

# A Heraldic Ethic

Critical Resistance, Theopoetic Embodiment, and Dialogical Impulses

*L. Callid Keefe-Perry*<sup>†</sup>

## ABSTRACT

This article advocates for a hermeneutic and theological position I term “Heraldic,” a stance argued from some of John Howard Yoder's work which challenges worldviews that are impositionally singular, rigid, and totalizing. In this manner, the “Herald” is one who is impelled by a theopoetic impulse “to roughen up unified appearances.” This paper first condenses and re-articulates that position, reframing the stance against totalizing worldviews as a normative, constructive position for a particular quality of interaction when engaging with the expression of religious knowledge. It then moves to explore some of the ways this Heraldic quality of interaction intersects with ethical thought. Namely, (1) which ethical frameworks are useful in considering the implications of a Heraldic position, and (2) what those frameworks suggest the Heraldic position might be in regards to ethical considerations of intercession on behalf of an innocent other.

---

<sup>†</sup> Callid Keefe-Perry is a member of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and travels in the ministry within and beyond that denomination. He is the founder of Theopoetics.net, an editor of the journal *Theopoetics*, the president of the board for the Transformative Language Arts Network, and a co-host on the podcast Homebrewed Christianity. He is a Doctoral Fellow in Practical Theology at the Boston University School of Theology.

Recent trends in postmodern theological studies relating to multiplicity and Catherine Keller's conception of "polydoxy,"<sup>1</sup> give rise to comparable questions for ethics: do the positions held by those promoting polydox stance(s) necessitate a revisioning or restatement of a Christian Ethic? Put another way, what are the implications for Christian ethics given an explicit acknowledgement of the role of perspective and hermeneutics to shade meaning and propositional knowledge? If the category of absolute and correct knowledge is being interrogated, what are the consequences for moral arguments that depend upon an equally fixed and external code?

This paper takes up these questions by first sketching a polydoxical theological position termed "Heraldic," which draws on the work of Anabaptist scholar John Howard Yoder and the insights of theopoetic thought to develop a critique which challenges worldviews that are impositionally singular, rigid, and totalizing. Drawing on previous work,<sup>2</sup> this position is condensed and re-articulated before being reframed as a normative, constructive model for dialogically engaging with the expression of religious knowledge. From there, consequences of the model are held up against traditional categories of ethical thought so as to determine which ethical frameworks are useful in considering the implications of a Heraldic position. An argument is then made for considering the Heraldic position as a form of post-structuralist ethics which David Hoy refers to as "Critical Resistance," and the piece closes with an exploration as to what new light such a critically-resisting Heraldic position might shed on the traditional, Christian, ethical questions surrounding intercession on behalf of an innocent other in danger of attack.

The root questions here are primarily ones at the intersection of language, epistemology, and ethics: a wondering about what an accepted fluidity of naming does to one's categories of right and wrong. If, as theopo-

---

1 Keller, *Polydoxy*.

2 Keefe-Perry, "Toward the Heraldic."

etic thought suggests, changes in expression of experience can change perception of experience, how do these new perceptions weigh upon the Christian life? What is called for is a sustained inquiry into the relationship between ethics, aesthetics – particularly as pertains to the ways in which we speak about God – and the ramifications for Christian thought when claims of multiplicity are made.

### A HERALDIC THEOLOGY

[The] Herald announces an event . . . Yet, no one is forced to believe. What the herald reports is not permanent, timeless, logical insights but contingent, particular events. If those events are true, and if others join the herald to carry the word along, they will with time develop a doctrinal system to help distinguish between more and less adequate ways of proclaiming; but that system, those formulae, will not become what they proclaim.

- John Howard Yoder<sup>3</sup>

The Herald<sup>4</sup> is one for whom the presence of God has become a reality which is personally undeniable. As a result, this experienced perception of God becomes an event which propels the Herald towards a reporting of the experience of the event(s) which transpired. The Herald is the bearer of kerygma, "an act of linguistic communication, as well as an occurrence or event meant to change the hearts and minds of those who experience it."<sup>5</sup> Yoder's offering calls for a Heraldic position wherein proclamation is not about adherence to "a doctrinal system," but rather an articulation of the

---

3 Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood*, 256.

4 The notion of "herald" is drawn from the Greek *kēryx*, used – among other places – in 1 Timothy 2:7, "For this I was appointed a herald and an apostle . . ." NRSV.

5 Moore, "Kerygma and Dogma."

Herald's experience of "contingent, particular events." His articulation of the Herald paints the picture of a post-colonial, invitational stance which acknowledges that claims to religious knowledge come about through interpretation in the context of community. Furthermore, while Yoder's Herald proclaims some particular interpretation, it is an admittedly time-bound and provisional one. This allows for a permeability of thought and praxis adapted as required to meet the dialectic needs of the community in which one resides. Truth need not change for the articulation of it to shift: that revelation can be interpreted multiple ways does not necessarily change or refute the revelation itself.

By simultaneously admitting human fallibility in interpretation, and the power and truth of a Divine message, communities of faith can attempt to perceive and proclaim what the Good News is for them, in their place and their time, without feeling like they are rewriting scripture or performing mass, communal eisegesis. This model does not call for a *de facto* abandoning of doctrinal positions or traditional expressions of faith for those of some other group. It asks only that some measure of a hermeneutic of humility be enacted when engaging in interpretation of that which exists in an entirety beyond human grasp. Human interpretations are limited and it seems we can not hold onto perfect representation for any extended length of time. Those that are people of faith may strive after faithfulness and God, however a claim to have reached some level of certainty about the entirety of God seems misguided, especially for those of the Abrahamic traditions, wherein there are scriptures which read that "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, / So are My ways higher than your ways / And My thoughts than your thoughts."<sup>6</sup>

It is only through fractured human experience that people sense anything. Rather than this being considered a negative thing though, the acknowledgment that cultural conditioning can influence experience, inter-

---

6 Isaiah 55:9, NRSV.

pretation, and expression of God can open up possibilities for theological discourse. A community which is catalyzed into self-reflection, dialogue, and renewed expression would reach a place akin to Bonhoeffer's view of the "communion of saints," as a group of "persons in profound and God-centered and God-inflamed relationship with one another, where revelation of the other is the revelation of the holy, and vice versa."<sup>7</sup> It is this kind of catalysis that a Herald's proclamation engenders.

The Herald need not be some messianic senator, just a *kēryx* messenger desiring to enter into multiplicitous "God-centered and God-inflamed relationships" which will leave her vulnerable to attacks from scientism and *realpolitik*. As Yoder writes, "what makes the herald renounce coercion is not doubt or being unsettled by the tug of older views. The herald believes in accepting weakness because the message [she carries] is about a Suffering Servant whose meekness it is that brings justice to the nations."<sup>8</sup> The Herald's example serves as a model for others to bear witness to their own experience. She asks how else things might be considered or portrayed and what would happen to practice and doctrine were new interpretations considered. She raises these questions and encourages others to do the same, offering her own expressions of "contingent, particular events," aimed at evoking resonance in the experience of others.

