

Particularity/Universality:  
The Retrospective Tracking of a Career

Emory University  
April 1997

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I have always been one -- a cultural relativist, that is -- though I could not name what it was for a long time, at least from a descriptive, empirical perspective. What people ate, where they worshiped, what second languages they spoke in our town on the Upper Peninsula of Michigan were related to their national origins. The Italians, Irish, Poles, Belgians, and French Canadians were all Roman Catholics; the Swedes and Cornish people, or Cousin Jacks (or "cussin' Jacks," as we called them), were all Protestants. Unless, of course, a Swede married an Italian -- then the kids were "Catlick," as it was pronounced on the U.P. My father was a minister who conducted Sunday morning services in Swedish until 1939; his Swedish Protestantism never kept our family from neighborly intimacy with and respect for E. T. O'Donnell -- a widower raising a brood of young people next door to us -- or for Bessie Ruwitch, who ran the local department store.

From Kansas, where we had moved, I went to Chicago in 1942 as a junior college student. I savored the neighborhoods. Three blocks from our school, on Lawrence Avenue, there were still Yiddish daily papers; to the east on Foster Avenue, Swedish was heard almost as commonly as English. By the "el," one went to "The Black Belt" to attend Sunday evening church services and walk the area. So varied were these experiences that I felt I was a sociologist in the making. During the war in Burma, we lived among Shans and Kachins; later I read in Edmund Leach's *Political Systems in Highland Burma* about rivers and villages I knew by name. In Assam and Calcutta after the Japanese surrender, the struggles for Indian independence and the fierce rivalry between Gandhi, Nehru, and the Congress Party on the one hand and Mohammed Ali Jinnah's Muslim League on the other, plus thousands of other impressions, would have convinced the dullest person that human, historical, cultural, and other differences -

- i.e., particularities -- were indubitable. Differences were powerful, and at least as impressive as sameness.

But there were also experiences of bigotry, of assuming that one's own particularity was superior to someone else's. My maternal grandfather and my immigrant uncles, none of whom ever lost their thick Swedish accents, demeaned Jews, blacks, and Catholics. A friend of our family in Chicago complained that a black person had sat next to him on the el. A Swedish hospital, religiously affiliated, covered a black accident victim with a sheet when he was wheeled to a room; this same group sent missionaries to the Belgian Congo. Conversations with shopkeepers in Newmarket, Calcutta, revealed divided opinion: did the British Raj provide a legacy of Western culture that was beneficial or detrimental to India?

Differences, yes; particularities, yes: but comparative valuations assumed at least two things: some hierarchy of values along which differences could be graded, and a privileged position in the hierarchy for one's own difference.

If one felt that bigotry was wrong, what reason could one give? If rickshaw pulling was offensive, dehumanizing, what backed the judgment? A sociology course at Northwestern I took on stereotypes was not only a descriptive account, but was loaded with indignation: moral indignation against behavior evoked by negative stereotypes; epistemological indignation against the closed-mindedness or at least blind-sidedness that stereotypes caused. Something of a moralist and a philosopher I became, in the making. If particularities led to injustice and to distortion in one's learning and explaining, there had to be some place to go for some standards of morality and some standards of judgment about the adequacy, if not the truth, of what one read or what one said.

What about one's own particularity? With all the exposure to differences, one turned inward to notice a few things about oneself. It helped to read books, take certain classes, and to think. A book in my father's library -- *Religious Aspects of Swedish Immigration* -- by a historian, Charles Stephenson, which I read when I was about fifteen years old, set the world of Swedish immigrant communities and

religion in which I lived in a larger framework. Today, one might call that an experience of liberation.

After the war, at Northwestern there was one book I studied and wrote about that had decisive impact by helping to explain myself, or at least interpret and understand myself, and others from whom I was distinguished. It was George Herbert Mead's *Mind, Self, and Society*. Augmenting this was Ralph Linton's *Cultural Background of Personality*. How to understand particularity and difference? Look at the gestures, the language, the significant symbols used in communication in family and other groups. Look at the meanings they bear and at how these meanings are internalized to form a "me," a persisting selfhood that provides one's perspective on the world, in large and in small.

