

Introduction to Christian Theology

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EMPIRICAL THEOLOGY AND ITS DIVERGENCE FROM PROCESS THOUGHT

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The movement of empirical theology has deep roots in early nineteenth-century German liberal Protestantism and late nineteenth-century American pragmatism. It is important to state at the outset that there is no direct correlation between contemporary empirical theology and eighteenth-century British empiricism, which operates under a highly abstract and truncated account of human experience. Hume's understanding of atomic sense data, tied to a deep skepticism about any religious claims, plays little if any role in current analyses of the forms and dynamics of human experience. For Hume, all complex experiences are products of primary, and ultimately simple, sense experiences that are brought together through resemblance, contiguity (closeness), and habit. Consequently, he held that any complex experience was to some degree arbitrary. Contemporary empirical theology has a much broader epistemology, governed by social theory, that honors the stretch and elasticity of all experience, especially religious. It rejects the idea that all complex experiences can or must be broken down into constituents. Its epistemology takes on the whole of experience in all its ambiguity while honoring its infinitely diverse connective tissue. In the tradition of William James, empirical theology takes relations to be as real as *relata* (thing) and struggles to find the divine or the holy within the relations that gather up the fragments of the world.¹

Perhaps the true founder of empirical theology is Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), whose careful descriptions of all phases of experience culminated in a brilliant phenomenological description of the unique features of religious experience as it opens the self to God.² Schleiermacher refused to see experience in purely subjective terms, insisting that finite human experience is what it is because its intentional object is what *it* is. That is, we can have a religious experience, specifically, the experience of sheer or absolute dependence (*das schlechthinige Abhängigkeitsgefühl*), only because the infinite opens itself to the finite in a direct way. Contrary to neoorthodox misreadings of Schleiermacher, his perspective insists that the woof and warp of human experience are driven by orders and powers outside itself.³ One can feel absolute dependence only because an actual and living infinite enters into subjectivity and shapes it around *its* infinite reality.

Given this kind of robust affirmation of the self-disclosure of divine realities, Humean skepticism is utterly out of place. The *telos* of human experience is to enter into the most pervasive and powerful orders of the world, which, by definition, are religious (although this point will be refined and challenged in the subsequent history of empirical theology). There remains a tension within Schleiermacher's thought that continues to appear and reappear in the ongoing evolution of empirical theology. It becomes manifest in his 1799 essays, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*.⁴ This tension involves the relation between a kind of universalistic understanding of experience and the particular positive or historical needs of a given community that shapes experience around texts, founders, and traditions that are unique to it alone. Put simply: just how generic is experience, and does it point to a kind of universal, perhaps romantic, religion that can dispense with conditions of origin in all their particularity?⁵

Schleiermacher felt pulled in both directions, the generic and the particular, and never fully resolved this tension. Perhaps the genius of empirical theology is just this refusal to land fully on either side of this great divide. The infinite, as an unconditional ground, has no finite or particular traits, while its historical appearance may, some—most notably Hegel—would say *must*, take on finite traits. There are tensions within contemporary empirical theology that mirror those already emergent in 1799. Is empirical theology necessarily Christian, or is it in a position to become a truly universalistic perspective? As we will also see, there is a tendency within some empirical theologians (e.g., Jerome Stone, Donald Crosby, and Charles Hardwick) to put pressure on the concept of divinity itself, thus giving us something that Schleiermacher would never have endorsed: namely, religious experience without a corresponding divine object.

The second historical trajectory animating contemporary empirical theology is classical American pragmatism. Here we see a more diverse and tension-filled antecedent horizon, which has flowered in various ways in the contemporary movement of empirical theology. One way to delineate these branches is to trace them back to specific figures from whom current categorical frameworks are derived. For the majority of contemporary empirical theologians (e.g., William Dean, Nancy Frankenberry, Jerome Soneson, and E. J. Tarbox), inspiration comes from William James (1842–1910) and John Dewey (1859–1952), both of whom integrated the Darwinian turn into biological and social accounts of experience. James is far less social than Dewey and more open to forms of psychopathology within experience, yet both thinkers radically broadened our understanding of what occurs when the self is placed within a shifting and often hostile natural environment.