Rather than becoming an idol in the cult of celebrity, the Herald offers his experience to the community in such a way that "he guides their eyes from himself to the spirit that quickens him."<sup>9</sup> The quickening spirit then, though it be fleeting, is that which inspires further proclamation, consideration, and proactive deliberation regarding what is needed to best express and encourage the way God is drawing communities out into the world. The Heraldic stance is one that embraces the richness and variety of ways in

---

7 Raschke, *GloboChrist*, 168.

8 Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood*, 256.

9 Alcott, "Orphic Sayings" 357.

which the Divine can be expressed and experienced, encourages individuals to speak the truth as they understand it, and reminds them that any lasting interpretations, doctrines, and claims to know God fully are always somewhat less than complete. While people of faith strive towards the Divine and will ever consider new interpretations to guide them towards faithfulness, God will always have "a name inscribed that no one knows but himself."<sup>10</sup>

The Herald's announcement is not that there is a new royal dictat or some new universal truth, but that she has experienced some event she feels compelled to share. Even still, her goal is not to individually develop and promote doctrinal systems and formulae, but to speak of an experience she understands to be true, sharing with others and calling out to see if others discern it to be true: to see if it evokes change or response resonant with their experience and their interpretations of Scripture. This is similar in approach to what some theologians refer to as a "process hermeneutic," which asserts that interpreters must "be prepared to treat the text as open-ended and evocative, pointing beyond itself not only to an extra-linguistic word, but more proximately to propositions . . . that engage the imagination."<sup>11</sup> The Herald points toward an experience of the Divine revealed in such a way that he has come to believe it to be true, and brings this sense of truth to others for their consideration: not as the way that it must be objectively, but the way that the Herald has experienced it to be experientially.

A Heraldic approach to interpretation acknowledges that any human proclamation of religious experience, faith, sin, or judgment, is bound by the marks of fallible interpretation, context, and community. Rather than attempting to disregard this fact, the Herald acknowledges that this is simply part of the human condition and proceeds with this knowledge in full view. There is something sublime in human limitations, something about finite sight that is nonetheless in the image of an eternal God. In speaking

---

10 Rev 19:12, NRSV.

11 Pregeant, "Scripture and Revelation," 74.

this way, the Herald is impelled by a theopoetic impulse “to roughen up unified appearances.”<sup>12</sup> That is, in affirming her own experience, the Herald does not just share her story, but invites others to share theirs, raising question to any monophonic theology that suggests a wholly accurate, complete, and closed interpretation of revelation and the Divine can be lastingly held in a single human voice.

In attempting to develop universally applicable answers to religious questions, theologians have sometimes too narrowly defined what is acceptable, too quickly cut off possibility, and too rationally declined an abundant invitation to consider that there is power in the experience of particularities and multiplicity. That is, in the effort to find a unifying answer that is eternally applicable and wholly complete, theologians have been driven to a form of abstraction which has often distanced them from the events that originally inspired their craft. A Heraldic position is a return to an emphasis on the perceived experience of God and implications following from that.

### A DIALOGICAL THEOPOETIC IMPULSE

The previous section focused primarily on the “theopoetic impulse . . . to roughen up unified appearances,” that is, an oppositional stance set against perceived monorthodoxy,<sup>13</sup> articulated as a “rejection of exclusive binary pairs,” and tending towards the polemic, critiquing various instances

---

12 Faber, *God as Poet of the World*, 318.

13 I use this term in awareness of Catherine Keller's work with the term *polydoxy*. While I appreciate what I understand to be the thrust of that term for her, I am eager to maintain the justified rightness, which orthodoxy conveys, while yet allowing for a multiplicity of what potentially constitutes that rightness. Thus, rather than *monodoxy* and *polydoxy* I employ the slightly more unwieldy *monorthodoxy* and *polyorthodoxy* in the hopes that it makes clear I have no desire to obliterate the categories of right and wrong, only to challenge who it is that interprets and polices the boundaries of those descriptions.

of monorthodoxy.<sup>14</sup> The turn now is to a reframing of that idea in its constructive form, as when “its narratives lead to other narratives, its metaphors encourage new metaphors, its confessions invoke more confessions, and its conversations invite more conversations.”<sup>15</sup> At the heart of this investigation is the question of what the constructive results are if the theo poetic impulse is borne out, engendering new conversations and interpretation.

The viability of the Heraldic model for communication of religious knowledge rests not only upon the role of the Herald as a provocateur and challenger of established mores and systems, but also upon the fact that she will be willing to hear out the voices of others even when they are in opposition to her understanding. The Herald is driven by an impulse to dialogue that manifests as an encouragement of new articulations and perspectives, regardless of whether the models or beliefs being articulated are ones she holds. While other epistemic models for the transmission of religious knowledge function within a pre-existing framework of a zero-sum game, the “goal” or purpose of the Herald is not to overcome or overpower other perspectives so that “the” Heraldic perception will win out. Instead, there is a trust that the Herald places in the the Suffering Servant who lifted up those whose voices – and cried – were not heard. As a theological agent, the Herald functions as a means by which minor voices are given space to sound. It is less about the Herald knowing that the opinions held by his dialogue partner are correct, and more about trusting that a methodology that allows for all voices to speak will eventually – owing to discernment and God's steadfast support – help guide us towards a more just and equitable society. In short, the Herald enacts a kind of New Jerusalem theology: the temple – and its associated doctrine – is no longer a particular building or belief, for God has become the means of seeking truth. The Herald attempts to be one facet of moral expression of a realized Kingdom of God. That is, the

---

14 Faber, *God as Poet of the World*, 318.

15 Holland, *How Do Stories Save Us?*, 327.



Heraldic quality of action, or a way of being, engenders the realization of a kind of theological justice in which there is greater opportunity for the perspectives and insights of marginalized people to be heard.

A faithful Heraldic approach would be one in which a multitude of varying voices will be raised in an equally diverse number of communities, with each coming to rest (still contingently) in different doctrinal stances, settling on those which seem to best articulate the experiences and hopes of that community. Each will have its own interpretation of orthodoxy and will understand that other communities will as well. The context(s) of community deeply affect each hermeneutic, and they will understand that interpretation is not the same thing as that which is interpreted.

A clear concern for this approach is the charge of syncretism. That is, if communities can accept varying doctrinal stances as conflicting but equally valid, there is a worry that the differing parts will not be reconcilable. In one sense, it is not worth wondering whether this will happen or not: it is already happening, no wondering needed. Even within a “single” belief system such as Christianity, there exist myriad beliefs, interpretations, and traditions. In another sense, the issue is deescalated because the claim here is not actually that all stances – theological, moral, and otherwise – are objectively valid epistemically, but that the ground upon which all people hold these positions can be equally unstable. A paraphrasing of Santiago Sia on Process Thought is similarly applicable here: there is a distinction to be made between absolute truths and our relative knowledge of such truths. Unlike relativism, this position accepts that there are indeed absolute truths; but unlike absolutism, it rejects the absoluteness of our knowledge of such truths. Furthermore, the certainty with which one holds one’s beliefs does not serve as proof or justification of the absoluteness of those truths.<sup>16</sup> This all begs the question: how is a Christian to proceed given all this decon-

---

16 Sia, “Whitehead on Religion.” As cited in Matthew LoPresti’s “Poiesis, Fides et Ratio in the Absence of Relativism.”

struction? Without firm anchors such as would be provided by an absolute account of morality, how are we to situate our lives and determine our standards?