Did understanding how one came to be the sort of person one was becoming imply that one could not claim some commitments and loyalties as at least preferable to others, some ways of knowing as more adequate than others, some standards of moral judgment as more valid than others?

I was a Swede, a Christian, a Protestant. All these defining characteristics were accidents of birth, weren't they? If being Christian was an accident of birth -- a fate just like being Hindu, Moslem, or Buddhist was -- did understanding that relation to birth now make all things not only relational but equally of value, relativistic in the valuational sense? In me, something of a theologian was beginning to show.

Retrospectively, at least, one can see how Christianity posed issues of particularity and universality that now swamp all of academic and much of cultural and public life. Indeed, my studies of the history of Christianity -- and particularly Christian thought -- showed how religion -- and in the West, particularly Christianity -- raised questions for which we now have different names in different fields of study from physical theory to poetry. Can what is historically particular claim to be universally true? This may be the central philosophical question for Christian theology. What does one do with a historical particularity once one recognizes two things: that the claims about it are in relation to knowers, their methods, their

cultures; and that, often, particularity is what gives access to what can be affirmed generally if not universally. I chose to study theology at the Federated Theological Faculty of the University of Chicago, a place that would expose me to alternatives and to a wide context for the study of religion.

What could one do with one's own religious particularity? The alternatives were (1) to claim that it was the only and exclusive access to what is universally true about the Deity and its relations to the world and humans -- a position defended both from biblical fundamentalism and from sophisticated biblical and historical theology beginning with the New Testament; (2) to take the Christian-existentialist position widely disseminated in the late 1940s and early 1950s when I was a student, namely that Christianity is subjectively true for the believer; (3) to claim that Christian particularity was a source of living and thinking about what is true universally without claiming its exclusivity, a position that hardly makes for evangelical zeal.

Teachers and books and fellow students were contexts in which to think about these alternatives and perhaps others. It was a time when there was a hair preparation for women called Tony, and the printed ads always asked of two pictures, "Which one has the Tony?" "Which Christ has the Tony?" we would ask each other after studying the controversies in the first centuries of the church, with their anathemas and curses on those who did not agree.

The impact of Mead was still strong when the Unitarian theologian James Luther Adams introduced me to the writings of Ernest Troeltsch during my first term of theological studies. Troeltsch won fame for, among other things, his book *Social Teachings of Christian Churches and Groups* which, in a sweeping and ideal-typical way, set the development of Christian ethics and theology in their changing historical and cultural contexts. I was also introduced to Max Weber, Wilhelm Dilthey, and the *Methodenstreit zwischen Geisteswissenschaften und Naturwissenschaften* at the turn of the century. I learned early to distinguish ideographic scholarship from nomothetic and wonder if the two could be related positively. I not only read Troeltsch, Harnack, and others, but studied from a student of Troeltsch -- Wilhelm Pauck, by name. Pauck concluded his lectures

on theology since Kant with a discussion of the most famous of Protestant theologians of this century, Karl Barth. In the late 1920s, Pauck had written one of the first books about Barth in English. Its title in one printing was Karl Barth: Prophet of a New Christianity, period; in another printing, a question mark followed the title. In Chicago, Barth was "neo-orthodoxy" personified; Pauck's passionate final lecture proclaimed that Barth and others never had answered the theological issues raised by Troeltsch and the historicists; they had simply ignored them.

Troeltsch's interpretation of the development of Christian ethics raised the issue of this retrospective tracking specifically. The ethics of Jesus and the New Testament were particularistic; their context also was not one that addressed issues of government and public life. They were, in a sense, sectarian. To be morally relevant as Christianity became stronger and eventually dominant in its region, it had to borrow from Stoic and other theories of natural law. Christian ethics and morality became universally applicable by absorbing ideas from classic, rational understandings of nature.

