

ROSEMARY RADFORD RUETHER

MARJORIE HEWITT SUCHOCKI

**Visions of Justice, the Question of Immortality:
A Study of the Nature of Oppression and Liberation
in the work of
Rosemary Radford Ruether
and
Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki**

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the ways in which two Christian, feminist theologians, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, understand the relationship between liberation, the fulfillment of justice and the concept of an immortal self. Central to this discussion are Suchocki's and Ruether's differing views of immortality. Suchocki argues that without subjective immortality (the possibility of continuing to experience some form of "life" after death as a subjective centre of consciousness) there can be no justice. Ruether, however, contends that the concept of an immortal self is the root of injustice. While Ruether reproaches the concept of subjective immortality, this thesis shows that she nevertheless defends a form of "objective" immortality (that all that occurs within the creation is taken up within the divine).

In Part One, I discuss Ruether's understanding of oppression and liberation. I conclude that while Ruether provides a good analysis of the role of freedom in the development of oppressive social conditions, she neglects to explain the nature of finitude within which human activity is carried out and the limitations which finitude places on human freedom. I also conclude that while Ruether's understanding of liberation addresses forcefully the emancipative aspect of liberation, her characteristic understanding of God's redemptive activity as a form of objective immortality does not address satisfactorily the consequences of injustice as at once individual and relational.

In Part Two, I discuss Suchocki's understanding of the nature of oppression and liberation. Her appropriation of Whiteheadian metaphysics figures significantly in her account of both enabling her to account for oppression as arising from freedom and from the limitations of finitude. It, moreover, enables her account of liberation to address fruitfully not only liberation as emancipation and salvation, but also as redemption. In regard to the latter, Suchocki develops a somewhat original argument for the necessity and possibility of subjective immortality.

I conclude that while both Suchocki's and Ruether's theologies are driven by a concern for justice, Suchocki provides a better understanding of the nature of oppression which results in injustice, and a better understanding of liberation as the fulfillment of justice. I, moreover, conclude that while for the most part the concept of subjective immortality has been viewed as anathema by feminist theology, Suchocki's view of subjective immortality may in fact open up the possibility of reassessing the concept of an immortal self within feminist theology as not only consistent with but as an aid to developing its own deepest concerns for liberation and justice.

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For in that sleep of death, what dreams may come
when we have shuffled off this mortal coil
must give us pause.

Shakespeare

Only Justice Can Stop a Curse

Alice Walker

And it was then I knew that the healing
of all wounds
is forgiveness
that permits a promise
of our return
at the end.

Alice Walker

Introduction

In this thesis I propose to examine the ways in which two Christian, feminist theologians,¹ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki² and Rosemary Radford Ruether, understand the relationship between liberation, the fulfillment of justice and the concept of an immortal self.³ To begin, it is important to consider Sharon Ringe's

¹ Since the advent of what is commonly referred to as the second wave of feminist theology, i.e., feminist theology that has developed since the early 1960s, a number of feminist theologians have abandoned Christianity. See, e.g., Mary Daly, *Gyn/ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978); Carol Christ, *Laughter of Aphrodite: Reflections on a Journey to the Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), and Daphne Hampson, *Theology and Feminism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990). Unlike Daly, Christ and Hampson, Suchocki and Ruether, however, have chosen to remain within the Christian tradition and develop their work as *Christian* feminist theologians. There are numerous essays within the literature which raise the question whether Christianity and feminism are indeed compatible. See, for example, Daphne Hampson and Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Is There a Place for Feminists in a Christian Church?" *New Blackfriars*, 68, 801 (January 1987), 7-24; Anne Carr, "Is a Christian Feminist Theology Possible?" *Theological Studies*, 43, 1982, 279-297, and Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, "The Challenge of Mary Daly," *Encounter*, 41, 4, (1980), 307-317.

² Suchocki grounds her theology on Whiteheadian process philosophy. See Chapter Three. In her 1994 work *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1994). Also see Chapter Three footnote 10.

³ Ruether's major works which are most pertinent to the present discussion include *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology Of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992), *Disputed Questions: On Being a Christian* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1989), *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (London: SCM, 1983), and *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (London: Serach Press, 1975). Suchocki's major works which are most pertinent to the present discussion include, *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology* (Continuum: New York, 1994); *The End of Evil: Process Eschatology in Historical Context* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), and *God-Christ- Church: A Practical Guide to Process Thought* (New York: Crossroads, 1985). If one considers only Suchocki's major works, it is possible to read her just as a process or "relational" theologian (see Chapter Three, footnote 10). Suchocki, however, views herself as a process theologian and as a feminist theologian. See, e.g., "The Idea of God in Feminist Philosophy," *Hypatia* 9.4 (Fall 1994), "Weaving the World," *Process Studies*, 14, 2

cautionary note concerning liberation theologies,⁴ which include feminist theologies.⁵ Ringe writes that

[t]o speak of "liberation theology" [or feminist theology] in the singular is a misnomer. Rather, we must speak of "liberation theologies" or of "theologies of liberation" in the plural. The methodological shift represented in these theological constructions, namely the affirmation of the significance of experience and social location in one's theological formulation, guarantees that no one expression of liberation theology can claim to speak for all.⁶

Suchocki's and Ruether's theologies are therefore two among now many feminist theologies.⁷ I have chosen to examine Suchocki's and Ruether's

(Summer 1985), 76-86, "Openness and Mutuality in Feminist Thought and Action," *Feminism and Process Thought*, ed. Sheila Greeve Davaney, New York: Edwin Mellen, 1981, "Anxiety and Trust in Feminist Experience," *The Journal of Religion*, 60/4(1980). and "The Challenge of Mary Daly."

⁴ Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutierrez's 1971 work *A Theology of Liberation* marks the beginning and gives the name to liberation theology. It is interesting to note that in the mid 1930s Chinese theologian Y. T. Wu "reinterpreted Jesus as 'a revolutionary, the upholder of justice and the challenger of the rights of the oppressed' ...anticipating the kind of liberation theology that developed decades later." Kwok Pui-Lan, "Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World," *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*, Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite & Mary Potter Engel, eds. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 274.

⁵ Rosemary Radford Ruether offers one formulation of the relationship between feminist theologies and the more general appellation of liberation theology: "Christian feminist liberation theology is necessarily interconnected with theologies representing all other movements for human liberation, whether from a class and Third World perspective, a racial or ethnic minority perspective, or perspectives critical of militarism and the abuse of the environment. Feminist theological critique, nevertheless, insists that sexism be recognized as a specific structure of marginalization and oppression that cannot be subsumed under any other category." Ruether, "Spirit and Matter, Public and Private: The Challenge of Feminism to Traditional Dualisms," Cooley, Paula M., Sharon A. Farmer and Mary Ellen Ross, ed., *Embodied Love: Sensuality and Relationship as Feminist Values* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 65.

⁶ Sharon Ringe, "Reading from Context to Context: Contributions of a Feminist Hermeneutic to Theologies of Liberation," *Lift Every Voice*, 284. It is also impossible to propose that there is necessarily some sort of one feminist "ideal." As Anne Klein argues "[i]deals are problematic philosophically as well as experientially. To assume any type of overly simple relation to an ideal is also to assume a unitariness of subject ...; it also suggests, untenably from most feminist perspectives, that the appropriate ideals are already fully conceived." Anne C. Klein, "Presence with a Difference," *Hypatia* 9, 4 (Fall 1994).

⁷ See Shelly Finson, ed., *Women and Religion: A Bibliographic Guide to Christian Feminist Liberation Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

understandings of liberation, justice and immortality for two primary reasons: 1) in my opinion they are vigorous and original theologians, and 2) their work distinguishes itself from that of other feminist theologians in that they both examine eschatological questions and in doing so raise significant concerns regarding the relationship between immortality and justice.⁸

If one considers the now extensive amount of feminist theological literature,⁹ one will find that there has been little feminist theological inquiry into the subject of eschatology.¹⁰ As Peter Phan notes,

while feminist theology has rearticulated almost all fundamental Christian doctrines, from hermeneutics and theological method to the doctrine of God and the Trinity, christology, ecclesiology, anthropology, ethics, and spirituality, it has not given a systematic treatment to ... [eschatology]."¹¹

Phan observes that the lack of study of the topic from a feminist perspective is notable especially in texts such as Catherine Mowry LaCugna's *Freeing Theology*:

⁸ This is not to say that this is the sole feature of their work that sets them off from other feminist theologians, nor is it necessarily the most important aspect of their theology, particularly in the case of Ruether. However, unlike most other feminist theologians Suchocki and Ruether take up these questions. Also see footnote 11 below.

⁹ See Finson, ed., *Women and Religion*.

¹⁰ Eschatology involves "the study of realities that occur both to the individual - called 'individual eschatology' - (i.e., death, particular judgment, purgatory, heaven and hell) and to human kind as a whole - called 'collective eschatology' - (i.e., the end of the world, the Parousia, [a New Testament term which refers to the second coming of Christ], the resurrection of the dead, and the general judgment." Peter C. Phan, "Woman and the Last Things: A Feminist Eschatology," *In the Embrace of God: Feminist Approaches to Theological Anthropology*, Ann O'Hara Graff, ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995), 207.

¹¹ Phan, "Woman and the Last Things: A Feminist Eschatology," 206. Other than Suchocki and Ruether the only other feminist theologian who considers the topic is Sallie McFague. See Sallie McFague, "Eschatology: A New Shape for Humanity," *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 197-212. I have not included McFague in this study because although McFague does include a chapter on eschatology in her work *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* she defines eschatology as "the breaking in of new possibilities, of hope for a new creation." (*The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 198) which seems to reflect an exclusively this-worldly eschatological vision. Although she makes one oblique reference to resurrection, she does not develop her understanding of the concept fully enough to be able to bring her views into dialogue with those of Ruether and Suchocki.

The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective (1993)¹² since, as Phan indicates, "its stated purpose is to present 'the essentials' of theology."¹³

While the lack of feminist theological inquiry into the concept of eschatology may be noteworthy, it is indeed not surprising. For many feminist theologians eschatology is not considered to be an "essential" of theology, at least certainly not as the doctrine is traditionally understood. Traditional Christian doctrines of eschatology presume the existence of an afterlife in which the individual participates as some form of an immortal self.¹⁴ The lack of feminist theological inquiry into the subject of eschatology stems from the position taken by most feminist theologians that the concept of an immortal self is anathema to feminist theology.

Within the field of feminist theology the concept of an immortal self tends to be viewed as "both anti-woman and antilife."¹⁵ a grievous inheritance of which the western world must divest itself. Dorothy Dinnerstein, for example, argues that until we come to terms with our bodies and our mortality we will continue "the self-contemptuous human impulse toward worship of dead automatic things and disrespect for what lives."¹⁶ Valerie Saiving states that "[t]he most basic assumption we have inherited from patriarchal culture, and the one which most

¹² Catherine Mowry LaCugna, ed., *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993).

¹³ Phan, "Woman and Last Things," 225.

¹⁴ General works on the topic of immortality include Geddes MacGregor, *Images of the Afterlife: Beliefs from Antiquity to Modern Times* (New York: Paragon House, 1992), and Hans Küng, *Eternal Life? Life After Death as a Medical, Philosophical and Theological Problem* (New York: Doubleday, 1982).

¹⁵ Naomi R. Goldenberg, "Archetypal Theory and the Separation of Mind and Body: Reason Enough to Turn to Freud?" *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* (1/1, 55-72), 55.

¹⁶ Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 162.

feminists may find most difficult to overcome, is that the enduring self is the true locus of value, and that the death of the self is our greatest adversary."¹⁷

From the perspective of many feminist theologians the death of the self is not viewed as the greatest adversary. On the contrary, the greatest adversary to be confronted is often considered to be the oppression and injustice which arise from theological doctrines and attendant social structures which reflect the belief in an immortal self. As feminist theologians Thistlethwaite and Engel write, "the denial of death lies at the root of much of the paralysis of social justice concerns in these societies.... Reverence for life (Schweitzer), public good, social sin, and social salvation are all values that are undermined by a personalistic view of salvation beyond history."¹⁸

Since most feminist theologians reject the concept of an enduring, substantial self, the concept of eschatology, as traditionally understood, has no relevance. Justice is not linked to some form of other-worldly redemption dependent on an immortal self, but is viewed in terms of liberation as this-worldly emancipation.¹⁹

For both Suchocki and Ruether, albeit in significantly different ways, immortality plays a crucial role in their understandings of the process of liberation and the fulfillment of justice. Suchocki champions a form of "subjective" immortality, while Ruether characteristically argues for what I refer to as an underdeveloped or mitigated form of "objective" immortality.

¹⁷ Valerie Saiving, "Androgynous Life: A Feminist Appropriation of Process Thought," *Feminism and Process Thought*, ed. Sheila Greeve Davaney (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1981), 28.

¹⁸ Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel, eds., *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 110.

¹⁹ For a discussion of the way in which I am using the terms redemption and emancipation see below, 13ff.

Subjective immortality refers to the possibility of continuing to experience some form of "life" after death as a subjective centre of consciousness.²⁰ The term "subjective" immortality is meant to contrast both with "social" immortality, which refers to the idea that while there is no subjective survival on death, one lives on in the lives of other humans,²¹ and with "objective" immortality, a view of immortality developed primarily within process thought. The concept of objective immortality refers to the belief that while there is no subjective survival at death, the deeds of one's life are taken up into God, enjoyed by God, and used by God for the future.²²

Suchocki argues that "for those who have been broken by evil, only subjective immortality can provide a sufficient redemption."²³ Suchocki insists, however, that "the major issue is not immortality *per se*, but justice, and that the

²⁰ There are three traditional ways of understanding the concept of subjective immortality. Subjective immortality can be understood as the survival of the astral or subtle body, which refers to the survival of "a subtle, ordinarily invisible body which survives the death of the ordinarily gross body." Peter Geach, "Immortality," *Immortality*, Terence Penelhum, ed. (Belmont, CA.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1973), 11. The concept of an astral body is championed today within modern spiritualism by, for example, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: Tavistock Publ., 1970). The concept can also be found, however, within the Christian tradition in the writings of the early church father Tertullian (c.160-220). Tertullian, "The Soul as an 'Astral Body,'" Anthony Flew, ed., *Body, Mind and Death* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 91. Subjective immortality can also refer to the survival of the disembodied mind, or soul. This view includes the concept of reincarnation or metempsychosis, the transmigration of a soul from one body to another. The third way in which subjective immortality can be understood is as resurrection which refers to the rising of the dead as a total person in an embodied form.

²¹ Werner Jaeger, for example, notes "references to a different kind of immortality than the survival of the human person after death. Such are man's physical survival in his offspring, or his social survival in the honour shown him by the community in keeping his name and memory alive after his death." "The Greek Ideas of Immortality," Krister Stendahl ed. *Immortality and Resurrection: Death in the Western World: Two Conflicting Currents of Thought* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 96.

²² For a more detailed discussion of the concept of objective immortality see Chapter Four, 192 ff.

²³ Suchocki, *The End of Evil*, 165. n. 2.

fullness of justice requires a transhistorical dimension through some form of existence beyond death."²⁴

While Suchocki argues that the concept of subjective immortality is inextricably linked to the fulfillment of justice, Ruether takes a significantly different position. Ruether contends that the "concept of the 'immortal self,' survivable apart from our particular transient organism [that is, the concept of a disembodied self which is subjectively immortal], must be recognized, not only as untenable, but as the *source* of much destructive behavior toward the earth and other humans."²⁵

Although Ruether challenges the concept of an immortal self, eschatological questions have been informed much of the development of her theology. In fact, a central concern of Ruether's theology is that it seeks to expose the dominant Christian eschatology as false and pernicious, offering as the basis of hope other-worldly redemption at the expense of this-worldly emancipation.

While challenging the dominant Christian eschatology provides a framework for her thought, the development of an alternative eschatology does not hold a key place in Ruether's theology. In her extensive body of work,²⁶ she devotes but one chapter to this theme in her work *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (1983).²⁷ An essay titled "Eschatology and Feminism" which appears to be a reworking of the earlier chapter, with some significant changes.²⁸

²⁴ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, "Evil, Eschatology, and God: Response to David Griffin," *Process Studies* 18, 1 (Spring 1989), 63.

²⁵ Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 251. Emphasis added. As I discuss below, Ruether's position is more ambiguous than this quote indicates. Even though Ruether rejects the concept of subjective immortality on the grounds that there is a direct relationship between the development of the concept of subjective immortality and social injustice, she nevertheless champions what can be described as a form of objective immortality. See Chapter Two, 102 ff.

²⁶ Ruether has written some twenty books and over two hundred articles.

²⁷ Ruether, "Eschatology and Feminism," *Sexism and God-Talk*, 235-258.

²⁸ See Chapter Two.

can be found in *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside* (1990).²⁹

Unlike Ruether, however, Suchocki has made eschatology a primary concern of her theological inquiry. Suchocki has written more extensively on the subject than Ruether, albeit from a significantly different point of view. Suchocki would not deny that traditional patriarchal views of subjective immortality have been detrimental. Unlike Ruether, Suchocki, however, views subjective immortality not as a doctrine which must be discarded but as a doctrine that needs to be retained within Christianity so as to allow for the possibility of the fulfillment of justice. Suchocki, however, does not rely on a traditional concept of subjective immortality nor on a traditional eschatological vision, but develops an alternative view based on her modification of Whiteheadian process philosophy.³⁰

Suchocki's development of an alternative eschatology can be traced back to her work as a doctoral student. Suchocki's unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, *The Correlation Between God and Evil* (1974) was the predecessor to her later major work *The End of Evil: Process Eschatology in Historical Context* (1988). In *The End of Evil* Suchocki develops most fully her understanding of the concept of subjective immortality and its relationship to the fulfillment of justice. In her work *God-Christ-Church: A Practical Guide to Process Thought* (1985), which as the title indicates is an introduction to process thought, Suchocki discusses her view of the relationship between subjective immortality and the fulfillment of justice in a less technical, and consequently more accessible way. Early discussions of the relationship between subjective immortality and the fulfillment of justice can be

²⁹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Eschatology and Feminism," 111-124.

³⁰ See Chapter Four, 206 ff.

found in her two 1977 essays "The Question of Immortality"³¹ and "A Whiteheadian Reflection on Subjective Immortality," which was written in collaboration with process theologian Lewis S. Ford.³² While in her most recent works *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology*, (1994) and *The Presence of God: Theological Reflections on Prayer* (1996),³³ Suchocki does not extend her eschatological views, these works presuppose those views.

The second reason that I have chosen to discuss Suchocki's and Ruether's theology is that they are in my opinion vigorous and original theologians. Of the two Ruether is the more widely acclaimed and influential.³⁴ Ruether, who is currently Georgia Harkness Professor of Applied Theology at the Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois, has been associated with feminist theology since the early 1970s, although she now defines her theology in terms of "ecofeminism."³⁵ As one of the most prolific feminist theologians, Ruether continues to play a vital role in the development of feminist theology.

³¹ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, "The Question of Immortality," *Journal of Religion* 57/33 (July 1977), 288-306.

³² Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki and Lewis S. Ford, "A Whiteheadian Reflection on Subjective Immortality," *Process Studies* (1977), 1-13.

³³ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The Presence of God: Theological Reflections on Prayer* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1996).

³⁴ There can be no doubt that many feminist theologians are indebted to Ruether. Carol Christ, e.g., who unlike Ruether rejects Christianity nevertheless maintains that Ruether's "brave and pioneering" work has made her own theological development possible. *Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), xxxii.

³⁵ The term ecofeminism was first introduced by Francoise d'Eaubonne in *Le féminisme ou la mort* (Paris: Pierre Horay, 1974). Ecofeminism brings together feminist and ecological theology. Ecological theology finds its impetus in the ecological crisis and demands a shift from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism or biocentrism. Ecofeminism brings together feminism and ecology and "explores how male domination of women and domination of nature are interconnected, both in cultural ideology and in social structures." Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 2. Ruether and Sallie McFague are two major figures in the field of ecofeminism. See Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993). This is not to suggest that an ecological aspect is new to Ruether's thought but that she has not defined her work in these terms until recently.

Ruether's theology has been the subject of a number of feminist theological studies, the earliest of which is Judith Vaughan's, *Sociality, Ethics and Social Change: A Critical Appraisal of Reinhold Niebuhr's Ethics in the Light of Rosemary Radford Ruether's Works* (1983).³⁶ Others include Mary Hembrow Synder's *The Christology of Rosemary Radford Ruether: A Critical Introduction* (1988)³⁷ and Kathleen Sands, *Escape from Paradise: Evil and Tragedy in Feminist Theology* (1994).³⁸ Studies of Ruether's theology can also be found in other works such as Pamela Dickey Young's *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology: In Search of Method* (1990) in which Young highlights Ruether's methodological approach as an example of a feminist methodology.³⁹

Suchocki is currently Ingraham Professor of Theology and Vice President for Academic Affairs and Academic Dean of the School of Theology at Claremont, Claremont, California. Her work to date has not had the same influence on the development of feminist theology as that of Ruether. While it is possible to find references to Suchocki's work within the feminist theological literature,⁴⁰ my

³⁶ Judith Vaughan, *Sociality, Ethics and Social Change: A Critical Appraisal of Reinhold Niebuhr's Ethics in the Light of Rosemary Radford Ruether's Works* (Lanham, Maryland: University of America Press, 1983).

³⁷ Mary Hembrow Synder *The Christology of Rosemary Radford Ruether: A Critical Introduction* (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publications, 1988).

³⁸ Kathleen Sands, *Escape from Paradise: Evil and Tragedy in Feminist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994.) Sands discusses Ruether's theology in relation to that of Goddess theologian Carol Christ.

³⁹ Pamela Dickey Young, *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology: In Search of Method* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 31-40.

⁴⁰ See e.g., Mary Grey, *Feminism Redemption and the Christian Tradition* (Mystic: Twenty-Third Publications, 1990). Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology Of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992); Carter Heyward, "An Unfinished Symphony of Liberation: The Radicalization of Christian Feminism Among White U.S. Women," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 1/1 (1985, 98-118). It is interesting to note that Phan does not discuss Suchocki's work, especially given the fact that she has written more extensively on the question of eschatology than either Ruether or McFague. (See footnote 11 above.) Phan's lack of reference to Suchocki's writings on this topic may indicate that he is either not familiar with Suchocki's work or that he perhaps considers her work to be that

research has not discovered any major studies done of her work. As the feminist scholar who has developed eschatological questions most fully, it is important to consider her work and examine her views, particularly with respect to the way in which they challenge other feminist views of the concept of an immortal self.

Approach

One of the fundamental tasks of theological inquiry is to examine the nature of the human condition. This task includes raising such questions as, Why is there injustice and attendant suffering in the world? What is, so to speak, wrong with human life? Is there a basic flaw that needs to be remedied or a sickness that needs to be healed? What creates the oppressive conditions under which so many live and die and to what degree are they manifestations of the nature of finitude and thus part of the tragic nature of existence? And to what degree are oppression and injustice the result of human freedom?

Another fundamental theological task follows from this initial inquiry: to explain the way in which oppression and injustice are overcome, that is to say, to explain the process of liberation.⁴¹ From this critical theological reflection another series of questions arises. Can humanity be in fact liberated from oppressive conditions that create injustice? If so, what is the nature of the process of liberation? Does the process of liberation involve the overcoming of oppression as this-worldly emancipation, or is there an "other-worldly" aspect to the process? What is the role of the individual in this process? What is the role of the divine?

of a process theologian rather than a feminist theologian. As I indicated above, (see footnote 3) it is possible to read Suchocki solely as a process theologian.

⁴¹ See below, 13 ff., for a discussion of the way in which I am using this term.

To examine Suchocki's and Ruether's views of the relationship between liberation, justice and immortality I begin by examining the way in which each understands the nature of oppression, that which creates injustice. I then examine their views of the process of liberation. After considering their theological positions, I compare their understandings of oppression and liberation in terms of the central question of the relationship between the fulfillment of justice and the concept of immortality.

This work is consequently divided into two parts. In Part One, Chapters One and Two, I will discuss Ruether's theology. In Chapter One, I will examine her view of the nature of oppression in western culture and her claim that the concept of an immortal self is the source of injustice. In Chapter Two, I will consider the way in which Ruether views the process of liberation as overcoming oppression and providing the grounds for the fulfillment of justice, focusing on her understanding of immortality

In Part Two, Chapters Three and Four, I will discuss Suchocki's understanding of the same topics: the nature of oppression and the process of liberation. In Chapter Three, I will examine Suchocki's understanding of oppression in relation to the Whiteheadian metaphysics upon which she bases her theology. In Chapter Four, I will discuss the way in which she modifies Whitehead's thought and develops a view of subjective immortality by which the fulfillment of justice is carried out.

In the conclusion to this work, Chapter Five, I will assess Suchocki's and Ruether's views of oppression and liberation by drawing on Schubert M. Ogden's tripartite understanding of the process of liberation as redemptive, salvific, and

emancipative.⁴² It needs to be noted that the terms redemption, emancipation, salvation and liberation are often used interchangeably within theological discourse and this can create considerable confusion. To provide consistency throughout this work I wish to explain Ogden's terminology more fully with the understanding that when I use these terms in this work I am applying his meaning to them unless otherwise stated.

In *Faith and Freedom: Toward a Theology of Liberation* (1989) Ogden develops the concepts of redemption, salvation and emancipation as interrelated processes comprising the single process of liberation. In Ogden's view, each of these terms relates to a specific activity carried out by a particular agent or agents. In differentiating between these processes Ogden maintains that redemption, "liberation from the bondage of death, transience and sin,"⁴³ refers solely to God's activity. This aspect of liberation is not only exclusively God's activity but, moreover, is "the unique process of God's self-actualization, whereby God creatively synthesizes all other things into God's own actual being as God."⁴⁴ God in relation to this aspect of the process of liberation is identified as "the Redeemer."

While redemption is solely God's activity, which is to say that only God is capable of overcoming sin, transience and death, salvation refers to "the faithful response to this action on the part of the individual sinner."⁴⁵ Whereas God redeems, the individual is saved through faith, i.e., through "[her or his] trusting

⁴² Schubert Ogden, *Faith and Freedom: Toward a Theology of Liberation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989). As with Suchocki, Ogden is also a process theologian.

⁴³ Ibid., 103.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 69. This rather obscure statement refers to the process of objective immortality. Objective immortality is explained at length below in Chapter Four, 185 ff.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 72.

acceptance of God's acceptance."⁴⁶ God carries out the redemptive act. Salvation depends on the human response to that divine activity inspired by faith. In Ogden's view redemption and salvation therefore are not synonymous terms. Only God redeems. Salvation is trust and faith in that redemptive activity and depends on human participation.

God, however, in Ogden's view, is not only the Redeemer, but also the Emancipator. While emancipation, as with redemptive activity, is also God's work, Ogden claims that God as the Emancipator depends "on the co-operation of God's creatures if the intention lying behind [God's work] is to be fully realized."⁴⁷ Unlike the redemptive process which is carried out within God, the process of emancipation occurs within the creation itself and depends on the creation for its actualization. So while redemption refers to the self-actualization of God in God's self, emancipation refers to the self-actualization of societies and cultures. Ogden claims that

by far the most important way in which we participate in God's work of emancipation is to labor for fundamental social and cultural change - the kind of structural or systemic change in the very order of our society and culture that is clearly necessary if each and every person is to be the active subject of her or his history instead of merely its passive object.⁴⁸

Ogden's definition of the process of liberation as redemption, salvation and emancipation makes clear that these terms are interrelated but discrete, that is to say, they are not synonymous. The term "liberation" refers to the overall transformative process from bondage to freedom.

My use of Ogden's distinctions goes beyond providing a set of working definitions to consider the way in which Suchocki and Ruether understand the process of liberation. Ogden develops his understanding of these different aspects

⁴⁶ Ibid., 73.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 75.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 78.

of the process of liberation in his critique of liberation theologies. Ogden argues that liberation theologies tend to collapse the complexity of the liberative process into the concept of emancipation, and therefore inadequately develop the concepts of redemption and salvation. Ogden maintains that such theological positions

seem to forget . . . that although Christian hope does indeed have to do with this world, and thus is open to all that secularity itself can hope for, it nevertheless is not in this world but in the boundless love embracing it [i.e., God] that such hope has its sole ultimate ground and object.⁴⁹

Feminist theologies, as one group of liberation theologies, are open to Ogden's criticism. I suggest that it is productive to examine Suchocki's and Ruether's thought especially in light of the question of justice which underlies their theology vis-a-vis this concern of Ogden.

In light of Ogden's distinctions I raise a series of questions which I regard as imperative for examining the relationship between Suchocki's and Ruether's understanding of the process of liberation. Does their work provide an adequate distinction between divine and human activity within the liberative process? In other words, do Suchocki and Ruether distinguish between the redemptive, salvific, and emancipatory aspects of liberation? If so, what distinctions do they make?

It needs to be stressed that while Ogden's categories provide a vocabulary and a framework for my discussion of Suchocki's and Ruether's understanding of the process of liberation, his categories are, of course, open to question and criticism. His view of the process of liberation is not to be seen as an absolute and self-contained framework into which Suchocki's and Ruether's thought must fit, but as a starting point to consider their views of oppression and liberation, and to

⁴⁹ Ibid.

examine their understandings of the relationship between liberation, the fulfillment of justice and immortality.

On examining Suchocki's and Ruether's views of oppression and liberation there are two interrelated criteria upon which I rely to evaluate the credibility of their claims. I refer to these criteria as "the particularity of injustice" which demands "the particularity of justice." A central insight of liberation theologies is the systemic nature of injustice. Liberation theologies have played a critical role in highlighting that social systems are not stable givens but human creations which must be continually assessed, critiqued and when appropriate changed. While it cannot be denied that there is an urgent need to recognize and address systemic injustice, the very particular nature of the results of systemic injustice cannot be overlooked. Injustice is, of course, decried because individuals or groups of individuals suffer unjustly. The particularity of injustice refers, therefore, to the very specific nature of injustice and the need to understand and address manifestations of injustice within the world, while also taking into account the systemic or relational nature of existence.

As I examine the way in which Suchocki and Ruether explain the nature of injustice, I consider, therefore, whether their arguments adequately address the very specific and particular nature of injustice. That is to say, I consider whether their arguments take into account the very human face of injustice.

Furthermore, I argue that to understand fully the process of liberation it is imperative to address these particular instances of injustice. An adequate concept of the process of liberation must consider specific instances of injustice not as abstract representations of injustice, however that is defined, but rather as concrete, particular experiences. Later when I refer to the "particularity" of justice and injustice I will have this in mind.

Such a stipulation is by no means unique within contemporary theology. Feminist theologian Mary Potter Engel, for example, states that for any process of liberation to be convincing it "must be grounded in and responsive to the practical experiences of oppression and liberation of particular victims."⁵⁰ The need for this criterion is poignantly stated by political theologian Johannes Baptiste Metz. In *The Emergent Church* Metz states that "[a]fter Auschwitz, every theological 'profundity' which is unrelated to people and their concrete situations must cease to exist. Such a theology would be the very essence of superficiality."⁵¹ Irving Greenberg, in turn, contends that theological statements must not only be related to concrete situations but that they must be credible to those who have suffered. In response to the practice of expediting the process of exterminating Jews at Auschwitz by throwing children "straight into the crematorium furnaces, or into a pit near the crematorium, without being gassed first,"⁵² Greenberg argues that "[n]o statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of burning children."⁵³ It is in the face of specific instances of injustice, that is, for

⁵⁰ Compare Mary Potter Engel, "Evil, Sin, and Violation of the Vulnerable," *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*, Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite & Mary Potter Engel, eds. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 153. While this criterion is but the first of seven which Engel argues are necessary for an adequate process of liberation, it is the most significant for the present discussion.

⁵¹ Johannes Baptiste Metz, *The Emergent Church: The Future of Christianity in a Postbourgeois World*, Peter Mann, trans. (London: SCM, 1981), 19.

⁵² Ibid., 10.

⁵³ Irving Greenberg, "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity and Modernity after the Holocaust," *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?*, Eva Fleischner, ed., (New York: KTAV, 1977), 23. Greenberg's plea is reminiscent of that of Ivan Karamozov: "I want to protect myself and so I renounce the higher harmony altogether. It's not worth the tears of that one tortured child who beat itself on the breast with its little fist and prayed in its stinking outhouse, with its tears to 'dear, kind God!' It's not worth it because those tears are unatoned for. They must be atoned for, or there can be no harmony. But how? How are you going to atone for them? Is it possible?" Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamozov*, Andrew H. MacAndrew, trans. (New York: Bantam Books).

example, in the presence of burning children, that theological claims must be credible.⁵⁴

The demand for the particularity of justice is moreover predicated upon an inclusive vision of the process of liberation. That is to say, addressing the particularity of justice is not only "grounded in and responsive to the practical experiences of oppression and liberation of particular victims,"⁵⁵ as Engel suggests, but I argue that the particularity of justice must also result in the resolution of injustice in a way that addresses the very particular nature of the relationships between those who suffer injustice and those responsible for injustice.⁵⁶ We need to consider, therefore, the way in which Suchocki and Ruether take into consideration the particularity of justice in their views of the process of liberation, and the degree of inclusivity within their views. We need to ask who is included within their understanding of the process of liberation. Who is excluded? How do Suchocki's and Ruether's views of immortality, subjective and objective respectively, address the question of inclusivity?

⁵⁴ I do not know of any feminist theology that has been developed using the welfare of children as its starting point. Robert Mesle, however, who refers to himself as a process humanist, cites Robert McAfee Brown's position that a new starting point for theology, "... must be a theology which puts the welfare of children above the niceties of metaphysics." Robert Mesle, *John Hick's Theodicy: A Process Humanist Critique* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), xi. While Mesle's statement raises the question of whether it is possible to have an adequate theology that does not have a coherent metaphysical basis, it nevertheless stresses the need for a theology to address the specific needs of the most vulnerable within society.

⁵⁵ Engel, "Evil, Sin, and Violation of the Vulnerable," 153.

⁵⁶ Certainly not all liberation theologians would concur that inclusivity is a requirement for the process of liberation. In *A Black Theology of Liberation*, James H. Cone criticizes an inclusive view of liberation which, in his view, compromises an adequate theological view of justice. "Black people want to know whose side God is on and what kind of decision he is making about the Black Revolution. We will not accept a God who is on everybody's side -- which means that he loves everybody in spite of who they are, and is working (through the acceptable channels of the society of course) to reconcile all people to himself." *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1970), 131.

PART ONE

ROSEMARY RADFORD RUETHER

**The Nature of Oppression
and
The Process Of Liberation**

Chapter One

The Nature of Oppression: The Tyranny of the Immortal Self

*The concept of the immortal self,
survivable apart from our particular transient organism,
must be recognized, not only as untenable,
but as the source of much destructive behaviour.*

Rosemary Radford Ruether¹

*High hearted son of Tydeus, why ask of my generation?
As is the generation of leaves, so that of men.
The wind scatters the leaves on the ground,
but the timber burgeons with leaves again
in the season of spring returning.
So one generation of men grows while another dies.*
Iliad 6. 145-50.

Introduction

It would certainly not be an exaggeration to state that Ruether's concern for issues of oppression, liberation and social injustice is the primary motivating force behind her theology. Of Ruether, Kathleen Sands writes that "[i]njustice is her

¹ Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 251.

guiding theological problem, and it has drawn her erudition and moral wisdom not only to the suffering of women but to a panoply of global issues."² Since Ruether has developed much, if not all, of her theology in response to specific manifestations of social injustice such as anti-Judaism, racism, the subjugation of women and ecological abuse, one might very well say that Ruether's theology is "justice-driven." Ruether, in fact, refers to herself as an "Anglo-American Roman Catholic woman who seeks to integrate faith understanding with commitment to justice."³

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the way in which Ruether understands the nature of oppression and attendant injustice. To carry out this task a number of questions need to be addressed. How, for example, does Ruether identify the nature of oppression? What, in Ruether's view, are the underlying causes of oppression? Are these causes directly related to human activity within the world, or does the inherent nature of this-worldly existence play a foundational role in the creation of oppression? Another way of stating the last question is, how does Ruether understand the relationship between freedom and finitude in the creation of oppression?

To begin this discussion I wish to provide a brief and selective overview of some of the early influences and experiences that lead Ruether to the development

² Kathleen M. Sands, *Escape from Paradise: Evil and Tragedy in Feminist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 71.

³ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Eschatology and Feminism," *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theology from the Underside*, Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite & Mary Potter Engel, eds. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 111. Ruether discusses the development of her theology in "The Development of My Theology," *Religious Studies Review* 15.1 (January 1989), 1-4, *Disputed Questions. On Being A Christian* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1989), and "Beginnings: An Intellectual Autobiography," *Journeys: The Impact of Personal Experience on Religious Thought*, Gregory Baum, ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), 34-56.

of what I have referred to as a justice-driven theology.⁴ The purpose of this discussion is to provide a thumbnail sketch of the way in which Ruether's theology developed. There is, however, an important presupposition underlying this discussion, which in fact underlies all of this thesis.

The way in which one knows the world and one's self within the world, that is, one's epistemic vantage point, and consequently the way in which one acts (here I am using the word "act" to include all that one does within one's life) are determined by two interdependent factors: 1) social expectations, which are determined primarily by the dominant social voice or ideology, and 2) one's experience of and response to the demands of those expectations, which are determined by numerous interconnected factors including one's social location within the social fabric,⁵ the degree to which one has internalized social expectations, and the nature of one's personal experiences.⁶

The relationship between women's epistemic vantage point, women's experience and ideological expectations of women is key to all feminist inquiry be that theological or otherwise.⁷ It needs to be stressed, however, that it is impossible

⁴ For a discussion of Ruether's theological development see Mary Hembrow Snyder, *The Christology of Rosemary Radford Ruether* (Mystic: Twenty-Third Publications, 1988), 2-27.

⁵ The term social location refers to one's place within society based upon factors such as one's gender, race, class, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity and ability.

⁶ Included within these experiences are also such factors as the natural environment within which one lives. For example, a woman who spends all of her life in Hamilton leads a significantly different life from a woman who spends her life in the Kalahari Desert.

⁷ It is important to note that Valerie Saiving's 1962 essay, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View" which is heralded as marking the beginning of the second wave of feminist theology, specifically addresses the question of women's experience. Saiving argues that the denial that women's experience differs from that of men has meant that the way in sin has been defined has not in fact represented women's experience. Saiving states that "[t]he temptations of woman as woman are not the same as the temptations of man as man, and the specifically feminine forms of sin ... have a quality which can never be encompassed by such terms as "pride" or "will to power." They are better

to subsume the myriad of women's experiences under some category which can be referred to as "woman's experience." Having said that, in her work *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology* Pamela Dickey Young outlines five dimensions of women's experience which are helpful to understand the gendered way in which women experience the world: "women's bodily experience, women's socialized experience (what culture teaches us about women), women's feminist experience (response to women's socialized experience), women's historical experience, and women's individual experience."⁸

Given that Ruether's theology explicitly challenges dominant Christian ideologies, it seems appropriate to begin my discussion of Ruether's view of oppression by considering particular experiences within her own life which directly influenced the development of her theology.

suggested by such terms as triviality, distractibility, and diffuseness: lack of an organizing center or focus, dependence on other's for one's self-definition; tolerance at the expense of standards of excellence ... In short, underdevelopment or negation of the self." *Womanspirit Rising*, Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow eds. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), 37.

⁸ Young, *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology*, 53. While women's experience has been ignored, "women" as a category of study has thrived throughout western history. As Virginia Woolf discovered on opening the British Museum's catalogue to "women," numerous books have been written about women. She found, however, that they were written primarily by men, some of whom she argued had "no apparent qualifications [for writing about women] save that they were not women." Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1945), 28-9. It is interesting, yet not surprising to note that when she looked under "men," she found no entries. 29. With the development of what Gerda Lerner refers to as "feminist consciousness," it has, therefore, become abundantly clear that what has been referred to as "man," or "mankind" has been a fallacious representation of the whole of humanity. *Mankind* has consequently meant just that. The way in which human nature has been defined has referred to the experience of men and not to that of women. More specifically human nature has been for the most part defined by certain "groups" of men; that is to say, socially privileged men, for example, men who are educated, usually middle or upper class, white, and heterosexual. See Gerda Lerner, Lerner, Gerda. *The Making of Patriarchy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986. and *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteenth Century*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Ruether: A Biographic Overview

Ruether (nee Rosemary Radford) was raised under the tutelage of her Roman Catholic mother, whose Catholicism Ruether describes as "free-spirited and humanistic."⁹ Ruether recounts that the Catholic environment within which she grew up shaped her "impression of Catholicism [as] something with deep historical roots, both profound and meaningful in content, not something trite or vulgar."¹⁰ Juxtaposing her Catholic upbringing with that of other Catholic women, Ruether writes that

[c]ertain obsessions with sex and conduct, which seem to have marred many a Catholic girlhood, thus passed me by. This means that I lack some of the more humorous memories that bind together products of parochial American Catholicism, but I also feel less of the hostility that comes from living down debilitating restrictions on personal and intellectual development.¹¹

During her years as an undergraduate at Scripps College, Claremont, California and as a graduate student at Claremont Graduate School, Ruether was in ongoing dialogue with Catholicism, although during much of this period she resisted affiliation with the Roman Catholic Church. Ruether contends that "representatives of official Catholicism available to [her] at that time tended to be anti-intellectual clerics who looked with suspicion on free questioning."¹² She not only found the Catholic ambiance anti-intellectual, she also found that it was sexist.

⁹ Ruether, *Disputed Questions*, 20. Ruether claims that her very conservative father, "Anglican, Republican, a Virginia gentleman," with whom she had little contact as a child and who died when Ruether was twelve, had little influence on her personality. *Ibid.*, 18-19.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.* This is an interesting comment upon which to reflect for it may in part be the reason that Ruether's theology is less "enraged" than that of other feminist theologians, e.g., Mary Daly. See Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*, Boston: Beacon, 1973, and *Gyn/ecology: the Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1978.

¹² *Ibid.*, 35.

presupposing as it did that theological study and marriage were mutually exclusive endeavours.¹³

Encouraged by the renewal of the Catholic church initiated by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), by the late 1960s Ruether had renewed her participation in the Catholic church. It was "[t]he development of liberation theology in Latin America, Catholic feminism, the Base Community movement in both Europe and the Third World, [that] provided expanding and international communities of Catholics to which [she] felt a special affinity"¹⁴ that provided her with an acceptable ambiance within which to once again feel at home within Catholicism.

Along with post-Vatican II Catholicism, the civil rights movement played a significant role in the development of Ruether's theology. In her words, the interplay between her involvement in post-Vatican II Catholicism and the civil rights movement, "the one questioning American society and the other questioning the Catholic church, were the matrix in which [her] theology developed."¹⁵ Her attempt to integrate the Christian meaning of faith "with commitment to social justice began in the early 1960s with the Civil Rights Movement."¹⁶ Ruether cites

¹³ Ruether cites the example of the nun with whom she took a course in medieval philosophy. Ruether writes that "[t]oward the end of the course [the nun] discovered that I was soon to be married. She breathed a sigh of relief and said, 'Well, this reading will be of no more danger to you. You will soon be too busy to do any more of it.' This statement was profoundly shocking. Apparently she thought that the best way to save my soul was to extinguish my mind in a diaper pail." Ruether, *Disputed Questions*, 35.

¹⁴ Ruether, *Disputed Questions*, 42.

¹⁵ Ruether, "The Development of My Theology," 111.

¹⁶ Ibid. Also see e.g., Ruether, "The Question of Politics and Religion in America," *Disputed Questions*, 75-107.

what she refers to as "[a]n important 'peak' experience"¹⁷ when she spent time working for civil rights in Mississippi in the summer of 1965.¹⁸

It was during this period that Ruether's awareness of the systemic nature of oppression began to develop. Ruether notes that

It was not merely a question of racism at home, but racist neo-colonialism and militarism in the relation of rich and poor nations. Intervention abroad bred police repression and paranoia at home. One began to connect the historic structures of oppression: race, class, sex, colonialism, finally the destructive patterns of human society toward nature, in an integrated vision of social contradictions and demands for social revolution.¹⁹

Ruether completed her Ph.D. in classics and patristics,²⁰ and in 1966 she moved to Washington D.C. with her husband, Herman Ruether, and their three children to begin a ten year teaching post at the School of Religion at Howard University. During this period she continued her involvement in the civil rights movement and in the peace movement. In 1972-73 she had her first opportunity to carry out major research in feminist theology when she was asked to teach as a visiting professor at Harvard Divinity School.²¹

¹⁷ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Social Sin," *Commonweal* 108 (January 30, 1981), 47.

¹⁸ It was during this period that Ruether witnessed the social consequences of racial hatred first hand. Ruether's awareness of the extent to which racial hatred is rooted in white hearts was heightened when she went to visit some elderly relatives of her father. During Ruether's visit one of the pink-gloved cousins proclaimed that "[i]f any of those civil rights workers comes around here, we are going to drive them right out of this world." Ruether also relates that one of the brothers had died of a heart attack when he went to vote against the civil rights voting acts. After the election another brother, "Cousin Trooper, had taken to the men's quarters [of their mansion] and hadn't appeared downstairs for a week." Ruether, "The Question of Politics and Religion in America," 80.

¹⁹ Ruether, "Beginnings: An Intellectual Autobiography," 53.

²⁰ Ruether's dissertation was a study of the Cappadocian father Gregory of Nazianzus (329-389). Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus: Rhetor and Philosopher* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).

²¹ Ruether, "The Development of My Theology," 2. Ruether's earliest writings from what could be referred to if not from a feminist perspective, at least from a woman's perspective include "Marriage, Love and Children," *Jubilee* 11 (December 1963), 17-20; "A Question of Dignity, A Question of Freedom," *What Modern Catholics Think About Birth Control*, William Birmingham ed. (Toronto: The New American Library, 1964), 233-240; "Symposium on Women," *Commonweal* 85 (January 27, 1967), 446-458; and

Another key area of Ruether's academic research which needs to be noted is her work in the area of Jewish-Christian relations, which she began in the 1960s²² and lead to a major and still unpublished manuscript, "The Messiah of Israel and the Cosmic Christ." Ruether states that the research for this work provided her with much of the background for her subsequent writing on "Christian origins in Christology, anti-Semitism, the Goddess and Mariology, and finally on political theology."²³

Since the early 1970s Ruether's concern for ecological issues has also played an important role in the development of her theology. In fact Ruether views "earth-exploitation" as having the same roots as other forms of oppression such as anti-Judaism and sexism. In *Liberation Theology* (1972) Ruether writes that

"The Becoming of Women in Church and Society," *Cross Currents* 17 (Fall 1967), 419-426.

²² See e.g., "Theological Anti-Semitism in the New Testament," *The Christian Century* 85 (February 14, 1968), 191-196; "Christian Anti-Semitism - The Dilemma of Zionism," *Christianity and Crisis* 32 (April 17, 1972), 91-94, and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (London: Search Press, 1975). In 1971 while carrying out research for *Faith and Fratricide*, Ruether was also in dialogue with women who were engaged in feminist theology. It is interesting to note that Ruether was called to task for being concerned with issues related to racism and poverty and not just sexism. "To be concerned about class and race was seen as distracting from 'pure' feminism." Her concern with race and class was found reprehensible, but the response to her interest in patristic anti-Semitism was disbelief. Ruether writes that "[t]he fact that I was teaching a course and writing a book on patristic anti-Semitism was seen by these feminists as a puzzling anomaly that did not fit any of their expectations. Anti-Semitism was not even a fad become passé for them. It simply did not make any sense at all. Feminist presumably should see Judaism as the granddaddy of patriarchal misogyny. Liberation theologians should sympathize with the Third World, not with Jews." *Disputed Questions*, 53.

²³ Ruether, *Disputed Questions*, 51. In the same work Ruether recounts the influence that a beloved Jewish uncle (by marriage) had on her relationship to Judaism. "Whenever the subjects of the Jews was mentioned I seemed to feel a special pang of personal pathos, as though here was a mystery that must be explored, a secret that underlay some unspoken tragedy of our whole civilization. It is possible that my uncle helped to create that sensitivity in an unintended way." 45.

"oppression of people and oppression of environments go together as part of the same mentality."

The rejection of a people finds its ultimate expression in the pushing of these people on to the "reservation" of ruined, waterless and unusable land. By the same token, the poor and despised in society are herded into the rotten core areas of the city where the unwillingness of the dominant society to build, except by polluting and ruining the land, is most evident.²⁴

Of late Ruether has come to define her own theology in terms of ecofeminism,²⁵ arguing that "[t]he abuse and neglect of nature has become a critical issue of planetary survival, without which all other justice issues will be rendered null and void."²⁶

The development of Ruether's justice-driven theology has been highly influenced by her epistemic vantage point which results from the confluence of personal experiences, and from the pressure to accept dominant social values and succumb to concomitant expectations. The resultant tension that both underlies and drives her theology forward has led Ruether to devote much of her theological enterprise to disclosing the nature of oppression and the way in which injustice arises within western society.

The Nature Of Oppression

There are a number of ways in which one could approach the topic of Ruether's understanding of oppression and attendant injustice. For the purposes of this discussion, however, I wish to begin with Ruether's statement that "[t]he concept of the 'immortal self,' survivable apart from our particular transient

²⁴ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Liberation Theology: Human Hope Confronts Christian History and American Power* (New York: Paulist Press, 1972), 18.

²⁵ For a definition of ecofeminism see Introduction, 9.

²⁶ Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 264.

organism, must be recognized, not only as untenable, but as the source of much destructive behavior toward the earth and other humans."²⁷ Many questions arise from Ruether's statement. Why does she claim that the concept of an immortal self is untenable? On what does she base this claim? Furthermore, how can Ruether associate the concept of an immortal self so closely with the concept of oppression, that is, with "destructive behavior toward the earth and other humans"? If traditionally Christianity has offered immortality as hope in the face of oppression, why does Ruether state the opposite? That is to say, why does Ruether argue that the concept of an immortal self should not be viewed as a vehicle of hope, but as the cause of suffering and injustice?

Before I begin to consider these questions, it is necessary to discuss briefly Ruether's use of the term "the concept of an immortal self." When Ruether uses this term, it is always in the context of referring to some form of "subjective" immortality. That is to say, she is referring to a concept of the self which continues "living" after death as a subjective centre of consciousness as opposed to some form of objective or social immortality.²⁸ Throughout this discussion, unless stated other wise, when I use the term "immortal self." I am, therefore, referring to the idea that the "true" self is thought to be able capable to exist in some immortal form.

Another term that I wish to clarify briefly is my use of the term "human nature." When I use the term "human nature," I am using it in a very restricted sense, referring to the most fundamental way in which a human being is defined. That is to say in this work, the term human nature refers to whether an individual is

²⁷ Ibid., 251.

²⁸ For a discussion of the way in which I am using these terms see Introduction, 13ff.

considered to be comprised of solely a mortal aspect or whether an individual is also considered to have an immortal aspect. If the latter is the case, the question that arises is what are the characteristics of the immortal aspect of human nature?

The Concept of the Immortal Self as Untenable and the Source of Injustice

To recall, Ruether states that "[t]he concept of the 'immortal self,' survivable apart from our particular transient organism, must be recognized, not only as untenable, but as the source of much destructive behavior toward the earth and other humans."²⁹ Ruether argues that the concept of an immortal self is untenable for it depends on a distorted view of human nature. She argues that the concept of an immortal self is the source of much destructive behaviour because oppressive conditions, which have become systematically entrenched in western culture, result directly from this misconstrual of human nature. For Ruether the concept of an immortal self is consequently intellectually incredible and morally suspect.³⁰

Ruether's view of the concept of an immortal self as untenable is by no means a recent development in her theology. Ruether traces her early misgivings concerning the concept of an immortal self back to her youth. In her essay "Beginnings: An Intellectual Autobiography,"³¹ Ruether writes that "[a]t the age of twelve I was alone in Greece when my father suddenly fell ill and died.... Both

²⁹ Ruether, *Gaia and God*. 251.

³⁰ As I discuss in Chapter Two, there is an underlying tension in Ruether's work between her dominant position on the concept of an immortal self and a more moderate and somewhat ambiguous position that she takes.

³¹ Ruether, "Beginnings: An Intellectual Autobiography," 39.

then and in subsequent brushes with death, I have experienced a strong sense of human mortality, the finitude of the individual self."³² Ruether goes on to state that over time "[t]he doctrine of the personal [subjective] immortality of the soul slipped away from me as an idea without real roots in my better intuitions."³³

While Ruether's "intuitive" rejection of personal immortality may be viewed as patently subjective, it is nevertheless important. Her rejection of the concept of an immortal self at a time of personal loss marked for Ruether the beginning of her conscious rejection of one of the fundamental doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church. Ruether admits that her rejection of subjective immortality puts her theological enterprise in tension with ecclesial authority. Ruether, however, discusses her rejection of the concept of subjective immortality as a positive personal development, as a "cross[ing] over from heteronomous to autonomous selfhood."³⁴ Ruether writes that

[s]uch a critical discarding of the central doctrine [subjective immortality] of catholic popular faith, the very nub upon which all discipline and doctrine are hinged, could only mean that, in an irrevocable sense, I had crossed over from heteronomous to autonomous selfhood. Whatever else I made up my mind to believe in thereafter would be because I found it personally believable, not because "the Church" taught it. Without knowing it I had also detached the keystone of any relation to the traditional mode of Catholic authority. Years later my Benedictine guru would point out to me the unCatholic character of my method, saying that, like Cardinal Merry del Val, who disputed the faith with Lord Halifax in the nineteenth century, he might not personally believe half so much as I, but he believed everything the Church taught, because she taught it. Such fideism was totally alien to me. Upon contact with it I could only shudder, as if encountering a macabre self-emasculation.³⁵

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid. Ruether notes that when in college she wrote down the following quote from the Iliad as an expression of [her] own perception" concerning the question of an immortal self. In this passage Glaukos is speaking to Diomedes. "High hearted son of Tydeus, why ask of my generation? As is the generation of leaves, so that of men. The wind scatters the leaves on the ground, but the timber burgeons with leaves again in the season of spring returning. So one generation of men grows while another dies." Ibid., 39.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

Ruether seems to view her personal rejection of the concept of subjective immortality as in some way symbolic of her independence as a theologian. I would suggest, moreover, that Ruether's rejection of the concept of an immortal self is more specifically symbolic of her independence as a *feminist* theologian.