Thinkers more attuned to James tend to work with a pluralistic and open-ended account of the mobile horizons of experience as they create a kind of personal, or even private and subjective, understanding of matters religious. Thinkers more attuned to Dewey stress social reconstruction and a strong organic model of organism-environment transaction at the foundation of whatever might be held to be religious.⁶ Followers of James can retain the more classical language of consciousness and the subconsciousness, whereas followers of Dewey are far less likely to speak of consciousness at all, preferring

to simply use the very broadly construed word "experience." James is open to a kind of pluralistic theism which speaks of centers of vitality in an emerging universe. Dewey, on the other hand, comes very close to affirming a deep naturalistic agnosticism and views the concept of God as little more than a kind of Kantian regulative Ideal that transcends the ethical or aesthetic, but which denotes nothing really ontological.

A third, and thus far less developed, branch derives its inspiration from C. S. Peirce (1839–1914), founder of pragmatism and semiotics (the theory of signs and their function).⁷ While Jamesians and Deweyans distance themselves from systematic metaphysics, thinkers friendly to Peirce (e.g., Douglas Anderson, Robert Corrington, Robert Neville, and Michael Raposa) recast the concept of religious experience within a more generic framework, which attempts to show the structure of nature and its relation to an ontologically real God. Yet Peirceans also tend to distance themselves from process metaphysics, which is held to be too romantic and idealistic in its delineations of the primordial and consequent dimensions of God. In addition, the Peircean trajectory moves toward a form of pansemioticism that affirms that everything that can be in any way discriminated by the self is manifest as signs that can be translated into other signs. Yet such perspectives also deny that there can be anything like a superorder of meaning or some kind of divine supersign.

Less influential, but still of great conceptual import, is the later thought of Josiah Royce (1855–1916), the absolute idealist who dominated the philosophy department at Harvard during its so-called golden age.⁸ Royce created a brilliant synthesis of Peirce's early (1860s) semiotic theory with his own understanding of the nascent theology of Paul and its relation to the communities of the early church. For Royce, Paul had the profoundly difficult task of weaving the fragmentary sayings of Jesus into a coherent theology and theory of community (as the body of Christ) that could give some self-consciousness to the very fragile communities that he established around the Mediterranean. From Royce's perspective, Paul became the first hermeneut of the church, and showed us how to use signs to interpret the inner workings of the Spirit in history.

There is thus an intimate relation between semiotics and the concept of community. Most empirical theologians, unless they embrace an extreme Jamesian relativism, locate religious experience within what are hoped to be emancipatory communities that live as the locus of signs-in-process.⁹ Royce's more idealistic and absolutistic elements have been dropped, while his semiotic eschatology has been regrounded in naturalism and empiricism. The empirical element can be found in the hermeneutic theory that is directly tied to signs within finite, but community-based, experience.

The classical American thinkers all worked out of what can be broadly construed as a naturalistic perspective. The kind of empiricism that is found in contemporary empirical theology is usually located within a naturalism that is distinctive to the American philosophical scene. While it is impossible to trace the full contour of a term as broad in scope as "naturalism," it is possible to give some indication of fairly stable and recurrent traits that, as a cluster, are unique to natu-

ralism. The most important commitment of a naturalist, in this American sense, is to the idea that there can be no supernatural realm disconnected from nature. Whatever is in whatever way it is, is in and of nature. It follows that God must be fully within nature, even if that same God can also, but in a different dimension, sustain nature.

There is only one nature, a nature that cannot be bound or contained in an order larger in scope than itself. Two other general conceptions usually go with this rejection of anything like a supernatural order. The first is a refusal to specify any kind of basic "what" for nature. That is, nature is best seen as the constant availability of orders, and as those orders themselves. Each order will have some unique traits, and no one trait can be found in all orders. Therefore it makes no sense to posit some primitive substrate, such as spirit, matter, substance, or energy, as being pertinent to all orders in all respects. The second general conception that usually accompanies naturalist perspectives is what the recent American philosopher Justus Buchler has called "ontological parity."¹⁰ This doctrine asserts that nothing can be more or less real than anything else. Contrasted to this is the recurrent position known as "ontological priority," which asserts, either explicitly or implicitly, that something—say God—is more real than something else. Naturalists generally refuse to see nature as a hierarchy or orders each manifesting some kind of diminishing or deepening participation in the real. From the standpoint of ontological parity, God is no more or less real than a fictional character or a passing thought.