For a student interested in issues of economic policy, international relations, race, and other matters, Troeltsch posed a central issue in this analysis -- namely, how could one be particularistically Christian and at the same time have an ethics that had general, if not universal, applicability? Could one affirm that particularity without claiming it to be exclusive? How could the necessary generalizability, if not universality, be related to the particular? These were questions for religious thought or theology, and for ethics. Both epistemological and ethical issues had to be faced.

The regnant systematic theology at Chicago during the late 1940s was "process theology," inspired by the writings of Alfred North Whitehead; indeed, for some professors and fellow students, Process and Reality was more important than classic theologians and even the Bible. Charles Hartshorne was physically located in the Divinity School building (as was Carnap, who might as well have been in Vienna as far as both he and the theologians were concerned). There was no escaping process theology, which for some scholars took a quite-rationalistic form, beginning with human experiences and ending by logical necessity with the primordial and consequent

natures of God. Daniel Day Williams closed a lecture on the latter in rather pious tones by saying, "And that is God." A classmate of mine - - one who was converted in the invasion of Guadalcanal (no atheists in the foxholes, remember?) -- blurted out so loudly that it echoed in the lecture hall a disdainful "GAWD!" and stalked out of the room. Whitehead's abstract argument, presumed to be universally persuasive to all rational persons, was repugnant to my friend's particular experience. Those of us who were in some sense or another historical and cultural relativists, while we might find congeniality in the experiential and interactional aspects of process thought, could not take the claim of objectivity, or of levels of abstraction, to the logical necessity of a deity. It was healthy to have to face such general but massive consensus among the systematic theologians in Chicago. My final research paper in my final quarter was on (guess) Process and Reality, since Dan Williams quietly made it clear that I had avoided Whitehead for almost three years and really could not claim a Chicago theological education without one paper on him. Nonetheless, my Bachelor of Divinity thesis was on Max Weber's methodology.

Was there a theologian in the world who not only took seriously historical and cultural relativism but also affirmed the particularity of Christianity in a significant way? It was Wilhelm Pauck who told me, long before my last terms, to read H. Richard Niebuhr's *Meaning of Revelation*. I read it -- not with euphoric elation, but with a quiet assurance that, yes, this is the way that not only I, but Christianity, could and ought to go. That book accepts and defends historical and cultural relativism, and the fatedness of being Christian; however, it also affirms that through the particular, Christ, one can know that God is friend and not the enemy of the human.

I had not applied for graduate study, since we were much moved to return to rural Montana to serve three churches -- Absorkee, Fishtail, and Columbus -- or to serve one church -- Broadus -- where one had to learn to fly to make one's pastoral calls.

"Hell, Jim, you belong in graduate school!" blurted one of my professors as he threw a *Chicago Tribune* to the floor. I knew that there was only one theologian I was interested in studying with, one theologian who combined theology, ethics, history, and sociology as I

had been learning to do: H. Richard Niebuhr. A late applicant to Yale's Graduate School, I was admitted by exception after a visit and a long conversation with the man who was to be my mentor, then my colleague and friend, and finally my predecessor at Yale, and whose pocket watch I carry. Louis Wirth and I talked about Troeltsch and Mead, Weber and Charles Horton Cooley, Dilthey and Karl Mannheim. (I had audited Louis's course on sociology of knowledge in Chicago; he was a translator of Mannheim, as Edward Shils was of Weber.) We also talked about particularity and universality, not always in precisely those words. I still have something he wrote about me three years later in which he noted that I had a deep skepticism about affirming that the Christian message assured one of the ultimate goodness of God. This matter concerned the ultimate unity of Being and value; it was a matter that Wirth's passionate conviction resolutely struggled for and affirmed against the odds of natural and moral evil in human life.

