and 2) arguments based on self-evidence. A realist-constructive ethic, like a realist ethic, claims that it has stated, in an explicit way, the true moral judgments.

This dissertation's analysis of the *Global Ethic* is the first to explore the notion of human flourishing embedded in its moral directives. Those directives rest on certain assumptions about the conditions for the possibility of a good life—I identify thirty indicators of the human good. These indicators, some might argue, merely reflect the

good life as understood by the authors of the *Global Ethic*, its network of consultants (though widespread and diverse), the Parliament's Trustees, and thousands of international supporters at the 1993 Parliament in Chicago. However, I showed that this understanding extends beyond the *Global Ethic*'s large but limited number of contributors and endorsers. The thirty indicators of the human good that I singled out, though subjective and open to contestation, share commonalities with a significant number of the metrics of human development worked out by the UNDP based on empirical studies and many decades of field experience. The considerable degree of correlation between the *Global Ethic*'s foundational views on human flourishing and the UNDP's indicators signals a basic level of agreement. While not everyone will grant my argument that the *Global Ethic* is real, the substantial intersection between its understanding of the good life and the UNDP's indicators lends additional support to the claim that its directives are universal.

Another strength of the *Global Ethic* is that it provides a middle way between universalism and particularism. It avoids particularism's tendency to underestimate the impact of exclusionary moral directives embedded in communal and cultural practices because its directives, present in all religious and cultural traditions, provide a basis for critique of such directives. At the same time, it avoids the tendency of an abstract universalism that fails to take into account the religious and cultural traditions' unique

ways of negotiating questions of moral choice. The *Global Ethic*'s directives are specific—they focus on particular areas of human life—but they are broad enough to enable practitioners to locate them in their traditions' sacred texts, rituals, and teachings. Indeed, the *Global Ethic* is multi-dimensional and consistent with several theoretical frameworks. On the one hand, it lends itself to a variety of nuanced and methodical analysis of its directives by ethicists from the world's religions; on the other hand, it lends itself to the inquiries of religious people as they turn to their own faiths for explanations regarding the grounding and legitimacy of the *Global Ethic*. I have claimed that the *Global Ethic*'s directives are real (true); as a result, I argue, religious people and moral philosophers alike will continue to "discover" these directives, whether they are formulated as a result of the bottom-up emergence described by Barnhart, a constructivist procedure described by Engstrom, a process of overlapping consensus, a constructivism overlapping with realism described by Copp, or a recursive process of bottom-up emergence followed by top-down hegemony leading to an increasingly stable set of directives.

The *Global Ethic*'s constructive-real directives preserve the manner in which religious traditions frame moral mandates and in which religionists experience them: they are impartial (they apply to every human being), they are categorical (they are non-negotiable and are in force at all times and in all situations), and when human

beings, fail to meet them—either through intentional non-compliance or by distorting their demands for personal or social ends—they commit a moral error. Real norms offer an intuitively satisfying account of what individuals perceive as moral errors. If moral truth is “set in some objective fashion,” we, human beings, have a straightforward explanation for our sense of error when we fail to live up to what is required of us. While the directives’ obligations may be impossible for any person to honor perfectly all of the time, their “impartiality,” though compatible with one’s moral norms, preempt any move to cant those obligations towards “one’s own parochial outlook” or give that outlook “priority.”⁸⁵ These strong obligations mitigate moral confusion and exception-making.

⁸⁵ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism*, 40.

IV Toward a Global, Humanistic Theological Method

Ch. 8

A THEOLOGICAL METHOD FOR CONSTRUCTING VALIDLY MORAL CONCEPTS OF GOD

“...we always need a certain analogy with natural being in order to make supersensible characteristics comprehensible to us.”¹

“Anthropomorphism, which is hardly to be avoided by human beings in their theoretical representation of God and his being, but is also harmless enough (provided that it does not influence concepts of duty), is highly dangerous with respect to our practical relation to his will and to our very morality; for, since we are making a God for ourselves, we create him in the way we believe that we can most easily win him over to our advantage, and ourselves be dispensed from the arduous and uninterrupted effort of affecting the innermost part of our moral disposition.”²

- Immanuel Kant

¹ Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, trans. and ed. by Allen Wood, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, eds. Karl Ameriks and Desmond M. Clarke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 83, footnote.

² Ibid., 165, footnote.

IN this closing chapter, I develop the framework for a global, humanistic theological method to assist reflective theists construct, or more likely re-construct, a validly moral concept of God. This method brings together elements of Kaufman's mid-career Phase II theological method and the *Global Ethic*, each of which I analyzed in earlier chapters. While I draw on Kaufman's method, I make significant changes in order to correct several components that I have previously argued were deficient or underdeveloped. Though the method that I advance is Kaufmanian because it is based on Kaufman's Phase II method, it reaches further back and engages in conversation—as does Kaufman himself—the global, humanistic line of philosophical and theological thought that began with Kant.

The proposed theological method is designed for theists who agree that God's existence cannot be proved or disproved and who have adopted an agnostic stance on this question. Absent reproducible, empirical data about the 'actual' divine, such persons question their understandings of the 'available' God as well as those of others. Every day, news reports remind them that certain understandings of God are linked to violence, war, and suffering, and they wonder how to determine which of those understandings, theirs included, are validly moral. Though such theists are prepared to revisit what they believe, God remains at the center of their religious and spiritual life, offering comfort and moral guidance.

The method sketched out in this chapter operates at a logical or conceptual level and focuses exclusively on the concept of God. It takes as a given that theists, whether members of religious traditions or not, cognitively construct their concepts of God by drawing synthetically from their religious upbringing, personality, social group, family of origin, profession, education, experiences, and more. Foundational to the method, then, is the assumption that God is a concept whose content individuals assemble, with various degrees of awareness, from different sources, and whose content they may analyze, de-construct, alter, and re-assemble. Since, to a certain extent, each person's concept of God is unique to that person, the method facilitates the construction of a wide range of concepts of God, whether abstract with little imagistic content or concrete with a great deal of particularistic content.

Though conceptual, the method takes into account the fact that human beings enter into their most meaningful relationships with other human beings. For most theists, God is meaningful, comforting, and morally-orienting when God is person-like. Many Christians, Jews, Muslims, agnostics, and atheists conceive of God as a sentient being who thinks, feels, wills, and has the ability to communicate through language and other human-like means. Hence, the method that I advance preserves the possibility of constructing person-like concepts of God. It likewise makes provisions for the drive of many theists to assimilate familiar images and personal experiences, as

well as personal goals, values, and norms into their concepts of God. A risk of such latitude is the construction of God-concepts that are uncritical projections of the self or immoral. To reduce this risk, the method, like Kaufman's, includes moral checks but replaces Kaufman's weak criteria of humanization with the strong directives of the *Global Ethic* to perform, more effectively, the function that Kaufman intended for his criteria—to secure non-anthropocentric concepts of God capable of providing moral guidance and orientation.

In its approach to the concept of God, the global, humanistic theological method advanced in this chapter is a type of ideal theory. Rather than start from the messy conditions of human life—its joys and sorrows, confusions, ambiguities, difficulties, successes, possibilities, it abstracts from these. It also abstracts from the many situations during which individuals turn to God—in prayer, when trying to make sense of suffering, for courage, with gratitude. It begins with ideal theory rather than an empirical basis in order to ascend to a high enough level of abstraction to reflect on the idea of God and on universal moral imperatives. It also adopts this approach so that it can focus on two features that it takes to undergird the relationship between human beings and their concepts of God. These features are: 1) for theists, God serves as the ultimate reference point, providing guidance and orientation; hence, based on the logical (but empirically-unproven) assumption that a validly moral conception of

God is more likely to help individuals orient their lives in a validly moral way, the method secures such a concept by testing it against the *Global Ethic*, and 2) a person-like God is more meaningful to those who turn to God in prayer (a conversation), when trying to make sense of suffering, for courage, with gratitude, and more; hence, the method is designed to allow for the possibility of generating person-like concepts.

Users of the global, humanistic method construct concepts that are existentially meaningful to them and that can help them resolve challenges in their lives in validly moral ways.

Besides drawing on the *Global Ethic* as a test for validly moral concepts of God, rather than Kaufman's criterion of humanization, this chapter's method clarifies and expands the recursive approach that is merely implied in his method. Recursion undergirds the global, humanistic theological method because it anticipates that several passes through the moment's steps could be required to achieve a global and humanistic outcome. While those who seek a relationship with God may conceive of God as person-like so as to render God comprehensible and comforting, like Kaufman's, the global, humanistic method that I advance stipulates that God must be 'other' than the world and self to serve as an absolute reference point. To produce concepts of God capable of providing guidance, especially with respect to moral decisions, the method preserves God's distinctiveness from the context of human

experience. Thus, the method does not allow constructs like "being itself" since only a God with autonomy and self-integrity has the capacity to order and inspire human life.³ It is not amenable to pantheistic understandings of God since these understandings collapse world and God together. It could perhaps accommodate panentheistic conceptions of the divine but I leave it to others to answer this question.⁴

After I offer a sketch of the proposed global, humanistic theological method, I note areas where the method could be expanded and developed. I also explore several ways in which integrating the *Global Ethic* into the method strengthens it. I then show how the concepts of God produced by the method's ideal theory can, in actual practice, provide valid moral orientation in people's lives. With Kaufman's Phase III creative-serendipity-God as a trial case, I test the method, especially the step that aligns concepts of God to the *Global Ethic*. Since every approach to the concept of God has inherent weaknesses, I identify a concern and conclude that, while it is important to note, this limitation is not fatal to the method.

³ Kaufman rejects any theological enterprise that relies on the 'human' and the 'world' as stable and well-understood points, and treats 'God' as a variable: "we and the world are functions of God, not God a function of us and our needs; God is the ultimate point of reference in terms of which the human and the world are to be understood, not the human and the world the principal points of reference for understanding God" (ETM, 33). He challenges people of faith to develop their ideas within as wide a scope as possible, and to continually qualify and balance the large set of complex factors they've selected.

⁴ While pantheism asserts that 'all that is' is God, panentheism asserts that God is 'all that is' and more.

I. A Sketch of the Method

a two-moment constructive method

The method advanced here asks about the logical moments required to develop a concept of God and place valid moral constraints on that conception. I argue that, on a procedural level, two moments are needed:

- Moment 1: construct, or more likely re-construct a concept of God aligned with the *Global Ethic*. These concepts, subject to the test of the *Global Ethic* and adjusted recursively until they align with its directives, are constructed and revised.
- Moment 2: assess and clarify the content of the concepts of world and of self. Align the concepts of world and of self that emerged in moment 2 to the concept of God produced in moment 1.

Like Kaufman's method's, the global, humanistic method's concept of God is tied to the concept of world, or the context of human experiences. Unlike Kaufman's, it asks users of the method to tease out the concept of self that is embedded in the concept of world. By engaging users on the question of who they are, they are better prepared to sort out their relationship to God and to recognize when they have projected too much of themselves into this concept. The method is designed to align the concepts of world and of self to concepts of God. By doing so, the method produces concepts of world and of self that correlate to validly-moral concepts of God since God-concepts must meet the norms of the *Global Ethic*. Content that a user

attaches to the concept of God that emerges from the method remains unverifiable and provisory. Regular passes through the method's steps are expected whether adjustments seem warranted or not (users may incorrectly assume that they have reached a 'final' formulation). The permanent 'under construction' nature of concepts of God helps undermine dogmatic claims or, in Kaufman's words, the worship of 'idols'. The contingency of all formulations, however, need not hamper those who hold them dear, nor need it weaken the force of the God-concepts' demands.

Like Kaufman's method, this dissertation's method rejects any theological enterprise that relies on the self and world as stable concepts while treating God as a variable to be adjusted. The method assumes that concepts of God are separate and distinct from the concepts of world and self. The global humanistic theological method accepts, as fundamental, that theists seek to align their worldviews and notions of self with God since God is, for them, the ultimate reference point providing guidance and orientation. Since the concept of God is not affected by changes to the concepts of world and self, any adjustments to world and self will be one-directional with respect to God. In addition, though the method is humanistic in its concern for the quality and character of human life and its accommodation of the seemingly ontological longing of agents for a person-like deity, it resists anthropocentric attempts to make "man the

measure of all things.” Rather, it insists that an individual’s view of the world and of the self be measured against a validly moral God.

Contra Kaufman, the humanizing and relativizing functions of God are provided without requiring separate attention, as he insisted, to this concept’s anthropomorphic (humanizing) and abstract (relativizing) features. The global, humanistic theological method preserves and even encourages person-like traits in concepts of God so that God remains relevant and approachable—as such, the concept is humanizing. In addition, the method stipulates: 1) God must remain separate from the world and the self, and 2) God must pass the test of the *Global Ethic*—these requirements ensure that God remains ‘more’ than human—as such, the concept is relativizing. Thus the global, humanist theological method accomplishes two primary goals of Kaufman’s method—to generate concepts of God that are humanizing and relativizing. Though the proposed method is attentive to a humanizing-relativizing balance, it relies on a different approach than Kaufman’s, giving users greater leeway as to the bespoke concepts of God that they may construct—requiring only that these concepts be validly moral.

The method’s two moments are designed to be repeated recursively until dynamic stasis is achieved:

Moment 1: Construct or re-construct recursively the concept of God until it aligns with the *Global Ethic* and is validly-moral.

Step 1:	Construction of concept of God
Step 2:	Align concept of God with the <i>Global Ethic</i>
Step 3:	Public assessment of concept of God
Step 4:	Dynamic stasis

Moment 2: Construct or re-construct concepts of world and of self.

Step 1:	Articulate concept of world
Step 2:	Articulate concept of self
Step 3:	Align world and self concepts to God-concept
Step 4:	Dynamic stasis

The proposed method accommodates non-theists who, though they have no interest in God, take an interest in assessing their concepts of world and of self; in their case, the method stipulates that they align their concepts of world and of self directly to the *Global Ethic*. Theists can do the same if they desire: by testing their concepts of world and of self against their validly-moral concepts of God as well as against the directives of the *Global Ethic* themselves, users double up on the checks provided by the *Global Ethic*.

To secure additional oversight on the moral dimension of God, the global humanistic method also includes public engagement. This entails inviting other people to assess concepts generated by the method. No doubt continuous and consistent re-evaluation of one's theological constructions can be carried out independently, but the method underscores the importance of copious vetting, by which I mean conversations with others at venues like congregational forums or religious-education workshops or sacred-text study groups or inter-religious gatherings. While the proposed theological

method should, in principle, detect and eliminate immoral features by aligning God-constructs with the *Global Ethic*, some undesirable features may be subtle enough to escape notice by a method's user. Or, a user may find ways to overlook anthropocentric, self-serving features or justify exemptions from their concept of God's moral demands. People at a remove from the constructive process are less invested in the concept of God that it produces and are more likely to identify normative lapses or unwarranted special pleadings.

