THE LINGUISTIC TURN AND MORAL THEOLOGY

Last June in Chicago, when John Boyle indicated that moral theology could benefit from a "bracing encounter with rigorous philosophical analysis," I am not sure whether or not he had the "linguistic turn" specifically in mind.[1] But in any case the convention theme has done precisely what was called for in his moral theology address last year, namely to invite theologians to examine certain developments in twentieth-century philosophy. Indeed, it has done more; it has invited us to listen in on nontheological conversations that span such disciplines as philosophy, linguistics, literary criticism, critical social theory, feminism, and hermeneutics. Our question might well be put, "What *has* language-obsessed Athens to say to a Jerusalem that has, after all, been speaking quite unselfconsciously in prose for lo these many centuries?" And the answer could metaphorically be expressed: "Negotiate the linguistic turn and then keep going with a new consciousness of pluralism, ambiguity, tradition, and hope." What such advice involves will be the burden of my analysis today, which I have organized in three sections:

I. The Linguistic Turn: From Modernity to Postmodernity
II. Linguistic Philosophy: Temptation and Resource
III. Beyond the Linguistic Turn: The Radical Conversion of Moral Theology

I. THE LINGUISTIC TURN: FROM MODERNITY TO POSTMODERNITY

The metaphor that governs this year's convention invites us to think of theology in terms of a progression in space and time. We are on a journey, and as we proceed we need at times to turn, to shift direction not only to correct the distortions that have accompanied our progress, but also to respect the new terrain we have reached. The image is a rich one, and it resonates with traditional texts from the Bible through Dante and Vatican II.

Even so, questions abound. What is "the linguistic turn" and is it a turn worth taking? Will it in fact bring us closer to our destination, which always seems to be the receding horizon anyway? Who has taken this turn before us? What are its hazards as well as its promises? And can we honestly avoid it, once we confront the option of making the turn or refusing to make it? Where did the phrase come from anyway? Perhaps there are clues to its meaning in its origin. The phrase immediately calls to mind the "Socratic turn," the "Copernican turn," the "turn to the subject," and most

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[1]John P. Boyle, "The American Experience in Moral Theology," *CTSA Proceedings* 41 (1986) 45.

recently, the "deconstructive turn."[2] The Copernican example is especially instructive. We know that a striking conceptual alternative, one that shook the Christian worldview profoundly, presented itself in the sixteenth century when first one scout and then another sent back word that it was time to turn from a geocentric cosmology and affirm a heliocentric alternative. This "Copernican turn" did not happen with ease, as Catholic historians will be the first to inform us.

Who, then, applied the metaphor of "turning" to the twentieth-century philosophical movements associated with Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Saussure? According to Richard Rorty, credit for coinage should go to Gustav Bergmann.[3] In 1953 Bergmann had written of the "radical novelty" in the way philosophers influenced by Wittgenstein's "linguistic turn" in the *Tractatus* were beginning to employ language. What this means for philosophy, Bergmann maintained, is that "both questions and answers are so reinterpreted that they have changed almost beyond recognition," though what is really involved is a "radically new" way of "approaching the old questions." Philosophers who disputed the meaning of the turn were at least agreed that the turn "must be executed, somehow or other," he observed, since they had learned from Wittgenstein to recognize how close and special is the relationship between language and philosophy.[4]

Rorty, in his introduction to the volume, *The Linguistic Turn*, assesses thirty years of linguistic philosophy in the following terms. First, insofar as this "philosophical revolution" aimed to *dissolve* traditional philosophical problems, it cannot be said to have succeeded. On the contrary, declares Rorty, "the extent of agreement among linguistic philosophers about criteria for philosophical success is inversely proportional to the relevance of their results to traditional philosophical problems."[5] However, the "revolution" was successful in putting all previous philosophy "on the defensive" by demonstrating that traditional problems can no longer be expressed in traditional ways. Rorty concludes by saying that the main thing to occur in philosophy since the thirties "is not the linguistic turn itself, but rather the beginning of a thoroughgoing rethinking of certain epistemological difficulties which have troubled philosophers since Plato and Aristotle." In a footnote he adds that these difficulties are due to a "'spectatorial' account of knowledge, one presupposing that the mind can have direct access to knowledge "without the mediation of language.'"[6] Rorty's later work, particularly *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, continues the critique of such an epistemology and

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[2]For discussions of these "turns," see Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957) 8 (the "Socratic turn"); Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Copernican Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957); David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975) 172-74 (the "turn to the subject"); and, Christopher Norris, *The Deconstructive Turn* (New York: Methuen, 1983).

[3]Richard Rorty, *The Linguistic Turn: Recent Essays in Philosophical Method* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967) 9.

[4]This essay is included in Rorty, *The Linguistic Turn*, 63-71. Mention of "the linguistic turn" first occurs on p. 63.

[5]Ibid. 25.

[6]Ibid. 39.

moves the discussion into the territory known as "hermeneutics."[7] A final point with respect to Rorty concerns the way his 1967 discussion enriched our focal metaphor, "the linguistic turn," by using it interchangeably with the image of a "philosophical revolution."[8] This served both to intensify the sense of change associated with the original image of turning and also to strengthen associations with the Copernican example of radical conceptual reorientation, since the latter is more often referred to as the "Copernican revolution" than the "Copernican turn," thanks in part to Thomas S. Kuhn's decision to call his 1957 study *The Copernican Revolution.*[9]

Writing twenty years after Rorty published *The Linguistic Turn,* and half a century after the advent of "linguistic philosophy," David Tracy, in *Plurality and Ambiguity* (1987), substantially agrees with Rorty that the significance of the linguistic turn is epistemological and that the category of hermeneutics is central to grasping its significance.[10] Tracy claims that the current cultural period is a "critical" one, in the sense that we find ourselves—like Augustine in his day, or Schleiermacher and Hegel in theirs—needing "to find new ways of interpreting ourselves and our traditions," and that during such critical epochs issues of interpretation theory, or hermeneutics, are necessarily central.[11] The relevance of all this for ethics Tracy states as follows: "To understand at all is to interpret. To act well is to interpret a situation demanding some action and to interpret a correct strategy for that action."[12]

To appreciate Tracy's handling of the linguistic turn, it is useful to recall that he is working with a model of truth as "manifestation," which involves a linguistic and dialogical process that results in both "disclosure-concealment" and "recognition." This model incorporates notions of truth as correspondence, if such is understood not as some "visual" match-up of proposition and "reality," but rather as "the consensual truth of warranted beliefs,"[13] and also a notion of truth as coherence, but what distinguishes this model is the insistence that truth is primarily "manifestation," and that all understanding is both linguistic and literary, that is, dependent on symbolic codes and texts. That Tracy himself has made the linguistic turn is clear when he says such things as " . . . all understanding is linguistic through and through" and "[t]here are no ideas free of the web of language."[14]

Tracy uses psychological, social, and spatial imagery to discuss the developments in thought that have been subsumed under our governing image. These developments all have to do with "theories that attempt to explain the uneasy re-

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[7]Richard Rorty, *Philosopy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

[8]Ibid. 1.