Ruether's rejection of the concept of subjective immortality provides her with an alternative sense of selfhood which frees her from not only what she views as an untenable doctrine which is the source of oppressive social structures, but, and perhaps more importantly, her rejection of the concept of an immortal self allows her to feel a degree of freedom from the authority of the church. By disavowing the very tenet which she views as the source of the creation of unjust social systems, which have been particularly detrimental for women, Ruether thereby challenges the ecclesiastic authority that developed and continues to sanction that doctrinal presupposition, and by extension continues to sanction the oppression of women.³⁶ In other words, by attacking the Roman Catholic Church at its doctrinal roots, she is in fact challenging its ethical integrity.³⁷

Ruether's challenge to the church follows from her view that the early Christian church³⁸ not only *regrettably* develops the concept of an immortal self as an essential part of its theology, but that it *spuriously* takes up the concept, thereby

³⁶ For a detailed discussion of Ruether's understanding of the relationship between the concept of an immortal self and the oppression of women see below 54 ff.

³⁷ References to the Roman Catholic Church as a promoter of injustice can be found throughout Ruether's work but perhaps none is so poignant as her statement in *Liberation Theology* where she maintains that "[t]he kingdom of Satan is thus doubly entrenched in history, since Satan now wears the robes of the Vicar of Christ and uses the cross of Jesus as his specter." 24. While, because of Ruether's affiliation with the Roman Catholic Church, this discussion is directed against that particular church, this is certainly not to suggest that the Catholic church is the only Christian church which must be held accountable for promoting injustice.

³⁸ By "the early church" Ruether is referring to the post-crucifixion community the theology of which became dominated by the Pauline-Augustinian tradition.

distorting the fledgling religion which initially emerged as an instrument of liberation into an instrument of oppression. To make this claim relies on a specific methodological approach so as to identify oppressive doctrinal formulations that have become regarded as religious truths.

In the most general terms Ruether's methodology can be referred to as at once deconstructive and restorative. By this I mean that Ruether's theology is grounded on two fundamental premises. First, Ruether insists that "[o]ne cannot correctly pose the question of the meaning of Christian identity today until one is willing to tell the story of Christian origins truthfully. Or, to put it another way, people who have to lie about their history cannot clarify their identity."³⁹ In Ruether's view to be able "to tell the story of Christian origins truthfully" requires deconstructing the story. Through the deconstruction process the way in which Christianity has misconstrued human nature and divine-human relationships will come to light.

The second premise upon which Ruether's theology is based is that when one engages in a deconstructive analysis of the Christian tradition one finds that underneath the lies and the deceit of the tradition there is "a deeper bedrock of authentic Being"⁴⁰ upon which to rebuild the tradition. Beginning with these two premises it is possible to identify four key elements to Ruether's deconstructive-restorative methodology.

First, in the most general terms, her approach is dialectical. That is to say "Ruether takes traditional polarities, -male/female, soul/body, humankind/nature, transcendent/historical- and seeks to transform them into dynamic unities."⁴¹

³⁹ Ruether, *Disputed Questions*, 50.

⁴⁰ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 18.

⁴¹ Snyder, *The Christology of Rosemary Radford Ruether*, 15.

Second, to move from theological claims based on oppositional dualisms to those based on interconnected dialectics Ruether draws on two critical principles to assess the degree to which a theological claim is credible, the concept of the critical principle of feminist theology and the prophetic-liberating traditions.⁴²

Third, Ruether draws on what she refers to as "feminist 'ecumenism'."⁴³ Ruether contends that "feminist theological reflection takes place in the context of a feminist 'ecumenism' between religious traditions that does not necessarily feel bound by the traditional boundaries between true and false religions."⁴⁴

Underlying the third aspect of her methodology, which supports her view that all religions point in some way to salvation,⁴⁵ is a fourth key element of her methodology: ever present, although concealed beneath the existent theological system, divine reality awaits to be re-encountered.⁴⁶ As Pamela Dickey Young states, "[a]ccording to Ruether, feminist theology must not be built on the foundation of Scripture, or tradition, or church, but on the belief in a divine foundation that is ultimately good, on a 'primal re-encounter with divine reality.'⁴⁷ This laconic phrase, "a primal re-encounter with divine reality," demands explanation, which I will do at length below. Suffice to say for the moment that

⁴² I discuss these two principles below. See 34 ff.

⁴³ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Spirituality and Historical Religion," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 16, 3 (1986), 11.

⁴⁴ Ibid. An example of Ruether's attempt to develop feminist ecumenical resources would be her work *Womanguides: Readings Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985). Ruether states that aim of the work is "to make women's experience visible," x. The text includes prose and pictures from "the ... cultural matrix that has shaped Western Christianity: the ancient Near East, the Hebrews, the Greeks, the New Testament and the marginalized communities at the edges of Judaism and Christianity," xi. Daphne Hampson raises important questions concerning the degree to which these texts can in fact help women today name their experience. Hampson, *Feminism and Theology*, 157.

⁴⁵ See Chapter Two, 92 ff.

⁴⁶ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Future of Feminist Theology in the Academy," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53 (1985), 710.

⁴⁷ Pamela Dickey Young, *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology*, 34.

Ruether's approach presupposes the existence of an ultimate divine goodness which one can, in fact, encounter.

As I indicated above, Ruether's methodological approach is deconstructive, a means to descry oppressive, hidden lies of the Christian tradition. If, however, the lies are deeply embedded within the tradition, as Ruether certainly insists that they are, one needs the aforementioned analytical tools, the prophetic liberating traditions and the critical principle of feminist theology, to be able to expose the lie and consequently to be able to assess the degree to which any given aspect of Christianity is oppressive. At this point I wish to discuss briefly what she means by the latter criterion, the concept of the critical principle of feminist theology. I will discuss the prophetic-liberating traditions later in this chapter.

Ruether develops the concept of the critical principle of feminist theology most fully in *Sexism and God-Talk*.⁴⁸ Ruether contends that this principle, which calls for "the promotion of the full humanity of women,"⁴⁹ can be applied to any theological system and its redemptive claims. Ruether argues that according to this principle whatever does not promote the full humanity of women is not of the Holy and does not reflect true relation to the divine. Conversely that which promotes the full humanity of women "is of the Holy, it does reflect true relation to the divine, it is the true nature of things, the authentic message of redemption and the mission of the redemptive community."⁵⁰

Ruether maintains, however, that what the *full* humanity of women means is still unknown. It is not been culturally experienced within the western world. What can be known is the "denigration and marginalization of women's

⁴⁸ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 18-20.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

humanity."⁵¹ The critical principle of feminist theology therefore emphasizes that any theological concept which continues to distort rather than to promote the full humanity of women contributes to injustice. By applying this principle Ruether contends that it is possible to recognize that extensive sexism within Christianity, the systematic privileging of men over women,⁵² has resulted from a fallacious understanding of the concept of human nature.⁵³

It needs to be clarified that by naming this principle the way in which she does, it may give the impression that *all* feminist theologians adhere to it. The statement of the principle is in fact Ruether's. While there are other feminist theologians who would certainly agree with this principle, Ruether is not drawing on a formal feminist theological principle that exists outside of her own work. This is also not to suggest that all feminist theologians do in fact agree with Ruether's

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² The pervasiveness of sexism in western society is also attested to outside of feminist writings. Writing in 1973 when feminist thought was beginning to emerge as a significant cultural force, Harvey Cox notes the cultural pervasiveness of sexism. Cox writes that "[m]an's domination of women is the oldest and most persistent and maybe the most basic form of seigniorality. It suffuses all societies with the bacillus of over-under hegemony and therefore fuels both racial tyrannies and the corporate caliphates that despoil the people of the Third World." *Seduction of the Spirit* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973), 232.

⁵³ While Ruether certainly suggests that men benefit more than women from the power structures of a patriarchal social system, (see e.g., "Patriarchy and the Men's Movement," *Women Respond to the Men's Movement*, Kay Leigh Hagan, ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 13-18), it needs to be stressed that Ruether is certainly not suggesting that only the full humanity of women needs to be advanced. There is to my knowledge no place in Ruether's writings where she argues that the full humanity of women takes precedence over the full humanity of men. Ruether's theology is not gynocentric, that is to say, her theology does not advocate restructuring social relations in such a way which privileges women at the cost of marginalizing men. Ruether, in fact, is highly critical of any gynocentric theological approach such as those promoted by Goddess feminism. See e.g., Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Goddesses and Witches: Liberation and Countercultural Feminism," *Christian Century* 97:28 (September 1980), 842-47. Ruether contends that "[a]ny principle of religion or society that marginalizes one group of persons as less than fully human diminishes us all." Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 20. In other words, systems that do not promote the full humanity of women are based on a distorted view of human nature, both female and male, and lead to distorted relationships.

use of the principle. Sheila Greeve Davaney, for example, maintains that Ruether's position is in danger of repeating a basic error of "male" thinking. Davaney contends that

propos[ing] as a critical norm for evaluating truth claims the furtherance of women's full humanity, ... and giving it ontological status is the assumption that such female becoming corresponds to and reflects divine purpose and will. Hence, visions supporting feminist aspirations are not simply compelling human views, conditioned and relative, but indeed 'true' if not absolute in that they bear the mark of divine validation and reflect the 'true nature of things.'⁵⁴

Davaney's critique is significant and I come back to her point in Chapter Five. For the present it is important to note that while Ruether applies this principle as a criterion upon which to evaluate truth claims, her use of the principle raises the question whether she is in fact substituting one "truth" for another, thereby absolutizing a "feminist" principle as *the* truth.

Through her application of the critical principle of feminist theology to her study of the origins of Christianity Ruether concludes that defining human nature in terms of a mortal body and an immortal soul is an erroneous presupposition of Christian thought. Ruether substantiates this claim by arguing that the development of the concept of messianism⁵⁵ within the Hebrew tradition suffered a series of changes as it shifted from a religio-political concept to an apocalyptic eschatology. Through these changes "the earlier prophetic concept of a redeemed historical age"⁵⁶ was overshadowed by a new cosmic vision. A view of liberation based in

⁵⁴ Sheila Greeve Davaney, "Problems with Feminist Theory: Historicity and the Search for Sure Foundations," *Embodied Love: Sensuality and Relationship as Feminist Values*, Paula M. Cooley, Sharon A. Farmer, & Mary Ellen Ross, eds. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 89.

⁵⁵ Messianism refers to the Hebrew expectation of the Messiah, or anointed one, who was thought would come to rule the world in righteousness. In Greek the term is translated as *christos* (which is derived from *chrío*, I anoint) from which comes the word "Christ."

⁵⁶ Ruether, "Eschatology and Feminism," 116.

social hope was gradually lost to an other-worldly vision, primarily in terms of the concept of the resurrection of the dead from past ages.⁵⁷

For Ruether the prophetic-liberating traditions,⁵⁸ which developed in the eighth-century B.C.E. as a way in which to resist the concept of hope in terms of national vindication, comprised a significant chapter within the story of the development of the messianic tradition. Ruether argues that these traditions contain the lost "truth" which became distorted by the later developments of the messianic tradition.

Ruether argues that the usurped prophetic-liberating traditions offer a more adequate view of "the basic ingredients of a just and livable society. These ingredients have roots in nature and involve acceptance of *finitude, human scale, and balanced relationships* between persons and between human and nonhuman beings."⁵⁹ In other words these traditions stand in stark contrast to later traditions which view messianism in future, other-worldly terms.⁶⁰ Ruether moreover

⁵⁷ Ibid. Ruether notes that the development of the concept of the resurrection appears to have been advanced by concerns for injustice rather than the problem of mortality. Death *per se* was not the central issue, but dying before justice was fulfilled. Ruether suggests that "[b]y resurrecting the unrewarded righteous and the unpunished evil-doers of past ages, it was possible to imagine that the scales of injustice could finally be balanced in history." Ruether argues that the apocalyptic texts do not suggest a definitive change from the concept of the self as mortal to the self as immortal. Ruether states that "[m]ost of the apocalypses continue to assume that humanity is mortal. Even the resurrected are often assumed to be mortal. They do not live for ever, but only live that full life of long years that is the proper measure of redeemed humanity." Ibid., 12-13. Cf. Ruether, "Eschatology and Feminism," 116-117.

⁵⁸ Ruether also refers to these traditions as "prophetic-messianic." See, e.g., Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 28. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Theologians in Transition*, James M. Wall ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 164. Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Interpretation: A Method of Correlation," *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, Letty Russell, ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 117. In this work I use the terminology prophetic-liberating traditions to allow for consistency.

⁵⁹ Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 253. Emphasis added.

⁶⁰ Ruether's emphasis on the prophetic-liberating traditions as a way in which to assess social sin contrasts to e.g., Hans Walter Wolf's view that "[a]lthough criticism of contemporary circumstances plays an important role in prophecy, even more prominent and characteristic is the prophet's word about

attributes a prototypical characteristic to these traditions, stating that "the biblical liberation tradition is precious to all concerned with social liberation because it is the cultural prototype of all such movements in Western society."⁶¹

Ruether maintains that from these traditions, which insisted on personal and social conversion,⁶² four central themes emerge.

(1) God's defense and vindication of the oppressed, (2) the critique of the dominant systems of power and their powerholders, (3) the vision of a new age to come in which the present system of injustice is overcome and God's intended reign of peace and justice is installed in history; and (4) finally, the critique of ideology, or of religion, since ideology in this sense is primarily religious.⁶³

Ruether argues that by evaluating any social situation or any theological concept in terms of these four themes, the prophetic-liberating traditions act as "a plumb line of truth and untruth, justice and injustice."⁶⁴

There are three significant points that need to be made concerning Ruether's insistence on restoring the use of these traditions. First, Ruether draws on them as a resource for feminist thought. Ruether maintains that although these themes emerged from a specific historical situation, that is to say, as a means to protest against the exploitative grip of the wealthy city-dwelling Canaanites, they can "be

the future. Two basic observations support this. First, the decisive content of all call narratives and visions is not contemporary sin, but those coming events brought forth by Yahweh. Second, it is to be observed in the structure of prophetic speech that if both elements are not presented as the word of God, then only the announcement of the future is; the indictment of the hearers is never given alone (cf. Amos 3:9-11; 4:1-3; Isa. 5:8-10; Mic. 2:1-5)." "Prophecy From the Eighth Through the Fifth Century," *Interpreting the Prophets*, James Luther Mays & Paul J. Achtemeier, eds. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 19.

⁶¹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Recontextualizing Theology," *Theology Today* 43:1 (April 1986), 27.

⁶² Oft-quoted as exemplary of these traditions is Amos' admonition "I hate. I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down the waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." (Amos 5:21, 23-24).

⁶³ Ibid. Cf., Ruether, *Disputed Questions*, 32-33.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 27.

constantly adapted to changing social contexts and circumstances."⁶⁵ They are tools of analysis, which "cannot be made into a static set of 'ideas.'"⁶⁶

Ruether therefore suggests that the prophetic-liberating traditions provide the means to assess whether any given system promotes justice or perpetrates injustice by asking such questions as: Does the system or principle defend the concerns of those who are the most oppressed within society? Or does the system merely serve to maintain the status quo and empower those who are already in the position to dominate and to control others?

The second point that needs to be made is that Ruether admits that the prophetic-liberating traditions are not sufficient in and of themselves to be able to provide an adequate social analysis. Although Ruether contends "it is not some particular statements about women's liberation, but rather the critical pattern of prophetic thought, that is the usable tradition for feminism in the Bible,"⁶⁷ she recognizes that these traditions developed within a patriarchal society and need to be critiqued. Ruether therefore argues that it is when the prophetic-liberating traditions are used in conjunction with the critical principle of feminist theology that they can offer an effective means of social analysis.⁶⁸

In light of the critical principle of feminist theology the prophetic-liberating traditions take on a new dimension as the critical principle of feminist theology "radicalizes" them.⁶⁹ In rediscovering the prophetic-liberating traditions Ruether maintains that "feminism goes beyond the letter of the prophetic message to apply

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "A Religion for Women: Sources and Strategies," *Christianity and Crisis* 39 (1979), 309.

⁶⁸ Ruether, *Disputed Questions*, 31.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 31-33.

the prophetic-liberating principle to *women*."⁷⁰ She suggests that "[b]y including women in the prophetic norm, feminism sees what male prophetic thought generally had not seen: that once the prophetic norm is asserted to be central to the Biblical faith, then patriarchy can no longer be maintained as authoritative."⁷¹ Feminism together with the prophetic-liberating traditions act "to destabilize" the power structures in a way that the prophetic-liberating traditions alone are unable to do. Ruether therefore contends that "all the liberating prophetic visions must be deepened and transformed to include what was not included: women."⁷²

Ruether's use of the prophetic-liberating traditions has met with considerable criticism from other feminist theologians. Feminist biblical scholar Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, who reproaches Ruether's methodology as neo-orthodox,⁷³ contends that "[b]ecause she [Ruether] does not analyze the classical prophetic tradition as a historical phenomenon, but uses it rather as an abstract critical interpretative pattern, she does not consider its patriarchal polemics and repression of the cult of the Goddess."⁷⁴

Chinese theologian Kwok Pui-Lan argues that she does not think that "the prophetic element of the Bible can be correlated with women's experiences as Ruether suggests because this assumes that the prophetic principle can be lifted from the original context and planted elsewhere."⁷⁵ Kwok applies the Korean

⁷⁰ Ibid., 32.

⁷¹ Ibid., 24.

⁷² Ibid., 32.

⁷³ Schüssler Fiorenza writes that "[t]his neo-orthodox hermeneutics can be described with Peter Berger as an attempt 'to absorb the full impact of the relativizing perspective but nevertheless to posit an 'Archimedean point' in a sphere immune to relativization.'" Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 15.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 17.

⁷⁵ Kwok Pui-Lan, "Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World," *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*, Susan

concept of *minjung* theology⁷⁶ and concludes that "the richness of the Bible cannot be boiled down to one principle. The *minjung* need many voices, not one critical principle."⁷⁷

Daphne Hampson, on the one hand, defends Ruether's use of the prophetic-liberating traditions. Hampson contends that "one must, as a theologian, make some judgment as to what the scriptures are about, and Ruether is explicit as to how she reads."⁷⁸ On the other hand, Hampson criticizes Ruether's use of these traditions as an inadequate application of a golden thread methodology.⁷⁹ By this Hampson means that through this methodological approach a thematic coherence is imposed upon Christianity. Hampson suggests that this approach "has considerable theological ancestry, particularly Lutheran," in which case the golden thread is justification by faith. Hampson maintains that much liberation theology uses the same approach. "The theme of liberation ... is both read out of the scripture and the scriptures are read in terms of this theme."⁸⁰

In Ruether's case, Hampson argues, this approach results in work that is "less than satisfactory because muddled methodologically." Hampson contends that

Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel, eds. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 280.

⁷⁶ *Minjung* "is a Korean word which means the mass of people, or the mass who were being subjugated or being ruled. ... The history of the *minjung* was often neglected in traditional historical writing. They were treated as either docile or as mere spectators to the rise and fall of kingdoms and dynasties. *Minjung* theology, reclaims *minjung* as protagonists in the historical drama, for they are the subject of history." Kwok, "Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World," 277. For a discussion of *minjung* theology see *Minjung Theology: People as the Subjects of History*, Kim Yong Bock, ed. (Singapore: Commission on Theological Concerns, Christian Conference of Asia, 1981).

⁷⁷ Kwok Pui-Lan, "Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World," 280.

⁷⁸ Hampson, *Theology and Feminism*, 28.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 25.

Ruether, who is by training a historian, and politically of left-wing convictions, comes quickly to embark on a description of certain threads which she believes to have run through history. Thus we have the impression of what we may call a 'sacred history', threaded through history: the history of the liberation of people.⁸¹

Kathleen Sands also criticizes Ruether's use of the prophetic-liberating traditions. Sands contends that "it has been tricky to show how the prophetic-messianic tradition is the truest or most authentic dimension of the Bible, other than on the a priori assumption of its moral superiority."⁸² I think that Sands is correct in stating that Ruether thinks that these traditions are morally superior. But this privileged status is not awarded arbitrarily. Ruether confers moral superiority on the prophetic-liberating traditions because of her judgment that "the prophetic texts themselves are written from the standpoint of the oppressed."⁸³ While she does not suggest that they comprise a "canon within the canon,"⁸⁴ she argues that despite the patriarchal framework within which they developed, these traditions are nevertheless authoritative in that they "indeed intend the full humanity of women as created and redeemed."⁸⁵

Sands contends that Ruether's use of the prophetic liberating traditions is more "theological than historical or exegetical"⁸⁶ by which she means that "the ethically good [as revealed through these traditions] is equivalent *ipso facto* to ultimate truth, while evil - though true enough in its own sphere - is a distortion of what is ultimately true."⁸⁷ Sands, therefore, holds suspect Ruether's "Christian

⁸¹ Ibid., 28.

⁸² Sands, *Escape from Paradise*, 103.

⁸³ Tony Clarke-Sayer, "The Bible and the Religious Left: An Interview with Rosemary Radford Ruether," *The Witness* 66:3 (March 1983): 8, quoted in Sands, *Escape from Paradise*, 104.

⁸⁴ Ruether, "Feminist Interpretation," 117.

⁸⁵ Ruether, "Theology as Critique and Emancipation from Sexism," *The Vocation of the Theologian*, Theodore Jennings, Jr. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 28.

⁸⁶ Sands, *Escape from Paradise*, 104.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 105.

theism,"⁸⁸ that is to say, Ruether's "[f]aith in a goodness beyond tragedy."⁸⁹ Ruether's adherence to these traditions is in Sands's view based on Ruether's faulty notion of transcendent goodness.

I think, however, that an essential aspect of Ruether's defense of these traditions, which is overshadowed by her more explicit use of them as a means of critical analysis, is that they were written out of a worldview that, as I stated above, offers a more adequate view of "the basic ingredients of a just and livable society. These ingredients have roots in nature and involve acceptance of *finitude, human scale, and balanced relationships* between persons and between human and nonhuman beings."⁹⁰

While it is indeed impossible to separate the message of the prophetic-liberating traditions from the worldview within they developed, I think that Ruether's argument that these traditions viewed human nature as finite lacking an immortal aspect tends to be overlooked. As I discussed in the Introduction, the concept of an immortal self is generally viewed as anathema by feminist theology. It may very well be that other feminist theologians do not highlight this aspect of Ruether's thought because it is seen in effect as somewhat of a given. Nevertheless, I think that by neglecting to acknowledge the importance of this aspect of the prophetic-liberating traditions one disregards an important point of Ruether's argument. This brings me to the third point which I wish to make concerning Ruether's use of the prophetic-liberating traditions.

Ruether defends her use of the prophetic-liberating traditions on the basis that they are central to the mission of Jesus.⁹¹ Ruether in fact develops her

⁸⁸ Ibid., 104.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 111.

⁹⁰ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 253. Emphasis added.

⁹¹ Ibid., 24.

Christology based on her view of Jesus as the defender of these traditions. Ruether maintains that her view of Jesus is not original but represents an early Christological vision, the predecessor of later orthodox Christology, which was initiated by the crucifixion of Jesus and took five centuries to come to full fruition.

To be able to understand Ruether's view of oppression, it is, therefore, necessary to understand her Christology in relation to the orthodox position as developed within the Pauline-Augustinian tradition. To that end it is useful to consider these views in relationship to Ruether's understanding of what is referred to as "the Fall," for it is through the development of this doctrine that Ruether's claims of the pernicious nature of traditional Christology and its role as a promoter of oppression is made most explicit.

The Beginnings of an Orthodox Christology: St. Paul and the Fall

The concept of the fall was initiated by St. Paul in the first century C.E. and was brought to full development in the thought of St. Augustine (354-430). Ruether argues that Paul's theology, which forms the basis for the doctrine of the fall, is based on "a profound dualism between two modes of existence: existence according to the 'flesh' which he characterizes as a state of slavery to sin and death, and existence in the Spirit, which he sees as freeing the Christian, through their rebirth in Christ, both to virtuous and loving life and also to *the promise of immortality*."⁹²

The passage from slavery to freedom depends on a twofold process. The first stage is baptism. While a fulfilled state of being may be anticipated after

⁹² Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 127. Emphasis added. See I Cor 15:35-45.

baptism, the process is not complete. After baptism the power of sin is still present "in our flesh."⁹³ Paul maintains that [a] fulfilled state of being can only be enjoyed within "an immortal state of being,"⁹⁴ which consequently demands a second stage in the transformative process. Ruether argues that through this second stage "the fleshly and mortal mode of life finally will be destroyed, and the self will be transformed into a sinless and immortal state of being."⁹⁵

Paul, however, goes beyond stating his theological position in terms of abstract ideas. He develops his idea of the fall and redemption in terms of a mythological framework. Drawing on Genesis 1-3, which includes the story of Adam and Eve, Paul develops what is referred to as the Adamic myth. While Paul's use of the Genesis story as a mythic explanation for evil was not unique, his interpretation of the story differs from other Jewish versions of the "fall of man" in that he uses the story to explain the cosmological necessity for Christ, the second Adam. However, unlike, for example, the influential Hellenistic Jew Philo (30 B.C.E. - 50 C.E.), Paul did not attribute blame to Eve.⁹⁶ Paul emphasizes the old individual giving way to the new, juxtaposing Adam, the first man, with Christ, the new Adam.⁹⁷

⁹³ Ibid., 128.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Philo, *Commentary on Genesis*, 46, 53. In fact the only place in the New Testament where Eve is blamed for bringing sin into the world is in the pseudepigraphal letter I Timothy. This letter, which was attributed to Paul, asserts that "I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor." (1 Timothy 2:12-14) For a general discussion of the development of the concept of Eve within the Christian tradition see e.g., J.A. Phillips, *Eve The History of an Idea* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984.); Gregory Allen Robbing, ed., *Genesis 1-3. History of Exegesis: Intrigue in the Garden* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), and William E. Phipps, *Genesis and Gender: Biblical Myths of Sexuality and Their Cultural Impact* (New York: Praeger, 1989).

⁹⁷ Romans 5:12-21.

While Paul did not directly scapegoat Eve for bringing sin into the world (a dubious privilege that was attributed to her by later Christian theologians⁹⁸), Ruether nevertheless criticizes his view of the fall as "seeing redeemed life as something fundamentally transcendent to our original, created potential."⁹⁹ Ruether argues that the error of Paul's theological position is that he confuses creation with evil. She contends that this confusion stems from Paul's quasi-Gnostic¹⁰⁰ cosmology.

Paul takes for granted the two-storied cosmology of contemporary philosophy. On the upper level, the celestial bodies are made up of a type of matter that is spiritual or "lightlike" and immortal. In the sublunar realm of air and earth, there are bodies that are subject to decay. This lower realm of earth and air is seen as governed by demonic powers that trap us in sin and death.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ I discuss this development in more detail below. See 54 ff.

⁹⁹ Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 127.

¹⁰⁰ Gnosticism, a term derived from a Greek word for knowledge (*gnosis*), is applied to a philosophical and religious movement, which can be found in a variety of pagan, Jewish, and Christian forms that influenced the Mediterranean world from the first century B.C.E. to the third century C.E. The movement gained its name from the promise of salvation through a secret knowledge or understanding of reality possessed by its followers.

¹⁰¹ Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 129. In *Gaia and God* Ruether indicates that Gnostic cosmologies insist on a radical division between the divine and the creation. In this system "the entire cosmos, including its planetary upper regions, have been demonized." 124. The creation is not divinely-appointed but the result of a fallen, demonic power. Ruether cites the Valentinian Gnostic myth which states that Sophia failed to accept her mediated relation to God thereby creating a fissure in the divine pleroma resulting in the divine community. Through Sophia's error ignorance erupts. Expelled from the pleroma, ignorance becomes "root and substratum of the visible cosmos." 125. Gnostic cosmology alleges that despite the demonic nature of the creation some humans embody divine sparks, "particles of divine light that escaped from the pleroma in the cosmic fall." 124. Once the spirit of these "elect" human beings are awakened, they gain knowledge, or *gnosis*, of their true being, and of the ignorance of the cosmos. Salvation occurs when the spirit is released from the restraints of matter and the divine spark is freed to return to the divine community. Ruether argues that the exclusionary nature of gnostic thought, the salvation of the elect, denies a concept of universal salvation. Only the few, the "elect," are to be saved. The rest of the creation is lost to the demonic. This system results in an exclusive, elitist and divisive view of humanity, which denies the inherently relational nature of all of existence. The chosen are the "elect," temporarily confined to a fallen world.

Within this worldview individuals, as inhabitants of this lower realm, come under the power of demonic spirits, powers and principalities.¹⁰² Ultimately only Christ can reconcile the creation to God.

Ruether argues that Paul understands Christ as the cosmogonic Logos.¹⁰³ Christ is the beginning and the end. Through Christ all was, and through Christ all will be reconciled to God. As Ruether explains,

[t]he manifestation of the cosmogonic Logos in the end time thus can be understood as a reincursion of God's primal creative power, subjugating these dissident angelic powers and thereby bringing about a reunified cosmos, reconciled to God, and filled with God's plenary goodness. The culmination of this process of subjugation of the unruly cosmic powers, and the reconciliation of the cosmos with God, is, as Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 15:25, "So that God may be all in all."¹⁰⁴

Ruether, however, taking issue with this christological position, argues that Paul's view of Christ as the cosmogonic Logos contradicts the gospel portrayal of Jesus' ministry, and what she views as a more adequate meaning of the concept of Christ.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² While Ruether criticizes Paul's use of the concept of power and principalities, she nevertheless also uses the terms. In *Sexism and God-Talk*, e.g., Ruether argues that "[t]he powers and principalities are still very much in control of most of the world." 234. Cf. to where she refers to "the powers and principalities that are the perverse realizations of the stuff of our heavenly dreams," "Paradoxes of Human Hope: The Messianic Horizon of Church and Society," *Theological Studies* 33:2 (June 1972), 251.

¹⁰³ Ruether *Gaia and God*, 232.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 233. Ruether cites Colossians 1:15-20 as "[o]ne of the fullest expressions of this cosmological Christology." *Gaia and God*, 232. Ruether, suggests that this Christological understanding reflects a Judaeo-Persian apocalyptic cosmology. *Gaia and God*, 233. It is not entirely clear from Paul's writings whether he believed in a universal salvation. Passages such as 1 Cor 15:22, Romans 5: 18, Romans 11:32 and Ephesians 1:10 would suggest that he did. On the other hand, Romans 9 and 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 suggest a non-universalist view of salvation.

¹⁰⁵ For Ruether's understanding of Jesus's mission and the concept of Christ see e.g., "In What Sense Can We Say that Jesus Was the Christ?" *The Ecumenist* 10 (January-February 1972), 17-24; "The Suffering Servant Myth," *Worldview* 17 (March 1974), 45-46; "Christology and Jewish-Christian Relations," *Jews and Christians After the Holocaust*, Abraham Peck, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 25-38; "Christology: Can a Male Saviour Save Women?" *Sexism and God-Talk*, 116-138; "The Liberation of Christology from Patriarchy," *Feminist Theology: A Reader*, Ann Loades, ed. (London: SPCK, 1990), 138-148.

Ruether's Christology¹⁰⁶

Ruether argues that fundamental to Jesus' teaching is his recognition and criticism of the way in which the prophetic-liberating traditions have become deformed.¹⁰⁷ Ruether argues that Jesus' ministry is a ministry of renewal, an attempt to restore the Hebrew prophetic critique on behalf of the oppressed.¹⁰⁸ Ruether contends that in keeping with the prophetic-liberating traditions Jesus maintains that "the Word of God does not validate the existing social and religious hierarchy but speaks on behalf of the marginalized and despised groups of society."¹⁰⁹ Ruether identifies Jesus as the liberator of "the poor, the downtrodden, those who hunger and thirst."¹¹⁰ As liberator Ruether views Jesus as "critic rather than vindicator of the present hierarchical social order."¹¹¹

Ruether argues that Jesus moreover provides a radical interpretation of the prophetic-liberating traditions. He not only rejects the "use of religion to sanctify dominant hierarchies but also the temptation to use prophetic language simply to justify the revenge of the oppressed."¹¹² Ruether contends that Jesus' critique of power relationships calls for a transformation. In her view this is not a transformation of a fallen world, at least not in Paul's sense of fallen world, but the

¹⁰⁶ The most extensive study of Ruether's Christology to date is Mary Hembrow Snyder, *The Christology of Rosemary Radford Ruether* (Mystic: Twenty-Third Publications, 1988).

¹⁰⁷ Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 29.

¹⁰⁸ Ruether cites e.g., Matthew 23:23 as witnessing to Jesus' true message. In this text Jesus confronts the scribes and Pharisees as hypocrites for tithing while neglecting the "weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith." See e.g., *To Change the World*, 35.

¹⁰⁹ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 136.

¹¹⁰ Ruether, "Christology and Feminism: Can a Male Saviour Save Women?" *To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 53.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 29. Cf., Ruether, *Disputed Questions*, 92-93.

transformation of all relationships. Relations of power that reduce the other to servility are to be exposed as sinful and changed.¹¹³

Ruether's christological position therefore suggests that Paul's understanding of the fall and consequently of redemption, that is the fall of humanity through Adam and the restoration of humanity through Christ, presents a distorted view of Jesus' ministry. Rather than the cosmogonic Logos Ruether views Jesus' mission as leading women and men to a new creation, "a new humanity"¹¹⁴ on earth. Paul also describes the work of Christ in terms of a new creation,¹¹⁵ but Ruether's and Paul's visions differ considerably.

Paul's vision depends on what Ruether refers to as fulfilled messianism, i.e., the promises contained in the scriptures are already fulfilled in Jesus. Ruether, however, claims that Jesus as Christ "is not confined to a static perfection of one person two thousand years ago. Rather, redemptive humanity goes ahead of us, calling us to yet incompleated dimensions of human liberation."¹¹⁶ Rather than fulfilled messianism Ruether's christological view is better described as proleptic and paradigmatic messianism. Ruether understands Jesus as redemptive inasmuch as he anticipates future glory. Jesus is the paradigm of humanity for he "reveals to us the structure of human existence as it stands in that point of tension between what is and what it ought to be."¹¹⁷

One of Ruether's clearest christological statements is in her chapter on christology in *Sexism and God-Talk*. I quote one paragraph from this chapter at

¹¹³ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 30.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 138.

¹¹⁵ See, e.g., Galatians 6:15 and 2 Corinthians 5:12.

¹¹⁶ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 138.

¹¹⁷ Ruether, "In What Sense Can We Say that Jesus Was 'The Christ?' ",

length for it presents a succinct summary of Ruether's understanding of Jesus' mission.

Implicit in the early Jesus movement is a challenge to religious authority embodied in past revelation and institutionalized in the hands of a privileged group of interpreters. Jesus declares that God has not just spoken in the past but is speaking *now*. Prophecy is not canonized in past texts; the Spirit of God speaks today. Those of low or marginal status (Jesus and his disciples [including women]) speak not simply as interpreters of past traditions but as the direct word of God (with authority, not as the Scribes and Pharisees speak). Jesus frees religious experience from the fossilization of past traditions (which doesn't mean he rejects those traditions) and makes it accessible in the present. And Jesus does not think of himself as the "last word of God," but points beyond himself to "One who will come."¹¹⁸

Ruether consequently differentiates between Jesus and Christ by suggesting that "Jesus is our paradigm of hoping, aspiring man, venturing his life in expectation of the kingdom and Christ stands as the *symbol* of the fulfillment of that hope."¹¹⁹ Christ therefore has not yet come, but is the sign of that which can be.¹²⁰

While Christ is a sign, Ruether maintains that Christ's spirit can be expressed through humanity, male and female. Ruether, therefore, does not view the confession that Jesus is the Christ as a gender issue. She argues that Jesus' ability to speak as liberator, as the Christ, does not depend on his maleness "but in the fact that he has renounced this system of domination [which supports sexism] and seeks to embody in his person the new humanity of service and mutual empowerment."¹²¹ Ruether argues moreover that Christ cannot be thought of in terms of a single person, male or female, rather that "[t]he redeemer is one who has

¹¹⁸ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 121.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 22. Emphasis added.

¹²⁰ Baum suggests that one implication of Ruether's position is that it "relativize[s] Christianity so as to leave room for other religions, and in particular for Judaism, before God." Baum, "Introduction," 17. This is a different position from, e.g., Karl Rahner's "anonymous Christian." In Rahner's view other religions are ultimately to be superseded by Christianity. See Karl Rahner "Anonymous Christians," *Theological Investigations*, vol. VI. (New York: Seabury, 1974).

¹²¹ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 137.

been redeemed, just as Jesus accepted the baptism of John. Those who have been liberated can, in turn, become paradigmatic, liberating persons for others."¹²²

Ruether therefore differentiates between the pre-crucifixion period in which Jesus proclaims repentance in anticipation of "One who is to come," and the post-crucifixion period which begins with the reassembling of the disciples "under collective experiences of Jesus Resurrection," and proclaims Jesus as saviour.¹²³ Ruether maintains that after the resurrection the prophetic Jesus and his mission become distorted.

This distinction is significant for Ruether contends that Jesus as the Christ, i.e., the potentially redemptive Jesus, is the one who proclaims the prophetic-liberating traditions. It is not the resurrected Jesus, but the living prophetic Jesus who is the redeemer. Ruether therefore clearly distinguishes between the idea of Jesus as renewer of the prophetic-liberation traditions which focuses on this worldly emancipation, and the concept of a resurrected Christ which reflects the shift to a worldview that relies on the concept of an immortal self. The former Ruether views as indeed a liberating Christ, the latter she views as a symbol of oppression which has lead to inordinate injustice for women.¹²⁴

It is interesting to note that in his introduction to Ruether's early work *Faith and Fratricide* (1974) Gregory Baum tries to apologize for Ruether's lack of attention to the resurrection of Jesus. Baum contends that Ruether wants to show that the facticity of resurrection event is of a different kind from the facticity of the Exodus event.¹²⁵ Baum argues that unlike the resurrection of Jesus, Israel's Exodus from the land of bondage was "visible to all participants as well as to their

¹²² Ibid., 138.

¹²³ Ibid., 122.

¹²⁴ See below, 54 ff.

¹²⁵ Baum, "Introduction," 19.

oppressors."¹²⁶ Baum suggests that belief in the resurrection of Jesus was a question of perspective. The Jews expected a different kind of event, a messianic event that would end all suffering.¹²⁷

I do not see that Baum's argument is related to the question at hand, i.e., why Ruether does not discuss the resurrection. Baum does not seem to want to explain Ruether's lack of resurrection talk, but to excuse it. Maybe it was because her book profoundly influenced his view of Jewish-Christian relationships¹²⁸ that he does not want to admit that she is challenging the veracity of the concept of resurrection. As Baum admits, if this is the case, Ruether could be accused of "having abandoned the center of the gospel, i.e., of no longer being a Christian theologian."¹²⁹ But as I indicated above, Ruether *knows* that she will be challenged, for in her own mind she *has* abandoned the center of the gospel, that is to say, if the centre is thought of in terms of the resurrection. Moreover, as I discussed above, she considers this to be a positive development both personally and theologically.¹³⁰ It is not just the resurrection of Jesus that Ruether gainsays, but the concept of resurrection in general.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 18.

¹²⁷ As Spivey and Smith state, "[t]he basic messianic hope of first-century Israel was the hope for a political Messiah, usually expected to be an heir of King David, and perhaps Son of God He was to overthrow the political enemies of Israel, establish the chosen people in a new and perfect reign of David, and inaugurate the Kingdom of God." Spivey, Robert A. and D. Moody Smith, *Anatomy of the New Testament: A Guide to Its Structure and Meaning* (New York: Macmillan, 1982), 236. Spivey and Smith clarify that "[n]ot all hopes for the restoration of Israel were tied to the figure of the Messiah. For example, the Messiahs of the Qumran community were apparently not expected to play the major role in the redemption and restoration of the fortunes of the true Israel. In some Jewish eschatological hopes and schemes the Messiah apparently played no role." 236.

¹²⁸ Baum, "Introduction," 2-4.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 18.

¹³⁰ See above. 30 ff.

What is, therefore, the significance of Ruether's Christology? First, in Ruether's view the development of the concept of an immortal self goes beyond a distortion of the concept of human nature within Christianity. Ruether contends that the development of the concept of an immortal self is a distortion of what she views as the true message of Christianity. Jesus in her view plays a prophetic role, challenging authority. Ruether argues that the "true" concept of Christ did not arise out of the resurrection event. Christ is a symbol for justice that can be. Ruether argues that through the development of traditional christology Jesus, however, becomes spiritualized into "a timeless revelation of divine perfection located in a past paradigmatic movement."¹³¹ In her view Jesus is not proclaiming the hope of an other-worldly redemption but demanding participation in this-worldly emancipation. Her christology therefore disassociates Jesus from the concept of an actually risen Christ. If Jesus lives, it is through his "spirit" that can be known by discerning the prophetic-liberating message he delivered. In sum, Ruether argues that the dominant christological position not only distorts Jesus' message but in its dependence on the concept of an immortal self it is oppressive and a source of injustice.

Throughout this chapter I have insisted that Ruether views the concept of an immortal self as the source of oppression for women. It is now necessary to clarify why in fact Ruether takes this view. In the following section I wish to continue my discussion of Ruether's understanding of the fall and through this discussion consider the way in which Ruether views the relationship between the concept of the immortal self and injustice particularly as it relates to the question of the oppression of women within the western world.

¹³¹ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 124.

The Concept of an Immortal Self: The Denial of the Full Humanity of Women

To begin this discussion it is necessary to recall what Ruether refers to as the critical principle of feminist theology. This principle states that any system of thought, theological statement or social system is unacceptable which does not promote the full humanity of women. It is in the context of Ruether's concept of the critical principle of feminist theology that I wish to consider her contention that the dominant Christological position is based on an erroneous understanding of human nature which has severely compromised women within western society.

To carry out this discussion it is necessary to reconsider the story of the fall as part of the mythological universe which developed within early Christianity. I indicated above that Ruether contends that the way in which the concept of the immortal self develops within early Christianity was highly influenced by Pauline thought through the development of the Adamic myth. Although Paul initiates the myth within Christianity, he does not bring it to its full development. His theology, however, serves as the basis for a significant development of the myth which results in the scapegoating of women as the cause of evil.

Ruether argues that the way in which the Genesis myth has been interpreted has lead to a particular understanding of the ontological status of women. Ruether contends that the myth is instrumental in developing the concept of the very *being* of woman as evil. The etiology of evil "not only makes women responsible for evil in the world, but it also translates female evil into an *ontological principle*." ¹³²

What needs to be stressed is that for this "characteristic" to be bestowed upon women depends on the possibility of directly associating women with the mortal body which is held in opposition to the eternal soul. "The female comes to

¹³² Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 168-9. Emphasis added.

represent the qualities of materiality, irrationality, carnality, and finitude, which debase the 'manly' spirit and drag it down into sin and death."¹³³ Ruether refers to this myth, which developed within a social-religious milieu in which the male is viewed as normative, as a "male mythology." In this myth the female is not only viewed as secondary to the male. The female, associated with matter, is viewed as dragging down the male, who is associated with spirit.

Ruether therefore endeavours to expose the theological construction of human nature which inspired contempt for women as exemplified, for example, by the infamous fiery admonition of the early Church father Tertullian (ca. 160-220 C.E.).

Do you not know that each of you is Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. *You* are the Devil's gateway. *You* are the unsealer of the forbidden tree. *You* are the first deserter of the divine law. *You* are she who persuaded him whom the Devil was not valiant enough to attack. *You* destroyed so easily God's image man. On account of your desert, that is death, even the Son of God had to die.¹³⁴

By the time of Tertullian women, all women, had become associated with Eve. The nature of women therefore had become directly linked to sin, mortality and the need for the redemption of all of humanity. Christ was indispensable because Eve had sinned.

Ruether states that it is with St. Augustine that these early "Christian perspectives on nature, sin, mortality, and redemption from sin and death were refined...."¹³⁵ Ruether argues that "[i]n a series of letters and treatises," to refute Pelagius' view of nature and free will, "Augustine hammered out the anthropology

¹³³ Ibid., 169.

¹³⁴ Tertullian, *De Culta Feminarum* I.I. Quoted in Ruether, "Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church," *Religion and Sexism*, Ruether, ed., 157. As Nel Noddings suggests, there are various translations of this text, and that [t]he translation in Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p. 58 sounds a bit less universally accusatory." Nel Noddings, *Women and Evil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 251, footnote 40.

¹³⁵ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 134.

of transcendent grace, and of the fallen self that has lost the freedom to do what it wills, which would shape Western Christianity."¹³⁶ Ruether stresses that while Augustine maintains that all is from God and therefore all is good,

there remains in his thought the Platonic version of the anti-body, anti-material hierarchy.... The intellectual journey to truth and the moral journey to goodness is one with the journey from bodily beings to disembodied Being.¹³⁷

In his interpretation of this intellectual journey which takes place within humanity's fallen state Augustine viewed women as redeemable but "they are 'by nature' under male subjugation. The male alone possesses the image of God, and woman is related to the divine 'image' only under the 'male as her head.'" ¹³⁸ Since fallen nature is tainted by concupiscence or lust, redemption as a journey from the natural world to the divine entails for Augustine moving from worldly relations to a celibate life. The redeemed male attests to his redemption by focusing away from his concupiscent body and onto his eternal soul, while the redeemed female attests to her redemption by subjecting herself to male authority. As Ruether states,

[w]omen, naturally subordinate, were to be redeemed by subordinating themselves all the more to the will of their husbands, or to other men in authority over them. Redeemed males express their redemption by eschewing sexual relations with women ¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Ibid., 136-7.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 138. Ruether's understanding of Augustine's concept of the image of God is a little misleading. Augustine understands the image of God as referring to the interior person where reason and intellect reside. Drawing as he does on Platonic thought the real person therefore is the mind or the soul. Augustine does not deny that women have souls. That is to say he does not deny that women were born in the image of God. He does however make it quite clear that woman was created not only second but from man for a reason. Women are men's inferior. Men are the master, the ruler. Women are to serve and to follow. Men are ruled by wisdom and women are ruled by men. See e.g., Augustine, *Two Books on Genesis Against the Manichees*, Roland J. Teske, S.J., trans. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 11-114. For feminist interpretations of Augustine's thought see e.g., Genevieve Lloyd, "Augustine and Aquinas," *Feminist Theology: A Reader*, Ann Loades, ed. (London: SPCK, 1990), 90-98.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 139.

Augustine's understanding of Adam and Eve, based on a Neoplatonic anthropology and consequently on a Neoplatonic understanding of immortality,¹⁴⁰ suggests that "[w]oman, despite her status as co-heir of grace, must pursue that same path burdened by the symbolic force of her subordination to man..."¹⁴¹ Augustine viewed this subordination as "natural." Redemption for women therefore depends on their submission to male authority.

¹⁴⁰ The Platonic notion of immortality is found most elegantly expressed in Plato's *Phaedo*. See, Plato, "The *Phaedo*," *Five Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo*, G.M.A. Grube, trans. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1981), 93-156. It is generally accepted by both ancient and contemporary philosophers that the concept of the body-soul split came into Greek thought through Orphism. In *Cratylus* Plato e.g., writes: "I think that this admits of many explanations if a little, even very little, change is made; for some say it is the tomb of the soul, their notion being that the soul is buried in the present life, and again, because by its means the soul gives any signs which it gives: it is for this reason also properly called 'sign'. But I think it is most likely that the Orphic poets gave this name with the idea that the soul is undergoing punishment for something; they think it has the body as an enclosure to keep it safe, like a prison, and this is, as the name denotes, the safe for the soul until the penalty is paid, and not even a letter needs to be changed." As quoted in Giovanni Reale, *A History of Ancient Philosophy: From the Origins to Socrates*, John R. Cratan, ed. & trans. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 296.

¹⁴¹ Genevieve Lloyd, "Augustine and Aquinas," 94. Platonic cosmology suggests that matter is shaped into the cosmos not by God but by "the Demiurgos (Creator), by fashioning it according to the eternal essences." The Demiurgos also fashions the soul or the life principle which when infused into the cosmos becomes its governing power. The soul has the power to govern for it has the capacity for knowledge, i.e., "contemplative union with the divine essences," which enables it to subdue to the body when it is joined to it. Since it also contains the "lower forces of unruly passions," the soul has the capacity to be lose its contemplative union by giving in to the lower passions and is consequently ruled by them. The desired end for the soul is to detach itself from matter and to return to its true home, the eternal. Freedom from matter can consequently come about only when virtue is attained, that is to say, when "the mind, as the governing principle of the soul and the body, remains united with the vision of the eternal, unchangeable truths." Ruether, *Gaea and God*, 122. Ruether contends that the hierarchical nature of the social systems that follow from this view promotes domination and its corollary oppression. Existence is understood in terms of a chain of being. God occupies the uppermost level followed by, in order of importance, spirits-male-female-animals-non-human matter. Ruether argues that this chain of being is moreover a chain of command. God rules all. Within this hierarchical system males are consequently viewed as the "natural" rulers of females. *Ibid.*, 123.

This Augustinian basis for understanding human nature becomes normative for Christian anthropology. It does, however, go through a significant development in the thirteenth century by the medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). Unlike Augustine who relied on Neoplatonism, Aquinas develops his theology based on Aristotelian thought which results in a somewhat different view of human nature. The social repercussions, however, are similar.

Aquinas follows Aristotle's view that woman is a misbegotten male.¹⁴²

According to Aristotelian biology, the male seed provides the "form" of the human body. Woman's reproductive role contributes only the matter that "fleshes out" this formative power of the male seed. Normatively, every male insemination would produce another male in the "image" of its father. But by some accident, this male form is sometimes subverted by the female matter and produces an inferior or defective human species, or female. This inferiority touches the entire nature of woman. She is inferior in body (weaker), inferior in mind (less capable of reason), and inferior morally (less capable of will and moral self-control.)¹⁴³

Aquinas argues that since the transmission of sin demanded an active impulse which had to be given through the seed of the father, the mother's passive contribution of material would not be able to transmit an active impulse. Eve therefore had nothing to do with the transmission of original sin. Consequently, if Eve alone had sinned, there would have been no original sin. His view implies that Eve's existence had no significance beyond her generative function. She had no moral or religious role to play as "mother of life."¹⁴⁴

So while Aquinas relieves women from having to bear the burden of guilt of bringing death into the world, it is at the expense of women's capacity to be active moral agents capable of bringing about such a catastrophe. Due to women's inferior nature she is less able to act. She is also "naturally," as attested to by

¹⁴² See Aristotle, *De Generatione Animalium*, A. L. Peck, trans., (London: Heinemann, 1943), 737a 28.

¹⁴³ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 96.

¹⁴⁴ Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, (Montreal: Eden Press, 1985), 387-400.

Augustine, dominated by men and subject to their reason. Aquinas argues that male domination of women is consequently essential to be able to assure a good social order. Just as it is "natural" for the mind or reason to rule the body, it is "natural" for men to rule women. As with Augustine's Neoplatonic anthropological model, Aquinas' Aristotelian anthropological model also depends on a direct correlation between the concept of the immortal self and the subjugation of women.

Ruether argues that keeping women in their place, that is to say, keeping women subjected to men, has meant trying to enforce a social structure which has denied women their full humanity. Social repercussions have been systematically enforced and have often been extreme.¹⁴⁵ For example, in the fifteenth century two Dominican fathers, Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, wrote that women by nature are "feebler both in mind and body." Through a woman's defective birth "she is an imperfect animal, she always deceives."¹⁴⁶ This view of women underlies their *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486), the opprobrious handbook used to determine the guilt of suspected witches. In this work "[w]itchcraft is explicitly linked to women's inferior 'nature'."¹⁴⁷

Through her analysis of the way in which Christianity has named evil in terms of the fall, Ruether consequently suggests that the nature of "the fall" has in fact been erroneously identified. With Paul and Augustine Ruether agrees that humanity exists in a fallen state. However, unlike the Pauline-Augustinian tradition which views humanity as having fallen from a pristine to a tainted state, Ruether argues that it is in fact the development of such a view that constitutes the real fall of

¹⁴⁵ See e.g., Mary Daly, *Gyn/ecology: the Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978).

¹⁴⁶ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 170. It is interesting to note that Kramer and Sprenger argue that women's "weak" and deceitful nature" can be apparently etymologically verified, "for *Femina* comes from *Fe* and *Minus*, since she is ever weaker to hold and preserve the faith." Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

the Christian world.¹⁴⁸ She contends that within western culture humanity is indeed "fallen" because it has been incorrectly defined, fallaciously mythologized in terms of a mortal body and an immortal soul.

