AUTHORITY IN A PLURALISTIC WORLD

Lonnie D. Kliever

Professor and Chairman, Department of Religion
Southern Methodist University
Dallas, Texas, U.S.A.

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Department of Religious Studies
Southern Methodist University

Pluralism is in high vogue today but the ease and enthusiasm with which pluralism is embraced suggests a widespread misunderstanding or naivete about its meaning. Such blithe pluralists often simply equate pluralism with the diversity of interest groups and the toleration of religious differences in modern democratic societies. But such political and ecclesiastical pluriformity is not pluralism. The dispersion of political power and the freedom of religious assembly within non-hierarchical societies represent differences and disagreements <u>within</u> a shared commitment to one nation and one God. Pluralism by contrast assumes no such overarching unity or loyalty. Pluralism is the existence of multiple frames of reference, each with its own scheme of understanding and criteria of rationality. Pluralism is the co-existence of comparable and competing positions which are not to be reconciled. Pluralism is the recognition that different persons and different groups quite literally indwell irreducibly different worlds.

I. Assessing <u>Pluralism</u> -- <u>Peril</u> <u>or</u> <u>Promise</u>?

Stated thus baldly, the peril of pluralism is obvious. What happens when these worlds collide? Can the relationships between contradictory visions of reality and schemes of meaning remain benign in a world of increasing population and decreasing resources? Can conflicts between such worlds be resolved in any way short of coercion or violence? What happens when the monopoly on world-definition is broken within a society? Can the common life survive without a common world-view and moral system? Can the

individual form a stable identity without a single life-world that guarantees order and meaning? In other words, the situation of pluralism not only jeopardizes international order and social stability. It threatens the very possibility of being a self and having a world. In a pluralistic world there are no uncontested systems of reality definition, social integration and personality formation. Moreover, these tasks which are interlocking in the traditional society have been torn apart within the demythologized and historicized societies of the modern world.

Precisely this separation must be grasped if we are to understand the character and challenge of pluralism in our time. Traditional societies combined the practical task of securing identity with the theoretical task of interpreting reality in a single world-view.[1] Such interpretive systems dispelled chaos and guaranteed meaning by mastering the problems of survival in both nature and society. Of course, that mastery was always incomplete and thus explanations and consolations for failure were built into these "nominizing" systems. In primitive societies the problems of survival vis-à-vis nature were so drastic that human ignorance and impotence were counterbalanced by a heavy overlay of mythic order. But increased control over nature gradually freed secular knowledge from dependence upon and loyalty to sacral world-views, which in turn were increasingly restricted to functions of personality formation and social integration. The natural sciences eventually established a monopoly on the interpretation and control of nature through standardized procedures of verification and technological conquests of nature. But the later-emerging social sciences have developed no comparable methods of confirmation or conquests of contingency in the social world. Indeed, the social sciences have intensified these problems by relativizing or dissolving the traditional

world-views which deal with human loneliness and guilt, suffering and death. Consequently the sociocultural world, where fundamental questions of human worth and duty predominate, has been rendered problematic by the separation of traditional interpretive systems of the social world from the consensus interpretive system of the natural world.

This separation has triggered a radical "legitimation crisis" in the life-worlds of modern societies.[2] This crisis is felt on two levels. The life-legitimating systems, which nominize the chaos and terror that threaten personal and social existence, have been decimated by the scientific erosion of mythic explanations and relativized by the scientific discovery of multiple world-views. These disruptions have in turn generated a crisis at the level of system-legitimating arguments. Of course, "secondary legitimations" of a given life-world have always been required whenever challenges to the facticity or authority of that life-world have arisen. These arguments typically span a wide range of theoretical completeness and sophistication. Justificatory appeals range from the customary (historical narratives of origins) to the cosmic (metaphysical systems of reality). Such system-legitimating arguments were in the past thought to be universally compelling but today we recognize that they are system dependent. This is the heart of the contemporary legitimation crisis. Pluralism has put us in a situation where we do not know just which world we inhabit. To determine which world we are really in requires a means of arbitration that does not presuppose any of them. We have at hand, in scientific methods of verification, system-transcending criteria for adjudicating rival interpretations of the natural world. But appeals to publicly experiencable and repeatable evidence have not proven applicable

to visions of human worth and duty in the sociocultural world. Thus we are confronted with a pluralism of life-worlds which are not legitimated by the cognitive content or criteria of scientific understanding. Shorn of demonstrably cognitive roots, religiocultural forms of life are without authority for those not predisposed to believe them.