The proposed global humanistic theological method includes two moments that are internally recursive and complementary to each other.⁵ Each moment is made up of separate four steps. Users may visit or revisit these moments either in tandem or individually but, the first time through, the user must start with Moment 1 before proceeding to Moment 2; otherwise, the user will align the concept of world and of self to a concept of God that has not yet been tested against the *Global Ethic*'s four directives. Tensions are built into the method, including the persistent demand that the

⁵ Recursion and iteration are often used interchangeably but the distinctions between them have important implications with respect to the method that I am proposing. Iteration repeats the same task over and over again. In contrast, recursion involves a selection structure; it repeats the comparison of the concept of God to the *Global Ethic* and makes necessary adjustments until it achieves a 'base case,' meaning a match between the concept and the *Global Ethic*. Recursion, or revisiting the concept of God, persists until that concept successfully meets the standards set by the *Global Ethic*'s directives (the base case). Hence the recursive method is designed to end when it has produced a concept of God that is validly moral.

concept of God meet the moral bar set by the *Global Ethic*. Another is the demand for epistemological humility subverting any claim to know with certainty if and what God is—save whether a given concept and the *Global Ethic*'s imperatives are in accord. Ideally, these two tensions prompt reflective users of the method to revisit their concepts regularly and recursively. The method expects that concepts of God, self, and world are likely to evolve over time as new features are integrated and older ones altered or abandoned, sometimes without individuals being aware that they have made these changes—hence the emphasis on revisiting the method's two moments regularly and often.

moment 1: a concept of God aligned to the *Global Ethic*

Moment 1, dedicated to constructing God, is comprised of the following four steps.

step 1: construction of the concept of God

This step corresponds to the 'creation' of a concept of God from sources that draw on the imagination or are inspired by personal experiences or stories inherited from family members or borrowed from religious traditions, etc. It is open to the plurality of sources that inspire human beings with respect to their understandings of God.

step 2: align the concept of God with the *Global Ethic*

In this step, individuals test their concepts of God against the *Global Ethic*'s moral standards to ensure that those concepts are validly moral and, as such, provide valid moral orientation and guidance in life. The test of the *Global Ethic* enables users to identify which features of their God concepts should be emphasized and which should be eliminated. Any concept's moral norms regardless of provenance—religion, neighbors, profession, family members, and others—that fail to meet the standards of the *Global Ethic* must be reworked recursively until it successfully meets those standards. Once the method's users have aligned their concepts of God with the *Global Ethic*, the resulting concepts will neither be anthropocentric nor resemble their human 'creators' writ large.

step 3: public assessment of the concept of God

The public dimension step involves public scrutiny, or a higher-order, at-a-remove assessment of users' concepts of God. As a result of open engagement, users can examine, test, and reflect on the changes they have made unconsciously or intentionally to those concepts. Gatherings organized by religious communities, for example, or for inter-religious dialogue provide important opportunities for conversation. The possibility of helpful questions and insightful comments should encourage users to revisit their concept of God with others. If soliciting feedback from

others is not an option, users can attempt themselves to take a step back and assess, as critically as possible, their concepts of God and then make adjustments, if warranted.

This step replicates the process of public input so important to the writing of the *Global Ethic*. The collaborative approach used by Küng to produce the *Global Ethic* can serve as a model for the kind of open scrutiny to which concepts of God can be subjected. Just as Küng and Trustees of the Council of the Parliament of the World's Religions solicited the opinion of a wide array of leaders and ethicists on early drafts of the *Global Ethic* to help them more accurately express the religious and secular traditions' shared moral imperatives, some of the strengths and weaknesses of a person's concept of God can be identified through a public process that invites commentary from religious leaders, theological thinkers, and trusted peers. The method's user is likely to benefit from learning the opinion of people—especially those who belong to religious or philosophical traditions, socio-economic classes, races, etc.—different from the user's own. Of special importance: the perspectives of those who have endured exclusion, suffering, and oppression since those individuals will be especially alert to moral failings in concepts of God. Users of the global, humanistic method who share their ideas with thoughtful peers, or trusted clergy, or engaged specialists, or those who have suffered at the hands of people inspired by a cruel or unjust God, may discover, based on feedback, that more work remains for them to

align their concepts of God to the *Global Ethic*. This may provide additional incentives for the method's users to commit themselves to revisit their concepts often and to cycle through additional recursive passes to ensure that the contents of their God-construct meet the test the *Global Ethic*'s directives.

step 4: dynamic stasis of the concept of God

This moment signals the stability that results when the moral dimension of a user's concept of God is in alignment with the moral constraints set out in the *Global Ethic*—an alignment confirmed, in part, through public vetting. This stability is dynamic, or temporary, because the user may deem, for a variety of reasons, that a return to previous steps is warranted. Ideally, dynamic stasis is characterized by the kind of internalization that Hans Joas calls flexible internalization. (I discuss Joas' research and his findings on flexible internalization at greater length later in this chapter.) In the case of concepts of God, flexible internalization means that persons have internalized their concepts of God while remaining flexible enough to review them and discuss them with others.

Theists may find that once their concept of God reaches stasis, they rarely re-examine its content because it provides the kind of guidance and ultimate reference point that they seek. However, *dynamic* stability points to an inherent tension. Users should not rely on mere self-awareness to alert them to changes in features of God

before they proceed to revisit their concepts. Rather, because concepts of God may shift without their advocates taking notice, commitment to a regular schedule of intentional and committed review is key; advocates will want to engage each step in Moment 1 recursively until their concepts align with the *Global Ethic* and reach dynamic stability once again.

the role of religious communities

For years, social theorists assumed that individuals who solicited comments about their ideas were at risk of either rejecting them or of tightening their hold on them. If such individuals remained attached to their ideas in spite of freely engaging with others about them, they merely held these ideas superficially, the theorists insisted. Joas, however, argues that discourse *stabilizes* ideas when carried out under conditions that include “learning and controlled change.”⁶ Conditions of stabilizing discourse include finding conversation partners who were committed to helping each other explore authentic and non-determined concepts.

Such conditions can be cultured with regard to concepts of God. Religious communities can play a significant role in providing opportunities for the public vetting of concepts of God and, thereby, for stabilizing these ideas and facilitating their stasis. Religious communities can create safe, respectful opportunities for theists to explore

⁶ Joas, 25.

their God-constructs individually and with others and to submit these constructs to gentle questioning. They can help theists develop stable concepts of God by helping them identify illuminating narratives and scriptural passages that correlate to their validly moral concepts. In addition, they can encourage and sustain their members who may need extra support as they negotiate the sacrifices required to honor the *Global Ethic*'s directives integrated into their God constructs. Religious communities can also assist members and help them avoid falling into despair when they fail to honor the obligations prescribed by the directives.

moment 2: concepts of world and self aligned to God

When users of the global, humanistic theological method make changes to the concept of God, both the concepts of world and of self, which are to remain in sync with the concept of God, must be adjusted. While Moment 1 produces concepts of God that can provide valid moral orientation and guidance, Moment 2 facilitates making concepts of the world and self explicit as well as clarifying the relationship between them. It then brings both into alignment with God. This Moment assumes that the process of recursion through the moment's steps eventually leads to dynamic stasis, a state in which users remain until an intentional decision to revisit the process is reached, or some event, realization, or challenge pushes re-engagement with the concepts of world and self once again. Just as users of the method are encouraged to revisit

Moment 1 regularly and re-evaluate their concepts of God, users are also encouraged to revisit Moment 2 routinely to re-evaluate their concepts of world and of self.

Why is Moment 2 an integral part of the global, humanistic theological method?

Why not systematically re-construct one's concept of God in Moment 1 and stop there?

Individuals have certain understandings of the world from which they turn to their concepts of God for guidance and orientation. Moreover, they have specific views about who they are—views that impact their perception of the world. For theists, ideas of God, world, and self are interconnected. One of the goals of the method is to secure a construct of God that can morally challenge, or in Kaufman's terms, relativize, all concepts of world—the context of human life as each person perceives it—and challenge all concepts of self—the way in which persons conceive of themselves. The

following, admittedly reductionist, comparative example highlights how God, world, and self are tightly intertwined. Some Reformed Christians believe that their actions and intentions in the world have no effect on their relationship with God since, according to them, the omniscient and all-powerful God pre-determined the course of their lives before they were born. They sort and organize and make meaning of their experiences accordingly. Convinced that they do not control their choices and actions, whether virtuous or malicious, they may insist that they bear no responsibility for harm

and have no ability to change their behavior. This perspective on God, the world, and the self differs from one held by Jews who are unlikely to believe that the course of their lives has been pre-determined. Rather, some Jews hold that God commands them to honor 613 *mitzvot* if they wish to remain in right relationship with God. If they fail to abide by the *mitzvot*, God holds them responsible; they are expected to identify and acknowledge their lapses, make amends, and atone. Such Jews have differing conceptions of God, world, and of self than Reformed Christians. Though concepts of God are central to Jews and to Reformed Christians, members of these religious traditions sort, organize, and make meaning of their experiences in distinct ways.

In light of the reality of these divergences and of their relationship to concepts of God, Moment 2 is dedicated to constructing concepts of world and of self. It is comprised of the following four steps and one optional step.

Moment 2: Construct or reconstruct the concept of world and of self-human recursively until they are in alignment with the concept of God.

- Step 1: Articulate concept of world
- Step 2: Articulate concept of self
- Step 3: Align concepts of world and of self to the concept of God
- Optional: Align concepts of world and self to the *Global Ethic*
- Step 4: Dynamic stasis

Hence, this moment of the global, humanistic theological method is dedicated to articulating a concept of world and self, and to aligning these concepts to the concept of God. It bears little resemblance to the corresponding moment in Kaufman's method

since Kaufman's moment only recommends developing a unifying concept of the world using an approach chosen by the user—for example, a general scientific or phenomenological description. As opposed to a generalized description of world, the global, humanistic theological method asks users to reflect on their view of the context of human experience—a view probably, but not necessarily, informed by scientific data about the objective dimensions of the world. Also, this dissertation's method focuses on the self and teases out self from world—unlike Kaufman's which focuses on world; when Kaufman mentions self, he does so in general terms, invoking it and "human" interchangeably. While his method includes a separate Moment 3 to align the concept of world to that of God, the global, humanistic theological method folds this adjustment into Moment 2, to prevent articulating a concept of world and of self without taking into account the concept of God. This is essential to the proposed method since it is the concept of God, tested against the *Global Ethic*, that ensures theists align their concepts of world and of self to validly moral standards.

step 1: articulate the concept of world

The concept of world collects a person's explanations about the world and interpretations of experiences. Though the method uses the term, 'world,' this concept points to something closer to worldview—the product of interactions with the world through a person's framework of ideas and beliefs. The way in which individuals

perceive or interpret the world influences their experiences, attitudes, and what they consider knowledge. An integral part of how people negotiate their lives (as the comparative example provided earlier demonstrated), worldview has a significant impact on their decisions and actions.⁷

Kaufman described worldview as follows:

"Each of us is a thinking/feeling/willing self, and each sees the world as the context within which these several sides of his being find expression. We will attain better understanding of the world-view within which we live and act, and we will achieve a more critical approach to our own conception of the world, if we recognize clearly its anthropological base and its one-sidedness, and if we are aware of the other principal alternatives with their strengths and weaknesses. Doubtless temperamental differences among individuals, and cultural and historical differences among communities, will affect our preferences for this or that world-view" (GP 224).

He separates the relationship of humans to world into thinking, feeling, and willing. The self is tripartite, with each part encountering the world as its context of expression. For Kaufman world is a third-order concept, one in which persons stand back and ask questions about 1) the original source of their experiences, or the world in itself, and 2) the worldview that shapes those experiences. This is one approach to worldview.

Another is writer and political commentator Michael Lind's; he defines this term as: "a more or less coherent understanding of the nature of reality, which permits its holders

⁷ John Doris and Stephen Stich, "Moral Psychology: Empirical Approaches," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Fall 2014 Edition, ed. by Edward N. Zalta. Published April 19, 2006. Accessed November 3, 2016. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-psych-emp/>.

to interpret new information in light of their preconceptions." The nature of worldview, Lind explains, is such that when persons with different worldviews disagree the conflict cannot always be resolved by turning to relevant empirical data; two parties may, on the basis of this data, reach different conclusions.⁸

Philosopher and advocate of interdisciplinary research, Leo Apostel, offers a third approach to worldview. He developed a set of five questions to help persons clarify their worldviews:

1. What is?
2. Where does it all come from?
3. Where are we going?
4. What is good and what is evil?
5. How should we act?⁹

Apostel, in the list of questions above, does not ask "Where am I going?" or "How should I act?" Instead, he focuses on the human in general. Though the global, humanistic theological method focuses on worldviews from a first-person perspective, asking higher-order questions like the ones proposed by Apostel offer the possibility of gaining a wider perspective. This approach may help individuals better understand how the self participates in various dimensions of contemporary life including

⁸ Michael Lind, "The five worldviews that define American politics," *Salon Magazine*, January 11, 2011. Accessed September 23, 2016.

http://www.salon.com/2011/01/12/lind_five_worldviews/.

⁹ Clément Vidal, "Metaphilosophical Criteria for Worldview Comparison," *Metaphilosophy* 43, no. 3 (2012): 311.

<http://homepages.vub.ac.be/%7Eclvidal/writings/Vidal-Metaphilosophical-Criteria.pdf>.

globalization, cultural demands, work constraints, family systems, and more. To step “beyond,” at least inasmuch as possible, from one’s personal worldview to gain a wider perspective can offer glimpses of dimensions of life, which, though not obvious at first glance, nonetheless affect one’s choices and decisions.

This step in the global, humanistic method, dedicated to fleshing out a person’s worldview, can devolve into navel-gazing. To facilitate stepping ‘beyond’ one’s worldview, the method includes a public dimension, encouraging users of the method to discuss their worldviews with others. To expand their perspectives and understand those of others better—an endeavor which gathers information but is also normative, users can ask: “How do my experiences and the worldview through which I interpret those experiences compare to those of others?” And they can also ask: “My conclusions about the world should be capable of being judged by a standard of truth, but by what process can I compare my perspective with those of others?”¹⁰ These exploratory questions assume that worldviews of individuals can be compared and that distinct worldviews share enough points of similarity to be mutually intelligible to their holders. An earlier section in this dissertation argues, like Küng and many others, that the religious and secular traditions share the *Global Ethic*’s moral directives; hence

¹⁰ Ibid.

humans potentially have in common one or more perspectives on the world, especially with respect to the way they wish to be treated.

Public engagement raises thorny but important questions about the scope of other worldviews to engage as one attempts to gain a wider perspective and reflect critically on one's explanations about the world and interpretations of one's experiences. Should females be satisfied with worldviews mainly based on their location on the gender continuum that is most comfortable? Should they engage the worldviews of misogynist males or those who have a history of assaulting women? Should the scientifically-inclined be satisfied with empirically-grounded worldviews that set aside aesthetics? Should they engage the worldviews of those who are skeptical about, or even outright deniers of scientific findings? Should college students also take an interest in the worldviews of persons who are recently retired from a lifetime of factory work or, perhaps more challenging, of anti-academics who actively work to defund universities?