In Ruether's view the fall, therefore, has nothing to do with a single event that ushered death and evil into the world. The fall, correctly identified, is the creation of a worldview based on dualistic oppositional thinking derived from the concept of a divided self. Ruether therefore views the Christian tradition as a "major culture and system of domination" due to its underlying patriarchal error of distorting the dialectics of human existence into oppositional dualisms which leads to "false polarities." Ruether argues that

[t]he Western design of consciousness might be described as one of alienation and the splitting of reality into false polarities: "masculinity" over "femininity," "man" (ruling class male) over creation, history over nature, ego over body, spirit over matter, whiteness over blackness, the "above" over the "below," self over society, heaven over earth.¹⁴⁹

As a result of this fallen way of viewing existence, that is, the ontological naming of women as evil, Ruether proclaims that "we are all products of the original sin of sexism."¹⁵⁰ Ruether argues that "the real Fall takes place in the dehumanization of woman. *There* is the essence of that original sin which is perpetuated, not through sex, biologically, but through *sexism*, morally and socially...."¹⁵¹

Ruether therefore challenges Christianity as a perpetrator of evil. She writes that

¹⁴⁸ See Ruether's development of this argument in *Sexism and God-Talk*, 159-192, and *Gaia and God*, 126-142.

¹⁴⁹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Whatever Happened to Theology?" *Christianity and Crisis* 35 (12 May 1975), 110. Cf., Rosemary Radford Ruether, *New Woman/New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 58.

¹⁵⁰ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 174. Emphasis added.

¹⁵¹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Sexism and the Theology of Liberation," *Christian Century* 60 (12 December 1973), 1225.

evil does exist, precisely in this false naming, projection and exploitation. This very process of false naming and exploitation constitutes the fundamental distortion and corruption of human relationality. Evil comes about precisely by the distortion of the self-other relationship into the good-evil, superior-inferior dualism¹⁵²

Ruether contends that the false naming of women, the creation of woman as the Other, which has lead to women's subjugation to men, women's inferior status and the insistence that women comply to male dominance, is symptomatic of what she refers to as the "Big Lie." Ruether argues that the Big Lie

makes matter the final devolution of the mind, and the mind the original source of all being. It regards the body as an alien tomb of the soul, and the soul as growing stronger the more it weakens the body. It abstracts the human from the earth and God from the cosmos... and tells us that we are strangers and sojourners on this planet, that our flesh, our blood, our instincts for survival are our enemy.¹⁵³

The Big Lie, that is, perpetuating the idea that human nature is comprised of a mortal body, which must die, and an immortal soul which can experience other-worldly redemption, has meant that for the most part the Christian tradition has been one of domination and deceit alienating humanity from itself, from others, from the earth and from the true nature of Christ.

Assessing Ruether's View of Oppression

What then can we say about Ruether's view of the nature of oppression? I have approached this question by beginning with Ruether's statement that "[t]h[e] concept of the 'immortal self,' survivable apart from our particular transient organism, must be recognized, not only as untenable, but as the source of much destructive behavior toward the earth and other humans."¹⁵⁴

As I discussed above, Ruether in part grounds her view of the immortal self as untenable based on what she refers to as her "better intuitions."¹⁵⁵ She recounts

¹⁵² Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 174.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 264.

¹⁵⁴ Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 251.

¹⁵⁵ Ruether, "Beginnings: An Intellectual Autobiography," 39.

becoming cognizant of her aversion to the concept when her father died when she was twelve. While it can be argued that this reflects a very subjective response of a child, Ruether nevertheless notes that the experience is foundational for the development of her understanding of the concept of an immortal self, and that this early intuition becomes more developed as she matures.

It seems evident that her growing social and political awareness helped to substantiate her earlier intuitive feelings. The destructive consequences, particularly as they apply to women, resulting from social structures which have their roots in a worldview based on the concept of an immortal self undoubtedly, in Ruether's view, serve to testify to its untenability.¹⁵⁶ The two aspects of Ruether's criticism of the concept of an immortal soul, its untenability and that it is the source of injustice are inextricably linked. The latter, verifiable from an analysis of social structures by applying the critical principle of feminist theology and the prophetic-liberating traditions, supports her "better intuitions" that the concept is untenable.

But is Ruether's argument tenable? Ruether's position leads to two interrelated and problematic consequences. First, Ruether reduces the nature of oppression to the misuse of freedom which in her view has lead to an insidious worldview, a counterreality which has inverted "the true patterns of biotic and social interdependence."¹⁵⁷ By arguing that "[t]he reconstruction of the ethical tradition must begin by a clear separation of the questions of finitude from those of sin,"¹⁵⁸ and by failing to examine the limitations of finitude in terms of oppression, Ruether creates a false dichotomy between oppression that arises from the misuse

¹⁵⁶ I raise this issue again in Chapter Two in light of my argument that Ruether appears to be perhaps softening her position on the concept of an immortal self. See 105 ff.

¹⁵⁷ Sands, *Escape from Paradise*, 92.

¹⁵⁸ Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 141.

of freedom within finitude and oppression that arises from the limitations of finitude. While Ruether acknowledges the cumulative social results of a false consciousness, that is to say, original sin, she ignores conditions over which human freedom does not have control regardless of the pervasiveness of original sin.

Ruether's neglect to examine the limitation of finitude raises numerous questions. How can a society endeavour to create just social systems when the nature of the "world" is in fact not understood? Without an understanding of the nature of the limitations of finitude within which social structures must be created, how can these limitations be taken into account? How is one to assess the degree of one's individual responsibility without having some knowledge of the limitations within which one has to act? Do these limitations not influence the ethical demands placed on individuals?

Without some base other than social analysis upon which to ground her view of oppression, Ruether's theology drifts into dangerous seas. Kathleen Sands faults Ruether for seeking refuge from the "risk of drowning in the tragic"¹⁵⁹ by "clinging to a boat that no longer floats."¹⁶⁰ that is, by clinging to the theistic notion of an unambiguous good. I argue, however, that Ruether's understanding of oppression falls short not from her failure "to live without metaphysical guarantees"¹⁶¹ but, on the contrary, from her failure to develop a metaphysical basis upon which to develop her theology.

We need to recall Ogden's use of the term metaphysics upon which I am drawing as

¹⁵⁹ Sands, *Escape from Paradise*, 112.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

that form of critical reflection which seeks to make fully explicit and understandable the most fundamental presuppositions of all our experience and thought, or, as I may also say, the most universal principles that are the strictly necessary conditions of the possibility of anything whatever.¹⁶²

Seyla Benhabib contends that "[s]ocial criticism without some form of philosophy is not possible, and without social criticism the project of feminist theory that is at once committed to knowledge and to the emancipatory interests of women is inconceivable."¹⁶³ As Benhabib further explains,

[s]ocial criticism needs philosophy precisely because the narratives of our cultures are so conflictual and irreconcilable that, even when one appeals to them, a certain ordering of one's normative priorities, a statement of the methodological assumptions guiding one's choice of narratives, and a clarification of those principles in the name of which one speaks is unavoidable.¹⁶⁴

Without analysing more fully the limitations of finitude, without some view of the metaphysical structures upon which all the world depends, the possibility of knowing the extent of one's freedom within finitude is obstructed.

The second consequence of Ruether's view of oppression is that by radically separating oppression that arises from freedom within finitude from oppression that arises from the limitations of finitude, the present unjust system can be viewed as the sole source of social evil while the future yet to be system is seen as the source of good. If, however, the limitations of finitude are not factored into an analysis of oppression, patriarchy can be viewed as the "evil other" that the emergent "good" feminist model must surmount. This is certainly an approach

¹⁶² Ogden, Faith and Freedom, 61.

¹⁶³ Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985), 225.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 226. Benhabib's concern is echoed in Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson's essay "Social Criticism without Philosophy." Here Fraser and Nicholson ask: "How can we conceive a version of criticism without philosophy which is robust enough to handle the tough job of analyzing sexism in all its endless variety and monotonous similarity?" Nancy Fraser and Linda J. Nicholson, "Social Criticism Without Philosophy: An Encounter Between Feminism and Postmodernism," *Feminism/Postmodernism*, Nicholson ed. (New York: Routledge, 1990), 34. Also see Iris Young, "The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference," *Feminism/Postmodernism*, 300-301.

which Ruether disclaims. As I discussed above, she rejects essentialist arguments which invert the male-female dichotomy thereby privileging women over men. By aligning "true" consciousness with emerging female consciousness her theology, however, fails to acknowledge that any social system, feminist-based or otherwise, will foster a certain degree of oppression, and may in fact result in forms of oppression hitherto unknown.

There is another danger with Ruether's view that is directly related to the preceding one. When a newly emerging system is viewed as ideologically correct, adherents to the new ideology may not recognize the degree to which they have internalized the system within which they have been socialized. Drawing on the work of Paulo Freire,¹⁶⁵ Audre Lorde cautions that "the true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations that we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor that is planted deep within each of us, and which knows only the oppressors' tactics, the oppressors' relationships."¹⁶⁶

While Ruether recognizes that an oppressed group "internalizes the dominant ideology, which shapes its own socialization, and so becomes filled with fear and ambiguity about its own humanity,"¹⁶⁷ she does not seem to apply this insight to her understanding of an emergent feminist theology. When the new is viewed as systematically sound, and the old as systematically perverse, there is the danger of slipping into the self-righteous illusion of systemic purity.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1970).

¹⁶⁶ Audre Lorde, "Age, race, class and sex: Women redefining difference," R. Ferguson, et al., eds. *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1990), 287.

¹⁶⁷ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 163.

¹⁶⁸ Compare Ogden's warning, "that the existing theologies of liberation typically show signs of still being very much under the influence of a metaphysical understanding of God that has played a fateful role in Christian theology." *Faith and Freedom*, 61.

Ruether may argue that the prophetic-liberating traditions and the critical principle of feminist theology are needed to counterbalance this possibility. We nevertheless need to ask if these tools of social analysis suffice.

Without repeating previous arguments it is possible to summarize the problem with the critical principle of feminist theology by stating that, while it is meant to address patriarchal tendencies within the prophetic-liberating traditions, it runs the risk of collapsing in on itself as feminist theology develops in disparate and at times conflicting ways. There is no unanimity as to what in fact promotes the full humanity of women.

The former critical tool, the prophetic-liberating traditions, which proposes that "the basic ingredients of a just and livable society ... have roots in nature and involve acceptance of *finitude, human scale, and balanced relationships* between persons and between human and nonhuman beings"¹⁶⁹ is also problematic. Ruether presents the traditions as morally superior precursors to later traditions which distort the nature of reality by appropriating the concept of an immortal self, thereby moving the eschatological vision out of this world to an other-worldly realm. She does not, however, examine what in fact she means by "finitude, human scale, and balanced relationships." Her primary intention seems to be to defend the traditions so as to undercut a worldview which includes a concept of an immortal self.

Without qualifying her underlying premise that the concept of an immortal self is the root of injustice *as it developed within the western tradition*, Ruether dismisses all views of the concept of an immortal self. She does not allow for the possibility that perhaps the concept of an immortal self alternatively conceived is in

¹⁶⁹ Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 253. Emphasis added.

fact not only intellectually tenable, but also morally defensible, as it may in fact provide the basis for the fulfillment of justice. In Ruether's view the concept of the immortal self is given the baneful status of villain and quickly sentenced to death, without perhaps being granted a fair trial.

Her own ambiguity vis-a-vis the question of an immortal self exacerbates the problems with her argument. As I will discuss in Chapter Two, Ruether may not have rejected the concept of an immortal self as fully as she would like to admit. Moreover, she may in fact be softening her view of the concept of an immortal self.

Ruether's view of the concept of an immortal self as the root of oppression and attendant injustice is problematic. In her attempt to deconstruct western culture so as to understand the underlying cause of oppression, Ruether reduces her understanding of oppression to a false consciousness which is alienated from the true nature of being. She does not take into account the role finitude has to play in the creation of injustice, nor that her view of the concept of an immortal self is culturally bound.

Of course, if Ruether admits to the possibility of an immortal self, it might be argued that she undermines her own view of oppression. Ruether can, however, retain her view that the concept of an immortal self, *as conceived within the Christian tradition*, has been the root of injustice while at the same time exploring alternative views of subjective immortality that may in fact address the question of justice more fully than hers. I return to this question in Chapter Five.

Summary

In sum, Ruether views oppression in terms of social injustice which arises from distorted relationships. The primary distortion which in her view is the source

of injustice results from dichotomizing human nature into a mortal body and an immortal soul. By splitting the individual into opposing components, pitting one against the other, and by extension dividing all of existence into the holy and the unholy, the good and the evil, the redeemable and the irredeemable, Ruether contends that the appropriation of this anthropology within early Christianity lead to the development of a dominant Christian tradition which has promoted various forms of injustice which include anti-semitism, sexism, and ecological abuse. Ruether therefore contends that in western culture oppression finds its roots in patriarchal Christianity's embracing of the concept of an immortal self.

Chapter Two

The Process of Liberation: At One With the Divine

*For Rosemary Radford Ruether,
women's passion for justice is itself heaven's defense,
pouring down to lower the mighty and buoy the oppressed*
KATHLEEN SANDS¹

*Mother, into your hands I commend my spirit. Use me as you will in your
infinite creativity.'*
ROSEMARY RADFORD RUETHER²

Introduction

It might seem from my discussion in the previous chapter that Ruether's position on the fulfillment of justice would be easily discernible. Her rejection of the concept of an immortal self would seem to imply that there is nothing to survive death, consequently the process of liberation and the fulfillment of justice must necessarily occur within finitude. If this were indeed the case, to assess Ruether's understanding of the process of liberation would therefore involve an examination of her understanding of salvation and of this-worldly emancipation.³ The

¹ Sands, *Escape from Paradise*, 71.

² Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 253.

³ This is the position that, e.g., Judith Vaughan takes in *Sociality, Ethics and Social Change: A Critical Appraisal of Reinhold Niebuhr's Ethics in*

fulfillment of justice as the righting of wrong relationships would involve exposing the patriarchal framework of western social structures and the creation of an alternative, more just social order.

While the primary concern behind Ruether's theology is to challenge the status quo and to endeavour to establish a more just this-worldly social order, it would be incorrect to suggest that this is the extent of her view of the process of liberation and the fulfillment of justice. There are, in fact, two ways in which Ruether understands the process of liberation: 1) this-worldly emancipation which depends on the human capacity to respond to the gracious inbreaking of God's will, recognize injustice within society, turn from it, and develop forms of social structures which enhance the full humanity of all members of the community. 2) As well as this-worldly emancipation, Ruether also identifies a redemptive aspect of the process of liberation which is carried out through a future unity within God.⁴

Since the emancipative aspect of the process of liberation depends on the human ability to respond to divine grace, and the redemptive aspect depends on God's activity, to understand the complexity of Ruether's view of the process of liberation it is necessary to consider the way in which Ruether understands the nature of the divine.

the Light of Rosemary Radford Ruether's Works (New York: Lanham, 1983), 147-186.

⁴ For a discussion of the way in which I am using the terms emancipation, liberation and redemption, see Introduction 13 ff.

The Nature of God

assertion that a new view of the divine will emerge as awareness of the detrimental nature of the patriarchal God becomes more clearly understood.⁵ This is not to excuse Ruether's lack of God-talk; nor is it to suggest that Ruether has nothing to say about the nature of God. If one, however, is looking for a highly developed concept of God in Ruether's work, one will look in vain.

As I begin this discussion of Ruether's doctrine of God, it is necessary to recall that Ruether draws on the critical principle of feminist theology to assess the degree to which a theological principle promotes or impedes justice.⁶ Ruether argues that a fundamental aspect of the Christian tradition which diminishes and distorts the full humanity of women is the way in which the concept of God has developed within Christianity. Ruether contends that mainstream Christianity as with all "[r]eligions that reinforce hierarchical stratification use[s] the Divine as the apex of this system of privilege and control."⁷ God from *his* seat of ultimate power is seen as justifying structures of distorted relationality through which, Ruether argues, sin arises.

Ruether maintains that a patriarchal community which understands existence in terms of distorted relationships is an idolatrous people, makers of idolatrous images of God.⁸ HE is created in the image of the powerful and the dominant. As a result "such images of God become sanctions of evil."⁹

⁵ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 71.

⁶ The critical feminist principle states that "[w]hatever denies, diminishes, or distorts the full humanity of women is, therefore, appraised as not redemptive." Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 18-19.

⁷ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 61.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.

As I discussed in Chapter One, Ruether argues that sin arises from hierarchical and oppositional relationships which set the self against "the other" The other, which is viewed as inferior to the self, can be another individual, a group of individuals, or the body when the mind or the soul is considered to be the "true" self. Within this type of oppositional relationship the other is seen as in some sense a threat to the individual or to the community. At best the other must be "subjugated," "tamed," or "controlled." At worst the eradication of the other, either physically or culturally, is justified as a necessary undertaking to eradicate evil.

Ruether therefore suggests that those who struggle for justice "know that the true God does not support the thrones of the mighty, but is one with those who struggle."¹⁰ Ruether, therefore, contends that the "true" Christian God supports those who seek to identify and eliminate structures that create injustice. Ruether states that "[o]nly a theology that denounces all forms of impoverishment (including spiritual impoverishment) and calls for a more just and mutual society, as God's mandate for creation, is in line with the normative message of biblical hope."¹¹

So as to reclaim the true nature of Christianity and an "authentic" vision of the Christian God, it is necessary to "rename" the divine. In Ruether's view renaming the divine does not mean substituting feminine God-talk for masculine, thereby, for example, replacing the metaphor of God as father with God as mother. Ruether, in fact, argues that reliance on parental language for the divine has played a detrimental role in the way in which individuals view themselves and their relationship to the divine, which has led to the pernicious doctrinal position that

¹⁰ Ruether, *Disputed Questions*, 105.

¹¹ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 91.

"[t]o become autonomous and responsible for our own lives is the gravest sin against God."¹²

Ruether does not, however, say that *all* parental language for the divine is damaging. Parental language can in fact be positive when it is used in terms of, for example, father-mother, inasmuch as it symbolizes our roots, "the sense of being grounded in the universe in those who have gone before, who underlie our own existence."¹³ She warns, however, that parental language can suggest "a kind of permanent parent-child relationship to God. God becomes a neurotic parent who does not want us to grow up."¹⁴

In lieu of the term "God" which tends to evoke traditional images of the patriarchal God, Ruether suggests using the term "God/ess."

The term God/ess [is] a written symbol intended to combine both the masculine and the feminine forms of the word for the divine while preserving the Judeo-Christian affirmation that divinity is one. The term is unpronounceable and inadequate. It is not intended as a language for worship, where one might prefer a more evocative term, such as Holy One or Holy Wisdom. Rather it serves here as an analytic sign to point toward that yet unnamable understanding of the divine that would transcend patriarchal limitations and signal redemptive experience for women as well as men.¹⁵

¹² Ruether, *Disputed Questions*, 105.

¹³ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 69.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 46. Ruether's use of the term God/ess is not to be confused with the use of the term "Goddess" by other feminist theologians. Ruether differentiates her own theology from that of Goddess feminism by suggesting that within the women's movement there are "women who take the need for a new culture or spirituality as primary, and therefore start with the need for a new women's religion" which expresses the divine in terms of the Goddess. Ruether maintains that there are also women, of which she is one, "who are mainly concerned with a new social order and who assess the negative or positive role of religion in relation to this social order." "Sexism, Religion and the Social and Spiritual Liberation of Women Today," *Beyond Domination: New Perspectives on Women and Philosophy*, Carol Gould, ed. (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983), 108. Works on Goddess religion include Margot Adler *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and other Pagans in America Today* (New York: Viking Press, 1979); Carol Christ, *Laughter of Aphrodite: Reflections on a Journey to the Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987); C. Spretnak, ed. *The Politics of Women's Spirituality: Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power within the Feminist Movement* (Garden City: Anchor Doubleday, 1982); Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979).

While Ruether states that the nature of God/ess is still to be known and that "[w]e have no adequate name for the true God/ess, the 'I am who I shall become,'" ¹⁶ she does not state that there is nothing that can be known about the divine. Ruether argues that the divine has the fundamental characteristic of being at once spirit and matter. By stating that God/ess is both matter and spirit Ruether is speaking ontologically, not metaphorically.¹⁷ In her view the divine *is* spirit, and the divine *is* matter. As matter God/ess is the "material substratum of our existence."¹⁸ As spirit God/ess is "the endlessly new creative potential."¹⁹ The way in which the divine as spirit and matter is *named* is metaphorical.

Traditionally the divine as a solely spiritual entity is identified with the "father," while nature as matter is identified in terms of maternal imagery. Ruether argues that "[t]he identification of matter, nature and being with mother makes such patriarchal theology hostile to women as symbols of all that 'drags us down' from freedom."²⁰ Traditionally, Ruether contends, such a view of the divine has meant that the process of liberation has been defined in terms of "out of or against nature into spirit."²¹

Ruether's contention that the divine is at once matter and spirit is problematic. The difficulty that she faces is how to explain the nature of the divine in a way that is consistent with a view of existence in which matter and spirit are not understood as two separate elements opposed to one another, but as two aspects of a single unity which cannot be split apart. Asking therefore how Ruether understands the divine as matter *and* as spirit can be misleading. The question can

¹⁶ Ibid., 71.

¹⁷ Ruether, *Womanguides*, 8.

¹⁸ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 71.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 70.

be interpreted as presupposing oppositionally dualistic language. Referring to the divine as "matter-spirit" or "matter/spirit," or perhaps by applying a referent such as "X," where X connotes a concept of the divine which can be discussed in terms of matter and spirit, may help to mitigate the language problem. It may be, however, that using these terms really only serves to highlight the inadequacy of language to express the concept of the divine as a unity of spirit and matter without immediately dichotomizing spirit and matter.

Ruether's view that God/ess is matter as well as spirit is based on her dialectical methodological approach to synthesize these dualisms into a new understanding of divine being. We need to consider, however, the efficacy of her approach. How does the divine as spirit and matter relate to the creation? If spirit and matter are, in fact, one and the same, and since we tend to assume that matter is contained within finitude, does that mean that spirit is also contained within finitude? If so, is there any sense in which she views God as in some way transcendent to nature? Does God as spirit-matter in some way depend on matter for God's existence? One may also ask if all of these questions are in fact ill-conceived, merely reflecting a dichotomous way of viewing spirit and matter that do not in the end reflect adequately Ruether's view of the nature of the divine.

Ruether develops the concept of God/ess as matter, or the "material substratum of our existence,"²² over against the traditional Christian view of God which by separating matter and spirit, and consequently subordinating matter to spirit, had led to the rejection of the concept of the divine as the material substratum of our existence. Ruether refers to this material substratum as "the Matrix."²³ Ruether's understanding of the concept of a matrix appears to correspond to the

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 258.

standard definition of a matrix as something within which something else originates or develops. Ruether contends that the great matrix which "supports the energy-matter of our individuated beings is itself the ground of all personhood as well."²⁴ As the ground of all personhood "[t]his matrix of dancing energy operates within a 'rationality,' predictable patterns that result in a fixed number of possibilities."²⁵

As the "ground" of being the Matrix is the sustainer of what we refer to as physical life, but it is also the sustainer of moral life. Ruether suggests that the primordial matrix or original harmony is, as our ontological ground, the "truth" out of which a future vision of goodness can be derived. It is the ground for the way things "ought" to be. God guides existence morally as well as limiting existence as to that which can occur within the confines of finitude.²⁶

While Ruether calls to task traditional patriarchal Christian views which understand God solely as spirit existing apart from matter, her critique of theologies

²⁴ Ibid., 266.

²⁵ Ruether. *Gaia and God*, 248-9.

²⁶ It is possible to see somewhat of a shift in Ruether's use of the term matrix for the divine. In her chapter on eschatology in *Sexism and God-Talk* (1985) Ruether uses the term exclusively in the lower case. In her essay "Eschatology and Feminism" (1990) Ruether consistently uses this term in its capitalized form as a title for the divine. (See, e.g., pages 122-124.) In the later essay, which appears to be a reworking of the earlier, instances can be found where Ruether rewrites sentences, at times nearly verbatim, but she consistently makes this change in the spelling of this term. For example in *Sexism and God-Talk* Ruether writes, "In effect, our existence ceases as individuated ego/organism and dissolves back into *the cosmic matrix* of matter/energy, from which new centres of the individuation arise.... Acceptance of death, then, is acceptance of the finitude of our individuated centres of being, but also our identification with *the larger matrix* as our total self that contains us all." 257. In "Eschatology and Feminism" she writes, "[o]ur existence as an individuated organism ceases and dissolves back into *the cosmic Matrix* of matter/energy out of which new centres of the individuated beings arise.... Acceptance of death is acceptance of the finitude of individuated centres of being, but also our identification with *the large Matrix* as our total self which contains us all." 122-123. Her invariant capitalized use of the term in the latter text seems to indicate that she is applying more significance to the term as a way in which to refer to the divine. It emphasizes that this is not just a attribute of the divine but that the divine is a matrix.

which reduce God to matter focuses on Goddess theology.²⁷ As with patriarchal theologies Ruether charges Goddess theologies with religious exclusivism which lays the basis for injustice by projecting evil onto the Other.

To recall, as I discussed in Chapter One, Ruether views the act of projecting evil onto any other as in itself constituting evil. This is a fundamental argument that Ruether levies against patriarchy and one that she also levies against Goddess theologies. As Sands aptly puts it,

[Ruether's] point was that evil must not be entirely projected onto an Other, since this legitimates the oppression of that Other and also leaves one's own group accountable to no higher good. This, to Ruether's mind, was the central error of patriarchal theology, and Goddess feminism was repeating it by absolutizing the immanent goods [sic] of women and nature.²⁸

Ruether contends that Goddess theologies, which, in abandoning Christianity and the Christian concept of God on the grounds that it is irredeemable, substitute the concept of a transcendent "male" God with an immanent "female" Goddess, are problematic.²⁹ Ruether maintains that "merely replacing a male

²⁷ This revival depended on theories developed in the nineteenth century by, e.g., J.J. Bachofen *Das Mutterrecht* (Stuttgart: Kraus and Hoffman, 1861) and Friedrich Engels *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (New York: International Publishers, 1942). Bachofen viewed this as "a period of 'immanence' in which the human spirit is controlled by 'dark forces.' Patriarchy represents a higher stage of development in which the 'transcendent Spirit' triumphs over 'nature.'" Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 146. The Marxist understanding of this early period of social development viewed it as "original communism, a time of primitive egalitarianism that was undone by unjust male and class rule. Finally communism will supersede these unjust social systems, bringing back original communist equality, but on a higher level of technological development." Ibid., 146. Ruether contends that some first wave feminists such as Matilda Joselyn Gage saw this early period as "a time of high culture in early Egyptian and Near Eastern civilization, when women were in the ascendancy in family, religion and society." Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 146. Patriarchy was seen as regressive. The liberation of women called for the overthrow of patriarchal Jewish and Christian heritage. Ibid., 145-146. Despite the rejection of the theory of original matriarchy by mainstream anthropology in the 1920s this idea has been revived within the current feminist milieu within the work of feminist thinkers such as Mary Daly, and Carol Christ.

²⁸ Sands, *Escape from Paradise*, 75.

²⁹ Ruether also criticizes Goddess theologians on the grounds that in abandoning Christianity they are also abandoning western culture. Ruether writes that "[i]f they try to negate that culture completely, they find themselves

transcendent deity with an immanent female one is an insufficient answer to the "god-problem."³⁰ Ruether reproves any form of Goddess theology which is separatist or female-dominant, and which consequently leads to the projection of evil onto an other, in this case on to males.³¹ Ruether therefore develops the concept of the divine as spirit-matter to counter patriarchal denigration of the earth, and "defend nature from its patriarchal detractors...." while at the same time she defends "the transcendent God from feminist detractors..."³² Against patriarchal thought she wants to overcome the rejection of the divine as matter; against Goddess theology she wants to defend the divine as being also spirit.

Ruether suggests that as spirit God/ess is a transcendental power active within the process of liberation. God/ess, Ruether writes, "liberates us from this false and alienated world ... as a constant breakthrough that points us to new possibilities..."³³ This does not happen "once-for-all" but on an ongoing basis "calling us to yet incompleated dimensions of human liberation."³⁴

Ruether refers to this process of ongoing divine activity as "Divine Grace."³⁵ God/ess activity as divine grace is, in Ruether's view, ever-present,

without a genuine tradition with which to work, and they neglect those basic guidelines which the culture itself has developed through long experience in order to avoid the pathological dead ends of human psychology." Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Goddesses and Witches: Liberation and Countercultural Feminism," *Christian Century* 97, 28 (Sept. 10-17, 1980), 846. Ruether, however, does not completely dismiss Goddess theology. On the contrary she sees its emphasis on "the naturalness and goodness of things as they are...as well as the communitarian and ecological values" as positive attributes of these theologies. *Disputed Questions*, 136. The Goddess theologian to whom she seems to be most sympathetic is Starhawk (Miriam Simos). Ruether suggests that Starhawk "would also reject female-dominant and separatists forms of Wicca ." *Disputed Questions*, 135.

³⁰ Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 4.

³¹ Ruether suggests that "Mary Daly has come closest in theological circles to th[e] view of males as demonic by nature." *Disputed Questions*, 127.

³² *Ibid.*, 77.

³³ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 71.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 138.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 266.

ever-available to the world. Ruether argues that "[t]he God/ess who is the foundation of our being-new being does not lead us back to a stifled, dependent self or uproot us in a spirit-trip outside the earth. Rather it [the God/ess] leads to the converted centre, the harmonization of self and body, self and other, self and the world. It [the God/ess] is the *Shalom* of our being."³⁶

What is significant concerning Ruether's understanding of God/ess is that the new possibilities to which she suggests God/ess leads individuals "are at the same time, the regrounding of ourselves in the primordial matrix, the original harmony."³⁷ Ruether therefore contends that God/ess, transcendent to nature, constantly breaks through into nature and leads the self back to the God/ess as matrix. God/ess as spirit leads humanity to God/ess as matter through which individuals become regrounded in what Ruether refers to as authentic being. Ruether therefore contends that images of God/ess "must be transformative, pointing us back to our authentic potential [i.e., back to the matrix, the material aspect of the divine] and forward to the new redeemed possibilities [the spirit aspect of the divine]."³⁸

Ruether's view of the nature of God raises many questions. I wish, however, to raise these questions in light of my discussion of the way in which she views the process of liberation. As I indicated above, there are two ways in which Ruether views the liberating power of the divine: first, through the emancipative

³⁶ Ibid., 71. Cf. Letty Russell who uses the term *shalom* to refer to the summation and fulfillment of God's purposes in creation. Russell writes, that *shalom* is "the most comprehensive denomination of happiness, as it designates the healthy development in all forms, both of the harmony within the covenant and all progress is life." Letty Russell, *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective - A Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 107.

³⁷ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 71.

³⁸ Ibid., 69.

interaction between the divine and the self within finitude; second, through a future unity within God which depends on God's redemptive activity.

The Process of Liberation: Liberation as Emancipation

The liberating power of the divine depends on the individual's ability to respond to ever-present divine grace and consequently to bring about emancipative social changes. Ruether therefore argues that the basis for the process of liberation from sin as distorted relationality is the salvific response of *metanoia*, conversion, the process of changing one's consciousness.³⁹ While conversion depends on a change of individual consciousness, it is not an individualistic change in one's consciousness in relation to God's grace that brings about emancipation, but a change in one's way of viewing the world which leads to an alternative way of relating to others within the world. That is, it leads to "the I-Thou relation as the relationship of men and women."⁴⁰

Ruether defines conversion as "a way to develop a just and balanced society that encourages harmonious relationships with the environment."⁴¹ Conversion, therefore, is at once a prerequisite to carry out the fulfillment of justice, the righting of wrong relationships, and conversion is conscious participation in attempting to establish a new social order as one comes to recognize evil in new terms.

³⁹ Ibid., 163.

⁴⁰ Ruether, *Sexism God-Talk*, 163. In a 1977 article Ruether writes that "Martin Buber was a very important mentor for me in the contemplative life. His concept of I-Thou encounter still provides my basic model of divine creaturely relationship." "Prayer-Authentic Marriage of Contemplation and Social Witness," *New Catholic World* 220 (January-February 1977: 682-685). Ruether continues to use Buber's model throughout her work. See Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, W. Kaufmann, ed. & tr. (London: T & T Clark, 1970).

⁴¹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Theology and Spirituality," *Christian Feminism: Vision of a New Humanity*, Judith Weidman, ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 18.

In Ruether's view conversion and consciousness of evil are inextricably linked. Indeed Ruether argues that "[c]onsciousness of evil, in fact, *originates* in the process of conversion itself."⁴² Through conversion one recognizes that below the falsehood and lies imposed by patriarchy there is an original harmony which is the basis for "authentic and truthful life."⁴³ Conversion takes one "back to some original base of meaning and truth before corruption."⁴⁴ Conversion allows one "to know that truth is more basic than falsehood and hence" that truth is "able, ultimately, to root out falsehood in a new future that is dawning in contemporary experience."⁴⁵

The "original base of meaning and truth" of which she speaks is in effect God/ess as matrix which I discussed above. Ruether uses the term "original" to refer to that which forms the foundation of an authentic existence. She argues that a change of consciousness is necessary so that the individual is able to comprehend not only that which can *be* but what should be within the limits of finitude.

Ruether's view of what can be and should be needs to be qualified. Ruether states that

while there is no one utopian state of humanity lying back in an original paradise of the "beginning," there are basic ingredients of a just and livable society. These ingredients have roots in nature and involve acceptance of finitude, human scale, and balanced relationships between persons and between human and nonhuman beings.⁴⁶

The continual breaking through of God/ess constantly lures all selves to authentic being. Grace, in Ruether's view, is not, however, irresistible. While all are potentially capable of conversion, there is nevertheless the possibility for a continual trajectory of alienation from authentic being for those who have not

⁴² Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 159. Emphasis added.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 253.

responded to God/ess's grace and have not experienced a change of consciousness. That is to say, that despite the ever-present nature of divine grace, it is possible to remain grounded in *inauthentic* being.

The question arises as to the way in which one can know and experience God/ess. Ruether contends that there are two ways: through nature and through specific religions. Ruether states that the basic ingredients "of finitude, human scale, and balanced relationships" which create the conditions for a "just and livable society" are rooted in and revealed through nature. Recognizing these conditions is in effect being aware of God/ess's will to which all have access. Ruether describes this relationship between the divine and the world as redemptive hope.⁴⁷ "Redemptive hope is the constant recovery of that Shalom of God/ess that holds us all together, as the operative principle of our collective lives."⁴⁸

As I indicated above, in contrast to Goddess theologies Ruether does not want to suggest that God/ess is analogous to nature and that the divine can be known exclusively through nature in and of itself. To avoid the Goddess theologians' notion of the divine, Ruether maintains that while divine grace is universal, that is to say, divine grace is available to all, the divine is also known through the many religious contexts found within the world.⁴⁹ While Ruether does not disavow the ability of any religion to reveal God/ess, she stresses and works within her own Christian context. Within Christianity, Ruether contends,

⁴⁷ In Ogden's terms this would be salvific hope. See Chapter Five for a more detailed discussion of Ruether's understanding of the process of liberation in relation to that of Ogden.

⁴⁸ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 256.

⁴⁹ Also see below, 92 ff.

"[c]hristology is that symbol of Christian theology that should manifest the face of God/ess as liberator."⁵⁰

While Jesus points to the possibility of justice, that is to say, of right relationship, divine grace is the power that brings the self into contact with the true basis of selfhood, the great matrix. Divine grace consequently leads to the possibility of right relationships within the world. Ruether maintains that to be able to live authentically depends on conversion to the "shalom of being" through which we "discover the blessedness and holy being within the mortal limits of covenantal existence."⁵¹

By covenantal existence Ruether is referring to a model of conversion-based hope which draws on the Jubilee tradition found in Leviticus 25:8-12. In *Sexism and God-Talk* Ruether describes this tradition as combining both linear and cyclical patterns of history. She argues that it is a continual "return to certain starting points," thereby suggesting that "revolutionary transformation cannot be done once and for all."⁵² Life is in constant process and change, and in need of continual renewal. The divine sets limits for the creation which necessitate the generational responsibility "to create and preserve the base of a livable world."⁵³ Ruether states that

⁵⁰ Ruether, *Womanguides: Readings Toward a Feminist Theology*, 105. For a discussion of Ruether's christology see above. As I discussed in Chapter One, Ruether understands Jesus as redemptive inasmuch as he anticipates future glory. Ruether consequently differentiates between Jesus and Christ by suggesting that "Jesus is our paradigm of hoping, aspiring man, venturing his life in expectation of the kingdom and Christ stands as the *symbol* of the fulfillment of that hope." Ruether, *Womanguides: Readings Toward a Feminist Theology*, 22. Emphasis added. Christ therefore has not yet come, but is the sign of that which can be.

⁵¹ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 256. Within this model of periodic redemptive eco-justice Ruether suggests a "more absolute messianic future" which "will bring a final fulfillment of the covenant of creation, restoring peace between people and healing nature's enmity."

⁵² *Ibid.*, 254.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 255.

[t]his concept of social change as conversion to the centre, conversion to the earth and to each other, rather than flight into the unrealizable future, is a model of change more in keeping with the realities of temporal existence.⁵⁴

She suggests that "[r]edemptive hope is the constant recovery of that Shalom of God/ess that holds us all together, as the operative principle of our collective lives"⁵⁵

Ruether's visionary social model is "The New Earth."⁵⁶ The arrival of the New Earth depends on "that massive repentance of all humanity, the great *metanoia*, in which all humans decide to disaffiliate from violence and cooperation with violence "⁵⁷ Ultimately the great *metanoia* "demands the conversion of all" to bring about the process of liberation. It is therefore incumbent upon each individual to refrain from "sinning." That is to say it is incumbent upon each individual to challenge the current social structures and not to identify oneself with the dominant ego group. Ruether writes that

[o]ne cannot just idealize the collective group ego as salvation but must seek a new synthesis in which the dichotomy between egoistic individualism and passive acquiescence in group roles is transcended in the self that is grounded in community as a free and individuated self.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Ibid., 255-6. Ruether also expresses this redemptive hope through anticipatory faith in Jesus, who "announced messianic hope and gave signs of its presence, but who also died in that hope, crucified on the cross of unredeemed human history," *Disputed Questions: On Being a Christian*, 72.

⁵⁵ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 255. In *Gaia and God* Ruether argues that although "[s]cholars have doubted whether the Jubilee laws were ever fully applied, there is evidence of partial application of these laws at different times." Ruether contends that "[t]heir importance, however, lies in providing a model of redemptive eco-justice. Unlike apocalyptic models of redemption, the Jubilee vision does not promise a 'once-for-all' destruction of evil. Humans will drift into unjust relations between each other, they will overwork animals and exploit land. But this drift is not to be allowed to establish itself as a permanent 'order.' Rather, it is to be recognized as a disorder that must be corrected periodically, so that human society regains its right eco-social relationships and starts afresh." *Gaia and God*, 213.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 233.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 183.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 164.

Consequently through the process of conversion the individual seeks new relationships as a "free and individuated self" while "grounded in community."⁵⁹ These new relationships undermine "The Big Lie"⁶⁰ as they aid in restructuring society in terms of non-patriarchal relationships.

In this section I have suggested that Ruether views the divine as an active force which lures the self toward conversion, and back to the ontological basis of being, that is to say, back to the divine. This emancipative aspect of the process of liberation depends on the process of conversion whereby the self, in response to divine grace turns to a right relationship with the world thereby allowing for the possibility for the fulfillment of justice in terms of this-worldly relationships. Through this process, through the application of the prophetic-liberating traditions and the critical principle of feminist theology, evil is recognized, social structures are analyzed and systemic injustice is challenged. While emancipative activity depends on inner conversion, the act of conversion cannot be separated from emancipative action, the attempt to change unjust this-worldly social structures. In Ruether's view "[s]ocioeconomic humanization is indeed the outward manifestation of redemption."⁶¹

It is interesting to note Vaughan's discussion of the emancipative aspect of Ruether's process of liberation which she puts forth in the militant term of

⁵⁹ Cf., Charles Taylor who in the 1991 Massey lectures *The Malaise of Modernity* addresses this very problem in terms of the "dialogical character" of human life. Taylor stresses the need to develop individual authenticity while realizing that individual identity depends on our relationship to others. Taylor writes that "modes [of understanding contemporary culture] that opt for self-fulfillment without regard (a) to the demands of our ties with others or (b) to demands of any kind emanating from something more or other than human desires or aspirations are self-defeating, in that they destroy the conditions for realizing authenticity itself." 33-35.

⁶⁰ See Chapter One, 63.

⁶¹ Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 216.

"revolutionary praxis."⁶² Vaughan suggests that Ruether's revolutionary praxis begins with consciousness raising and includes "utopian thought or creative imagination"⁶³ which leads to social transformation, solidarity with the oppressed, and women as revolutionary leaders.⁶⁴ Based on her reading of Ruether's work Vaughan outlines "a program of action as a part of praxis" which includes the two primary features of "*denouncing* the existing order and *announcing* what is not yet but will be."⁶⁵ Denunciation includes empowerment and armed resistance;⁶⁶ annunciation includes universal community and nonviolence.⁶⁷

Vaughan's reading of Ruether's understanding of the process of liberation in strictly emancipative terms is echoed, albeit, more critically, by Daphne Hampson who suggests that Ruether's theology appears to be a social activist platform which ultimately has little to say about God. Hampson asks if there is really any God behind Ruether's use of God-talk. Hampson criticizes Ruether's "Marxist-Hegelian" approach in which "all reality tends to collapse into history." Hampson states that

⁶² Vaughan, *Sociality, Ethics and Social Change*, 160.

⁶³ Ibid., 162.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 163.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 164.

⁶⁶ Vaughan argues that by "armed resistance" Ruether means "*response*. It is the refusal by a group of people to be dehumanized to the point of death. It is, in Ruether's words, 'a grim holding out in the face of evil, stupidity and blindness to elementary justice, [and] an effort to carve out some small spaces of humanization within which to keep one's sanity and soul.' " *Sociality, Ethics and Social Change*, 165-166. Cf. Karen Lebacqz, *Justice in an Unjust World: Foundations for A Christian Approach to Justice* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987). Lebacqz writes that "[g]oing to war is justified only if: (1) there is a just cause, such as the repudiation of grave evil; (2) the legitimate authority declares war; (3) the intention is just - that is, it is to resist evil, not to annihilate others; (4) the intention is made public; (5) war is a last resort, other avenues have been tried; (6) there is a reasonable hope of success; and (7) the good to be done is proportional to the destruction or evil likely to be caused by the war." 97-98. Also see, James F. Childress, "Just-War Criteria," Thomas A. Shannon, ed. *War or Peace?: The Search for New Answers* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1980), 40-58.

⁶⁷ Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 164-170.

it is difficult for her [Ruether] to have a God who is something other than a force (perhaps a human idea) present within history. In the event one is hard pressed to see how hers is a theology, as opposed to simply a political agenda for the liberation of people. (In fact, if one reads her work carefully, one notices that she never speaks of God, but rather of people's concept of God, which may lead them on in their striving for justice.)⁶⁸

While Hampson's and Vaughan's readings of Ruether's theology stress Ruether's primary concern for this-worldly emancipation, emancipative activity is not the only way in which Ruether envisions the process of liberation. Ruether also develops a redemptive aspect to her view of the process of liberation as a future unity within God.

The Process of Liberation: God's Redemptive Activity

Ruether contends that there can be this-worldly justice when a community recognizes right relationship within the limitations of finitude and strives to create social systems which reflect those limitations. The fulfillment of justice within finitude demands an ongoing critique of social structures so as to ensure that these structures do not become oppressive and hierarchical favoring one social group over another. Ruether maintains therefore that "[h]ope for a redeemed world must begin by saying 'never again' will we be silent while any group of people is victimized."⁶⁹ If refusing to be silent in the face of injustice is the beginning of hope for a redeemed world, inasmuch as systemic injustice can be addressed, what about individual experiences of injustice? What about those who have suffered and do not experience some form of redemption in this world?

Ruether certainly does not ignore these questions. She raises serious concerns questioning the meaning of existence in the face of injustice:

⁶⁸ Hampson, *Theology and Feminism*, 29. Also see Hampson and Ruether, "Is there a Place for Feminists in a Christian Church?"

⁶⁹ Ruether, *Disputed Questions*, 10.

What of all those who have suffered and died in misery because of social evil over which they have no control? What of the vast toiling masses of human beings who have had so little chance to live fulfilling lives through the centuries? What of the whole tragic drama of human history where so few have had opportunities for moments of leisure and happiness in the midst of oppressive labor?"⁷⁰

Ruether recognizes that there cannot be complete fulfillment of justice within finitude. In a letter to Daphne Hampson, Ruether moreover concedes that she "thinks that the conclusion to history may well be that we annihilate ourselves."⁷¹ Ruether, however, does not leave the question of hope in such pessimistic terms. She provides an eschatological vision of hope based on her concept of a future unity within God.

Ruether's eschatological vision has not received much attention. In fact, neither Hampson nor Vaughan, for example, acknowledge this aspect of Ruether's theology. It is difficult to say with any certainty why this is so. Both Hampson and Vaughan have most certainly read Ruether's *Sexism and God-Talk* in which Ruether first puts forth her view of a feminist eschatology most systematically.⁷² I can only speculate, but it may be that in Hampson's case Ruether's underdeveloped doctrine of God did not provide a sufficient basis for Hampson to recognize some form of convincing divine redemptive activity. In Vaughan's case it may be that Ruether's emancipative argument provided her with a satisfactory way in which to

⁷⁰ Ruether, "Eschatology and Feminism," 122.

⁷¹ Hampson, *Theology and Feminism*, 28.

⁷² While Vaughan's *Sociality, Ethics and Social Change*, was published in 1983, the same year as Ruether's *Sexism and God-Talk*, Vaughan drew on Ruether's galley copy of the text to develop her argument. Hampson's and Vaughan's reading of Ruether seems to concur with that of Mary Hembrow Synder inasmuch as in her discussion of Ruether's Christology Synder also does not refer to the redemptive aspect of Ruether's theology. As I indicate in Chapter Five, Kathleen Sands takes quite a different position. Sands argues that Ruether's concept of the process of liberation depends too heavily on the concept of a transcendent God. While I do not agree with the conclusions that Sands draws from her reading of Ruether (that Ruether's theism is her theology's shortcoming), I think that her reading more adequately reflects Ruether's understanding of the process of liberation (Sands recognizes the redemptive aspect of Ruether's theology) than that of the other aforementioned theologians.

understand the process of liberation. She may simply ignore the eschatological argument as irrelevant, or she may be uncomfortable with the argument and prefer to not engage with it.

Hampson and Vaughan do not represent, however, the only response to Ruether's view of the process of liberation. As I discuss in Chapter Five, Kathleen Sands argues that Ruether's concept of the process of liberation depends too heavily on her eschatological vision. While I do not agree with the conclusions that Sands draws from her reading of Ruether's work, I think that her argument more adequately reflects Ruether's understanding of the process of liberation than that of either Hampson or Vaughan.⁷³

We now need to consider in some detail Ruether's concept of a future unity within God. To carry out this discussion there are a number of questions which need to be considered: What does Ruether's view of a future unity within God mean in terms of divine activity and in terms of the relationship of the self to this activity? How does this concept provide some basis for hope? How does it address the issue of justice?

To understand Ruether's concept of a future unity within God I wish to begin by considering her development of this concept in her work *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (1975).⁷⁴ While *Faith and Fratricide* is not written from what could be called a feminist perspective, this work

⁷³ That Sands refers to Ruether's eschatology may in part be due to Ruether's discussion of her eschatological view in *Gaia and God*, a text published after Hampson's and Vaughan's examinations of Ruether's thought. The fact remains that Hampson and Vaughan nevertheless would have presumably read Ruether's chapter on eschatology in *Sexism and God-Talk*, which outlines the basic eschatological position upon which Ruether develops her later work, and therefore would not have been unaware of her view.

⁷⁴ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (London: Serach Press, 1975).

is the first, as far as I am aware, in which Ruether distinguishes between the emancipative and redemptive aspects of the process of liberation.

Ruether's primary thesis in this work is that Christian thought is based on an exclusionary dualistic mode of Christian self-understanding which she describes in terms of the "Christological midrash and its anti-Judaic left hand."⁷⁵ Ruether argues that the development of a christology as final and fulfilled, i.e., the promises contained in the scriptures are already fulfilled in Jesus, created an anti-Judaic myth⁷⁶ which becomes intrinsic to Christian theology. Christianity develops the claim that Judaism is to be superseded by the new Christian vision of redemption. The "good redeemed" Christian is identified over against the "evil unredeemed" Jew. The Jew as the outsider and as the other therefore is seen as existing over against the Christian. Ruether argues that the concept of a fulfilled eschatology, which incorporates a vision of the salvation of the elect and the destruction of those who are not, has provided the roots for anti-Judaism in Western civilization, thereby turning Christianity into a fratricidal religion.⁷⁷

Ruether argues that to overcome the injustice that results from Christianity's fratricidal tendencies it is necessary to establish "an internal task of Christian theological reconstruction."⁷⁸ For Christianity to overcome the sin of fratricide the theological structures from which sin has emerged must be challenged by critically

⁷⁵ Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, 95. For a more detailed discussion of Ruether's christology see Chapter One, 49 ff.

⁷⁶ The anti-Judaic myth contains elements such as "the Jews are a rejected people, a people abandoned by God, condemned for their unbelief." Gregory Baum, "Introduction," *Faith and Fratricide*, 4.

⁷⁷ For a critique of Ruether's *Faith and Fratricide* see Monika Hellwig, "From the Jesus of Story to the Christ of Dogma," *Anti-Semitism and the Foundations of Christianity*, Alan Davies, ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 118-136. For Ruether's response see "The Faith and Fratricide Discussion: Old Problems and New Dimensions," *Anti-Semitism and the Foundations of Christianity*, Alan Davies, ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 242-243.

⁷⁸ Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, 228.

rethinking anti-Judaic tendencies within the Christian tradition. This process, challenging theological structures which promote injustice, is the emancipative aspect of the process of liberation which addresses the specific situation of Judeo-Christian relations.⁷⁹

The redemptive aspect of Ruether's concept of the fulfillment of justice, a future unity of all humanity, is much less developed in *Faith and Fratricide* than is the emancipative aspect. It nevertheless is there and warrants comment. To be able to understand Ruether's view of the fulfillment of justice in terms of a future unity it is necessary to note the way in which Ruether identifies Judaism and Christianity as two "religious languages." Ruether argues that the Jewish and Christian communities must be understood as arising out of different experiences, which give them "different foundations [or languages] for their faith."⁸⁰ While both can claim revelatory knowledge of the process of liberation from within the experiences of their own faith communities, neither has the ultimate word on the precise nature of this process. As redemptive religious traditions Ruether argues that both point beyond the particularity of their own traditions to a vision of universal redemption. Universal redemption, however, depends on the particular religious language of each faith community for its expression.⁸¹

Ruether suggests that no one religion can claim ultimate knowledge of the nature of redemption. All religions, however, point to a universal future unity. Ruether maintains that there is no single language which can adequately express that

⁷⁹ Also see Ruether, *Disputed Questions*, Chapter Two "The Question of Jewish-Christian Relations," 43-74.

⁸⁰ Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, 4.

⁸¹ Also see e.g., Hampson and Ruether, "Is There a Place for Feminists in a Christian Church?", 15.

unity. While revelatory experiences differ as they are discerned within a given context, all revelatory experiences point in some way to universal kinship.

Ruether maintains that the basis for universal kinship is the concept of a God as a unifying Creator. Only the creative power of God can bring together the particularity of each religion into a future unity. Ruether does not, however, explain the nature of this messianic fulfillment of history other than in general terms such as, for example, "the ultimate,"⁸² "the final hope which is still ahead of both Jews and Christians,"⁸³ and the becoming of one people "at that end of history which is truly 'final.'"⁸⁴ From this general understanding of the nature of religion she contends that "[t]his future point of unity exists now only in the transcendent universality of God and his original work as Creator, which gives us the basis for affirming universal human kinship."⁸⁵

Ruether emphasizes universal human kinship as a way to overcome tendencies of particularity and exclusivity in religious thought that lead to oppression. Her concern in this work is to advance the concept as an ethical demand to overcome Christian exclusivism so that "this unity of God as Creator and Redeemer cannot be said to be incarnate in one people and their historical revelation, giving them the right to conquer and absorb all the others."⁸⁶ Ruether claims that "[t]he only universality which can be truly said to be 'of God' is one that transcends every particularity..."⁸⁷ Ruether presents the concept of a future unity

⁸² Ruether. *Faith and Fratricide*, 238-9

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 256.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 260-1.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 239.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

in terms of an ethical position which guarantees "the integrity of each people to stand before God in their own identities and histories."⁸⁸

Ruether's view of a redemptive future unity is therefore present early within her thought. In her later work, however, the way in which she expresses this unity shifts in meaning. Instead of a unity of kinship brought about by God at some final endpoint her view changes to an ongoing unity which occurs within God's self. Ruether develops two aspects to her understanding of the concept of a unity in God: the dissolution of the self as energy-matter back into the cosmic matrix, and the retention of one's deeds within the divine. The way in which Ruether understands the concept of unity within God depends not only on her understanding of the nature of the divine but also on her understanding of the nature of the self. It is therefore necessary to consider the way in which Ruether understands the nature of the self.