For Niebuhr, one could adhere to a particularity, Christian faith, and affirm its universal meaning -- that God is ultimately the friend of the human -- while acknowledging the relativity of the source of that meaning and certainly not arguing for its exclusivity. In his view, theology and ethics were coherently related. The Bible portrayed a God, said Niebuhr, who is active in all events, and humans are to respond to God's action in those events. This position led to an ethics of response and responsibility: shades of Martin Buber as well as Dewey and others. Value was relational, not objective or subjective. The good and the right are primarily relational terms, not substantive.

The relativism in me always had a bit of skeptical flavor. This was particularly the case with claims (made by various persons -- in my case, mostly by theologians) that were apparently empirical, but against which no contrary evidence seemed to count. As a sociologist of religion whose thought had developed at Chicago and been reinforced there and elsewhere by H. Richard Niebuhr, I found much literature about the church in the 1950s to be rather overblown. The World Council of Churches -- this was the era of ecumenism -- had a commission on Christ and the church, and many books were being written by many famous theologians on that topic.

It might not have been Ockham's razor that moved me, but I certainly thought that a lot about the church that was being explained and interpreted in theological language could be explained in the language of sociology and social theory: Mead, Dilthey, Royce, Troeltsch, Mannheim, Weber and, a bit more speculatively, Bergson. Exhaust as much as you can by naturalistic accounts before you resort to theological explanations, then interpret the natural theologically. This impulse became something of a leitmotif in my work for some years.

The church was a natural, political, social community or group. Its continuity and unity could be interpreted using Mead's, Royce's, and Dilthey's concepts and proposals. A "naturalism," not philosophically argued or defended, came into play, one that was probably there from my childhood; I was always an agnostic about personal immortality. One could reinterpret a social account of the life of the church through time -- its changing characteristics and its persisting ones -- in traditional theological language. Schleiermacher -- a German from Kant's and Hegel's time -- had it right when he explained the effects of Christ on people and the community in different naturalistic terms from mine, but in terms that were functionally equivalent.

There was no leaving the particularity of the institutional church; it was the place -- with its narratives, its symbols, and its rites -- that awakened and sustained the experience of the divine, the ultimate reality. As theologians from the Apostle Paul at Areopagus all through the centuries pointed out (and many did so forcefully in my time, such as the Jesuit Karl Rahner), ultimately we cannot speak or write literally about God. The access to the universal is in and through a particular, but no particularity is exclusive. The experience of the divine is always particular in a tradition, in a community: "God is in the details." Still, the particular is only and always a means, an instrument, to what is beyond itself. Religious faith for me was a little like Calvin's comment after many pages analyzing the niceties in arguments about how Christ could be present in the bread and the wine of the Eucharist. "Now, if anyone should ask me how this takes place, I shall not be ashamed to confess that it is a secret too lofty for either my mind to comprehend or my words to declare. And to speak more plainly, I rather experience than understand it." The experience of the reality of the divine, named by us God, is always through the local, the particular, and in the details. Access to the universal is

through particularities. The human construal of that reality and the human experience of it is always relational, partial, metaphorical, analogical. Indeed, one is often reduced to silent awe. Piety is expressed through different words and symbols; nonetheless, it is an experience of dependence on the radically Other.

This sounds like a bit of preaching. Where between the poles of particularity and universality does that leave one in articulating the beliefs that express that experience and formulating a view not only of moral experience but also of ethical ideas? One way to proceed is to invoke two authors -- from the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas, and from the twentieth, Karl Barth. Why focus more on these two than others? We will come to that soon.