But what is the future of such systems of personality formation and social integration in a pluralistic world? There can be no doubt that the traditional religions have undergone a serious erosion of belief and authority in modern societies. These religions have lost their monopoly on world-definition and world-maintenance. But that loss has not signaled the end of religion. The massive debunking and dismantling of traditional worldview at the hands of modern criticism has only loosed a new rage for order and meaning. The persistence of religion³ should not surprise us. Skepticism and nihilism are after all philosopher's diseases and seldom if ever become epidemic among the populace. The human craving for meaning and order, which has the inexorable force of instinct, continues unabated despite the demystification and disenchantment of the natural world. Indeed the persistence of religion has fueled the pluralism of our time by multiplying the religious options present within modern societies. Herein lies the real question of the future of religion. Can human meaning and order survive in a world and in a society fragmented rather than united by religion?

Having thus clearly raised the problem of pluralism, I want to join the "blithe" pluralist in arguing that human meaning and order can not only survive but thrive in a pluralistic world. But the promise of pluralism will be reached only if the peril of pluralism can be avoided. And that will prove to be more

difficult and costly than many enthusiasts for pluralism dare imagine. The promise of pluralism is a world and a society newly freed for diversity and even idiosyncrisy, newly flexible for change and experimentation. Out of pluralism's creative ambiguity and dissonance can come an enriched and enlarged sense of the possibilities of life here and now. Finally the promise of pluralism is the dream of allowing each life to be a distinctive work of art -- each person fashioning the materials of his biological and cultural inheritance into a personal statement of reality. But this Nietzschean promise of a new man and a new world can be redeemed only if these diverse life-forms are not allowed to overcome, dominate or suppress one another. Pluralism permits different groups and persons to create worlds unto themselves but they dare not become laws unto themselves. We must admit that forms of life are logically and psychologically self-legitimating. There are no external or neutral vantage points from which to confirm or commend a given vision of human order and meaning. But pluralism will surely self-destruct if accepting pluralism means <u>carte</u> <u>blanche</u> endorsement for any and all forms of life. The sophomoric argument against moral relativism invoking the spectre of the maniac whose "world-view" licenses mayhem states the problem precisely if inelegantly because it recognizes the <u>social</u> solidarity of human existence and human value. Unfortunately that problem cannot be solved by the implied counterargument for moral absolutism. We can only solve the problem of pluralism from within, but solve it we must or whirl will truly become king.

In other words, the greatest peril of pluralism is that we will carry over into the pluralistic situation our centuries-old authoritarian habits of thinking and acting. These habits will not easily change because they are deeply rooted in <u>religious</u> craving for absolutes to fend off death and all its

experiential counterparts -- bafflement and impotence, suffering and evil,
disorder and despair. Every religion and every sociocultural world is a
pact with death. This pact takes the form of a system of death-defying and
life-extending symbols and rituals, institutions and relationships which
prescribe the patterns and dispense the assurances for heroic transcendence
of death.[4] As such, these systems have traditionally claimed absolute
devotion and exclusive deliverance for themselves alone. Such authoritarian-
ism and exclusivism are highly effective instruments of integration and
legitimation within a given group. But they are equally effective instruments
of aggression and destruction against those beyond the group. This is doubly
so when death is "fetishized" -- located in special places, powers or persons.[5]
Then the quest for heroic transcendence lays waste to those treasures and
creatures, peoples and cultures which are isolated and identified as evil.
This compulsive devotion and defense of social and personal "immortality
ideologies" is understandable, given the stark terror and sheer chaos of
existence deprived of some "sacred canopy." But just this compulsive power
must be broken for a genuine pluralism to emerge and exist among us. Unless
we can reshape the pretheoretical depths of religious fears and hopes
pluralistically, we will not avoid the kaleidoscopic violence of a world
or a culture of multiple absolutisms.