There are in effect two ways in which Ruether understands the nature of the self: the social self and the self as energy-matter.⁸⁹ The social self refers to the "self" as it engages in emancipatory activity. Perhaps the most significant point that needs to be made concerning Ruether's understanding of the social self is that Ruether maintains that there is no inherent anthropological difference between women and men that can account for their roles within any given social system. Ruether contends that "all humans possess a full and equivalent human nature and personhood, *as male and female*."⁹⁰ By this Ruether is not suggesting an androgynous model of humanity in which feminine and masculine aspects of the

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ As I discuss below, see 102, it may also be possible to suggest a third concept of the self in terms of "the meaning of the self."

⁹⁰ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 111. Ruether's emphasis.

self need to be brought together within each individual.⁹¹ Ruether argues that the difference between men and women can be best expressed in terms of "reproductive role specialization."⁹² She holds that "[t]here is no necessary (biological) connection between reproductive complementarity and either psychological or social role differentiation. These are the work of culture and socialization, not of 'nature'."⁹³ Suggesting that male and female are inherently different, associating male nature with the mind, reason and God and consequently with good, and female with the body, nature and consequently with evil is the result of a culturally determined social construction which results in the distortion of relationships between women and men, humanity and nature, God and the world.

Just as Ruether contends that the divine must be renamed so as not to perpetuate the erroneous patriarchal split of matter and spirit, she also contends that the concept of the self must be expressed in terms that overcome the oppositional and hierarchical view of the self as a mortal body and an eternal soul. Ruether therefore refers to the self as energy-matter, which acknowledges that the self is more than a "physical" being. The energy component of the self cannot, however, be severed from the self as matter as some form of disembodied mind or soul.

Ruether develops the concept of the self as energy-matter most fully in *Gaia and God*. In this text Ruether briefly discusses the paradigm shift from Newtonian physics to that of subatomic physics, within which through the discovery of energy fields "in which energy 'events' appeared and disappeared"⁹⁴ an alternative understanding of matter arises. This alternative view of the nature of matter challenges the concept of elementary building blocks. Ruether argues that

⁹¹ Ibid., 110-111.

⁹² Ibid., 111.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 248.

subatomic physics advances the notion of an absolute minimum and an absolute maximum. In the case of the absolute minimum Ruether contends that "the classical distinction between matter and energy disappears. Matter is energy moving in defined patterns of relationality."⁹⁵ Ruether suggests that once we move beyond the "absolute minimum" we recognize that this is also the "absolute maximum," which Ruether refers to as "the matrix of interconnections of the whole universe,"⁹⁶ i.e., God. It is at the extremes of existence that all collapse into one, and in doing so emerges as the oneness of the divine.

Ruether therefore suggests that matter and energy which are in effect one, depend on the relational nature of existence. God as absolute maximum - the Matrix which contains all interconnections - contains the energy-matter of which all selves are comprised. So what happens to the self when one dies? In *Sexism and God-Talk* Ruether states that after we die, "[i]n effect our existence, ceases as individuated ego-organism and dissolves back into the cosmic matrix of matter-energy, from which new centres of individuation arise."⁹⁷ The dissolution of the self back to God, which in this case she also refers to as matter-energy like the self, is the coming together of all within God. Ruether contends that "[t]he disintegration of the many into infinitely small 'bits,' and the One, or unifying whole that connects all things together, coincide."⁹⁸ The finite nature of the self unites with the whole that connects all as part of that whole.

Ruether therefore maintains that the self, as energy-matter, is not lost after death, rather it is retained within the matrix of being. Ruether suggests that the process by which God and matter come together to form a unity as the self is taken

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 257.

⁹⁸ Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 248-9.

back into the earth is a form of redemption. She argues, therefore, that "[t]o bury ourselves in steel coffins, so that we cannot disintegrate back into the earth, is to refuse to accept this process of entering back into the matrix of renewed life. Such a manner of burial represents a fundamental refusal to accept earth as our home and the plants and animals of earth as our kindred."⁹⁹

Ruether consequently maintains that we are redeemed by returning to our home which is the earth. We are redeemed by changing form, by becoming "food for new beings to arise from our bones."¹⁰⁰ Ruether argues that the acceptance of our individual finitude is not just the acceptance of the cessation of our individuated being at death. It also involves the acceptance of "our identification with the larger matrix as our *total* self that contains us all."¹⁰¹ Ruether writes that "[i]t is this matrix, rather than our individuated centres of being, that is 'everlasting,' that subsists underneath the coming to be and the passing away of individuated beings and even planetary worlds."¹⁰²

Ruether, therefore, distinguishes between the self which becomes part of the great matrix, and the concept of an everlasting existence which is predicated upon some form of subjective immortality. She argues that subjective immortality results from "an effort to absolutize personal or individual ego"¹⁰³ as itself everlasting, over against the total community of being."¹⁰⁴ Ruether contends moreover that "[t]o the extent to which we have transcended egoism for relation to community, we can also accept death as the final relinquishment of individuated ego

⁹⁹ Ruether. *Sexism and God-Talk*, 258.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 257. Emphasis added.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ While Ruether does not define her use of the term "ego," an examination of her work indicates that she seems to use it to refer to the individual as a conscious self.

¹⁰⁴ Ruether. *Sexism and God-Talk*, 257.

into the great matrix of being."¹⁰⁵ Ruether maintains that it is imperative that our society learn to accept death and in doing so accept "the finitude of our individuated centres of being."¹⁰⁶

But what can we say about her view of the self as energy-matter which returns to the divine? I think that the major problem with her argument is its lack of clarity. Just what does she really mean by this occurrence? Is she suggesting that the individual ego perishes on death and the body returns to the earth? It seems possible to reduce this aspect of her view of redemption to such simple terms.

It is interesting to note the question which Phan raises. Phan writes that while Ruether "does grant that the human person achieves a kind of survival by being dissolved back into what she terms the 'cosmic Matrix of matter-energy' which alone is everlasting ... what is the difference between the cosmic Matrix of matter-energy and individual human beings (who are also matter-energy) that makes the former alone everlasting?"¹⁰⁷ Phan continues his inquiry by asking, "[i]s it because there is a greater amount of matter-energy in the cosmic Matrix? " He seems to assume an affirmative answer to this question and continues, "[b]ut it is difficult to see how a quantitative difference can produce such an essential disparity between immortality and mortality."¹⁰⁸

Phan's line of questioning indicates two things. First, the ambiguous nature of Ruether's argument concerning the returning of energy-matter back to energy-matter. It is simply not clear what she means. Her argument therefore leads to numerous questions which cannot be answered without making ungrounded assumptions.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 257-258.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 257.

¹⁰⁷ Phan, "Woman and the Last Things," 221.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

Second, Phan's questioning also suggests that he has reduced the two ways in which Ruether understands divine redemption to one. He does not satisfactorily differentiate between the two. While Ruether states that the finite self returns to the divine as the Matrix, there is more to her argument than that we die and become sustenance for the crocuses. As I indicated above, in *Sexism and God-Talk* Ruether develops her understanding of the concept of the unity of all within God to include the retention and consequently the redemption of the "meaning of the self" within God, as "our achievements and failures are gathered up, assimilated into the fabric of being [that is, into the divine] and carried forward into new possibilities."¹⁰⁹ Ruether therefore differentiates between the redemption of the self as matter-energy and the *meaning* of the self. In her view, when an individual dies, neither are lost. They are both retained albeit in different ways.

As I have just discussed, Ruether argues that the self as matter-energy returns to the earth and is thereby in her view redeemed, inasmuch as nothing that exists within the world is lost. Ruether also argues that what the individual self *does* becomes a part of God and is used by God. In this way the meaning of the self is redeemed. Ruether therefore insists that the "life" of the self, in terms of that which occurs within the period of the self's existence, is not lost. While God does not redeem an aspect of the self which could be referred to as a soul in the sense of some aspect of the self which is meant to endure beyond the death of the body, God nevertheless redeems what the individual does. Redemption in terms of God taking up all into God's self thereby gives meaning to all human activity that occurs within finitude.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 258.

Ruether does not leave the issue of the redemption of the meaning of human life without at least questioning the way in which this divine activity might occur. She asks if we can see "the collective Person of Holy being¹¹⁰ as where our personal achievements and failures are gathered up and assimilated into the fabric of Being, to be preserved in eternal memory?"¹¹¹ It is interesting to note the way in which she poses this question. By asking if all is preserved in eternal memory, Ruether seems to be alluding to the concept of objective immortality as found within process theology which states that all is taken up into the divine memory, preserved therein and used for the future.¹¹² While Ruether does not name this activity in terms of process thought, the allusion to objective immortality seems to be unmistakable.

In response to her question of the way God uses our deeds Ruether maintains that we cannot know the answer. She claims that it is "beyond our power and imagination"¹¹³ to know the manner in which God uses our deeds. While Ruether's answer indicates that she does not fully ascribe to the process concept of objective immortality, a similarity can nevertheless be drawn between Ruether's view of the redemptive process and that of process thought. Ruether, as with process theologians who champion objective immortality, argues that God retains all within God's self using that which has been for the future. While Ruether does not want to go any further than this very general statement, her view of God's redemptive activity is in effect an underdeveloped version of the process concept of

¹¹⁰ "The collective Person of Holy being" refers to God in that God contains all within God's self. Cf. "[t]he great collective personhood is the Holy Being," in the corresponding sentence in *Sexism and God-Talk*, 258.

¹¹¹ Ruether, "Eschatology and Feminism," 123.

¹¹² For a more detailed discussion of the concept of objective immortality, see Chapter Four, 194 ff.

¹¹³ Ruether, "Eschatology and Feminism," 123.

objective immortality.¹¹⁴ As I discuss in Chapter Five, this similarity becomes of particular importance when I bring Ruether's view of divine redemptive activity into dialogue with that of Suchocki.

Ruether views this lack of knowledge in positive terms. She argues that by not having the capacity to know the way in which one's deeds are retained within God, we are therefore relieved of the responsibility of having to understand God's activity, and consequently should not feel obliged to try to understand it. Ruether contends that

[i]t is not our calling to be concerned about the eternal meanings of our lives, and religion should not make this the focus of its message. Our responsibility is to use our temporal life span to create a just and good community for our generation and for our children.¹¹⁵

Ruether argues that since the self cannot acquire such knowledge, it is most prudent to take an agnostic position vis-à-vis this question. By this she is not denying the meaningfulness of human existence. She contends that to be able to claim that our lives have meaning in the face of apparent meaninglessness depends, however, on faith. Ruether avers that "our agnosticism about what [everlasting life] means is then the expression of our faith."¹¹⁶

Ruether's argument that one's deeds are taken up into God, yet that it is impossible to know what this means except as a statement of faith, raises a number of questions. What does it mean that "our deeds" are taken up into God? To be able to make this statement she must have some vision of God's activity in mind. While I have stated that Ruether's view of God's activity is similar to that of process thought, according to the Whiteheadian process tradition all that has become actual, as opposed to merely potential, is then taken up into the life of God.

¹¹⁴ Peter Phan also suggests that there is a similarity between Ruether's view of the redemptive nature of God and that of "process thought's notion of immortality...." Phan, "Women and the Last Things," 221.

¹¹⁵ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 258.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

conserved, treasure, redeemed by being included within God's everlasting experience. This would include what one has felt and experienced as well what one did in the narrow sense of one's "deeds."

Ruether, however, does not develop this idea. Nevertheless, her view raises the question of what it means that "our deeds" are taken up into God but that "we" are not. Is she in effect creating a new dichotomy, or perhaps better stated a trichotomy? Rather than a body/soul split do we now have a split between, 1) the conscious "I," which is not 2) the self as a physical body, nor 3) the "deeds" carried out by the mortal self? Ruether's intention is certainly not to splinter the self into a multifarious being. She seems to try to get around this by arguing that albeit in different ways the self as a physical body and that which the self does during its finite existence on earth are taken back into the divine. What therefore may seem to be multiform is in fact unified through God. The finite body which is energy-matter returns to the Matrix which is also energy/soul-matter. She argues in turn that all that we do returns to the divine. It would seem that for our deeds to be retained within God there must, however, be something that can in fact be retained. Are our deeds also a form of energy-matter? And what about the conscious "I"? Is it not in some way retained and thereby redeemed?

In view of such questions as these Ruether advocates agnosticism as an appropriate response. She argues that "[w]e should not pretend to know what we do not know or to have had "revealed" to us what is the projection of our wishes."¹¹⁷ But we need to ask how in fact she can say as much as she does about God's activity. It would seem that to be able to contend that "our achievements and failures are gathered up, assimilated into the fabric of being and carried forward

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 257.

into new possibilities" requires not only some sort of vision of God's activity, but also some sort of vision of the nature of the relationship between the divine and the world. Ruether, however, does not indicate the way in which she comes to this view of God, other than to say that it is an expression "of our faith." Is this Ruether's personal faith statement? Or is she referring to the faith of a larger community? If so, how does she define the nature of the community and the way in which it reached this faith stance? Is this vision based on some form of revelation? Is it scripturally verifiable, or is it revealed through nature? None of this is clear in her work.

In his essay "Women and the Last Things" Peter Phan raises some significant questions concerning Ruether's eschatology. He states that

with regard to questions concerning the individual's fate after death, especially of "the vast toiling masses of human beings who had so little chance to fulfill themselves," Ruether commends, as we have seen, "honest agnosticism." While her reticence to give detailed descriptions of the beyond is admirable and while we have to be mindful of the analogical and imaginative character of our eschatological language, it is far from satisfactory to say, as she does, that "our images of life after death, individually and collectively, are not revealed knowledge, but projections of our wishes and hopes."¹¹⁸

Phan contends that such a position is unsatisfactory for "besides putting us on the slippery road of Feuerbach and the 'masters of suspicion,' [it] does not take seriously what has been revealed to us in the resurrection of Christ."¹¹⁹

I come back to questions concerning Ruether's understanding of the resurrection below. With Phan I agree that Ruether's position "put[s] us on the slippery road of Feuerbach." While Ruether criticizes traditional eschatological views as projections of hope, it would seem that without a base on which to ground her argument, Ruether's faith stance that all is taken up into God could also be

¹¹⁸ Phan, "Woman and the Last Things," 222.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

interpreted as a Feuerbachian projection of her own wishes and hopes that the meaning of human existence is retained.

This faith position, by whatever means she has come to it, is part of Ruether's answer to the question of "the sad insufficiencies of natural finitude."¹²⁰ When confronted with questions of the meaning of our personal lives such as, "What of the personal good to be remembered, the evil to be redressed? Does the personal have no meaning in itself? Does it simply disintegrate into the impersonal Matrix of the all?"¹²¹ Ruether wants to offer some measure of hope as a way in which to address issues of the meaningfulness of existence. But is she in fact providing a vision of hope? While the meaning of our lives may in some way be retained, can the retention of our deeds within God offer any hope in the face of injustice? If the self does not participate consciously in the resolution of particular instances of injustice, if the individual is not aware that her or his deeds are being used, what difference does it make to the self if one's deeds are retained? Is the individual to take solace solely in what she or he can potentially give to the whole despite what has occurred within her or his own life? Is there to be no reconciliation with those with whom the individual has interacted within the world?

In light of Ruether's understanding of God taking up all into God's self, autonomous selves could apparently play a meaningful role in the future if their deeds are taken into the divine and in some way used by the divine. Each self would aid in creating the future. But we are still left with the question of the relationship between the meaningfulness of existence and the fulfillment of justice. Does having a meaningful existence depend on having some influence on the future, whether one is aware of that influence or not? Or does meaningfulness

¹²⁰ Ruether, "Eschatology and Feminism," 122.

¹²¹ Ibid., 123

need to include the fulfillment of justice on a personal level whereby oppressive relationships are in some way righted? If the latter is the case, can there ever be right relationship for all, or even for some? Is justice as the righting of wrong relationships indeed a possibility beyond implementing systemic changes?

Ruether might answer that these questions reflect too great a concern with the survival of the individual ego and are indeed treacherous questions which underlie the development of a concept of subjective immortality. But if the individual lives in an inherently relational world, can the individual be considered except within the context of those relationships which define her or his life? When an injustice has been levied against an individual or a group of individuals, should the fulfillment of justice not in some way include these individuals and the righting of the wrong that has occurred within these particular relationships? If it is impossible for this to occur within finitude, can the inherent relationality of existence extend beyond finitude?

While Ruether rejects the idea of subjective immortality on the grounds that it is a concept which leads to distorted relationships, she nevertheless tries to develop an alternative eschatology which takes into account the relational nature of existence. If Ruether's argument were consistent throughout her writings, that is to say, if she were consistent in her view that on the death the self as energy-matter returns to the primordial matrix and that there is an ongoing process of the divine taking up and using that which occurs within the world, then an analysis of her position would be quite straightforward.

A careful examination of her work, however, indicates that her position is not consistent. In this section I examine four significant examples of the tension which arises in her work: 1) Ruether's use of resurrection language in *Disputed Questions: On Being a Christian*; 2)

her use of a funereal prayer which she states sums up her view of feminist eschatological spirituality;¹²² 3) her discussion of eschatology in *Sexism and God-Talk* and in "Eschatology and Feminism;" and 4) her discussion of the process view of God's redemptive activity in *Gaia and God*. I begin with the first.

In Chapter One, I indicated that Ruether does not view the resurrection as a fundamental aspect of the Christian message. In *Disputed Questions: On Being a Christian* Ruether, nevertheless, describes Christianity as "resurrection faith."¹²³ She refers to the "Cross and resurrection" as foundational "breakthrough" Christian experiences "that mediate hope in the midst of adversity *for us*."¹²⁴ Ruether claims that Christianity "arises through a refusal to take these facts of the victory of evil [i.e., that after Jesus was crucified by the Romans '[t]he powers and principalities showed in Jesus' death that they were still in command'] as the last word."¹²⁵ Ruether writes that "Christianity, in the resurrection, looks back to a foundational experience that expresses hope and conquest of defeat."¹²⁶

What is notable is that Ruether does not deny that the resurrection is a feasible concept. In this chapter Ruether's concern appears to be to *de-emphasize* the resurrection as an overcoming of death and stress Jesus' struggle against this-worldly evil. She writes that "[w]e transform it [the cross] into a symbol of the victory of God only if we reject this victory of evil [i.e., the death of Jesus] by continuing Jesus' struggle against it."¹²⁷ Ruether therefore argues that Christians

¹²² This prayer occurs in two places in Ruether's work. It was first published in *Women-Church: Theology and Practice of Feminist Liturgical Communities* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 213. It later appears in Ruether's 1990 essay "Eschatology and Feminism," 123-4.

¹²³ Ruether, *Disputed Questions: On Being a Christian*, 98.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 73. Ruether's emphasis.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 105.

should not "use the resurrection as a way of not taking the unresolved evils of history seriously."¹²⁸ The importance of Jesus' death is not that he rose on the third day, although in this work she does not deny that this occurred, but that there is a continual struggle against the powers of evil.

In this work Ruether draws a connection between this-worldly emancipation and Jesus' resurrection. She states that "[h]ere and now ... we struggle with unresolved history, holding on to the memory of Jesus' resurrection from the grave as the basis for *our* refusal to take evil as the last word and *our* hope that God will win in the end."¹²⁹ If we take this passage at face value, it seems to contradict Ruether's understanding of the nature of the finite self as well as contradicting her understanding of the mission of Jesus. I indicated in Chapter One that Ruether views Jesus' mission as that of renewing the prophetic-liberating traditions and that critical to Ruether's vision of his mission is that he does not champion a view of hope which depends on subjective immortality. What, therefore, is she suggesting in this passage? She seems to be implying that Jesus *experienced* resurrection, and that Jesus' experience of the resurrection is the basis of our hope that God will overcome evil.

It is interesting to consider these passages in light of Ruether's and Daphne Hampson's essay "Is There a Place for Feminists in a Christian Church?" In this essay Ruether discusses her understanding of the concept of the resurrection as a religious truth. Ruether contends that "[w]hat makes these things [resurrection and the virgin birth] religious truths to me lies in their metaphorical ... meaning."¹³⁰ Ruether, however, goes on to state that

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 72.

¹³⁰ Ruether and Hampson, "Is There a Place for Feminists in a Christian Church?" 23.

[t]he resurrection represents my basic faith commitment that lies, violence and death will not have the last word in human affairs. Life will triumph over death; truth will win out finally against deceit. That these are *faith* commitments means that they rest on a fundamental trust in God and in the meaningfulness of human life, that transcends the "facts" of human, historical experience.¹³¹

In this essay Ruether therefore suggests that belief in the resurrection is a metaphorical expression of belief in the power of God to make life meaningful by overcoming lies, violence and death. The purpose of metaphoric language is to relate the word which is being used as a metaphor to that which it is pointing. When Shakespeare states that "[l]ife's but a walking shadow, a poor player, that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more," one is able to distinguish between life, a shadow and a player as distinct nouns while at the same time drawing a relationship between them. Ruether states that she uses the term resurrection as a metaphor to indicate that God overcomes death as well as lies and violence. But does not the term resurrection in and of itself refer to the overcoming of death? Is it possible to use a particular word as a metaphor to suggest that which the word in fact means? This is a rather confusing use of metaphoric language, which seems to reflect Ruether's confusion concerning the concept of resurrection.

In this essay Ruether also raises the question of what she views as ambiguous contemporary theological language around key Christian terms such as the resurrection. Ruether maintains that theologians and biblical scholars often use ambiguous language for one of three reasons.

First, they often haven't fully sorted out the difference [between the literal meaning of the resurrection and the metaphorical and paradigmatic] in their own minds. Secondly, fundamentalists are in political power in the church, and they don't want to struggle with them. And, finally, and most importantly, the educational and cultural gap between pre-critical and theologically-educated Christians makes it difficult to bridge the two kinds of consciousness in any other way.¹³²

¹³¹ Ibid., 23-24.

¹³² Ibid., 23. Her second and third reasons certainly highlight Ruether's discomfort with subjective immortality. Her view that only fundamentalists

Ruether does not apply this analysis to her own work, but it seems possible to do so. I think that Ruether's own ambiguous language concerning the resurrection results from the first reason that she cites. By this I am suggesting that Ruether is unclear in her own mind about the nature of the term "resurrection" in relation to her own theological position. While for the most part it seems that Ruether would certainly deny a concept of physical resurrection, and would certainly reject any traditional eschatological vision which "focuses on the personal eschatology of the soul, which passes on to places of punishment, purgation, or glory immediately after death in a realm transcendent to this present finite world."¹³³ when she uses the traditional terminology and tries to reflect a "Christian" position in *Disputed Questions* her theology becomes somewhat muddled.

It may be argued that Ruether is trying to use traditional language in non-traditional ways. There is certainly nothing wrong with such an approach *when* the alternative view is clearly distinguished from more traditional views. As I indicate below in Chapter Four, Suchocki uses the concept of resurrection in a very different way from its traditional usage. By explaining the metaphysical principles upon which she is developing the term there is, however, no confusion that what Suchocki means by the term resurrection differs from the traditional understanding. As I will discuss in some detail below, in Suchocki's case she is presenting an alternative view of a form of "actual" resurrection. The self is resurrected into God and continues to "live" now within God. One can certainly disagree with Suchocki's view, but at least it is apparent that she is presenting an alternative use of the language.

and the theologically uneducated succumb to the illusion of subjective immortality, is a rather stereotypic portrayal of those who believe in subjective immortality.

¹³³ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 245.

Ruether in turn suggests that she is using metaphorical language to explain God's activity. In other words she seems to be suggesting that while we cannot talk about resurrection in terms of a physical resurrection through which evil is overcome and the individual continues to live, we can nevertheless talk about resurrection as pointing to God's power to overcome "lies, violence and death." But to repeat my earlier question, why state that we must "[hold] on to the memory of Jesus' resurrection from the grave as the basis for *our* refusal to take evil as the last word and *our* hope that God will win in the end."¹³⁴ Does such use of resurrection language not simply lead to confusion? How is it that God wins in the end? On to what memory are we being asked to hold so that we are to have hope in such victory?

Ruether might very well insist that I am taking the term resurrection too literally, that I must recognize her metaphorical use of it. I argue, however, that Ruether's metaphorical use of the term is not clear and that it does not lead to an alternative vision of God's power, but into a confusion of her disavowal and acceptance of traditional views. I think that Ruether's use of the term resurrection as a metaphor is too ambiguous, too undifferentiated from the traditional concept of resurrection.

The second example of tension in Ruether's work vis-à-vis her understanding of the concept of subjective immortality is her use of a prayer which she composed for a funeral. As I indicated above, Ruether states that this prayer sums up her view of feminist eschatological spirituality. It would seem that if this prayer presents a summation of her views, some of the key points she would want to include would be that we do not know what happens after death; we must accept

¹³⁴ Ruether, *Disputed Questions: On Being a Christian*, 72.

the finitude of our individuated centres of being; there is no split between the body and the soul; we hand our "deeds" over to the divine so that the divine can use what has occurred in our lives; and it is the divine Matrix and not some form of individual consciousness which survives death. One would presume that the language she would use in such a prayer would express these ideas in a way that provides comfort for those in mourning and helps the community to have a vision of the relationship between the divine and the self so as to understand more fully the relationship between life and death. In view of her insistence on developing a concept of God/ess so as to overcome the detrimental aspects of a patriarchal view of God, one would think that this prayer would provide a propitious opportunity to present images of the self and the divine to help develop an alternative Christian vision. It is necessary therefore to consider the nature of the images and the metaphors that Ruether uses to try to ascertain the way in which her prayer is meant to console and to inspire.

The prayer that Ruether offers is as follows.

Unless a seed falls into the ground and dies, it does not rise again. So our human spirits must let go of their *perishable form to be transformed into the unperishable*. This is a great mystery which we do not pretend to understand. But we trust with that faith of little children who put their hand into the hand of a loving parent, knowing they will be led aright. So we trust, even without knowledge, in that great Creator-Spirit from which all life comes and to which it returns, *to raise this human spirit to immortal life*. Take back now our sister into your bosom. O Wisdom-Spirit. In faith we entrust her into your arms.¹³⁵

Keeping in mind that this prayer is according to Ruether a summation of her understanding of feminist eschatological spirituality, the imagery that she uses raises numerous questions. Ruether begins with the image of a human being as a

¹³⁵ Ruether, "Eschatology and Feminism," 123-4. Also see Ruether, *Women-Church: Theology and Practice of Feminist Liturgical Communities* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 213. Emphasis added.

seed which must return to the earth.¹³⁶ A seed is not an image of a mature being that has lived its life and now after flourishing must die and return to the earth. A seed is an image of potential life. The image suggests that death is the birth of that which the human spirit is really destined to become. Beginning with this image Ruether shifts the emphasis of the meaning of existence off of life to death. Life produced the seed which now must come to fullness of being through death. This image certainly seems to be at odds with Ruether's view that human existence is bound by the limitations of finitude.

But this is just the beginning of the questions that the prayer raises. What does Ruether mean by the human spirit letting go of its "perishable" form to be transformed into the "imperishable"? I have indicated that Ruether contends that the self as energy-matter is not lost after death but returns to the great Matrix. What then is the perishable form of the human spirit? And into what is it transformed? Does the imperishable refer to the God/ess? And what does she mean by saying that we must trust the great Creator-Spirit "to raise this human spirit to immortal life"? What is the nature of the human spirit that is being taken back into the Wisdom-Spirit? Is this separate from the energy-matter that comprises the individual? Does "the spirit" mean the deeds of one's life? What is the nature of this "immortal life"? Is this purely metaphorical language or is Ruether offering some other vision than that of the self as energy-matter becoming part of the cosmic matrix?

¹³⁶ Seed imagery is prevalent throughout both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. It is used to refer to "the posterity of any particular man, as the seed of Abraham, referring to his descendants." Alexander Cruden, ed. *Cruden's Complete Concordance to the Old and New Testaments* (Chicago: The John C. Winston Co, 1930), 575. It also refers both literally and metaphorically to the seed of plants. Metaphoric use of the word includes the idea that God sows God's "imperishable" seed within the mortal body. It is this seed which survives when the body perishes. See e.g., 1 Corinthians 12: 35-38, 1 Peter 1:23, and 1 John 3:9.

Another issue that needs to be considered is Ruether's use of parental language for God, and the "little children" language for the community. As I indicated above, in *Sexism and God-Talk* Ruether argues that the use of parental language for the divine does not promote the full humanity of women when it encourages dependence and not autonomy. In this later prayer (1990) she seems to contradict her earlier view. She is not using affirmative parental language that symbolizes our roots thereby affirming independence and autonomy, but language that refers to a kind of permanent parent-child relationship to God.¹³⁷

It is of course significant that this prayer was written for a funeral. There can be no doubt that it was written in such a way so as to offer hope at the time of death. In this prayer, however, Ruether seems to be suggesting that hope is not just hope for the retention of the "meaning" of our lives as I discussed above, but for some form of hope which would necessitate some form of a "conscious" self after death. It seems therefore that when it comes to that crucial moment of addressing the relationship between the divine and the self in the face of death that Ruether's language alludes to the possibility of a self which endures death other than as energy-matter, or the continuation of 'the meaning' of the self.

It is interesting to note that while this prayer was first published in 1985 in *Women-Church: Theology and Practice of Feminist Liturgical Communities*, Ruether includes the prayer in her 1990 essay "Eschatology and Feminism." What is significant about this point is that "Eschatology and Feminism" is a reworking of her earlier chapter on eschatology found in *Sexism and God-Talk* (1983). This prayer does not appear in this chapter, which may indeed simply be due to the fact that it was not as yet written. Ruether, however, has nevertheless deliberately added

¹³⁷ See above, 76.

this prayer to the later essay as her conclusion to her view of a feminist eschatology. I think that it is important to consider why she would add a prayer that admits so easily to a traditional eschatological interpretation, and not develop a prayer which in fact challenges traditional eschatological viewpoints and endeavours to create an alternative one.

I think that an answer to this question may be ascertained by trying to put into perspective the development of Ruether's eschatological vision. On considering the development of Ruether's eschatological vision, albeit an underdeveloped aspect of her theology, there seem to be two interconnected shifts in her thought. While it is possible to trace her vision of God's redemptive activity as a future unity within God from early in her work, beginning with *Faith and Fratricide* (1975) this is not a static vision. The most significant shift is from a very obscure view of a final endpoint by which she emphasizes the kinship of all of humanity in *Faith and Fratricide* to a two-fold concept of God's redemptive activity in *Sexism and God-Talk* (1983): the returning of all that exists within finitude as energy-matter back to the Matrix, and the taking up of all that occurs within finitude into God's self.

This redemptive activity not only addresses the issue of the universal kinship of all of humanity as does *Faith and Fratricide*, but also addresses the question of loss within finitude by redeeming or giving meaning to all that has *been* as it returns to the divine, and by redeeming all that has *occurred* within finitude as it is taken up within the divine. As I argued, the latter part of this redemptive process appears to be similar to a process understanding of objective immortality.

But this shift is not all that is to be said about Ruether's understanding of the process of liberation. It is moreover possible to note an ongoing tension within Ruether's work which seems to indicate an unacknowledged reluctance to abandon

completely a view of the possibility of God's redemptive activity which in some way includes an interplay between God and the retention of human consciousness. That is to say, while Ruether remonstrates the concept of an immortal self, she is in fact hesitant to give up the concept completely. Her ambiguity toward the concept seems to be the reason for her ambiguous use of resurrection language in *Disputed Questions* and her use of the funeral prayer in "Eschatology and Feminism."

Both the ambiguity of her thought and a shift in her position vis-à-vis immortality are evident in the third passage which I wish to examine, her chapter of *Sexism and God-Talk* titled "Eschatology and Feminism." In this chapter Ruether asks "whether women have the same stake in denying their mortality through doctrines of life after death, or whether this is not the apogee of male individualism and egoism?"¹³⁸ To answer this question Ruether draws on the work of psychotherapist Anne Wilson Schaef, and economist and philosopher Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

Gilman addresses the issue of gender and immortality in her book *His Religion and Hers* (1923).¹³⁹ Gilman suggests that there are "two fundamentally different orientations to life based on the crises of male and female experience"¹⁴⁰ From these experiences two religions emerge: the death-based male religion which "becomes centered on the "blood mystery" of death and how to escape it," and the birth-based female religion in which the pivotal experience is birth and [the] basic concern is how to nurture ongoing life here on earth."¹⁴¹ Gilman argues that the main question of death-based religion, "What is going to happen to me after I

¹³⁸ Ibid., 235.

¹³⁹ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *His Religion and Hers* (New York: Century, 1923).

¹⁴⁰ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 236.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

die?," [the male question] exemplifies a posthumous egoism; while the birth-based [female] question, "What is to be done for the child who is born?" indicates an attitude of immediate altruism.¹⁴²

Schaef, in turn, Ruether tells us, suggests that women are not so concerned about personal immortality as men.¹⁴³ Schaef maintains that "[i]f women think about [immortality] at all, it is primarily in the context of relationship - they would like to be able to see loved ones who have died - while males are primarily concerned about their own self-perpetuation."¹⁴⁴

It is interesting to note that in her 1990 essay "Eschatology and Feminism" published seven years after *Sexism and God-Talk* Ruether seems to have altered her position on the meaning of life after death for women. In the later essay, which appears to be a reworking of the earlier, one significant difference is that while Ruether still draws on the work of Gilman to argue for a gendered notion of religion and to suggest that "our first responsibility lies in building upon the powers of birth,"¹⁴⁵ she omits any reference to Schaef.

Ruether does not explicitly revoke her earlier use of Schaef's work; she nevertheless implicitly rejects Schaef's argument. While in *Sexism and God-Talk* Ruether draws on Schaef to defend the idea that life after death is not an issue for women, in her later essay Ruether now writes that "[a]lthough eschatology has been shaped by a male intelligentsia in a way that negates woman, *this does not*

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Anne Wilson Schaef, *Women's Reality: An Emerging Female System in the White Male Society* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1981).

¹⁴⁴ Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 235. Schaef suggests that "[s]ince White Male-System persons so firmly believe that it is possible for one to become God, they are understandably concerned with the issue of immortality. Female-System persons, on the other hand, realize that immortality is not a genuine possibility and spend little or no time worrying about it," 235.

¹⁴⁵ Ruether, "Eschatology and Feminism," 121.

necessarily mean that the meaning of life after death is not an issue for women."¹⁴⁶ Ruether therefore no longer asserts that interest in life after death is a gendered issue. She grants that women may in fact be interested in the afterlife, arguing that "[a]s women increasingly claim the right to be autonomous, individuated persons, persons with 'selves' of their own, and not simply auxiliaries to males, they certainly do want to ask about the permanent meaning of their existence."¹⁴⁷ Ruether therefore links the idea of women's concern for life after death directly to the development of a concept of the self for women as an *autonomous* self.

One question that arises from this apparent shift in Ruether's thought is the way in which she connects this view of the self in terms of an autonomous, individuated self with her concept of the self as energy-matter which is to return to the cosmic matrix as well as with the redemption of one's deeds into the divine. If Ruether continues to defend her view of the self as energy-matter, would it not be irrelevant that women are now concerned about an autonomous self in relation to the after-life?

In this passage we can see another example of the tension in Ruether's work concerning the nature of the self in relation to redemptive activity. On the one hand, throughout her writings Ruether emphasizes the transience of existence, the value of each transient self, and the injurious nature of the concept of an immortal self as the foundation of spiritual and ethical practices. Moreover, as Ruether's theology develops, she states more explicitly that the concept of the immortal self is the source of sin. As Sands points out, in Ruether's latest work *Gaia and God* "Ruether's etiology of sin ... centers squarely on the rejection of the body and on dualism, its philosophical corollary, which she now defines as 'the rejection of

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. Emphasis added.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

mortality.' "¹⁴⁸ On the other hand, Ruether insists that the human self has some form of ongoing meaning, and she alludes to the idea that "meaning" appears to demand the retention of consciousness beyond death.

This tension extends into her latest major work *Gaia and God* (1994). In this work Ruether cites process thought as a contemporary model for developing an ecofeminist theology. In her discussion Ruether briefly outlines what she views as the process concept of God. Ruether states that

[p]rocess theologians also postulate that this Consequent Nature of God, reflecting the memory of all that has been, is taken up in some way into the Primordial Nature of God, not only preserving immortally all that has been, but also incorporating it into the total vision of what could and should have been, to reconcile the evils and missed opportunities of history. In this way all that has been is *not only remembered* in the eternal being, *but is redeemed as well* ¹⁴⁹

Technical error aside,¹⁵⁰ Ruether's description of the process concept of God's redemptive activity is noteworthy. Ruether states that God's redemptive activity goes beyond remembering or preserving all, the basic assumption of objective immortality, to include reconciling "the evils and missed opportunities of history," and thereby redeeming all. Ruether therefore differentiates between "remembering," which is the traditional view of objective immortality, and "reconciling and redeeming." This distinction indicates that remembering is but one component of God's redemptive activity, not the complete redemptive process.

Moreover, at the end of this passage, Ruether refers the reader to Suchocki's works *The End of Evil* and *God-Christ-Church*. In this footnote

¹⁴⁸ Sands, *Escape from Paradise*, 100. In *Gaia and God* Ruether writes that "even as we take into our spirituality and ethical practice the transience of selves, relinquishing the illusion of permanence, and accepting the dissolution of our physical substance into primal energy, to become new matter for organisms, we also come to value again the personal centre of each being." Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 252.

¹⁴⁹ Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 246-7. Emphasis added.

¹⁵⁰ In process thought the Consequent nature is not "taken up" into the Primordial nature of God as Ruether states. The primordial nature and consequent nature are two ever-present aspects of God.

Ruether cites the specific passages in these works in which Suchocki discusses the development of subjective immortality in relation to the fulfillment of justice.¹⁵¹ By explaining God's activity as remembering and redeeming, and by referring to Suchocki's works, it seems that in the passage quoted above that Ruether is not describing the dominant process view of God's redemptive activity as objective immortality, but is describing what appears to be *Suchocki's* understanding of God's redemptive activity which is predicated upon subjective immortality.¹⁵²

Assuming that Ruether has read Suchocki's work, which the specificity of her referencing certainly suggests, she could not fail to recognize Suchocki's explicit demand for subjective immortality as a requisite for the fulfillment of justice. Ruether's reference to Suchocki therefore raises the question as to what in fact Ruether means by the statement that "all that has been is *not only remembered* in the eternal being, but is *redeemed* as well." Why does she contrast the concepts of "remembered" and "being redeemed"? I have argued that although she does not state it explicitly, Ruether's understanding of the redemptive nature of God seems to be indebted to the process concept of objective immortality. Why then would Ruether refer her readers to Suchocki's work which explicitly rejects objective immortality in favor of a very explicit demand for subjective immortality? Why does Ruether not challenge Suchocki's demand for subjective immortality, or perhaps draw on a process theologian who champions objective immortality and not subjective immortality?

If there were no further references to process thought concerning the redemptive nature of the divine, this passage might be viewed as an inconsequential

¹⁵¹ Ruether cites, Suchocki, *The End of Evil*, 97-114 and *God-Christ-Church*, 183-216.

¹⁵² For a discussion of Suchocki's view of God's redemptive activity see Chapter Four, 203 ff.

sideline of Ruether's main argument. There is, however, a further reference which is worth noting. Ruether contends that the divine is a personal deity, "a heart that knows us."¹⁵³ Ruether raises questions concerning the nature of this deity in view of a process understanding of the redemptive nature of God.

Is there also a consciousness that *remembers and envisions and reconciles* all things, as the Process theologians believe? Surely, if we are kin to all things and offspring of the universe, then what has flowered in us as consciousness must also be reflected in that universe as well, in the ongoing creative Matrix of the whole.¹⁵⁴

Ruether repeats her view of the process view of redemptive nature as "remembering, envisioning and reconciling," which, as I just noted raises questions as to what in fact she means by the concept of reconciliation.

We also need to ask what Ruether views as the relationship between reconciliation and the reflection of our consciousness in the universe. While God's consciousness of us certainly does not imply that we too are conscious, it seems that by raising the question the way she does begs the question whether there can be reconciliation if *only* God is conscious of all that occurs. God may be able to "redeem," as in remembering all, but is there indeed "reconciliation"?

Although the passages I have cited are by no means probative of a shift in Ruether's thought, they nevertheless indicate a persistent, underlying tension throughout Ruether's work concerning her view of God's redemptive activity. While at most it is only possible to say with any assurance that Ruether does not restrict liberation to emancipation and salvation and that she has a notion of redemption which can best be referred to as a form of objective immortality, it seems incorrect to conclude that Ruether has taken a definitive position vis-à-vis God's redemptive activity.

¹⁵³ Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 253

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. Emphasis added.

What is important to consider for the moment is that the tension in Ruether's work that I have noted seems to indicate a *possible* openness on Ruether's part to entertain some form of subjective immortality. While such a statement seems to contradict the heart of Ruether's argument, that is, that the concept of an immortal self is the root of injustice and is therefore untenable, it seems that in trying to formulate an eschatological position which can in fact address injustice, it may be that Ruether feels somewhat compelled to develop a concept which takes into account the retention of individual consciousness. The apparent systemic nature of injustice which served to validate her early "better intuitions" that the concept of an immortal self is untenable seems to be failing her. I venture, and I must state venture very warily, to suggest that at this stage in her theological development Ruether is perhaps questioning the limitations of a finite view of human nature as it relates to the redemptive nature of the divine. The enormity of systemic injustice and the tremendous loss that results for which there is no hope of this-worldly emancipation may be a decisive factor in Ruether's reassessment of the tenability of the concept of an immortal self on both moral and intellectual grounds.

Summary

In my discussion of Ruether's understanding of the process of liberation I have suggested that there are two ways in which she views the process of liberation as occurring. First, she develops a salvific component based on her view of *metanoia*, conversion, the process of changing one's consciousness. Second, Ruether develops the emancipative aspect of the process of liberation in terms of social change resulting from personal conversion initiated by the divine. Third, she proposes a redemptive aspect in the form of a future unity within God. In Ruether's view the redemptive aspect of the process of liberation therefore occurs within the divine in two distinct ways: the return of all as energy-matter to the great Matrix, and the inclusion of all deeds and achievements within the divine.

Throughout her writings Ruether stresses the emancipative aspect of the process of liberation, the creation of a just social order, which is the primary concern of her theological enterprise. She develops the redemptive aspect of the process of liberation, which involves her eschatological vision in a more limited and somewhat ambiguous way. Ambiguity in Ruether's thought concerning eschatological questions seems to result from the difficulty that she has bringing together the relevance of her feminist concerns and her Christian identity.¹⁵⁵

From a feminist perspective the difficulty that she faces is to present hope in terms that do not rely on a dualistic way of understanding the human self which

¹⁵⁵ In the first chapter of his work *The Crucified God* Jurgen Moltmann discusses what he refers to as the 'crisis of relevance' and the "crisis of identity." Moltmann writes that "[t]heologians, churches and Christians are confronted in their Christian life today more than ever with a double crisis: the *crisis of relevance* and the *crisis of identity*. These two crises are complementary. The more theology and the church attempt to become relevant to the problems of the present day, the more deeply they are drawn into the crisis of their own Christian identity in traditional dogmas, rites, and moral notions, the more irrelevant and unbelievable they become." Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism and Christian Theology*, Wilson & Bowden, trans. (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 7.

leads to the denigration of women and nature. As a Christian theologian the difficulty she faces is that in refusing to abandon the Christian tradition she wants nevertheless to redefine by divesting it of its patriarchal trappings. The basic patriarchal trapping is the concept of an immortal self which traditionally has offered a means by which the fulfillment of justice can be achieved in other-worldly terms.

The problem that arises, however, is that if justice is conceived as the righting of wrong relationships, the world certainly does not offer a way in which for justice to be fulfilled. It very well may be that without some form of other-worldly venue for the fulfillment of justice the meaningfulness of existence can be called into question.

This tension leads to questions of the success of Ruether's ability to develop a concept of the process of liberation in terms of the fulfillment of justice. I will consider this question in some detail in Chapter Five. In Chapter Five I also will consider whether the tension in her work, which is an important creative impetus behind her theology, may in fact be instrumental in leaving her more open to considering an alternative understanding of an enduring form of the self to allow for the fulfillment of justice.

Conclusions to Part One

In Part One of this work I have examined Ruether's understanding of oppression and the process of liberation. Ruether argues that the concept of an immortal self is the root of injustice in the western world. Her analysis of oppression depends on her ability to expose what she views as the fallacious nature of the concept of an immortal self, and to indicate the way in which oppressive structures have resulted from this misguided anthropology. Ruether contends that to live fully human lives we must content ourselves to live within the limits of finitude and not cast our hopes onto some other-worldly existence.

In her analysis of oppression Ruether distinguishes between "sin" as social injustice which results from the misuse of human freedom and "evil" as that which arises directly from finitude. She moreover contends that "[t]he reconstruction of the ethical tradition must begin by a clear separation of the questions of finitude from those of sin."¹⁵⁶

In my view her understanding of oppression is somewhat flawed. Ruether does not examine the nature of finitude and the way in which finitude impacts on the freedom to develop just social structures. Her analysis of oppression separates rather than brings together these two interconnected aspects of existence. It places inordinate responsibility on human freedom to fulfill justice. As I discuss more fully in Chapter Five, Ruether's view of oppression is consequently unable to account adequately for the "particularity of injustice."

Ruether's limited view of the nature of oppression also hinders her ability to develop an adequate understanding of redemptive aspect of the process of liberation. The tension in her work which arises from her ambiguous

¹⁵⁶ Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 141.

understanding of the nature of the self and of God's redemptive nature arises directly from her neglect to address the nature of finitude. While she attempts to account for the question of loss within finitude through a form of objective immortality, her view of this redemptive process is intellectually wanting. Ruether is not able to account for God's redemptive activity in relation to the nature of finitude. While she insists on the inherent relationality of existence and on the need for justice, she does not provide an adequate understanding of the way in which this occurs. Her argument is not only intellectually questionable but also morally. Since the relational nature of existence is not addressed by her understanding of God's redemptive activity, justice, when understood as the righting of wrong relationships, is indeed not fulfilled. It is questionable whether her view provides hope beyond the restructuring of social structures.

I have noted, however, that there is however an underlying tension in her work arising from whether in fact she does champion the view of a mortal self over against that of an immortal self. Again her failure to explain sufficiently the nature of finitude so as to support her view of a finite self seems to underlie this confusion in her theology. Without a more developed understanding of the nature of finitude and the nature of the self within finitude in relation to the divine her theology remains obscure. The ambiguity of her thought might also be read as her inability to marry her hope for justice in an inherently relation world with an adequate expression of the fulfillment of this hope. She does not want to deny the meaningfulness of existence; she does not want to leave injustice unaccounted for. Other than some underdeveloped form of objective immortality she does not seem to be able to formulate an expression of God's redemptive activity.

PART TWO

MARJORIE HEWITT SUCHOCKI

**The Nature of Oppression
and
The Process of Liberation**

Chapter Three

The Nature of Oppression

Introduction

In Chapter One I began my discussion of Ruether's understanding of oppression with a brief biographic overview of some of the personal experiences which have influenced the early development of her theology and her understanding of oppression. Unlike Ruether, Suchocki does not provide extensive autobiographical details upon which to draw to discuss her theological development. Nevertheless, in her essay "Weaving the World"¹ Suchocki relates a personal experience which warrants consideration for it apparently served as her "watershed experience" much as the summer of 1966 did for Ruether.²

Suchocki writes that before she began to study theology (in the 1960s), she "had the entire world figured out."³ She was fully confident that she "knew the divine mind and the divine plan and the whole scheme of things."⁴ Reflecting on this period of her life Suchocki describes herself as wearing her theological

¹ Suchocki, "Weaving the World," 76-86.

² Ruether, *Disputed Questions*, 76. The summer of 1966 refers to the summer that Ruether spent in Mississippi working with the civil rights movement. See Chapter One, 26.

³ Suchocki, "Weaving the World," 84.

⁴ Ibid.

certainly "like a thing of crystal which encased me - rigid, unyielding."⁵ But her crystal shroud did not endure. It began to crack one day when, as she recalls, "it suddenly occurred to me that out of the about four billion people in the world it was very odd, even ludicrous, that I out of the billions should be right on so important a point as the fundamental nature of the universe."⁶ This revelation inspired Suchocki to organize a women's Bible-study group. However, when confronted with the stark reality of the women's personal problems, Suchocki found that her Bible-study guide did not help her to provide answers to questions of "evil, meaning, life, [and] death."⁷ She threw the guide away and began to rely solely on the text. Answers still eluded her.

Unlike for Ruether, for Suchocki the core experience of her theological awakening did not involve confronting the depths of systemic oppression of which she had hitherto been unaware, but confronting oppression that seemed to emerge from the depth and complexity of existence itself: oppression which seems to creep stealthily into one's life or which seems to demand recognition by afflicting a devastating blow. This is not to suggest that Suchocki denies or trivializes systemic injustice, that is, socially enforced oppression which is sustained by rationalizing a particular worldview. Her initiation into the quest for understanding, however, seems to have begun with her awareness of the pervasiveness of what appears to be "irrational" oppression evidenced in all of existence.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid. Suchocki writes that "[t]hese women provided a spectrum of some of the world's problems. Vi's baby had died when only eight months old; Anne, who was about to return to school for her longed-for masters, had just been told that she had multiple sclerosis; Mary's grown son was institutionalized for a severe mental disorder, with no realistic hope of recovery. A neighbor boy had randomly dropped a plastic bag of water from the overpass on a nearby interstate, killing the random motorist." 84.

Suchocki's search for understanding reached a crisis one night. She recounts awaking from a terrifying dream to find that "the crystal theology surrounding me, protecting me from the world, had cracked completely and crumbled, falling in tinkling shards to my feet."

Now there was only darkness, and I was falling through it, only there was no place to fall. No walls, no bottom, no ceiling - no God. God had crumbled with the crystal, and I no longer knew the divine mind nor the divine plan. This was all a long time ago - certainly long before I became a feminist, or knew of process thought - and if I had, I would have thought it heathen! But I still remember the agony of that night. And I remember its profoundly simple resolution. There came over my frightened spirit the sense that the darkness was God. I had fallen out of "faith" and into God. Or, to put it into more accurate theological language, I had moved from faith in my ideas about God to faith in God.⁸

With her theological certainty shattered Suchocki was left with but her faith in God upon which to found a new theological basis to answer critical theological questions.

Suchocki found the base for an alternative theology when she was a graduate student at the School of Theology at Claremont. At this time Suchocki was formally introduced to Alfred North Whitehead's major work *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (1929).⁹ Suchocki describes this experience in epiphanic terms.

Whitehead was describing *my* experience. Suddenly I had found a philosopher who knew the same world I did, but who had the power to penetrate the dynamics of that world, and to formulate its nature in terms of a comprehensive metaphysics. Since then, I have consciously incorporated into my life structure what was implicit in my views for so long. I do indeed interpret the world from a "Whiteheadian perspective."¹⁰

⁸ Ibid., 84-85.

⁹ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1929).

¹⁰ Suchocki, "Openness and Mutuality in Feminist Thought and Action," 62. In her 1994 work *The Fall to Violence* Suchocki, however, begins to use the phrase "relational theology" rather than "process theology" to describe her work. Suchocki writes that "[a]ll theologies based upon the work of Alfred North Whitehead deal with relationships as central to existence, and the phrase 'relational theology' communicates this. 'Process' denotes the dynamism of existence, and assuredly implies this relational existence. Insofar as this implication is not always obvious to those unfamiliar with Whitehead's works, I

Whitehead's thought provided the framework for Suchocki to begin inquiring into fundamental theological questions evil, meaning, life, and death, and to begin formulating some answers of her own.¹¹ Because of "the existential quality of [his] thought,"¹² Suchocki, therefore, took up Whitehead's thought "not as an interesting speculative system, though it is surely that, but from [her] need to understand [her] world in holistic terms through a conceptuality which fits [her] experience."¹³

Out of this inquiry came Suchocki's Ph.D. dissertation, *The Correlation Between God and Evil* (1974). Suchocki later reworked her dissertation into *The End of Evil: Process Eschatology in Historical Context* (1988). While *The End of Evil* is not Suchocki's first major work, in 1982 she published *God-Christ-Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology*, it is in *The End of Evil* that Suchocki develops most fully her understanding of the nature of oppression. In my discussion of Suchocki's understanding of oppression I, therefore, rely heavily on this text.

Since Suchocki's theology is based on Whiteheadian metaphysics, in this section I often refer directly to passages from Whitehead's work to help clarify basic notions of process thought. On occasion I also draw on the work of other process theologians when I think that it can help to elucidate some of the complex

have chosen to use 'relational theology' as the more explicitly descriptive term." 48, footnote 1.

¹¹ It is interesting to note that it appears that Whitehead's personal need to come to terms with questions of evil, meaning, life and death played a significant role in the development of his philosophy. Bertrand Russell reports that Whitehead suffered "appalling grief" over the death of his youngest son Eric who, serving in the Royal Flying Corps, was shot down in France in March 1918. Russell writes that Eric's death "had a great deal to do with turning [Whitehead's] thoughts to philosophy and with causing him to seek ways of escaping from belief in a merely mechanistic universe." *Portraits from Memory* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1951), 100.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 62-63.

aspects of Whitehead's philosophy. When I refer directly to Whitehead or to other process theologians, my reading of their work concurs with that of Suchocki unless otherwise indicated.