[9]See note 2 above.

[10]David Tracy, *Plurality And Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987).

[11]Ibid. 8.

[12]Ibid. 9.

[13]Ibid. 28.

[14]Ibid. 43.

lationships among language, knowledge, and reality,''[15] theories that have the effect of "interrupting" conversations that would naively consider knowledge and reality without attention to the plurality and ambiguity bound up with all understanding because of its linguistic, social, and historical character.

Tracy's discussion can be summarized in three main points. First, the function of the linguistic turn has been "therapeutic" in that the new direction removed illusions that went with its chief predecessors, positivism and romanticism. Second, the linguistic turn marks the difference between "modern" and "postmodern" thought. Whereas the former was still traditional in the way it saw language as a more or less stable *instrument* employed by a relatively unified self, the latter views language much less instrumentally, recognizing a dividedness in the self that threatens all previous assurances. After the linguistic turn there is no going back to a situation of untroubled confidence in what Tracy calls "the power of reflection to eliminate error and render consciousness translucent if not transparent.''[16] Tracy's third point is that the change has occurred in three stages, and brief consideration of these will clarify what the linguistic turn involves.

According to Tracy, in the first stage of the linguistic turn attention began to be paid to the *use* of language. Wittgenstein and Heidegger both showed that language "is not an instrument that I can pick up and put down at will," but instead "is always already there, surrounding and invading all I experience, understand, judge, decide, and act upon." Wittgenstein's distinct contribution was to stress the *social character* of language and therefore of understanding; his insight into the plurality of "language games" and "life forms," in Tracy's estimation, "freed much Anglo-American philosophy from the seductions of positivism." Heidegger's achievement was to call attention to the *historicity* of all understanding. His views on "language as the house of being," Tracy declares, "helped to free much Continental philosophy from idealistic and romantic self-interpretations." These contributions "de-centered" the human self and put in question the anthropocentric worldview that had characterized the modern period.[17]

The contributions of Saussure, the structuralists and semioticians, and the deconstructivists all belong to Tracy's "second stage" of the linguistic turn, which viewed language as *system*. Saussure's basic insight was that language is a system of differential relations. One can see this by noting that the difference of a single phoneme is what gives our word "turn" its meaning, in distinction from similar words like "burn" or "churn." Structuralists and semioticians applied this theory about language to other systems of signs and structures, such as myths and societies. More recently, the poststructuralists, or deconstructivists, have taken Saussure's insight concerning the differential nature of linguistic relations and drawn the conclusion that *no* system of linguistic, textual, or social structures is either closed or fully analyzable. All meaning depends on the "traces" of signifiers that are "absent" from a given text and yet "present" in their effects. What

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[15]Ibid. 47.

[16]Ibid. 77.

[17]Ibid. 49-50. For an important recent critique of anthropocentrism, see James M. Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981-1984).

this implies, Tracy says, is that "Any claims to full presence, especially claims to self-presence in conscious thought, are illusions that cannot survive a study of language as a system of differential relations." Summarizing the contribution of the most famous practitioner of deconstructivism, Tracy observes: "Like a Zen master, [Jacques] Derrida has exposed an illusion, the illusion that we language-sated beings can ever be fully present to ourselves or that any other reality can be fully present to us either."[18]

With Derrida's renewed attention to difference and rhetoric having thus undermined the structuralist hopes for thoroughgoing understanding of linguistic, mythic, and social systems, the second stage of the linguistic turn has been completed, and a third stage begun. Going beyond concern with language as *use* and language as *system or differential non-system,* many philosophers are now preoccupied with language as *discourse.* This stage deals with what goes on when "someone says something to someone." The move to "discourse analysis" is seen in Edward Said's literary criticism, Paul Ricoeur's work on metaphor, Michel Foucault's study of the relations between "power" and "truth," and Jacques Lacan's rewriting of psychoanalysis, to mention some notable examples. There is a renewed concern with how language is actually employed; we are pursuing social, historical, ethical, and political questions with a new recognition that the rhetorics we experience influence our motivations and our actions. Fascination with language-itself has been transcended and attention is now given to the whole relational transaction of human efforts to understand and communicate, which is what the rich concept of "discourse," with its bivalent meanings of "reasoning" and "speaking," entails. We are only beginning to recognize the implications of this last stage of the turn, which include Foucault's insight that "every discourse bears within itself the anonymous and repressed actuality of highly particular arrangements of power and knowledge."[19]

Tracy's narrative is spare, and it leaves out some of the interesting moves in Anglo-American philosophy that are relevant to the concerns of moral theologians, such as the development of speech-act theory, which I presume would belong in his "language as discourse" stage of the linguistic turn. But nevertheless it correctly states the main results of this half-century of conceptual change: we postmoderns have a new sense of plurality and ambiguity about our knowledge of anything, including ourselves and our most revered traditions. This development has greatly complicated life for moral theologians:

1. With respect to *epistemology,* aspirations to perfect certainty and absolute stability must be tempered; we can at best strive for relative adequacy in our given social-historical circumstances.

2. With respect to discussions of *moral agency* and responsibility, our efforts cannot avoid critical analyses of social, historical, political, psychological, and economic factors.

3. With respect to *our professional work,* the plurality and ambiguity of our own situation as moral theologians must be recognized; the element of self-critique is essential.

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[18]Ibid. 59.
[19]Ibid. 79.