Unlearning old habits of reflective and religious expectations
will not be easy or automatic. The mere presence of multiple frameworks in
our midst will not dispel the propensity for groups to make absolute and
exclusive claims for their own life-world. The human hunger and search
for absolute religious and moral claims must be combatted and negated -- absolutely!
This means that pluralism requires an authority that transcends the authority

of all systems of thought and life without becoming a system in turn.
Pluralism is a possibility only if all frameworks are relativized by some
absolutely iconoclastic principle or by some absolutely empty authority.
The only absolute permitted and required in a pluralistic world is the
absolute denial of all absolutes.

II. Protecting Pluralism -- Radical Transcendence or Radical Relativism?

How then can plural life-worlds be protected against all forms of
absolutism? There seem to be two possibilities. We may place competing
and contradictory world-views within a context of radical transcendence
or of radical relativism. We may argue that human order and meaning are
grounded in a reality that radically transcends every historic concretion
or that human order and meaning are adjustive responses to individual and
social needs without grounds in any reality whether immanent or transcendent.
Either of these overviews of human value offers a framework-transcending
authority which relativizes all sociocultural systems of human order and
meaning. As such both are iconoclastic or empty principles of authority.

Radical transcendence as a normative overview of pluralism may be
expressed in either monotheistic or mystic terms. A radically transcendent
God can function as a permanent iconoclastic principle which not only
relativizes all concrete world-views and life-styles but subjects them to
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perpetual revolution as well. Such a "radical monotheism" centers in the
Transcendent One for whom alone there is an ultimate good and from whom
alone there are proximate goods. This radically transcendent God permits
the construction and coexistence of many relative value systems -- each
of them tentative, experimental and objective. But these plural life-
systems are possible only because the Transcendent One prevents any one
of them from being erected into an absolute or even being elevated above

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the others.   In short, radical monotheism makes pluralism possible by
freeing the world from idolatry.

The long tradition of divine sovereignty has always recognized that
man is an idolater.   Theologians of the sovereignty of God have known that
man left to his own designs seeks absolute security and significance by
absolutizing finite things and groups, ideals and causes.   To be sure,
these theologians have not always perceived that the pursuit of cosmic
heroism and the escape from cosmic dread are inseparable counterparts of
the life-project of every human being.   Nor have they discerned the ambiva-
lence and danger in their own claims to absolute security and significance
through their understanding and relation to the Infinite God.   But the
wisdom of this tradition can be carried over into a pluralistic situation
by translating sovereignty into radical transcendence.   This move runs
counter to the reigning theologies of today which stress the pervasive
immanence of God.   But stressing the indwelling presence of God too easily
reinforces the human propensity to absolutize finite conditions and concerns.
Only a God radically beyond yet universally related to the world can maintain
the worth and wellbeing of all things.   In a pluralistic world, the radi-
cally transcendent God is the experientially relevant God.

Despite its obvious prophetic power, such a monotheistic protection
of pluralism may finally prove unsuccessful.   For monotheism, God is the
constructive principle as well as the iconoclastic principle of all systems
of human order and meaning.   As constructive principle, the symbol of God
is vested with a content which militates against a genuine pluralism.
Monotheistic conceptualities of ultimate reality as personal and eschato-
logical will almost certainly reflect particular historical and ideological
biases.   This likelihood is increased by the centrality of historical
revelations of God in the great monotheistic traditions.   Thus the monotheistic

concept of God, even though conceived of as radically transcendent, may be too ideologically particular to be genuinely iconoclastic.

Non-dualistic mysticism offers an alternative conceptuality of radical transcendence. This type of mysticism conceives of the relationship between the everyday world and ultimate reality in a variety of ways. But all parties to the debate on the reality or unreality of the world agree that the ground of all reality is an all-inclusive, unitary Absolute which is empty of all distinctions, qualities and limits. This Undifferentiated Absolute relativizes the value of all things finite, shatters all attachments to particular things. Mysticism's Undifferentiated Absolute seems promising as an iconoclastic principle which continually breaks life open to variety and change. But this promise is compromised by the tendency in non-dualistic mysticism to lose all interest in the finite and particular world. The quest to achieve oneness with the Absolute need not but often does end in negation of the empirical and social world. Thus iconoclasm is itself turned into a belief-system that negates all order and meaning in historical existence.