The concept of world is necessarily refracted through one person's perspective; nonetheless, explorations of the worldviews of others offers insights into one's own worldview and also brings into focus other possibilities. Individuals, starting from their own worldviews, can gather information about other worldviews and discover the relationships between them. They can bring to bear the directives of the *Global Ethic*

to worldviews—whether their own or those of others—either directly or refracted through one's concept of God when in need of guidance about which worldviews are fruitful and illuminating to engage and which are to be resisted or rejected. Gaining a greater understanding of one's worldview, deepened and enriched by a higher-level perspective and by engagement with the worldviews of others can help the method's users better manage their experience of the world, the forces that buffet their lives, and the moral quandaries they face daily. This, in turn, could help them more easily align their decisions and actions with the guidance and orientation provided by the *Global Ethic* and by their validly moral concepts of God.

step 2: articulate the concept of self

Users of the global, humanistic theological method can explore their concepts of self by asking: "Who am I?" Their answers describe the interpretive lens through which they sort and organize and make meaning of their experiences of the world. Some individuals understand themselves as independent from their families and social groups; some as so thoroughly interconnected with others that they do not perceive themselves as autonomous. Concepts of self are influenced by culture and many other factors, although, in all likelihood, most individuals do not recognize this as being the case. The global, humanistic theological method, aware of these influences, does not expect users to identify or explore all of them—an impossible task—but encourages

attempts to identify at least a few. In addition, to adopt a more general, human-focused rather than self-focused approach, users take up the question of how *human beings* sort and organize and make meaning of their experiences of the world. As with the concept of world, users are encouraged to expand and deepen their concepts of self, both by exploring a higher-level perspective and by engagement with others.

Why consider the concept of self separately from the concept of world, or worldviews? There are at least three reasons for users to articulate recursively their constructed concept of self until it reaches a dynamic stasis and is ready to be aligned with their concept of God. First, human beings interpret the world with which they interact through cognitive frameworks of ideas and beliefs. The global context of experience—the world—is perceived through this prism of the self, called by individuals ‘me’ or ‘I.’ Since the concept of world, as circumscribed by the global, humanistic theological method, is refracted through the ‘I’, a full understanding of one’s worldview requires an understanding of how the self participates in its construction. Second, although a common assumption is that the constructed, first-person perspective of human beings—the self—is stable over time, most social scientists and psychologists agree that, to a certain extent, it is malleable and adjusts

to context.¹¹ As long as one's interpretations of experiences are congruent with the way the self understands the world, the self's worldview or perspective will be accepted by the self as the 'actual' or 'true' interpretation of the context of human life. Nonetheless, the concepts that individuals have of themselves can change dynamically and even permanently as a result of reflection or in response to situations or events, especially significant life crises, which, in return, affects worldview.¹² Third, theists may perceive themselves as being in relationship with God separately from world. They hold that they are able to separate and distinguish from the context of the world some portion, or even all of their 'I'. The current step, by teasing out self from world, lays the groundwork for adjustments between the concept of self and Moment 1's concept of God.

step 3: align concepts of world and of self to the concept of God

After the concepts of the world and of self have been explored and elaborated in the first two steps, they are ready to be assessed and adjusted with respect to a validly moral God, the ultimate point of reference. Such an adjustment is necessary to ensure that, in every day life, the decisions and actions of the method's users remain

¹¹ David DeSteno and Peter Salovey, "Structural Dynamism in the Concept of Self: A Flexible Model for a Malleable Concept," *Review of General Psychology* 1, no. 4 (1997): 390. Accessed February 4, 2018.

<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.385.1929&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

¹² Ibid.

closely aligned with their concepts of God and, by extension, to the directives of the *Global Ethic*. This step is essential if the validly moral concepts of God produced by Moment 1 are, in turn, to orient and guide theists in a validly moral way.

In Step 1, the method's users explored their personal worldviews and asked higher-order questions comparing and assessing the worldviews of others. Doing so leads to other questions such as how to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their own worldview and those of others as well as about criteria to use to decide whether one worldview is 'better,' or 'more' moral than another. Since, for theists, God serves as the absolute reference point, if this concept has been tested by the *Global Ethic*, it provides answers to such questions.

In step 2, users explored their concept of self. The self perceives itself as making choices and taking actions that are congruent in certain situations and not congruent in others. A perspective is transparent and apprehended as coherent when it succeeds in illuminating the person's situation in the world. Vital to the moral life, the self deciphers complex situations, reaches decisions, and acts on them. Various factors can challenge the adequacy of one's perception of those choices, decisions, and actions. This, Step 3 of Moment 2, recognizes that most important factor for theists is that, when one's perception of the world fails to align with the guidance and orientation provided by a validly moral concept God, this perception is challenged and new ones may develop.

As an important “perceptual, motivational, and self-regulatory tool,”¹³ the concept of self is key to securing a life aligned with the concept of God and, by extension, with the *Global Ethic*. As the component of persons that integrates embodied traits, social relations, autobiographical memories, experiences, and more, the self can respond to the guidance and orientation provided by God, the ultimate reference point. Step 3, then, of the global, humanistic theological method’s Moment 2, combats the self’s tendencies to slip into anthropocentrism and egocentrism. Any disparity between one’s choices and actions and those modeled by a person-like God tested by the *Global Ethic* calls into question one’s perspective and may provoke emendations to that perspective. The ability to notice this congruence, or lack thereof, helps the self remain in touch with, and responsive to, contextual subtleties including the opportunities and constraints of the situations it navigates each day even if it is not always aware of the ways in which these subtleties impact its choices and actions. The self, then, is critical to the successful deployment of the global, humanistic theological method because of its attunement, in theists, to the humanizing guidance, and relativizing critique provided “from without” by the concept of God.

¹³ Daphna Oyserman, Kristen Elmore, and George Smith, “Self, Self-Concept, and Identity,” in *Handbook of Self and Identity*, 2nd edition, ed. by Mark R. Leary and June Price Tangney (New York: The Guilford Press, 2012), 69.

optional step: verify alignment of world and of self with the *Global Ethic*

This step, while it can be helpful to all users of the method, has been expressly added for users whose concepts of God may be too minimalistic to 'do much work'. Compared to the more typically meaningful and vivid concepts, some concepts of God are so abstract that they are at a remove from the concerns of everyday life. Faced with moral quandaries, when disciples of such concepts turn to them for orientation, they detect the strong, formal directives of the *Global Ethic* but perhaps little else. Because those concepts offer minimal comfort, their disciples may not be in the habit of relying on their guidance even in times of moral distress or confusion. These theists are advised to align their worldviews and notions of self to the same moral criteria integrated into concepts of God. If they embrace God only as a minor reference point instead of the ultimate one, they can impose direct moral checks on their lives by verifying that their concepts of world and of self meet the standards expressed in the directives of the *Global Ethic*. By taking this optional, but recommended step, they secure moral lives although they rely on God only incidentally to provide them with orientation. The downside, however, is that the *Global Ethic*, integrated into concepts of world and self, loses some of its independent status and thus its ability to serve as an objective external measure by which to assess actions and decisions. It is much more challenging to tease out one's concept of world and of self from the *Global Ethic* in

order to compare them than to take these concepts as a whole and check their alignment to the *Global Ethic*, which, because it is integrated into the distinct concept of God, is already wholly separate.

step 4: dynamic stasis of the concepts of world and self

Stasis remains ever dynamic because concepts of world and self may drift out of alignment with the concept of God. For this reason, users of the method should review world and self on a regular basis, engaging Moment 2 recursively until dynamic stasis is restored. Changes to concepts of God trigger a return to Moment 1 and then a return to Moment 2 to re-align world and self to that concept.

II. How Does the Global Ethic Improve the Method?

The global, humanistic theological method benefits from integrating the *Global Ethic* in at least three ways. The *Global Ethic*:

1. Ensures that concepts of God are validly moral by testing them against an ethic that was articulated collaboratively and ratified by thousands of representatives from the world's religions.
2. Averts the anthropocentrism that can result from associating personalistic metaphors with God.¹⁴

¹⁴ Thinkers from other religious traditions acknowledge the human drive to integrate person-like features in concepts of God. They are called "loan-images" by Muhammad Asad, and "parabolic illustrations" by Zamakhshari.

3. Relativizes human principles, norms, and values by highlighting the disparity between these and a validly moral concept of God tested against the *Global Ethic*'s directives.

In the following sections, I discuss these benefits at greater length.

the *Global Ethic* is not a conventionalist ethic

I argued, in earlier chapters, that Kaufman's self-generated criterion of humanization is too vague to serve as the strong moral test that he advocated for concepts of God.

Moreover, its roots in the Christian tradition may lead non-Christians to reject not only the criterion but also any theological method into which it is integrated. Unlike

Kaufman's, the *Global Ethic*'s moral directives have the support of a significant number of leaders, ethicists, and representatives of the world's religious traditions. By setting

aside the criterion of humanization and relying on the strong directives of the *Global Ethic* as a moral test for concepts of God, the global, humanistic theological method

preserves an essential component of Kaufman's method but addresses its considerable weaknesses. When the *Global Ethic* was ratified, Kaufman had already moved into

Phase III of his theology; had he not, he might have proposed the substitution himself.

Besides the advantages of the *Global Ethic* listed in the paragraph above and in previous chapters, do its directives benefit a global, humanistic theological method like the one developed in this dissertation in other ways? Joas' research provides one answer. Widespread agreement exists that, given increasing pluralism and

globalization, people are exposed to a great number of moral codes and sets of principles and thus have a variety of options from which to choose. The putative sources of human norms—whether empirical, religious, epistemological, etc.—cannot, by themselves, confirm the validity or reality of these norms.¹⁵ The sense of contingency engendered by intensifying pluralism and increasing globalization do not undermine the possibility of commitment to ethical directives, according to Joas, but they do alter the way these commitments are “rooted” in individuals. When faced with interpreting situations and deciding what actions to take, Joas reports, persons juggle a growing set of alternatives. The moral principles that they select or construct, often without making a conscious choice, may settle into a consistent—though not necessarily coherent—collection with the kind of “dynamic” stability discussed above. Though stable, Joas writes, commitment to these moral principles remains contingent and the principles themselves remain open to self or collective reflection and to revision.¹⁶

New experiences, authentic conversations, deeper understandings, and engagement with moral issues expose people to other options and, as a consequence,

¹⁵ Shafer-Landau, 260.

¹⁶ Hans Joas, *Faith as an Option: Possible Futures for Christianity (Cultural Memory in the Present)*, (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2014), 87.

influence how often and how deeply they re-evaluate their own norms.¹⁷ Though awareness of a multiplicity of options may lead to questions about personal commitments, it need not weaken those commitments, nor provoke anxiety or a sense of unrootedness with respect to them. Moreover, flexible internalization of norms, values, and principles does not necessarily lead to shaky pseudo-convictions.¹⁸ To illustrate how one may explore alternatives while remaining grounded, Joas explains that his own encounters with other religious and secular traditions have not undermined his personal commitment to Christianity. He also offers this example of “contingency-adapted” forms of commitment: While at one time certain domestic chores were almost automatically relegated to certain individuals based on gender and generation, shifts in attitudes about gender and generational roles mostly put an end to these seemingly obvious assignments. Yet, Joas points out, people rarely experience either “constant fear” or “behavioral insecurity” as a result.¹⁹ Though a loss in “static” stability ensues from such shifts, Joas emphasizes the benefits of achieving “a more elevated, ‘dynamic’ form of stability.”²⁰

While cultural shifts and encounters with others may produce changes in norms, values, and principles, persuasive arguments can also induce significant changes in an

¹⁷ Ibid., 86-87.

¹⁸ Ibid., 87.

¹⁹ Ibid., 85.

²⁰ Ibid., 86.

individual's religious and moral commitments. Thoughtful people can be convinced to adopt norms that are different from their current ones but they demand compelling reasons to justify this shift. They are more likely to be motivated to adopt, and to act upon, alternative norms, values, and principles if such persons respect their source and are convinced that these reflect valid views about right and wrong, good and evil.²¹ The *Global Ethic* is capable of persuading individuals that its directives are sound and trustworthy—because these shared norms were identified and expressed by representatives of the world's religious and secular traditions through a collaborative and public process. To be sure, even when large numbers of people work together they may generate mere articulations of the conventions held to be self-evident—if only implicitly—by the majority of the participants. The *Global Ethic*'s collaborative process incorporated mechanisms to defeat the drive toward "majority-rule" or "conventionalism" by seeking out contributors from a wide array of religious and secular traditions as well as from different areas of the world. The impressions —shared on the *Global Ethic*'s directives by experts rooted in a variety of cultural and national contexts—were based on years of study of their particular traditions, and deep knowledge of those traditions' ethical principles. Because the *Global Ethic*'s imperatives are shared by the world's religious and secular traditions, they can be

²¹ Shafer-Landau, 46.

identified by anyone familiar with the traditions' resources and teachings. Thus, regardless of how obscurely the *Global Ethic* is embedded in doctrines and texts, its directives can be located and recognized. As a result, people are more likely to assent to those directives and make an autonomous decision to embrace and bind themselves to them.

tested by the *Global Ethic*, concepts of God humanize

A significant feature of the global, humanistic theological method, like that of Kaufman's, is its openness to associating person-like metaphors and analogies with concepts of God. The method encourages theists to include such metaphors and analogies so that they may better relate to God. Of note is that person-like concepts may render their disciples more humane, or in Kaufman's term, 'humanize', the individuals who turn to them when they seek guidance about ideal human behavior. Indeed, Kaufman insisted that person-like concepts of God could provide role models capable of orienting believers toward validly moral lives. As a caveat, however, such concepts of God serve as proper role models only *as long as they are validly moral beings*. The requirement by the global, humanistic theological method that concepts of God be tested against the *Global Ethic* ensures that this is the case. A person-like God provides sound guidance and orientation with respect to the existential and moral dimensions of life, *if* this God is invested with righteousness and love and demands

that believers invest themselves with the same righteousness and love towards fellow human beings. The method, whose concept of God is tested by the *Global Ethic*, offers users of the method the possibility of a humanizing, person-like God who, as the users' supreme focus inspires and exemplifies a more consistently humane life.

A consequence of integrating personalistic metaphors or analogies into concepts of God is that their 'creators' select metaphors and analogies from their own lives. The resulting concepts are meaningful to those creators so that the concepts that pass the test of the *Global Ethic* are more likely to serve as inspiring role models and exert a humanizing influence. Some of the metaphors, images, and experiences that the method's users may be tempted to include in their concepts of God will no doubt fail to meet the standards set by the *Global Ethic* and will be set aside. When this occurs, users perceive their accountability for the choices they make. As they grow more aware of their responsibility in selecting the content of the God whom they hold dear, users learn how to identify which metaphors and analogies count as validly moral.

tested by the *Global Ethic*, concepts of God relativize

The global, humanistic theological method relies on the *Global Ethic* to identify and purge perversions of God. Though some of its directives may be difficult to discern in the world's religious and secular traditions, and they are, more often than not, ignored

or distorted, they constitute the core of a universally shared, validly moral code. As such, they provide an objective standard against which to assess concepts of God.