Clearly a ''postmodern'' moral theology has been underway for some decades now, but we cannot gloss over how difficult the undertaking currently is, given the context of our labors in a religious institution that has only lately begun to come to terms with *modernity*, let alone *postmodernity*![20] Small wonder that the residual forces of opposition to the Copernican turn, which were officially freed-up by the reinstatement of Galileo in 1979, should lately find another outlet by opposing moral theologians who, with varying degrees of self-awareness, are taking their lessons from the linguistic turn.[21]

But to paint the picture as simply one of intransigent classicist ''power'' versus historically conscious, relatively adequate ''truth,'' would be to miss the main point of the linguistic turn, namely the existence of plurality and ambiguity on *both* sides of such struggles. There is some validity in characterizing the current time as a contest between abusive power and new, relatively adequate understandings of religious and moral truth, but this validity is not without ambiguity. We who voted overwhelmingly last year in favor of a resolution urging that ''no action be taken against Charles Curran that would prohibit him from teaching on the theology faculty at the Catholic University of America'' do need what Tracy calls ''strategies of resistance'' and ''strategies of hope'' to keep our enterprise going productively in these discouraging days.[22] We should pray fervently for the ''moral equivalent'' of *Divino Afflante Spiritu*. But in the meanwhile we must also seek to do justice to the concerns that motivate the best of those who are employing, perhaps too desperately, their own ''strategies of resistance'' against the results of the linguistic turn, against the terrors felt to be unleashed by this latest in a long series of ''revolutionary'' philosophical discoveries.

II. LINGUISTIC PHILOSOPHY: TEMPTATION AND RESOURCE

The work of the earlier stages of linguistic philosophy has resulted in a spate of discussions in moral philosophy that we label under such headings as ''emotivism,'' ''prescriptivism,'' and ''meta-ethics.'' The discussions are fascinating, and to my mind, somewhat seductive. The linguistic temptation, as I see it, is the inclination to jump aboard a fifty-year-old philosophical movement and assume that answers to our troubled situation in moral theology will emerge if we can only get clear on the meaning of terms and start using language ''properly.'' The linguistic territory is safe from curial scrutiny, its literature is learned and academically well-heeled, and indeed it has many salutary things to say to us theologians, who from a philosophical point of view have sometimes been less than rigorous about our logic and our use of words and and categories. Gordon D. Kaufman

[20]See Joseph A. Komonchak, ''Issues Behind the Curran Case,'' *Commonweal* 114 (January 30, 1987) 43-47.

[21]Pope John Paul II, ''Faith, Science, and the Search for Truth,'' *Origins* 9 (1979) 389-92. From an historical perspective it is interesting to note that the year 1979 also saw the beginning of correspondence between the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith and Charles E. Curran, which led eventually to his being removed from the ranks of officially authorized Catholic theologians in 1986.

[22]''Secretary's Report,'' *CTSA Proceedings* 41 (1986) 177.

commended the movement for such reasons when he reviewed Rorty's anthology *The Linguistic Turn* for *Commonweal* in 1968:

> But our theologians, unfortunately, often seem completely unaware that many of their difficulties may arise precisely because of the ways they are using—or misusing—their words. . . . It is to be hoped that the kind of spirit and sophistication one sees [in the linguistic philosophy essays in Rorty's book] will prove contagious and will infect the present generation of theologians as it has the past generation of philosophers.[23]

Never ones to rush into novelty, even thirty-year old novelty, theologians have not stampeded into the pastures of linguistic philosophy. After all, it was not clear that much would be learned from a movement that had early on asserted a linguistic positivism that found God-talk meaningless because it was non-verifiable, or at least non-falsifiable. But now, twenty years after Rorty's book, people we trust have opened the gates and told us that relatively adequate truth will never be had without making the linguistic turn. Shall we now rush in and head for the green patches that still remain after the Ordinary Language philosophers have picked over the lawns of Oxford and the Ideal Language philosophers have chomped away at the Cambridge commons? If I seem to trivialize a serious movement, it is only because the movement itself has tended to trivialize morality, as thinkers much closer to it than I have acknowledged. The Oxford philosopher Mary Warnock, for example, has declared that:

> One of the consequences of treating ethics as the analysis of ethical language is . . . that it leads to the increasing triviality of the subject. . . . One aspect of this trivializing of the subject is the refusal of moral philosophers in England to commit themselves to any moral opinions. . . . [T]he concentration upon the most general kind of evaluative language, combined with the fear of committing the naturalistic fallacy, has led too often to discussions of grading fruit, or choosing fictitious games equipment, and ethics as a serious subject has been left further and further behind.[24]

Such findings are all the more serious in view of the fact that moral philosophy's fascination with linguistic rigor and clarity developed during the period of the Holocaust and the post-World War II arms race. I share Warnock's concern that the inclination to analyze linguistic phenomena without regard to normative considerations and practical implications is a temptation we ought to resist. Whenever the linguistic turn leads to an obsession with language that is detached from the questions and struggles of ordinary life, there is danger of distraction and trivialization. But to recognize this danger is by no means to deny that studies of words and speech acts can be of value to moral theology. My theme, after all, is ambiguity, not villainy, and to balance the account I shall now mention five ways in which insights from secular moral philosophy have enriched moral theology.

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[23]Gordon D. Kaufman, review of *The Linguistic Turn*, *Commonweal* 87 (January 26, 1968) 513.

[24]Mary Warnock, *Ethics Since 1900*, third edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978) 136-37. Similarly, G. J. Warnock declares in the Introduction to his recent book, *Morality and Language* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble Books, 1983) that he had concluded by 1962 that "certain doctrines about language were actually retarding progress [in moral philosophy] by directing attention the wrong way" (7).

In the first place, linguistic philosophy has called attention to the category of *discourse* and to the variety entailed in the discourses employed and studied by moral theologians. An important contribution is Henry David Aiken's analysis of "Levels of Moral Discourse," first published in 1952.[25] Aiken sorted out four such levels: the *expressive level* of spontaneous utterances regarding value and disvalue, the *level of moral rules,* the *level of ethical principles,* or critical reflection about justifications for moral rules, and finally, the *post-ethical level,* which involves justifications for caring about morality at all, for "playing the moral language game," as Wittgenstein might have phrased it. Here at last was linguistic moral philosophy that recognized a realm of discourse important to theologians— indeed, that implicitly acknowledged that one's convictions about ultimate reality are basic to more properly ethical and moral positions—and more than one theologian has made use of Aiken's analysis of these levels of moral discourse.[26]