Paradoxically, for a true naturalist, it makes no sense to even talk of nature *per se*, as if it were a *discriminandum* or object over and against the self. It makes more sense to see the word "nature" as functioning as a kind of precategory, rather than as a term that could have a contrast. While we *can* speak of the contrast of God and nature, we cannot speak of something "nonnatural" that would contrast with nature. The precategory of nature refers to whatever is in whatever way.

Given this rejection of supernaturalism, it follows that the classical doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is put under profound pressure.¹¹ God is either coemergent with the other orders of nature, or is a later emergent. To talk of a creator prior to creation or, more precisely, of a creator who *becomes* the creator in the very act of creation, is to posit by fiat some reality that is discontinuous with all other realities. Such an ad hoc deity, according to naturalism, actually has no ontological location rather than in the realm of human language. Naturalists in general are suspicious of any concept of divine omnipotence, although their criticisms are different from those of a process thinker like Hartshorne. For a naturalist, God cannot be omnipotent, because God is one order, perhaps the supreme one, within nature. These other orders each have their own sphere of power which is other to the divine power. For most process thinkers, on the other hand, there is a crucial sense in which God still transcends and envelops nature (the position known as panentheism). For them, nature cannot be greater than God. For naturalists, on the other hand, it is almost as if nature is the genus of which God is the species. Put differently, nature cannot be plurally located (since it spawns all locations in its dimension of *nature naturing*), while God can be and is so located.

When naturalism is wedded to the radical concept of experience that comes jointly from the liberal German theological tradition and the classical American philosophical tradition, a powerful epistemology and metaphysics emerge that can recast many of the antecedent doctrines of theology. To take one important example, the classical doctrine of sin is recast in a variety of ways to show that the human process is not so much in rebellion or in disobedience as it is in a state of woundedness, which is a direct result of the indifference of the nature from which the self has been ejected. It is important to note here that this rethinking of the concept of sin runs parallel to current feminist and nonfeminist deconstructions of patriarchy.¹² What makes empirical theology distinctive is that it makes its own deconstructions and reconstructions out of a much more generic and compelling metaphysical horizon which locates race, class, and gender analyses within categorical delineations of greater scope. Put differently, social conflicts are in and of an indefinitely ramified nature, from which it is impossible to prescind such crucial realities. Empirical theology avoids many of the provincial and polemical debates that can reduce theology to a war of finite powers, or of self-positioning narratives.

With the concept of sin transformed in this way, it follows that the concept of grace must be recast. For a naturalist and an empirical theologian, grace is manifest as a natural process that can appear in the qualitative consummation of experience or in the pulsations of nature that have no ultimate whence or whither. Natural grace, the sense that any order is rather than is not, is ubiquitous. Such grace is, of course, beyond good and evil. The ebola virus is sustained by natural grace in the same way that a great creative product is. This grace is not a gift from a divine being, nor is it tied to history in a special way. This is not to say that there may not also be a special form of divine grace that is a unique presence within nature. God's grace has very different relational features than natural grace, although some empirical theologians remain skeptical about this divine and more particular form of grace.¹³

It is safe to say that almost all empirical theologians would call themselves naturalists. Yet naturalism has several species-variations, and each one carries with it a distinct tone.¹⁴ The form that is most removed from traditional religious conceptions is what could be called a *descriptive naturalism* (e.g., Dewey, Santayana, Buchler). This form stresses the utter scope and utter indifference of nature to the needs of the human process. At the same time, it works out of the contemporary neo-Darwinian synthesis and focuses on antecedent causal relations. Teleology is introduced only in sparing ways, and any concept of panpsychism (mind being more basic than matter in the universe) is firmly rejected. A second form of naturalism can be labeled *honorific naturalism* (e.g., Emerson, Heidegger). This form focuses on spiritual momenta within nature and sometimes has a strong eschatological flavor. For an honorific naturalist, nature may or may not be fundamentally mind or spirit, but at the very least it is the locus for world-transforming energies that have been most adequately described by the great religions. Process thought seems to belong to the family of naturalisms, but it is disqualified because of its panentheism, that is, its nature is too small while God is too big. Finally, there is

what might be called an *ecstatic naturalism* (e.g., Peirce, Tillich, Corrington¹⁵), which stresses the utter indifference of nature in the dimension of *nature natur-ing*, while affirming some finite and fragmentary prospects of transcendence within the dimension of *nature natured* (creation).