The search for an iconoclastic principle that authorizes pluralism in a radically transcendent monotheism or mysticism runs into a common problem. The central principle in each is also the constructive principle of a concrete life-world. The iconoclasm of a Sovereign God or of an Undifferentiated Absolute is limited to keeping symbolic and social expressions open and tentative within the general world-view generated by each. This same iconoclasm serves as a irenic principle of criticism and assimilation of alien world-views. In other words, a radically transcendent monotheism or mysticism promotes intramural ecumenism and unaggressive evangelism.

But, as welcome as all such retreats from absolutism and exclusivism are, they do not legitimate pluralism.

What then of radical relativism as an authorization of pluralism? Radical relativism differs from all notions of "objective relativism" or "perspectival relativism." For objective or perspectival relativism, symbolic and conceptual constructs are relative, but they are relative to and relativized by an objective reality that in some way stands apart and over against all human knowing, doing and feeling. Systematic differences between human formulations of understanding and value reflect the inescapable limitations of one's standpoint. Relativism lies in the eye of the beholder rather than in the beholded. By contrast, radical relativism assumes no such objective reality beyond our diverse interpretations of human order and meaning. Can such radical relativism sustain co-existence and cooperation between diverse and even contradictory life-worlds? If so, how and why?

Once again there are broadly speaking two ways of articulating radical relativism -- mystic and naturalistic. Certain forms of Tibetan, Chinese and Japanese Buddhism deny the reality of all unchanging absolutes, including the Absolute.[7] For these mystic traditions, the symbol of "emptiness" denies rather than describes the eternal, self-sufficient, undifferentiated Absolute of non-dualistic forms of mysticism. Indeed, the self-existent reality of any and all entities is denied. Such denial does not involve the annihilation or disconnection of all things but the discovery of the infinite relatedness of all things in a continuous process of change. "Emptiness" is a symbol and a means of perceiving and participating in the eternal relatedness and change of all things. This new way of seeing the familiar world sees through the "fabricated" character of all entities, qualities and distinctions in the

phenomenal world. It thereby diverts all religious craving for unchanging absolutes, whether temporal or eternal. Awareness that all entities visible and ideal are absolutely empty of self-sufficiency releases man from thirsting after ultimates and its accompanying anxiety and defensiveness. Thus released from attachments to false ultimates, the enlightened can live without pain or peril in the ordinary structures of existence by participating in their mutual dependence and co-origination.

The iconoclastic power of this religious framework is obvious at a glance. The radical emptiness of all things offers a permanent check against all idolatrous attachments as well as the divisiveness and defensiveness that usually follow from such attachments. But considered in the round this mystic consciousness seems to radically undercut pluralism. Emptiness does not simply relativize the many solutions to the fundamental problems of human existence -- it dissolves the problems themselves in a cosmology of non-self-existence and infinite relatedness. In short, the bottom line of this mystic way looks more like a processive monism than a radical relativism since the on-going process is "surrelative" to each fabricated 'moment' or 'part' of the process.[8] Perhaps this mystic version of radical relativism can be interpreted in such a way as to sanction diverse life-worlds. But I must leave that to those more competent and convinced than I that this is a genuine option for a pluralistic world.

We are left then with the radical relativism historically articulated in the philosophies of empiricism and materialism. These two traditions have typically argued that human values are relative to human needs -- biological, psychological, sociological and cognitive. As such there are no objective and necessary structures of reality which predispose or compel

one way of realizing these needs over another. Neither tradition of course denies that human values have the air of objectivity. The facticities of embodiment in a world, the conventions of language in a culture, the persistence of institutions in a society place severe limits on freedom and innovation in need-fulfilment at any given time and place. Nor do these traditions necessarily deny that actual value judgments are subject to reasoned argument. Ultimate principles of value lie beyond all argumentation but lower-level arguments about how and when these principles apply are certainly possible. But the objectivity of local standards and lower-level arguments do not overcome the radical relativism of values.