While much of this paper is concerned with fleshing out answers to those questions, an initial, broad response is that the Heraldic approach necessitates a trust in God above and beyond human reason. More particularly, trust that God through the Holy Spirit will shepherd us into greater things, ever lengthening our path as long as we are faithful and live. If 1) there is a commitment to remain engaged with each other and records of God's work through Scripture and testimony, and 2) communities try to live up to the standards which they develop in the course of such engagement, individuals within those communities will find themselves living more Christ-like lives.

At some level, personal profession of a Christian faith must presume some form of authority given to Scripture, and as such, "living a Christ-like life," should be modeled on Jesus as revealed in the Gospels. Once again though, the issue of deep hermeneutics arises. Whose vision of Christ? What Gospel's articulation gets precedence? Which tradition's interpretation of that Gospel? Put another way, the issue is how one is to differentiate between 1) actual movement towards faithfulness and claims to that and 2) a Christian veneer over simple self-justification of personal hopes and dreams, hiding personal indulgences by means of tricky and selective reading.

Ultimately, there must be a concession: reason can only take the Christian so far, and at some point faith must drive her to a state of belief without proof. There she accepts that God via the Holy Spirit is actually able to instruct and convict contemporaneously. Yes, there is record of God's work and the result of Jesus' sacrifice in Scripture and testimony, but that is all second-order discourse, talking about how God has been revealed. Spirit's movement serves as affirmation of the present Living God, calling forth not

just a response of submission, obedience, and repentance, but also one of joy, communion, and liberation. Lives ordered under the Gospel ought to result in the fruits of the Spirit; getting an argument about morality right is not the equivalent of trying to live out a Godly life.

The proposition here is that the Heraldic model is a viable means of communication of religious knowledge and the dialogical impulse is one which helps to support Christian faithfulness. From this, it follows that a life lived from within the assumptions made by the model will be observably different from one operating within a monorthodox one, and the results of an encouragement of the Heraldic perspective will lead to ethical and concrete changes in Christian practice. An exhaustive exploration of this possibility is beyond the scope of this work, however, what follows is a preliminary sketch of what a Heraldic ethic might entail and what some of those changes might be.

### TRADITIONAL MODELS OF COMPARISON

A key recognition here is that the term “ethic” is a poor fit if we are limited to the traditional categories of ethical thought. That is, while a consequence of living into a Heraldic perspective will likely result in some set of actions more than others, its guiding focus is not moral or ethical, but dialogical. In spite of this, or perhaps because of this, there emerges a quality to the actions which seems worth considering in ethical terms. This begs the question though: if the Heraldic schema fails to comply with standard ethical frameworks, why bother with the comparison? In other words, if it doesn't seem to be concerned with ethics, what about a Heraldic position makes it worth considering ethically? The answer to this is that regardless of its stated intent, an embodiment to such a position entails a resulting moral quality of action. That is, while the Heraldic perspective is

not directly concerned with ethics, the results of living within a Heraldic perspective are themselves appropriate to consider ethically.

There is a comparable allusion to the work of sculptors such as Tim Noble and Sue Webster, who craft pieces in metal, but whose medium of artistic expression could be considered light and shadow. After assembling what looks like a random amalgamation of scrap metal, they shine light through it at a particular angle to produce a shadow which becomes the focus of attention. If one were to solely observe the results of welding and scrap, she could not hope to see the image being cast upon the back wall. Just as steel is not made of shadow, yet nonetheless results in it, so too is the relationship between the Heraldic position and an ethical framework. To see where the ethical and Heraldic overlap and diverge, it is worth considering the basic functional principles that would inform a Heraldic perspective and comparing these to various models of traditional ethical thought.

Ethics – broadly construed – concerns itself with morality and the frameworks for judging good from evil, right from wrong, and socially beneficial from detrimental. Conversely, the organizing principles of Heraldic thought are an engendering of minor voices to speak against totalizing dominant worldviews, an increased sense of liberation and faithfulness as a result of the speaking out, and an encouragement of dialogue with others. The schema which describe the Heraldic perspective intersects with moral frameworks, but is primarily concerned with the degree to which 1) individual experience is being given voice, 2) communities test that experience against their own and find comfort and truth in what follows as a consequence, and 3) communities and individuals find themselves engendering greater dialogue with others on issues to which they can speak their experience. What follows next is a taking up of various forms of ethical thought in comparison to this type of framework, each providing insight as to what the implications are for Heraldic action.

In some ways, the three prongs of the Heraldic schema above provide “goals” to which Heralds might aspire, akin to a consequentialist account of ethics. However, it does not neatly fit ethical consequentialism in that even if each prong is positively met by some series of actions, there is no guarantee that the actions involved necessarily lead to moral conduct. That is, while ethical consequentialism is a normative account which asserts that moral actions are those which produce, or lead to, beneficial outcomes, it is entirely feasible that a Heraldic action might not lead to such results. For example, a religious extremist may commit some act of violence that 1) non-verbally communicates his perspective, 2) pleases his community, and 3) brings that community into dialogue, but I would be reticent to identify this as strictly good.

Ultimately, the belief of the Herald would be that her actions do lead to some greater connection to one another and the Divine, which would amount to moral action given an assumption of God's goodness. However, given limited human capacity regarding religious knowledge, it may not be apparent how a particular perspective serves this connection in the present. In the Heraldic insistence upon movement to dialogue as a primary impetus rather than moral action, something other than ethical consequentialism emerges. If one is willing to strictly equate communication and dialogue with moral action and goodness, then there is an argument for the Heraldic ethic as a consequentialist one, but that seems a rather significant stretch. Moving from consequentialism then, a deontological ethic can be considered.

A deontological position is a normative one which evaluates morality from an examination of an agent's actions themselves, as opposed to the consequences of the actions, or the agent's intention or reasoning for doing them. A deontological ethics arguing along Kantian lines – sometimes called

an absolutist deontology<sup>17</sup> – would posit a fixed morality wherein an action is judged apart from its results. That is, an action can still be wrong even if it results in a great, net good. This is perhaps epitomized in Kant's line that it is “better the whole people should perish” than unethical action be done.<sup>18</sup>

Another way to consider deontological ethics in the Kantian stream is to acknowledge that this perspective posits that the only purely good thing – i.e. it needs no qualification – is a good will/intention, with all other things having varying degrees of goodness or wrongness. Interestingly, though deontological reasoning proceeds along markedly different lines than consequentialist thought, it is once again the fact that the Heraldic schema is primarily calibrated to the theo-poetic task of encouraging new articulations and conversations places that it is placed outside of the rubric which a deontological position employs. A closer fit, though still imperfect, is the position of virtue ethics as articulated by Martha Nussbaum.