All three forms of naturalism, the descriptive, honorific, and ecstatic (with process thought being a kind of quasi naturalism), are empirical in methodology. Again, this special sense of the word "empirical" has nothing to do with the tradition associated with Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, each of whom imposed a strait-jacket on experience and reduced it to a pale shadow of itself. For the contemporary empirical theologian, in contrast, empiricism entails the view that experience is a medium in and through which the various orders of the world become manifest in all their complexity. There is no such thing as a drive to boil down the objects of experience to some kind of alleged simple. Indeed, empirical theology rejects the very idea that nature could even contain such simples.

The question suggests itself as to whether or not this fairly wholesale reconstruction of experience, nature, and the divine can play a positive role in the Christian church or, by implication, in reformed or reconstructive forms of Judaism? It is fair to say that empirical theologians remain divided on this key issue. Some, such as Neville, feel very much at home within the Christian perspective and find no fundamental tension between their naturalism and the symbols and claims of either Christianity or Judaism. The church, in such a view, consists of those for whom transforming and creative experiences bind them around the historical and natural appearances of the Christ, or of the covenant. Authority still derives from finite but shared human experience, rather than from antecedent texts or doctrinal formulations. Thus, a number of empirical theologians can claim membership in a positive and historically based religion, even if the locus of authority has shifted.

Yet for other empirical theologians, there is a strong need to move to the edges of Western monotheism. This takes place for two main reasons. The first is that of the growing pressure felt in the encounter with world religions. By definition this relativizes the truth claims of exclusivistic, and some might say, tribal, monotheism. Empirical theologians claim to have an advantage over doctrinal theologians precisely because they can meet representatives of other religions on the ground of common human experience, even though that common ground is, of course, shaped by cultural forces as well. The second reason put forward for moving to the edges of our Western monotheism is that the philosophical resurrection of nature, after its forced abjection for many centuries, makes it impossible to go back to particularistic and self-serving religions that are deeply wedded to structures of origin and power that have no generic import. Simply put, naturalism conveys a breadth of vision that compels a move toward a universalistic, but nonimperial, understanding of religion.

The actual historical situation is, of course, more ambiguous. Most empirical theologians would have to admit that their driving categories and metaphors come from both Judaism and Christianity, even if they are stretched, or even broken, to serve a vision that insists on being generic and nonexclusivistic. This situation is reminiscent of that facing the young Schleiermacher as he tried to balance the

claims of natural religion (a religion of pure universal reason without the alien intrusion of revelation) with a positive religion (that has its founder, text, tradition, and unique symbol system). Empirical theology is no stranger to this tension, but has evolved after the crises of evolutionary theory and the big bang cosmology, thus moving it farther away from positive claims that are tied to speciesism or an anthropocentric view of the cosmos. If anything, the new cosmology makes it increasingly hard to cling to claims of private or group-specific textual revelation. Living in an expanding universe, and immersed in a biosphere driven by natural selection, random variation, and self-organization, it is an insult to prop up a cosmology that would privilege one religion and its history over time. Put in stark terms, entropy (the tendency of any closed system toward heat loss and loss of order over time) will someday make all life on our biosphere impossible. Eschatological dreams are always devoured by an indifferent nature.

Using Wesley's quadrilateral of reason, experience, scripture, and tradition, it is clear that empirical theology privileges reason (in a humbled form) and experience (in an expanded form). Reason is humbled from its seventeenth-century form with its quest for universal sufficient reasons. Experience is expanded from its eighteenth-century form to include anything that could impact on human awareness in any way. The human process assimilates much that it cannot render conscious, yet this too is a nascent form of experience. For example, one may assimilate the effects of gossip without being conscious of them. Some possibilities may emerge and some actualities may change, all shaping the *general tenor* of experience.

Empirical theology is thus a naturalism and a radicalized empiricism. Tradition is held by most empirical theologians to be the presence of the powers of origin, and hence slightly demonic. Scripture is sometimes held to be a slightly heteronomous body of insufficiently generic positions. This is not to say that empirical theology must be antitraditional or hostile to the biblical witness, but that it moves more decisively in the direction of fresh and open experience that rides on the back of a self-transforming nature. Like Kant, who judged the Bible according to the canons of pure and practical reason, the empirical theologian will place the Bible against the infinite book of nature. This larger book dwarfs all human artifacts and shows us that history, no matter what its glories, is a mere species of nature. Hence, empirical theology, at least in its most radical forms such as that found in ecstatic naturalism, shows that history is a subaltern configuration *within* nature.¹⁶ From this perspective, an overemphasis on tradition or scripture is anti-naturalistic, and hence a form of idolatry.