Such radical relativism clearly offers an iconoclastic perspective over against all value-systems and life-worlds. The categorical denial of universal objective standards deprives all human valuing of the sense of inevitability and necessity that so often sanctions defensiveness and exclusivism. By the same token this radical relativism is open to an endless variety of systems for giving human life order and meaning. But here, no less than in non-dualistic mysticism, the iconoclastic principle may be turned into a constructive principle which actively negates all historical order and meaning. Neither of these options is likely to prove attractive and workable for the masses. Radical world negation belongs to a madness or a saintliness that lies far beyond most of us. But thorough-going skepticism and nihilism is certainly a possible expression of this form of radical relativism.

We are left then with four distinct ways of protecting pluralism which divide in two over whether the grounds of value are radically transcendent

or radically relative. Each of th   ways offers an iconoclasm that
relativizes all claims though perhaps not all cravings for the absolute.
Yet there is a tendency in all, especially the monotheistic and mystic
iconoclasms, to undercut a genuine pluralism of life-worlds. There are
two reasons for this. First, a truly iconoclastic principle continually
breaks the forms of life but it does not automatically remake those forms.
Relativizing all options does not necessarily solve the inevitable problems
of coexistence in a pluralistic world. In a densely pluralistic world or
culture, some way to shape and sustain orderly change and conflict must be
found. Each of these iconoclasms we have reviewed are drawn to this "other
side" of iconoclasm. Second, each of these iconoclasms has historically
been articulated as the critical principle of a constructive world-view.
Thus, "buying into" one or another of these iconoclasms apparently involves
assuming a distinctive tradition of human meaning and order. Little surprise
that *i*conoclasm and evangelism are so closely interwoven.

Can iconoclasm avoid dependence upon some distinctive tradition?
Certain monotheists and mystics have long sought a philosophia perennis
but their programs never finally escape the shape and sounds of their own
heritage. But naturalistic radical relativism can be separated from depen-
dence upon any distinctive world-view. Such a separation requires an
important re-visioning of philosophical empiricism and materialism as well as
of religious values. Much that is cherished if not central in religious
systems of meaning and order will be lost or transformed in that re-visioning.
But perhaps that is the price we have levied on ourselves to live in the
modern world. Perhaps that is the final cost of legitimating a pluralistic
world.

III. Legitimating Pluralism: Facts and Fictions

Empirical and materialistic accounts of man's value experience have in the past shown little resemblance or relevance to the actual value experiences of individuals and communities. Their emotive and epiphenomenal characterizations of values and value judgments have often obscured the role of factual knowledge in all value judgments, often minimized the function of value commitments in all human existence, and often ignored the centrality of value differences in all social conflict. Value judgments have been reduced to purely emotive or factual conditions and transactions which when recognized as such are thought to become harmlessly or harmoniously benign. But these accounts simply do not square with the urgency and ubiquity of values in all personal and social existence. Even if values are radically without grounds they remain present and powerful in human life -- even in the lives of empiricists and materialists.

These traditions have failed to fully understand value because they have equated value's loss of ontological status with value's loss of existential function. This elimination or reduction of value is a consequence of philosophical literalism. Empiricism and materialism have typically been understood as explanations of the mechanisms of cognition and the stuff of reality (e.g., behavioral psychology and mechanistic metaphysics). But, as Ernest Gellner has persuasively argued, we must interpret these traditions not as descriptive accounts of knowing and being, but as <u>selectors</u> which establish the norms that "govern and limit our cognitive behavior."[9] These traditions gain enormously in plausibility and compatibility when they are read not as accounts of what knowledge and reality "really are" but as ways of sifting rival constructions and symbolizations of the "real world." As such, they operate independently of particular accounts of that world.

Gellner's "decoding" of the Western epistemological tradition throws

valuable light on the entire question of pluralism. Gellner argues against "cognitive pluralism" by showing that the operative cognitive underpinnings of modern society support a "critical monism" of knowledgeable belief.[10] Though empiricism and materialism are at odds philosophically, they have come together in two decisive ways. They have carried out parallel programs of debunking all mystifying authorities and magic practices. They have also pervaded the structures of modern consciousness and modern culture with two different but reinforcing selectors of cognitive endeavor. Empiricism has trained us to accept evidence which is experiential-- especially publicly available and empirically given data. Materialism has disposed our thinking to expect explanations which are in some sense mechanistic -- especially publicly observable and universally reproducible structures. The normative demand for this kind of data and this type of explanation has transformed our cognitive style and thereby fatefully altered our life-worlds.