William Schweiker, who participated in the pre-ratification phase of the drafting of the *Global Ethic*, discussed its role in calling the moral norms of religious traditions into question:

By signing the Declaration, the representatives of various traditions affirmed [its] standards, but also, and this is important, relativized their own traditions in light of human commonalities.²²

Hence, when the *Global Ethic*'s directives serve as the ultimate test to ascertain whether a given concept of God is validly moral, its directives override those of particular religious tradition in cases where they do not align. Since the *Global Ethic* expresses, in explicit terms, the directives shared by the world's religious and secular traditions, they take precedence over all other formulations. As Schweiker states, the common standards affirmed in the *Global Ethic* relativize all other standards.

At a granular level, by ensuring that the content assigned to God concepts by individuals aligns with the *Global Ethic*, the method secures a crucial dialectic between those individuals' personal norms and principles which *may* be universal, and those of God's, which *are* universal. Concepts of God, tested by the *Global Ethic*, provide the ultimate normative standard by which to assess all dimensions of human life. By virtue

²² Schweiker, *Theological Ethics and Global Dynamics*, 14.

of integrating the *Global Ethic*'s directives into their God-constructs, users of the global, humanistic theological method secure, for God, a relativizing function. These directives provide standards or objective principles against which to compare and criticize personal norms, including those in which one may have had absolute confidence and which themselves served as standards or ultimate principles. When these norms are found wanting when compared to the *Global Ethic*, they are set aside as false or improper.

Kaufman insisted that all concepts of God produced by his theological method include a relativizing dimension. He achieved this by requiring that God include a "relativization motif" in the form of higher-order, abstract descriptors such as just, good, loving, etc. These ideals call into question human projects, plans, goals, values, and norms by engendering questions like: "Is this project just, good, and loving?" The importance of abstract descriptors lay in undermining the human tendency to project lesser qualities and characteristics onto God and constructing an anthropocentric concept. The global, humanistic theological method does not follow Kaufman by insisting on a relativization motif *per se* since the *Global Ethic* provides this function. The method is designed to identify which of a given God-construct's qualities and characteristics align with its strong directives and which do not. As users of the method turn to their *Global-Ethic* tested, validly moral concepts of God for guidance and

orientation, those concepts will relativize the users' lesser qualities and characteristics and raise ethical questions about plans, goals, values, and norms.

III. Moment 1 of the Method: Does It Work in Practice?

The global, humanistic theological method integrates checks to identify validly concepts of God. How does this work in practice? For example, how do users ascertain whether their concepts are validly moral? How does the method help them decide whether their concepts are 'hefty' enough to guide their decisions and orient their lives in a validly moral direction? Given these questions, if they were to turn to Moment 1 of the global, humanistic theological method for assistance in reflecting on their God, what would they discover about their concepts? If they decided, based on what they learned, that changes to their concepts of God were needed, would Moment 1 successfully guide them in making them? To evaluate how the logical and conceptual global, humanistic theological method translates into 'real life', the next section shifts from ideal theory to actual practice. It focuses on assessing whether Moment 1 of the method proves helpful, from a practical perspective, in securing a validly moral God. A similar exploration of Moment 2 is warranted but has been set aside in the interest of keeping the chapter of a manageable length.

a test case: Kaufman's Phase III concept of God

Also for the sake of efficiency, rather than introduce an entirely new theological approach and concept of God, I have selected Kaufman's Phase III, religious-naturalist God as the test case for Moment 1. I discussed this concept's basic outlines in previous chapters but provide additional details to ensure a fair evaluation. Though, during Phase II, Kaufman mentions his attachment to the suffering Christ who, motivated by love, inspires sacrifice for the sake of others, he reveals little else about his personal theology, preferring to develop a theological method at an abstract, general level for use by wide range of theists. However, by Phase III, he formulates and defends creative serendipity as the appropriate understanding of God. I have insisted throughout this dissertation, as Kaufman did during Phase II, that theological methods allow users to construct concepts of God that are person-like enough to offer what humans recognize as comfort, reassurance, meaning, orientation, forgiveness, love, accountability, and more. Kaufman recommended anthropomorphic concepts during Phase II but, already concerned about anthropocentrism, he integrated his criterion of humanization into his method. By Phase III, he had lost confidence that people could hold in check their tendency to twist person-like concepts of God into self-centered self-projections. For Kaufman, the dangers of anthropocentrism now overrode all other concerns—he renounced his earlier emphasis on the human drive for a person-like God and

rescinded his previous support of anthropomorphic deities. He also dismissed the importance of life's so-called 'existential' interest in a comforting, personally-meaningful concept of God. In his view, ecological threats to the planet dwarfed all other considerations:

Today ... we find ourselves in a period beset by serious issues significantly different from the existential problems of our personhood.... Today the most important religious issue is not how we can find a way to live with or overcome despair or meaninglessness or guilt or sinfulness, or human suffering generally—however significant these problems may be. Now it has to do with the much more basic matter of the objective conditions that make all life—including human life—possible: we are destroying them, and it is we who must find a way to reverse the ecologically destructive momentums we have brought into being (IBC, 37-38).

Convinced that, for contemporary persons, reality is primarily shaped by experiences of the natural world and its processes rather than by the painful struggles and difficult choices of everyday life, Kaufman conceived of God in an entirely different way. This concept must be constructed, he came to believe, not in a way that addresses life's daily struggles but in a way that highlights "our ecological embeddedness in the natural order." If people focused, he warned, on the human activities, relationships, and experiences that were integrated into person-like concepts of God, they would "obscure" their relationship to the natural order (IBC, 41).

Unlike Kaufman's Phase III method, the global, humanistic theological method assumes that human beings continue to face the same problems with which they have

been beset throughout history—despair, meaninglessness, suffering, violence—giving rise to a longing for God's comfort and support and love. Though enmeshed, as Kaufman asserts, in an ecological destructive momentum, individuals nonetheless continue to face daily, life-impacting moral decisions. For a concept of God to serve as the ultimate reference point and provide moral orientation and guidance, it must offer clear parameters for how human beings are to be in relationship with one another.

Contra Kaufman, I maintain that, for most people, *existential* issues have not become secondary to *ecological* ones—the two are intertwined—climate change causes existential problems and existential demands contribute to climate change. When people are forced to abandon their homes and communities because of rising sea levels or when they sustain injuries or endure the death of a loved one due to increasingly violent weather events, they despair and question the meaning of their suffering. Environmental problems are contributing to the growing list of outrages inflicted, with mounting frequency, on people the world over. On the flip side, environmental problems result from existential demands for material goods even, for example, when such demands place unsustainable strains on natural resources or result in polluting chemicals that are difficult to neutralize, the need to support one's family even if activities linked to these efforts involve expanded land use that encroaches on the habitats of endangered animals or on watersheds key to controlling flooding. An

existentially-meaningful, person-like concept of God may be more likely to serve as an effective guide to theists, calling on them to reflect consistently about their impact on the planet and on their neighbors' quality of life.

Kaufman overlooked the link between existential and ecological issues. Solely focused on the "ecological ordering of life" and how to constitute human existence in light of this ordering, he abandoned his concern for the every day struggles of his fellows—the province of person-like concepts of God—in favor of three concepts: 1) a *biohistorical* understanding of human life, 2) *serendipitous creativity* manifest throughout the cosmos; rather than a cosmic person who has created the world and now stands outside of it, God is not so much a concept as a label for that component of the cosmos that theists choose to understand as creative, and 3) "*trajectories or directional movements* that emerge spontaneously in the course of evolutionary and historical developments" (IBC, 42). These concepts, he held, if taken all together, would help theists engage with God, humanity, and each other. Kaufman argued that theists determined to hold onto a concept of God should follow his lead and de-anthropomorphize their concepts. Human beings may long for love from God but ascribing affection or concern to serendipitous creativity, he argued, was "unintelligible" and "absurd." There was only one link between God and love, Kaufman posited: In the trajectory of God (serendipitous creativity) in which human beings emerged, love also

emerged. Created during the arc of this trajectory, humans *qua* humans have the inherent ability to express love and behave lovingly. These expressions and behaviors, in turn, evoke love in persons capable of responding to them. To say, "God is love," is overly simplistic, in Kaufman's view, but theists could claim with authenticity that a relationship with God could lead to significant "loving, caring attitudes and activities" (IBC, 64).

For most theists, Kaufman's Phase III creative-serendipity God is too abstract to offer the comfort, affection, and guidance that they seek. However, this fact alone is not a reason for the global, humanistic theological method to reject this conception as a validly moral God. Not every user of the method is driven to conceive of God as a source of comfort and support and love. Nor does every user desire, from God, a perfect role model or an intimate relationship. Though Kaufman's serendipitous creativity may seem, to many theists, to do so little 'work' that they dismiss this conception as irrelevant to daily life, it is possible that it falls within the method's acceptable range of constructs. The global, humanistic theological method, committed to facilitating the systematic production of a wide range of concepts, places no *a priori* barrier to any construct. For individuals who embrace such an abstract God, the method recommends invoking the optional step in Moment 2 to secure alignment between the concepts of worldview and of self, and the *Global Ethic*.

Kaufman abandons epistemological humility

Also problematic, in Phase III of his theology, Kaufman set aside his epistemological humility and reached a conclusion on the question of God's existence. He argued that neither God in general terms nor God conceived more narrowly as Creator of the Universe exists.

What could we possibly be imagining when we attempt to think of God as an all-powerful personal reality existing somehow before and independent of what we today call "the universe"? As far as we know, personal agential beings did not exist, and could not have existed before billions of years of cosmic evolution of a very specific sort, and then further billions of years of biological evolution also of a very specific sort, had transpired (IBC, 54).

Nonetheless, Kaufman conceded, since God remained an important symbol to theists, this symbol could not be abandoned. It needed to be reimagined, however.²³ God as cosmic creativity was a plausible option and, for him, an acceptable understanding of deity (IBC, 55). Because of the comprehensive nature of the cosmos, Kaufman explained, its creativity is much greater than that of human beings and because this creativity is "going its own way in the universe," it relativizes all else. In the same sense that abstract terms attached to constructs of God served a relativizing function in his Phase II theological method, serendipitous creativity, he wrote, "overturns our creature activities, projects, and goals" (IBC, 45). Kaufman, however, resisted any suggestion

²³ Kaufman's change of mind in Phase III was likely influenced by the arguments developed by his colleague and friend, James Gustafson; see Gustafson's two volume: *Ethics. A Theocentric Perspective*.

that this creativity, labeled as “God,” could exert force or exercise power. A link between comprehensive creativity and power lacked warrant because human beings had merely been able to observe the coming into being of “new and novel realities” (IBC, 56). At most, then, serendipitous creativity was a feature of the cosmos. This feature simply happened, Kaufman insisted, manifesting itself in trajectories of different kinds, some in tension with others. How and why the cosmos displayed creativity were questions without answers—in his words, it was an “absolutely amazing” mystery (IBC, 56, 61).

To preserve the idea of God for pastoral reasons, Kaufman assigned the label ‘God’ to a presumed biohistorical trajectory, but based on the findings of contemporary science, he abandoned his commitment to agnosticism and concluded that God did not exist.²⁴ Such a dismissal violates one of the grounding commitments of the global, humanistic theological method since its starting point is that the matter of God’s existence cannot be settled. From a practical viewpoint, the global, humanistic theological method retains some flexibility on the question of God’s reality. Confidence by theists about God’s existence can be accommodated as long as they acknowledge that the content of their concepts is uncertain, contingent, and ever open

²⁴ Most theists are admittedly not agnostic on the question of God’s existence. For many, God is real and they are certain that the God in which they place their trust exists.

to re-evaluation and revision. The formulation of their 'available' God may have little relation to the 'real' God—a relationship that remains unknown and unknowable. Hence, agnosticism on the question of God's existence is not required by the method, but agnosticism on the possibility of formulating a definitive description of God is.

Kaufman's creative serendipity vs the *Global Ethic*

To return to this section's principal question: is Kaufman's Phase III God capable of providing validly moral orientation and guidance? An affirmative answer for the global, humanistic theological method requires that a concept of God like serendipitous creativity align with the directives of the *Global Ethic*. Kaufman understands human beings as part of a biohistorical trajectory that he calls God. The earth's ecological web is also part of this trajectory. It is the task of human beings (or what Kaufman considers "our proper human business") to bring their creativity vis-à-vis the earth into concert with its trajectory. For persons to correlate their moral considerations to this central demand, he explains, they must abandon lives focused, to the exclusion of much else, on human-centered projects. Deepening awareness of the monumental impact that a growing human population is making on the planet should lead citizens to invent or identify ways to reduce the harm that their activities cause and to create as little lasting damage as possible. Paradoxically, Kaufman warns, such a shift may require destructiveness because human beings will be required to "destroy many of our

present patterns of action” if they hope to achieve the desirable level of harmony with creative serendipity. The focus must remain fixed on being of service to the progressive movement of serendipitous creativity, participating in its “open future” on Earth, and contributing to the trajectory with which humanity came into being and to which it must seek to be “ultimately responsible” (IBC, 62).

To determine whether Kaufman’s concept of God is aligned with the directives of the *Global Ethic* requires an answer to this question: Is there a relationship between the demands of the *Global Ethic*’s directives and the demand that human beings bring their moral considerations into harmony with serendipitous creativity by embracing their responsibility to the planet’s well-being? A sub-category of the *Global Ethic*’s first directive, “Commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life,” addresses the threats to the ecological health of the planet that result from human activities. It does so by pointing to the long-term consequences of environmental abuse. The sub-category reminds agents of their responsibility toward the planet in light of their impact on future generations. Its precise wording appears below. The emphasis in bold-type appears in the original text (see Appendix A for the entire text of Directive 1).

1. Commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life
 - 1(d). A human person is infinitely precious and must be unconditionally protected. But likewise the lives of animals and plants, which inhabit this planet with us deserve protection, preservation, and care. Limitless exploitation of the natural foundations of life, ruthless destruction of the

biosphere, and militarization of the cosmos are all outrages. As human beings we have special responsibility—especially with a view to future generations—for Earth and the cosmos, for the air, water, and soil. We are all intertwined together in this cosmos and we are all dependent on each other. Each one of us depends on the welfare of all. Instead we must cultivate living in harmony with nature and the cosmos.²⁵

Much of the language used in the *Global Ethic* quoted above recalls the Phase III language used by Kaufman. As he does, the directive demands the protection, preservation and care of animals and plants. It insists on attention to future generations, which involves care for the air, water, and soil. It exhorts an end to the exploitation of nature, the destruction of the biosphere, and the launching of weapons into the cosmos. However, unlike Kaufman's Phase III preoccupation with ecological threats to the planet, the *Global Ethic* does not focus solely on these issues. The *Global Ethic* does not neglect to provide guidance for existential situations and moments of decision. Indeed, its four directives cover the gamut of everyday moral quandaries, whether of life-altering or planetary-changing importance.