The focus on pragmatic and finite reason, on the one hand, and a radicalized account of experience on the other, received a new dynamism and richness in the twentieth-century movement known as the "Chicago School of theology." This loosely defined movement, held together by a common commitment to Deweyan pragmatism and Whiteheadian process thought, expanded philosophical categories in the direction of a church-related theology that struggled to integrate metaphysics and practical church life.¹⁷ What is interesting about this so-called school is that it shied away from a more robust metaphysics in the process vein,

insisting that the basic process categories, like that of creativity, must work in a less architectonic and, therefore, more pragmatic context. Hence, Whitehead's concept of cosmic creativity, as separate from God, becomes translated into creative processes within nature and human culture that sustain and enhance value.

Perhaps the most important figure of the Chicago School, at least for the philosophical theologian, is Henry Nelson Wieman (1884–1975), whose own daring reconstruction of both Dewey and Whitehead paved the way for later innovators who wished to render theology into evolutionary and empirical terms.¹⁸ For Wieman, value exists as a real force in the world, that is, it is not reducible to human projection, and God is the power of creativity working, not to create the world out of nothing, but to sustain the growth of value in an evolutionary context. Like Dewey, who also taught at the University of Chicago (although not in the Divinity School), Wieman wants the religious impulse to be thoroughly naturalistic and embedded in finite evolutionary structures that surround and shape human culture. For Wieman, as for the other empirical theologians, supernaturalism is antireligious because it cuts us off from the real values that must operate under the shifting and ambiguous events of nature. Insofar as members of the Chicago School ventured to say something of the "what" of nature, it was understood to be the "sum" of energy/events that harbor some genuine novelty and some fairly robust forms of teleology (the process element).

The focus on value moved the Chicago School dramatically away from continental positivism, with its insistence that value is only a matter of human preference projected onto an inert and value-free realm of nature. Rather, value, embodied in goods that are enjoyed by individuals and their communities, is that part of nature that participates in divine creativity in an intimate way. Writing in 1946, Wieman says:

We shall try to demonstrate that there is a creative process working in our midst which transforms the human mind and the world relative to the human mind. We shall then show how transformation by this process is always in the direction of the greater good. The human good thus created includes goods, satisfaction of human wants, richness of quality, and power of man to control the course of events. . . . Throughout the writing that follows we shall take as our guide the creative event, which produces qualitative meaning.¹⁹

Thus there is no ontological abyss separating divine value from human and natural value. God is nothing if not manifest within those creative events of nature that enhance our enjoyment of qualitative meaning. Here we see Wieman articulating a form of the naturalist commitment to ontological parity. No value is less real than another, and no creative event is more real than another. God cannot be more real than the various loci of divine appearance within nature, and no humanly enjoyed value can be in any way less real than God.

The process component of Wieman's perspective is evident in the optimistic sense that there will be an increase in the complexity and enjoyment of value over time. His language is more honorific than Dewey's, who always stressed the equal

status of the precarious and the stable. For a Deweyan descriptive naturalist, there is no room for any kind of eschatology, other than a minimalist communal hope for positive democratic reconstruction. For the empirical theologian of the Chicago School, the goods of nature are also divine goods which we were meant to enjoy even under the strenuous conditions of evolutionary ramification, a process that allows for expansion and teleological growth around instantiated values. Within the travail of evolution, the creative process, greater than the "sum" of finite creative events, has saving and transforming power, a power that is rooted in God, not in mere collective or cultural projection.