Another important way that attention to discourse has enriched moral theology involves a social ideal expressed by James M. Gustafson in terms of "a community of moral discourse."[27] Gustafson originally used this phrase when speaking of the potential of a university to be a locus for interdisciplinary ethical reflection, but similar language has been employed by theologians who see the Church as ideally a community that searches, in dialogue, for moral wisdom. Much has been written of the complementary roles of hierarchical magisterium, theologians, and faithful alike in this ongoing process of discovery through discourse. It is the linguistic turn that has been so instrumental in bringing us to appreciate the dialogical nature of knowledge, and thus to prize open discussion as essential for progress toward relative adequacy on practical moral questions. Catholic theologians have expressed this ideal of a community of moral discourse in various ways. John Boyle, for example, has observed that " . . . the traditional doctrines of indefectibility and infallibility of the Church . . . stand in tension with others which assert that the eschaton is not yet." This means that,

> The Church's perception and thematization of moral values is therefore in need of correction and reformulation, especially at the level of specific moral directives.
> . . . Given the multiplicity of the gifts of the Spirit in the Church, the community must be one of ongoing moral discernment as its seeks the implications of its Christian commitment for its life."[28]

Likewise, Gerard J. Hughes, in a study of method in moral theology that is greatly influenced by linguistic moral philosophy, makes a convincing case for the need and possibility of "open moral debate" in a church that esteems tradition and au-

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[25]Henry David Aiken, "Levels of Moral Discourse," *Ethics* 62 (1952) 235-48.

[26]See, for example, James M. Gustafson, *Christ and the Moral Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968) 1; and, William C. Spohn, *What Are They Saying About Scripture and Ethics?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984) 130-36.

[27]James M. Gustafson, "The University as a Community of Moral Discourse," *The Journal of Religion* 53 (1973) 397-409.

[28]John Boyle, "The Natural Law and the Magisterium," in Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick, eds., *Readings in Moral Theology No. 3: The Magisterium and Morality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982) 444-45.

thority.[29] Most significantly, the American bishops have begun to model this ideal of the "community of moral discourse" in the consultative processes whereby they drafted their pastoral letters *The Challenge of Peace* and *Economic Justice for All*. And on the other side, efforts to inhibit the process of ethical discourse, whether by firing, cancelling speaking engagements, or other variations on the theme of silencing, have increasingly been called into question by theologians who recognize that reasoned argument is essential to the doing of moral theology. Currently it is authoritarianism and its reverse, uncritical disdain for authority, that seem most threatening to the ideal of the church as a "community of moral discourse," and we should be grateful that various thinkers have articulated the reasons why open moral debate can and should exist in a church where respect for authoritative teaching is not diminished. Here it is appropriate to note the distinctive contribution that Richard McCormick has made to promote discourse in moral theology, not only in his persuasive pleas for civility and openness in debate, but also in his long-term service of rendering widely accessible a pluralistic, ever-burgeoning literature by means of the "Notes" in *Theological Studies* as well as the series of *Readings in Moral Theology* that he and Charles E. Curran have co-edited for Paulist Press.[30]

A second result of the linguistic turn is the appreciation of *plurality* in various dimensions of social and intellectual life. Plurality is opposed to authoritarianism and to monisms of all sorts, but is it also destined to degenerate into utter relativism? This is the question that naturally arises when moralists encounter plurality. Tracy maintains that the recognition of plurality, in combination with attention to the ambiguity of history and society, leads ideally to decisions about which visions of the good life are more relatively adequate than others, and although these judgments are not absolute, they are far from relativistic.[31] Hughes also devotes attention to plurality in his study of method in moral theology, and argues that pluralism in ethics is both inevitable and desirable—inevitable because the evidence needed for making ethical judgments is complex and always to some degree incomplete, and desirable because of the "almost inexhaustible variety of human nature and the rich diversity of the many ways in which human beings can find

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[29]Gerard J. Hughes, *Authority in Morals: An Essay in Christian Ethics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1978) 129.

[30]See, for example, Richard A. McCormick, "Rules for Abortion Debate," in Edward Batchelor, ed., *Abortion: The Moral Issues* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1982) 27-37; "L'Affaire Curran," *America* (April 5, 1986) 261-67; and, "The Vatican Document on Bioethics: Some Unsolicited Suggestions," *America* (January 17, 1987) 24-28, 39. The *Theological Studies* review essays have been collected in *Notes on Moral Theology 1965 through 1980* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1981) and *Notes on Moral Theology 1981 through 1984* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984). The five volumes of readings in moral theology co-edited with Charles E. Curran are subtitled: "Moral Norms and the Catholic Tradition," "The Distinctiveness of Christian Ethics," "The Magisterium and Morality," "The Use of Scripture in Moral Theology," and "Official Catholic Social Teaching." All are published by Paulist Press, New York.

[31]Plurality is the phenomenon that Tracy highlights in his account of the linguistic turn, maintaining that the findings of linguistic philosophy have exposed the "radical plurality in language, knowledge, and reality alike" (*Plurality and Ambiguity*, 47).

fulfillment.''[32] He is careful to distinguish pluralism from relativism, maintaining that "acceptable pluralism" must yield the fruits of "happiness and justice," which assumes that some "culturally neutral" criteria of adequacy are available to judge these fruits, despite the difficulties inherent in cross-cultural comparisons. Whether Hughes is entirely successful in building his case for pluralism I cannot get into here; that he and others are making the effort to clear the ground for pluralism in a religious institution that has traditionally assumed that uniformity even in smaller matters was a hallmark of unity is clearly an important way in which moral theology has entered the postmodern age.[33] Hughes' concluding words define rather well the agenda for theoretical progress in Catholic moral theology:

> It is my final conclusion that taking the concept of human nature seriously . . . leads inevitably to an ethical theory which is neither relativist nor monolithic. It seems to me that only such a theory can be integrated with any appeal to an authoritative tradition in a religion which has to be preached to all men.[34]

Hughes' infelicitious use of the so-called "generic" masculine in the above passage is what led me to say the agenda was put only "rather" well, and this point leads directly to a third contribution the linguistic turn has offered moral theology, namely, attention to the way *language-itself* either serves or inhibits human well-being. We have come to realize that in a certain sense the limits of our language define the limits of our thought, and that it matters a great deal if common discourse renders women invisible when generalizations are made about "the nature of man," the ethical ideal of "brotherhood," and "the salvation of mankind."[35] This is well-worn ground by now, and I trust that all here are persuaded that not only our nouns and pronouns for persons, but also our words for God, have ethical significance in a world where gender has figured so prominently in unjust patterns of distributing the rewards and burdens of life.[36]

Close on the heels of attention to the morality of language itself has been a fourth result of the linguistic turn, namely, recognition of the *politics of language use*. We are asking the question of discourse: Who has been saying what to whom? And we are coming to appreciate what it has meant that powers of definition, powers of absolution, powers of declaring this or that morally significant, powers of

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[32]Hughes, *Authority in Morals*, 111.