Thus, Kaufman's stand-in for God, creative serendipity, does not violate the directives set out in the *Global Ethic*—at least, not the requirements set out in directive 1(d). Nonetheless, this concept of God does little to bolster them. For example, creative serendipity fails to make clear-cut demands for a commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order, or to a culture of tolerance and a life of

²⁵ Küng, *A Global Ethic*, 24-26.

truthfulness, or of equal rights and partnership between men and women. Kaufman abandoned Phase II in part because, in his view, traditional male-gendered language about God produced misogynous and patriarchal concepts. Yet, the attenuated moral demands (other than demands related to ecological well-being) of his Phase III God do little to subvert or prevent unequal relationships between men and women. When Kaufman gave priority to the health of the planet, he contradicted his well-documented interest in securing the good for all people. Indeed, creative serendipity undermines this interest by failing to orient human beings effectively toward the welfare of persons through lack of attention to the moral norms regulating those relationships.

Kaufman's Phase III God orients life in a consistently moral direction with difficulty. It is unlikely to motivate any but the most dutiful of persons to carry out the obligations spelled out in the *Global Ethic*'s directives. William James compared the moral life to a war in which voluntary service to the highest ideals counts as "cosmic patriotism." The individual who is dedicated to the moral life only because he believes that he must, James wrote, has to stay at the ready, vigilant, ever poised to "hold his breath and keep his muscles tense." As long as this individual is well enough and strong enough to maintain this "athletic attitude," he can maintain his voluntary service to morality. However, in James' experience, this attitude, even among the sturdiest of moral athletes, usually wears thin and may come apart. God comes to the rescue, in

James' words, by adding "to life an enchantment which is not rationally or logically deduced from anything else."²⁶ It is conceivable that serendipitous creativity can add enchantment to the life of a theist. This may have been the case for Kaufman. Serendipitous creativity, capable of providing only the weakest of incentives for 'voluntary service' to the moral life, relies on 'cosmic patriotism'.

Testing Kaufman's Phase III God against the *Global Ethic* in Step 3 of the global, humanistic theological method's Moment 1 does not eliminate this concept outright. Serendipitous creativity does not violate the principles of the *Global Ethic*. However, the test identifies several significant weaknesses in this God if the concept is to provide validly moral guidance and orientation. While it offers support for the *Global Ethic*'s sub-directives that address planetary health, the rest of this particular directive as well as the other three directives are not explicitly included in Kaufman's conception, thereby providing no specific moral support for significant portions of human life. Concepts of God have too great a potential to effect on people's lives, whether for good or for ill, to set aside swaths of their moral content. Even if associating serendipitous creativity with God succeeded in engendering a commitment to seek creative ways to live in harmony with and respect other "lines of life that also have their homes here" including the lines of life of human beings, many interpretations of

²⁶ William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, Kindle version, page 48 of 461.

"harmony" and "respect" are possible. Absent greater precision, these interpretations, unconstrained by Kaufman's concept, could too easily transgress the strong moral requirements set forth in the *Global Ethic*. Moment 1, then, identifies the lacunas in Kaufman's serendipitous creativity and brings to light the potential risks of ambiguous hints or outright silence on the majority of human interactions. Kaufman would, then, have faced a choice: leave his concept of God as-is despite its deficiencies, or loop through Step 3 recursively until the concept integrated more, if not all, of the *Global Ethic*'s directives. For Kaufman and others who embrace a God conceived as serendipitous creativity, the global, humanistic method expects that this concept will integrate the imperatives of the *Global Ethic*. Kaufman's Phase III God fails to meet this requirement. The global, humanistic theological method has succeeded in clarifying how well and thoroughly God as serendipitous creativity aligns with the *Global Ethic*.

IV. A Critique of the Method

As I assessed Kaufman's Phase III God by using it as a test case for Moment 1 of the global, humanistic theological method, I have emphasized the strengths of the method to detect validly moral concepts of God. I now turn to a weakness. The proposed method duplicates a similar weakness, noticed by James Gustafson, in Kaufman's Phase II theological method. Gustafson, with regard to Kaufman's method, objected

to “moral effects” as the exclusive test of proper theological construction. He argued that these effects failed to go far enough in taking “man’s continuity and interdependence with nature” into account.²⁷ What if nature and the continuity and interdependence of man with nature were incompatible with a life-policy of leading a validly moral life? To preserve the natural world and stop the destruction of the planet, thwarting the anthropo-centric aspirations of human beings is a necessary first step. Nonetheless, Gustafson was not certain this step was enough. The urgency of Gustafson’s critique and his well-placed fear likely swayed Kaufman and may, in part, explain his decision to abandon Phase II theological method’s emphasis on person-like concepts of God in favor of Phase III’s serendipitous creativity. Though the potential for anthropocentrism in Phase II is held in check by his method’s humanization and relativization criteria, Phase III’s abstract serendipitous creativity was the antithesis of a person-like God and, as such, is incapable, at least in principle, of promoting anthropocentrism.

The specter of anthropocentrism denounced by Gustafson and eventually by Kaufman also stalks the global, humanistic theological method since it allows and even encourages person-like concepts of God. The possibility of creating a self-serving God is mitigated, however, by the requirement that concepts be tested against the

²⁷ Gustafson, 265.

directives of the *Global Ethic*. Worth noting, nonetheless, is the fact that the *Global Ethic*, does not focus on norms related to nature other than in the sub-directive discussed earlier. Küng chose not include other strictures related to the environment in the *Global Ethic*. This was intentional, and driven by two reasons:

1. For Küng, an ethic or ethos is primarily concerned with the inner world of human beings—the spheres of the conscience and of the heart. These remain hidden and resistant to sanctions imposed by external powers like civic or religious institutions. Changes of conscience and of heart require autonomous decisions by the individual who may respond to persuasive arguments or to new information but cannot be compelled by external mechanisms like legislated statutes or legal rulings. Climate change and ecological devastation are issues that fall in the realm of the political, not of the individual and of the moral. To address these global problems effectively, Küng wrote, policies must be worked out by governments, “and imposed by political power, the courts, and law enforcement.”²⁸
2. Küng intended the *Global Ethic* to provide ethical support for the UN Declaration on *Human Rights*. Like the protections stipulated in this Declaration, the *Global Ethic* limited its area of concern to human beings.

Küng, ethicists, leaders, and representatives from the world’s religions who contributed to or vetted and ratified the *Global Ethic* retained the reasoning that underpinned Küng’s original draft and the versions that followed. Some representatives attending the 1993 Parliament of the World’s Religions advocated for the addition of a directive regulating the relationship between human beings and nature. When their efforts failed, a number joined together to draft a document that has become known as the *Earth*

²⁸ Küng, *A Global Ethic*, 58.

*Charter.*²⁹ Initiatives by *Earth Charter* supporters and other advocates and advocacy groups around the world have made inroads, one person at a time, in changing consciences and hearts, demonstrating a growing and now widespread agreement among the religious and secular traditions about the moral requirements with respect to sustainability and care for the environment. Laws and policies at the level of governments, backed by political power to enforce them, have proved key to managing the extraction of resources from the planet's surface and to reducing humanity's impact on the atmosphere and oceans. The human and economic costs of weather-caused disasters linked to climate change have driven worldwide agreements like COP21; these agreements are essential to addressing environmental threats but they must also be coupled to sensitized individual consciences that do not depend on them to motivate new habits and reformulate ideas, in the developed world, about the level of material goods and comfort are needed for a life to count as a 'good' life.

Thus, Gustafson's critique is important to note. He recommended one of two solutions to address the mistaken priority that he identified in Kaufman's method, and by extension, in this dissertation's. Fortunately the Parliament of the World's Religions is currently in the process of expanding the *Global Ethic* with a fifth directive to strengthen and widen its norms pertaining to the relationship between human persons

²⁹ To read the *Earth Charter*, visit <http://earthcharter.org/discover/the-earth-charter/>.

and the rest of the planet whether animate or not. Language for this new directive, "A commitment to a culture of sustainability and to care for the environment," will likely have been approved by the Parliament's Board of Trustees in time to introduce to the thousands of people who will attend the early-November 2018 Parliament in Toronto. Whether this expanded *Global Ethic* resolves the problem that Gustafson brought to the fore remains to be seen. Though the effect of anthropogenic change grows more brutal and pervasive year by year, a balance between human well-being and that of the planet is the preferred solution. Billions of people and the pressure they place on natural resources cannot be 'eliminated' but the world's religious and secular traditions agree that consumption must be significantly reduced and for-its-own-sake material acquisition curtailed. While Gustafson may be implying that human beings should be prepared to endure deprivations for the sake of their planet-home, a proposition more likely to win global support and thus to succeed in the long term, is a smarter and more judicious use of natural resources using current technologies with significant investments to develop better ones. This approach aims to improve living standards in impoverished parts of the world by achieving a judicious equilibrium between all stakeholders, giving equitable importance to peoples in the world who have little voice. Such an approach relies on strategic sacrifices by middle-class and

wealthy persons in the developed world but does not countenance loss to the point of suffering.

Another response to address Gustafson's critique is this: Users of the method could conceive of a person-like God who demands from them a radical commitment and even supererogatory efforts to reduce their carbon and other impactful footprints on the planet. Would this God—deleterious in Gustafson's opinion—succeed less well at challenging human beings to tip their personal financial and time resources in the direction of the natural world than the one he advocates—a God who demands that human beings make the earth primary and their own needs and desires secondary? Concepts of God could also be conceived as challenging their disciples to educate themselves about local, regional, and national laws and how to tighten those laws' protection of air, water, and earth? This God who, by offering comfort and affection and challenge, guides and orients human beings toward white-glove care of the environment, may succeed better at motivating change than a fearsome and punitive God who, like Gustafson's, calls into question the right of humanity to exist. And finally, a person-like God who comforts those who attempt but fail to meet the extreme and burdensome demands described above may prove more effective at motivating long-term lifestyle changes by helping prevent people from falling into despair. Though they

may falter, believing themselves loved by God, they could rally and rededicate themselves to the hard work of ending harmful practices.

V. Wrapping Up and Looking Forward

The global, humanistic theological method developed in this constructive chapter is based on Kaufman's Phase II theological method, explored in the second section of this dissertation, and integrates the *Global Ethic*, explored in the third section. Given its grounding in the ideas and work of Kaufman and of the many contributors to the 1993 Parliament of the World Religions' *Global Ethic*, both of these sections were crucial to the elaboration of the global, humanistic theological method. The present chapter sketched out the general features of the method and, as it did so, identified which features were added as well as which features from Kaufman's method were rejected, retained, or adapted. A notable difference is the replacement of Kaufman's criterion of humanization by the *Global Ethic*. To justify this substitution, I explored the way in which the *Global Ethic* supports one of the principal aims of the method—to assist reflective theists in an age of increasing globalization, intensifying pluralism, and theological contingency to construct validly moral concepts of God based on the assumption that such concepts are more conducive to validly moral lives. I then assessed the method's effectiveness in meeting the conditions that it set out for itself

by using Kaufman's Phase III God as serendipitous creativity as a test case. This initial exploration offers a foundation on which to build a more detailed method in the future.

Though the method does not require users to integrate personal images, experiences, goals, and values into their concepts of God, users are encouraged, though not required, to construct meaningful, person-like Gods to which they can turn for comfort, affection, and challenge. Regardless of content, the method requires concepts of God to meet the test of the *Global Ethic* to ensure that they qualify as validly moral ultimate reference points. While personal images, experiences, goals and values are integrated into concepts of God through an effort of individual reflection and the approach to constructing a concept is most likely solitary and self-sufficient, the concepts also undergo scrutiny in the form of public engagement. Though required, the contours of such engagement are loosely defined, leaving the user to seek and even create such opportunities, whatever they may be. The public component incorporates elements of public theology based on, in the words of Stackhouse, the "conviction that it is the duty of theology to provide a reasonable proposal with regard to the moral and spiritual architecture and the inner guidance system of civilizations."³⁰

One of the basic assumptions of the global, humanistic method is that no concept of God is ever beyond the reach of critique. The alignment of concepts of

³⁰ Stackhouse, *God and Globalization: Volume 4*. Kindle version, loc. 2038 of 5495 (37%).

God to the *Global Ethic* is to be tested and remains open to question. The method benefits from integrating the *Global Ethic's* directives in at least three ways. The addition of the *Global Ethic* to the method 1) provides a moral test—which has won support from a significant number of scholars, religious leaders, and members of the world's religions—to verify that concepts of God produced by the method are validly moral, 2) undermines the possibility of anthropocentrism that can result from choosing personalistic metaphors for God, and 3) subordinates any concept of God to the moral directives held in common by the world's religious and secular traditions.

Like the process that Küng had anticipated for the continuous assessment and revision of the *Global Ethic*, the proposed method relies on a recursive mechanism. Periodic passes through its two moments are recommended and encouraged. As users re-engage their concepts of God, world and self, they can turn to their religious communities and other venues to seek input from a diversity of persons, paying particular attention to the perspectives of those familiar with exclusion, suffering, and discrimination since individuals who have experienced transgressions in the name of God are best equipped to identify such concepts' failings. Due to the difficulty of leading a life of moral resolve guided and oriented by a validly moral concept of God, religious community can serve as places of comfort and of mutual support. And,

though theists must remain always ever uncertain that God is the source, when struggling to lead validly moral lives, they may be graced with perseverance.

APPENDIX A: TOWARD A GLOBAL ETHIC: AN INITIAL DECLARATION

4 September 1993
Chicago, U.S.A.

The Declaration of a Global Ethic

The world is in agony. The agony is so pervasive and urgent that we are compelled to name its manifestations so that the depth of this pain may be made clear.

Peace eludes us – the planet is being destroyed – neighbors live in fear – women and men are estranged from each other – children die!

This is abhorrent.

We condemn the abuses of Earth's ecosystems.

We condemn the poverty that stifles life's potential; the hunger that weakens the human body, the economic disparities that threaten so many families with ruin.

We condemn the social disarray of the nations; the disregard for justice which pushes citizens to the margin; the anarchy overtaking our communities; and the insane death of children from violence. In particular we condemn aggression and hatred in the name of religion.

But this agony need not be.

It need not be because the basis for an ethic already exists. This ethic offers the possibility of a better individual and global order, and leads individuals away from despair and societies away from chaos.

We are women and men who have embraced the precepts and practices of the world's religions:

We affirm that a common set of core values is found in the teachings of the religions, and that these form the basis of a global ethic.