For Wieman, we are called by the creative momentum of the divine to enter fully into the tensions of our evolutionary context. He called this process one of "appropriate awareness" that goes beyond mere cognition and awakens all aspects of the self-world correlation. As is often the case in naturalist and empiricist frameworks, social and aesthetic categories seem to usurp strictly religious ones. Yet the empirical theologian can rightly ask: Just what does one mean by the "strictly" religious? For a naturalist or empiricist (in this special sense of the term) there can be no such detached sphere or removed order that has allegedly unique features. Rather, there is a continuum connecting the most "ordinary" experience with all other types. Perhaps the religious experience has a special intensity and a special object, but it is fully permeable to the social, ethical, and aesthetic dimensions of the self-world relation. Hence, our "appreciative awareness" of divine creative energy and value is one that utilizes all dimensions of experience. There is a direct correlation between antisupernaturalism and the rejection of something like a unique and quarantined religious experience.²⁰

The Chicago School brought both metaphysical and social categories to bear on theological issues. Its radical immanentism, tied to an appreciation of science as a privileged form of inquiry, advanced theological reflection by tying it to issues in general culture. However, it must not be assumed that empirical theology is simply another form of apologetic theology that has as *its* task the translation of theological structures into ones held to be congenial to the surrounding culture. The drive within empirical theology is far more radical, precisely because it wishes to push to the edges of established monotheisms to gauge how the human process can encounter nature face-to-face.

In line with this momentum, the concept of revelation becomes dynamized to incorporate future elements. Empirical theology refuses to acknowledge something like an antecedent repository of so-called extranatural wisdom. Revelation is moved into the open future and becomes a form of education or learning within an infinite nature that has no obvious whence or whither.²¹ In *ecstatic naturalism* revelation is understood to be something akin to Tillich's ecstatically transformed reason. In no case will an empirical theologian see revelation as a form of information or as a command. The issue of the covenant is more complex. In Robert Neville's quasi-process naturalism, the concept of the covenant is central to explaining the self-world bond as sustained by an indeterminate God (as being-itself) that becomes determinate in the act of creation. For most empirical theologians, however, the concept of the covenant is muted. Perhaps the alterna-

tive metaphor is that of mourning, a feeling-tone that points directly to the infinite and heterogeneous momentum of nature from which all things come, and into which all things return. In this view, the human process has the status of a foundling rather than that of an image of God that participates in God's glory.

Once that self becomes a foundling it must negotiate between and among the innumerable orders of creation. On this side of the great divide (between *nature naturing* and *nature natured*) there are a number of intrinsic relations and connections that bind the self to nature's orders. Empirical theology, especially in its Jamesian forms, insists that the universe is filled with dynamic continua that grow and change. Any item in the universe will connect with innumerable others. Only process thinkers, however, will go so far as to insist that a given item (actual occasion) will be related to all other past realities. For an empirical theologian, there are genuine discontinuities in the heart of nature, and all continua must admit tears in their fabric. By the same token, there can be no ultimate continuum of continua. Nature is the constant availability of continua, not an overarching unity. Unities come and go in a nature that cannot support all that it spawns.

Is this view of nature pessimistic, especially when contrasted with the Judeo-Christian conception of a good creation? For the empirical theologian, nature cannot be anything other than what it is; namely, the indifferent generative source of whatever is in whatever way it is. To call "it" either good or evil is to make a profound category mistake. Goods come and go, as do demonic eruptions. If nature is the genus of which God is the species (although nature must be beyond all genera), then it cannot be the result of a divinc creative act out of nonbeing. Hence God cannot put a unique moral/ontological stamp on the innumerable orders of the world. Perhaps a much more fruitful image than that of the "goodness" of creation is that of the unconscious of nature, an unconscious that is prior to any predication or moral evaluation.²² It is not often noticed that there is a deep mystical strain in empirical theology, especially in its conjunction with generic forms of naturalism. By the term "mysticism" in this context is meant an awareness of the utter abyss and groundlike quality of *nature naturing* in its inexhaustibility. Justus Buchler coined the term "providingness" as an alternative to the term "providence."²³ This terminological shift represents a profound metaphysical sea-change. Nature has no special relation to providence, but is the providingness that makes each and every order possible. Providingness is without purpose, without consciousness, without moral intent, and without any understanding of time and time's flow. Yet it is indirectly available to the human process through its connection with the unconscious of the self. This connection is one that almost all empirical theologians are still a bit reluctant to make. After all, the classical American philosophical tradition, to name no other, was not friendly to depth psychology (James is only a partial exception to this claim, because of his stress on the transforming focus of consciousness rather than on the heterogeneous momenta of the unconscious). Hence, any connection between the depth of the human process and unconscious providingness of nature is looked at with some suspicion. However, I am persuaded that it is just this connection which remains the unthought within the heart of empirical theology.