Before I begin my discussion of Suchocki's view of oppression, it is necessary to make two general comments. First, in the elaboration of his philosophy, referred to as process philosophy, Whitehead developed his own idiosyncratic, technical language. Unable to explain adequately his vision of the experience of reality through available philosophical language, Whitehead created his own.¹⁴ Since Suchocki's view of reality and the language which she uses to describe her view are inextricably linked, it is necessary to use process terminology. To the reader who is unacquainted with process philosophy, Whiteheadian terminology may be confusing. To assist the reader I endeavour to explain the most important process terms as fully as possible when they first arise within the discussion.¹⁵

Second, it will become quickly apparent that my discussion of Suchocki's view of oppression differs significantly from that of Ruether. Suchocki would not disagree with Ruether's criticism of traditional Christianity as an oppressive

¹⁴ This is not to suggest that Whitehead saw his own language as in any way definitive. As he writes, "no language can be anything but elliptical, requiring a leap of the imagination to understand its meaning in its relevance to immediate experience. The position of metaphysics in the development of culture cannot be understood without remembering that no verbal statement is the adequate expression of a proposition." Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 20.

¹⁵ Introductions to Whitehead's thought include, Ivor LeClerc, *Whitehead's Metaphysics: An Introductory Exposition* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1965); William A. Christian, *An Interpretation of Whitehead's Metaphysics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967); Victor Lowe, *Understanding Whitehead* (Baltimore: The John's Hopkins Press, 1966); Donald W. Sherburne, ed., *A Key to Whitehead's Process And Reality* (New York: Macmillan, 1982); and Thomas E. Hosinski, *Stubborn Fact and Creative Advance: An Introduction of the Metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publ., 1993).

patriarchal religion.¹⁶ However, unlike Ruether, whose analysis of oppression involves deconstructing traditional Christianity so as to expose its underlying inadequacies, Suchocki, as I have indicated, bases her understanding of oppression on a metaphysical system.

In the discussion that follows I explain Suchocki's view of oppression in relation to this metaphysics. It is not, however, my intention to challenge Suchocki's use of Whitehead's thought nor to challenge the fundamental metaphysical claims which it makes. It is my intention to discuss as clearly as possible Suchocki's use of process metaphysics so as to explain her understanding of oppression, and to provide the necessary background to understand the modifications that she makes to Whitehead's thought to develop her view of the process of liberation (Chapter Four).

The Nature Of Oppression

In Suchocki's view this-worldly oppression arises out of the inevitability of evil and sin. To understand what Suchocki means by oppression it is necessary to examine each of these terms separately.

The Nature Of Evil

Suchocki states that at the root of Whitehead's understanding of evil is the "dominant fact" of destruction.¹⁷ Suchocki observes that by this Whitehead means that the primary defining feature of evil is that of the experience of destruction

¹⁶ See, e.g., "Weaving the World," *Process Studies*, 14, 2 (Summer 1985), 76-86. "Openness and Mutuality in Feminist Thought and Action," *Feminism and Process Thought*, ed. Sheila Greeve Davaney, New York: Edwin Mellen, 1981. "Anxiety and Trust in Feminist Experience," *The Journal of Religion*, 60/4(1980). "The Challenge of Mary Daly," *Encounter*, Vol. 41, No. 4, (1980).

¹⁷ Suchocki, *The End of Evil*, 62.

which "involves the loss of possibility and the loss of actuality..."¹⁸ In Whitehead's view to equate evil with the experience of destruction is, however, too simplistic. Whitehead contends that evil arises from the collective activity of three metaphysical¹⁹ principles:

(1) that all actualization is finite; (2) that finitude involves the exclusion of alternative possibility; (3) That mental functioning introduces into realization subjective forms conformal to relevant alternatives excluded from the completeness of physical realization.²⁰

Suchocki discusses these principles in terms commensurate to those of Whitehead: 1) evil is an inevitable act of finitude which results in perpetual perishing, 2) evil involves the exclusion of alternative possibilities, and 3) evil results from "ideals born out of season."²¹ One, however, must be attendant to the fact that although Whitehead's, and hence Suchocki's, understanding of evil can be stated in terms of these principles, they do not exist independently of each other: as Whitehead states "[e]vil arises from [their] conjoint operation."²²

Evil as Perpetual Perishing

Suchocki maintains that there are two distinct ways in which the nature of evil has been formulated within the Christian tradition. The first formulation depends on freedom, or on what Suchocki refers to as the primacy of the subjective

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ I am following Schubert M. Ogden's use of the term metaphysics as referring "to that form of critical reflection which seeks to make fully explicit and understandable the most fundamental presuppositions of all our experience and thought, or, as I may also say, the most universal principles that are the strictly necessary conditions of the possibility of anything whatever." *Faith and Freedom*, 61.

²⁰ Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933), 333.

²¹ Suchocki, *The End of Evil*, 66.

²² Ibid., 62.

pole of evil.²³ Another way to state this is that in this view evil is rooted in the human will. The second formulation of evil depends on the primacy of the objective pole. That is, evil is understood as primarily rooted in the very structures of finitude. Suchocki argues that within any system of thought in the Christian tradition both views have been present though with one or the other tending to dominate. The first view, the primacy of the subjective pole, dominated the tradition until the seventeenth century. The second view, evil as rooted in the structures of finitude, dominates the contemporary era.²⁴

Suchocki maintains that the dominance of one view over the other results in an inadequate theory of evil. In her view a satisfactory theory must explain evil in such a way that the subjective pole of evil, freedom of the human will, is balanced by the objective pole of evil, the structures of finitude. Suchocki contends that Whitehead's theory of evil provides such a balance.

Suchocki states that Whitehead's theory of evil results from his view of the creative processes which determine the world. In Whitehead's view there is an inexorable link between evil and the creative process of what Whitehead refers to as "actual entities." Through his development of a process or "organic" philosophy Whitehead strives to correct philosophical thought that deals in abstract notions thereby creating what he refers to as "the fallacy of 'misplaced concreteness.'"²⁵

²³ Ibid., 6.

²⁴ Albeit in differing ways Suchocki contends that Augustine and Kant emphasize the subjective pole of evil; Leibniz, Schleiermacher, Hegel and Nietzsche in turn emphasize the objective pole. Suchocki summarizes their ideas as: "the sin of a misdirected will that raises the finite to the infinite in idolatrous loves [Augustine]; the problem of an inevitable conflict in values [Leibniz]; the perverse moral failure to act for the good of an ethical commonwealth [Kant]; incompleteness of being [Schleiermacher]; alienation from oneself, one's destiny, one's projected good, or one's true society [Hegel]; the meaninglessness which is entailed in the loss of a sense of a unifying transcendence, and its corollary, fragmentation [Nietzsche]." *The End of Evil*, 61-62.

²⁵ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 27.

Instead of basing philosophy on abstract notions such as "mere awareness, mere private sensation, mere emotion, mere purpose, mere appearance, mere causation,"²⁶ Whitehead argues that "an endeavor has to be made to base philosophical thought upon the most concrete elements in our experience."²⁷ Actual entity, along with the terms nexus and prehension, which I describe briefly below, are the three notions that Whitehead develops to base philosophy in concrete experience. These notions express in Whitehead's view the most basic experiences that occur within the world.

The concept of an actual entity, also referred to as an actual occasion,²⁸ is fundamental to Whitehead's philosophy. Suchocki, quoting Whitehead, defines actual entities as the "final real things of which the world is made up."²⁹ The concept of an actual entity is Whitehead's answer to the question, What sorts of things are there which constitute existence?³⁰

Whitehead's own words are helpful to elucidate this definition. Whitehead writes that

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Suchocki suggests that the one distinction between an actual entity and an actual occasion is that "the word occasion implies a locus in the spatio-temporal extensiveness of the universe. Thus 'actual occasion' refers to a finite reality. 'Actual entity,' on the other hand, is not so limited." *The End of Evil*, 175. An actual entity can also refer to God. Suchocki argues that there is an aspect of God which is nontemporal, therefore, "God is always referred to as an actual entity, and never as an actual occasion." Ibid. See below for a discussion of Suchocki's understanding of the nature of God.

²⁹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 175. Actual entities can be compared with what Whitehead refers to as "eternal objects." Eternal objects Whitehead explains "transcend particular concrete occasions of actual happening." Eternal objects include for example colors, scents, sounds and geometrical figures. Eternal objects are *pure potentials for becoming*. Their resemblance to Plato's forms or eternal ideas is obvious. Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 17.

³⁰ Whitehead's philosophy grounded on the concept of actual entities is an alternative to, for example, philosophies of substance or quality (Aristotle and Aquinas) or the Cartesian bodiless mind/mindless body philosophy.

[t]here is no going behind actual entities to find anything more real. They differ among themselves: God is an actual entity, and so is the most trivial puff of existence in far-off empty space. But, though there are gradations of importance, and diversities of function, yet in the principles which actuality exemplifies all are on the same level. The final facts are, all alike, actual entities, and these actual entities are drops of experience, complex and interdependent.³¹

There are a number of points that need to be stressed here. First, actual entities are the most *real* aspects of the world. Within a process view of the world "each unit of process is called an actual entity... Actual entities are the building blocks that, through an essential interconnectedness, make up the composite world of rocks, trees, and people."³² In Whitehead's view actual entities come together as societies. In *Adventures of Ideas* Whitehead writes that

[t]he universe achieves its values by reason of its coordination into societies of societies, and in societies of societies of societies. Thus an army is a society of regiments, and regiments are societies of men, and men are societies of cells, and of blood, and of bones, together with the dominant society of personal human experience, and cells are societies of small physical entities such as protons, and so on, and so on.³³

To be a society actual entities are ordered among themselves in such a way that they are self-sustaining, or as Whitehead states, "that it is its own reason."³⁴ For Whitehead humans are societies of actual entities with personal order.³⁵

Following directly from the point that actual entities are the most real aspects of the world it needs to be stressed that all creation, from the most inanimate particle to God, are all comprised of actual entities. As Whitehead suggests, "there are gradations of importance and diversities of functions," nevertheless both God and, for example, an atom, a stone and a tree are all societies or aggregates of actual entities. Despite their diversity all actual entities, including the divine, are affected

³¹ Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 27-28.

³² Suchocki, *The End of Evil*, 175.

³³ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 206.

³⁴ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 137.

³⁵ Whitehead differentiates between "personal" and "non-personal", "living" and "lifeless" societies. While a plant is a living society it is not a personal society. All animals are personal societies, but not as personal as humans. See *Process and Reality*, 136-167.

by the same basic metaphysical principles. Whitehead recognizes, of course, that "there is a specific difference between the nature of God and that of any occasion."³⁶

Another point that needs to be stressed, and one that I will emphasize throughout my discussion of Suchocki's theology, is that actual entities are interdependent. All actual entities are highly relational. As Norman Pittenger states, "this is a societal world in which everything influences or affects everything else."³⁷ Since God is also an actual entity and subjected to the metaphysical laws of the world, God is also highly relational and hence is influenced by the world.³⁸

The last aspect of the nature of actual entities that I want to stress is that actual entities are not static. Whitehead argues that actual entities are "drops of experience," always in the process of becoming. "Every actual occasion," Whitehead writes, "exhibits itself as a process: it is a becomingness."³⁹ The concept of the process of becoming is fundamental to Whitehead's philosophy. Whitehead refers to this activity as *concrescence*, a process by which forces come together to become concrete centers of activity and reactivity. The process of concrescence depends on the creative participation of each actual entity in its own actualization, or self-creation as a "subject-superject".

While the actual entity is involved in its own self-production as a subject, the highly relational nature of existence means that it can not carry out this process in isolation from other actual entities. As Suchocki explains "[t]o be something for

³⁶ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 110.

³⁷ Norman Pittenger, "Redemption: A 'Process Theology' Interpretation," *Theology* 88 (1985), 446-453.

³⁸ For a discussion of Suchocki's view of the nature of God, see below 178 ff.

³⁹ Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 175.

oneself necessarily entails being something for others."⁴⁰ In Whitehead's terms this means that an occasion is not only a subject but also a "superject." "Superject refers to the sense in which an occasion has an effect beyond itself. This is not optional; it is simply a matter of fact. Whitehead underscores this frequently by calling an actual entity a 'subject/superject.'"⁴¹

Since all actual entities, including God, are subject/superject each actual entity affects other actual entities and is in turn affected by other actual entities. For this process to occur Whitehead identified each actual entity as having the capacity to "feel," or, in Whiteheadian terms, to "prehend" other actual entities.

To understand the concept of prehension I think that it is helpful to draw directly on Whitehead's formulation of the term.⁴² Whitehead refers to the term prehension as "a determinate operation."⁴³ This operation involves five factors, "(i) the 'subject' [the actual entity] which feels, (ii) the 'initial data' which are to be felt, (iii) the 'elimination' in virtue of negative prehensions, (iv) the 'objective datum' [a nexus] which is felt, (v) the 'subjective form' which is *how* that subject feels that objective datum."⁴⁴ Every moment of creation, or concrescence, involves these five factors as the actual entity undergoes a transition from what it is, to what it will be.

Prehensions therefore are multi-faceted processes. The subject, the actual entity, receives the initial data, which the actual entity experiences. Initial or primary data, in Whitehead's view, are "particular existents."⁴⁵ As the actual entity

⁴⁰ Suchocki, *The End of Evil*, 177.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Whitehead develops his theory of feeling in *Process and Reality*, Part 3, "The Theory of Prehensions," 331-428.

⁴³ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 337.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 338.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 230.

experiences these data, it eliminates those that it cannot or does not want to carry forward into the future. Stated in somewhat different terms, "Whitehead argues that an actual entity always decides, consciously or unconsciously and to a greater and a lesser degree, what qualities and quantities to appropriate."⁴⁶

The processes by which some data are eliminated are referred to as "negative prehensions." That which is maintained is referred to as the "objective datum" or the "nexus."⁴⁷ While the objective datum refers to a constellation of actual entities, the "subjective form," indicated above in point five, refers to the way in which an actual entity feels, or values, that objective datum as it incorporates it into itself.

Due to the highly relational nature of this process the actual entity is consequently both self-determined and other-determined. It is self-determined through its ability toprehend the past. It is other-determined in that the past determines what the actual entity will become. What is, is bound within the limitations of the world as it strives to become. As Maurice Barineau explains,

[o]n one hand, an actual occasion is a creature formed under the limitations of the universe open to its comprehensive capacity. On the other hand, an actual occasion is "the cause of itself, its own creative act." An actual occasion is a "self-creating creature" exhibiting spontaneity or freedom within the bounds of determination.⁴⁸

It must also be stressed that as the actual entity carries out this process within what Barineau refers to as "the bounds of determination," it must prehend other actual entities and evaluate these prehensions. Through this evaluative process the actual entity decides which prehensions it is going to integrate into itself

⁴⁶ R. Maurice Barineau, *The Theodicy of Alfred North Whitehead: A Logical and Ethical Vindication* (New York: University Press of America, 1991), 82.

⁴⁷ Whitehead describes a nexus as "[a]ny particular fact of togetherness among actual entities." *Ibid.*, 30.

⁴⁸ Barineau, *The Theodicy of Alfred North Whitehead*, 83.

as a final unity. Those which are included are felt "positively" and those that are excluded are felt "negatively."

To be able to understand the way in which this evaluative process occurs there is one more technical aspect of the process of concrescence that needs to be discussed. The process of concrescence depends on what is referred to as the actual entity's "dipolar nature." In Whitehead's view each actual entity is composed of a physical and a mental pole. The physical pole, or actuality, refers to that which is available from the past, the data, for the actual entity toprehend or feel. The mental pole, in turn, refers to "an aspect of the actual entity which responds to what is given."⁴⁹ The mental pole therefore is the aspect of the entity which permits it to choose and to value. Through the mental pole the actual entity "grasps the possibilities relative to the subject's own becoming."⁵⁰ By means of this process the "many" of the past become concretized into the "one" of the future. When unity is determined, "satisfaction" is achieved. Therefore, "[e]ntity succeeds entity, or as Whitehead put it, 'the many become one, and increased by one.' "⁵¹ Satisfaction which completes the occasion is the goal of concrescence.⁵²

Concrescence, which ends in satisfaction, is experienced by all actual entities. While all actual entities undergo this process, the process varies for each actual entity. The more complex the actual entity, the greater the ability toprehend

⁴⁹ Donald Sherburne, *A Key to Whitehead's Process and Reality*, 228. Sherburne writes that "the terms *physical pole* and *mental pole* may not be the happiest of terms to introduce into a philosophy that repudiates the Cartesian dualism and insists that actual entities are the only finally real actualities. Certainly Whitehead has no intention of reintroducing the old concepts of mind and matter, and it is emphatically *not* the case that actual entities in the physical world have only physical poles and that mental poles are present only in the higher organisms." Ibid., 228-9. Sherburne's emphasis.

⁵⁰ Suchocki, *The End of Evil*, 176.

⁵¹ Ibid., 136.

⁵² Ibid., 177. For a discussion of the way in which Suchocki extends Whitehead's concept of satisfaction see Chapter Four.

data. The greater the degree of complexity therefore results in a greater degree of self-determinacy. A person, a complex actual entity, possesses a greater degree of self-determinacy, or freedom, than any other form of actual entity, apart from the divine. Freedom is necessary for there to be positive value, albeit at the risk of possible moral evil or sin.

Concrescence is therefore the basic creative process on which all actual entities depend for their existence. My discussion of this process has highlighted two basic tenets of process thought: all existence participates in the creative process of becoming, and all existence is highly and inherently relational. Suchocki cites two important implications of these metaphysical principles with respect to Whitehead's understanding of evil as destruction. First, as a result of the process of concrescence there arises the "stubborn facticity" that the actual entity becomes this and not that. The many possibilities prehended or felt by the mental pole are actualized into a particular "one." As a result of this process there is a "thisness" of actuality. Something becomes, and that something is concrete, and therefore real. In other words, "there is an inescapable definiteness to actuality...."⁵³

The second implication that Suchocki cites pertains to the inevitable outcome of this process. The process of concrescence is a constant movement of coming into being of actual entities which must eventually lose their immediacy and perish. Suchocki argues that "[t]his loss of immediacy is the primary meaning of evil as perpetual perishing in Whitehead."⁵⁴

Although an entity perishes, it does not disappear. The one that is now becomes part of the data of the settled past which future concrescences can and

⁵³ Ibid., 63.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

somehow must take into account in their own acts of self-determination. To exemplify perpetual perishing Suchocki uses the analogy of a mighty waterfall.

If each drop of water which has ever fallen over the underlying ledges and cliffs for millennia of time could be conceived as an actual entity reaching the edge and tumbling down, crashing into the waiting river which it itself helps to create, only to be succeeded on the ledges above by innumerable others, the force of "perpetual perishing" might be grasped. Each drop moves into the river, but the waterfall as a whole continues through time. Perpetual perishing is the loss of each drop of actuality, even though there is an endurance of the total effect.⁵⁵

Through perishing each actual entity becomes "a stubborn fact for the future."⁵⁶ Suchocki's language here is not gratuitous. The actual entity becomes a *stubborn* fact, because that which perishes cannot be changed. It is determined, resolute. To become a stubborn, resolute fact the entity loses its immediacy. That is to say, each entity loses its "own experience of itself in the concrescent process."⁵⁷ It becomes objectified. This loss of immediacy is also referred to as "objective immortality."

"Objective immortality" is another crucial term that needs to be considered here briefly. First, it must be noted that there are two interrelated ways in which to understand objective immortality. I mentioned the concept of objective immortality above in relation to my definition of subjective immortality as God's ability to retain all within God's self.⁵⁸ I discuss this meaning of objective immortality in greater detail in Chapter Four in relation to Suchocki's development of the concept of subjective immortality. Objective immortality not only refers to the retention of all within God, it also refers to an aspect of the process of concrescence within finitude. For the moment I wish to consider this latter meaning of the term.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 176. Immediacy in process philosophy is often referred to as 'subjective immediacy.'

⁵⁸ See Introduction, 5 ff.

As I have indicated, as an actual entity reaches satisfaction, the actual entity "dies" as a subjective form. The actual entity does not disappear, but becomes part of the data that other actual entities incorporate and thus use in their own acts of self-creation. In this way actual entities affect successive actual entities not as active subjects but as *objective* data as the actual entity that is in the process of becoming prehends the data to create a new future.

Suchocki suggests that this "process is *objective*, since no finite occasion canprehend another in its entirety. Hence the other is felt as object."⁵⁹ The prehending entity feels other actual entities as objects. The subjective existence that is lost becomes an objective existence and as such "an efficient cause or influence for subsequent occasions."⁶⁰ Suchocki goes on to suggest that "[t]his process is termed *immortality*, since it perpetuates one's continuing effect throughout the universe."⁶¹ Thus Whitehead writes, "as we perish we are immortal." It belongs to the essence of a subject that it passes into "objective immortality" and that "its own activity in *self*-formation passes into the activity of *other*-formation."⁶²

In sum, Suchocki maintains that the first aspect of evil refers to perpetual perishing. This aspect emphasizes that all creation is in a constant process of becoming. All actual entities perpetually perish, lose immediacy and become objectively immortalized as stubborn facts or data for their successors. In Whitehead's view, the destruction of the actual entity, as subject through the process of concrescence, is understood as evil. In the ongoing creative process

⁵⁹ Suchocki, *The End of Evil*, 176-77.

⁶⁰ Barineau, *The Theodicy of Alfred North Whitehead*, 81.

⁶¹ Suchocki, *The End of Evil*, 177. Emphasis added. Suchocki's development of the concept of subjective immortality, "the finite occasion's participation in God," is in large part in response to what in her view are the limitations of objective immortality to fulfill justice. See below.

⁶² *Ibid.*

there is necessarily destruction through "perpetual perishing." Once actual, nothing ceases to be. That which has come to be, will continue to be. Processes of coming to be, that is to say, acts of becoming, however, come to an end. All actual entities become, and all actual entities die inasmuch as they lose their subjective immediacy. Perpetual perishing as the loss or destruction of subjective immediacy, while an inevitable result of the process of concrescence within finitude, is, Suchocki contends, "the primary meaning of evil ... in Whitehead."⁶³

Evil as the Exclusion of Alternative Possibility

To say that perpetual perishing is evil may at first glance seem to render the term "evil" meaningless since all actual entities partake in the process of concrescence and all must perish. If perpetual perishing is necessary for the ongoing process of concrescence to occur, can it really be thought of as "evil"? To be able to understand perpetual perishing as evil Suchocki considers the interrelationship between the objective and the subjective poles of evil as they are presented in Whitehead's thought. I have indicated above that Suchocki argues that to have an adequate theory of evil, the concept of evil as rooted in the objective pole, or finitude, has to be balanced by the concept of evil as rooted in the subjective pole, or freedom.

While I stated that the concept of evil as perpetual perishing accounts for the objective pole of evil, the second aspect of evil accounts for the subjective pole, the freedom of the actual entity to act within the structures of finitude. While perpetual

⁶³ Ibid., 62

perishing is necessary within finitude, for something to become *this* and not *that*, the actual entity must assess that which it prehends.

Depending on the complexity of an actual entity, it determines to a greater or lesser degree that which it is to become. Because of the limited nature of less complex actual entities, they have less opportunity to determine their futures. More complex actual entities, particularly human beings which are the most highly self-determinate societies of actual entities, save for the divine, have, on the contrary, considerable freedom to determine their futures through the process of concrescence.

No matter how complex actual entities are, it is not possible for actual entities to appropriate all that theyprehend. As they engage in the process of prehending other actual entities, certain possibilities are necessarily excluded. Choice, as Suchocki, following Whitehead, argues, "is by definition exclusive."⁶⁴ The process of becoming therefore depends on the exclusionary nature of choice. That which an actual entity chooses to value positively, that is, to include in the future, or negatively, to exclude, is determined through an act of comparison. When a feeling is prehended negatively and excluded from the entity's concrescent activity, the feeling which has been lost in the process of perpetual perishing is consequently lost again in relation to the emerging occasion. It is not extended into being. Loss therefore is understood as evil for it entails the destruction of possibility through the necessity of choice.

This aspect of evil has significant consequences for the creation of the actual entity. Since the actual entity cannot include all within itself, it must limit itself

⁶⁴ Ibid., 64.

through the choices that it makes. The actual entity is therefore not only self-determining, but also self-limiting.

Other actual entities are also affected by this process. The relational nature of actual entities means that one actual entity depends on another for its "perpetuation of meaning."⁶⁵ Actual entities, objectively immortalized in the past, must be brought from the past into the present. When an actual entity chooses not to bring the past into the present, Whitehead contends that evil results for there has been loss of the possibility of actuality.

Evil as described above is an inherent part of finitude. As with perpetual perishing it cannot be avoided.⁶⁶ Process is unavoidably tragic. Evil, however, takes on moral significance and becomes "sin" when through the possibility of choice the well-being of another actual entity is denied when it could indeed have been enhanced. This occurs in one of two ways: through extensive positive or extensive negative valuing.

Extensive positive valuing refers to the actual entity trying to bring "all" of the past into the present. It is however impossible for the entity to incorporate or to

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Maintaining that evil results from these metaphysical principles raises the question whether Suchocki's use of the term "metaphysical evil" is a correct expression of Whitehead's understanding of evil. Metaphysical evil refers to "evils which necessarily infect the realm of finite actuality." Barineau, *The Theodicy of Alfred North Whitehead*, 99. This notion of evil suggests that "finite experiences should be called 'evil' simply because they are finite." David Ray Griffin, *God, Power and Evil* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 284. Griffin argues that Whitehead rejects this notion of evil. Barineau argues that "[e]very evil in Whitehead's cosmology is a 'physical' evil rather than a 'metaphysical evil.' Barineau contends that "[p]hysical evil refers to the evil of the actual world over which actual entities, in their own degree of self-creativity, exercise some measure of control, and 'actual entities' refer to both natural and moral agents. Physical evil occurs within the process of Creativity but, unlike metaphysical evil, is not beyond the conscious volition or unconscious spontaneity of actual entities." Barineau, 99. While Suchocki uses the term metaphysical evil, I think that she would concur with Barineau inasmuch as she seems to be stating that while evil is inevitable, the way it which it manifests itself depends on, as Barineau suggests, the conscious volition or unconscious spontaneity of actual entities.

reiterate all that it prehends from the past. By trying to do so the actual entity disregards its own limitations within finitude. Extensive positive valuing overwhelms the actual entity and leaves it in a state of dysfunction.

The extreme use of negative prehensions refers to a very different response to the world. In this case the actual entity tries to eliminate as much of the past as possible, which results in "a trivialization of experience."⁶⁷ On an individual level this means that through extensive non-reiteration the actual entity endeavors to close itself off to change. The actual entity tries to maintain a form of stasis by treating data it prehends as irrelevant, trivial or unimportant. The actual entity thereby seeks to close itself off from further experience. By doing so, it tries to deny the relational nature of existence by trying to maintain the lie that it is an autonomous being, unconnected to other actual entities. It tries to resist appropriating data from the past by living as if the past were in some way irrelevant to its own being. By doing so it also, however, closes off experience from being taken into the future for other actual entities.

Suchocki does not provide an example of this situation, but for the purposes of this argument I suggest we consider, for example, a factory owner I will call Ms Jones. Let us imagine that Ms Jones is currently in conflict with her employees because she refuses to address her employees' complaints concerning the quality of workplace conditions. By denying the relevance of their complaints, Ms Jones denies herself the possibility of developing a healthier environment within which her employees could work. Ms Jones' refusal to support her employees' demands affects her as she has to resist actively external influences by trivializing them as unimportant. Her response also affects her workers. Where policies could be

⁶⁷ Suchocki, *The End of Evil*, 65.

implemented that would enhance the quality of life of the workers and consequently their productivity, this possibility is not actualized. Visions of an alternative working environment are lost.

Just as the extreme use of negative prehensions can diminish the experience of the entity, the extreme use of positive prehensions is also potentially detrimental, but for very different reasons. If one lets oneself be overly affected by the past and is reluctant to exclude any feelings, there is the danger, as Suchocki states, of opening oneself "to the evil of discord, or the sense of unreconcilable alternatives"⁶⁸ If our hypothetical Ms Jones tries to incorporate all the demands of the employees into effective policy, she may find herself in a state of despair as she is unable to meet all demands fully. Her effectiveness as an employer would be jeopardized, as well as the productivity of her business. Owner and employees would be adversely affected.

Trivialization of experience and discord created by an imbalance between positive and negative prehensions are in Whitehead's view manifestations of evil. Suchocki suggests that while positive and negative prehensions are always in tension, a balance needs to be sought to try to ensure inclusive well-being. This is not to suggest that a balance *can* necessarily be achieved, but that a balance should be pursued to try to avoid triviality or discord and their "attendant interpretations of evil."⁶⁹

In sum, while the first principle of evil, which stresses the process of becoming, refers to the unavoidable loss of the continuing immediacy of the actual entity through perpetual perishing, the second principle of evil suggests that due to the valorative process carried out by all actual entities certain possibilities cannot be

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

actualized. This aspect of the process emphasizes the possibility of choice that is necessary for the ongoing creation of actual entities.

There are two features of the second principle of evil that need to be highlighted. First, this principle as with the first reinforces the relational nature of the world. Actual entities depend on each other to be extended into the future. Second, this principle also suggests the ethical nature of existence. The process of valuing, of having to apply value to the initial data to be able to move them forward into the future or deny their actualization, depends on the way in which the actual entity perceives available choices.

Evil as "ideals born out of season."

In the previous section I examined the second metaphysical principle of evil which states that within finitude there is always an exclusion of possible alternatives as actual entities move into an ever-new present through the creative process of concrescence. Whitehead's third principle of evil focuses on the inability of the actual entity to carry all possibilities into the future. Evil results from the frustrating or rendering unrealizable of "*relevant* alternatives." I emphasize the word relevant due to its ambiguous nature.

Suchocki refers to these unactualized alternatives as "ideals born out of season in a time not yet ripe for their fullest realization "⁷⁰ To consider an alternative as relevant it must first be judged as such by those who feel frustrated by its lack of realization. For the alternative to continue to be considered as an "ideal

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 66.

born out of season," however, it also has to be reevaluated at some future time. This two-fold process leads to the ambiguous nature of this aspect of evil.

On the one hand, there is loss for the entity that is not able to actualize visionary ideals. As ideals they are momentarily impeded thereby creating "anguish and impatience."⁷¹ Suffering which could have been avoided results from this loss. On the other hand, there is also gain. "Such a situation becomes the motivating power toward achievement of a different actuality."⁷² There is, as Whitehead says, an " 'intermingling of Beauty and Evil.' "⁷³

To illustrate this aspect of evil Suchocki cites the attempts of Anna Oliver and Anna Howard Shaw to obtain permission to be ordained within the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1880. On the one hand, the struggles of these women had detrimental effects on their personal lives. The denial of ordination led to the early death of Oliver. Shaw was later ordained within the smaller Methodist Protestant Church but the struggle left her embittered and finally estranged from the church. On the other hand, Suchocki argues that "[t]he efforts of Oliver and Shaw, while of little effect as far as they were concerned, nonetheless surely contributed to the slow change in society whereby other women can serve where they could not."⁷⁴

This principle of evil as ideals born out of season raises questions concerning the issue of justice. While the actual entity may be used in the future in an objectively immortalized form, it has suffered in the past. But is there any hope of justice for the suffering that is experienced by the past actual entity. In other words, while the experiences of Oliver and Shaw may have been beneficial to others in the long run, do Oliver and Shaw experience some form of personal

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 67.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

justice for the suffering that they endured during their lives? Is the particularity of their personal suffering addressed in such a way that does justice to their suffering?' These questions are addressed in Chapter Four.

In sum, Suchocki argues that there are three principles of evil: "perpetual perishing, a competition of values resulting in a self-selected exclusion of possibilities, and a competition of values resulting in an other-imposed exclusion of possibilities."⁷⁵ The first stresses the way in which all actual entities participate in the process of concrescence by which they inevitably lose subjective immediacy. The second stresses the possibility of choice and the inevitable loss involved in the creative process as each actual entity must value the data prehended. All possibilities cannot be included within the entity. Choice involves inclusion but also exclusion, gain but also loss. Possibilities are often impossibilities. The actualization of one possibility involves exclusion and thus loss of others. The third principle, in turn, stresses that one's choices not only affect others but that one is in turn affected by others' choices. That which one values can be excluded from actualization not by one's choice but by that of others.

Each of these principles is "an essential component of every element of existence: every entity is finite, it involves the exclusion of alternative possibilities, and it is open to the effect of alternatives not its own."⁷⁶ The degree to which an actual entity participates in evil, however, depends on the level of determinacy that it possesses. An atom, a stone, a plant and a human being have varying levels of determinacy and therefore participate in the creation of evil in different ways.

To conclude this section I wish to summarize Suchocki's position by highlighting three key points of her argument. First, by incorporating both the

⁷⁵ Ibid., 75.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 67.

subjective and objective poles of evil. Suchocki argues that Whitehead's concept of evil provides a more balanced view of evil than the tradition has hitherto provided. The limiting principles of finitude and the freedom of the actual entity combine to form the basis of evil. As Suchocki states, " '[f]reedom in community' is the fundamental structure allowing both subjective and objective poles of evil to be held in creative tension."⁷⁷ Second, based on Whiteheadian metaphysics Suchocki understands evil as inextricably relational. Evil results from the three principles of perpetual perishing, exclusion and misbegotten ideals as all actual entities engage in the creative process of concrescence

The third point that I want to stress is that although evil is inevitable within finitude, at the human level there is a relatively high degree of choice albeit choice dependent upon the relational nature of freedom in community. In Suchocki's words, human

freedom is relative to the condition of finitude, but it is freedom nonetheless, so that the final reason for what a thing becomes is to be found within that thing and within the conditions from which it arose. Thus the subjective pole of freedom is as involved in the metaphysics of evil as is the objective pole of finitude.⁷⁸

The Nature of Sin

A study of Suchocki's major works on the nature of sin indicates that there is an ongoing development in the way in which she understands the concept. In *The End of Evil* (1988) Suchocki suggests that sin is a form of evil for which one can be held morally responsible. In her 1991 essay "Original Sin Revisited" Suchocki states her operative definition of sin as "those intents and actions that

⁷⁷ Ibid., 62.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 68.

work the ill-being of any facet of existence."⁷⁹ In *The Fall to Violence* (1994) Suchocki extends her earlier understanding of sin by proposing that "sin is unnecessary violence against any aspect of existence, whether through act or intent, whether consciously chosen or otherwise."⁸⁰ When these three definitions are taken in conjunction a number of questions arise. In what way does Suchocki define moral responsibility? What does Suchocki mean by unnecessary violence? Is there "necessary" violence that leads to injustice? Is there possibly necessary violence that does not lead to injustice? How does one participate in this violence? Why does she suggest that violence is at the root of sin? How can one's actions be called sin if they are unconsciously chosen? Does sin not involve some degree of intentionality? Moreover, we need to ask if sin is directed against the creation, what is the relationship between sin and the divine?

I want to begin answering these questions with a discussion of Suchocki's view of the dyadic nature of sin. Suchocki maintains that sin is both transpersonal and personal.⁸¹ As I discuss below, these are not mutually exclusive aspects of sin. Suchocki maintains that they need to be identified as separate terms to be able to explain fully the relationship between the individual and sin. In this section I discuss Suchocki's view of transpersonal and personal sin beginning with the former.

⁷⁹ Suchocki, "Original Sin Revisited," *Process Studies*, 20, 4 (Winter 1991), 238.

⁸⁰ Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 16.

⁸¹ Suchocki, *God-Christ-Church*, 14. In her discussion of the nature of sin Suchocki follows traditional Christian analysis of sin which establishes this dual focus of personal and transpersonal sin. 14.

Transpersonal Sin

Suchocki contends that transpersonal sin refers to destructive social conditions into which one is born. This form of sin is referred to as "transpersonal" for no one actual entity can be held directly responsible for the creation of these conditions. The creation of these conditions goes *beyond* individual accountability.

In *God-Christ-Church* Suchocki develops the concept of transpersonal sin in terms of "original sin" and the "demonic." Suchocki's development of these terms, as determined by her reliance on process thought, differs, however, from traditional Christian usage. In Suchocki's view original sin refers "to that which precedes the individual and is greater than the individual."⁸² Suchocki, therefore, uses the term original in the sense of antecedent or prior. As with Ruether,⁸³ for Suchocki the term does not carry connotations found in, for example, the Augustinian tradition, of a primary or unique event that ushered sin into a previously sinless world, which was void of evil and death.

Original sin, in Suchocki's view, "describes the human condition in which we find ourselves; it is the stage upon which we play out the drama of our human lives."⁸⁴ Original sin refers to the complexity of inherited social, cultural, economic and political structures which are already in place before one's birth. Suchocki interprets original sin as "inherited structures of consciousness, acting as socially sanctioned norms, that assume the ill-being of earth or any of its inhabitants."⁸⁵ These structures create social conditions that are preexistent to

⁸² Ibid., 16.

⁸³ See Chapter One.

⁸⁴ Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 161.

⁸⁵ Suchocki, "Original Sin Revisited," 238.

one's personal influence or responsibility. As part of an intrinsically relational world each individual inherits the sinfulness which results from social structures.⁸⁶

While the term "original sin" describes the destructive conditions into which one is born, the term "demonic" refers to the *power* that is derived from original sin as an inherited condition. Unlike theological views which Suchocki claims have projected the powers that make up the transpersonal aspect of sin "away from ourselves as a nonhuman being, [onto] a devil, whose temptation of humanity in its very beginnings resulted in transgression and original sin,"⁸⁷ Suchocki argues that process theology "suggests a more tragic view, naming the cumulative acts of human beings in society as the source of the demonic."⁸⁸ Original sin is, consequently, demonic because of the "confluence of many powers, some remote and some near, all of which create an environment that will pressure toward destruction."⁸⁹ The power of the demonic is its ability to affect the process of concrescence not for, but against, well-being.

Suchocki stresses that it is because of this demonic force that a reappropriation of the concept of original sin is necessary. Without such a concept, the onus of sin falls solely upon the individual, neglecting the fact that we are born into a world that has been determined by actions other than our own. Some of these actions are destructive of human well-being, that is to say, some are evil. Resultant social structures embody and perpetuate this evil. No single individual

⁸⁶ Suchocki also differentiates her view from that e.g., of Sigmund Freud. Suchocki writes that "Freud speaks of a primal murder, as does his more recent follower Rene Girard. But my intent is not to posit an original violent act, which in effect follows the same dynamics as looking for an original Adam and Eve." *The Fall to Violence*, 29.

⁸⁷ Suchocki, *God-Christ-Church*, 15. Suchocki does not clarify to which views she is referring and whether she understands these views of the demonic as entailing, for example, a principle independent of God, an aspect of God, or a fallen, created being.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 16.

can be held responsible for the sins produced by these structures. The individualization of sin trivializes the concept, thereby divesting it of meaning. Suchocki argues that the concept of original sin is consequently indispensable within Christian theology, an essential doctrine to understand freedom within community.

As I discussed in Chapter One, traditionally original sin is understood in terms of "the fall" from perfection as developed within the Augustinian tradition. While Suchocki suggests that "[w]hile we cannot use the myth of Adam and its corporate corruption,"⁹⁰ as it developed with traditional Christianity, she nevertheless contends that the myth holds an essential meaning inasmuch as it reflects that there is "a corporate human condition preceding and affecting each individual."⁹¹ It is this corporate condition that needs to be reformulated in terms that are meaningful today.

In *The Fall to Violence* Suchocki develops her concept of original sin more fully. She extends her definition of original sin to include

a bent toward violence through our evolution, the interwoven relationality that creates a solidarity to the human race, and the temporal structures of intersubjectivity through which we inherit assumptions concerning how we interpret, value and act in our world.⁹²

Each part of this tripartite definition of original sin brings with it one or more important developments in Suchocki's thought. I want to discuss briefly those which are most pertinent to the present work beginning with those developments which arise out of her concept of a bent toward violence through our evolution.

Suchocki maintains that part of our inheritance as social beings who are compelled to act within a relational and evolutionary is the inclination to violence.

⁹⁰ Suchocki, "Original Sin Revisited," 233.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 13.

In fact, Suchocki contends that "innate human aggressiveness and its corollary violence are the basis of sin, and that God's continuing creative call is toward a spirituality that embraces the well-being of all things."⁹³ Suchocki draws on four thinkers to "connect the religious and secular analysis of violence in relation to evolution."⁹⁴ The second century theologian Irenaeus (d. c. 202), and the nineteenth century theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher provide her with an early and later formulation of an evolutionary model of the emergence of sin within the Christian tradition. The contemporary physicist and student of archeological research Christoph Wassermann, and the contemporary ethologist Irenaeus Eibl-Eibesfeldt provide "a more empirical grounding to the intuitions of [Irenaeus and Schleiermacher] concerning the role of sin in the evolving history of the human race."⁹⁵

Suchocki argues that Irenaeus provides an early evolutionary model within the Christian tradition. Irenaeus's view differs from the Augustinian formulation in that he understands the whole of the human race as undergoing a process of development.⁹⁶ In his attempt to "account for the universality of sin and suffering... he did so by considering the human race as a whole to be in its infancy."⁹⁷ Born in the "image" of God creation passes through a painful process to become the "likeness" of God. Christ, as a healing and empowering model, revealed to humankind the nature of God's likeness.⁹⁸

⁹³ Ibid., 87.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 92.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ The Irenaean tradition, which emphasizes sin as the result of finitude, is often contrasted to the Augustinian tradition which emphasizes free-will. See e.g., John Hicks "An Irenaean Theodicy," Stephen Davis, ed., *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 40-52.

⁹⁷ Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 87.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

While Suchocki draws on Irenaeus as an early Christian example of understanding human nature in terms of an evolutionary process, she draws in turn on Schleiermacher to provide a similar yet more contemporary understanding of the development of human nature. "Like Irenaeus," Suchocki writes, "Schleiermacher saw our physical beginnings as existing for the sake of that which could emerge from physical existence, which is to say, the God-consciousness of spirituality."⁹⁹ Suchocki states that Schleiermacher suggests that sin and evil result from the struggle that ensues as the creation evolved from self-centeredness to God-consciousness.¹⁰⁰

Suchocki states that within the evolutionary process, as put forth by Schleiermacher, "physicality precedes spirituality, and is its necessary foundation."¹⁰¹ The physical world exists prior to the development of the consciousness of the actual entities which exist within the world. Consciousness arises out of the physical world. The greater the consciousness, the more aware the actual entity is of its relationship to the world. For Schleiermacher

[t]he human predicament is that the nascent spirituality is much weaker than the long-established self-centeredness... this precedence of the physical nature and subsequent difficulty of the emerging spiritual nature functioned in the role of original sin.¹⁰²

While Irenaeus and Schleiermacher provide theological and philosophical support for Suchocki's view of the evolutionary development of human nature, she maintains that Wassermann and Eibl-Eibesfeldt empirically ground Irenaeus's and Schleiermacher's intuitions "concerning the role of sin in the evolving history of the human race."¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Ibid., 88.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 89.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 93.

¹⁰² Ibid., 89.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Suchocki argues that Wassermann and Eibl-Eibesfeldt concur that "human survival necessarily entailed violence, but that violence itself was ambiguous, yielding life-enhancing as well as life-destroying behaviour."¹⁰⁴ She contends that in his essay "The Evolutionary Understanding of Man and the Problem of Evil"¹⁰⁵ Wassermann "carries the evolutionary theory further through the archaeological evidence suggesting that our long physical struggle depended integrally, if ambiguously, on the fact of human violence."¹⁰⁶ Suchocki argues that Eibl-Eibesfeldt, in his work *Love and Hate*, "gives a descriptive analysis of the contemporary phenomenon of aggression throughout life."¹⁰⁷ Suchocki writes that in Eibl-Eibesfeldt's view

living creatures possess instincts toward aggression and instincts toward social bonding. The first yields violence, whether toward those beyond or within the kin group, and he argues convincingly that there is no living species without violent behaviour. The

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Christoph Wassermann, "The Evolutionary Understanding of Man and the Problem of Evil." H. May, ed., *Kooperation und Wettbewerb: Zur Ethik und Biologie menschlichen Sozialverhaltens* (Loccumer Protokolle Bd. 75, 1989).

¹⁰⁶ Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 90. Wassermann develops "four major transitions in the evolution of humankind, seeing in each a double-edged consequence holding new forms of good and evil." The four transitions include: 1) the prehistoric period of three million years ago. Wassermann suggests that during this period two types of hominoids inhabited the African continent, a larger vegetarian type and a smaller meat-eater. He argues that during the drought period of the end of the Pliocene and the beginning of the Pleistocene period the mobile nomadic hunters survived. 2) Lower Pleistocene era. Wassermann traces the development of the hunting and gathering period, which also depended upon violent death. "At the same time, however, tool-making also marked an advance through greater complexity of existence and greater possibilities for stability of existence." 3) Transition to Neolithic age. Neolithic age which developed farming and the domestication of animals. Two key developments during this latter period were the nurturing of animals before slaughter, and the use of slavery as an alternative to killing nonkinship groups. As society becomes more complex the way in which violence is used also develops. 4) The introduction of urbanism. Wassermann indicates that through "new behavioural patterns of codes of law and warfare...[that] once again, the increase in the human ability to inflict violent death was integrally related to the human ability to evolve more complex forms of social life." 90-91.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 90.

second is a general drive within individuals to seek and maintain some form of closeness with another.¹⁰⁸

Through his study of innate behavior patterns of birds, animals and humans Eibl-Eibesfeldt concludes that the "universality of the responses indicates that the manner of response is coded within the physiological structures of the species."¹⁰⁹ Eibl-Eibesfeldt argues that we therefore inherit not only the instinct for aggression but also specific patterns of aggressive responses.

Suchocki stresses that "the force of Eibl-Eibesfeldt's work is his demonstration of the universality and physiological basis of aggressive instincts in human life, and the strong implication that these instincts derive from our own evolutionary history."¹¹⁰ Suchocki argues that internalized violent tendencies are mitigated by the instinct toward social bonding. Violence and bonding are therefore always in tension.

If we turn now to the second part of Suchocki's definition of original sin, the interwoven relationality that provides solidarity within the human race, we can see another development in Suchocki's thought. Suchocki argues that sin through human solidarity refers to the ontological fact of human connectedness or relationality. We sin "in our solidarity with the human race."¹¹¹ Sin is not an isolated act. Sin is relational

When Suchocki argues that sin is relational her understanding of relationality is indeed complex. Suchocki insists that "what happens in one entity has an effect on all entities."¹¹² Consequently in her view the sin of one is *felt* by all. Through this theory of what might be referred to as "radical relationality"

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 91-2.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 92.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 93.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 101.

¹¹² Suchocki *The Fall to Violence*, 104.

Suchocki is extending the notion of prehension, of one actual entity feeling another, to include all actual entities feeling or prehending all other actual entities albeit some more immediately and vividly than others.

Suchocki, however, qualifies the ontic fact of being bound up in one another's good by suggesting that the prehension of all actual entities goes beyond "what our consciousness is capable of handling."¹¹³ In other words, while an actual entity feels or prehends all other actual entities, it is not fully conscious of its own feelings. Suchocki contends that "a responsive anxiety is the half-way house between unconscious and conscious experiences of sin as mediated through the solidarity of the race."¹¹⁴ This raises, however, a serious question. If, as Suchocki admits, "one is not conscious of the violence, then what difference does it make?"¹¹⁵

Suchocki argues that although one may not be conscious of the details of the act of violence, "the subliminal experience of violence gives rise to an existential anxiety."¹¹⁶ Unlike Reinhold Niebuhr's view that anxiety is the cause of violence, Suchocki maintains that anxiety is produced in response to an inherently violent world. Suchocki asserts that

[v]iolence, not mortality, is the source of the anxiety that lies just beyond the edges of the human consciousness. Proximity to violence pushes anxiety into awareness. Whether experienced consciously or subconsciously, anxiety over violence combines with our own individual bent toward violence, increasing the probability of sin.¹¹⁷

Suchocki is not just suggesting that violence directed against the individual is felt by the individual but that *any* violence against the world, *any* injustice against the world, produces a subconscious response in the form of anxiety. Suchocki,

¹¹³ Ibid., 105.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 101.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 106.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 107.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 163.

however, does not clarify what she means by subconscious experiences of sin other than that they exist and produce anxiety.

Despite the murkiness of this limited explanation of anxiety produced by subconscious experiences of sin, I think that this is a notable development in her work. As I discuss in Chapter Four, Suchocki's vision of the process of liberation depends on the ability of entities toprehend each other fully. As I indicate, however, complete prehension can only occur within God. In her understanding of sin through human solidarity Suchocki seems, however, to be suggesting that the human capacity for complete prehension is present within finitude, albeit limited inasmuch as the entity is not aware of this capacity within finitude. The implication of this point is that the difference between finitude and infinity, between earth and the realm of God, is not one of kind but of degree. While all existence is related, this can only be fully comprehended when the entity is totally contained within God, which can only happen upon death. I come back to this point in Chapter Four.

There is one last point that I wish to consider regarding Suchocki's understanding of original sin. This point pertains to the third part of her definition, the temporal structures of intersubjectivity. Suchocki maintains that despite the power of the social circumstances into which one is born, this power does not negate individual responsibility. While one is born into a network of social structures and institutions, that is to say, one is born into socially inherited sin, Suchocki suggests that what makes this sin and not merely evil, i.e., that which is destructive but that which one cannot control and for that which one is not responsible, is the individual's ability to transcend the circumstances through the power of self-transcendence.

While the concept of transpersonal sin relieves the individual of the full responsibility of social sin, it does not mean that the individual is unable to respond to the demonic powers of social sin. On the contrary, Suchocki argues that members of any given group have it within their own personal ability to transcend demonic power. Since the individual has the possibility to do good, Suchocki argues that "[a]s in a Kantian model, the possibility to do good is the responsibility to do good."¹¹⁸ Self-transcendence, which I discuss in detail below, is the means by which one recognizes original sin. The human ability of self-transcendence also brings with it personal culpability, that is personal sin.

Personal Sin

Suchocki argues that the concept of "personal" sin presupposes individual accountability. If we are cast into a world already full of sin, how can we be individually responsible? One, for sure, cannot be held accountable for one's actions if one has not had the opportunity to act with some degree of freedom. With Niebuhr, Suchocki states that while "sins arise from the condition of sin," that is to say that sins arise from the systems that propagate sin, individual freedom exists to transcend these conditions.¹¹⁹ Suchocki holds that the Whiteheadian model of creativity as discussed above not only indicates the inevitability of evil but also the possibility of freedom within finitude. Although the power of the demonic is greater than the individual in that the individual finds herself immersed within

¹¹⁸ Suchocki, *The End of Evil*, 129.

¹¹⁹ Suchocki, "Original Sin Revisited," 237.

power structures without prior consent. Suchocki contends that "[t]here is always a wedge of novelty that entails a degree of freedom and responsibility."¹²⁰

Suchocki's concept of personal sin stresses free will, or the subjective pole of evil. Free will, however, cannot be separated from the objective pole of evil, the limitations within which the actual entity acts. As I discussed above, these limitations are determined by the basic metaphysical principles of perpetual perishing, exclusion and misbegotten ideals. Through the confluence of former human activity specific limitations are imposed upon the individual.

Suchocki develops her concept of freedom in terms of the basic process of concrescence as described above. Three points concerning this process need to be restated here. First, through the process of concrescence all actual entities prehend the available data of the past in their act of creating the future. Second, actual entities respond to the past by evaluating the data which they prehend or feel. Third, within creation there are varying degrees of freedom which determine the nature of this process for each actual entity.

Because of the highly relational nature of existence, freedom is exercised from within the complexity of relationships. Suchocki goes one step further, however, and insists that freedom *is* the basis of relationships. "The very possibility of relationships," Suchocki maintains, "depends upon the ability to respond to relationships and that this 'response-ability' is at the core of every moment of our lives."¹²¹ There is no level of existence that does not have some level of "response-ability." The degree, however, varies from "minuscule indeterminism on a chain that includes, at its other end, what we call human

¹²⁰ Suchocki, *God-Christ-Church*, 17.

¹²¹ Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 132.

freedom."¹²² In human beings the level of freedom is at its greatest as one responds in the present to the past in view of future possibilities. Freedom as "present perceptions of what can be done have an influence on what *will* be done."¹²³

The ability to respond begins with the child's first "why?" Through this questioning, Suchocki suggests,

is the beginning of self-transcendence, for recognizing structures is seeing them as being in some respect differentiated from the self. The marvel of this occurrence is that the structures that are differentiated from the self yet form the self; for this reason, a questioning of the structures is already self-transcendence.¹²⁴

Suchocki therefore suggests that freedom resides in the ontological nature of being. In Suchocki's view original sin becomes personal sin and one becomes accountable for one's actions "when freedom to transcend the structures of well-being is present and one does not transcend these structures."¹²⁵ When one lives as if one has no power over the past, one is living under the power of the demonic. "The demonic consumes the past and denies any future but its own perpetuation, under the illusion that the future must be only more of the same."¹²⁶

Suchocki recognizes that there is a "Catch 22" in all of this. That is to say

personal action depends upon structures of consciousness which themselves involve seeds of their own transcendence. The possibility for self-transcendence through questioning one's structured norms creates the responsibility and therefore the guilt that is entailed in the transition from original sin to sins. However- and we are again in a "Catch 22" - in the nature of the case, we inherit structures of consciousness from our birth onward, and hence by the time questioning is possible, the destructive norms are already internalized. The combined power of intersubjectivity creates the grooves of subjectivity.¹²⁷

122 Ibid.

123 Ibid., 134.

124 Ibid., 136.

125 Ibid., 130. Suchocki suggests that there are three forms of guilt: "ontological guilt incurred through solidarity with the human race, or passive guilt through failure to transcend boundaries that work ill-being, or active guilt through personal participation in acts of psychic or physical violence." Ibid., 142.