We affirm that this truth is already known, but yet to be lived in heart and action.

We affirm that there is an irrevocable, unconditional norm for all areas of life, for

families and communities, for races, nations, and religions. There already exist ancient guidelines for human behavior which are found in the teachings of the religions of the world and which are the condition for a sustainable world order.

We declare:

We are interdependent. Each of us depends on the well-being of the whole, and so we have respect for the community of living beings, for people, animals, and plants, and for the preservation of Earth, the air, water and soil.

We take individual responsibility for all we do. All our decisions, actions, and failures to act have consequences.

We must treat others as we wish others to treat us. We make a commitment to respect life and dignity, individuality and diversity, so that every person is treated humanely, without exception. We must have patience and acceptance. We must be able to forgive, learning from the past but never allowing ourselves to be enslaved by memories of hate. Opening our hearts to one another, we must sink our narrow differences for the cause of the world community, practicing a culture of solidarity and relatedness.

We consider humankind our family. We must strive to be kind and generous. We must not live for ourselves alone, but should also serve others, never forgetting the children, the aged, the poor, the suffering, the disabled, the refugees, and the lonely. No person should ever be considered or treated as a second-class citizen, or be exploited in any way whatsoever. There should be equal partnership between men and women. We must not commit any kind of sexual immorality. We must put behind us all forms of domination or abuse.

We commit ourselves to a culture of non-violence, respect, justice, and peace. We shall not oppress, injure, torture, or kill other human beings, forsaking violence as a means of settling differences.

We must strive for a just social and economic order, in which everyone has an equal chance to reach full potential as a human being. We must speak and act truthfully and with compassion, dealing fairly with all, and avoiding prejudice and hatred. We must not steal. We must move beyond the dominance of greed for power, prestige, money, and consumption to make a just and peaceful world.

Earth cannot be changed for the better unless the consciousness of individuals is changed first. We pledge to increase our awareness by disciplining our minds, by meditation, by prayer, or by positive thinking. Without risk and a readiness to sacrifice there can be no fundamental change in our situation. Therefore we commit ourselves

to this global ethic, to understanding one another, and to socially beneficial, peace-fostering, and nature-friendly ways of life.

We invite all people, whether religious or not, to do the same.

The Principles of a Global Ethic

Our world is experiencing a *fundamental crisis*: A crisis in global economy, global ecology, and global politics. The lack of a grand vision, the tangle of unresolved problems, political paralysis, mediocre political leadership with little insight or foresight, and in general too little sense for the commonweal are seen everywhere: Too many old answers to new challenges.

Hundreds of millions of human beings on our planet increasingly suffer from unemployment, poverty, hunger, and the destruction of their families. Hope for a lasting peace among nations slips away from us. There are tensions between the sexes and generations. Children die, kill, and are killed. More and more countries are shaken by corruption in politics and business. It is increasingly difficult to live together peacefully in our cities because of social, racial, and ethnic conflicts, the abuse of drugs, organized crime, and even anarchy. Even neighbors often live in fear of one another. Our planet continues to be ruthlessly plundered. A collapse of the ecosystem threatens us.

Time and again we see leaders and members of *religions* incite aggression, fanaticism, hate, and xenophobia—even inspire and legitimize violent and bloody conflicts. Religion often is misused for purely power-political goals, including war. We are filled with disgust.

We condemn these blights and declare that they need not be. An *ethic* already exists within the religious teachings of the world which can counter the global distress. Of course this ethic provides no direct solution for all the immense problems of the world, but it does supply the moral foundation for a better individual and global order: A *vision* which can lead women and men away from despair, and society away from chaos.

We are persons who have committed ourselves to the precepts and practices of the world's religions. We confirm that there is already a consensus among the religions which can be the basis for a global ethic—a minimal *fundamental consensus* concerning binding *values*, irrevocable *standards*, and *fundamental moral attitudes*.

I. No new global order without a new global ethic!

We women and men of various religions and regions of Earth therefore address all

people, religious and non-religious. We wish to express the following convictions which we hold in common:

- We all have a responsibility for a better global order.
- Our involvement for the sake of human rights, freedom, justice, peace, and the preservation of Earth is absolutely necessary.
- Our different religious and cultural traditions must not prevent our common involvement in opposing all forms of inhumanity and working for greater humaneness.
- The principles expressed in this Global Ethic can be affirmed by all persons with ethical convictions, whether religiously grounded or not.
- As religious and spiritual persons we base our lives on an Ultimate Reality, and draw spiritual power and hope therefrom, in trust, in prayer or meditation, in word or silence. We have a special responsibility for the welfare of all humanity and care for the planet Earth. We do not consider ourselves better than other women and men, but we trust that the ancient wisdom of our religions can point the way for the future.

After two world wars and the end of the cold war, the collapse of fascism and nazism, the shaking to the foundations of communism and colonialism, humanity has entered a new phase of its history. Today we possess sufficient economic, cultural, and spiritual resources to introduce a better global order. But old and new ethnic, national, social, economic, and religious tensions threaten the peaceful building of a better world. We have experienced greater technological progress than ever before, yet we see that world-wide poverty, hunger, death of children, unemployment, misery, and the destruction of nature have not diminished but rather have increased. Many peoples are threatened with economic ruin, social disarray, political marginalization, ecological catastrophe, and national collapse.

In such a dramatic global situation humanity needs a vision of peoples living peacefully together, of ethnic and ethical groupings and of religions sharing responsibility for the care of Earth. A vision rests on hopes, goals, ideals, standards. But all over the world these have slipped from our hands. Yet we are convinced that, despite their frequent abuses and failures, it is the communities of faith who bear a responsibility to demonstrate that such hopes, ideals, and standards can be guarded, grounded, and lived. This is especially true in the modern state. Guarantees of freedom of conscience and religion are necessary but they do not substitute for binding values, convictions, and norms which are valid for all humans regardless of their social origin, sex, skin color, language, or religion.

We are convinced of the fundamental unity of the human family on Earth. We recall the

1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations. What it formally proclaimed on the level of rights we wish to confirm and deepen here from the perspective of an ethic: The full realization of the intrinsic dignity of the human person, the inalienable freedom and equality in principle of all humans, and the necessary solidarity and interdependence of all humans with each other.

On the basis of personal experiences and the burdensome history of our planet we have learned

- that a better global order cannot be created or enforced by laws, prescriptions, and conventions alone;
- that the realization of peace, justice, and the protection of Earth depends on the insight and readiness of men and women to act justly;
- that action in favor of rights and freedoms presumes a consciousness of responsibility and duty, and that therefore both the minds and hearts of women and men must be addressed;
- that rights without morality cannot long endure, and that there will be no better global order without a global ethic.

By a global ethic we do not mean a global ideology or a single unified religion beyond all existing religions, and certainly not the domination of one religion over all others. By a global ethic we mean a fundamental consensus on binding values, irrevocable standards, and personal attitudes. Without such a fundamental consensus on an ethic, sooner or later every community will be threatened by chaos or dictatorship, and individuals will despair.

II. A fundamental demand: Every human being must be treated humanely.

We all are fallible, imperfect men and women with limitations and defects. We know the reality of evil. Precisely because of this, we feel compelled for the sake of global welfare to express what the fundamental elements of a global ethic should be—for individuals as well as for communities and organizations, for states as well as for the religions themselves. We trust that our often millennia-old religious and ethical traditions provide an ethic which is convincing and practicable for all women and men of good will, religious and non-religious.

At the same time we know that our various religious and ethical traditions often offer very different bases for what is helpful and what is unhelpful for men and women, what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is evil. We do not wish to gloss over

or ignore the serious differences among the individual religions. However, they should not hinder us from proclaiming publicly those things which we already hold in common and which we jointly affirm, each on the basis of our own religious or ethical grounds.

We know that religions cannot solve the environmental, economic, political, and social problems of Earth. However they can provide what obviously cannot be attained by economic plans, political programs, or legal regulations alone: A change in the inner orientation, the whole mentality, the “hearts” of people, and a conversion from a false path to a new orientation for life. Humankind urgently needs social and ecological reforms, but it needs spiritual renewal just as urgently. As religious or spiritual persons we commit ourselves to this task. The spiritual powers of the religions can offer a fundamental sense of trust, a ground of meaning, ultimate standards, and a spiritual home. Of course religions are credible only when they eliminate those conflicts which spring from the religions themselves, dismantling mutual arrogance, mistrust, prejudice, and even hostile images, and thus demonstrate respect for the traditions, holy places, feasts, and rituals of people who believe differently.

Now as before, women and men are treated inhumanely all over the world. They are robbed of their opportunities and their freedom; their human rights are trampled underfoot; their dignity is disregarded. But might does not make right! In the face of all inhumanity our religious and ethical convictions demand that every human being must be treated humanely!

This means that every human being without distinction of age, sex, race, skin color, physical or mental ability, language, religion, political view, or national or social origin possesses an inalienable and untouchable dignity, and everyone, the individual as well as the state, is therefore obliged to honor this dignity and protect it. Humans must always be the subjects of rights, must be ends, never mere means, never objects of commercialization and industrialization in economics, politics and media, in research institutes, and industrial corporations. No one stands “above good and evil”—no human being, no social class, no influential interest group, no cartel, no police apparatus, no army, and no state. On the contrary: Possessed of reason and conscience, every human is obliged to behave in a genuinely human fashion, to do good and avoid evil!

It is the intention of this Global Ethic to clarify what this means. In it we wish to recall irrevocable, unconditional ethical norms. These should not be bonds and chains, but helps and supports for people to find and realize once again their lives’ direction, values, orientations, and meaning.

There is a principle which is found and has persisted in many religious and ethical traditions of humankind for thousands of years: What you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others. Or in positive terms: What you wish done to yourself, do to others! This should be the irrevocable, unconditional norm for all areas of life, for families and

communities, for races, nations, and religions.

Every form of egoism should be rejected: All selfishness, whether individual or collective, whether in the form of class thinking, racism, nationalism, or sexism. We condemn these because they prevent humans from being authentically human. Self-determination and self-realization are thoroughly legitimate so long as they are not separated from human self-responsibility and global responsibility, that is, from responsibility for fellow humans and for the planet Earth.

This principle implies very concrete standards to which we humans should hold firm. From it arise four broad, ancient guidelines for human behavior which are found in most of the religions of the world.

III. Irrevocable directives.

1. Commitment to a Culture of Non-violence and Respect for Life

Numberless women and men of all regions and religions strive to lead lives not determined by egoism but by commitment to their fellow humans and to the world around them. Nevertheless, all over the world we find endless hatred, envy, jealousy, and violence, not only between individuals but also between social and ethnic groups, between classes, races, nations, and religions. The use of violence, drug trafficking and organized crime, often equipped with new technical possibilities, has reached global proportions. Many places still are ruled by terror “from above;” dictators oppress their own people, and institutional violence is widespread. Even in some countries where laws exist to protect individual freedoms, prisoners are tortured, men and women are mutilated, hostages are killed.

- a) In the great ancient religious and ethical traditions of humankind we find the directive: You shall not kill! Or in positive terms: Have respect for life! Let us reflect anew on the consequences of this ancient directive: All people have a right to life, safety, and the free development of personality insofar as they do not injure the rights of others. No one has the right physically or psychically to torture, injure, much less kill, any other human being. And no people, no state, no race, no religion has the right to hate, to discriminate against, to “cleanse,” to exile, much less to liquidate a “foreign” minority which is different in behavior or holds different beliefs.
- b) Of course, wherever there are humans there will be conflicts. Such conflicts, however, should be resolved without violence within a framework of justice. This is true for states as well as for individuals. Persons who hold political power must work within the framework of a just order and commit themselves to the most non-violent, peaceful solutions possible. And they should work for this within an international order of peace which itself has need of protection and defense against perpetrators of violence.

Armament is a mistaken path; disarmament is the commandment of the times. Let no one be deceived: There is no survival for humanity without global peace!

c) Young people must learn at home and in school that violence may not be a means of settling differences with others. Only thus can a culture of non-violence be created.

d) A human person is infinitely precious and must be unconditionally protected. But likewise the lives of animals and plants which inhabit this planet with us deserve protection, preservation, and care. Limitless exploitation of the natural foundations of life, ruthless destruction of the biosphere, and militarization of the cosmos are all outrages. As human beings we have a special responsibility—especially with a view to future generations—for Earth and the cosmos, for the air, water, and soil. We are all intertwined together in this cosmos and we are all dependent on each other. Each one of us depends on the welfare of all. Therefore the dominance of humanity over nature and the cosmos must not be encouraged. Instead we must cultivate living in harmony with nature and the cosmos.

e) To be authentically human in the spirit of our great religious and ethical traditions means that in public as well as in private life we must be concerned for others and ready to help. We must never be ruthless and brutal. Every people, every race, every religion must show tolerance and respect—indeed high appreciation—for every other. Minorities need protection and support, whether they be racial, ethnic, or religious.

2. Commitment to a Culture of Solidarity and a Just Economic Order

Numberless men and women of all regions and religions strive to live their lives in solidarity with one another and to work for authentic fulfillment of their vocations. Nevertheless, all over the world we find endless hunger, deficiency, and need. Not only individuals, but especially unjust institutions and structures are responsible for these tragedies. Millions of people are without work; millions are exploited by poor wages, forced to the edges of society, with their possibilities for the future destroyed. In many lands the gap between the poor and the rich, between the powerful and the powerless is immense. We live in a world in which totalitarian state socialism as well as unbridled capitalism have hollowed out and destroyed many ethical and spiritual values. A materialistic mentality breeds greed for unlimited profit and a grasping for endless plunder. These demands claim more and more of the community's resources without obliging the individual to contribute more. The cancerous social evil of corruption thrives in the developing countries and in the developed countries alike.

a) In the great ancient religious and ethical traditions of humankind we find the directive: You shall not steal! Or in positive terms: Deal honestly and fairly! Let us reflect anew on the consequences of this ancient directive: No one has the right to rob or dispossess in any way whatsoever any other person or the commonweal. Further,

no one has the right to use her or his possessions without concern for the needs of society and Earth.

b) Where extreme poverty reigns, helplessness and despair spread, and theft occurs again and again for the sake of survival. Where power and wealth are accumulated ruthlessly, feelings of envy, resentment, and deadly hatred and rebellion inevitably well up in the disadvantaged and marginalized. This leads to a vicious circle of violence and counter-violence. Let no one be deceived: There is no global peace without global justice!

c) Young people must learn at home and in school that property, limited though it may be, carries with it an obligation, and that its uses should at the same time serve the common good. Only thus can a just economic order be built up.

d) If the plight of the poorest billions of humans on this planet, particularly women and children, is to be improved, the world economy must be structured more justly. Individual good deeds, and assistance projects, indispensable though they be, are insufficient. The participation of all states and the authority of international organizations are needed to build just economic institutions.