[33]Of interest in this regard is the issue of *Concilium* edited by Jacques Pohier and Dietmar Mieth, *Christian Ethics: Uniformity, Universality, Pluralism* (New York: Seabury, 1981), which assembles various essays in support of the claim that moral pluralism has obtained throughout the history of Christianity.

[34]Hughes, *Authority in Morals*, 121.

[35]See Benjamin Lee Whorf, *Language, Thought, and Reality*, edited by John B. Carroll (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1956).

[36]See, for example, Casey Miller and Kate Swift, *Words and Women* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1977); Beverly W. Harrison, "Sexism and the Language of Christian Ethics," *Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics*, edited by Carol S. Robb (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985) 22-41; and, Anne E. Patrick, "Toward Renewing 'The Life and Culture of Fallen Men': 'Gaudium et Spes' as Catalyst for Catholic Feminist Theology," in Judith A. Dwyer, ed., *"Questions of Special Urgency"* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1986) 55-78.

indicating by omission that this or that is *not* morally significant, have resided with an elite corps within the church, which has presumed that silence and compliance are the main duties of the rest of the faithful. Tracy's summary of Foucault's findings is indeed relevant to the discourse called moral theology or Christian ethics:

> What these analyses show is that every discourse bears within itself the anonymous and repressed actuality of highly particular arrangement of power and knowledge. Every discourse, by operating under certain assumptions, necessarily excludes other assumptions. Above all, our discourses exclude those others who might disrupt the established hierarchies or challenge the prevailing hegemony of power.[37]

To recognize that systems involving power have had detrimental effects is not to deny that they have also had good, even very good, effects. I am not saying that the Catholic sacramental system, moral theological tradition, or episcopal church polity should be scrapped in favor of some structureless religious encounter group. But I am saying that we cannot, in a postmodern age, assume uncritically that all is well in the religious institution that has been our spiritual home. This point is hardly novel; indeed, *Lumen Gentium* #8 said it quite well. What we are finding, however, is that applications of this insight currently evoke defensive responses from many who wield juridical power in the church.

For the sake of truth and justice, there is need to listen to those who have been marginalized from the dominant systems of moral reflection in our tradition. And despite the staggering methodological challenges entailed, moral theologians are beginning to do this, for the profoundly theological reason voiced by Tracy when he declares that "the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized—all those considered 'nonpersons' by the powerful" have been seen "by the great prophets to be God's own privileged ones."[38]

Moral reflection has in fact been going on among officially silenced groups. Women have had a discourse that is only now receiving systematic and public expression.[39] So also have various non-European Christian peoples; so indeed have gays and lesbians.[40] Moral theology is cautiously listening to these "discourses of otherness," and is beginning to learn from them. And in a related development, moral theology is also coming to recognize the contribution to ethical reflection made by great poets, novelists, and dramatists, particularly since the eighteenth century, when both secular and religious ethics began to grow more distant from the concerns of ordinary people.[41]

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[37]Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, 79.

[38]Ibid. 81.

[39]See, for example, Barbara Hilkert Andolsen, Christine Gudorf, and Mary Pellauer, eds., *Women's Consciousness, Women's Conscience: A Reader in Feminist Ethics* (Minneapolis: Seabury, 1985), and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Mary Collins, eds., *Women: Invisible in Church and Society* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd., 1985).

[40]See John Coleman, "The Homosexual Revolution and Hermeneutics," in Gregory Baum and John Coleman, eds., *The Sexual Revolution* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, Ltd., 1984) 55-64, and Mary Hunt, "Transforming Moral Theology: A Feminist Ethical Challenge," in Fiorenza and Collins, *Women: Invisible in Church and Society,* 84-90.

[41]See James T. Laney, "Characterization and Moral Judgments," *The Journal of Religion* 55 (1975) 405-14, for elaboration of the claim that post-Kantian ethics led to a "moral-emotional vacuum [that] came to be filled by the novel" (413).

Finally, a fifth result of the linguistic turn is the recognition of the *radical ambiguity* inherent in all efforts, past and present, to articulate moral truth. This seems the most theologically significant of all, for it removes any justification for trusting blindly in human language and authorities, and should leave us more vividly aware that God alone is the proper object of ultimate trust and loyalty. Rather than discuss this point in general terms, I shall conclude my treatment of "the linguistic resource" by describing some contributions by a thinker who is not only well-read in both Catholic moral theology and contemporary philosophy, but is also attentive to "discourses of otherness," particularly those of women, sexual minorities, divorced and remarried persons, hospital patients, women religious, and seminary students.

I have in mind the theologian who five years ago in New York gave a panel presentation at our convention on a case involving the conflict between the magisterium and the Religious Sisters of Mercy of the Union over the issue of tubal ligation. Margaret Farley's recognition of the ambiguities of that case and the issues of power and powerlessness it involved provides a clear example of the practical fruits of the linguistic turn for moral theology and for the church. Philosophical abstractions come to life in Farley's account of why the leaders of her religious community submitted to a Vatican directive to withdraw a letter they had sent to hospital administrators inviting dialogue on the issue of making tubal litigation available in Mercy hospitals:

> The decision to forego a public position of dissent was not made because of a new belief in the teaching of the magisterium (on the issue of tubal litigation) or out of religious obedience to a disciplinary command. This does not mean that the Sisters of Mercy accept no fundamental authority in the Church, or that they see themselves in regard to their life and ministry as only autonomous agents in the Church, not subject to the Church and its legitimate authority in an important sense. It does mean that in this case they could not find the teaching of the magisterium persuasive and, in fact, interpreted the demands of the magisterium as an attempt to use juridical power to settle a question of truth. Perhaps even more importantly, they perceived the demand for continuation of a policy which they were convinced was unjustly injurious to other persons (patients in their hospitals) as contradictory to the overall obligation of the Sisters of Mercy (in fidelity and obedience to God and the Church) to carry on a ministry of healing. In other words, without special further justification, these specific demands by church officials entailed doing evil.[42]