Virtue ethics asserts that morality is to be evaluated from an examination of the agent's intention or reasoning for doing an action, rather than the eventual outcome of those actions (consequentialism), or to what degree the actions adhere to an abstract and fixed statute (deontologicalism). At its core, any essentialist, neo-Aristotelian<sup>19</sup> formation of virtue ethics presupposes three things. 1) That there exist positive, possessable, transcultural virtues, or qualities of character, that function to guide the agent's actions; 2) That the agent can learn to employ these guides with increasing success as she attempts to live up to her virtuous ideals, accruing experience and gain-

---

17 While there are technically forms of deontological ethics which are not absolute, e.g. a sliding scale threshold deontology, they so closely resemble consequentialism that the reasoning above would hold true.

18 Kant, *The Metaphysical Elements*, 100.

19 This working definition is cribbed from Martha Nussbaum's “Non-Relative Virtues: an Aristotelian Approach,” which she proposes over and against a kind of culturally dependent, relativistic Virtue Ethics such as she identifies with the types propounded by Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue*, or Foot in *Virtues and Vices*.

ing practical wisdom (*phronesis*) on how to better accomplish the things she wishes to do; and 3) That there is such a state as the “highest human flourishing and happiness” (*eudaimon*) which is achievable when the agent lives virtuously.

Where virtue ethics and the Heraldic position fail to overlap fully, it is not through some shortcoming of virtue ethics: while the ethical argument is set to address moral human behavior broadly, the almost-singular concern of the Herald is narrowly about the communication of religious experience, the communal testing of that experience, and the consequent frameworks built around the insight such experience provides. The reason this model provides a better basis for comparison is not because of its identical scope, but because it acknowledges that to some degree, the notion of “virtue” as such, is in flux. Nonetheless, it does not abandon the notion that particular virtues can be ascertained. That is, it does not accept an “anything goes” mentality, but rather, asserts that there are processes and re-calibrations by which the virtues – and how they culturally manifest – are clarified and articulated. Nussbaum offers the following on this point precisely:

Despite the evident differences in the specific cultural shaping of the grounding experiences,<sup>20</sup> we do recognize the experiences of people in other cultures as similar to our own . . . [W]e can understand progress in ethics, like progress in scientific understanding, to be progress in finding the correct fuller specification of a virtue, isolated by its thin or "nominal" definition . . . When we understand more precisely what problems human beings encounter in

---

20 For Nussbaum, “grounding experiences,” are those cultural events from which we all derive our frame of reference for virtuous behavior. Put another way, while people from varying cultures and/or with different worldviews may very well disagree about the virtuous response in a certain situation which causes concern, Nussbaum asserts that all people are concerned, and engage, with the same types of situations. These areas of concern, or “meaningful spheres of a truly human life,” are the grounding experiences.

their lives with one another, what circumstances they face in which choice of some sort is required, we will have a way of assessing competing responses to those problems, and we will begin to understand what it might be to act well in the face of them.<sup>21</sup>

Forced into this rubric, it is conceivable that the consequences of the Heraldic position could be categorized as a form of virtue ethics in the sense that the fulfillment of the three prongs of Herald's schema serves as a virtue, perhaps falling somewhere under civility or perceptiveness in Aristotelian terms. Following that, the Herald learns better means (acquires *phronesis*) of being his virtuously dialogical self, moving towards a sense of *eudaimon* that for the Christian Herald is likely to be associated with being Christ-like. "Heraldism" – for lack of a better term – could then be considered a virtue in the meaningful sphere of human activity relating to religious expression.

Taken this way, Nussbaum's position provides a useful account of "progress in ethics, like progress in scientific understanding,"<sup>22</sup> which is dependent upon the exploration of what people "encounter in their lives with one another." Here we begin to more readily see a possible relationship between the Heraldic position and ethics: as a means by which a society might seek to find the "correct fuller specification of a virtue, isolated by its thin or "nominal" definition." In particular, where moral judgments and virtues are directly linked to dominant and presumed religious knowledge, the Herald's theopoetic "roughing up of unified appearance," will serve to uncover minority perspectives on grounding experiences that are no less

---

21 Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues," 688.

22 It is worth noting that in this "assessable competing responses" rebuttal to relativism, Nussbaum very strongly appears to resemble a Deweyan ethical pragmatist rather than a virtue ethicist. To some extent this is unavoidable as she has to account for shifting perspectives over time, however her overlap in this regard is more than passing.



valid than those in positions of more significant privilege, but which are less likely to be given voice by those in power. Following this reasoning and adding in John Caputo's voice yields an interesting result.

Caputo asserts that "there are always lingering or unavowed theological presuppositions in what we say or do," and therefore "it is not a question of getting free of our presuppositions but rather of entering into them all the more primordially."<sup>23</sup> If this is the case, and I suggest that is, then the Heraldic position takes on a much more significant role. Rather than a mere supplemental method to be employed in the subsets of virtue ethics discourse which directly relate to issues of morality over which religion has direct sway, the Heraldic perspective functions as a means of critique to all ethical positions, interrogating them as to what presuppositions they maintain, and upon which doctrines and beliefs they have come to settle given such positions. In other words, the Herald herself become a catalyst for sites of Critical Resistance and pragmatic ethical critique.

### **PRAGMATIC ETHICS AND HOY'S CRITICAL RESISTANCE**

As Nussbaum herself notes, one point of necessary tension is the assessment of categories of virtue. In her attempt to maintain that such categories are, in fact, discernible, she makes an argument not far afield from Yoder's original claims about the Herald, namely that if articulations "are true . . . they will with time develop a doctrinal system, to help distinguish between more and less adequate ways of proclaiming." Core to both these positions is the belief that true articulations will win out.

For theological reasons, Yoder believes that the Herald self-acknowledgedly accepts a non-coercive approach to religious knowledge "because the message is about a Suffering Servant whose meekness it is that brings justice to the nations." That is, his meekness is part of the larger project such that

---

23 Caputo, "Theopolitic," 105.

justice and equity are entailed in the embodiment of the Heraldic perspective. Without the Herald having to attack other positions, Yoder assumes that communities will discover that there are “more and less adequate ways of proclaiming,” and the wheat will fall from the chaff. For Nussbaum, there is a parallel means of assessing categories of specific virtue, eventually settling upon, “thick definitions which correspond to the experience and traditions of a particular group.” In both cases there is an agreement that even for situations where “adequate ways,” and “corresponding definitions” refer to initially nebulous concepts, a process of clarification is possible, taking place over time, and continually provisional.<sup>24</sup> This type of “ethics without strong metaphysics” argument is present within pragmatic ethics as well.