A solution which can be supported by all sides must be sought for the debt crisis and the poverty of the dissolving second world, and even more the third world. Of course conflicts of interest are unavoidable. In the developed countries, a distinction must be made between necessary and limitless consumption, between socially beneficial and non-beneficial uses of property, between justified and unjustified uses of natural resources, and between a profit-only and a socially beneficial and ecologically oriented market economy. Even the developing nations must search their national consciences.

Wherever those ruling threaten to repress those ruled, wherever institutions threaten persons, and wherever might oppresses right, we are obligated to resist—whenever possible non-violently.

e) To be authentically human in the spirit of our great religious and ethical traditions means the following:

- We must utilize economic and political power for service to humanity instead of misusing it in ruthless battles for domination. We must develop a spirit of compassion with those who suffer, with special care for the children, the aged, the poor, the disabled, the refugees, and the lonely.
- We must cultivate mutual respect and consideration, so as to reach a reasonable balance of interests, instead of thinking only of unlimited power and unavoidable competitive struggles.

- We must value a sense of moderation and modesty instead of an unquenchable greed for money, prestige, and consumption. In greed humans lose their “souls,” their freedom, their composure, their inner peace, and thus that which makes them human.

3. Commitment to a Culture of Tolerance and a Life of Truthfulness

Numberless women and men of all regions and religions strive to lead lives of honesty and truthfulness. Nevertheless, all over the world we find endless lies and deceit, swindling and hypocrisy, ideology and demagoguery:

- Politicians and business people who use lies as a means to success;
 - Mass media which spread ideological propaganda instead of accurate reporting, misinformation instead of information, cynical commercial interest instead of loyalty to the truth;
 - Scientists and researchers who give themselves over to morally questionable ideological or political programs or to economic interest groups, or who justify research which violates fundamental ethical values;
 - Representatives of religions who dismiss other religions as of little value and who preach fanaticism and intolerance instead of respect and understanding.
- a) In the great ancient religious and ethical traditions of humankind we find the directive: You shall not lie! Or in positive terms: Speak and act truthfully! Let us reflect anew on the consequences of this ancient directive: No woman or man, no institution, no state or church or religious community has the right to speak lies to other humans.
- b) This is especially true
- for those who work in the mass media, to whom we entrust the freedom to report for the sake of truth and to whom we thus grant the office of guardian. They do not stand above morality but have the obligation to respect human dignity, human rights, and fundamental values. They are duty-bound to objectivity, fairness, and the preservation of human dignity. They have no right to intrude into individuals’ private spheres, to manipulate public opinion, or to distort reality;
 - for artists, writers, and scientists, to whom we entrust artistic and academic freedom. They are not exempt from general ethical standards and must serve the truth;
 - for the leaders of countries, politicians, and political parties, to whom we entrust our own freedoms. When they lie in the faces of their people, when they manipulate the

truth, or when they are guilty of venality or ruthlessness in domestic or foreign affairs, they forsake their credibility and deserve to lose their offices and their voters.

Conversely, public opinion should support those politicians who dare to speak the truth to the people at all times;

- finally, for representatives of religion. When they stir up prejudice, hatred, and enmity towards those of different belief, or even incite or legitimize religious wars, they deserve the condemnation of humankind and the loss of their adherents.

Let no one be deceived: There is no global justice without truthfulness and humaneness!

c) Young people must learn at home and in school to think, speak, and act truthfully. They have a right to information and education to be able to make the decisions that will form their lives. Without an ethical formation they will hardly be able to distinguish the important from the unimportant. In the daily flood of information, ethical standards will help them discern when opinions are portrayed as facts, interests veiled, tendencies exaggerated, and facts twisted.

d) To be authentically human in the spirit of our great religious and ethical traditions means the following:

- We must not confuse freedom with arbitrariness or pluralism with indifference to truth.
- We must cultivate truthfulness in all our relationships instead of dishonesty, dissembling, and opportunism.
- We must constantly seek truth and incorruptible sincerity instead of spreading ideological or partisan half-truths.
- We must courageously serve the truth and we must remain constant and trustworthy, instead of yielding to opportunistic accommodation to life.

4. Commitment to a Culture of Equal Rights and Partnership Between Men and Women

Numberless men and women of all regions and religions strive to live their lives in a spirit of partnership and responsible action in the areas of love, sexuality, and family. Nevertheless, all over the world there are condemnable forms of patriarchy, domination of one sex over the other, exploitation of women, sexual misuse of children, and forced prostitution. Too frequently, social inequities force women and even children into prostitution as a means of survival—particularly in less developed countries.

a) In the great ancient religious and ethical traditions of humankind we find the directive: You shall not commit sexual immorality! Or in positive terms: Respect and love one another! Let us reflect anew on the consequences of this ancient directive: No one has the right to degrade others to mere sex objects, to lead them into or hold them in sexual dependency.

b) We condemn sexual exploitation and sexual discrimination as one of the worst forms of human degradation. We have the duty to resist wherever the domination of one sex over the other is preached—even in the name of religious conviction; wherever sexual exploitation is tolerated, wherever prostitution is fostered or children are misused. Let no one be deceived: There is no authentic humaneness without a living together in partnership!

c) Young people must learn at home and in school that sexuality is not a negative, destructive, or exploitative force, but creative and affirmative. Sexuality as a life-affirming shaper of community can only be effective when partners accept the responsibilities of caring for one another's happiness.

d) The relationship between women and men should be characterized not by patronizing behavior or exploitation, but by love, partnership, and trustworthiness. Human fulfillment is not identical with sexual pleasure. Sexuality should express and reinforce a loving relationship lived by equal partners.

Some religious traditions know the ideal of a voluntary renunciation of the full use of sexuality. Voluntary renunciation also can be an expression of identity and meaningful fulfillment.

e) The social institution of marriage, despite all its cultural and religious variety, is characterized by love, loyalty, and permanence. It aims at and should guarantee security and mutual support to husband, wife, and child. It should secure the rights of all family members.

All lands and cultures should develop economic and social relationships which will enable marriage and family life worthy of human beings, especially for older people. Children have a right of access to education. Parents should not exploit children, nor children parents. Their relationships should reflect mutual respect, appreciation, and concern.

f) To be authentically human in the spirit of our great religious and ethical traditions means the following:

- We need mutual respect, partnership, and understanding, instead of patriarchal domination and degradation, which are expressions of violence and engender counter-

violence.

- We need mutual concern, tolerance, readiness for reconciliation, and love, instead of any form of possessive lust or sexual misuse.

Only what has already been experienced in personal and familial relationships can be practiced on the level of nations and religions.

IV. A Transformation of Consciousness!

Historical experience demonstrates the following: Earth cannot be changed for the better unless we achieve a transformation in the consciousness of individuals and in public life. The possibilities for transformation have already been glimpsed in areas such as war and peace, economy, and ecology, where in recent decades fundamental changes have taken place. This transformation must also be achieved in the area of ethics and values!

Every individual has intrinsic dignity and inalienable rights, and each also has an inescapable responsibility for what she or he does and does not do. All our decisions and deeds, even our omissions and failures, have consequences.

Keeping this sense of responsibility alive, deepening it and passing it on to future generations, is the special task of religions.

We are realistic about what we have achieved in this consensus, and so we urge that the following be observed:

1. A universal consensus on many disputed ethical questions (from bio- and sexual ethics through mass media and scientific ethics to economic and political ethics) will be difficult to attain. Nevertheless, even for many controversial questions, suitable solutions should be attainable in the spirit of the fundamental principles we have jointly developed here.
2. In many areas of life a new consciousness of ethical responsibility has already arisen. Therefore we would be pleased if as many professions as possible, such as those of physicians, scientists, business people, journalists, and politicians, would develop up-to-date codes of ethics which would provide specific guidelines for the vexing questions of these particular professions.
3. Above all, we urge the various communities of faith to formulate their very specific ethics: What does each faith tradition have to say, for example, about the meaning of life and death, the enduring of suffering and the forgiveness of guilt, about selfless sacrifice and the necessity of renunciation, about compassion and joy. These will

deepen, and make more specific, the already discernible global ethic.

In conclusion, we appeal to all the inhabitants of this planet. Earth cannot be changed for the better unless the consciousness of individuals is changed. We pledge to work for such transformation in individual and collective consciousness, for the awakening of our spiritual powers through reflection, meditation, prayer, or positive thinking, for a conversion of the heart. Together we can move mountains! Without a willingness to take risks and a readiness to sacrifice there can be no fundamental change in our situation! Therefore we commit ourselves to a common global ethic, to better mutual understanding, as well as to socially beneficial, peace-fostering, and Earth-friendly ways of life.

We invite all men and women, whether religious or not, to do the same.

APPENDIX B: INTRODUCTION TO THE *GLOBAL ETHIC*

NOTE: Numbers have been added to the list of principles. In the original (see Appendix A), the principles are organized in paragraphs.

The world is in agony. The agony is so pervasive and urgent that we are compelled to name its manifestation so that the depth of this pain may be made clear. Peace eludes us...the planet is being destroyed...our neighbors live in fear...women and men are estranged from each other...children die. We condemn the abuses of the Earth's ecosystems. This is abhorrent!

We condemn the poverty that stifles life's potential; the hunger that weakens the human body; the economic disparities that threaten so many families with ruin. We condemn the social disarray of the nations; the disregard for justice which pushes citizens to the margin; the anarchy overtaking our communities; and the insane death of children by violence. In particular we condemn aggression and hatred in the name of religion. But this agony need not be.

It need not be because the basis for an ethic already exists. This ethic offers the possibility of a better individual and global order, and leads individuals away from despair and societies away from chaos.

We are women and men who have embraced the precepts and practices of the world's religions. We affirm that a common set of core values is found in the teachings of the religions, and that these form the basis of a global ethic. We affirm that this truth is already known, but yet to be lived in heart and action. We affirm that there is an irrevocable, unconditional norm for all areas of life, for families and communities, for races, nations, and religions. There already exists ancient guidelines for human behavior which are found in the teachings of the religions of the world and which are the conditions for a sustainable world order.

We declare:

1. We are interdependent. Each of us depends on the well-being of the whole, and so we have respect for the community of living beings, for people, animals, and plants, and for the preservation of Earth, the air, water, and soil.

2. We take individual responsibility for all we do. All our decisions, actions, and failures to act have consequences.
3. We must treat others as we would wish others to treat us.
4. We make a commitment to respect life and dignity, individuality, and diversity, so that every person is treated humanely, without exception.
5. We must have patience and acceptance.
6. We must be able to forgive, learning from the past but never allowing ourselves to be enslaved by memories of hate.
7. Opening our hearts to one another, we must sink our narrow differences for the cause of world community, practicing a culture of solidarity and relatedness.
8. We consider humankind our family.
9. We must strive to be kind and generous.
10. We must not live for ourselves alone, but should also serve others, never forgetting the children, the aged, the poor, the suffering, the disabled, the refugees, and the lonely.
11. No person should ever be considered or treated as a second-class citizen, or be exploited in any way whatsoever.
12. There should be equal partnership between men and women.
13. We must not commit any kind of sexual immorality.
14. We must put behind us all forms of domination or abuse.
15. We commit ourselves to a culture of non-violence, respect, justice and peace.
16. We shall not oppress, injure, torture, or kill other human beings, forsaking violence as a means of settling differences.
17. We must strive for a just social and economic order, in which everyone has an equal chance to reach full potential as a human being.
18. We must speak and act truthfully and with compassion, dealing fairly with all, and avoiding prejudice and hatred.
19. We must not steal.
20. We must move beyond the dominance of greed for power, prestige, money, and consumption to make a just and peaceful world.
21. Earth cannot be changed for the better unless the consciousness of individuals is changed first.
22. We pledge to increase our awareness by disciplining our minds, by meditation, by prayer, or by positive thinking.
23. Without risk and a readiness to sacrifice there can be no fundamental change in our situation.

Appendix C: “Other” Global Ethics

*2009 Charter for Compassion*¹

When author Karen Armstrong won the 2008 TED Prize, she expressed her desire for the creation and dissemination of a Charter for Compassion. She received additional financial support as she worked to develop such a charter. In November 2009, Armstrong made the *Charter* available to the public by posting it to the charterforcompassion.org website.

The website that features the *Charter* does not permit comments or offer a way to suggest emendations to the *Charter* (questions about the *Charter* are welcome). The *Charter* is presented as a finished document. The website makes an effort to demonstrate buy-in; it invites supporters to signal their support of the *Charter's* contents by filling out an online form. As of October 17, 2014, 99,576 had filled out the form. The website boasts support of the *Charter* by leading thinkers but does not identify them by name.

The *Charter* is not an attempt by Armstrong to identify moral ground shared by the religious and cultural traditions. Rather, it intentionally “transcends religious, ideological, and national differences” with the goal of restoring not only “compassionate thinking,” but more importantly “compassionate action to the center of religious, moral and political life.” The *Charter* places the Golden Rule at the center of its call for compassion. Problematically, it does not define what is meant by “compassion,” perhaps assuming that all religious and cultural traditions define this word in the same manner. Or perhaps Armstrong does not define it to allow different traditions and individuals to overlay the word with their own interpretation of its meaning.

An excerpt appears below:

The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves.

¹ charterforcompassion.org. The Charter for Compassion. Accessed October 17, 2013. <http://charterforcompassion.org/charter>.

Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the centre of our world and put another there, and to honour the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect...

2008 Faith in Human Rights Statement²

A small number of religious leaders were invited to the Peace Palace in The Hague, Netherlands, to sign the Faith in Human Rights Statement (FHRs) on the 60th anniversary of the adoption by the UN of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UCHR). The FHRs affirmed “the responsibility of religious believers ‘to promote human dignity and human rights.’”³

Organized by *Justitia et Pax* (A Dutch Catholic NGO) and STEK (a Dutch Protestant foundation), this occasion received support from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Municipality of The Hague in the Netherlands. According to oikoumene’s website, the select group convened to sign the Statement included a mere ten leaders from the world religions, including the WCC General Secretary at the time. They signed in front of a “large audience of national and international dignitaries and human rights activists.”

Unlike the *Global Ethic*, the FHRs was not vetted by scholars and religious leaders belonging to the world’s religious and cultural traditions; instead, it was vetted by a Dutch Catholic NGO and a Dutch Protestant foundation. Unlike the *Global Ethic*, the FHRs focuses on human rights rather than seeking to identify the moral norms, values, and principles the religious and cultural traditions share. Nor does the FHRs, like the *Global Ethic*, have the buy-in of several thousand representatives from the world’s religions.

² For more information about the “2008 Faith in Human Rights Statement,” see Richard Amesbury, “Inter-Religious Declarations of Human Rights: Grounding Rights or Constructing ‘Religion’?” *Religion and Human Rights* 5 (2010): 43.

³ Ibid., 44.

The oikoumene website contains the full text of the FHRs including these statements:

The primary responsibility to promote and protect human rights belongs to States. In addition, States have duties to the wider communities to which they belong, and bear the responsibility to promote and proclaim the universality of human rights. Today, thousands of innocent people die, face hardship and are victims of ill-treatment due to mere violations of their basic human rights, thus making the enjoyment of basic human rights a mirage for many.