The early 1960s brought several new waves to religious studies and theology. One such wave, somewhat relevant here, was breaking out of doctoral programs from dominant Protestant theological agendas, or dominant Catholic ones, to place more emphasis on Judaism, non-Western religions, and alternative methods or approaches to the study of religion. Backing this approach was a new acceptance of differences and particularities as being all worthy of academic research and teaching. The hegemony of Christianity, of Protestantism or Catholicism, declined in the field of religious studies; I was appointed the first chair of the Department of Religious Studies at Yale in 1964. The other change was the surf that rolled in from Pope John XXIII: the flocking to dominantly Protestant, though nominally nondenominational, doctoral programs by Roman Catholic priests, nuns, and laypersons. *Aggiornamento*, or "letting the air blow through" Roman theological and church life, brought a new period both to students and to our research and teaching. Protestants studied Catholics with open minds, as Catholics studied Protestants. This was not utterly new; Professor Ted Weber of Emory's faculty was a decade ahead of the pack with his dissertation on a Roman Catholic social thinker, Don Luigi Sturzo, in the 1950s. And some Catholic institutions had their say about Protestants with, say, dissertations on St. Thomas. The quantity and openness of such studies was novel, though.

Greater and lesser Catholic theologians were proclaiming that we had moved from a "classical" worldview to a "historical" one, or from a

classical "consciousness" to a historical "consciousness," or from a "static" to a "dynamic" view. What did this movement chart? It was movement from universality to particularity. The shift could be argued in very nonhistorical abstractions, as it was by the Jesuit Bernard Lonergan. What this meant in terms of this lecture was that there was a shift in two presumptions, one toward a view that Catholic theology and ethics were not static, but had changed through the centuries; and this fact required acknowledgment that many universal claims had particular historical contexts -- a relativization of sorts. The other was that the absolute certitude of moral judgments in particular cases -- a "creeping infallibility," as Charles Curran called it -- was subject to fundamental rethinking. Part of this, for the most widely influential moral theologian of the time, Bernhard Haring, was a recentering of Catholic ethics in the particularities of New Testament materials. Haring was following a tradition begun by his teachers at Tübingen, one that emphasized the universal.

Coming from a tradition that claimed exclusivity and universality, a stress on particularity was for many Catholics an intoxicating intellectual and moral experience. For many, it did not stop with a recentering in biblical materials or Protestant influences, but went on to Buddhism, secular modes of thought, and atheism. Some of the younger ones did their first sympathetic study of Thomas Aquinas in my seminars. As a historical relativist, I came from the particularist emphasis and was cognizant of its limits, both in religious truth claims and in ethics, cognizant of where particularism could go without some incorporation and governing by standards shared among wider communities. And the enthusiasm of some Roman Catholics for their new historical consciousness led the archetype of the alienated Protestant theologian, my friend and classmate Van Harvey, to review a major book and sarcastically compliment it for bringing Catholic theology into the nineteenth century.

Back to Karl Barth and Thomas Aquinas. Because of their differences as well as commonalities, and because of their systematic comprehensiveness, they provided both me and my doctoral students with more issues -- including different ways of relating particularity and universality -- than one can resolve in a lifetime. Every third or fourth year, in both New Haven and Chicago, I would offer a year-long seminar comparing works of these men. That situation was

problematic: a thirteenth- and a twentieth-century thinker being taught by a person who was a historical relativist without being a historian. My historical colleagues cringed.

To an audience that already has heard more about theology than many of you have for a long time, if ever, and who by now might feel deceived by the title of this lecture, I shall spare exposition of these men, except in terms of the lecture's title. Each dealt with particularity and universality, and with the relations of each to the other. But they did it very differently. For Barth, the twentieth-century Protestant, what was made known in the particular -- that is, Jesus Christ and the Bible -- was universally the case about God and true about God before its full disclosure in those particular events.

God is for the human, gracious in the creation before the events localized in Roman-occupied land on the east end of the Mediterranean Sea. Barth wrote about God and God's relations in personal terms: God speaks, and humans hear; God commands, and humans obey. And ethically, the terms were exceedingly particularistic: the command of God was specific to the particular person acting in very particular circumstances. The universal God, known fully in a historical particularity, was a person, and also exceedingly particular in how humans were addressed. While God was free to command, though, God's commands were unlikely to violate the meaning of the particular that revealed what was universally true -- that is, Jesus Christ. This was not the analogy of being, but the analogy of relations. This was not the language of law, but the language of personal address in ethics.