This issue of the unconscious of nature can be traced back to the German philosopher F. W. J. Schelling (1775–1854), a contemporary of Schleiermacher. It is well known that Tillich (whom I have called a precursor of ecstatic naturalism) wrote two dissertations on Schelling and that he remained indebted to him throughout his theological career. It is not often noted, however, that Tillich pulled away from some of the more radical aspects of Schelling's theory of nature in order to domesticate it within the context of systematic theology. On the American side, one of the most important sources for contemporary empirical theology is in the writings of C. S. Peirce, who was also a slightly wayward disciple of Schelling. In the move to radicalize our understanding of nature, empirical theology has come close to affirming many of Schelling's key insights. Yet the openness into the utter ground of the world, which is in no way correlated to any Logos-like structure, has been restrained. At this stage in the evolution of naturalism it is important to engage in an emancipatory reenactment of Schelling so that this hidden side of nature, a side that is ultimately known through a kind of mystical experience, can appear. The text that I have in mind comes from his 1809 work *On Human Freedom*:

Following the eternal act of self-revelation, the world as we now behold it is all rule, order and form; but the unruly [*das Regellose*] lies ever in the depths as though it might again break through, and order and form nowhere appear to have been original, but it seems as though what had initially been unruly had been brought to order.²⁴

The unruly is that which is prior to any of the manifest orders of creation. Schelling even hints that it may be prior to God, as a kind of churning or striving that births even the divine. The unruly ground, as heterogeneous momentum, is the ultimate abyss (Plato's *chora* or Julia Kristeva's *material maternal*) out of which the world emerges. Nature is not just what is manifest to consciousness, but what appears in the rhythmic momenta of the unconscious. Here all images of sight, or of the mirroring of nature, break down. A special *kind* of experience takes over that brings the self face-to-face with the unruly depths of a nature that can never be encompassed by philosophy or theology, or perhaps even the divine.²⁵

Not all empirical theologians would be happy with this nod to Schelling, yet there are clear antecedent hints within their various naturalisms that another and deeper trajectory must manifest itself in the self-nature-divine correlation. Suffice it to say that at this historical juncture, few competing perspectives have exhibited such metaphysical courage in an age that prefers piecemeal and self-congratulatory analyses to what Hegel called the "strenuousness of the concept." Empirical theology and its several naturalisms represents a distinctively American contribution to world theology and philosophy, perhaps precisely because it has strong roots in other traditions. In the end it asks us to have the courage to accept a smaller God so that we can become permeable to a much larger nature. At the same time, it asks us to let go of our cherished projections and desires in the face of an unruly ground that does not even know that they exist.

NOTES

1. On the issue of experience and religion, see Nancy Frankenberry, *Religion and Radical Empiricism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987).
2. The locus for this phenomenological description is in the second edition (1830–1831) of his *Der christliche Glaube*, ed. and trans. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart as *The Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928).
3. The chief example of such a misreading is Karl Barth's *The Theology of Schleiermacher*, ed. Dietrich Ritschl and trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982). The text is based on Barth's 1923/24 lectures given at Göttingen University.
4. There are several translations available of Schleiermacher's *Speeches*. An excellent one for teaching purposes, because of its fine introduction, is *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, trans. Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). This translation is based on the first (1799) edition.
5. See Roger A. Badham, "World Spirit and the Appearance of the God: Philosophy of Religion and Christian Apologetic in Schleiermacher's Early Thought," *The New Athenaeum* 5 (forthcoming).
6. For a contemporary defense of a Deweyan natural theology, see Jerome Paul Soneson, *Pragmatism and Pluralism: John Dewey's Significance for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).
7. See Robert S. Corrington, *An Introduction to C. S. Peirce: Philosopher, Semiotician, and Ecstatic Naturalist* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, Pnbs., 1993).
8. See Robert S. Corrington, *The Community of Interpreters: On the Hermeneutics of Nature and the Bible in the American Philosophical Tradition* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1987). Second edition with a new preface, 1995.
9. For an increasing alternative perspective that stresses a strong relativism, see the work of J. Wesley Robbins, who comes out of a sustained dialogue with the thought of Richard Rorty. See Robbins's article "Pragmatism, Democracy, and God: A Reply to Rockefeller," *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 14:3 (September 1993): 279–85.
10. Justus Buchler's main metaphysical work is *Metaphysics of Natural Complexes*, 2d expanded ed., ed. Kathleen Wallace, Armen Marsoobian, and Robert S. Corrington (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).
11. One important exception to this divorce of naturalism and a radical doctrine of creation can be found in the thought of Robert C. Neville. His most important book in this connection is *God the Creator: On the Transcendence and Presence of God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968). A second edition with a new preface has been published by State University of New York Press in 1992.
12. Among those thinkers who are working to combine aspects of feminist analysis with empirical theology are Sheila Davaney, Nancy Frankenberry, and Marjorie Suchocki.
13. For a physicalist account of grace, Charley D. Hardwick, *Events of Grace: Naturalism, Existentialism, and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). For a minimalist account, see Jerome A. Stone, *The Minimalist Vision of Transcendence: A Naturalist Philosophy of Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).
14. On the forms that naturalism can take, see William M. Shea, *The Naturalists and the Supernatural: Studies in Horizon and an American Philosophy of Religion* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1984), and Robert S. Corrington, *Ecstatic Naturalism:*