Why then did these women decline to take a public position in opposition to the magisterium? After attending to three competing values—community, ministry, and truth—they judged that in this instance silence and submission were necessary to preserve the religious community and its ministry, and so they accepted the evil entailed in "material cooperation" with a problematic Vatican directive, and hoped that their decision would lead ultimately to greater good for the church. Farley describes the decision in terms of a relatively adequate choice that must continue to be scrutinized:

> The decision of the Sisters of Mercy must still be reviewed and critiqued by those within the Community and without. The answer to the question, "Why did this group

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[42]Margaret A. Farley, "Power and Powerlessness: A Case in Point," *CTSA Proceedings* (1982) 117.

of women agree to be silenced?'' seems to me to be this: ''In order that their and other voices may ultimately prevail.'' The danger, of course, is that the silence will grow, and that power in the Church will be more and more isolated, especially from the experience of women. But this story is unfinished.[43]

These words reflect the great insight of the linguistic turn that knowledge, which is inherently hermeneutical, social, and historical, is never perfect, but always in process. The case also shows that the fact that knowledge is limited need not paralyze our powers of judgment, but rather can allow for finite decisions to be made in trust and hope, with a conscience consoled by the assurance that God's mercy will compensate for the ambiguity entailed.[44]

Farley's work provides other examples of practical results the linguistic turn has meant for moral theology. Her recent book *Personal Commitments,* for example, analyzes a concept of great religious and moral significance in light of insights gained from a variety of theologians and philosophers, including speech act theorists.[45] Perhaps most significantly, the book is informed by the discourse of ordinary struggling individuals as well, and even aspires to be useful to a nonspecialist audience. Farley agrees with the speech act theorists that a commitment to love is a performative utterance, and also maintains that such a commitment ''assumes a fundamental ground of moral obligation in the reality of persons.''[46] She does not, however, assume that the ''reality of persons'' is a static, monochromatic item that can be the basis for absolute pronouncements about conduct. The fruits of the linguistic turn are clearly evident in her observation that,

> If . . . the norm of a just love is the concrete reality of the beloved, everything will depend on how we interpret this reality. Our knowledge of human persons generally, as well as of individual persons, obviously differs and changes, for our interpretation of human experience is importantly historical and social.[47]

This recognition of historicity and ambiguity leads Farley to seek a middle course between absolutizing ''the obligation to keep our commitments'' and relativizing it ''out of existence in favor of a general obligation to avoid harmful consequences or produce good ones.''[48] Her solution is to argue that a commitment to love does entail an enduring obligation, but the framework in which that love is expressed may in certain circumstances need to be changed:

> Within our promise, then, lies the basis for our being released from it and the basis for our continuing to be bound. A just love, committed unconditionally, may

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[43]Ibid. 119.

[44]See H. Richard Niebuhr, ''The Ego-Alter Dialectic and the Conscience,'' *The Journal of Philosophy* 42 (1945) 359.

[45]Margaret A. Farley, *Personal Commitments: Beginning, Keeping, Changing* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986). It is interesting to note the degree to which this work makes use of the insights of imaginative artists as well as of philosophers and theologians. There are references to John A. Searle and Thomas Aquinas, but also to Alan Paton, Alice Walker, and Henrik Ibsen.

[46]Ibid. 136-37 (n. 1).

[47]Ibid. 82.

[48]Ibid. 69.

require that its framework be lived to the end; but it may also require that its framework be changed.[49]

Farley's characterizing of the norm as one of "just love" recalls an earlier essay of hers, which is also very relevant to our theme of the "linguistic turn." This is a 1975 essay from *Theological Studies* entitled "New Patterns of Relationship: Beginnings of a Moral Revolution."[50] Here Farley shows how changed views about gender require a re-examination of moral language, especially concepts of love and justice. This analysis shows not only how productive the work of meta-ethics can be, but also how profound and far-reaching are the changes involved as our culture moves from the "old order" of male dominance and female subordination to a "new order" of mutuality between the sexes. Farley compares this twentieth-century development to other monumental "turns" of thought in Western history:

> Indeed, so profound are these changes and so far-reaching their consequences that one is tempted to say that they are to the moral life of persons what the Copernican revolution was to science or what the shift to the subject was to philosophy.[51]

What Farley did not articulate, but what I trust has become clear by now, is that it is the linguistic turn that made possible the contemporary critique of the inadequate notions of human nature sustaining the old order. I think she is especially correct to associate new understandings of gender and sexuality with the "Copernican revolution," and I shall now show how this sixteenth-century "turn" is even more closely linked with the current "moral revolution" than she indicated, and that it also has striking affinities with the linguistic turn.

III. BEYOND THE LINGUISTIC TURN:
THE RADICAL CONVERSION OF MORAL THEOLOGY

Up to this point I have followed Tracy in describing the linguistic turn as the name given the various intellectual developments resulting from fifty years worth of attention to language (as use, as system or differential nonsystem, and as discourse), agreeing with him that the movement has so complicated our understanding of knowledge and ourselves that we have crossed over from modernity into a territory called postmodernity. And further, I have indicated that this change has affected moral theology especially in regard to our understandings of moral epistemology, moral agency, and our own enterprise. I have argued that certain risks associated with these new developments are well worth taking, for the linguistic turn has enriched our discipline by its attention to discourse, its recognition of plurality and ambiguity, and its acknowledgement of the moral significance of language forms and the politics of discourse. Furthermore, I have intimated that the last item, attention to the politics of discourse, already opens into a stage *beyond*

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[49]Ibid. 99.

[50]Margaret A. Farley, "New Patterns of Relationship: Beginnings of a Moral Revolution," *Theological Studies* 36 (1975) 627-46. For another work that stresses justice, written by a moral theologian who regards racism and sexism as priority issues, see Daniel C. Maguire, *The Moral Revolution: A Christian Humanist Vision* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986).

[51]Ibid. 628.

the linguistic turn because discourse analysis attends to other realities besides language. What then is this new stage we have reached? What are we finding beyond the linguistic turn?