While not a traditional ethical category, pragmatism in general is certainly employable in the arena of ethical thought. A key insight into philosophical pragmatism and its intersection with ethics is the notion that whether or not there are fixed, objective, moral standards – such as literally interpreted Biblical codes of conduct – the fact is, that practically speaking, humans will not be able to lay absolute claim to them without some statement of faith. Put another way, there is no way of proving the absolute-ness and universality of a moral stance objectively. For the Pragmatist, the issue isn't a metaphysical conflict between absolute external morality and moral relativism, but about the practical ways in which those positions try to come to terms with one another and get lived out: even if there is an absolute morality after which we are striving, our morality derives – in practice at least – from ethical thinking that is socially con-

---

<sup>24</sup> Adaptive and contextual positions such as this are too often accused of being absolute-relativist, or, in the very least, overly permissive. What is interesting to note is that the literary theorist Stanley Fish, a self-proclaimed champion of communal hermeneutics and the notion of interpretive communities, advocates that we need to “rule out some interpretations.” Often caricatured as a postmodern advocate of being wishy-washy, even he asserts the possibility of evaluating the appropriateness of meaning. For more see Fish's “What Makes an Interpretation Acceptable?”

structed. The realistic ethicist employing pragmatic philosophy is not attempting to use pragmatism to settle upon “the” proper ethical and moral framework, but is instead trying to find which moral judgments and assumptions seem to work better for the communities in which they are used.

Accepting the premise that the “best framework” is shorthand for “best for now given what we know and have experienced,” the Pragmatic ethicist allows for acknowledging human fallibility and moral revisioning in light of new knowledge and experience. Indeed, communities and individuals may be mistaken even about those moral judgments which they had been most confident. The pragmatists do not find this disheartening or a cause for apathy, suggesting instead that it gives them “compelling reason to subject our views to the scrutiny of others.”<sup>25</sup> With a broader range of knowledge and experience from which to develop interpretations and guiding frameworks, the revisioning process should continue; whether it is being ever-revised en route to a final, perfect revision, or is simply the process of a continual, communal development, does not change the present mechanics of moral framework construction. Either might be possible, but what the Pragmatist asserts is that the present processes actually taking place are not contingent upon the resolution of that kind of metaphysical dilemma. Morality is realized socially even if there is an external model which we have some a priori obligation to obey. This recognition is concisely articulated by Hugh LaFollette, whose comments on the application of pragmatism to ethics are equally well-suited to the processes at play in a Heraldic position:

Just as ideas only prove their superiority in dialogue and in conflict with other ideas, moral insight can likewise prove its superiority in dialogue and conflict with other ideas and experiences. Hence, some range of moral disagreement and some amount

---

25 LaFollette, “Pragmatic Ethics,” 417.

of different action will not be, for the pragmatist, something to bemoan. It will be integral to moral advancement, and thus should be permitted and even praised, not lamented. Only someone who thought theory could provide final answers, and answers without the messy task of doing battle on the marketplace of ideas and of life, would find this regrettable.<sup>26</sup>

It is exactly the “messy task of doing battle on the marketplace of ideas and life,” that the Herald proclaims as he theopoetically “roughens up unified appearances,” and encourages Nussbaum's “progress in ethics.” As an attempt to embody Jesus' acceptance of, and space-making for, “the least of these,” within the realm of religious expression and dialogue, the Herald necessarily pushes against perspectives that might otherwise attempt to drown out minor voices. This push, this “marketplace battle,” is at the heart of what David Couzens Hoy offers as an attempt to craft a framework for a post-structuralist ethics.

In his text, *Critical Resistance*, Hoy draws on a variety of French post-structuralist thinkers in an attempt to provide a philosophical explanation for the existence of resistance against oppressive domination even when it seems impossible that such resistance might be successful. Of particular relevance to the Heraldic project is his canvassing of Emmanuel Levinas, especially his concepts of intersubjectivity and the Face: there Hoy elucidates the presuppositions that undergird Levinasian thinking on ethical resistance. I suggest that his insights on this topic are equally applicable to understanding the rationale for positing the Heraldic position as one that entails a necessary shift in ethical thought.

Hoy's position is one that he refers to alternatively as the “post-critique model,” or more specifically, as “critical ethical resistance.” He cribs from Levinas, abstractly defining this critical resistance as “not the attempt to use power against itself, or to mobilize sectors of the population to exert their

---

26 LaFollette, “Pragmatic Ethics,” 419.

political power,” but “the resistance of the powerless.”<sup>27</sup> That is, Hoy acknowledges that while dominant systems and individuals with social cachet will resist attempts to wrest power from them, his focus is upon resistance to those forces, not resistance from them. Far from self-defeatist thought, his characterization of critical resistance as “the resistance of the powerless” is via the idea that life resists death. Though each struggle ultimately succumbs to the unavoidable, the larger arc is that the struggle continues in spite of this. Each instance of “failed” resistance contributes to the success of the larger, continuing struggle. This is an important point and plays out in interesting ways.

Consider the irony of LaFollette's phrase “battle of the marketplace.” While it is common to use militaristic metaphors for capitalistic competition, when pushed, this reveals a fundamental flaw in our characterizations of these types of interactions. One need only look to communist attempts at market exchange to realize that if a merchant defeated others completely, the power amassed by the remaining monopoly does not breed guaranteed success. Similarly, if the merchants against which shoppers are “battling” were actually to be defeated, then they would be without a marketplace! Market-goers do resist the merchants in the sense that they push against the other's desires and assets with their own, but for the Market-goer to remain the Market-goer, and the Merchant the Merchant, utter victory is impossible: their mutual struggle is self-defining.

Hoy points this out via examples from political theorist Wendy Brown, who notes that when workers dream of a world without work and teenagers long for a world without parents, even their desires are being unwittingly shaped by the social structures from which they want to be freed. A teen who imagines a world without parents still “presupposes the subject identity 'teenager,' and therefore the same social organization that is resented.”<sup>28</sup>

---

27 Hoy, *Critical Resistance*, 8.

28 *Ibid.*, 3.

Hoy's broad point is that often people are not aware of the extent to which even their dreams "presuppose the patterns of oppression that they are resisting."<sup>29</sup> Thus, all resistance is somewhat blind in the sense that even while it is being resisted, the object being resisted configures the resistor's hopes and visions of the future. This is why Hoy uses "the resistance of the powerless," and encourages this type of struggle, blind spots and all. "[A]gents need not know explicitly all their reasons and principles in advance . . . . On this account, the engaged agents will find out what is possible by seeing what their resistance opens up."<sup>30</sup> Why encourage resistance against oppressive domination even when it seems impossible that such resistance might be successful? Because in the resisting, new sites of resistance can emerge and those engaged in the struggle are able to see that more is possible because of what "their resistance opens up." This is precisely the position of the Herald.

The Herald's push against a totalizing theology and its accompanying ethic unavoidably becomes a tilting at windmills. Utterly denying the possibility of belief rapidly devolves into nihilism and/or skepticism. At some point, whether the argument is metaphysical, materialistic, hedonistic, or otherwise, people will end up believing something. The Herald cannot change this, she can only open up times when those beliefs might shift. What I think Hoy points out that is useful though, is that even those struggles which are ultimately doomed to "fail," may illuminate some greater measure of the form into which oppression has shaped thinking. This illumination then can result in a reconsideration of actions taken that stem from that thinking.<sup>31</sup>

---

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid., 11.

31 While somewhat tangential to this point, but relevant in broader consideration, the Greek word *μετάνοια* (*metanoia*) entered into Strong's Dictionary of Greek as a derivative of a verb *μετανοέω* (*metanoeo*), given as "to think differently or afterwards, that is, reconsider." It is this word that is often translated into English as "repentance."