For Thomas, also, the knowledge of God as gracious became known only in sacred doctrine, in the revelatory event of Christ. Absorber as he was of the classic as well as biblical traditions, Thomas believed that there is an analogy of being between God and the human and all of creation. Only in a few cases did God address persons directly. Normally, humans were naturally oriented toward God as their ultimate good and could determine with some correctness the ordered patterns of life in the world that led toward that end. They could be directed toward their true earthly and final supernatural end in part by conformity of law, in its critical form of natural law. The universal was mediated through laws that ordered particularities;

humans could know that law and conform their actions to it. An impersonality of relations, orders of being, was very different from Barth's personalistic language.

Not only the thought of Barth and St. Thomas but also a lot of other literature, information, and alternative ways of thinking have to be taken into account when one's relativism is seen to have limited adequacy and when claims for universality are not always defensible. Not only humanities and social sciences but also the behavioral and natural sciences had some similarities to thinking about religion, about morality, about issues of public policy. The same phenomenon, for example, the human (on which I delivered the Phi Beta Kappa lecture here last year), is described, interpreted, explained, and valued differently by persons from various disciplines. I came to criticize and finally reject tacit and explicit claims for autonomy or independence of various disciplines, including theology and ethics. As autonomous disciplines, theology and ethics could be applied to information about the human, about the environmental crisis, about biology and medicine, and other matters. If, however, one comes to see that the claims of theology and ethics include claims about what is -- including human life and activity that other disciplines also interpret -- then theology and ethics have to be open to revision in the light of knowledge and interpretation from other fields.

This led me to write a work titled *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*. Of these two volumes, Edward Farley of Vanderbilt has written quite correctly that they have been praised with loud damns. From traditional and orthodox Christian perspectives, they are heterodoxical at best and, for many, heretical. They have let nontheological, nonethical fields from the sciences determine questions and answers for theology and ethics. They have never been endorsed in toto, or even in their major points, by anyone, to my knowledge -- at least not in print. They are still studied and written about, nonetheless. Among my scores of former students, there is none who rises to my full defense. This, however, is not a lament. The point of teaching and supervising research is not to create disciples, but rather to nurture scholars who face perduring and profound issues. Not least of these issues is the relation of particularity and universality, not conceived abstractly and generally, but in the fine-

grained, dense intersections of other forms of knowledge with theology and ethics.

The Luce faculty seminars at Emory -- what have they done to my thinking about our bipolar terms? The more than 100 different books dealt with in the eight years of the program, from accounts of physical theory to poetry: what effect, beyond intellectual exhilaration and frustration, have they had? I can only state, but not defend, three conclusions here, and make one plea afterward.

First, the polarity that provides the title of this lecture is much too sharp. It is a binary distinction, a distinction between opposites. That it can be addressed at a high level of generality or abstraction is very clear, both from what one reads and from what one hears. But why not tripolar, quadripolar distinctions, and why not use them as heuristic devices to assess materials from various disciplines and set them in contexts that take account of their intersections with other knowledge?

I have not developed the kinds of refinement that are both necessary and possible, nor can I now. For one intellectual scaffold that is applicable to the polarity of this lecture, and many other things, I return to Robert Merton's "Paradigm for the Sociology of Knowledge." It sorts out various social and cultural bases of particularity that affect what we say we know generally; it distinguishes between various spheres in which we relate particularity to generalities and identifies which aspects of them are under examination; it clarifies various relations claimed between our two poles and illuminates the "manifest and latent" functions imputed to what we know on the basis of our particularities. (See Robert Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* [Glencoe IL: The Free Press, 1949] 221-22.) I, and many of you, have other favorite procedures to make more precise and apply more vigorously the analyses of relations between particularity and universality.