- Signs of the World, Advances in Semiotics* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1994). Shea's book details the rise of the Columbia University School of philosophical naturalism. This school, which has roots in Aristotle and Santayana, and was embodied in the work of Dewey, Woodbridge, Randall, and Buchler, is second in importance only to the classical period of pragmatism (roughly 1870–1930s). The Columbia School was somewhat indifferent to theological issues, yet has a great deal to say about how nature is to be envisioned.
15. For an analysis of ecstatic naturalism, see Roger A. Badham, "Windows on the Ecstatic: Reflections on Robert Corrington's Theonomous Naturalism," *Soundings* (forthcoming); and Todd A. Driskill, "Beyond the Text: Ecstatic Naturalism and American Pragmatism," *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 15:3 (September 1994): 305–23.
 16. A very important exception to this is the unique historical naturalism found in the work of William Dean. Concerning this, see his two books *American Religious Empiricism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), and *History Making History: The New Historicism in American Religious Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988).
 17. An indispensable study of the whole of the empirical theology movement, with special focus on the Chicago School, is Randolph Crump Miller, ed., *Empirical Theology: A Handbook* (Birmingham, Ala.: Religions Education Press, 1992). See especially the chapters by Tyron Inbody and Nancy Frankenberry for an overall perspective. Other key figures in the Chicago School are Bernard Loomer and Bernard Eugene Meland.
 18. An excellent introduction to Wieman's thought is Marvin C. Shaw, *Nature's Grace: Essays on H. N. Wieman's Finite Theism* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995). This book is the second volume in the ongoing series *American Liberal Religious Thought*, ed. Don Crosby and W. Creighton Peden.
 19. Henry Nelson Wieman, *The Source of Human Good* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1946), 17. For a contemporary empirical theology that focuses on the centrality of value, see Frederick Ferré, *Being and Value: Toward a Constructive Postmodern Metaphysics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).
 20. Another important anthology touching on many aspects of empirical theology is Creighton Peden and Larry E. Axel, eds., *God, Values, and Empiricism: Issues in Philosophical Theology*, Highlands Institute Series I (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1989). This book is a product of the First International Conference on Philosophical Theology, held at Oxford University, and sponsored by the Highlands Institute for American Religious Thought. The Highlands Institute, founded in 1986, is devoted to research and publication in empirical theology and naturalism. In addition to the publishing series is their refereed periodical, the *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy*. A new anthology of original Chicago School writings, covering the period from 1906 to 1988, has been published in two volumes as *The Chicago School of Theology: Pioneers in Religious Inquiry*, ed. Creighton Peden and Jerome A. Stone (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996).
 21. On revelation as learning, see Robert C. Neville, *A Theology Primer* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).
 22. For a slightly different take on this issue, see Donald C. Crosby's article "The Ultimacy of Nature: An Essay on Physidicy," *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 14:3 (September 1993): 301–14.

23. Buchler, *Metaphysics of Natural Complexes*, 3.
24. Friedrich W. J. Schelling, *On Human Freedom*, trans. James Gutman (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1936); from the 1809 German text, *Über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit*.
25. See my article, Robert S. Corrington, "Nature's God and the Return of the Material Maternal," *American Journal of Semiotics* 10:1-2 (1993): 115-32.