What comes into focus as a Heraldic perspective is viewed through the lens of Hoy's Critical Resistance is a type of "ethical epistemology" in which "truth claims are justified most essentially in terms of their relational or ethical adequacy (as opposed to their rational or instrumental adequacy)" that is, "truth is determined by its relation to local communal contexts of responsibility, rather than by its relation to an abstract and universal system."<sup>32</sup> Insofar as our ethical frameworks result in moral judgments which affect the lives of others, insistence on the veracity of the beliefs and religious knowledge we hold which support those frameworks should be tied to claims that are a posteriori. This type of thinking leads phenomenologist and theologian Peter Rollins to wonder if "truth," as we colloquially use it, is applicable at all to the task of theology and ministry.

Rollins offers that the idea of "religious knowledge" ought not be construed as a way of firmly defining the world and events within it, but as a means of affecting transformation on reality. Framed this way, "instead of truth being an epistemological description, it is rediscovered as a soteriological event (an event that brings healing and salvation). This is no more a form of relativism than it is a form of absolutism; rather it is an understanding of truth as that which transforms us into more Christ-like individuals."<sup>33</sup> Severing the expression of religious knowledge from primary claims to absolute justification opens up possibilities for this type of knowing to be grounded not through cognitive acknowledgement, but through ethical relation to one another. It is in his exposition of this type of relational knowing that Hoy employs the work of Emmanuel Levinas.

---

For example, in Mark 1:4, "repentance for the forgiveness of sins." In this light, the Herald calls for repentance, not as a euphemism for some particular doctrinally-inspired behavioral adherence, but as a reconsideration of actions stemming from oppressive thinking. For more on this see my piece "Toward the Heraldic."

32 Clegg, "Epistemology and the Hither Side."

33 Rollins, "Christian A/Theism," 15.

For Levinas, meaning itself is “produced in the face of the Other . . . ,”<sup>34</sup> and he argues that “prior to any act, I am concerned with the Other and can never be absolved from this responsibility.”<sup>35</sup> In other words, part of the human condition is a sense of being “responsible without being culpable.”<sup>36</sup> We are tied to one another just as the Merchant and Market-goer are, and philosophy and theology “is misguided if it tries to break down alterity.”<sup>37</sup> Such types of Knowing-as-Relating-to-the-Other accept that the heart of the human condition – even as far down as epistemology – is an undeniable giving of oneself to, and a welcoming of, the Other.<sup>38</sup>

To see such a kenotic framework enacted one can examine the sacrifice of Jesus, a giving of self to the other which not only theo-poetically provided “a narratives that lead to other narratives,” and “ metaphors [that] encouraged new metaphors,”<sup>39</sup> but also inspired centuries of concrete, ministerial work for good, a resistance to the seemingly indefatigable Principalities and Powers, the “cosmic powers of this present darkness.”<sup>40</sup>

---

34 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 81.

35 Hoy, *Critical Resistance*, 162.

36 Hoy, *Critical Resistance*, 162.

37 *Ibid.*, 115.

38 I would be remiss here if I did not acknowledge the glaringly problematic issue of the fact that the form of Levinas' phenomenological argument here is exactly the type of strongly metaphysical, abstract reasoning against which much of the paper up until this point was railing against. To this point I can reply on three fronts, the first two minor, the third greater. (1) However Levinas arrived at his words, for me they do speak of my experience. (2) I believe they concisely (though perhaps in a too-rarefied air) articulate the kind of self-given-to-another ethos that in practice would be born by personal narratives and particular articulations of experience rather than philosophical commentary. (3) A recapitulation of my belief that reason can only take a person of faith so far: while Levinas is trying to rationalize and articulate reasoning for the fundamental importance of the Other, I do not believe this to be true because Levinas says so but because that is how I seem to experience it. Levinas has merely provided a way to articulate that experience.

39 Holland, *How Do Stories Save Us?*

40 Eph 6:12, NRSV.



## HERALDIC ETHIC AS CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

While it is certainly not within the scope of this paper to systematically address the entire major corpus of debate taken up within Christian ethics, a significant consideration of one of the major points will provide some insight into the way a Heraldic Ethic might function. As argued above, if the Heraldic model is a viable means of communication of religious knowledge, and the dialogical impulse is one which helps to support a Christian faithfulness, then an encouragement of the Heraldic perspective will lead to ethical and tangible changes in Christian practice.

The purpose of this section is to consider how the Heraldic position might engage with a complicated issue of Christian ethics that has been controversial for centuries: what is the appropriate role of the Christian regarding intercession when in a situation where an innocent third party is in danger? Formulated in many iterations over the years, this issue is at the heart of Just War theory and much of the problematic relationship between Christianity, the State, and the Military. A freshly relevant response and/or perspective on this issue would seem obligatory if the Heraldic position is to be considered as a viable approach. First a classical Augustinian response to this issue will be detailed and then a possible Heraldic response will follow.

In short, the issue at hand is the degree to which it is appropriate or required by faith to engage another in the use of force. The standard complication is that the force in question is not being employed for self-gain or even self-protection. The inquiry is about what the Christian is to do when an innocent third party is unjustly in danger from an attacker and it is possible their danger would be reduced if the Christian forcefully interceded. A strong advocate for the correctness of forceful intercession, Jean Bethke Elshtain states her position as follows:

If our neighbor is being slaughtered, or systematically and continually crushed by the heavy hand of an intolerable oppression, the just use of force and the vocation of soldiering rise to the fore as options to which we may be urged, perhaps even commanded, by a God of justice.<sup>41</sup>

Strongly neo-Augustinian in this regard, Elshtain draws upon a line of thinking that traces back through Aquinas to Augustine himself. In the section “Of War” within the *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas writes that “it is said to those who are in authority:<sup>42</sup> Rescue the poor: and deliver the needy out of the hand of the sinner,” and he paraphrases Augustine, claiming that “the natural order conducive to peace among mortals demands that the power to declare and counsel war should be in the hands of those who hold the supreme authority.” Augustine himself is equally pointed, though more abstract, when he writes that “the wrong-doing of the opposing party . . . compels the wise man to wage just wars.”<sup>43</sup>

The intervention between the attacker and the innocent third party is to come from the onlooker's love for both other parties, and Augustine argues that this reasoning applies to individuals as well as countries at war. Both the innocent third party and the attacker are people for whom Christ died and therefore are worthy of love. However, because the criminal is unjustly transgressing against the other, the Christian should intercede. Christian love for Augustine requires that the innocent onlooker be defended and that the Christian defend against the attacker, being willing to “meet force with proportionally effective force right up to and including the possibility of killing.”<sup>44</sup> What is important for Augustine is that it be clear that even with the possible death of the attacker at the hands of the Christian, there is no

---

41 Elshtain, “Just War Against Terror,” 52.

42 Ps. 81:4, NRSV.

43 Augustine, *City of God*, §19.7.

44 Johnson, *Can Modern War Be Just?*, 4.

guilt for the Christian to carry: he acts out of a duty of love, for “opposition to the enemy's evil does not imply hatred for the enemy.”<sup>45</sup> In summary, while Augustine considered self-defense to be un-Christian via the need to follow the counsel of Jesus to turn the other cheek, that pacifistic streak idea “did not extend to letting the neighbor be assaulted or to turning the neighbor's cheek for him when he was struck on the one.”<sup>46</sup> Acting in faith with a duty to love, Augustine argued that the Christian ought to defend the third party, and would do so under divine authority, as a “servant of God, to execute wrath on the wrongdoer.”<sup>47</sup> How then, is this position to be seen in light of the above discussions on ethics and the Heraldic?