Second, the distinction has a graded relevance depending on the subject matter and disciplines involved. Arguments are appropriate to subject matter; and while certain rules of formal logic pertain to all arguments, the structure of various discourses, as we have come to call them, is relative to the content and to the contexts in which the

content is being examined. Even persuasion about the priority of the particular comes only from capacities to generalize its validity or adequacy, and thus from appeals to norms more generally, if not universally, held. Moreover, persuasion about the universal validity of claims in various fields, including the hard sciences, acknowledges the particularities of the evidence, concepts, and modes of argument that defend them. The language of physics is mathematics; language about physics can be English or German prose. Even if one works at the intersections of quite disparate fields, one has to take account of the graded relevance of the distinction between the particular and the universal. Cosmological theories, if taken into account by theologians, have a different authorization than scientific accounts of the nature and activity of humans, which also can be taken into account.

Third, and perhaps implied in the first two conclusions, is that the finer-grained the material with which we deal, the more qualifications we find necessary regarding the bipolarization between the particular and the universal, or the adequacy of either pole. This is one of the deepest convictions I formed as a result of the Luce Faculty seminars. Whether other participants gained the same conviction, I cannot say. Terms such as objectivity, essentialism, totalization, and others do not carry as much weight when one is, in interaction with others, trying to understand the mixes of evidences, concepts, and arguments involved in truly and properly presented dense materials -- whether in literature, other humanities, the social and behavioral sciences, or the natural sciences.

Now for the plea that follows from these conclusions. It is not necessarily for the continuation of a Luce-type seminar. It is instead for the time, space, and institutional arrangements in which -- as scholars and teachers -- we can confront different dense and fine-grained materials, have time to attempt to understand them, and interact according to our mutual critical interpretations and understandings for the benefit of our own scholarship and for the benefit of university intellectual life. Many of us believe that reality, and the particular realities we deal with, no longer can be exhaustively understood, explained, or even valued from the segmented and presumed independence or autonomy of particular disciplines. The proper response to such a belief is not to gloat about our perception of the limitations of particularities, nor to presume the

capacity to develop some all-encompassing universality inclusive of all the parts. It is to work in the intersections, the fine-grained realities, with others who bring different descriptions and interpretations.

Multiversities might, in coming decades, be compelled to become more universities not on the basis of the good will of the participants, but on the basis of the researched and taught subject matters that erode the independence and autonomy of disciplines.

"Gustafson, what kind of lecture have you given anyway? You've never given a lecture like this before in your life! Is it a sign of dotage? Or of reckless efforts to be novel?"

Let me step out of this lecture to reflect a bit about what was said and how it was said.

First, this lecture has been basically a personal narrative. Now, there is a long tradition of personal narratives in religious discourse and particularly in the Puritan tradition that has nourished my work. But I do not claim such backing. Indeed, a decade ago I would not have used narrative as a way to deliver a distinguished university lecture; it would have smelled, and may still, of show and tell.

Why resort to personal narrative? Certainly one reason is evidence of its rhetorical effectiveness in bringing others into one's own world of ideas and even one's discipline. James Watson's *Double Helix* is an example of writing that brought many of us nonscientists into the exploration and justification of a major theory. One can cite others as well, from other intellectual endeavors.

Another reason, though hardly a justification, is the recent legitimization of narrative as one form of academic discourse, on whatever basis this has occurred. What is legitimated in theory long has been in practice. For instance, economists formulate researchable issues out of narratives of events and alternative choices. Psychologists dealing with moral development often cite their own children or their observations of others as at least sources of hypotheses, if not evidence.

Surely, however, there is great insufficiency in my lecture. In one sense, I have valorized a general account on the basis of particularity - the particularity of my own experience as a scholar, thinker, and teacher. If that is not wrong, it is at least ironic. And the narrative of my retrospective reflections is both highly selective and interpreted from some interests. My older brother, a retired sociologist who knows my personal intellectual development better than anyone, might tell a different story.