126 Suchocki, *God-Christ-Church*, 18.

127 Suchocki, "Original Sin Revisited," 243.

While Suchocki admits to the circularity of her argument, she nevertheless maintains that it is through the power of self-transcendence that new forms of well-being can be established.

Suchocki argues that self-transcendence is an inherent aspect of the human self. In her view self-transcendence cannot be viewed as solely atemporal, other-worldly experiences. Suchocki maintains that self-transcendence is "extraordinarily ordinary, qualifying every existent reality."

It does not provide the vantage point of a lofty perspective surveying the universe from above. It does provide, through the very thoroughness of its relationality, a vantage point that transcends the rest of the world through its uniqueness, even when it relates to the rest of the world through its relativity. It may indeed survey the universe from within.¹²⁸

Suchocki contends that there are three fundamental characteristics of the self which permit self-transcendence within finitude: memory, empathy, and imagination. The "failure of one or more of these modes of self-transcendence" is the basis of the violation of well-being, in other words, the basis of sin.

Violating another through the failure of memory, empathy or imagination, or sinning, always occurs within the confines of relationships. Since relationships occur within the world by selves who are agents of self-transcendence, the ability to sin depends on the self as an actual entity which is "constituted as historical."¹²⁹ It is through the transcendent capacity of memory that the self can be referred to as historical. Memory provides the self with the capacity to be conscious of its relationship to others and to the otherness of its own past. Memory therefore "is entailed in the very constitution of self-consciousness"¹³⁰ as it "evolves through one's relation to one's past, and the creation of one's historicity."¹³¹

¹²⁸ Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 34.

¹²⁹ Ibid. 37.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 39.

¹³¹ Ibid., 41.

Empathy, the second form of self-transcendence, "relates to the *how* of one's response."¹³² Self-transcendence through empathy "entails a regard for the other as the other, openness to the other as subject, and the transformation of the self."¹³³ Empathy as an effective means of transcendence consequently demands one of two scenarios: first, that one does not absolutize the self, that is, that one acknowledges the 'otherness' of others, and second, that one does not absolutize the other, thereby disregarding the self. "Transcendence through empathy is a present phenomenon created through relation to the other as subjective other."¹³⁴

While transcendence through memory emphasizes the past and transcendence through empathy emphasizes the present, transcendence through imagination in turn emphasizes the future by calling "upon the novelty of that which may yet be."¹³⁵ Imagination entails "a projective phase, [of the creative process] wherein the completed reality participates with the rest of the universe in calling new realities into being".¹³⁶

As a historical agent with the transcendent capacities of memory, empathy, and imagination, the self is "created through the successiveness of its continually emerging transcendence."¹³⁷ The ability for self-transcendence allows the actual entity to become, in a way unique to human existence, as the actual entity prehends and makes effective choices.

As indicated above, Suchocki maintains that sin is not simply a result of choice. There are situations in which one must make choices which do not always allow for a "good" choice. Suchocki cites a poignant example from William

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

Styron's novel *Sophie's Choice*. On her arrival at Auschwitz Sophie has to decide which of her two children is to stay with her and which is to be sent directly to the gas chambers.¹³⁸ In this case while a choice has to be made there is no "good" choice which enhances the well-being of all. Life presents numerous instances where, as in Sophie's case, choice results in conflict within finitude.

The "sin" that Sophie commits is bound to the circumstances in which she finds herself, circumstances over which she has little control, but nevertheless must act within. The entity's freedom, its ability to make choices, is never carried out in solitude but is always situated within community. Although an entity's choices ultimately determines what that entity will become, the nature of the possible choices depends upon the social environment which establishes the limitations of freedom. "No actuality's value can be determined solely upon its own grounds in a relational universe."¹³⁹ Sin therefore is always relational. Sin follows "inevitably from freedom within community."¹⁴⁰

It is the nature of finitude to create an arena whereby value comes into existence. From the alternatives offered, an individual values and chooses within the context of relationships. "The relation to others is essential to every being, and therefore one's meaning of goodness or evil must finally be reckoned not on the basis of the single entity alone, but upon the basis of the entity and its relationships."¹⁴¹

I want to stress three points here. First, Suchocki views sin as inevitable. Inherently relational existence means that although one may try to avoid sinning,

¹³⁸ William Styron, *Sophie's Choice* (New York: Randon House, 1976), 483-484.

¹³⁹ Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 70.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 75.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 71.

there will be circumstances under which one will act in such a way which will not enhance well-being. Second, Suchocki argues that sin which is the "unnecessary violation of this interdependence"¹⁴² in a relational world is first and foremost a sin against the creation. Sin against the creation can be in the form of violence against the self, others or against nature.¹⁴³ Third, Suchocki argues that since one cannot avoid sinning against the world, one cannot avoid sinning against God.

Up until this point in this work I have said very little about Suchocki's view of the nature of God and God's relationship to the world. In this section of this chapter I wish to discuss briefly Suchocki's understanding of these topics. To discuss Suchocki's understanding of the nature of God and God's relationship to the world it is necessary to draw once again on the Whiteheadian process terminology that I introduced earlier in this chapter.

The Nature of God

As I indicated above, in Whitehead's view all existence demonstrates relational dynamics that are determined by metaphysical principles. Within this view of existence, God is no exception to the metaphysical principles that determine existence. As Whitehead states, "God is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save their collapse. He is their chief exemplification."¹⁴⁴

Whitehead maintains that God, like all actual entities, has a dipolar nature comprised of a mental and a physical pole. God, however, differs from other

¹⁴² Ibid., 43.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 521.

actual entities in that God's dipolar nature is the reverse of that in other entities.¹⁴⁵ Whereas in the finite entity the mental pole refers to "an aspect of the actual entity which responds to what is given,"¹⁴⁶ the mental pole in God, also known as God's primordial nature, refers to 'God's grasp of all possibilities. This grasp involves an ordering evaluation of possibilities into a harmony that is called the primordial vision, or primordial envisagement.'¹⁴⁷

Whereas in the case of the creatures the mental pole presupposes the physical pole; in the case of God the physical presupposes the mental. That is, for actual entities within finitude, the "mental" pole depends on the creatures' coming to terms with the stubborn facts that characterize the environment in which they find themselves "thrust" as they envision the particular possibilities that emerge from their particular, limiting situation.

In the case of the divine, God grasps from all eternity the wealth of pure possibilities prior to and presupposed by the subsequent actualization of any particular possibilities. All specific actualizations, divine or otherwise, presuppose God's original and abiding envisagement, which Whitehead refers to as God's primordial nature.¹⁴⁸

While God's primordial nature contains all possibilities, God has no knowledge of the way in which any given actual entity will act. This is not because God's knowledge is deficient. God's knowledge, however, has to be understood

¹⁴⁵ For a discussion of the way in which Suchocki develops the concept of God's dipolar nature in relation to other process thinkers see "The Metaphysical Ground of the Whiteheadian God," *Process Studies*, 5, 4 (Winter 1975), 237.

¹⁴⁶ Sherburne, *A Key to Whitehead's Process and Reality*, 228.

¹⁴⁷ Suchocki, *The End of Evil*, 177.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 136.

in terms of reality as consisting of what is and what might or might not be. That is, God's knowledge needs to be understood in terms of actuality and potentiality.

God knows all that has been actualized, and God knows all potentialities for actualization. It needs to be made clear that Suchocki is not suggesting that God has a specific vision of a particular world that God wants to see actualized. Suchocki contrasts Whitehead's view with that of Leibniz. Leibniz argues that God envisions *the* best of all possible worlds, implying that God has a specific vision of the way in which the world is to be. Whitehead argues that God envisions "the best possible for *any* world."¹⁴⁹ God's initial aim "yields a particular possibility for what the new occasion might become."¹⁵⁰ This possibility is qualitative not quantitative. While God "is the organ of novelty,"¹⁵¹ God does not have a specific vision but lures the world in terms of creating a unity founded on adventure, zest, truth, beauty and peace. As Suchocki maintains, "[t]hus the vision [of God] is as much a matter of *how* the possibilities are held together as it is what is held together."¹⁵²

God's subjective aim toward the realization of possibilities is clothed with the feeling for harmony, implying or containing within that feeling the intent toward adventure, zest, truth, beauty, and peace—qualitative feelings which can be manifested in an infinite variety of ways. The Whiteheadian valuation in its qualitative sense refers not to a previsioned world, but to qualities which would work to the ultimate enhancement of *any* world.¹⁵³

While affirming that God provides the initial aim in terms of potentiality within finitude, Suchocki writes that

{w}hat the entity becomes, then, depends finally upon that entity, given the parameters set down from its past and the possibilities relevant to its future. But its becoming is always the actualization of a possibility, whether that one optimally presented by God, or some

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 177. Emphasis added.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 176.

¹⁵¹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 116.

¹⁵² Suchocki, *The End of Evil*, 118.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 119.

suggested alternative actualized instead. Once the entity becomes, it is itself a force generating an effect. And God, as well as the world, receives that effect.¹⁵⁴

God's dependence on the actualization of the possibilities is the physical pole or consequent nature of God. The physical pole is "consequent" for two reasons. First, because "it follows from the primordial nature in God, and second, because, it follows from the actual happenings in the world."¹⁵⁵

In Suchocki's view, God is dependent on the world for the manifestation of particularities. This is not to say that in Suchocki's view God is the creation in a pantheistic sense, but that God is both in the world and separate from the world. God therefore relates to the world panentheistically. God is directly and internally affected by that which occurs within finitude, as God *incorporates* into God that which occurs within finitude, and gives back to the world that which the world must now use to help create well-being within the world. The emancipative process not only creates well-being within the world, but it also facilitates the completion of God. Without the world God is only potentiality. God is not complete. God is, as Whitehead suggests, "deficiently actual."¹⁵⁶

Consequently, while God is eternal, God is not static. God therefore not only depends on the world to manifest particularities, God also depends on the world to create an eternal yet ever-changing divine harmony.

The harmony of God is a harmony involving the particularity which has been achieved through the multiple creativity of the finite world. Since occasions are constantly being

¹⁵⁴ Suchocki, *God-Christ-Church*, 33.

¹⁵⁵ Suchocki, *The End of Evil*, 176.

¹⁵⁶ Whitehead writes that God "is not *before* all creation, but *with* all creation. But, as primordial, so far is he from 'eminent reality,' that in this abstraction he is 'deficiently actual' - and this in two ways. His feelings are only conceptual and so lack the fullness of actuality. Secondly, conceptual feelings, apart from complex integration with physical feelings, are devoid of consciousness in their subjective forms." *Process and Reality*, 521.

multiplied, the harmony is dynamic; there can be no static pattern of divine harmony since the pattern changes with every prehension.¹⁵⁷

God therefore prehends all actualities within God's self. Although all occasions are accepted and none are rejected, this does not occur indiscriminately. God always prehends, or feels, "the world in the full consciousness of purposive valuation."¹⁵⁸ God values all occasions in relation to God's own purposes, i.e., in terms of God's initial aim. As I indicated above, God's initial aim is not quantitative but qualitative. Each occasion is valued not only for itself as self, but also for its capacity to help unify the many occasions that God receives into God's being. As Suchocki explains, "the evaluative vision of God is a complex unity, where possibilities are so ordered that their way of combining is the intensity which is itself a manifestation of adventure, zest, truth, beauty and peace."¹⁵⁹

In Suchocki's view therefore "relationality occurs on the divine level through God's feelings of the world, integrated with God's vision of harmonized possibilities."¹⁶⁰ God is not totally separate from the world but is in constant relation with the world offering possibilities, luring entities toward divine purposes, yet God is dependent on the world for the actualization of possibilities. God receives all into God's self, values all in relation to God's aim and lures the world forward in relation to the existent but ever-changing harmony. This is in effect the redemptive aspect of the process of liberation. I discuss this aspect of the process of liberation in detail in Chapter Four.

How, then, does God's nature relate to the question of sin? Suchocki maintains that sin and subsequent injustice which creates undue suffering is first an

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. This refers to the redemptive activity of God. See Chapter Four.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 143.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 118.

¹⁶⁰ Suchocki, *God-Christ-Church*, 253.

act of rebellion against creation. By viewing sin primarily in terms of injustice within the world Suchocki is by no means discounting sin against God.

I indicated above that in Suchocki's view God contains within God's self all the possibilities that may be actualized within the world, as well as all the actualizations of the world. God therefore has full knowledge of what is, what was, and of what *may* be. Suchocki argues that it is "precisely the fullness of God's knowledge of the world that is the basis of maintaining that violation of the world is violation of God as well."¹⁶¹

How can Suchocki move from the assertion that God has full knowledge of the world to say that the fullness of God's knowledge is the basis for maintaining that violation of the world is also the violation of God? As we have seen, God, as understood within the process model, is anything but exempt from relationality. God is "providential energy" affecting every emerging act by acting as a source of guidance. God provides the initial aim, the lure to the best possible future within the limitations of the present as the entity unifies the past with the possibilities of the future to create the actual moment of the present.

Suchocki argues that as actual entities experience the process of concrescence and God takes all into God's self, God is affected by that which the world has created. This is where the process theist's concept of God differs from that of the traditional theist. What is perhaps most original about process theism is that it emphasizes the reciprocity between God and the world. God affects the world as traditional metaphysics also grants. In process theism the world, however, also affects God, thereby introducing change, becoming and suffering

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 54.

into God. Traditional theism does not admit to this view of God since change within God indicates imperfection within the divine.

Moreover, the process theist and traditional theist both say that God loves the world. However, for the latter love is equated with agency, that is, doing something to and for the other. For the former, love equals both agency and receptivity. God not only gives to the world, but also allows the world to give to God's self, that is, God receives from and responds to the world. There is thus a literal sense in which the creature is given the opportunity to serve and glorify God. When an actual entity has sinned against another actual entity by not promoting its well-being, God receives the effects of this experience within God's self, and this experience affects God. Suchocki emphasizes that sin against God is not "a primal violation of a command,"¹⁶² but a "primal violation of well-being."¹⁶³

It is at this point that Suchocki diverges from the more common view of process thought that identifies sin "as deviation from God's initial aim"¹⁶⁴ which identifies sin as first an action against God. This is a position that Suchocki does not champion. Suchocki presents four reasons against this position:

1) the intent of the aim must be influential rather than determinative; 2) the aim is already contextualized, so that it relates to the actual conditions of the world and not an idealized condition unrelated to the world, 3) the aim is not for a single good, but actually is more complex than that, and can imply multiple goods, each of which can yield different judgments in terms of what might be called "best"; 4) not all deviations from initial aims can be counted as sin.¹⁶⁵

Suchocki suggests that what is missing from the traditional process understanding of sin, and which in turn provides the basis of correction for its position, is the factor of "unnecessary violence"¹⁶⁶ within the creation. Sin as the unnecessary

¹⁶² Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 64.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 57.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

violation of well-being within creation has an effect upon God. Suchocki contends that in terms of God's initial aim the "interpretation of sin as being against God becomes less what one has done with God's aim and more with what one has done to God as God receives the effects of one's deeds into God's own experience."¹⁶⁷ Sin against creation is consequently sin against God because, in the simplest of terms, when one sins against creation one *affects* God, as God takes this creative activity into God's self. The violation of well-being of the creation leads directly to the violation of well-being of God. One cannot sin directly against God only indirectly. As Suchocki writes,

humankind is in rebellion against the fullness of well-being for creation, and that acts against God follow indirectly as a result of this primal rebellion against creation. Rebellion against creation constitutes humans as sinners, and even God feels the effects.¹⁶⁸

In sum, Suchocki offers three criteria by which it is possible to call actions sin: "1] these actions should not have happened, 2] there is human responsibility for these actions, 3] there is an alternative vision for how interdependent human beings can resolve disputes."¹⁶⁹ Moreover in Suchocki's view sin disavows well-being, first against the creation and only secondly and by extension against God.

Before I leave this discussion of Suchocki's view of oppression there is one other aspect of her thought that needs to be considered briefly. Suchocki contends that sin against God entails a "primal violation of well-being."¹⁷⁰ But how, in fact, does she measure well-being? What criterion does she use to gauge whether well-being is present in any given situation?

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 162.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 45.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 64.

Suchocki discusses the concept of well-being most fully in *The Fall to Violence*.¹⁷¹ Beginning with her definition of sin as "rebellion against well-being of any aspect of existence" Suchocki proposes that the criterion needed to measure the degree of well-being must "be located within the whole of existence."¹⁷² That is to say the criterion to identify well-being must refer to an interdependent world, a relational God and the togetherness of the world and God.¹⁷³

Suchocki states that there are two basic problems which arise in trying to establish all-inclusiveness as the criterion for well-being. The first she puts in terms of Whitehead's phrase, "[l]ife is robbery."¹⁷⁴

All life, and not just human life, lives through the destruction of other life, whether that be animal or vegetable. How can "well-being" serve as a concept for measuring sin, if in fact our very existence depends upon the destruction, and therefore the ill-being, of other life?¹⁷⁵

While the first problem that Suchocki cites arises at the most basic level of creaturely biological interdependence, the second problem arises at the cultural level. Well-being, Suchocki admits, "is a culturally dependent concept."¹⁷⁶ The way in which well-being is understood culturally reflects different religious approaches to the concept of sin. This raises the question whether "sin is in fact a

¹⁷¹ See Chapter Four, "The Criterion of Well-being," 66-80.

¹⁷² Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 66.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*,

¹⁷⁵ Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 67. Suchocki's emphasis on the basic biological interdependence of the world and thus the destructiveness of nature is poignantly exemplified by Ernest Becker in his work *Escape from Evil*. Becker writes that "[l]ife cannot go on without the mutual devouring of organisms. If at the end of each person's life, he were to be presented with the living spectacle of all that he had organismically incorporated in order to stay alive, he might well feel horrified by the living energy he had ingested. The horizon of a gourmet, or even the average person, might be taken up with hundreds of chickens, flocks of lambs and sheep, a small herd of steers, sties full of pigs, and rivers of fish. To paraphrase Elias Canetti, each organism raises its head over a field of corpses, smiles into the sun, and declares life good." Ernest Becker, *Escape From Evil* (Free Press: New York, 1975), 2.

¹⁷⁶ Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 67.

culturally limited concept, with no application between cultures?"¹⁷⁷ If the concept of sin cannot be applied between cultures, does this mean that the concept of well-being is also limited in its intercultural application?

Having presented the problems which challenge the possibility of inclusive well-being, Suchocki, nevertheless, contends that the concept of inclusive well-being needs to be used as an *ideal*. Suchocki finds a precedent within the Christian tradition for the ideal of inclusive well-being in Julian of Norwich's statement "[t]hat all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well."¹⁷⁸ There are, however, two problems with respect to Suchocki's argument.

The first problem pertains to Suchocki's use of Julian's statement. Although Suchocki quotes this phrase throughout her work *The Fall to Violence*, she does not qualify her use of it. This gives the impression that Suchocki and Julian share the same understanding of the phrase "and all shall be well." While Suchocki develops the notion of *universal* well-being which is fulfilled through the interrelationship between God and the divine, Julian does not.

In Julian's view the phrase "and all shall be well" does not refer to inclusive reconciliation, as does Suchocki's view, but to a vision of retributive justice. In her work *Showings* Julian states that

[o]ur faith is founded on God's word, and it belongs to our faith that we believe that God's word will be preserved in all things. And one article of our faith is that many creatures will be damned, such as the angels who fell out of heaven because of pride, who are now devils, and many men upon earth who die out of the faith of Holy Church, that is to say those who are pagans and many who have received baptism and who live unchristian lives and so die out of God's love. All these will be eternally condemned to hell, as Holy Church teaches me to believe.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, Edmund Colledge, O.S.A., & James Walsh, S.J., trans., (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 151.

As will become clearer in my discussion of Suchocki's view of the process of liberation, Suchocki's and Julian's eschatological visions are very much at odds. It seems therefore to weaken Suchocki's argument to draw on, albeit a catchy rhetorical phrase, one that she uses very much out of context, and one which in fact counters her own vision of the process of liberation.

The second and much more serious problem with Suchocki's understanding of the concept of well-being is that while she is able to address the problem of "life as robbery" in terms of the process of concrescence, she reduces the problem of pluralism to the position that the concept of well-being is a useful "ideal."

While Suchocki acknowledges that there are significantly different cultural and religious views of well-being, she argues that "[t]here may be no resolution short of heated debate over the immediate issues [that is, how God's truth, love and beauty are equally represented in the Christian and the Hindu traditions]."¹⁸⁰ She therefore contends that the focus should not be on the *reason* for suffering, which she suggests is "for the sake of eventual well-being"¹⁸¹ but on "the *ideal* represented by the goal."¹⁸²

That is, each religious system and/or cultural system tends toward endorsement of some idealized form of well-being, and it is in that teleological or eschatological formulation that the recognizable marks of truth, love, and beauty will be found.¹⁸³

Suchocki insists that the ideal represented by the goal will help to ascertain true manifestations of well-being. Suchocki argues that the criteria for well-being are both open and recognizable in relation to sin.

To the degree that well-being is violated, to the degree that human conduct negates the truth of the other's or one's own fullness, to the degree that human conduct has no love toward the other's or one's own good; to the degree that human conduct maintains a

¹⁸⁰ Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 79.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid. Emphasis added.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

blindness to beauty in forms other than one's own, to that degree there is sin. Sin is the violation of the well-being of creation.¹⁸⁴

But we have come full circle and are left pondering the relationship between differing views of sin as they relate to differing views of well-being. In this work Suchocki has not found a suitable way in which to address the question of pluralism, but rather her argument begs the question.

In her earlier essay "Openness and Mutuality in Process Thought and Feminist Action," (1981) Suchocki presents an alternative way in which to address the question of well-being. In this essay she argues that there is an important link between process thought and feminist thought in establishing a vision of well-being. She contends that "[t]he two perspectives, process and feminism, meet in the values related to mutuality and openness."¹⁸⁵ By openness she is referring to "the orientation of existence to ever-new forms of value."¹⁸⁶ Openness, Suchocki states, "is the reality of alternatives made available to persons; it is the enlargement of real potentiality in the actual world."¹⁸⁷ Suchocki maintains that "[f]eminists define and actualize the moving edge of openness."¹⁸⁸ She contends that "[t]hrough feminists -- and indeed, all liberation groups -- openness is defined, actualized, and concretized."¹⁸⁹

By mutuality Suchocki is referring to "the interrelationships of existence whereby value is created through interdependence."¹⁹⁰ Suchocki contends that there are three ways in which "feminists call for a concrete actualization of this

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 80.

¹⁸⁵ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, "Openness and Mutuality in Process Thought and Feminist Action," *Feminism and Process Thought*, Sheila Greeve Davaney, ed. (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1981), 64.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 77.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 76.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 63.

value [mutuality] in the fabric of society:"¹⁹¹ first, through the "bonding together to achieve new goals." second, "through the very breaking of traditional roles when they are assumed by women." and third, "through the uniqueness of women's presence in society."¹⁹²

It would seem that Suchocki could develop her earlier insights into openness and mutuality to advance her understanding of the concept of well-being and to formulate a more satisfactory answer to the problem of pluralism. She does not, however, do so nor does she seek an alternative solution. She therefore leave her discussion of pluralism considerably underdeveloped.

Summary

In this chapter I have presented a rather technical examination of Suchocki's understanding of the nature of oppression in terms of her view of evil and sin. Evil, which she explains in Whiteheadian terms as the interrelated metaphysical principles of perpetual perishing, exclusion and misbegotten ideals, results from the limitations of finitude and is inevitable. While Suchocki contends that sin, or moral evil, is best explained in terms of freedom, it is also inevitable. Since one must act within an "evil" world, that is, a world where perpetual perishing, exclusion and misbegotten ideals are inevitable, it is not always possible to act in a morally just way, that is to say, it is not always possible to act in such a way that promotes the

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 78.

¹⁹² Ibid., 79. By this third point Suchocki is not suggesting some form of essentialism, but that because women are in constant contact with men their "pervasive presence" allows them to influence the world as they develop the value of mutuality.

well-being for all. While there may be freedom to choose between this and that, none of the available choices may indeed be propitious.

In this chapter I have therefore stressed Suchocki's view of the nature of oppression in terms of the metaphysical principles upon which, in her view, the world depends. As I will explain in the following chapter, Suchocki's understanding of these principles provides the foundation for her development of the concept of the process of liberation.

Chapter Four

A Balm for Gilead: The Process of Liberation

*If God is a God of justice (as I believe),
then there must be subjective immortality.*

Marjorie Suchocki

*The major issue is not immortality per se, but justice, and ... the fullness of
justice requires a transhistorical dimension through some form of existence
beyond death.¹*

Marjorie Suchocki

Introduction

To examine Suchocki's understanding of the process of liberation I wish to begin with her assertion that "for those who have been broken by evil, only subjective immortality can provide a sufficient redemption."² Suchocki maintains that "the major issue is not immortality *per se*, but justice, and that the fullness of

¹ Marjorie Suchocki, "Evil, Eschatology, and God: Response to David Griffin," *Process Studies* 18, 1 (Spring 1989), 63.

² Suchocki, *The End of Evil*, 165, n. 2.

justice requires a transhistorical dimension through some form of existence beyond death."³

In this chapter I will examine the way in which Suchocki develops the relationship between the concept of subjective immortality and her understanding of the process of liberation. I will begin by considering Suchocki's discussion of subjective immortality in "The Question of Immortality"⁴ (1977). It is in this essay that Suchocki first raises the question whether one can affirm objective immortality and subjective immortality disjunctively or conjointly. Suchocki's question does not challenge objective immortality *per se* but challenges whether *merely* objective immortality is sufficient given the Christian promise of hope. In the second section of this chapter, I present a detailed discussion of her development of the relationship between the concept of subjective immortality and the process of liberation drawing on her works *The End of Evil* (1988), *God-Christ-Church* (1982), and *The Fall to Violence* (1994).

The Question Of Immortality

Suchocki begins her essay "The Question of Immortality" by raising Job's question, "If a man die, shall he live again?"⁵ Suchocki answers in the affirmative, that yes, one lives after death. I suggested above that there are various ways in

³ Suchocki, "Evil, Eschatology, and God: Response to David Griffin," 63. Cf. John Hick who makes a similar claim: "If there is any eventual resolution of the interplay between good and evil, it must lie beyond this world and beyond the enigma of death. Therefore we cannot hope to state a Christian theodicy without taking seriously the doctrine of life beyond the grave...." *Evil and the Love of God* (London: Fontana, 1968), 375.

⁴ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, "The Question of Immortality," *Journal of Religion* 57, 3 (July 1977), 288-306.

⁵ Suchocki, "The Question of Immortality," 288.

which to understand the concept of life after death.⁶ Suchocki understands this concept in terms of subjective immortality. That is to say, Suchocki understands the concept of an immortal self as the entity's ability to continue experiencing as a subjective centre of consciousness after death.

Suchocki develops her argument of the need for subjective immortality over against those who argue that God's redemptive activity involves (merely) objective immortality. To explain Suchocki's development of this concept I will consider three issues: what is meant by the concept of objective immortality, Suchocki's objections to the concept, and her development of the concept of subjective immortality.

Objective Immortality

There are two ways of understanding objective immortality both of which address the issue of loss. The first, which refers to loss within finitude, I examined in Chapter Three in my discussion of evil as perpetual perishing, that is, the loss of an entity's subjectivity within finitude. Once an entity loses its subjectivity it becomes "a stubborn fact for the future."⁷ Alternatively one can say that the occasion becomes "objectively immortal."

The second way of understanding objective immortality refers to the loss of subjectivity in infinity or within the divine. In this second sense, loss of subjectivity is considered to be surmounted by the retention of all occasions within

⁶ See Introduction, 6.

⁷ Suchocki, *The End of Evil*, 63.

the memory of God. This form of objective immortality is "the standard process solution to the threat of meaninglessness inherent in perpetual perishing."⁸

Suchocki states that in his 1975 essay "The Meaning of Christian Hope"⁹ Schubert M. Ogden offers one of the most cogent statements of the concept of objective immortality.¹⁰ In this essay Ogden states that

[e]ven if all creatures eventually perish or pass away, in that they reach the term of their own subjective participation in life, their lives nevertheless are *objectively immortal* through God's loving participation in them, and thus are in no sense lost or destroyed. All that they are and ever have been, for good or for evil, is raised beyond their own death and transience into the eternal life of God himself, where it abides forever as imperishably significant.¹¹

What needs to be stressed is that in Ogden's view death and transience are overcome not through some form of subjective immortality, but through God taking all into God's self thereby objectively immortalizing all that occurs within finitude. Ogden suggests that God's power to take all within God's self is therefore the end, the *telos*, of the creative process for all actual entities. That is to say, when entities reach their completion or satisfaction, although they no longer exist as centres of consciousness, they become immortalized as a part of the divine memory. Accordingly, nothing is lost that occurs within finitude. All is eternalized within God.

Following from his understanding of the redemptive process in terms of objective immortality, Ogden insists that "the meaning of Christian hope *may* and *must* be so redefined that the hope for our own subjective immortality can no longer be held to be essential to it."¹² Ogden recognizes "the unusual claim" that he is

⁸ David Ray Griffin, "Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The End of Evil: Process Eschatology in Historical Context*," *Process Studies* 18, 1 (Spring, 1989, 57-62), 58.

⁹ Schubert M. Ogden, "The Meaning of Christian Hope," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*: 3 (1975, 153-64).

¹⁰ Suchocki, *The End of Evil*, 165. n. 2.

¹¹ Ogden, "The Meaning of Christian Hope," 162. Emphasis added.

¹² *Ibid.*, 156.

making as a Christian theologian. Subjective immortality is generally considered to be a basic principle of Christian faith. Ogden nevertheless insists on the legitimacy of his claim, which he defends in two ways: 1) through his understanding of the nature of the self in relation to the divine, and 2) through his understanding of the New Testament message of hope

Ogden refers to the self as "something like a little indwelling god"¹³ incarnate in the body. This "little god" in Ogden's view is limited spatially and temporally. It "interacts directly only with its own brain cells, or, at most, with the cells of its central nervous system."¹⁴ Spatially confined to the limitations of the body the self can only relate indirectly to the rest of the world. The self is also temporally confined, bound by birth and by death. The self, transient and finite, has a marked beginning and end.

But what about the self's relationship to the divine? Ogden maintains that God is distinct from the world yet immanent in it as its "primordial ground."¹⁵ As the self is to the individual body, God is to the world. While the self which is the "god" of an individual body relates indirectly to all else, the divine indwells in all and consequently relates directly to all the world.¹⁶

Critical to Ogden's argument is the way in which he views memory operating in the self and in God. In the self memory is limited. Experience is constantly lost through the self's inability to retain more than a fragment of its experiences. "Each moment is, as it were, a little dying, a prefiguring already in the present of the final loss of experience as such."¹⁷ Ogden argues that God's

¹³ Ibid., 153.

¹⁴ Ibid., 154.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid. Ogden meaning of "the world" includes the entire universe.

¹⁷ Ibid., 155.

memory on the contrary is infallible. Nothing is lost and everything everlastingly remains immediate in it. All is eternalized, divinized, or immortalized in God. Through God's ability to retain all within God's memory "the transience of life is overcome, or rather simply does not exist."¹⁸

Ogden also argues that God is not only able to retain all within God's memory but that God's primary characteristic is God's boundless love for all.¹⁹ Since God, spatially and temporally limitless, interacts directly with all, the power of God's endless love affects all the world embracing all everlastingly.

It is through God's ability to embrace all that Ogden contends that God is the "redeemer," that is to say, the one who overcomes sin, death and transience. One, however, has to be attentive as to the way in which Ogden uses these terms. Although Ogden claims that God overcomes death, this does not include the overcoming of individual death, if one understands the overcoming of individual death in terms of the retention of consciousness after the cessation of what are considered to be fundamental corporal functions. In Ogden's view one transcends death through the eternalization of one's deeds within God. Ogden therefore argues that Christian hope rests "in the confidence that the significance of our efforts and all our values are retained everlastingly, without loss of vividness, in the memory of God."²⁰

It is therefore within the context of this relationship between the self and God, the self as finite, limited and transient, God as eternal, unlimited, and intransient that Ogden makes the claim that the meaning of Christian hope necessarily excludes our own subjective immortality. The self cannot exist after

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

death except within the memory of God. To hope otherwise is to fail to recognize that earthly existence is transient and finite.

Ogden maintains that Christian hope is "classically attested by Scripture and tradition,"²¹ and was formulated under the influence of apocalyptic and Gnostic thought. Ogden claims that apocalyptic hope, affirmed by Paul, e.g., in 1 Thess. 4:16-17,²² offers hope in the resurrection which includes the process by which all will be judged and "consigned to [their] final destiny."²³ Gnostic hope arises when apocalyptic hope is left unfulfilled and Christians more and more "found themselves in a non-Jewish cultural [i.e. Hellenistic] community."²⁴ Unlike apocalyptic hope, in a gnostic framework the decisive happening is "not the resurrection of the dead and the judgment of the world, but the death of each individual person, when - provided he is properly instructed - he ascends immediately to the heavenly world of light from which he originally fell."²⁵

²¹ Ibid., 156.

²² Paul writes. "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangels call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord."

²³ Ogden, "The Meaning of Christian Hope," 156.

²⁴ Ibid. Ogden seems to be suggesting that Greek thought did not influence Christianity until after it began its mission to the Gentile world. Following from this argument he would seem to be suggesting that Paul was not at all influenced by Greek thought. Cf. his view to that of James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992). Barr argues that the "clearest antecedent of Paul is the Wisdom of Solomon [which Barr contends "is undoubtedly among the most Hellenistic in style and thought"]; it most clearly stated the parameters that were to be regulative for St. Paul: God created man for incorruption and made him in the image of his own eternity; but through the devil's envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his party experience it. (Wisdom 2.23)." Barr states that "[w]e do not know with certainty whether Paul had read the Wisdom of Solomon; but it does not matter much, for if he had not read it, that only means that he followed the same tradition of understanding which it was the first writing now extant to express." 16-17.

²⁵ Ibid.

Ogden consequently differentiates between apocalyptic hope which "is projected along the horizontal line of historical development and anticipates the resurrection of the body" and Gnostic hope which "is really a vertical projection which envisages solely the immortality of the human soul."²⁶ Ogden contends that despite the waning of apocalyptic hope Gnostic interpretations of hope do not for the most part replace apocalyptic hope,²⁷ but become "superimposed upon apocalypticism to express the hope of Christian orthodoxy."²⁸

What is important for the present argument is that Ogden contends that both of these visions of hope "are thoroughly mythological and must be interpreted accordingly."²⁹ Ogden suggests that "[t]he real intention of myth - and in this lies its distinctive kind of meaning and truth - ... is to express our own most basic understanding of ourselves in relation to reality as such."³⁰ Ogden qualifies this view by suggesting that myth does not "speak of the various details of reality in a scientific manner."³¹ By adding this disclaimer Ogden argues that Christian hope must not be taken to mean *literal* resurrection or *literal* immortality of the soul. Ogden argues that the terms resurrection and immortality of the soul are ways of speaking that "disclose the truth of our existence in relation to reality as a whole,"³² which need to be understood strictly as metaphors. They refer to a way of speaking about a *this-worldly* vision of existence. Ogden consequently contends that Christian eschatology must be demythologized so as to make sense of these metaphors in relation to the nature of the world. Ogden contends that hope must

²⁶ Ibid., 156-7.

²⁷ Ogden cites the Gospel of John as an exception.

²⁸ Ogden, "The Meaning of Christian Hope," 157.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 158.

³² Ibid.

therefore be interpreted in terms of the world as many, limited, finite selves and an unlimited eternal God.

Once New Testament eschatological hopes have been demythologized, Ogden argues, it becomes evident that according to the New Testament "the only proper object of Christian hope ... [is] nothing other than God's boundless love for us."³³ Ogden therefore contends that "our own subjective immortality is not to be counted as belonging essentially to [God's love for us]."³⁴ Subjective immortality cannot be taken as a "real" but only as a metaphorical expression of hope.

Ogden moreover argues that to hope for subjective immortality is to desire to be like God, thereby denying the "essential difference between God and man - the Creator and creature, and Redeemer and redeemed."³⁵ Defending subjective immortality, in Ogden's view, is not only wrong-minded but an idolatrous act. Idolatry, which refers to worshipping the non-divine as if it were divine, results from viewing oneself as immortal and therefore "god-like." One is attributing to oneself characteristics that are only attributable to the divine.

While Ogden argues against the notion of belief in subjective immortality, he is nevertheless critical of contemporary theological positions which collapse all redemptive activity into this-worldly emancipation. Ogden contends that

the most serious danger confronting contemporary theology is hardly that it will succumb to false other-worldliness which obscures the truth that Christian hope has to do with this world's ultimate significance and fulfillment. The greater danger, rather, is that in its concern with developing such things as political theologies and theologies of hope and liberation, theology today will repeat the mistake of the social gospel and reduce Christian hope in God's love to little more than a secular hope for this-worldly human fulfillment.³⁶

Ogden maintains that such theological positions

³³ Ibid., 160.

³⁴ Ibid., 160-61.

³⁵ Suchocki, "The Question of Immortality," 288.

³⁶ Ogden, "The Meaning of Christian Hope," 164.

seem to forget ... that although Christian hope does indeed have to do with this world, and thus is open to all that secularity itself can hope for, it nevertheless is not in this world but in the boundless love embracing it that such hope has its sole ultimate ground and object³⁷

Ogden therefore contends that the sole ultimate ground and object of Christian hope is recognizing that one becomes objectively immortalized in God's memory.

Suchocki's Critique Of Objective Immortality: A Lack Of Hope

In her response to Ogden's position, Suchocki grants that "[t]he beauty of Ogden's view lies in the appreciation and zest it engenders toward a world in which we are responsible for creating value."³⁸ She contends, however, that his view overlooks a crucial aspect of the Christian faith: the overcoming of evil. Suchocki argues that there must be some "future fullness of life beyond suffering;" if not, she argues, there is no basis for redeeming hope.³⁹

To fulfill the promise of Christian hope Suchocki contends that the entity needs to *experience* the fulfillment of redemption. "If God is to overcome evil wholly, there must be some 'present' in which the individual fully realizes his/her redemption from evil in the depths of experience."⁴⁰ Suchocki argues that without a form of subjective immortality through which God can heal the "scars of being," evil keeps the upper hand. "For many victims, evil is the final and overwhelming word; apart from redemption, this word remains in everlasting contradiction to the redemptive word of God."⁴¹

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Suchocki, "The Question of Immortality," 288.

³⁹ Ibid., 290.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 291.

⁴¹ Ibid., 298.

Suchocki therefore contends that, contrary to the reduction of immortality to objective immortality, it is not enough that God merely remembers us. Evil must be overcome in such a way that the entity, subjectively and not merely objectively immortalized, is conscious of God's redemptive power as it participates in the fulfillment of justice.⁴²

Suchocki's Development of Subjective Immortality

To develop a basis for the overcoming of evil through subjective immortality Suchocki, as with Ogden, draws on process metaphysics and the New Testament witness. The development of her concept of subjective immortality therefore depends on her ability to bring these sources together in a coherent and logical manner. In this section I begin by discussing her view of the New Testament witness. Her revision of Whitehead's thought, the discussion of which comprises the most extensive part of this section, provides the metaphysical basis for understanding the way in which the New Testament witness is fulfilled.

⁴² The concept of objective immortality has also met with criticism by non-process theologians. Thomas Morris and Austin Farrer, for example, do not agree with Hartshorne's notion of eternal joy based on, as Morris states, "divine snapshots of my life preserved forever in the gallery of omniscience." Thomas Morris, "God and the World," *Anselmian Explorations: Essays in Philosophical Theology*. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press), 147. Austin Farrer cites the error of process thought as establishing God "as an act of thought resulting from the world-order" thereby not allowing souls created in the divine image to be rescued from "the whirlpool of transience" and "given fellowship with what solely endures." Austin Farrer, "The Prior Actuality of God," *Reflective Faith: Essays in Philosophical Theology*, Charles C. Conti, ed. (London: SPCK, 1972), 188 & 180.

The New Testament Witness

In her early development of the concept of subjective immortality Suchocki contests Ogden's view that hope in subjective immortality is not an essential aspect of Christian thought. As with Ogden, Suchocki defends her position in terms of the New Testament witness. In Suchocki's view subjective immortality, as a provision for the hope of a future life beyond death through which evil is overcome, is an inherent part of Christian thought. Unlike Ogden, Suchocki, argues that "for the New Testament writers subjective immortality was an integral component in God's victory over evil."⁴³

Suchocki, however, does not develop her argument in much detail. She briefly discusses three New Testament texts, the Gospels of Mark, and John, and the Epistle of James, as examples of early Christian hope which "demonstrate a dynamic relationship between the Christian's future and his present,"⁴⁴ thereby attesting to the deliverance from evil through subjective immortality. Suchocki concludes that a vision of future hope through subjective immortality is a central insight found in the New Testament witness of the early Christian experience. This insight, she argues, must be preserved and not regarded as a time-bound myth as Ogden suggests. Suchocki insists that

[t]he contemporary theological task of clarifying scriptural texts through demythologization may well question the continued usefulness of the imagery, but care must be taken to preserve the central insight, which is *the fullness of redemption from evil for each individual*.⁴⁵

Suchocki therefore argues, against Ogden's view, that the concept of hope in the New Testament includes the overcoming of evil through subjective immortality. Citing Ignatius, Irenaeus and Tertullian as representative of three

⁴³ Suchocki, "The Question of Immortality," 289.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid. Emphasis added.

doctrinal positions that the early church developed concerning "the importance of immortality to the overcoming of evil."⁴⁶ Suchocki moreover contends that the overcoming of evil through subjective immortality is a major theme that is carried beyond the New Testament and into the theology of the early Church. It is not rooted in idolatry as Ogden suggests, but emerges from the Christian witness of God's victory over evil.

Suchocki does not offer an explicit explanation as to why she and Ogden come to such different conclusions concerning the New Testament witness other than to say that "there is another dimension to the doctrine of immortality which is not addressed by arguments such as Ogden's, and this dimension - the overcoming of evil - calls for continued theological consideration of the question of immortality."⁴⁷ The different positions that they take on the witness of the New Testament vis-à-vis subjective immortality appears, however, to depend in large part on their points of departure. As I indicated above, Ogden begins with an understanding of the self as finite and subject to the limitations of finitude. Although that which occurs within the world is taken up into God, the finite nature of this-worldly existence precludes any possibility of conscious participation in this process. While God is eternal and unlimited, it is not within God's nature to overcome the self's transience and death by preserving the self as a centre of consciousness after death.

Suchocki's approach differs in that she reads New Testament and early church views of the relationship between immortality and the overcoming of evil as a literal "event" and not a metaphorical hope. She argues that the New Testament witness claims that subjective immortality answers evil inasmuch as subjective

⁴⁶ Ibid., 291.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 288.

immortality is necessary for the fulfillment of justice. Consequently, and this is key to Suchocki's argument, she supports the concept of subjective immortality not as an end in itself but as the means by which to allow for the fulfillment of justice.

Suchocki provides her most cogent statement on her view of the relationship between immortality and injustice in her 1992 essay "Charles Hartshorne and Subjective Immortality." I quote a rather lengthy section of her essay to indicate the essence of her argument.

With regard to justice, I can only agree that the vision of subjective immortality is absurd or selfish if in fact all persons are as privileged as most philosophers and theologians. The point is not that we die, nor that some of us die young, nor that others of us die painfully. Death, like life, comes in many ways; why not? *Death* is not the problem - the problem is injustice. There are little children who are grossly mistreated, burned, battered, and continuously raped, who manage to survive physically, but do not survive psychically. Never having known love, they never learn to give love, and their lives are lived in a web of tragedy.... Holocausts, genocides, nuclear destruction - how many miseries can people survive? The problem is not death. Many of these victims might - and eventually do - welcome it as a solution to the problem of life. The deeper problem is injustice. That there is no justice for many in this life is quite evident. But we believe in God; is God no more just than our sorry histories? Is there no balm in Gilead?⁴⁸

Suchocki, therefore, inextricably links justice and subjective immortality. Subjective immortality allows for the possibility of the fulfillment of justice; the fulfillment of justice relies on a concept of subjective immortality.

It is interesting to note that in the aforementioned essay Suchocki argues that Hartshorne's rejection of subjective immortality on the basis that it reflects "the tradition's coercive way of demanding good action because of rewards and punishments,"⁴⁹ attests to his failure to consider the concept of subjective immortality in terms other than it is traditionally conceived. Hartshorne, one of the

⁴⁸ Suchocki, "Charles Hartshorne and Subjective Immortality," *Process Studies* 21, 2 (Summer 1992), 119.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 120.

most prominent and influential Whiteheadian process thinkers, suggests that the desire for eternity is an egoistic aspiration.⁵⁰

Hartshorne maintains, as does Ogden whose argument is highly influenced by that of Hartshorne, that it is only through the power of divine memory that humanity is eternalized. Hartshorne states that the image of God as judge has fostered social relationships based on the possibility of the hope of future reward or the fear of punishment and not on the more appropriate human possibility that "one is to love one another and wish well to one another as intrinsically valuable."⁵¹ Hartshorne moreover suggests that, "[p]erhaps our culture will find its way back after a long detour to the original Jewish insight that only two things matter, creaturely life between birth and death, and the unborn and undying life of God."⁵² Hartshorne argues that "[t]he sole bargain or covenant to make with God is that we do our best and trust him to salvage what can be salvaged from our failures and to make the most that can be made of our successes."⁵³ Hartshorne maintains that God's love for us is "as we are, between birth and death," not for us as "some magically different yet oddly identical entities after death."⁵⁴

Suchocki, however, states that her view that subjective immortality is a means to an end and not an end in itself "constitutes [her] basic difference with Hartshorne...." For as Suchocki indicates, Hartshorne in fact "maintains that God

⁵⁰ Hartshorne also argues against subjective immortality on the grounds that it would be monotonous and boring. Charles Hartshorne, *The Logic of Perfection and Other Essays in Neoclassical Metaphysics* (Lasalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1962), 261.

⁵¹ Charles Hartshorne, *Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), 127.

⁵² Charles Hartshorne, *A Natural Theology of Our Time*, (Lasalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1967), 110.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

receives the subjective immediacy of the occasion, but does not develop the effects of God's concrescence on the occasion itself."⁵⁵

Suchocki states that Hartshorne, "never transcended his view of a defective immortality to discover the possibilities inherent in the completeness of God's prehensions for providing a more adequate view of a defective immortality."⁵⁶

Suchocki, moreover, argues that

[i]f Hartshorne's argument for God's prehension of the subjectivity of an occasion holds, then regardless of his preference for objective immortality, he has provided the basis for subjective immortality and therefore the basis for the further possibility of justice.⁵⁷

In other words, Suchocki's argument suggests that if Hartshorne were able to accept Suchocki's argument as morally credible, that is, not as a form of egoistic desire, he may be willing to entertain it as intellectually credible.

It is possible that Suchocki could apply the same argument to Ogden. For Ogden to consider the possibility of the concept of subjective immortality he would have to accept her argument as intellectually credible, that is to say, as metaphysically possible. Moreover, for Ogden to consider the possibility of the concept of subjective immortality he would have to be able to admit that there is an alternative, non-idolatrous way of understanding the concept of subjective immortality, which would render the concept morally credible.

Process Metaphysics

It needs to be reiterated that Suchocki is not advocating subjective immortality for its own sake. As stated above, Suchocki maintains that "[t]he

⁵⁵ Suchocki, *The End of Evil*, 169, footnote 2. Suchocki's criticism will become clearer in light of my discussion of her development of subjective immortality in the following section.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Suchocki, "Charles Hartshorne and Subjective Immortality," 119.

major issue is not immortality *per se*, but justice, and that the fullness of justice requires a transhistorical dimension through some form of existence beyond death."⁵⁸ Suchocki states that a concept of justice that does not include the possibility of its actual fulfillment through subjective immortality has serious ethical limitations in that it "cannot inspire the hope that is so necessary to effective action."⁵⁹ Without a vision of *empowering* justice, i.e., "unless a vision of justice holds within it the real possibility of its fulfillment,"⁶⁰ it will be inadequate, contributing "to injustice through the quenching of hope."⁶¹ Since the fulfillment of justice cannot occur within finitude, Suchocki contends that some form of subjective immortality is indispensable.

Suchocki details her development of the concept of subjective immortality most fully in *The End of Evil*.⁶² In Chapter Five of this text she presents what she refers to as "a simple metaphysical argument ... for the establishment of subjective immortality."⁶³ This argument involves developing the way in which each actual occasion is "resurrected" into God. In Chapter Six of the same work Suchocki embarks on what she refers to as "a far more speculative work of the imagination."⁶⁴ This speculative aspect follows from her argument that it is necessary to question what happens to the resurrected occasion once it is part of God. Suchocki admits that "[l]ike the angels of a hymn, we should lower our eyes

58 Suchocki, "Evil, Eschatology, and God: Response to David Griffin," 63.

59 Suchocki, *God-Christ-Church*, 76.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.

62 For earlier discussions of her view of subjective immortality see Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki and Lewis S. Ford, "A Whiteheadian Reflection on Subjective Immortality," *Process Studies* (1977), 1-13; and Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, "The Question of Immortality," *Journal of Religion* 57/33 (July 1977), 288-306.

63 Suchocki, *The End of Evil*, 66.

64 Ibid.

rather than gaze into such mysteries [as the nature of the resurrected self]."65 She also admits, however, that "philosophical theologians have never been noted for humility."66 and she boldly sets out to examine this mystery.

Through her examination of the mystery of immortality Suchocki modifies Whiteheadian thought and provides an alternative view of subjective immortality. However, for her argument to be intellectually credible Suchocki must be able to demonstrate that the actual entity can consciously participate within God. In technical terms Suchocki has to be able to show that the occasion is able to retain some form of subjective immediacy, that is to say, the entity must be able to retain its "own experience of itself in the concrescent process."67 The entity, as an individual entity, must be able to participate consciously within God.

Since Suchocki is arguing that subjective immortality is not in fact the principle issue at hand but the fulfillment of justice, Suchocki has to be able to defend her view that as the entity now consciously participates in God, it must also be able to *experience* the fulfillment of justice. In other words, the entity must be able to participate actively, thus self-consciously and with full awareness in the process whereby well-being is created both for itself and for others, and therefore for God. The question is whether process thought as a philosophical system in fact allows for this possibility to occur.

While Suchocki admits that subjective immortality is not a category developed by Whitehead, she nevertheless argues that in his struggle with the "insufficiency of objective immortality alone in relation to the reality of perishing"68 there are intimations of subjective immortality in his thought. It is in view of the

65 Ibid., 67.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid., 176.

68 Ibid., 84.

insufficiency of the concept of objective immortality as a way to address loss within finitude that Suchocki considers three passages from Part Five of Whitehead's *Process and Reality* which seem to hint at the possibility of subjective immortality. In the first passage Whitehead states that "[i]n the temporal world, it is the empirical fact that process entails loss: the past is present under an abstraction. (PR 340)"⁶⁹ As I discussed in Chapter Three, this form of loss refers to the inevitability of perpetual perishing. Whitehead continues by stating that "there is no reason of any ultimate metaphysical generality why this [that is, that process entails loss] should be the whole story (PR 340)."⁷⁰

While Whitehead suggests that loss is not the whole story, he does not explain his view any further. Suchocki takes it upon herself to add what she considers to be missing, a chapter on subjective immortality, which following from Whitehead's basic metaphysical principles would address the question of loss.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Ibid., 92. The passages that Suchocki quotes from Whitehead's *Process and Reality*, which she refers to as (PR), are taken from the 1978 edition, David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne eds. (New York: The Free Press, 1978).

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Whitehead states that his philosophy was "entirely neutral" on the question of subjective immortality. Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1960), 107. David Griffin, who with Suchocki contends that Whitehead's thought suggests that "subjective immortality may be a real possibility" argues that "[t]he fact that Whitehead himself was little interested in this question [i.e., the question of subjective immortality] increases the weight of his support rather than decreases it, since it can hardly be claimed that he developed his principles precisely in order to give this support." Griffin, "The Possibility of Subjective Immortality in Whitehead's Philosophy," *The Modern Schoolman* LIII (November 1975), 57. Whitehead did in fact write one essay on the question of immortality. "Immortality," *The Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead*, Paul Arthur Schilpp, ed. (Lasalle: Open Court, 1941), 682-700. His argument, however, is very obscure. As Suchocki notes in *The End of Evil* "his most concrete statements concerning immortality are that 'the World of Value exhibits the essential unification of the Universe. Thus while it exhibits the immortal side of the many persons, it also involves the unification of personality. This is the concept of God.' (p. 694). Later on the same page he writes that God 'is the unification of the multiple personalities received from the Active World.'" Suchocki goes on to state that "Whitehead does not expand upon these notions; I hope to do so in this and the following chapters." 166-7.