Many things, surely, but important among them is a renewed call to the radical sort of "turning" our tradition has always commended, which we term *metanoia*, or conversion. What this means for moral theology I shall now attempt to sketch, showing how some of the intellectual moves on the far side of the linguistic turn may help us to speak more adequately to certain moral questions of our time. My clues for this analysis come not only from moral theologians but also from hermeneutical theorists. These reflections, in fact, are an exercise of what Tracy terms the "analogical imagination," one that has benefited from the theory of knowledge-in-process recently delineated in Mary Gerhart and Allan Russell's book *Metaphoric Process*.[52]

I shall explore two related analogies, one of which concerns striking similarities-in-difference between the linguistic turn and other great "turns" of Western history, while the other concerns the similarities-in-difference between sexuality and language. To begin with the latter, we are aware that some recent moral theology discusses sexual ethics in terms of an analogy between sex and language.[53] The basis for the analogy is that sex has the potential for highly meaningful communication, and that sexual conduct should respect this teleology. The analogy has provided room for a natural law ethic to maneuver beyond physicalism and procreationism, without being cast adrift on a sea of relativism. Although the analogy needs more critical scrutiny, it does have possibilities, one of which deserves particular attention. Obviously sex figures in human communication and relationships, but perhaps less obviously and yet very importantly, it also figures in the Catholic believer's *relationship with God*, especially in the form of sexual abstinence and self-discipline.

Over the centuries, sexual self-discipline has been central to the *language of Catholic piety*, much as dietary self-discipline has been central to the language of Jewish piety. In neither case has the discipline in question been the only dialect of the language of piety, but its prominence can be seen in the way membership in the community, understood broadly to include also an individual's sense of whether or not one is a "good" member, is defined, as it were, by conformity to the standard grammer and syntax. E. P. Sanders has shown how useful attention to the practical patterns that define membership in a community of faith can be for understanding the first-century situation, and when I reflect on our Catholic tradition in this light it seems clear that conformity on sexual matters has long been a prominent factor in the functioning of Catholicism.[54] We all know persons who

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[52]See David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), and Mary Gerhart and Allan Russell, *Metaphoric Process: The Creation of Scientific and Religious Understanding* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1984).

[53]See, for example, André Guindon, *The Sexual Language: An Essay in Moral Theology* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1976).

[54]E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977). For a recent discussion of the connection between piety and Christian ethics, see James M. Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective* vol. 1 (201-204) and vol. 2 (9-11).

have found it necessary "to leave the Church" over decisions to marry non-Catholics or divorced persons, for example, but never over decisions to go into the liquor business or nuclear weapons industry, though in certain other communions such moves would surely lead to exclusion. And we sense that the response of a gay man who recently mailed his baptismal certificate back to his bishop is not the sort of thing that would be done by a Catholic who was upset over the teachings of the hierarchy on racial or economic questions. When we consider how deeply Catholics have internalized the traditional sexual ethos, and how strongly this has been enforced compared to other moral teachings, it is hardly surprising that many just and charitable persons who are sexual nonconformists have chosen to say they "are no longer Catholic," or "are not good Catholics," whereas dyed-in-the-wool racists have rarely been plagued with doubts about their Catholic identity.[55]

Furthermore, when we pursue the analogy between sex and language, we find that a core dimension of the language of Catholic piety has been a discourse of silence, or of very restricted speech, when it comes to the matter of sexual expression. Indeed, the tradition has tended to hold that the safest course is to associate sexual pleasure with sin, allowing an important exception in the case of licit marital love that it open to procreation, or in recent decades, that is not artificially closed to procreation. This traditional presumption that sexual pleasure is sinful in so many circumstances, however, is increasingly being questioned today, much as the Ptolemaic view of a geocentric universe was found in the late middle ages to be less and less adequate to what astronomers were discovering about the planets.

We know that the longstanding identification of a great deal of ordinary human sexual experience with moral evil has been challenged by the findings of biologists, psychologists, feminists, and other critical social theorists, and I want here simply to note that the changes in attitudes about sex that seem so reasonable to postmodern thought are of great *religious* as well as moral significance. And having reached the point where the analogy of language and sex intersects with the line of thought that sees connections between the linguistic turn and other revolutionary changes in Western thought, we can say of these postmodern views on sex much the same thing that Thomas Kuhn said regarding the findings of Copernicus:

> Copernicanism was potentially destructive of an entire fabric of thought. . . . More than a picture of the universe and more than a few lines of Scripture were at stake. The drama of the Christian life and the morality that had been made dependent upon it would not readily adapt to a universe in which the earth was just one of a number of planets. Cosmology, morality, and theology had long been interwoven in the traditional fabric of Christian thought described by Dante at the beginning of the fourteenth century. . . . Copernicanism required a transformation in man's view of his relation to God and of the basis of his morality.[56]

Indeed, a revolutionary change in understandings of God and humanity, as well as of sin and virtue, is now in progress in our religious culture, and we seem to be in that very uncomfortable phase when a less adequate model is being patched and

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[55]J. F. Powers depicts this problem, using the case of racism, in "The Trouble," in *The Prince of Darkness and Other Stories* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1958) 19-31.

[56]Kuhn, *The Copernican Revolution*, 192-93.

defended by some because a more adequate model has not yet been recognized as compatible with central religious beliefs.[57] Copernicus' notion of a "moving earth" resulted in a "de-centered universe," required a massive reinterpretation of the biblical tradition, and led to many changes in Christian religious practice. Similarly, the notions of "moving language" and "moving human nature," both fruits of the linguistic turn, have exposed the plurality and ambiguity in all knowledge and have "de-centered" the human subject. Again we need a massive reinterpretation of the biblical tradition, and require numerous changes in religious practice.

As we muster the courage and energy to do this work of renewal and adaptation, it may help to look back in our tradition and notice an important similarity between the revolutionary developments in the sixteenth and twentieth centuries and the radical development early in Christian history involving another great turn, the "turn to the Gentiles." One thing common to all three cases is the phenomenon of intense resistance to new ideas, which happened because the ideas shook not just a world of thought but also a world of practice, specifically religious practice. We have always known that the welcoming of non-Jews into first-century Christian communities raised enormous issues of religious practice, and we have also come to realize that the reason why Copernicus' ideas were judged so harshly, first by the Protestant reformers and then by the Catholic counter-reformers, is that these notions put in question the whole biblical worldview upon which the ethos of medieval Christianity had reposed.[58] So likewise the contemporary Catholic resistance to new ideas of moral theologians who have been influenced by the linguistic turn—whether these ideas have to do with tubal ligation, or artificial contraception, or same-sex love, to mention a few controversial subjects—goes deeper than simply a case of intransigent patriarchy holding on to what vestiges of power it can. Also at play are theological and pastoral factors that can profitably be distinguished from the "patriarchal conspiracy hypothesis," though they are related to it in certain ways.