A narrative is not an argument. It may interpret or even explain, but it does not justify. It might be some evidence to support an argument, but it is not sufficient. So, in the end, this lecture is -- if not a failure -- a limited success: I have not provided an argument for a position, or positions, on a spectrum between particularity and universality.

I have moved into the issues of the polarity from the point of primacy of particularity, of social and historical relativism that might imply epistemological and moral relativism. I have indicated, for example, in my section on Vatican II Catholicism, how others have a different entry. The trajectory of my work has been to recognize the limitations of particularity and find ways to overcome them without claiming universality. My Roman Catholic students and colleagues often were in a euphoric state of release from claims of absolute exclusivity and universality, which enabled them to appreciate diversity and particularity. How one comes to the polarity depends on one's starting point.

It also depends upon what one is most indignant about, or what one most worries about. If one is indignant about oppressive experience in one's personal life, one's social identity, or one's gender, one's antennae are usually alert to any empirical, moral, political, or religious claims, or any theories, that seem to legitimize oppression. Focus on particularities and differences provides some evidences that carry moral weight against the tyranny of claims to universality, especially if these are embodied in structures of custom, power, or authority. Arguments that stress difference and particularity qualify the claims to universality, or even demolish them. Liberation of various kinds is the good outcome. (Early in the narrative, I indicated how reading a book on the religious background of Swedish

immigration set my life and community in a wider context, which relativized its impact upon me.)

If, however, one is indignant about the erosion or weakening of acceptance of claims to truth, or the erosion of moral values and right human relations that easy acceptance of diversity and particularity seems to support, one's antennae are alert to ways in which generalizable, if not universal, claims can be supported. Some literature in ethics symbolizes the polarity as a choice between the Tower of Babel and moral Esperanto.

In ethics, in science, in theology, in any arena of human activity and particularly scholarly activity, what does one worry about most, and why? And how does that worry direct our choices about what to study, what information to gather, what arguments to prefer? Or can one, as in my case, worry about the extremes of the polarity, whether one is talking about the validity of what one knows, or the rightness of what one does?

How one justifies what one is worried about in either extreme is a matter beyond this lecture. Justifications about worries are sometimes mixed and even confused. One reads overtly historical, sociological, literary, or other analyses that thinly disguise a moral stance -- usually a moral stance not defended on moral grounds. And one sometimes reads overtly moral arguments that are presumably validated by historical, sociological, medical, and other evidences.

So, with regard to those matters, as well as others, this lecture is a limited success at best, or a failure, at worst.

Finally, this retrospective tracking of a career may be utterly idiosyncratic. Its narrative indicates a reciprocal engagement between human experiences and information and ideas gained from intellectual pursuits. The human experiences are in some respects deeply personal; they touch upon a question that is more implicit than explicit, namely, "Who am I?" They are also quite pervasively social: the recognition of both self and other -- both in particular and in general, if not universally -- emerges in relations not only with other human beings and institutions, but with more inclusive aspects of nature writ large. The reciprocal engagement between experience

and information and ideas might have a particular idiosyncratic nexus in a career that has been centered on religion and morality. Lived experiences and convictions are to some extent the content of critical inquiry and reflection. Critical inquiry and reflection are focused not only on ideas and information, abstracted from their significance to the human subject (the knower and moral agent) and their significance to the human community. They make a difference in how one views the world, how one orients one's life, what ends (not only individual, but social) one ought to realize, how one decides what one ought to be and to do. This may, or may not, be distinctive to a career focused on religion and morality, a career as a theologian whose primary interest has been the relation of theology and ethics. I may be utterly idiosyncratic and be significant to few, or no, others.

In the end, I still am one -- a cultural relativist, that is. I am, though, a much chastened one -- buffeted by information, ideas, and experiences that press me to move from particularity toward universality. And, if truth be known, the universal also has always been there -- in the experience of an ultimate power, the source and the determiner of the destiny of all that is, the one beyond the many. Some of us call that "God."