Our life-worlds have been split off from a universe which is mechanistically arranged, morally neutral and humanly indifferent.[11] Our cozy, comfortable and familiar life-worlds continue to exist because we cannot long inhabit the world we have discovered by means of our modern selectors. But as modern men we do not indwell these life-worlds in the same way as those who have gone before us. Our fateful choice of selectors has unmasked the "dirty secret" that we have so long hidden from ourselves -- that the cold, heartless, impersonal universe is the real world. Precisely because modern science speaks of that world in an idiom which is discontinuous with everyday life yet still manifests a cognitive power greater than any available in everyday life, our life-worlds have become radically suspect and problematic.

Gellner uses the term "ironic cultures" to describe the character of modern man's life-worlds.

> By this I do not mean that the individuals involved in them necessarily or indeed generally hold and internalize such cultures and their doctrinal content in a detached ironic spirit. The irony is not generally conscious, explicit or individual. It resides in the fact that the whole organization of such cultures, the way in which they are implemented and enforced in life, the limits within which they are enforced, works in a manner which tacitly presupposes and admits that they are not to be taken seriously, as knowledge. They contain claims, assertions which <u>sound</u> cognitive, and which in other, non-ironic cultures would indeed have been such; but here, it is somehow understood that they are not fully serious, not commensurate or continuous with real knowledge.[12]

In other words, human life-worlds are marginal elaborations on life in the real world. They are fictional transparencies projected on the factual world.

Speaking in this way of life-worlds as "fictions" involves more than the claim that they are imaginative fabrications or symbolic constructs. All reality claims, whether factual or fictional, are fabrications. All facts and fictions are constructions. 'Facts' are symbolic constructs which have been established as reliable representations of an external, objective world. 'Fictions' are not simply symbolic constructs which have yet to be verified. They are not hypotheses whose truth remains in doubt for the present. 'Fictions'[13] are symbolic constructs which <u>cannot</u> be verified and hence <u>cannot</u> be true. In the modern world, fictions are judged to be fictions (unreal and impossible cases) because they fail to pass the empiricist-mechanist selectors of knowledgeable belief. Why these selectors prove to be the final arbiters of reality-claims, the ultimate sifters of factual and fictional constructs, is the story of four centuries of theory of knowledge in modern philosophy and theology. The hidden God and the secular universe both pay homage to the emergence to dominance of empirical data and mechanical explanations. Only these selectors have produced a genuinely cross-cultural body of usable

knowledge. Only these selectors have proven separable from any particular
theory of how the world is. And in a world where all thinking proceeds by
paradigm and all knowledge consists of constructions, the question of how
we know is necessarily prior to the question of what we know and the assurance
that we know.

These modern norms of cognitive belief and behavior have not brought
an end to religion. The Enlightenment vision of 19th century rationalists
and 20th century secularists has proven vain. Reason does not produce a
new closed naturalism, as gratifying to man as the old closed supernaturalism
only upside down. Scientific reason generates no styles of life or systems
of meaning. It succeeds only in depriving all of cognitive authority and
universal necessity. But our scientific world does permit and facilitate an
endless variety of styles and systems of human life and meaning. Emancipation
from economic pressure, reduction of authoritarian education, dissolution of
traditional institutions have encouraged an explosion of luxuriant and arduous,
ecstatic and cerebral faiths both old and new. The religious and moral
imagination has been gloriously freed for culturally-innovative meanings and
freed from culturally-imposed guilt -- in styles of dressing, eating, playing,
schooling, working, mating, parenting and even dying. What Gellner calls
"the meaning industry" is enjoying an unprecedented expansionist market.[14]

But despite our time's religious fecundity and exhuberance, these
modern life-worlds remain deeply ironic and inherently tragic. Gellner's
comments about the revival of traditional faith equally applies to the
survival of old faiths and the arrival of new faiths in the modern world.