The basic difference here is that Augustine wants the Christian's primary calibration to be towards the fulfillment of the “duty of Christian love.” This is a concept of right response clearly within the realm of deontological reasoning, or “divine command theory,” while the Heraldic position is one that wants to 1) advocate that individual experience to be given voice; 2) encourage communities to test that experience against their own in hopes of finding comfort and truth in what follows as a consequence; and 3) support communities and individuals themselves as they engender greater dialogue with others on issues to which they can speak their experience.

In a sense, Augustine's reasoning does not unfold in the midst of the hypothetical “innocent third party being attacked while a Christian observes” situation: his thinking is structural, non-contingent, and already complete. It is a forgone conclusion that the Christian is justified in meeting “force with proportionally effective force,” because duty to the love of God has been given priority. What I suggest is that the Heraldic response prioritizes not duty, but the embodiment of some divine principle and

---

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., 176.

47 Rom 13:4, NRSV.

impulse: in placing that trio of priorities as a guide to interpretation and action, the Herald resists the assurance of a completed ethic. Any decision made cannot be an absolutely forgone conclusion. As addressed in the section above, functionally, morality is determined by its relation to local communal contexts of responsibility, not a direct relationship to an abstract and universal system.<sup>48</sup>

It may be that the “moral response” is not one which can be determined in advance. That is, the process of constructing an eternal, transcultural, ethical framework for the purposes of methodically addressing possible, particular instances of ethical action – should one be killed to save another? – may itself be in opposition to the Levinasian articulation at the ground of our relationship to one another: the look into Face, a true, Other-regarding action. Given that ethics concerns itself with morality and the frameworks for judging right from wrong, a Levinasian read is that when we prioritize metaphysical commitments above our concrete relation to the other, we commit a fundamental act of violence as deep as there can be.

This may suggest then that for all its attempts to do otherwise, ethics as category of thought only actually functions either descriptively in the present, or normatively in reflection.<sup>49</sup> However, before this line of thought continues I want to “roughen up” even my own reasoning and insist – perhaps a resistance against the Heraldic position itself becoming totalizing – and force the issue: if tomorrow comes and I am actually witness to someone about to be attacked and I can intervene, what then? The following is a sketch of thoughts on this issue as best as I can imagine, deferring a certain conclusion, yet still fleshing out some possible Heraldic reasoning.

The act of violence is itself communicative,<sup>50</sup> so engaging the attacker with violence is potentially an appropriate response: if someone spoke to me

---

48 Clegg, “Epistemology and the Hither Side.”

49 A book-length consideration of a point similar to this is to be found in John Caputo's *Against Ethics*.

50 Schmid, *Violence as Communication*.

in Dutch and I could reply similarly, wouldn't I want to do so? Another possibility is to employ a pragmatic consideration. If the Herald believes it to be her calling to engender new conversations and interpretations, how would that play out in different situations? If she interceded and the attacker died, wouldn't that mean she fell short because that person would no longer be present to voice their perspective? Or perhaps in being the successful defender of an innocent potential-victim, the Herald would catalyze an enormous population now interested in her actions that were not before.

Conversely, what if the Herald refused to kill another, believing that to do so even when an innocent was involved would somehow be cause for some compunction given his commitment to dialogue-creation? Intervention would still be possible, but not “proportionally effective force right up to and including the possibility of killing.” Perhaps the Herald would engage the attacker directly, willing to die himself, regardless of others' charges of “Pilatism” and “preference for moral purity over responsible action.”<sup>51</sup> That might indeed promote dialogue: stories of a person so willing to be fully present to the other's presence that he became physically “vulnerable to address.”<sup>52</sup> Viewed this way, Jesus did precisely that, giving such credence to the other that he was willing to fully receive them even when that meant death. I am interested in narratives of Jesus being considered through the lens of him as the acme of the Heraldic life lived out, the greatest example of the Dialogical impulse embodied.

Bearing in mind that this suggestion is possible rather than requisite, I suggest that the Heraldic response to aggression towards an innocent third party would be intercession without proportional force, even if death was possible as a result.<sup>53</sup> Let me be clear: the Herald's primary impulse is a

---

51 Weaver, “Unjust Lies, Just Wars?,” 51.

52 Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 13.

53 Intersubjectivity is at the heart of this, not pacifism. With supreme commitment to be engaged in dialogue with both God and others, pacifist acts may take place, but the Herald is not committed to Pacifism itself as a principle to be upheld.

socially, dialogical, generative one, not a personal, thanotic drive towards a pietistic martyrdom. This follows Augustine, who posits that “salvation is not a matter of the emanation and remanation of the soul, but of the life-f fulfilling redemption of the will”:<sup>54</sup> Heraldism is not a matter of adherence to duty or contingent upon whether the innocent bystander is saved or not, it is about having given over completely to a God which has been experienced yet cannot be fully named or assuredly claimed to justify one's actions. The Herald acts on faith beyond doubt, never sure, but willing to act on behalf of others regardless.<sup>55</sup>

John Caputo suggests that both Augustine and Derrida ask “what do I love when I love my God?,” and that both possess Augustine's “restless heart.” But while Augustine is able to sublimate that question and settle his heart with an abstract notion of God, Derrida finds that that question “stir[s] up still more restless inquiry,” because for him “the constancy of God . . . does not have one settled and definite name.”<sup>56</sup> The Herald is caught in this same conundrum: she has a belief in God via some experience to which she can give voice, but insists that her expression of that experience is neither final nor complete. She loves her God, but cannot know God's extent, only that she loves and wants to encourage others to do the same. Her attempts to name God are “not permanent, timeless, logical insights but contingent, particular” articulations which always slip past an ultimate naming, deferred in favor of holding open the conversation, taking responsibility for giving the Other space to speak. Possibly even unto death.

---

54 Fitzgerald, *Augustine through the Ages*, 852.

55 The issue of actions “beyond doubt” will likely give the reader reason to pause: this is sounds like the type of thinking that fuels fanaticism. Thomas Biebricher addressed this issue head on in his review of Hoy's book and concludes that Hoy's position necessitates at least some “(weak) universalist principles or norms,” or it runs the risk of providing a basis for actions that “simply reproduces contextual biases and prejudices” (Biebricher 295).

56 Caputo, *Philosophy and Theology*, 64-5.

## CONCLUSION

Insofar as the articulated position of a Heraldic theology is worth further exploration, if one is interested in its ethical ramifications, comparison and critique seems best fit to a type of post-structuralist approach. Such a position does not deny human drives towards beneficial action, but argues that such drives arrive “without metaphysico-ethical back-ups.”<sup>57</sup> Instead of compunction as the originary source of descriptively ethical action, writers like Caputo suggest that our obligation to the Other arises precisely in “the alterity or the otherness of the other, the heteronomy, that disrupts me, that is visited upon me, that knocks me out of orbit.”<sup>58</sup> As a mere fact of our relation to one another, of our mutual Levinasian “responsibility without culpability,” we are driven to resist that which takes away our ability to connect, that which totalizes experience and flattens individual expression.