The theological factors concern especially the doctrines of God and Creation. For example, more work needs to be done to lift up the connections between classical sexual teachings that stress procreation and the Neoplatonic God-concept that helped to usher in the Copernican worldview in the first place. Here is Kuhn's description of this God-concept:

> The Neoplatonist's God was a self-duplicating procreative principle whose immense potency was demonstrated by the very multiplicity of the forms that emanated from Him. In the material universe this fecund Deity was suitably represented by the sun whose visible and invisible emanations gave light, warmth, and fertility to the universe.[59]

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[57]See, for example, Jacques Pohier and Dietmar Mieth, eds. *Changing Values and Virtues* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, Ltd., 1987), forthcoming as *Concilium* 3/87. This volume includes a specific discussion of the paradigm shift from "patriarchal" ideals of virtue to "feminist" or "egalitarian" ones in Anne E. Patrick's article, "Narrative and the Social Dynamics of Virtue."

[58]Kuhn, *The Copernican Revolution*, 192.

[59]Ibid. 129.

Feminist theology, informed by the discourse of women who can testify vividly to the human costs of boundless fecundity, must be a prime resource for articulating a more adequate concept of Divine Reality for our times.

Likewise, a reinterpretation of the doctrine of Creation is also needed before a more adequate ethics of sex and reproduction can be fully embraced by the church, because currently for many believers *passivity in relation to the origins of human life* seems necessary for God to be its author, which in turn is necessary for life to have meaning at all. In Jewish and Christian understanding, the doctrine of Creation has supported the conviction that life is good and meaningful. The Genesis story has had a powerful influence in shaping Western religious sensibility, serving as a basis for a way of life that respects persons as created in God's image.

So too the myth of the origin of *individual* life as the result of special divine creation has been very powerful, particularly among Catholics whose piety was shaped from an early age by the first item in the Baltimore Catechism: "Who made you?" "God made me." This is important in view of the way a religious perspective functions to sustain a world of meaning and an ethical way of life for the believers of any tradition. As anthropologist Clifford Geertz has argued, the "religious perspective" involves symbols that establish and reinforce a conviction that there is an "unbreakable inner connection" between the way things are and the way one ought to live.[60] Applying this insight to the contemporary situation, it seems clear that for some Catholics and Protestants, their meaning system depends on a literal interpretation of symbols of Creation. For such Christians, life would have no meaning if it were not the result of God's *direct* intervention. This bedrock feature of religious sensibility cashes out in absolutist defenses of embryonic human life and in passionate espousal of creationist theories of the origin of species. And when the options are framed as either the security of literal acceptance of religious myth and authority on the one hand, or else the loss of meaning that results from corrosive critical reason on the other, it is not hard to see why some people prefer the former. Theologians know that these are by no means the only options available, but we face an enormous task of translating "second naïveté" understandings of Creation from the discourse of systematic theology into terms that make sense to believers schooled in precritical understandings of these mysteries.[61]

Finally, there is a nexus of pastoral factors that also requires attention. If the classical association of sexual pleasure with sin is no longer adequate, what then will take its place? How shall we speak to God? How shall we present our bodies as "a living sacrifice" (Rom 12:1)? Of course it will continue to be necessary to discipline our sexual energies, though now for reasons of justice rather than because of traditional taboos; a degree of sexual restraint will no doubt always be

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[60]Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971) 98.

[61]Paul Ricoeur's term "second naïveté" is discussed in his study, *Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967) 347-57. John Shea applies this idea to key Christian doctrines in *Stories of God: An Unauthorized Biography* (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1978).

part of the language of piety.[62] But more central to the piety needed at this juncture of history will be an asceticism that disciplines our *attention* and controls our *greed*. Is it not the case that unreasonable levels of accumulation and unjust patterns of consumption are responsible for much of the evil we experience on this planet today? And is not our basic problem due to a failure to see what life is really like for neighbors who are *other* than ourselves? The revolution that moral theology must continue to be about involves not only the liberation of otherwise comfortable Catholics from various sorts of sexual oppression, which is important enough, but also the liberation of *all* who are oppressed for whatever reasons, especially by racism, militarism, and economic injustice.

From a moral and religious perspective, then, it seems to me that the great turn "beyond the linguistic turn" must be the "turn to the oppressed." This work is surely underway, and we are experiencing its difficulty, much as the early church suffered the conflicts involved in the "turn to the Gentiles." And because we in this century of the Holocaust are aware of the tragic consequences of the polemics that went on in the first century, we have reason to give thanks especially to those moral theologians who are struggling to articulate new visions of sexual, economic, and political ethics that do not break finally with our traditional heritage even as they challenge us to a *metanoia* more fundamental than our catechisms ever suggested would be required.

Negotiating the linguistic turn, I said at the beginning, should result in our proceeding with a new consciousness of pluralism, ambiguity, tradition, and hope. I conclude by adding that when attentiveness to the "otherness" in all who are oppressed has been creatively combined with our best understanding of the mysterious "Otherness" that sustains us in life and in hope, it will happen that Peter will once again give expression to a new vision of what God finds acceptable. Thanks to the narrative in Luke-Acts, we do have a precedent in our tradition for monumental change in the language of piety. In Acts 10 we read of Peter's dialogue with the Spirit just prior to meeting Cornelius: "But Peter said, 'Far be it from me, Lord, for never did I eat anything common or unclean.' And there came a voice a second time to him, 'What God has cleansed, do not thou call common' " (Acts 10:15-16). Moral theologians, currently in a relation of tension with Peter over various questions of sexual and reproductive ethics, should understand that we are nonetheless contributing to some future Petrine "discourse" on the subject, which will not be the last word, though we have reason to hope it will be a more relatively adequate word than has lately been spoken.

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[62]For examples of approaches that stress *justice* as a norm for sexual ethics, see Margaret A. Farley, "Sexual Ethics," in Warren T. Reich, ed., *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, vol. 4 (New York: The Free Press, 1978) 1575-1589; Beverly W. Harrison, *Making the Connections;* and, Joan Timmerman, *The Mardi Gras Syndrome: Rethinking Christian Sexuality* (New York: Crossroad, 1984).