When a traditional faith was held in the full and literal sense it was wedded to the best available current forms of knowledge. When it is theatrically revived, in a kind of social inverted commas, it is revived, precisely, by disconnecting it from what is taken seriously as knowledge, and is kept alive only by this artificial insulation; by inventing special criteria and functions for it, which are carefully made distinct from serious cognition. But when serious issues are at stake, when the fate of individuals and communities are at risk, one will not fail to make use of the best available knowledge; so, in any crisis, men tend to ignore the revived 'tradition' and think in terms which they cognitively respect, rather than in terms of antiquarian conceptual furnishing. So, ironically, the traditional 'faith' is used when things go smoothly and no faith is really needed, but it is ignored when the situation is grave.[15]

For modern man, religion neither solves problems (monotheism) nor dissolves them (mysticism) but disguises them. Religious fictions dignify our daily rounds of problem-solving and distract our anxiety over insoluble problems by concealing both in a friendly and familiar universe. But the real work of social-order and problem-solving has passed into secular hands. Everyday existence is based largely on a productive and administrative technology which is scientifically based and culturally indifferent. Religion remains decisive only in those areas of human need where genuine knowledge is still lacking or simply impossible. In short, religion is largely diversionary and decorative. Like play and art, religion is a way of forgetting the harsh limitations and necessities of our creatureliness. And like creative play and playful creation, religion is the triumph of illusion over reality -- for a time. But modern man faces the special problem of remembering while he is forgetting. The separation of soluble and insoluble problems have deprived us of that innocent forgetfulness that let us hope, even dare believe that all life's terrors and threats will be overcome. This is the tragic irony of modern religious consciousness.

But this same tragic irony is the special challenge to heroic transcendence -- to seek an impossible beauty, to pursue an unattainable victory.

Faced with the finality of death, we may respond in two ways. We may "rage, rage, rage against the dying of the light" or we may "play, play, play against the coming of the night." The first is the mandate for all science. The search for knowledge is the heroic quest for the extension of life -- it is rage against the dying of the light. The second response is the heart of all religion. The venture of faith is the heroic quest for the enhancement of life -- it is play against the coming of the night. Despite the radical separation of science and religion, the heroic quest still embraces both. Heroic transcendence is that rebellion and artistry which "contests reality while endowing it with unity."[16]

This situation _may_ not be permanent. The cognitive norms of scientific knowledge are after all normative rather than descriptive. The modern world has in effect chosen to favor public, reproductive, impersonal and universal knowledge. It is at least possible that some post-modern and post-scientific world could select some other criteria of what counts as knowledge more amenable to sorting out visions of human order and meaning. Failing that incredible revolution in human thought, science may yet establish a de-mythologized and dehistoricized unity of the human world. Science will certainly not take over all the functions of traditional world-views, par-ticularly the compensatory ones promising ultimate fulfilment and death deliverance. But some dynamic structure of reality which constrains human cooperation and channels human activity toward the wellbeing of one and all might yet be achieved through scientific argumentation. But neither of these eventualities are very likely. Our society is deeply committed to empirically confirmed and technologically effective knowledge. Even latter-day returns

to the agrarian society or the magic universe are pseudo-cultures which rest on the scientific and technological culture which they claim to reject. Moreover, a scientifically founded social world which dispels life's chaos and terror and guarantees human order and meaning is scarcely conceivable, given the very nature of scientific explanation. The search for impersonal and reproducible structures which are publicly and empirically confirmable undercuts those values sought and sustained in the life-world -- individual worth, freedom, responsibility, dignity and destiny. Indeed, scientific knowledge and technology systematically and remorselessly eliminate the individual.[17] Thus for the conceivable future the moral-practical task of fashioning a human world that maintains meaningful personal identity and intimate community still falls to the religions, fictive though they are.

Thus, the modern world is pluralistic in a double sense -- societies and selves are a symbiosis of diverse conceptual and cultural styles. The separation of cognitive imagination from other forms and functions of imagination places each of us in multiple worlds. Only the cognitive imagination discovers and describes a single world. It is an austere and impersonal world, but it contains and thus joins us all. It requires and provides a fundamental order for personal and social existence. But like the empty spaces and blank walls of a spacious gallery, this world permits an endless variety of furnishings and groupings to fill our lives with color and comfort, with detail and delight. Moreover this world allows free exchange and movement between such humanly designed and decorated sites. In short, our scientific selectors legitimate a verdant pluralism of meaning-systems and life-styles among groups and for selves. Indeed, "pluralism" may be the wrong word for a truly modern religious consciousness. The right word may be "polytheism." But that is a topic for another day.