The Declaration is by no means a 'pick-and-choose' list: it is a document that should be accepted comprehensively. There is an urgent need for a thorough reflection on the acceptance of each right as an integral part of the whole. The rights, freedoms and obligations laid down in the Declaration are universal, indivisible and interdependent and interrelated. Despite the national and regional particularities, as well as historical, cultural and religious backgrounds of many, arguments regarding the cultural relativity of human rights should not be encouraged. Rather, a dynamic interpretation of human rights should be welcomed, and ought to highlight States' duty in the promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

In these times when many in the world are fascinated by violence and its various forms, we - religious leaders - should relentlessly promote peaceful means to redress and refrain from the use of violence. With regard to the increase in religious intolerance, and without denying the importance of the freedom of expression, special sensitivity and respect should be shown to the portrayal of objects of religious veneration.

As religious leaders, our role is to study carefully our respective holy scriptures and teachings so as to find grounds for theological rationale in defense of human rights. We need to address situations where harm has been done in the name of religion, promote forgiveness, reconciliation and healing in order to foster mutual respect and understanding among our communities, and stimulate interfaith co-operation with mutual respect.⁴

⁴ World Council of Churches. *Faith in Human Rights*. Published December 10, 2008. Accessed October 17, 2013.

1998 Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the World's Religions

The 1998 "UDHR by the World's Religions" was drafted during a World Conference held in Montreal to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the 1948 UDHR. The faculty of the department of Religious Studies at McGill University in Montreal spearheaded the effort for the 1998 UDHR by asking the planners of the World Conference to add, to the Conference's agenda, the drafting of a new declaration. Its purpose: to serve as a successor to the 1948 UDHR. In the view of the McGill faculty, a replacement was needed in response to persistent accusations that the UDHR was overly "Western," and that it served as a tool of continued imperialism by imposing "Western" values "on the rest of the world in the guise, or rather disguise, of universalism."⁵

Since 1998, the declaration has been the subject of additional presentations at several conferences as well as discussed in panel-sessions at conference plenaries. The last revisions were made in 2000 in response to suggestions made during the international conference, "Ethics and Religion for a Global Twenty-First Century," held at Chapman University and Loyola Marymount University.

Posted on a website which does not allow comments, the 1998 UDHR seemingly remains strictly a product of, and a discussion tool for, scholars. Because it is based on the 1948 UDHR, its principal concerns are political and economic rights, not identifying an ethic shared by the world's religious and cultural traditions.

Below is an excerpt from the 1998 UDHR:

ARTICLE 1

All human beings have the right to be treated as human beings and have the duty to treat everyone as a human being.

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/general-secretary/statements/faith-in-human-rights>.

⁵ See Second Global Conference on World's Religions after September 2001. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the World's Religions*. September 7, 2011. Accessed February 4, 2018.

http://gcwr2011.org/universal_declaration_of_human_rights_by_the_world's_religions.htm.

ARTICLE 2

Everyone has the right to freedom from violence, in any of its forms, individual or collective; whether based on race, religion, gender, caste or class, or arising from any other cause.

ARTICLE 3

- (1) Everyone has the right to food.
- (2) Everyone has the right to life, longevity and liveability and the right to food, clothing and shelter to sustain them.
- (3) Everyone has the duty to support and sustain the life, longevity and liveability of all.⁶

1993 Leonard Swidler's Universal Declaration of a Global Ethic (UDGE)

The Universal Declaration of a Global Ethic (UDGE) was drafted—at the same time that Kung was working on the *Global Ethic*—by Leonard Swidler, then Professor of Catholic Studies and Interreligious Dialogue at Temple University. The UGE claims to offer not only basic principles, but also “middle principles to put it into action.”⁷

The UGE incorporated the input of a significant number of well-known scholars from various traditions. Swidler wrote the Declaration with the intention that it continue to undergo scrutiny and emendation by individuals wherever they may be located in the world until a consensus emerges. To this end, he has issued an open-ended, general invitation for suggested revisions communicated by email or regular mail.⁸ However, my recent attempt to reach Swidler by email failed.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Amesbury, 46.

⁸ Leonard Swidler is the director of the non-profit Center for Global Ethics whose website (<http://globalethic.org>) provides a list of world-wide organizations, each with an online presence, which can serve as resources for the work of global ethics. For example, the Center’s website lists the Association for Communal Harmony in Asia (asiapeace.org), located in the state of Oregon, because it makes available, for the purpose of supporting and enriching global ethics, an archive of stories originating

A version of the UDGE was posted in 1998 on the website of the Global Ethic Center directed by Swidler. The UDGE was last updated, according to the website, in 2010, by Ingrid Shafer, Mary Joe Regan Professor Emeritus of Interdisciplinary Studies at the University of Oklahoma. For unknown reasons, the UDGE has not been updated in five years. Perhaps for lack of input or for lack of monitoring or both, the UDGE seems to be dormant. Even if it were still active, what criteria Swidler would use to determine that a consensus has emerged are not clear. Will he declare a particular version, the “final” version, or is the UDGE to remain a focal point for an ongoing dialogue without a termination point? More problematic, however, is Swidler’s assumption that a consensus can be reached.

Since Swidler’s academic home is in the West, if he declares a particular version to be the “final” version, then the UDGE will, as other such documents produced in the West, become open to charges of Western oppression and of serving as a from-the-top-down global ethic (which may be well-founded). Does Swidler hope that by leaving the UDGE open to revision, non-Westerns will identify oppressive ideas which can then be excised? By remaining open to comments and revisions indefinitely, the UDGE in its present form remains tentative and lacks authority. This may deter potential commenters, whether individuals or groups, from investing time and effort to participate in its crafting.

What is clear is that Swidler insists that efforts to impose a single ethic from the top down have “inevitably fallen miserably short of globality.” As examples, he offers the failure of communism and the rejection of secularism. He does not mention the UN’s Declaration of Human Rights, however, which, though ignored by government leaders, has assumed the practical force and influence of canon law. To avoid falling short of globality, he recommends that, using his or the *Global Ethic* as a basis for conversation (if they wish), “all communities and regions need to make their own contributions to the final Declaration...”

Swidler presented the original draft of the UDGE at the January 1993 meeting of the International Scholars’ Annual Trialogue. Afterwards, the UDGE underwent a period

from the interreligious and intercultural collaboration of South Asian communities in Oregon.

of consultation until it became stable enough that Swidler made it available more widely, including it, for example, in a book published in 1999.⁹

The June 14, 1995 version of the UDGE asserts that the fundamental rule on which the “Basic” and “Middle” Principles are based is the Golden Rule since it has, for thousands of years, been affirmed by religious and ethical traditions alike. The Golden Rule, according to the UDGE, is not limited, in its application, to how one is to behave toward family members, friends. It is also in force when making moral choice with regard to entities described as community and nation. (This move is reminiscent of the granting, by the US Supreme Court, based on the 14th Amendment of the US Constitution, “personhood” to corporations granting them rights and protections that had, until then, only been accorded to the human person.)

What one is to do to one’s “community,” or one’s “nation,” as one would wish done to one’s self is unclear. The UDGE does not stop with the community and nation, but also states that the Golden Rule “should be valid” vis-à-vis “the entire world,” and indeed “the cosmos;” thus, each person is asked with doing to the entire world and the cosmos what s/he would wish done to her- or him- self. The UDGE expounds this claim, explaining that the “loving/loved ‘self’” seeks what it perceives as the good, not just itself, for family and friends, but needs to go further, expanding and transcending its boundaries to desire the good for “the community, nation, world, and cosmos.”¹⁰

Swidler defines ethic, intentionally in the singular, as “the fundamental attitude toward good and evil, and the basic and middle principles needed to put it into action.” The basic and middle principles are more political than ethical. The middle principles, Swidler writes, are “in fact” the same principles that appear in the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights “formally approved by almost every nation in the world.” This list includes:

1. Legal Rights/Responsibilities
2. Rights/Responsibilities concerning conscience and religion or belief

⁹ Leonard Swidler, “Toward a Universal Declaration of a Global Ethic,” in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 42, vol. 3 (Summer 2007): 337-350. The book in which Swidler published the Declaration along with responses from various scholars: Leonard Swidler, ed., *For All Life: Toward a Universal Declaration of a Global Ethic* (Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press, 1999).

¹⁰ Swidler, “Toward a Universal Declaration,” 348.

3. Rights/Responsibilities concerning speech and information
4. Rights/Responsibilities concerning participation in all decision-making affecting oneself or those for whom one is responsible
5. Rights/Responsibilities concerning the relationship between women and men
6. Rights/Responsibilities concerning property
7. Rights/Responsibilities concerning work and leisure
8. Rights/Responsibilities concerning children and education
9. Rights/Responsibilities concerning peace
10. Rights/Responsibilities concerning the preservation of the environment

The UDGE, then, covers the same ground as the UNDHR, and, rather than provide moral principles, focuses on political principles, again underscoring the difficulty of deriving moral principles from human rights/responsibilities. Essentially, then, Swidler wrote a version of the UNDHR that applies to individuals and organizations instead of to nation-states. Indeed, he intended the UDGE to be signed by individuals and organizations:

"[I thought] of the declaration as a public commitment by the signatories (individuals and organizations, such as religious and ethical bodies) to live by the principles enunciated—being expected to be held publicly accountable."¹¹

Though these commitments may be embraced by organizations, can they help individuals resolve moral dilemmas and make ethical choices? The UDGE's principles are more relevant to the social sphere than to the personal one. What would be entailed in doing unto another's property as one would wish done to one's own? What about doing unto other's work and leisure as one would wish done to one's own? While this is conceivable, how does one do to an organization's property as one would do to one's own private property?

The scope of "others" to which the golden rule applies complicates and obscures the individual dimension.

*1995 Our Global Neighborhood, A Report by the International Commission on Global Governance*¹²

¹¹ Swidler, "Toward a Universal Declaration," 344.

Küng quotes “Our Global Neighborhood,” a global ethic calling for a “neighborhood ethics” to “help humanize the impersonal workings of bureaucracies and markets and constrain the competitive and self-serving instincts of individuals and groups.”¹³ This ethic, as the title and Küng’s quote makes clear, focuses on governance issues.

*1995 Our Creative Diversity, A Report by the World Commission on Culture and Development*¹⁴

The World Commission on Culture and Development’s *Our Creative Diversity* report was produced in collaboration with the UN and UNESCO. The Commission included thirteen members, each from a different country, led by the then-President of Peru, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar. Though the report focuses on issues related to pluralism, it includes a chapter, “A New Global Ethics,” dedicated to exploring what peoples of the world morally hold in common. The report explains that the possibility of collaboration between cultures could be improved if, when they come together, they operate out of a shared set of core “ethical values and principles.” The Commission observes: “despite all the differences between cultures there are some themes that appear in almost all cultural traditions.”¹⁵ These themes, the Commission believes, could serve as the basis for a new global ethics. They include the “idea of human vulnerability and the attendant ethical impulse to alleviate suffering where such is possible and to provide security to each individual,”¹⁶ and human rights.

Küng, in his assessment of the Commission’s report notes that the principles advanced are “more political rights and postulates than ethical principles.” Thus,

¹² Commission on Global Governance. *Our Global Neighbourhood, The Report of the Commission on Global Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹³ Hans Küng, “A Global Ethic in an Age of Globalization,” *Business Ethics Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (July 1997): 17-32.

¹⁴ <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0010/001055/105586e.pdf>

¹⁵ Hans Küng, “A Global Ethic in an Age of Globalization,” in *Business Ethics Quarterly* 7, vol. 3 (1997), 20.

¹⁶ Küng quoting *Our Global Neighbourhood, The Report of the Commission on Global Governance*, in “A Global Ethic in an Age of Globalization.”

though the Commission set out, its chapter title notwithstanding, to offer its insights on the world's shared core of "ethical values and principles," they failed to do so.

In Küng's view, their failure underscores two difficulties encountered by secular commissions when attempting to identify this shared core. The first difficulty is that of deriving a common ethic from human rights. This difficulty, he explains, is the result of rights being interpreted differently depending on the society. In non-Western societies such as those of southern Asia: 1) people regard human rights only "in the context of religion," 2) responsibilities take precedence over human rights, 3) human rights as developed in the UN Declaration are either unknown or seem to have little relevance to everyday life.¹⁷

The second difficulty is the reluctance to draw on religious resources. Kung speculates that this "restraint" is the product of the commonplace but reductive link made between violence, war, destruction and religion. If this is the case, then the Commission ignored the great good for which the religions are also responsible. To the detriment of its stated goal, it did not turn to religion's "*incomparable resources*" which include its ability to inspire and motivate people to liberate themselves from totalitarian governments, to attend to, and defend human dignity, and to work toward securing world peace.¹⁸

In his pre-9/11 writings, Küng insists that a 'realistic assessment' of the role of the world's religions and their constructive role in the contemporary age would convince Commissions like this one on culture and development of the importance of turning to them in developing a world ethic. Though this optimistic defense of the world's religions may appear naive, Küng offers three reasons why the religions remain important even under the circumstances of the post-9/11 'new normal':

1. Time and again over the millennia the religions have kept demonstrating their inexhaustible power.
2. The religions can speak much more concretely of human responsibilities than some more recent ethical doctrines.
3. The great leading religious figures of humankind have lived out an ethic in an exemplary way.¹⁹

¹⁷ Küng, "A Global Ethic in an Age of Globalization," 20-21.

¹⁸ Ibid., 21.

¹⁹ Ibid.

*1997 A Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities, Proposed by the
InterAction Council²⁰*

In 1997 (1 September), the InterAction Council of former heads of state or government called for a global ethic and submitted to the UN a proposed “Universal Declaration of Human responsibilities.” It was “designed to underpin, reinforce and supplement human rights from an ethical angle.”

Küng served as senior academic advisor to the InterAction Council while drafting this global ethic. He wrote the first draft, circulated it to the former heads of state and of governments as well as to experts “from different continents, religions and disciplines.”²¹

1997 A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Global Economics

Küng wrote *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Global Economics* as a secular, political continuation of the 1993 *Global Ethic*. To formulate a global ethic appropriate for global politics and economics, he worked with the 1948 UNDHR and the 1993 *Global Ethic*.²²

²⁰ InterAction Council. “A Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities.” Proposed September 1, 1997. Accessed February 4, 2018. <http://interactioncouncil.org/universal-declaration-human-responsibilities>.

²¹ Hans Küng, “Global Ethic and Human Responsibilities,” a paper submitted to the High-Level Expert Group Meeting on “Human Rights and Human Responsibilities in the Age of Terrorism,” April 1-2, 2005, Santa Clara University. Accessed February 4, 2018. http://www.oneworlduv.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/hkung_santaclara_univ_global_ethic_human_resp_2005.pdf.

²² Hans Küng, *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics*, 1st ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

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