Functionally, traditional models of ethics provide frameworks of adherence whereas the Heraldic ethic is one of coherence. Instead of the morality of an action being adjudicated on how well one adheres to external rules considered irrevocable because of some presumed metaphysical claims, or to beneficial future consequences which the action may engender, morality instead can become an assessment of the degree to which things appear to function as resistance to oppression in the present, can become about cultivating a theopoetic sensibility. This is bound to appear fool-hardy to those insisting upon the primacy of metaphysics, that is, for “the more rationalistically inclined social theorists who believe in the primacy of universal principles.”<sup>59</sup> And indeed, their critique is useful: it continues to provide ground for resistance, pressing against attempts to keep moralistic claims to absolute knowledge out of the picture. The Herald though, asserts that the

---

57 Briggs, “Genealogy, Transcendence and Obligation,” 6.

58 Caputo, *Against Ethics*, 8.

59 Hoy, *Critical Resistance*, 11.

present is sufficient and continually draws us to the particulars of experience, which itself gives rise to our obligation to one another.<sup>60</sup>

Supporters of traditional ethical models will “want the agent to articulate the principles that would legitimate the envisioned social change before actually taking social or political action.”<sup>61</sup> The Herald would reply that she “speaks of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit.”<sup>62</sup> A Christian Ethic operating without faith in the work of the Holy Spirit to actually instruct in the present seems no different than any other system of moral codification based on doctrine. Jesus did not teach with doctrine, but with parable. Not just verbally but narratively, embodying oneself for another and pointing his people towards the Kingdom of God with stories that have been endlessly discussed and reconsidered, drawing his followers into action and solidarity for those on the margins. There is no reason we cannot take up this same task today.

The argument for a Heraldic position is not because of an ethical stance that emerges as a result of living into a Heraldic perspective, but because by supporting and validating others' experience – possibly even accepting their violence – the Herald promotes access to knowledge, not just of the other, but of the self, God, and God's intertwining immanence. We engage each other, encouraging new articulations of the Divine – and interpretations of Scripture – not because we believe that that task will be accurately completed in our lifetimes, but because there is much gained from meeting each other in incomplete spaces. Something about dialogue is inherently tied to mystery. We cannot ever fully comprehend the Other, and yet meaning rises only in her face. The study and production of language about (and for) God is not to “get it right,” but to engender more noticing of God and each other, and that of God in each other and Creation. It is a commitment to

---

60 Briggs, “Genealogy, Transcendence and Obligation,” 6.

61 Hoy, *Critical Resistance*, 11.

62 1 Corinthians 2:13, NRSV.



remain faithful to our connection to one another and to a God that calls us forth into ethical relation.

## WORKS CITED

- Alcott, Amos B. "Orphic Sayings" *The Dial: Magazine for Literature, Philosophy, and Religion*. Boston, MA: Week, Jordan, and Company. 1 (1841): 351-61.
- Augustine. *The City of God*. Translated by Marcus Dods.  
<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/120119.htm>
- Biebricher, Thomas. "Book Review."  
*Constellations*. 14.2 (2007): 292-5.
- Briggs, Robert. "Genealogy, Transcendence and Obligation: Questioning (the Question of) Ethics." *Discourse: An Interdisciplinary Philosophical Journal*. 3 (1997): 1-12.
- Brown, Wendy. *States of Inquiry: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995.
- Butler, Judith. *Excitable Speech: a Politics of the Performative*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1997.
- Caputo, John. *Philosophy and Theology*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Against Ethics: Contributions to a Poetics of Obligation with Constant Reference to Deconstruction*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993.
- \_\_\_\_\_. and Catherine Keller. "THEOPOETIC/THEOPOLITIC." In *Cross Currents* 56.4 (2006-7): 105-11.
- Clegg, Joshua W. & Brent D. Slife. "Epistemology and the Hither Side: A Levinasian Account of Relational Knowing." *European Journal of Psychotherapy, Counseling, and Health*. 7 (2005): 65-76.
- Elshtain, Jean B. *Just War Against Terror: The Burden of American Power In a Violent World*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2003.
- Faber, Roland. *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*. Louisville: WJK, 2008.

- Fish, Stanley E. *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982.
- Fitzgerald, Allan.D. *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999.
- Holland, Scott. *How Do Stories Save Us?* Dudley: Eerdmans, 2006.
- Hoy, David C. *Critical Resistance*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005.
- Johnson, James T. *Can Modern War Be Just?* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986.
- Kant, Immanuel., *The Metaphysical Elements of Justice: Part I of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Translated by J. Ladd. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1965.
- Keefe-Perry, L. Callid "Toward the Heraldic: A Theopoetic Response to Monorthodoxy." In *Theopoetic Folds: Philosophizing Multifariousness*. Edited by Roland Faber and Jeremy Fackenthal. New York: Fordham, 2013.
- Keller, Catherine & Laurel Schneider (Eds.) *Polydoxy: Theology of Multiplicity and Relation*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2010.
- LaFollette, Hugh. "Pragmatic Ethics." In *Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1969.
- LoPresti, Matthew. "Poiesis, Fides et Ratio in the Absence of Relativism." In *Theopoetic Folds: Philosophizing Multifariousness*. Edited by Roland Faber and Jeremy Fackenthal. New York: Fordham, 2013.
- Moore, Mark E. "Kerygma and Dogma: A Post-Modern Perspective" *Theandros*. 2.2 (2004/5): Web. Accessed 12 Dec. 2009. <http://www.theandros.com/kerygma.html>

- Pregeant, Russel. "Scripture and Revelation," in *Handbook of Process Theology*. Edited by Jay McDaniel and Donna Bowman. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2006.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach." In *Ethical Theory: An Anthology*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.
- Noble, T. and Sue Webster. HE/SHE, (Diptych) 2004  
[http://timnobleandsuewebster.com/he\\_she\\_2004.html](http://timnobleandsuewebster.com/he_she_2004.html)
- Raschke, Carl. *GloboChrist: The Great Commission Takes a Postmodern Turn*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008.
- Rollins, Peter. "Christian A/Theism" *Movement: Termly Magazine of the Student Christian Movement*. 122 (2006): 12-8.
- Schmid, Alex P. *Violence as Communication*. London, UK: SAGE Publications, 1982.
- Sen, Amartya K. "Rights and Agency." *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 11.1 (1982): 3-39.
- Sia, Santiago. "Whitehead on Religion: A Philosophical Basis for Interreligious Dialogue?" In *Philosophical Basis of Inter-religious Dialogue: The Process*. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009.
- Weaver, Alain E. "Unjust Lies, Just Wars? A Christian Pacifist Conversation with Augustine." *The Journal of Religious Ethics*. 29:1 (2001): 51-78.
- Yoder, John H. *The Royal Priesthood*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998.