There are other topics for another day which I have not addressed. Most have to do with the psychology and sociology of fictive religions. How do fictive life-worlds maintain an intersubjectively obligatory character? Can we intentionally create socially integrating fictions? Can the traditional religions be theatrically revived? Can other fictive cultures (e.g., nationalistic, ethnic, avocational) function religiously? To what extent can consummable values take the place of scarce meaning values? Other questions have to do with the politics and economics of knowledge. Must knowledge be concentrated in the hands of power elites to maintain social order? How is knowledge to be deployed in the accumulation and distribution of wealth? Still other problems have to do with the morality of technological civilization. How can positive legal norms maintain public order while allowing a maximal variety of private moral systems? What is the educational system's role beyond socialization in facilitating religiocultural elaborations of life? That these problems trouble me I will not deny. But they are problems for the point of view I have argued and not necessarily objections against it.

IV.

I have argued a polemical thesis but I wish to close on an irenic note. Without stepping back from the position that deserves and surely will receive vigorous criticism from many here, I want to reiterate the primary concern of this paper. That concern is to find a way to make the world safe from value imperialism and safe for value idiosyncrasy. Simply declaring a truce among competing and contradictory life-worlds will not establish co-existence or avoid disaster. We need some shared principle -- either a principle of overarching unity or of irreducible diversity -- to legitimate such pluralism. To that end, I enter a plea for advocates of all such principles to become party to the search for such a legitimation.

FOOTNOTES

1. See Peter Berger, The Sacred Canopy (1966), 3-104; Ernest Becker, The Denial of Death (1973), 1-66; Joseph Campbell, The Masks of God: Creature Mythology (1968), 573-624.

2. Ernest Gellner, The Legitimation of Belief (1974), 149-67; Berger, op. cit., 29-51, 155-75. cf. Jürgen Habermas, Legitimation Crisis (1973), 97-143.

3. Andrew M. Greeley, Unsecular Man (1972).

4. I find Ernest Becker's discussion of religion as the quest for "cosmic heroism" very enlightening. See The Birth and Death of Meaning (1971), 65-129, 180-99. The Denial of Death, 1-8, 255-85; Escape from Evil (1975) 146-170. cf. Berger, op. cit., 53-80.

5. Becker, Escape from Evil, 148-51. cf. H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation (1942), viii-ix.

6. For prime examples, see H. Richard Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism and Western Culture (1962); Herbert Richardson, Toward an American Theology (1967); Gabriel Vahanian, No Other God (1966). Among Christian theologians, Vahanian has developed the iconoclastic theme most extensively. Of special importance to the present discussion, see his "Technology as an Ecclesiological Problem," Union Seminary Quarterly Review, XXX (1974), 261-70. There Vahanian argues that technological civilization presents liberating possibilities for human life when viewed iconoclastically.

7. The first patriarch of these traditions was the second century philosopher Nāgārjuna. See Frederick J. Streng, Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning (1967), especially pp. 155-69.

8. Compare to the American process thinkers, especially Charles Hartshorne's The Divine Relativity (1948).

9. Gellner, op. cit., 31.

10. Ibid., 24-70.

11. Gellner speaks of this separation as "the big ditch" which divides traditional and modern societies, the "savage" and the "scientific" mind. This cognitive division of labor has led to the autonomy of fact. Op. cit., 149-67.

12. Ibid., 193-94.

13. See Hans Vaihinger's distinction between hypotheses (constructs not yet proven), semi-fictions (unproven constructs which may or may not be verifiable) and fictions (constructs which are inherently unprovable and self-contradictory). The Philosophy of 'As If' (1935), 78-108.

14. Gellner, op. cit., 191-95.

15. Ibid., 147-48.

16. Albert Camus, The Rebel (1958), 296.

17. Habermas, op. cit., 117-30.