Suchocki also draws on two passages that hint more specifically at the way in which Whitehead's metaphysical principles, in her view, provide a basis for subjective immortality. First Whitehead states that "[i]n [God's consequent nature] there is no loss, no obstruction. The world is felt in a unison of immediacy. The property of combining creative advance with the retention of mutual immediacy is what ... is meant by the term 'everlasting.' (PR 346)"⁷²

This passage obviously implies that "everlastingness" refers to a process which involves some form of creativity on the part of the divine. Suchocki contends, however, that this passage *also* seems to suggest that this creative process includes some form of immediate awareness on the part of that which is taken up into God. In Suchocki's view, Whitehead's notion of "creative advance" hints at something other than the standard process concept of objective immortality which contends that that which is taken up into God is unaware of its presence within the divine. Suchocki asks,

[c]ould it not be that this creative advance into new immediacy is made possible by the passage of the attained immediacy not into nothingness, nor into sheer memory, nor yet into the shrouded past, but into God? As God prehends the immediacy of the occasion, lifting it into the divine nature, is not this the making way for a new immediacy?⁷³

The last passage which Suchocki draws on is Whitehead's statement that "[i]n everlastingness, immediacy is reconciled with objective immortality (PR 351)."⁷⁴ Suchocki contends that this passage suggests that the entity's ability toprehend or feel which results in objective immortality within finitude is in some way resolved in everlastingness, that is, resolved within God. In other words, in some way loss within finitude is overcome within God.⁷⁵ Here Suchocki argues

⁷² Suchocki, *The End of Evil*, 92.

⁷³ Ibid., 94.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

that Whitehead's thought opens up the possibility that objective immortality does not have the last word. The concept of immediacy, the ongoing feeling of the entity, is extended within God.

Relying on these passages Suchocki suggests that the concept of subjective immortality "seems to haunt the edges of his [Whitehead's] system."⁷⁶ Suchocki, consequently, makes two modifications to Whitehead's understanding of the process of concrescence and develops a concept of subjective immortality which she contends transforms subjectivity and immortality from discontinuous into continuous terms. Through her modification of Whitehead's concept of becoming subjectivity becomes linked to immortality so that within Suchocki's revisionary form of process theology subjective immortality joins objective immortality as a fundamental category of existence.

The first modification which Suchocki makes involves the development of a third phase of the creative process. Suchocki maintains that between the two phases of the creative process, the concrescent and the transitional phases, there is an intermediary phase, which she refers to as *enjoyment*. While in the concrescent phase the occasion is involved in selecting and determining its future, in this intermediary phase the occasion engages in the enjoyment of its prior activity. Satisfaction, the attainment of concrescence is normally understood as a passive activity. In Suchocki's view, however, enjoyment is an active response to that which the entity has created. As an active aspect of the process the satisfaction that results from what the occasion has prehended "is in itself a form of creativity which then naturally gives rise to givingness, or the transitional power which offers just

⁷⁶ Ibid., 84.

this mode of determinateness to a future, evoking that future into becoming a new present."⁷⁷

The second modification that Suchocki develops addresses the nature of enjoyment in relation to the way it is perceived as either objective or subjective immortality. The perspective which leads to objectification is, in Suchocki's view, determined by the nature of finite prehension which demands that "[a] finite occasion mustprehend other occasions selectively, feeling the other from its own new standpoint and in accordance with the kind of harmony now made possible."⁷⁸ The act of objectification therefore "stems from the conditions of creativity whereby the nascent occasion must narrow the creative possibilities offered by its past."⁷⁹

The act of objectification lies in the partiality by which a becoming occasion prehends each past occasion. No finite occasion canprehend another occasion wholly; it must eliminate portions of each occasion through negative prehensions in order to unify its world through its subjective becoming.⁸⁰

Suchocki argues that this does not hold true for God. Since God takes the whole process of concrescence into God's self, God also takes up the enjoyment that the entity experiences. God is able to retain the immediacy of enjoyment within God's self. While from the perspective of the world the occasion is considered to be objectively immortal; from the perspective of God the occasion is considered to be subjectively immortal.

Suchocki moreover suggests that as "God prehends the immediacy of the occasion, lifting it into the divine nature, this very act may be making way for a new immediacy."⁸¹ Suchocki argues that immediacy does not end with the satisfaction of the occasion. In the finite world the occasion takes on an objective

⁷⁷ Ibid., 88.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 91.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., 94.

immortality acting as an impetus for the future. In the realm of God it is the subjective nature of the occasion which is prehended, or felt, by God. Consequently, Suchocki maintains that within God the occasion continues to feel its own consciousness of the satisfaction, that is to say, it continues to feel its own concrescent activity, as well as feeling the consciousness of God as God values the occasion transforming it toward God's own "self-defined subjective aim."⁸² Suchocki is therefore able to contend that the occasion therefore participates in God as a subjectively immortal entity.

Suchocki also refers to the process of subjective immortality as "resurrection." Suchocki's understanding of the resurrection differs significantly, however, from a concept of resurrection which suggests that the new spiritual body shall be awakened at the eschaton, that is, at some distant point in time. On the contrary, in Suchocki's view resurrection occurs continuously as each occasion is taken up into God. The resurrection experience is the continual rebirth within God of all of the occasions which "have been the whole person's life, body and soul."⁸³

To explain this form of subjective immortality as resurrection Suchocki maintains that

[o]ne could say that occasions are resurrected directly, and persons indirectly insofar as the particular togetherness of occasions created just this person. This would mean, then, that in God *all* events or times of a person are present, and not simply the final event in the total series of the soul.⁸⁴

⁸² Ibid., 103.

⁸³ Suchocki's understanding of resurrection depends on her understanding of personhood, which she bases on the metaphysical model of persons "composed of a whole society of actual occasions continuously coming into being and perishing." Suchocki argues that while a person is a society of occasions she or he finds unity as a personality "in that each concrescent immediacy includes reflective consciousness not of its own experience, but of the experience of its immediate predecessor." Continuity occurs through the prehension of the past and the creation of a consciousness for the immediate future. *The End of Evil*, 107.

⁸⁴ Suchocki, *The End of Evil*, 108.

Suchocki argues that this process suggests that the resurrected identity that occurs within God is better thought of in terms of " 'thick,' much deeper than the 'thinness' of seriality. The wholeness of the person's life is present and not just the concluding moment."⁸⁵ There is therefore a depth to the entity's resurrected identity within God. There is, in effect, a "layering" of the resurrected self as many resurrected selves. There are successive phases or episodes that make up a person's life history.

This layering occurs for the resurrection experience does not happen after one's death. Resurrection occurs continually. That part of one's life that one has already lived is consequently already resurrected into God. Suchocki describes the resurrection experience in terms of "a multiple transcendence of personality in God."⁸⁶ Suchocki argues that this involves a tripartite process involving the self, others and God. Suchocki writes that there is "first a transcendence of seriality into the fullness of the self."⁸⁷ It is not just the self which is transcended but what she refers to as a transcendence of self-hood. The second form of transcendence occurs through the self's "mutuality of feeling with all other selves and occasions."⁸⁸

The third aspect of this process involves "a transcendence of selves into the Selfhood of God."⁸⁹ In this case Suchocki argues that "[t]he conerescent subjectivity of God is the unifying force whereby the occasions formerly held in seriality are again created as a composite personality in God."⁹⁰ Through this resurrection process each occasion enters a new relationship with itself, with others

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

and with the divine. This transcendent relationship provides the basis for the fulfillment of justice and consequently for the well-being for all.

Having modified Whiteheadian thought so as to include the concept of subjective immortality, Suchocki now has to identify the way in which the fulfillment of justice occurs within God. To recall, subjective immortality is only the means by which the process of liberation occurs; "it is not in itself a sufficient answer to evil."⁹¹ Suchocki recognizes that subjective immortality alone "could itself constitute a form of evil. In the case of pain, the immortal retention of pain would resemble Augustine's hell, and in the case of pleasure, its immortal retention formed the first circle of Dante's hell."⁹²

Subjective Immortality and The Process Of Liberation

In this section I discuss what Suchocki refers to as her speculative view of the fulfillment of justice.⁹³ The two primary questions that I address are, What is the role of the divine within the process of the fulfillment of justice? And what role do the finite actual entities play in the process assuming that they are subjectively immortalized and consequently retain their immediacy? I begin by considering the role of the divine.

As indicated above, Suchocki maintains that God takes all occasions into God's self. Once the occasions are within God, God integrates these occasions into God's own experience and life. God feels the world in three concurrent ways:

⁹¹ Ibid., 97.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ See above, 208.

in relation to all other aspects of the world, "to the initial influence God has offered that entity... [and] relative to God's own character."⁹⁴ This act is both judgmental and redemptive.⁹⁵

In *The Fall to Violence* Suchocki develops her view of God's redemptive nature in terms of truth, love and beauty.⁹⁶ Truth as a redemptive category means that "the distortions that mitigate against well-being would be impossible in God."⁹⁷ Truth corresponds to God's knowledge. "The application of this quality to human life means that despite the mystery of the self even to its own self, one is known."⁹⁸ Truth in God therefore means that all is known absolutely by God.

While truth has to do with God's knowledge of all, love as a redemptive characteristic of God has to do with God's "absolute acceptance of every entity in the fullness of what it can be."⁹⁹ Love as redemptive is derived from the notion that "love involves an ultimate acceptance of the other as the other really is."¹⁰⁰ Since only God can truly know the other, "then God's love becomes a standard for all other forms of love."¹⁰¹

Finally Suchocki suggests that beauty as redemptive is the end, the final adventure, of God's feeling. She explains that

[i]n terms of beauty, God's feeling of the world is not simply for the sake of feeling the world, nor even of judging the world, nor even of loving the world. But God's feeling, judgment, and love of the world are for the sake of integrating the world into God's own

⁹⁴ Suchocki. *The End of Evil*, 97.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 74.

⁹⁶ Cf., e.g., Whitehead's statement. "He [God] does not create the world, he saves it: or, more accurately, he is the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by his vision of truth, beauty and goodness." *Process and Reality*, 526.

⁹⁷ Suchocki. *The Fall to Violence*, 75.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 78.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

nature as the final adventure of things in a harmony that continuously surpasses itself, and this is beauty.¹⁰²

Beauty consequently involves "God's ability to integrate every entity not only with all others in a 'reconciliation of all things' within God's own nature, but also with the infinite resources of the divine harmony."¹⁰³ How, it is necessary to ask, does Suchocki's concept of beauty as "the final adventure of things in a harmony that surpasses itself" relate to the fulfillment of justice? To answer this question it is necessary to consider the way in which Suchocki extends her understanding of God's nature to include the fulfillment of justice as the process of forgiveness.¹⁰⁴

Forgiveness as Restorative Justice

In my view Suchocki's understanding of forgiveness is one of the distinguishing features of her understanding of the process of liberation. I wish therefore to discuss her view of the concept in some detail with particular attention to the way in which she views forgiveness as occurring within the divine.

It needs to be stressed that Suchocki certainly recognizes the problematic nature of forgiveness and admits that the concept "may be the most difficult of virtues."¹⁰⁵ I think that it is safe to say that Suchocki would most likely agree with

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Suchocki develops the concept of forgiveness most fully in *The Fall to Violence*. See Chapter Nine, "Forgiveness and Transformation," 144-160.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 144. In her work *The Human Action of Forgiveness* Jean Lambert provides what she contends to be "four specific errors in definition that are made within the Christian tradition: confusing forgiving with forgetting, condoning and pardoning; understanding it as a purely divine action; understanding it as reward for good behaviour; and understanding it substantively, i.e., 'as a quasisubstance; a person 'forgives' and a person 'receives forgiveness.' " *The Human Action of Forgiving: A Critical Application of the*

Sharon Ringe who states that "theologians of liberation [which include feminist theologies] ... seem not to be drawn to the theological motif of forgiveness, and for very good reason it is heard as a word that would whitewash past abuses whose present consequences continue to be felt."¹⁰⁶

While Ringe cautions against the uncritical use of the concept of forgiveness, she does not in fact deny the possibility of developing the concept. She contends, however, that

to move too quickly to "forgiveness" ... without addressing the way the patterns of oppression have become institutionalized, risks simply perpetuating the status quo. Before "forgiveness" can find its way back into the lexicon of liberation, it must be linked to justice¹⁰⁷

What is significant about Suchocki's view of forgiveness is that she does in fact link forgiveness to justice, or to more specifically what might be referred to as restorative justice,¹⁰⁸ that is to a form of justice whose primary demand is

Metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead (Lanham, MD.: University of America Press, 1985), 1.

¹⁰⁶ Sharon Ringe. *Jesus, Liberation and Biblical Jubilee*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 95. Compare Marie Fortune who writes, with particular reference to the issues of rape and sexual abuse, "[f]orgiveness is a word which has become more and more meaningless in our society. Some people mean that they want to simply forget what happened - just put it out of their mind. Others mean by forgiving that the offense or injury which occurred is okay, i.e., that somehow it becomes a non-offense. Neither of these meanings is adequate to the experience of rape or sexual abuse. A person can never forget these offenses. the memory of the event will always be in the victim's consciousness. It becomes part of one's history as do one's positive experiences. And nothing can ever make the offense a non-offense. It will never be okay that a person was raped or molested. It is forever a wrong done to another human being." Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1983), 208-215. As quoted in Pamela Cooper-White *The Cry of Tamar: Violence Against Women and the Church's Response* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 255.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 94. Cf. Pamela Cooper-White who writes, "[b]ecause premature forgiveness bypasses consequences and rehabilitation for the offender, it is, in fact, tacit permission - perhaps even an invitation - to continue the violence." *The Cry of Tamar*, 256.

¹⁰⁸ While I use the term "restorative justice" to describe Suchocki's understanding of forgiveness, it is not one which she uses to describe her understanding of forgiveness. She does, however, describe it in terms of transformation of relationships which leads to reconciliation. See e.g., *The Fall to Violence*, 160.

reconciliation and not retribution.¹⁰⁹ Suchocki, moreover, develops a concept of restorative justice which finds its completion within the divine.

To understand Suchocki's view of forgiveness as justice let us begin by considering her definition of forgiveness. Suchocki defines the concept of forgiveness as "willing the well-being of victim(s) and violator(s) in the context of the fullest possible knowledge of the nature of the violation."¹¹⁰ Suchocki states that her understanding of the nature of forgiveness serves to undercut two popular understandings of the concept: that "to forgive entails feelings of love," and that "to forgive is to accept the other."¹¹¹ While the ability to feel plays an essential role in the process, Suchocki contends that forgiveness is essentially an act of the will.

¹⁰⁹ In his work *Justice that Heals: A Biblical Vision for Victims and Offenders* Arthur Paul Boers outlines five primary distinctions between restorative and retributive justice as developed by Howard Zehr, director of the Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Office on Criminal Justice: 1) "In retributive justice, crime violates the state and its laws. Crime is against the state.... The affected community of victims is not included in the 'due process.' " Boers states that "[i]n restorative justice, however, crime violates people and relationships.... Crime is a breaking down of community, a break down that can only be restored by the community." 2) "Retributive justice focuses on determining blame and guilt in the past (i.e., did he/she do it?). [r]estorative justice aims to identify needs and obligation, with a future- oriented focus on problem solving (i.e., what should be done?)." 3) In the retributive model the focus on guilt pits the offender "against the state in an adversarial relationship of 'due process.' Court trials are not such a careful investigation of the truth as a contest between lawyers (paid professional proxies)." Boers contends, however, that "[i]n restorative justice, negotiation and exchange of information are done in ways that give victims and offenders central roles. The insights of the victim-offender mediation made a crucial contribution to this process of bringing healing to both victims and offender." 4) "In retributive justice, doses of pain are measured out to punish, deter, and prevent further crimes. In restorative justice, the priorities are restitution as a mean of restoring both parties with the hope of reconciliation as the goal, so that insofar as possible things can be made right." 5) "In retributive justice, rules and intentions outweigh outcomes: one side wins and the other loses. In this system the victim is largely ignored and a convicted offender merely receives punishment." Restorative justice differs in that the system "is judged by the extent to which responsibilities are assumed, need are met, and healing (of individuals and relationships) is encouraged." Arthur Boers, *A Biblical Vision for Victims and Offenders* (Newton: Faith and Life Press, 1992), 23.

¹¹⁰ Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 145.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

She writes that "[t]he primacy of forgiveness as an act of will assures that forgiveness and its concomitant release are possible even when the valued qualities of warmth and acceptance are not authentically viable."¹¹²

To understand forgiveness as a willed activity demands the recognition of the nature of violation within a relational world. Within a relational world the violation is neither external to the individuals involved nor to the society, rather it is internalized by the individuals involved and by the society as a whole. On an interpersonal level Suchocki contends that there is "an entwining of victim and violator through the very nature of violation. The well-being of one is necessarily affected by the well-being of the other."¹¹³ There is no separation between violator and victim. They both experience the event not only at the moment that it occurs but also as an ongoing memory. For the victim this means that "[v]iolence does not end with the completion of its occurrence: it insinuates itself into the ongoing experience of the victim."¹¹⁴ The past is not only violated but also the future for "[v]iolation amounts to the robbery of future time by forcing what should be new experiences to conform to the contours of the old."¹¹⁵

The effects of violence moreover are social. They become internalized within the community as part of the cumulative effects of original sin.¹¹⁶ The violation of one becomes the "sin" of all.

As a willed activity Suchocki contends that forgiveness is both self and other directed. It is the means by which to overcome the internalized effects of violence through the constellation of memory, empathy and imagination. Each of

¹¹² Ibid., 146.

¹¹³ Ibid., 147.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 157.

these human capabilities allows one to transcend one's present, thereby mitigating against the effects of internalized violence.

Suchocki argues that "[t]hrough the transcendence of memory, one differentiates oneself from the absorption into the past by allowing the past to *be* past."¹¹⁷ Memory allows one to know the past and to see the past as past. Forgiveness, however, entails remembering with the specific end of transformation.

Suchocki contrasts the transformative nature of forgiveness to the destructive nature of vengeance, which can also be referred to as retributive justice.¹¹⁸ In the case of retributive justice one remembers not with the view to a new transformed future but in order to seek revenge, to punish or even, in more extreme cases, to destroy.¹¹⁹ Vengeance does not aim to heal the effects of violence but to perpetrate violence.¹²⁰ The shift from retributive to restorative justice, which

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 152.

¹¹⁸ See above footnote 108.

¹¹⁹ Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 151. Cf. Sam Keen who states that, "[f]orgiveness alone allows me both to accept my past and to be free from its crippling wounds. Hatred binds me in a repetitive compulsion, in a continual search for targets (or its opposite - paranoia - to a conviction that I am a universal target). Sam Keen, *To a Dancing God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 34.

¹²⁰ In his work *Violence and the Sacred* Rene Girard offers an insightful, albeit a somewhat reductionist, view of the nature of justice. Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, Patrick Gregory, trans. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977). Girard argues that our current justice system is rooted in the principle of vengeance and that "the specter of vengeance plays an important role in shaping relationships among individuals." 15 Girard contends that "[t]he obligation never to shed blood cannot be distinguished from the obligation to exact vengeance on those who shed it. If men wish to prevent an interminable outbreak of vengeance (just as today we wish to prevent nuclear war), it is not enough to convince their fellows that violence is detestable - for it is precisely because they detest violence that men make a duty of vengeance." 15. Cf. e.g., John Howard Yoder who writes "vengeance does not need to be commanded; it happens. It is the normal response of fallen humanity to any situation that calls forth hostility. And normally such vengeance is unlimited." *The Christian and Capital Punishment* (Newton: Faith and Life Press, 1961), 6.

entails a shift from viewing the aim of memories to preserve violence to viewing the aim of memories to heal, is at the base of Suchocki's view of forgiveness.

Reconciliation demands not only the transcendence of memory but also what Suchocki refers to as the transcendence of empathy. Suchocki contends that, "[t]hrough the transcendence of empathy, one gains the ability to separate self from the other and to see the other as fully other, even in relation to the self."¹²¹ Once one is able to feel the other as a separate self, Suchocki argues, "[o]ne is then free to will one's own well-being and the other's well-being."¹²² In Suchocki's view the other is not in opposition to the self. As I stressed in Chapter Three, Suchocki views existence as inextricably relational so that to see the self in opposition to the other is to create a false dichotomy between individuals. The value and integrity of the other is known empathetically through the inherent relationality of existence.

Another way to state this is that Suchocki's view supports the "autonomy" of each individual. Autonomy in this case does not mean isolation, separation or independence, but interdependence, that is to say, integrity in relationship. The transcendence of empathy allows one to appreciate the autonomy of the other and thereby to wish the well-being of the other.¹²³

Suchocki argues that the third aspect of forgiveness involves the imagination. She maintains that "[t]hrough the transcendence of imagination, one receives release from the past through openness to a new future. In and through imagination, the will to well-being moves into visions of well-being, which themselves empower one to work toward well-being."¹²⁴

¹²¹ Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 151.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ For a more detailed discussion of the concept of autonomy see below, 2 ff.

¹²⁴ Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 152.

Suchocki also stresses the role of prayer as an essential part of the redemptive process so as to wish the well-being of all. While Suchocki insists that "[t]o forgive is to will the well-being of the other, and to live accordingly,"¹²⁵ she acknowledges the difficulty of the demand to pray for those who have violated one's existence. Nevertheless, she argues that "[w]e must pray for the other's well-being, even through gritted teeth, in the honesty of our souls."¹²⁶ She goes on to state that "[s]ometimes the prayer is as crude as 'oh God, I wish they would rot in hell, but I pray for their well-being anyway, and ask you to forgive my own evil wishes even though I prefer to keep on wishing them; God help us both. Amen.'"¹²⁷

Suchocki admits that the benefit of a vengeful prayer is limited and that "[t]here is seldom great release in such praying, since we are in the grip of hatred."¹²⁸ Despite its limitations Suchocki argues that

responding to my wishes for vengeance with a prayer for the other's well-being actually begins to release me from my own participation in hatred and transform me. God universally desires well-being, and God desires my enemy's well-being. Should I not be in conformity with God's own great will toward well-being?¹²⁹

While Suchocki suggests that forgiveness should be striven for within the world, forgiveness within finitude differs, however, from forgiveness within the divine. Suchocki argues that in God

¹²⁵ Suchocki, *In God's Presence*, 54.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid. Suchocki's position is reflected in a letter written by a woman to her father who had molested her as a child. (The letter written as an exercise in therapy, was never sent) "Dad,... I believe God wants me to forgive. Why? You don't deserve it - God knows that. All the demons in hell know it. You don't even want it. So why would I forgive you? For me! As I forgive you I let go of you - the sorrow, the rage, the memories, and gain peace - imperceptibly, minute bits at a time. I do not forgive because you deserve it, but because I deserve it and God asks it of me. I cannot live with my bitterness any longer, for it has nearly destroyed me. I forgive you. I ask God to forgive you. I release you." Cooper-White, *The Cry of Tamar*, 259-60.

the criterion of well-being (truth, love and beauty), and the elements that make for forgiveness (memory, empathy, and imagination) merge, so that in a sense one might say that the divine character is forgiveness.¹³⁰

Truth merges with memory in God. All is in God not as the past, for God "does not have 'a' past - but God contains the past."¹³¹ Through the power of God's memory the past in God is ever-present. Truth refers to all that is in God; this is "the fullest possible knowledge of all that has ever been."¹³²

Empathy and love also converge within God. Empathy and love share the characteristic of having the capacity to feel the otherness of the other. In God this process is intensified. As Suchocki argues,

[i]f indeed God ... resurrects the world into the divine life, [e]ach element of the world would be recontextualized in God, being fully itself (since God feels it in its entirety), and yet a participant in God, who contains and sustains it. Otherness and sameness dance in the interchange between God and a resurrected world. In God, empathy and love converge.¹³³

Suchocki also speculates that within God imagination and beauty come together as one. Whereas in the world imagination is restricted by this-worldly limitations, no such limitations exist within God. Suchocki argues that "God's transforming power is an ultimate form of imagination. And the imagination of God is an ever-changing vision of beauty wherein all manner of things shall be well."¹³⁴ Suchocki therefore equates God's love with forgiveness. God receives the world. All is thereby "invited" into the "divine love that is God's forgiveness, God's own will toward our well-being."¹³⁵ Within God, God's love is the basis of

¹³⁰ Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 158.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid., 159.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid. It is interesting to note Suchocki's use of the word "invitation." An invitation implies something that can be refused. In her earlier work there is no suggestion that one can refuse God's will once taken up within God.

all forgiveness. Suchocki consequently concludes that "[t]o forgive is to participate in the nature of God."¹³⁶

Suchocki's argument calls to mind Alexander Pope's adage that "to err is human and to forgive is divine."¹³⁷ While Suchocki would certainly agree that to err is human, within her view the possibility for forgiveness as the fulfillment of justice depends on the interrelationship between God and the world. Suchocki refers to forgiveness as a vision which is "drawn from the whole universe of relations, and it bespeaks the beauty of reciprocal well-being, of justice, of love without boundaries."¹³⁸ This vision provides the basis for the hope of transformation and reconciliation. Suchocki indicates that the vision necessitates divine and human activity as "[t]he vision is brought ever to fruition through the divine and human event of forgiveness."¹³⁹

The question of forgiveness as divine and human activity needs to be considered briefly in relation to the larger issue of divine grace and human freedom. It is well beyond the scope of this chapter to go into a lengthy discussion of this topic.¹⁴⁰ Let us consider, however the Pauline - Augustinian - Lutheran tradition in which humans are viewed as having the capacity of carrying out certain activities (for example, exercising saving faith, truly loving, that is, without ulterior, self-serving motives, or experiencing steadfast hope), *only* by virtue of the grace of God working within them. All of these acts or virtues are rooted in the "heart." The ungraced (and thus unsaved) heart is self-oriented rather than God-oriented and

¹³⁶ Ibid., 160.

¹³⁷ William Warburton, ed., *The Works of Alexander Pope*, vol. 1, "Essay on Criticism" (New York: William Durell, 1807), Part I, line 325.

¹³⁸ Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 160.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ See, e.g., Hans Küng, *Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Response*. T. Collins, E.E. Tolk, & D. Granskou, trans. (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1965).

acts emanating from this orientation can be, at best, nothing but, as Augustine states, "splendid vices."¹⁴¹

But thanks to grace (*gratia operans*) - a fresh creative act of God - the heart can be radically changed, from self-love to love of God, set free and energized to real virtue. The question arises if this means that God rather than individuals perform these acts? At the very least this tradition maintains that we must say that our *real* love, our *real* faith is God's grace working through us.

Does this view, therefore, diminish our humanity making us merely mechanical puppets of God? Christian theology typically denies this, although the concern about this was certainly raised by the Pelagians¹⁴² and the Arminians.¹⁴³ Augustine, e.g., contends that the more filled with grace (*gratia operans* and *gratia cooperans*) we are, the more human we become. It is self-love, i.e., sin, that *dehumanizes* us. In this view the love of God restores our fallen and vitiated humanity. The more dependent we are on grace, the freer we become - and the more blessed.¹⁴⁴

Related to this question, and worth mentioning briefly with respect to the current discussion, is the issue of extrinsic or juridical versus intrinsic justification. Against the idea of works-righteousness held by the Roman Catholic Church the sixteenth century Reformer Martin Luther claimed that we are justified by grace

¹⁴¹ See e.g., Romans 1:21; Romans 7:18, and 2 Cor. 3:5.

¹⁴² Pelagianism, which was named for the British theologian Pelagius c.360-c. 420 and strongly opposed by St. Augustine, taught that humans can achieve salvation through their own sustained efforts.

¹⁴³ Arminianism takes its name from the Dutch Reformed theologian Jacobus Arminius (Jakob Hermans) (1560- 1609). Against the Calvinist position that Christ died only for the elect, i.e., the predestined few, the Arminians argued that Christ died for all of humanity. In the 18th century John Wesley (1703-1791), founder of Methodism, taught a form of Arminianism. See A.C. Outler, *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

¹⁴⁴ Also see footnote 208 below.

alone (*sola*), and not by our deeds.¹⁴⁵ Swiss reformer John Calvin, for example, said that by grace God clothes and covers us with "the robe of Christ's righteousness" and henceforth looks at it when he looks at us, seeing it and not the vile content of our hearts and souls. The Reformers said that God regards us "as if" we were righteous, even though we are not. We are *declared* righteous rather than *made* righteous. Moreover they insisted that faith and grace do not keep us from being still wretched sinners. We are, Luther states, *simul iustus et peccator* - at once righteous though sinful.

Against this extreme emphasis, however, Roman Catholicism insisted on both extrinsic and intrinsic righteousness.¹⁴⁶ God does forgive us and love us even though we are sinful but God's will is not only to regard us *as though* we were righteous but also to make us internally righteous, to bring us to the state of conforming to the divine will. Granted this does not happen immediately upon the birth of saving faith, indeed it only begins then and may not be completed in this life (hence the need for purgatory). It does, however, begin with faith and this is its goal and trajectory.

While parallels can be drawn between Suchocki's view of the action of God's forgiveness and that of the Roman Catholic tradition inasmuch as she stresses that this activity occurs as a process as one is in effect "purged" of one's sins, her view differs significantly from more traditional views in that God's

¹⁴⁵ Luther's conflict with the Roman Catholic Church arose from a personal experience which convinced him of Augustine's emphasis on theocentricity, of the nothingness of humanity alongside of God and of the sense of personal assurance that God grants salvation to individual souls.

¹⁴⁶ As Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) writes: "Take away free will and there will be nothing to save; take away grace, and there will be nothing by which salvation is wrought.... Grace arouses free will when it plants reflection: grace heals when it changes the desire; grace strengthens free will that it may be lead to action; it preserves it from thinking of defection." As quoted in, Küng, *Justification*, 266.

forgiveness is not given directly but is mediated to us through others. This is not a unilateral process, nor for that matter a bilateral process, between God and the individual.¹⁴⁷ In Suchocki's view forgiveness demands the resolution of specific transgressions of justice. Breaches of right relationship must be transformed from within the very relationships which went amiss. While God can and does facilitate this transformation for all, this process of forgiveness involves that we forgive others and that others forgive us. God as judge mediates this process by conferring knowledge upon those involved so that they can come to know God's will and in this way be reconciled to each other within God.

In *God-Christ-Church* Suchocki illustrates the way in which the fulfillment of justice as forgiveness is carried out by introducing the scenario of a medieval woman who was tried, found guilty, and burned as a witch. I think that it is worth discussing her description of this process at length to indicate the way in which Suchocki envisions the role of actual entities within the redemptive process. In presenting this scenario Suchocki explains her view of the relationship amongst the various layers of the resurrected "selves" of the woman and the experience of these selves within the divine. Suchocki suggests that within God

[t]he seven-year-old child feels the thirty-seven-year-old woman burning at the stake-but it also means that the thirty-seven-year old woman feels again with a simultaneity the delights of other moments in her life. The regathered personality in God is the resurrected body in all ages and no age, transcending every moment of existence in the reunion of all moments of existence.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ P. Dupont, for example, writes that "... Man is 'reconciled' in that he sees his situation between God changed. The change is accomplished at the time of the death of Christ. It precedes every change in the personal attitudes of man. Christ has made peace once for all. Henceforth the world finds itself at peace with God," as quoted in Küng, *Justification*, 231.

¹⁴⁸ Suchocki, *God-Christ-Church*, 212.

Suchocki contends that "[t]his phase of judgment is the suprapersonal totality of the self, feeling one's whole existence as copresent in God and with God, and as felt by God."¹⁴⁹

The woman taken up into God is not, however, the whole story. In the first place the many resurrected selves are not alone in God, and in the second place, the woman has not experienced justice within God. To be able to experience justice the woman has to experience not only God's judgment but she also has to be aware of the judge who sentenced her to death. Suchocki writes that the judge also "experiences resurrection in God; he, too, experiences the totality of himself; he, too, experiences his effects upon others."¹⁵⁰ Within the divine the judge will therefore know his actions as God knows them, and consequently he will know his actions as not responding to God's initial aim. Since within God there is fullness of knowledge, he will be aware not only of his personal complicity but also of the complicity of the whole system that sanctioned his earthly judgments. That is to say, he will be aware of his own personal sin as well as the manifestations of original sin.

His sin is more than individual sin. Sin is never wholly private and demands more than just an individual solution. Just as sin is not solely a private matter neither is forgiveness. The danger with an individualized understanding of sin and forgiveness is that it is "very useful for the oppressors."¹⁵¹

If the oppressed and others can be convinced that sin and forgiveness are individual matters, then they will not see that sin and forgiveness have systemic and structural roots. They will not see that in order to root out sin and promote real forgiveness, the structures of oppression have to be changed.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ The Amanecida Collective, *Revolutionary Forgiveness*, 91.

¹⁵² Ibid. The way in which our society sanctions abuse is poignantly exemplified in a statement made by an abused woman. "My husband struck me on our honeymoon. He killed our first child by kicking the four-month child

The abused are asked to be 'patient, forbearing, and 'forgiving' of the wrongs done to them. As such, 'good Negroes,' 'good girls,' and 'good peasants' harbor no grudges. They 'forgive' the harm done to them by acting as if nothing were the matter."¹⁵³

It is, however, within the realm of God', that is, God's knowledge that comprehensive judgment and consequently forgiveness can occur. To return to the earlier scenario of the woman and the judge Suchocki contends that "[t]he inexorable movement whereby God pulls [the judge's] subjectivity into increasing self-knowledge is experienced by him not as freedom, but as that which goes against his own freedom"¹⁵⁴ Suchocki argues that "[t]he divine freedom governs the divine concrescence; insofar as one's own use of freedom was in conformity with the nature of God, one will experience God as heaven; insofar as one's freedom was against the nature of God, one will experience God as hell."¹⁵⁵

This does not mean, of course, that in God there is literally a pit of fire and brimstone, at the entrance to which one is warned to "[a]bandon hope, all who enter here." A different scenario arises. By participating in God the entity becomes opened up to another sort of hell, perhaps, as I indicated above, better referred to as a form of purgatory.

[I]f th[e] occasion formed itself against the divine will toward the well-being of all, then that occasion will experience God's freedom as its own restrictive hell, and it will burst

out of my uterus. My doctor asked me what I did to make him so mad, our Anglican minister reminded me that I had married for better or worse, the lawyer wanted to know where I would get the money to pay the fees, and my mother told my husband where I was hiding. I called the police after my husband hit me. The officer arrived and said to me, 'Would you mind shutting up and sitting down.' He spoke to my husband even though I called him to help me." Anonymous, quoted in Minister of Supply and Services, Canada, *Final Report of the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women*, 5.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 92.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 214.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

against the bonds of such imprisonment until it finds the bonds dissolved through its own transformation into God's love.¹⁵⁶

Through this participation, through the power of divine knowledge, transformation occurs. In the case of the woman and the judge Suchocki writes that the woman is aware of the judge

experiencing her pain within the divine nature. But her own movement is beyond that pain into transformation. The judge is not locked into her pain, any more than she is, the judge, too, experiences her transformation in God, and therefore participates in that transformation. She contributes to his redemption.¹⁵⁷

Knowledge, as divine prehension, becomes transformed. Within the limits of finite reality knowledge of oneself is "mediated" by God. In the realm of God one participates in a more profound form of knowledge as God's judgment, and comes to recognize one's self and others in terms of God's love and forgiveness.

Process theologian and Jesuit Joseph Bracken suggests that "[p]erfect knowledge implies perfect love, and vice-versa."¹⁵⁸ This movement toward perfect love is one wherein multiplicity moves deeper and deeper into unity.

The judge moves from alienation from the others toward supplementation by the others toward completion through and contribution to others in the full integration of God. Just as the redemption of the woman he harmed contributed to his redemption, even so, his increasing redemption contributes to her deepening joy. For the ultimate transformation and unity in God is love, pervasive, deep, everlasting.¹⁵⁹

There is in Suchocki's view a reciprocity of feelings. She is not suggesting that the woman's joy deepens as the judge suffers his own personal hell. This is not a vision of the righteous delighting in the suffering of the sinful.¹⁶⁰ It is a

¹⁵⁶ Suchocki, "Evil, Eschatology and God: Response to David Griffin," 67.

¹⁵⁷ Suchocki, *God-Christ-Church*, 214.

¹⁵⁸ Joseph Bracken, S.J., *Society and Spirit: A Trinitarian Cosmology* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1991), s. 174.

¹⁵⁹ Suchocki, *God-Christ-Church*, 215.

¹⁶⁰ Geddes MacGregor writes that "even the generally moderate and judicial temper of Thomas Aquinas [1225-1274] did not prevent his endorsing the view, by then widely held, that the blessed in heaven will be granted a perfect view of the punishment of the damned and will have no pity on them; indeed, the punishment of the damned will be an indirect result of the joy of the blessed,

vision of the transformation of suffering through participation within the power of God's knowledge and forgiveness.

To conclude this discussion of Suchocki's view of forgiveness as restorative justice it is necessary to point out that a review of the literature indicates that Suchocki's view of justice linked to forgiveness is indeed not unique within the field of feminist theology. Important work in this area has been done by Marie Fortune,¹⁶¹ Pamela Cooper-White,¹⁶² the Amanecida Collective,¹⁶³ and Frederick Keene.¹⁶⁴ Suchocki's view, however, differs in that she provides an

since it is part of the fulfillment of God's justice." *Images of the Afterlife: Beliefs from Antiquity to Modern Times* (New York: Paragon House, 1992), 179-80.

¹⁶¹ Marie Fortune. *Keeping the Faith: Questions and Answers for the Abused Woman* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987). Also see Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1983). Fortune views justice as a "prerequisite for a victim to move toward forgiveness.... If justice is the right relation between persons, then reconciliation is the making of justice where there was injustice." *Sexual Violence*, 211, 213. Fortune contends that 'justice making' must be carried out through truth-telling, acknowledging the truth, compassion, protecting the vulnerable, accountability, restitution and vindication for the victims.

¹⁶² Cooper-White *The Cry of Tamar*.

¹⁶³ The Amanecida Collective, *Revolutionary Forgiveness: Feminist Reflections on Nicaragua* (Orbis Books: New York, 1987). The collective is comprised of thirteen American citizens, students, teachers and ministers. The group includes Carter Heyward, Anne Gilson, Kirsten Lundblad, Susna Harlow, Margarita Suarez, Laura Biddle, Florence Gelo, Elaine Koenig, Virginia Lund, Pat Michaels, Laurie Rofinot, Jane Van Zandt, and Carol Vogler. Amongst them the members of the collective made five trips to Nicaragua between January 1983 and August 1985. During their visits to Nicaragua members of the Amanecida Collective were confronted with a hitherto unknown vision of forgiveness. In trying to forge a new form of society which would not propagate the hatred and the vengefulness that the Somoza regime had fostered the Sandinista regime sought to develop an alternative vision of justice based on what the collective refers to as "revolutionary forgiveness." Through the collective's examination of the Sandinista regime's attempt to create a just society, i.e., a society of right relationships, the collective concludes that "an essential key for moving beyond wrong relationship to right relationship is forgiveness." *Revolutionary Forgiveness*.

¹⁶⁴ Frederick W. Keene, "Structures of Forgiveness in the New Testament." Carol J. Adams & Marie M. Fortune, eds. *Violence Against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook* (Continuum Publishing Company, 1995), 121-134. Keene develops a model of forgiveness as an alternative to "repentance required" or the conservative model of forgiveness (based on such texts as Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3) and the "unconditional" or the liberal model (based on such texts as Mark 2:1-12; Matt. 9:2-8, Luke 5:17-26). Keene argues that a careful study of the concept of forgiveness in the New Testament

understanding of God's redemptive nature through which forgiveness for *all* occurs. I come back to this point in Chapter Five. Suffice to say for the moment that while Suchocki's view of forgiveness finds support in that of other feminist theologians who develop the concept of forgiveness as restorative justice, Suchocki expressly bases her view of emancipative forgiveness in the nature of God's redemptive activity which allows for the transformation and reconciliation of *all* relationships.

In sum, Suchocki insists on the need for some form of subjective immortality to be able to defend the basic Christian hope of overcoming evil, through the fulfillment of justice. In her works *God-Christ-Church* and *The End of Evil* Suchocki develops the concept of subjective immortality based on modifications that she makes to Whiteheadian metaphysics. Suchocki suggests that justice is achieved within God through the process of forgiveness as each entity moves into a fuller knowledge of its own actions from the perspective of God's initial aim. It is through divine knowledge that each entity comes to know itself, the other in God, and God. Justice is fulfilled through the process of forgiveness, that is, through knowing, feeling and forgiving within God.

reveals that another model of forgiveness emerges. "one where forgiveness occurs only when the parties involved possess equal power in the relationship where forgiveness is applicable, or else when the person with the grievance has the greater power within that relationship." Following from this view of forgiveness Keene argues that "[i]f an offence [sic] is committed against the weaker by the more powerful, the weaker are not expected to be forgiving." Keene, therefore, maintains that "no one should be asked or expected to forgive those who retain the power in a relationship where forgiveness might be applicable.... Only when the patterns of power are reversed can the act of forgiveness be considered." "Structures of Forgiveness in the New Testament," 129-132.

Assessing Suchocki's Understanding of the Process of Liberation

To assess Suchocki's understanding of the process of liberation in this section I consider her argument in relation to the criticism raised against it by process theologian David Griffin and Jesuit process theologian Joseph Bracken. Amongst those process theologians who advocate some form of subjective immortality,¹⁶⁵ Griffin¹⁶⁶ has provided the most detailed critique of Suchocki's understanding of the concept in his review of *The End of Evil*.¹⁶⁷ While, as I discussed above, Suchocki challenges Ogden with respect to the *need* for subjective immortality to address God's ability to overcome evil, in this section I show that Griffin challenges Suchocki with respect to her *formulation* of the process of subjective immortality as a means to overcome evil.

¹⁶⁵ Other examples of process arguments for subjective immortality include Tyron Inbody, "Process Theology and Personal Survival," *The Iliff Review* 31 (1974), 31-42; David Ray Griffin, "The Possibility of Subjective Immortality in the Philosophy of Whitehead," *The Modern Schoolman* 53 (1975), 342-360; John B. Cobb, Jr., *Christ in a Pluralistic Age* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), Chapter Sixteen; Charles Hartshorne, "Three Responses to Neville's *Creativity and God*," *Process Studies* 10/3-4 (Fall-Winter 1980), 93-97, and Joseph Bracken, *The Truine Symbol: Persons, Process and Community* (Lanham: University of America Press, 1985), Chapter Seven.

¹⁶⁶ As Joseph Bracken suggests, "Griffin's argument is limited to subjective immortality for human beings in their temporal consciousness. Since the human psyche even in this life enjoys a certain independence of the body in which it is housed, it seems entirely possible that, freed from the body through death, it could relate to God and other finite selves more directly and immediately than it can in the present life." *Society and Spirit*, 143. See David Ray Griffin, "The Possibility of Subjective Immortality in Whitehead's Philosophy," *The Modern Schoolman* 53 (1965-76).

¹⁶⁷ See Griffin, "Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The End of Evil: Process Eschatology in Historical Context*." Griffin does not develop as fully as Suchocki the concept of subjective immortality, but he does argue that in view of Whitehead's philosophy he "is neither a dualistic nor a materialist, and is yet a pluralistic realist" which means that Whitehead's philosophy opens up an alternative way of understanding the self. From this Griffin contends that "the human soul could not have emerged except by being located at the focal point of a highly complex, coordinated animal body, so organized as to contribute the majority of its data to this focal point, and in turn to be receptive to influence from this point." Griffin suggests, however, that "it does not seem to require that this high-level actuality, once it has fully emerged, would be unable to survive, and even flourish, in another environment." "Subjective Immortality in Whitehead's Philosophy," 55.

Unlike Griffin, Bracken for the most part supports Suchocki's view of subjective immortality. While Bracken is by no means uncritical of Suchocki's argument, he not only defends much of it but he also uses it as the base for the development of his own understanding of divine-creaturely relationships.¹⁶⁸ Assessing Suchocki's view of subjective immortality in light of Griffin's and Bracken's arguments highlights not only some of the possible weaknesses of her argument but also its many strengths.

In his review of *The End of Evil*, Griffin maintains that he now agrees with Suchocki that "an adequate theodicy requires an eschatology that portrays God's power as sufficient to guarantee the victory of good over evil."¹⁶⁹ While Griffin supports Suchocki's view that there is a need to develop an eschatology which includes the fulfillment of justice, he nevertheless criticizes the way in which she carries out the task. It needs to be kept in mind that it is not subjective immortality *per se* that Griffin criticizes but whether Suchocki has been able to develop an adequate concept of subjective immortality based on Whitehead's metaphysical principles.

Griffin's primary objection to the way in which Suchocki develops her modifications of Whitehead's thought to establish her concept of subjective

¹⁶⁸ See Joseph Bracken, S.J., *Society and Spirit: A Trinitarian Cosmology* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1991), Chapter Seven.

¹⁶⁹ Griffin, "Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The End of Evil*," 62. When discussing the nature of God in relation to the question of justice, what is referred to as the problem of evil or the question of theodicy comes to the fore. While the term theodicy, etymologically derived from the Greek theos, God, and dike, justice, was introduced by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716), the problem of evil was apparently first formulated by Epicurus (341-270 BC) in the form of a dilemma which perhaps receives its most succinct formulation in the words of David Hume (1711-76): "Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? then he is impotent. Is he able but not willing? then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?" *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, in *The English Philosophers from Bacon to Mill* Edwin A. Burt, ed. (New York: the Modern Library, 1939), 741. Suchocki defines theodicy "as the justification of God in the face of unnecessary evil in creation." *The End of Evil*, 2.

immortality is that her addition of *enjoyment* as a third mode of creativity¹⁷⁰ and her suggestion that "the satisfaction, with its subjective immediacy, can be prehended either objectively *or* subjectively"¹⁷¹ are incompatible with fundamental Whiteheadian categories. Griffin argues that these additions lead to three problems.

First, the notion that subjective immediacy persists in the "creativity of enjoyment" in the satisfaction does not imply that it would persist in the "transitional creativity." Second, her argument seems to turn a difference of degree into a difference of kind: she goes from saying that an occasion's immediacy cannot be "fully retained" when it is prehended by a finite actual entity to the absolute distinction between objective and subjective immortality. Third, it is not clear that the "immediacy" that is reconciled with objective immortality in Whitehead's statement ["in everlastingness immediacy is reconciled with objective immortality"] is *subjective* immediacy: the issue taken in context ... seems to be that in God's experience, unlike ours, the distant past is not felt with less immediacy than the immediate present.¹⁷²

In light of his reading of Whitehead's philosophy Griffin therefore challenges the coherence of Suchocki's modifications which support her concept of subjective immortality.

I wish to consider briefly Griffin's first point which strikes at the heart of her argument, the addition of enjoyment as a third mode of creativity. Griffin argues that there is not *necessarily* a retention of subjective immediacy in transitional creativity just because there is the retention of subjective immediacy in the creativity of enjoyment. One does not necessarily follow from the other, at least not if one assumes, as Griffin's argument seems to, that at some point enjoyment must reach completion thereby providing the opportunity for subjective immediacy to be lost. In Griffin's view positing a third form of creativity, enjoyment, as the retention of immediacy, negates Whitehead's understanding of creativity.

Suchocki addresses this question in *The End of Evil* by arguing that the subjective immediacy of an occasion needs to be understood in terms of "process

¹⁷⁰ See above, 22.

¹⁷¹ Griffin, "Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki. *The End of Evil*," 58.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 59.

and outcome, rather than process alone."¹⁷³ In other words, Suchocki argues that the activity of enjoyment includes immediacy although during this part of the process of concrescence, it "does not come within the category of prehension at all - it is the result of what has been done with prehensions."¹⁷⁴ In her view satisfaction as enjoyment is active, which "naturally gives rise to givingness, or the transitional power which offers just this mode of to a future, evoking that future into becoming a new present."¹⁷⁵

In response to Griffin's criticism that positing a third form of creativity, enjoyment, as the retention of immediacy, negates Whitehead's understanding of creativity, Suchocki argues that enjoyment is not only a tenable modification but also a necessary modification to Whitehead's understanding of creativity if one wishes to be able to explain more fully the relationship between concrescent activity and transitional activity. In Suchocki's view, this distinction is only one of perspective. As she contends in *The End of Evil* "there is *only* concrescent creativity or *only* transitional creativity, depending upon whether one spoke from the perspective of the present or the past."¹⁷⁶ Immediacy is found through an "enjoyment which is the dynamic holding together of the many into the unity of the now determined being."¹⁷⁷ This modification is crucial for Suchocki's argument. By claiming that immediacy is not lost she is able to contend that the occasion is active within God and not passive as Griffin contends.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷³ Ibid., 87.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 88.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Suchocki, "Evil, Eschatology and God," 66.

¹⁷⁸ The idea of the occasion as passive within God follows from Whitehead's statement that "[n]o actual entity can be conscious of its own satisfaction; for such knowledge would be a component in the process, and would thereby alter the satisfaction." Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 31.

It seems to me that Suchocki's development of the concept of enjoyment is a feasible modification of Whitehead's thought. It is interesting to note that Joseph Bracken applauds Suchocki's development of the concept of enjoyment what he refers to as "a minor modification of Whitehead's conceptual scheme that would enable literally every actual occasion to enjoy subjective immortality within the consequent nature of God."¹⁷⁹ We need, however, to consider the consequences of this view of subjective immortality.

Suchocki suggests that as an entity becomes apotheosized it becomes part of God, thereby participating in God's immediacy, feeling the immediacy of its own existence and that of others. Griffin argues that Suchocki's argument implies that while for Whitehead "the 'completion' applied only to the occasion as objective superject [i.e., the occasion has an effect beyond itself]: it was not a completion to be felt by the occasion's immediacy."¹⁸⁰ Griffin argues that in effect Suchocki collapses the subject/superject nature of the occasion when the occasion is taken up into God. Through her concept of enjoyment the occasion remains itself while becoming more than itself. Griffin contends that this view contradicts a basic Whiteheadian claim that "the occasion's satisfaction ... admits of no addition."¹⁸¹ That is to say, once satisfaction has been completed, once the concrescence process has been completed, the occasion perishes before a new occasion arises. There must be a form of closure before a new occasion can arise.

Suchocki contests Griffin's criticism by suggesting that the problem lies in their differing understandings of the nature of God. There are two ways in which

¹⁷⁹ Bracken, *Society and Spirit*, 143. Bracken moreover builds on Suchocki's revisions to develop a trinitarian and what he refers to as a "field-oriented" approach to the God-world relationship. Ibid., 140-160.

¹⁸⁰ Griffin, "Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The End of Evil*," 60.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

Whitehead interpreters understand God, as either an "everlasting actual entity,"¹⁸² Suchocki's position, or as a "temporal society of divine occasions." Griffin's view.¹⁸³

The difference in the two views is based on the way in which one understands the dipolar nature of God. From the perspective of God as an everlasting entity God, unlike all other actual entities, begins with the mental pole, i.e., God begins with a primordial satisfaction, and is completed through the physical pole. As Griffin explains,

[m]any Whitehead interpreters believe that Whitehead's account of God as a single actual entity interacting with the world is insuperably problematic. Whitehead said that God was not to be an exception to metaphysical principles. The priority of physical to mental feelings seems a good candidate for a metaphysical principle, yet God is said to originate from the mental pole. And it seems to be a metaphysical principle that contemporaries cannot interact; yet God is said, while in the midst of concrescence, to take in worldly actual occasions in return, thereby simultaneously exerting final and efficient causation. Many Whiteheadians, most notably John Cobb in *A Christian Natural Theology*, have resolved these problems by following Hartshorne's lead in defining God as a temporal society of divine occasions.¹⁸⁴

Suchocki maintains that since Griffin views God as a society of occasions rather than an actual entity he finds it problematic "that there are mutual prehensions of occasions within a society."¹⁸⁵ Suchocki contends, in what I find to be a rather obscure answer, that "the prehended data, whether in God or in a finite occasion, must be felt relative to one another in comparisons and contrasts."¹⁸⁶

Suchocki seems to circumvent Griffin's question by asking in turn what difference it makes "if the prehended data include retained immediacies, with some of these immediacies including consciousness."¹⁸⁷ Suchocki argues that she

¹⁸² For a definition of an actual entity see Chapter Three 10ff.

¹⁸³ Griffin, "Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The End of Evil*," 59.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁸⁵ Suchocki, "Evil, Eschatology and God," 67.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

explores the possibility that the consciousness (when applicable) of the resurrected occasion is grounded in the greater consciousness of God, and therefore - in the unity of God - participates in both. It continues to experience its own satisfaction, but also, as part of God, experiences God's satisfaction. Put another way, God's consciousness is infinitely complex, including a variety of standpoints. The part is saved by its relation to the whole.

To be able to address Griffin adequately Suchocki needs to be able to explain more fully what she means by the variety of standpoints which make up the infinite complexity of God's consciousness. How do these in fact stand in relation to the whole? The question still remains whether in fact from these myriad of variant standpoint experiences new prehensions arise.

Bracken approaches this problem in Suchocki's thought by suggesting that "the self-constituting decisions of the occasions are not thereby altered; only the degree of self-acceptance is altered as the occasions progressively learn to make God's feelings in this regard the basis for their own feelings about themselves."¹⁸⁸ Suchocki and Bracken seem to avoid the question of additions to the occasion's satisfaction by emphasizing the shift in consciousness or self-awareness which occurs with the process of liberation within God. The question that must be asked is whether a shift in consciousness necessarily means an addition to the occasion's satisfaction?

Bracken seems to be able to differentiate in Suchocki's thought between self-acceptance and an addition to the occasion's satisfaction. As I indicated above, Bracken defends his position by suggesting that through the transformation process "the self-constituting decisions of the occasions are not thereby altered; only the degree of self-acceptance is altered as the occasions progressively learn to make God's feelings in their regard the basis for their own feelings about themselves."¹⁸⁹ Bracken recognizes that his argument raises questions with regard

¹⁸⁸ Bracken, *Society and Spirit*, 147.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

to a basic Whiteheadian understanding of the process of concrescence. He, however, grounds his defense on Whitehead's statement from *Process and Reality* that

God is completed by the individual, fluent satisfactions of finite fact, and the temporal occasions are completed by their everlasting union with their transformed selves, *purged* into conformation with the eternal order which is final absolute "wisdom."¹⁹⁰

While I concur that Bracken's analysis of Suchocki is correct, that is to say, that she is suggesting an alteration of self-acceptance, I do not think that he takes the significance of her thought far enough. It seems to me that the way in which Suchocki presents the process of liberation involves not only self-acceptance but moreover the acceptance of the other as one enters into a fuller knowledge of oneself through God. Being within God leads to forgiveness. It seems to me that the process which leads to forgiveness would necessarily mean some form of change within the occasion.

It is, therefore, not clear to me that Bracken can separate this act of self-acceptance which comes from being "purged into conformation with the eternal order" from an addition to the occasion's satisfaction. It seems that the problem lies in, as Bracken states, the fact that in the "last part of *Process and Reality* Whitehead was trying to express insights and feelings for which his previously worked out categoreal scheme was no longer fully adequate."¹⁹¹

It is nevertheless essential for Suchocki's argument that the resurrected occasion be able to experience its own satisfaction within God, but as I just suggested I think that she is perhaps presenting a more complex scenario than Bracken suggests. This brings me to my next point that both Griffin and Bracken also acknowledge. If it is necessary for the "individual" to experience subjective

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 142.

immortality, does Suchocki's concept in fact allow for the retention of some form of individuality. The scenario that Suchocki present, that of the woman and the judge, certainly suggests that it does. Griffin, however, contends that Suchocki's argument results in the loss of the "conceptual protection for distinct individuals."¹⁹²

This point calls into question the way in which actual entities relate internally and externally. Griffin argues that Suchocki's vision implies "mutual prehensions [which] would be infinitely reciprocal" therefore resulting in the break down of individuality. As Griffin explains it: "A feels B, and B feels A: A therefore feels B feeling it, and B feels A feeling it; A therefore feels B feeling A feeling B-and so on to infinity."¹⁹³

Griffin's concern here is an important one. The issue of the reciprocity of mutual prehensions could moreover be extended beyond what Griffin suggests. For A not only feels B, but also C, D, E, F etc. which all in turn also feel A. Can individuality in fact be maintained within all this morass of relationships? Is individuality retained so that the fulfillment of justice which depends on individual experience can occur?

Bracken raises the question of maintaining individuality within God as "the ambiguity of maintaining that one and the same reality is both a transcendent individual entity and a community of finite individuals." He argues that the problem is that "[r]eductively the one concept must be subordinate to the other,"¹⁹⁴ Bracken contends that Suchocki's solution to the problem results in pantheism rather than the process notion of panentheism. In this case, the individual loses its

¹⁹² Griffin, " Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki. *The End of Evil*," 61.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Bracken, *Spirit and Society*, 148.

finite form and becomes part of the reality of the other substance (the divine being)."¹⁹⁵

Bracken's solution to this problem is to develop Suchocki's concept of subjective immortality in terms of "a genuinely panentheistic understanding of the God-world relationship [which] envision[s] God as a community of divine persons within whose all-comprehensive field of activity the field proper to the community of all finite entities has its place."¹⁹⁶ This is not the place to go into a detailed discussion of Bracken's theory. Suffice to say that while Suchocki's solution to the problem of individuality is problematic, it may be that Suchocki's modification of Whiteheadian metaphysics, as further developed by Bracken, can in fact support her view. I come back to this issue below from a somewhat different perspective.

Griffin's next criticism centers on what he refers to as Suchocki's extreme requirement of overcoming all instances of evil. He argues that Suchocki's requirement

leads to an extreme solution, which is that every occasion of experience .. enjoys subjective immortality in God, and that this immortality involves a redemptive transformation in which all evil is overcome by the divine harmony, resulting in everlasting peace for each occasion.¹⁹⁷

Griffin argues that by advocating the redemption of all Suchocki attributes to God a capacity for power that is "appropriate only to the God of Augustine and Leibniz with its absolute omnipotence."¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Griffin, "Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The End of Evil*," 58. While Griffin, on the one hand, challenges the credibility of her view, Bracken, on the other, defends the inclusive nature of her position. Bracken moreover argues that this aspect of Suchocki's argument need to be taken even further. He states that Suchocki tends to discuss "those occasions that constitute temporal consciousness or the psyche within human beings." *Society and Spirit*, 145. Bracken contends, however, that "it is important to propose subjective immortality not only for human beings but also for all other societies of occasions as well." Ibid., 141.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

Griffin suggests that Suchocki's concept of divine power means that the fulfillment of justice is guaranteed at the expense of freedom. Griffin writes that

[o]ccasions with conscious satisfaction are ever-lastingly conscious in God, but they have no freedom to exercise this consciousness in a destructive, even a self-destructive, fashion. Peace and harmony are therefore guaranteed by the divine subjective aim.

Suchocki contests Griffin's challenge by suggesting that there is a "process analogue to the absolute power of God." Unlike the classical position, process thought does not admit to an absolutely omnipotent God. On the contrary process thought posits a God who depends on the creation to complete God's power. As Whitehead states, "[i]t is as true to say that God creates the World, as that the World creates God."¹⁹⁹

This is not to say that the term omnipotence is inapplicable to the God of process thought. When the term is used, however, it takes on a meaning different from that of the traditional usage as a sheer monopoly of power. God is omnipotent in as much as God has the maximum power that one among many agents could have. In his discussion of God's omnipotence from a process perspective Ogden writes that

the only coherent meaning that 'all-powerful' or "omnipotent" could have is not all the power there is - since nothing can have that, power being social or divided by the very meaning of the word - but only all the power that any one individual could conceivably have consistently with there being other individuals who are as such must themselves also have some power, however minimal.²⁰⁰

It is this form of "omnipotent" power to which Suchocki is referring. Such omnipotence is power that extends to all things but is not absolute in its relationship

¹⁹⁹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 528. For a discussion of the nature of God's omnipotence in process thought see, e.g., R. Maurice Barineau, "Whitehead on Omnipotence," *The Theodicy of Alfred North Whitehead*, 152-178.

²⁰⁰ Schubert Ogden, "Evil and Belief in God: The Distinctive Relevance of a 'Process Theology,'" *Perkins Journal* (Summer 1978), 33. Ogden's emphasis.

to all things. God depends upon the creation to be able to manifest God's power.

Suchocki states that

[i]f God is a single but unfathomable complex actual entity, then what happens within God's concrescence depends upon God. *What* God must deal with in the divine concrescence depends upon the world; *how* God deals with it depends upon God.²⁰¹

Suchocki argues that we cannot control the way in which God deals with that which God receives within God's self. She contends moreover that "[t]he aim is not to develop the answer to evil that we like, but to follow the metaphysics as far as possible to see what kind of an answer it suggests."²⁰²

Within Suchocki's metaphysical view God, however, does not have the power to select that which God takes into God's self. Actuality depends on the creative process of actual entities. That which occurs within God, the completion of the fulfillment of justice, depends on the nature of the occasions taken up into God. Once within God freedom is experienced in relation to God's will. Suchocki admits that this overrides personal freedom. Suchocki maintains, however, that losing personal freedom means gaining a new form of freedom. Suchocki writes that

I posit that if a now subjectively immortal occasion in God has yearned for the well-being of all, and so formed itself that it was in conformity with God's own desire for the well-being of the world, then that occasion will experience God's freedom as its own most deliriously joyful freedom, it will be freer than it ever hoped to be. But if that occasion formed itself against the divine will toward the well-being of all, then that occasion will experience God's freedom as its own restrictive hell, and it will burst against the bonds of such imprisonment until it finds the bonds dissolved through its own transformation into God's love.²⁰³

201 Suchocki, "Evil, Eschatology and God: Response to David Griffin," 67.

202 Ibid., 167.

203 Elsewhere Suchocki writes that "[i]t is God's subjectivity into which the occasion is now incorporated, and hence God's subjective aim and God's own freedom governs the process. The occasion is therefore not free to accept or reject its completion within God, for freedom belongs with the concrescing subject. This is now God. The occasion's freedom was exercised in its finite process of becoming, and was exhausted in the process. Hence its incorporation is an incorporation into the freedom of God." *The End of Evil*, 111.

But has Suchocki been able to answer Griffin's concern convincingly? Suchocki wants to suggest that there is awareness within God and that there is a change of perception so that the resurrected "self" feels all, gains knowledge and ultimately forgives and is forgiven. There are two points that need to be made here. First, is this act of forgiveness significant given that within God one can act in no other way? Is the power of God's being such that forgiveness can be viewed as the essence of one's true being? Is freedom an illusion which must give way to forgiveness? Is there indeed some form of moral agency?

This question is particularly relevant from a feminist perspective. Developing the concept of the self as a moral agent is critical for feminist theology. Granted that there are feminist thinkers who would argue to the contrary,²⁰⁴ I agree with Wanda Berry that, "[i]f feminist theology is to help women become fully human, it must make central an image which facilitates the assumption of responsibility for one's own life - past, present and future."²⁰⁵ To suggest that the self is a moral agent is to admit that women are autonomous selves responsible for their own moral decisions, a social and an ontological status that women have not always been awarded.²⁰⁶ To make this claim in a meaningful way within a feminist context, it is necessary to reconsider the nature of autonomy.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ Feminist criticisms of the concept of a self come from post-modernists critiques. See e.g., Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge, New York & London, 1990). For a critique of postmodernism from a feminist perspective see Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 203-239. Benhabib argues that "[t]he postmodernist position(s) thought through to their conclusions may eliminate not only the specificity of feminist theory but place in question the very emancipatory ideals of the women's movements altogether." *Ibid.*, 213.

²⁰⁵ Wanda Warren Berry, "Images of Sin and Salvation in Feminist Theology," *Anglican Theological Review* 60 (1978), 51.

²⁰⁶ Kathryn Pauly Morgan argues that "[w]omen can be denied full moral agency in at least three separate ways; first, through a process of pseudo-blind gender essentialist thinking; second, by generating theories of women's nature which claim that women and men are different in degree or kind to such

Feminist ethicist Susan Sherwin contends that

feminist ethics shares with feminine ethics a rejection of the paradigm of moral subjects as autonomous, rational, independent, and virtually indistinguishable from one another; it seems clear that an ontology that considers only isolated, fully developed beings is not adequate for ethics.²⁰⁸

Feminist ethics consequently challenges more traditional ethical theories which view moral agents as "isolated, disembodied, purely rational decision-makers."²⁰⁹ As Sherwin writes,

[p]eople do not approach a social contract with no moral history, as most contractarians would have it; nor do they privately deliberate about moral laws as purely rational beings, as Kant presumes. Further, they can only follow the utilitarian injunction to value the happiness of others if they experience themselves as members of a community where people are mutually caring about one another's well-being.²¹⁰

an extent that women are, necessarily, inferior to men by nature; and third, by alleging that women's lives are marked by a kind of negative moral epiphenomenalism." "Women and Moral Madness," *Science, Morality and Feminist Theory*, 202. Examples of the difference-in-degree theory are found in Aristotle's *Politics*, see e.g., 1143a8, 1260a4 and 1260a30; Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, (Westminster: Christian Classics, 1981), see e.g., Part I, Question 92, Reply to Objection 1 and Reply to Objection 2, and Part III, Question 39, Reply to Objection 3; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile: Or on Education*, Allan Bloom, trans., New York: Basic Books, 1979; Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, John Goldthwait, trans. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960); Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Philosophy of Moral Development* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981).

²⁰⁷ For an early discussion of the way in which women have been excluded from the community of moral persons see Marilyn Frye, "Male Chauvinism," *Philosophy and Sex*, Robert Baker and Frederick Ellison eds., (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1975). For a more extensive historical analysis of the philosophical tradition, see Genevieve Lloyd *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

²⁰⁸ Susan Sherwin, *No Longer Patient: Feminist Ethics and Health Care* (Philadelphia: University Press, 1992), 52-3. Sherwin argues that "feminist" ethics is different from "feminine" ethics in that the former "derives from the explicitly political perspective of feminism, wherein the oppression of women is seen to be morally and politically unacceptable." Sherwin argues that unlike the latter which involves "the recognition of women's actual experiences and moral practices, feminist ethics 'incorporates a critique of the specific practices that constitute [women's] oppression.'" 49.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 53. This is not, however, to suggest that only feminist ethics has provided a critique of the abstract nature of the individual agent. Communitarian theories provide a similar critique, but they differ from feminist ethics in that they are conservative in nature. They fail to analyze hierarchies of oppression and seek to maintain the status quo while feminist ethicists insist on challenging it. *Ibid.*, 54.

From Suchocki's view existence within finitude is not separate from existence within the divine. But can it be said that the self, as a moral agent exists at once within finitude and within the divine?

Suchocki's view does seem to allow for a degree of moral agency within the divine albeit in a significantly different form from that within finitude. Within the divine, the entity now experiences from the perception of God's love and knowledge. To recall, within the divine the entity is no longer lured toward God's will but now as part of God it becomes immersed in God's will and feels, or prehends, itself and others in the totality of that will. The concern is whether the "totality" of God's will is not perhaps indistinguishable from a "totalitarianism" of God's will.

Within the Christian tradition Suchocki certainly has a precedent in Augustine when she suggests that the freedom within God to do good and not have the freedom to sin is the highest form of freedom.²¹¹ But is this view of freedom meaningful? In his discussion of Suchocki's theology Bracken addresses this question by suggesting that although there is no longer self-determinacy *per se* within God there is nevertheless a deepening of moral awareness. Bracken contends that "the occasions progressively learn to make God's feelings . . . the basis for their own feelings about themselves."²¹² Following Bracken's lead, it is

²¹¹ Augustine's position, of course, differs greatly from that of Suchocki. Augustine argues that prior to the original fall humans had the freedom to sin (*posse peccare*) and the freedom not to sin (*posse non peccare*). After the fall, before heaven, and apart from grace, we have the freedom to sin in various ways. In heaven the redeemed enjoy the possibility not to sin (*posse non peccare*) and not the having the possibility to sin (*non posse peccare*). This is not quite the same as the pre-lapsarian state in which humans had the possibility to sin and the possibility not to sin (*posse peccare* and *posse non peccare*). The highest form of freedom for Augustine, therefore, is that of which one may participate in heaven: the freedom to do good and not have the freedom to sin. St. Augustine, *The City of God*, Gerald G. Walsh et al. trans. (New York: Image Books, 1958), 541-2.

²¹² Bracken, *Society and Spirit*, 146.

possible to say that while moral agency is retained within the divine, there is a reversal of its effects. Within the world moral agency affects the world first and second, God. Within God moral agency refers to becoming fully aware of the implications of one's former agency, and the way in which other agents have affected one's existence. Since the effect a subjectively immortalized entity has on the world is predicated upon its ever-increasing depth of moral awareness, there is consequently a reversal of the effects of moral agency. Through the entity's ever-deepening knowledge the entity now enriches first the divine and second the world as "the reality of heaven passes back into the world."²¹³ It seems therefore possible to suggest that Suchocki's understanding of redemption supports a form of moral agency within the divine, granted that it is different from moral agency within finitude.

The second point that I want to make pertains to the variety of experiences that any given entity has within God. As more occasions are taken into God, it would follow that the occasion's experience would change accordingly. The entity, if aware of that which was taken into God, would recognize its own complicity in the whole as it changes and would feel the resolution in terms of God's will as resolution occurs. But does this also mean that if each actual entity is potentially aware of all that occurs within God, is it part of an never-ending experience of conflict and resolution within God?²¹⁴ Bracken contends that the ever-deepening of one's feelings within the divine answers, for example, Hartshorne's concern that

²¹³ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 351.

²¹⁴ This question might be considered in light of H.H. Price's concept of subjective immortality as possibly involving "*many* next worlds, a different one for each group of like-minded personalities." Price admits that he does not know what he means by like-minded but what is interesting is his idea of a limited group of selves which interact after death. "Survival and the Idea of 'Another World,' " *Immortality*, Terence Penelhum, ed. (Belmont, CA.: Wadsworth, 1973), 37.

subjective immortality would in fact be monotonous and boring.²¹⁵ We need, however, to ask what this would mean in terms of one's "freedom" if one is to be cast about within the depths of the divine with no opportunity to effect change but only able to participate within the divine's will in relation to all that occurs within the world.

Lack of freedom leads to another important concern which Griffin raises. He argues that if there is no freedom, "there would be no such thing as genuine evil."²¹⁶ All evil would be *prima facie*.²¹⁷ Griffin argues that under these conditions "it would then not matter what happens in the temporal world, because God could create the greatest possible harmony no matter what."²¹⁸ What follows from Griffin's argument is that if genuine evil does not exist since all is going to be overcome by God, nothing that happens in history ultimately matters. *God will prevail and all will be well.*

Griffin asks if "Suchocki's emphasis on the inevitable ambiguity of finitude, which means that good simply is not possible without the possibility of a correlative degree of evil [does] not provide a sufficient answer to at least many forms of evil?"²¹⁹ In other words he asks if Suchocki would be willing to accept a certain degree of tragedy which results from genuine evil.

²¹⁵ Bracken, *Society and Spirit*, 146.

²¹⁶ Suchocki, "Evil, Eschatology and God: Response to David Griffin," 61.

²¹⁷ Griffin distinguishes between *prima facie* evil, evil which "is necessitated by the conditions of finitude, which could not, by hypothesis, be otherwise," and *genuine* evil, that "which is caused by the free decisions of actualities." Griffin, "Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki. *The End of Evil: Process Eschatology in Historical Context*," 57.

²¹⁸ Suchocki, "Evil, Eschatology and God: Response to David Griffin," 61.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 57-58.

Suchocki answers no. She defends the concept of *inclusive* well-being. She argues however that a reading of her work which reduces genuine evil to *prima facie* evil is a "gross misreading." Suchocki contends that

[w]hat happens in history has an everlasting effect on God, and even God would be better off without much that is in our histories. And what happens in God has an effect on history. "Realized" and "future" eschatologies are woven together in a process eschatology, each form demands transformation, both in historical time and in everlastingness. It matters indeed what happens in human history. The future - both temporal and everlasting - depends on it.²²⁰

Suchocki therefore argues that to focus solely on what happens within God overlooks the inextricable relationship between God and finitude, between God and history. Evil as enacted within finitude influences God and the creation determining the particular way in which the creation and consequently God unfold. The overcoming of evil is an ongoing eschatological event, which does not deny the reality of genuine evil but recognizes God's power to overcome it.

This brings me to the last point that I want to note, which can be stated in terms of Griffin's question: "Does the eschatology portrayed by Suchocki make any connection with the kind of salvation for which anyone has yearned, whether for themselves or for others?"²²¹ Griffin says that Suchocki's understanding of immortality as enduring momentary experiences, rather than in the more traditional sense of enduring persons, presents a vision of immortality based on a myriad of experiences with which the individual cannot identify. Griffin states that "if I cannot now identify with those already extant immortal experiences, I cannot be excited by the thought that, after I die, experiences of the same kind knowing themselves to have been David Griffin will be immortal."²²²

²²⁰ Ibid., 68-69.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Griffin, "Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The End of Evil* , 62.

Suchocki acknowledges Griffin's criticism which she refers to as "the problem of 'the million Marjories.'" ²²³ The difficulty arises from the ongoing resurrection of occasions into God. Suchocki addresses this problem in terms of the nature of the metaphysics she champions.

I am bound by the metaphysics to posit not that God prehends each finite person and so resurrects the person, but that God prehends each finite occasion, and so resurrects the occasions, some of which are indeed personal. What are we to do with so many of ourselves around? ²²⁴

Suchocki suggests that despite the problem of "so many of ourselves around" this ongoing resurrection process "offers intriguing possibilities for understanding personality." ²²⁵ Suchocki states that unlike "the old understanding of 'corporate personality,' in which individuality was lost to the greater whole; it requires instead a fuller mutuality, a togetherness of deep reciprocity." ²²⁶ Suchocki acknowledges, however, that Griffin's critique raises a deeper problem of the "continuity of temporal and everlasting identity." ²²⁷

The difficulty that Griffin points out with Suchocki's argument concerning the "million Marjories" is in effect a version of a problem that process philosophy has long acknowledged. The problem arises from process philosophy's challenge to the classical way in which the self is understood. Classical metaphysics thought of the self in terms of a perduring substance qualified by mere "accidents" i.e., characteristics such as quality, quantity, space and time which inhere in a

²²³ Suchocki, "Evil, Eschatology and God: Response to David Griffin," 67 Griffin also raises the identity problem in terms of the "eight billion David Griffins." Griffin calculates that "[i]f we assume that I have five occasions of experience per second, and that I live for 70 years, I will have over 11 billion occasions of experience in my lifetime." Griffin calculates his number of occasions at the time of writing the review at 8 billion. Griffin, "Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The End of Evil*," 62.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid., 68.

²²⁷ Ibid.

substance, cannot exist independently of it, but as such are not essential to the substance. While this view of the self allows for an explanation of our experience of self-identity through time (a substance does not change), it nevertheless fails to do justice to our experience of becoming and change (e.g., growth, sleep, lapses into unconsciousness, personality changes, acts of repentance, conversion, "rebirth").

Process metaphysics, which has been radically critical of the adequacy of the idea of substance, more successfully addresses our experience of change than substance metaphysics by electing to make becoming and not being the root metaphor and inclusive category of existence. Process metaphysics, however, has more difficulty with the experience of identity than substance metaphysics. Process philosophers have certainly not failed to acknowledge this problem, nor have they failed to respond to the problem with some measure of success.²²⁸

Process philosophers recognize that we do have some sense of ourselves as both changing and as perduring. The latter can be explained, they argue, in terms of feeling and intention, memory and reiteration (or non-reiteration) of purpose. There is indeed a sense in which I am a series of momentary psychical events. Each psychical event, however, having a "physical pole" feels its neighbours, especially its closest neighbour, that is, the past event of the same name as itself. In one's present activity of concrescence by which I in part must create myself, I mustprehend or feel in some way or another antecedent realities, including especially my own previous self.

²²⁸ See e.g., Charles Hartshorne, *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method* (London: SCM Press, 1970), 173-204, and John B. Cobb, Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology of Our Time Based on the Thought of Alfred North Whitehead* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1965), 71-78.

To recall, as I discussed in Chapter Three, one can apprehend in different ways. One can choose to reiterate either totally or partially the subjective aim or intention of the other or one can apprehend it negatively, that is, elect not to reiterate it. Insofar as I reiterate the other the possibility of continuity and for a bond between myself and the other develops. Over a period of time by reiterating and reaffirming previous purposes one becomes a unified self. Unity and identity, however, are not simple, but complex, not static but dynamic. The self is more like the unity of a narrative than of a stone or an abstract entity like a triangle or a number. One becomes a self in a growing cumulative manner.

Process philosophers are often challenged as to the adequacy of their own model. Nevertheless this situation is not viewed as one which discredits process thought but one that demands ongoing thought and attention.

Now I suggest that the difficulty that Griffin points out with Suchocki's argument concerning the "million Marjories" is not different in kind from the one process philosophers have identified and addressed before. The difference is that in this case the self is becoming not the "earthly" self but the "heavenly" self. As each actual entity is resurrected into God, a layering of selves results. The question is whether this serial concept of identity can be explained in such a way to provide an adequate account of identity.

In her response to Griffin Suchocki suggests that possibly through death and the cessation of finite occasions the "I" is unified within God, which might mean that the unified entity at that point becomes fully conscious of itself in God. Suchocki does not develop this line of reasoning in this article and to my knowledge she does not pursue it in any other of her writings. She, ultimately, admits that at this stage of her theological development she does not have an answer to this problem. "But it seems to me," Suchocki writes,

that this musing-like all speculations concerning such ephemeral things as everlasting life and the full reality of justice-is a mixing of metaphysics and intuitive imagination, the rigor of logically extending the metaphysics fails, and I have not adequately answered the objection.²²⁹

Criticism and her own acknowledgment of the limitations of the metaphysical coherency of her argument have not, however, dissuaded Suchocki from continuing to apply her view of subjective immortality and God's redemptive activity.²³⁰ While the difficulties in Suchocki's thought are certainly real, they are not decisive disqualifications when considered within this heavenly context any more than in the this-worldly context previously familiar to process thought. It is, however, still to be seen if Suchocki's intellectual musings can reshape Whiteheadian thought so that her religious sensibility will find a way in which to address the question of identity within the divine.

While Suchocki to date has not provided an answer to this question, through his development of Suchocki's thought Joseph Bracken has attempted to do so. Bracken contends that his field-oriented approach to the nature of reality can indeed explain the Suchockian problem of "how finite occasions within the divine consequent nature can grasp their predecessors not serially as in the space-time continuum, but simultaneously."²³¹

Bracken's view of existence as a "complex hierarchy of structured fields of activity: for example, the field proper to some local community or environment, to our planet, the creation as a whole, and, finally, to the all-embracing activity of the

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ See e.g., her most recent work *In God's Presence: Theological Reflections on Prayer* (1996) in which Suchocki applies her understanding of subjective immortality in relation to specific this-worldly situations.

²³¹ Bracken, *Society and Spirit*,

three divine persons,"²³² provides the base upon which he claims that identity can be maintained. Bracken argues that a resurrected occasion within the divine "grasps" its predecessors for it "canprehend the field as a structured whole" and can therefore "read the past history of the society to which it belongs in the structure of the field, and thereby identify with all the previous subjectivities therein represented."²³³ Bracken contends that since reality is in effect structured fields the entity is not limited to identifying with each previous subjectivity serially.²³⁴

Bracken's argument which depends on his application of his field-oriented approach to the nature of reality challenges the Platonic paradigm of the One and the Many to which he states Whitehead's and Suchocki's philosophies conform.²³⁵ Within the Platonic paradigm, the "Many" are grounded in a transcendent "One." Within the new paradigm Bracken, however, shifts the emphasis off of the predominance of the One and onto the interrelatedness of the Many. Bracken maintains that the "One," which he refers to as the "all-embracing cosmic society," is in fact "the dynamic unity of all interrelated subsocieties."²³⁶

This is not to suggest that Bracken is proposing a pantheistic solution to the question but that, as he states, "the three divine persons ... have with us humans and indeed with all their creatures a common world, the world of creation that is co-constituted at every moment by all actual occasions (finite and infinite) in existence at that instance."²³⁷ This is not the place to go into a detailed discussion of

²³² Ibid., 151. For a detailed discussion of the way in which Bracken develops a field-oriented approach to the God-world relationship see *Society and Spirit*, Chapter Six.

²³³ Ibid., 150.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Bracken notes the role that Heidegger has played in bringing about this paradigm shift. See *Society and Spirit*, 29 ff.

²³⁶ Bracken. *Society and Spirit*, 151.

²³⁷ Ibid., 157.

Bracken's arguments. Suffice to say that Bracken does indeed recognize the difficulty with Suchocki's view of identity. He is able, however, to go beyond mere criticism and provide a cogent solution to the Bracken's view of identity within the divine depends on Suchocki's view of subjective immortality.)

Summary

In sum, to end this discussion of Suchocki's view of subjective immortality it is necessary to begin by distinguishing between 1) Suchocki's argument for the need for and the reality of subjective immortality, and 2) her particular conception of, that is, the details, of the nature of subjective immortality and the fulfillment of justice. I think that Suchocki perhaps succeeds more completely at the first than at the second, that is she argues more convincingly for the need for subjective immortality than for the way in which it occurs. Her argument for the need for subjective immortality as a way in which to allow for the fulfillment of justice, and moreover a particular form of justice (forgiveness as restorative justice) is highly commendable. This is not a frivolous demand to receive that which one feels one was not granted in finitude, but the demand of an inherently relational world in which individuality is valued, accountability to the other demanded and the transformation and restoration of relationships granted.

While her formulation of the way in which this occurs within the divine still requires some development, I think that Suchocki has been successful at modifying Whitehead's thought in such a way that a promising path for imaginative and rational thought has been opened. Bracken's development of Suchocki's views certainly attests to their tenability, that is, the possibility of envisioning an original view of subjective immortality and the fulfillment of justice.

Conclusions to Part Two

In Part Two of this work I have examined Suchocki's understanding of oppression and the process of liberation. While I provide a detailed discussion of my conclusions of Suchocki's views in the following chapter, there are, however, three points which need to be highlighted briefly at this point in my discussion. First, Suchocki's view of oppression as resulting at once from the complexity of freedom and finitude can account for the way in which particular instances of injustice arise be that as the result of social injustice or from the limitations of finitude.

Second, the metaphysical basis upon which she explains oppression provides the framework within which she develops her understanding of the process of liberation. Through her modification of Whitehead's view of concrescence Suchocki develops an original view of the nature of subjective immortality which allows for the fulfillment of justice for all. While her argument needs further development, it seems possible to address many of the criticisms levied against it. Suchocki's modifications, moreover, provide the basis for extending the discussion of the concept of subjective immortality and the fulfillment of justice as evidenced, for example, by Bracken's development of her thought.

Third, through her formulation of subjective immortality Suchocki allows for the development of the concept of the process of forgiveness as restorative justice both within this-worldly and "other-worldly" contexts. Her formulation of God's redemptive activity provides a unique model for this-worldly emancipative activity. Just as God's love mediates the restoration of all relationships, the world is called to assume responsibility and to find the most adequate means to promote right relationship, that is, to find the means to promote justice.

Chapter Five

Conclusions

In Parts One and Two I have shown that central to Suchocki's and Ruether's theologies is their concern for justice as flowing out of their concern for liberation from oppression. What then can be concluded concerning their views of oppression? And what can be concluded concerning their views of the fulfillment of justice in relation to their understandings of immortality? Do their views of immortality as developed in relation to the process of liberation provide a meaningful concept of justice? Moreover, what can we say about the way in which their views address the "particularity of injustice" which demands the "particularity of justice?"

To recall, the particularity of injustice refers to the very specific nature of injustice. As I discussed in the Introduction, fundamental to feminist inquiry has been exposing and seeking to redress the systemic nature of injustice. The extent of the tyranny of systemic injustice can, however, only be properly understood in terms of individual suffering, or what I refer to as the particularity of injustice. While systemic injustice is recognized by the effects it has on specific individuals or groups of individuals, for example, sexism on women, heterosexism on the gay community, racism on blacks, the consequences of these systems need to be

addressed in a way that includes attention to what I refer to as the particularity of justice. The particularity of justice does not attend only to the systems *per se* but also to the particular relationships which have resulted from and in fact maintain the systems.

It needs to be stressed emphatically and unambiguously that this emphasis on the particularity of justice is certainly not meant to go back on one of the central insights of liberation theologies, that is, the insight into the systemic nature of injustice. Social systems are not stable givens but human creations which must be continually assessed, critiqued and when appropriate changed. Social ethics is not solely a matter of changing behaviour within social structures but also a matter of changing the structures themselves. The emphasis on the particularity of justice is not meant to revoke this crucial insight but to go beyond it, and to deepen it.

The demand for the particularity of justice is predicated upon an inclusive vision of the process of liberation. If, as I have suggested, for both Suchocki and Ruether the fulfillment of justice refers to the righting of wrong relationships, what can we conclude about the way in which they view God's redemptive activity to provide an inclusive understanding of the process of liberation?

The discussion in this chapter presupposes, of course, the arguments developed in Parts One and Two. While I do not go into a detailed discussion of all of the issues already addressed, it is nevertheless necessary to revisit a number of them. (For clarification of general, summary statements I refer the reader to Part One for my discussion of Ruether's understanding of oppression and liberation, and to Part Two for my discussion of Suchocki's understanding of these topics.)

Oppression

In my view Suchocki provides a more adequate understanding of the way in which oppression arises than does Ruether. As I discussed in Chapter One, Ruether traces oppression back to a misuse of human freedom. Averse to have oppression described in terms of finitude, lest humans thereby evade responsibility for injustice within the world, Ruether not only focuses exclusively on freedom as the cause of oppression, but she also contends that "[t]he reconstruction of the ethical tradition must begin by a clear separation of the questions of finitude from those of sin."¹

There are three general conclusions that we can draw concerning Ruether's radical separation of questions which arise from freedom and those which arise from finitude. First, by neglecting to examine the nature of finitude, her understanding of oppression tends to be a critique of the oppressive nature of western society, rather than an exhaustive analysis of the nature of oppression in itself. In her analysis of oppression and attendant injustice Ruether does not take into account the nature of finitude within which all social structures arise. While Ruether claims that it is necessary to accept the limitations of finitude, she does not examine what these limitations are. Without recognizing the complexity of the world within which ethical decisions are made, i.e., without taking into consideration the fact that social systems develop within a world which imposes restrictions upon all human activity, unrealistic demands are placed on the human capacity to create socially just systems.

The second primary point that needs to be made is that while Ruether argues that the root of injustice is the concept of an immortal self, I have indicated that Ruether's view of the concept of an immortal self is in fact somewhat ambiguous.

1 Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 141.

It would seem therefore that her ambiguous position challenges what she in fact views as the root of oppression. As I argued in Chapter One, to support her argument she needs to qualify her understanding of subjective immortality so as to make clear that the point of contention is the concept of an immortal self as it has developed within a patriarchal Christian framework.

The third conclusion that can be drawn from Ruether's understanding of oppression is that while she addresses systemic oppression and resultant injustice, her analysis of oppression falls short in that it does not adequately address particular instances of injustice which cannot be explained in terms of systemic oppression. We might recall some of the issues which the women of Suchocki's early Bible study group had to face:² the despair of a woman whose baby who had died when only eight months old; the dismay of a woman who was about to attend graduate school when she discovered that she had multiple sclerosis; and the plight of the woman whose grown son was institutionalized for a severe mental disorder, with no realistic hope of recovery.

Are these not instances of injustice which demand some sort of theological explanation? It seems that in terms of Ruether's view of oppression they cannot be explained. They simply do not "fit" into her scheme of things. It may be that in attempting to correct for the lack of attention to systemic injustice, Ruether has in fact overcorrected her theological perspective thereby disregarding and potentially trivializing certain forms of suffering. While it certainly would be grossly misleading to suggest that Ruether is indifferent to individual suffering it must be acknowledged that her understanding of oppression fails to address these events adequately.

² See Chapter Three.

Suchocki, by contrast, contends that an adequate analysis of oppression must not separate, but, in fact, must bring together freedom and finitude as "accomplices" in the creation of oppression. By stressing that both freedom and finitude must be taken into account to understand the nature of oppression, Suchocki does not disregard the role of human responsibility in the creation of justice, as Ruether fears will happen if one includes the limitations of finitude within an analysis of oppression. By acknowledging that there is an ethical imperative that all should strive to promote the well being of all, while also acknowledging that human choice no matter how well-intentioned will not always result in the promotion of well-being, Suchocki's view of oppression explains, in my opinion, more adequately the relationship between personal responsibility (freedom) and the world within which one is obliged to act (finitude).

Suchocki's analysis of oppression acknowledges the metaphysical complexity of the world within which decisions are made and within which injustice arises. By recognizing the tripartite nature of evil as "an inevitable act of finitude which results in perpetual perishing.... the exclusion of alternative possibilities," and as arising from "ideals born out of season"³ Suchocki's analysis of injustice is more comprehensive than Ruether's. It includes not only an analysis of oppression as it arises from freedom, and an analysis of oppression as it arises from the nature of finitude, but also accounts for the way these two aspects of existence relate. It is thus does more justice to the complexity of the world within which all must act, without reducing decision making merely to free acts.

³ Suchocki, *The End of Evil*, 66.

The Process of Liberation

The process of liberation, as defined in this work, is comprised of three distinct but interconnected processes, salvation, emancipation and redemption.⁴ Redemption is the most pertinent aspect of the process of liberation for the present discussion, for it is through God's redemptive activity that the fulfillment of justice ultimately occurs. It is also through an examination of God's redemptive activity that the question of immortality as part of the process of liberation arises. Before beginning my discussion of Suchocki's and Ruether's views of redemption it is necessary to consider briefly their views of salvation and emancipation so as to be able to understand the interconnection between these aspects of liberation and Suchocki's and Ruether's views of God's redemptive activity.

Salvation

Given that salvation is understood as a faith response to divine activity, it is possible to identify in both Suchocki's and Ruether's theologies that which can be referred to as a salvific component of their understanding of the process of liberation. For Suchocki and for Ruether salvation depends on four interconnected presuppositions: that God exists, that knowledge of God's will is universally accessible, that God's will reflects justice and goodness, and that all individuals are capable of freely responding to God's will.

As a critical component of the process of liberation the concept of salvation provides the base for the way in which Suchocki and Ruether understand divine-

⁴ To recall, "salvation" refers to the creature's faith response to the hope of redemption, "emancipation" which refers to working for "fundamental social and cultural change" depends on the interaction between the divine and the creation, and "redemption" refers to God's unique activity of overcoming sin, transience and death.

human relationships. For both Suchocki and Ruether salvation is not a transaction which occurs solely between the divine and the individual; it is rather an event which is carried out between the divine and individuals *within a community*. That is to say, on their understandings, one never responds directly to God. It is through one's response to the world that one in fact responds to the divine. This is a crucial similarity in Suchocki's and Ruether's understandings of salvation. For both Suchocki and Ruether salvation involves, moreover, most emphatically involves, an awareness of specific manifestations of social injustice.

While both Suchocki and Ruether contend that there is an ever-present salvific relationship between the creation and the divine -- God is there for the creature, and the creature has the capacity to respond --, there is a significant difference in their thought. Process metaphysics provides Suchocki with two important starting points to develop an understanding of a salvific relationship between God and the world: 1) a model of a dipolar God, which offers the world God's "initial aim," while also offering to the world the "feelings" of that which has occurred, and 2) a model of "concrecence," the process by which the self responds to God by responding to the world.

While the salvific aspect of Suchocki's process of liberation can be explained in terms of her metaphysically grounded view of the divine-creation relationship, Ruether faces a situation somewhat different from that of Suchocki. Ruether seeks to dismantle what she considers to be a false concept of God to allow for an "authentic" faith response. Working outside of a given theological framework, Ruether endeavours to understand the nature of the divine without repeating detrimental patriarchal assumptions. Her starting point is the insistence that the patriarchal concept of a god and the true God are not to be equated.

One of the most serious weaknesses of Ruether's argument is her failure to

explain adequately the transcendence of God so as to be able to support her view of *metanoia*, that is, a salvific experience. Ruether attempts to link God's transcendence, the being of God beyond the world, to true knowledge of God within the world. As I discussed in Chapter Two, Ruether contends that the divine as "spirit and matter are not dichotomized but are the inside and outside of *the same thing*."⁵ We need to ask, however, to what is faith responding? Ruether does not succeed in clarifying what she means by "the same thing." Consequently the way in which Ruether in fact understands the transcendent nature of God is not clear. While Ruether certainly intends to maintain the transcendence of God so as to avoid the charge of pantheism, her lack of God-talk in fact leaves her open to that very charge.⁶ This is a significant concern in view of the current discussion.

If Ruether cannot in fact provide an adequate way in which to explain the transcendent nature of the divine, she will not be able to develop an adequate understanding of the redemptive nature of God. Consequently, her view of the process of liberation will not be able to provide an adequate answer to the question of the particularity of justice.

Suchocki's religious intuition, relying as it does on process thought, grounds her view of salvation in a way that Ruether's religious intuition can not. By formulating the divine nature and the divine-human relationship more fully than Ruether, Suchocki's view provides a more adequate basis to explain the redemptive aspect of the process of liberation, and consequently, as I discuss below, is able to address the demands of the particularity of justice. Salvation is not restricted to finitude but extends into experience within God.

⁵ Ruether, *Gaia and God*. . Emphasis added.

⁶ Stanley Grenz and Roger Olsen, for example, argue that Ruether's "account of God/ess is only a hairsbreadth from the nature-personification Mother Goddess of the radical feminists who worship the earth and themselves." *20th Century Theology*, 233.

Emancipation

The second aspect of the process of liberation which needs to be considered is emancipation. To recall, Ogden claims that

by far the most important way in which we participate in God's work of emancipation is to labor for fundamental social and cultural change - the kind of structural or systemic change in the very order of our society and culture that is clearly necessary if each and every person is to be the active subject of her or his history instead of merely its passive object.⁷

Undoubtedly Ruether can not be reproved for lacking a this-worldly emancipative component to her understanding of the process of liberation. On the contrary, she has been criticized by those who complain that her theology is little more than a social activist platform.⁸ While Ruether has been taken to task for collapsing her concept of the process of liberation into that of emancipative activity, Suchocki has been criticized on the grounds that her view of emancipative activity is meaningless. Griffin, for example, charges that given Suchocki's belief that all is ultimately redeemed within God "it would then not matter what happens in the temporal world, because God could create the greatest possible harmony no matter what."⁹

A significant difference in Suchocki's and Ruether's views which leads to these differing criticisms is the way in which they develop their understandings of the human and divine roles within emancipative activity. A similar criticism can be levied against the emancipative aspect of Ruether's view of the process of liberation as against the salvific. Just as Ruether does not clarify the nature of divine activity in relation to salvation, neither does she clarify the nature of divine activity in relation to emancipation. Her underdeveloped doctrine of God leaves her open to the criticism that her theology is all imperative, that is to say, moral injunction, the

⁷ Ibid., 78.

⁸ See Chapter Two.

⁹ Suchocki, "Evil, Eschatology and God: Response to David Griffin," 61.

call to social action, and not indicative, that is, affirmation, a proclamation as to God's activity.

Suchocki, however, links emancipative and redemptive activity. As well-being occurs within the world and consequently within God, this is given back to the world, as "what is done in the world is transformed into a reality in heaven, and the reality of heaven passes back into the world."¹⁰ As Suchocki writes,

[t]he redemptive community is called to actualize a moving image of God within its own structures, with a mutuality of good and inclusiveness of well-being. The faithfulness of God ensures that guidance is ever given toward the form of this structure, and also that the actual form will be dynamic rather than static, moving always to fuller modes of community.¹¹

It is misleading to state, as for example Griffin does,¹² that Suchocki develops God's redemptive power at the expense of this-worldly activity. This misrepresentation of her view undercuts the concepts of inclusivity and relationality which are essential components of her view of the process of liberation. Suchocki draws an explicit link between emancipative and redemptive activity. The fulfillment of justice which can be carried out to a limited extent within the world, comes to fruition within God as the world is subjectively immortalized within the divine. While emancipative activity may be limited for many within this world, that which occurs within the world is nevertheless linked to that which is completed within the divine.

Suchocki's model thereby allows her to state with some degree of theological assurance that

insofar as God is faithful in providing all societies with aims which are consonant as possible with the divine nature, the redemptive society labors with God, increasing possibilities for redemption [emancipation] in the world. The redemptive [emancipative] society .. models God's peace within its own community....¹³

¹⁰ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 351.

¹¹ Suchocki, *The End of Evil*, 131.

¹² See Chapter Four.

¹³ Suchocki, *The End of Evil*, 131.

Ruether is unable to make such a clear statement of the relationship between divine activity and emancipation. Ruether may claim that the salvific response to divine will is manifested through emancipative activity thereby helping to promote this-worldly justice as right relationship and as such helps to restore this-worldly justice. The question remains, however, whether Ruether indeed presents a view of God as being indeed anything other than "the nice side of the universe," so to speak. In other words, what one misses in her theology is the sense of a divine "Thou" addressing, calling and challenging the self in dialogue, responsibility, and emancipatory action.

Redemption

In this section it is necessary to consider in some detail what we can conclude from Suchocki's and Ruether's views of redemption. As an integral part of the process of liberation, redemption refers to God's activity which brings about "liberation from the bondage of death, transience and sin."¹⁴ Following Ogden, this aspect of liberation is "the unique process of God's self-actualization, whereby God creatively synthesizes all other things into God's own actual being as God."¹⁵ Suchocki views this process of God's creative activity as depending on subjective immortality; Ruether in turn views God's creative activity as depending on objective immortality. But we need to ask, do Suchocki's and Ruether's views of God's activity, dependent as they are on subjective and objective immortality respectively, address the demand of the particularity of justice?

¹⁴ Ibid., 103.

¹⁵ Ibid., 69.

In Ruether's view God redeems all in that all that "is" within the world returns to the primal matrix and all that "occurs" within the world, that is, the deeds of the world, are taken up into God. Her attempt, however, to develop an account of redemption involving a form of objective immortality (and an underdeveloped and largely implicit version of this belief at that) does not, in my view, provide a satisfactory answer to the dilemma of human existence as we find it.

A serious problem with Ruether's argument is her reliance on "agnosticism" to account for God's activity. While Ruether does not claim complete agnosticism, that is, she does not claim that we can know absolutely nothing as to the nature of God's activity, she does claim a form of mitigated agnosticism. We can have, in her view, the assurance that "[t]hat great collective personhood is the Holy Being in which our achievements and failures are gathered up, assimilated into the fabric of being, and carried forward into new possibilities."¹⁶ She nevertheless contends that we "do not know what this means."¹⁷

Introducing what seems to be a rather sophisticated "agnostic" view of God's activity without offering some explanation other than we must have faith in its veracity creates theological confusion rather than clarity as to the redemptive nature of God. We need to ask how in fact she can say as much as she does. Upon what is she basing this faith claim? How can all be "gathered up, assimilated into the fabric of being, and carried forward into new possibilities"? Is this statement at all meaningful without some explanation as to the nature of the relationship between the divine and the world so as to allow for this gathering up, assimilation and carrying forward to occur? Ruether's concept of God's

¹⁶ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 258.

¹⁷ Ibid.

redemptive activity requires further development to make her agnostic position intelligible.

The conceptual shortcomings of her argument are exacerbated by its moral shortcomings. It follows from her view that justice depends solely on emancipative activity, that is, on that which can occur within finitude. The events that are taken up into God are consequently disassociated from the agents governing those events. As there is no way to redeem specific instances of injustice, those who suffered and those who caused suffering are not granted an arena beyond their limited life-span on earth in which to reconcile their relationships. Instead those who suffer are entitled only to the satisfaction or reassurance of the belief that somehow God uses their suffering to the world's advantage as all is taken up into the divine.

Kathleen Sands states that Ruether's view of the process of liberation, particularly its redemptive component of objective immortality,¹⁸ is a far too optimistic and inclusive a view of the process of liberation. Sands contends that Ruether's reliance on a notion of transcendent goodness leads to her refusal to accept the hard realities of tragedy.

I concur with Sands that Ruether does less than full justice to the tragic element of existence. While Sands argues that hope does not stem from the illusion of an omnibeneficent deity but from "our messy, multiform continuance...,"¹⁹ does not the very tragic nature of existence demand an even more inclusive view of the process of liberation than Ruether provides? Without a more specific vision of the way in which God uses all, to what "good" is God's redemptive activity indeed aimed?

¹⁸ Sands does not use this terminology but her objections to Ruether's theology are directed at what I refer to as Ruether's view of God's activity as a form of objective immortality.

¹⁹ Ruether, *Sexism and God Talk*. 169.

If we recall Greenberg's demand that any theological statement must be credible to the "burning children," the insufficiency of Ruether's argument becomes clearer.²⁰ While God may "take up" the meaning of the children's cries of pain, anguish and despair and may in some way use these experiences, Ruether does not offer a vision of the way in which the children's experience can be righted in any meaningful way *for the children*. There is thus no way to address their particular experiences. There can be no righting of that which they endured. Ruether maintains that we must have faith so as to claim meaning for these events. But, we must ask, what sort of meaning?

Ruether's redemptive vision of God consequently offers very little theological support for her argument. By basing her doctrine of God on her rejection of traditional concepts, her *via negativa* tends to be a dark and nebulous dead-end alley rather than a clear, illuminated path to liberation. One need not for a moment, of course, doubt Ruether's compassion for the suffering and loss of, say, holocaust children. Within her theological vision, however, the children's cries of despair would be of little avail to the children.

Moreover, it follows from Ruether's view that those who cause suffering are not necessarily held accountable for their actions. Her view of God does not include any vision of God's ability to act as healer, mediator or judge (all characteristics of Suchocki's view of the divine) so as to in fact bring about right relationships. By retreating into the weak assurances of agnosticism Ruether's doctrine of God does not provide a satisfactory model of divine activity upon which to base this-worldly social relationships. The emancipative model which follows from her redemptive model is the righting of wrong relationships so that

²⁰ See Introduction.

future injustice will be minimized. The vision that systemic injustice must be dismantled overrides the vision of healing, rectifying or righting specific instances of injustice that have occurred.

In contrast to Ruether's position Suchocki certainly cannot be accused of suffering from the weakness of having an exclusive view of the process of liberation and the fulfillment of justice. While I grant that her argument raises questions concerning the metaphysical credibility of her radically inclusive position, her argument is nevertheless a necessary (if to date not sufficient) basis upon which to develop a more coherent view of subjective immortality. Her argument, certainly forceful enough to promote further development as evidenced by the work of Bracken, seems to be able to find a firm foothold within the sphere of process thought.

We need however to consider the credibility of her view of God's redemptive activity in light of the fact that most feminist theologians view the concept of subjective immortality as a gendered and thus pernicious concept, objectionable to feminist theological sensibilities. Suchocki's alternative view of the concept challenges the limitations of the traditional concept of subjective immortality, thereby attesting to the possibility of variant ways in which the concept can be formulated. Suchocki's development of an alternative view of subjective immortality serves "to problematize" the concept. That is to say, her view of subjective immortality highlights the fact that there may be as yet unformulated ways of understanding the concept. The "meaning" of subjective immortality should, therefore, not be taken for granted, but be open to further analysis from alternative perspectives and given a new hearing.

When one equates subjective immortality solely with traditional understandings of the concept which are detrimental to women, one is in effect still

caught within the trappings of a patriarchal mindset. Suchocki's view provides a vision which offers the possibility of disengaging belief in immortality as such from some of its traditional forms, including those which so many feminist theologians have faulted.

It is possible that Susan Sherwin's distinction between "feminist" and "feminine" ethics might be helpful here to provide us with a model. As I indicated in Chapter Four, in her work *No Longer Patient: Feminist Ethics and Health Care* Sherwin contends that "feminist" ethics differs from "feminine" ethics in that the former "derives from the explicitly political perspective of feminism, wherein the oppression of women is seen to be morally and politically unacceptable."²¹ Sherwin argues that unlike the latter which involves "the recognition of women's actual experiences and moral practices," feminist ethics "incorporates a critique of the specific practices that constitute [women's] oppression."²²

It may be that once we allow for an alternative formulation of subjective immortality and following Sherwin's distinction between "feminine" and "feminist" a distinction can be drawn between "feminine" views of subjective immortality, views that suggest that women by nature reject the concept of subjective immortality, and "feminist" views of subjective immortality which do not reject outright the idea as a gendered concept but instead analyze the concept in relation to the way in which it is promoted within specific social contexts. For the most part the latter approach to the concept of subjective immortality has not been pursued within feminist theology. I suggest that Suchocki's view of subjective immortality may indeed be a model to open up discussion of the concept from a feminist perspective.

²¹ Sherwin, *No Longer Patient: Feminist Ethics and Health Care*, 49.

²² Ibid.

It is, however, important to stress that Suchocki's concept of subjective immortality must not be severed from her vision of the fulfillment of justice, for which subjective immortality provides the means. It is necessary to recall and to heed Suchocki's words that "for those who have been broken by evil, only subjective immortality can provide a sufficient redemption,"²³ while she also insists that "the major issue is not immortality *per se*, but justice...."²⁴

What is significant about Suchocki's view of the inclusive nature of the process of liberation which is predicated upon subjective immortality is her notion of justice as forgiveness. Although Suchocki argues that all is taken up into God and consequently redeemed, Suchocki objects to a view of redemption which involves some form of "'cheap grace' whereby persons do not have to deal with the consequences of their actions."²⁵ While God's love is freely given, and while all are taken into God, forgiveness as restorative justice involves the righting of relationships from within the relationship. While complete forgiveness can only happen within God, the demand of God's love is that justice is attained through reconciliation. God's eternal being, in which God "acts" as judge and as mediator, provides the arena for this to occur.

As I discussed in Chapter Four, the concept of forgiveness is problematic. The concept is unacceptable if victims are expected to "forgive" meaning simply to "love," "accept," or "exonerate" unconditionally the violator(s). Forgiveness demands, Suchocki's view rightly contends, justice, the restoration of relationships.

²³ Suchocki, *The End of Evil*, 165, n. 2.

²⁴ Suchocki, "Evil, Eschatology, and God: Response to David Griffin," 63.

²⁵ Ibid., 147. Dietrich Bonhoeffer coins the phrase "cheap grace" in his work *The Cost of Discipleship*, R.H. Fuller, E. Booth trans. (New York: Macmillan, 1976), 47-48.

Moreover as I also discussed in Chapter Four, a review of the literature indicates that Suchocki's view that justice must be linked to forgiveness is indeed not unique. I cited various examples of feminist theologians who develop the concept of forgiveness as restorative justice. Suchocki's view of forgiveness is not, therefore, an anomaly but finds support within the field of feminist theology.

While Suchocki's championing of forgiveness as restorative justice is not unique, her view of forgiveness offers an original theological perspective in that it provides a vision of inclusive redemption. Suchocki provides a "divine model" of forgiveness which challenges other more traditional models in that *all* is redeemed. Inclusive redemption is not a unilateral activity fulfilled solely by the divine but one in which the creatures also subjectively participate not only in this life but also in the next, in which the reconciliation of specific relationships, the fulfillment of the particularity of justice is mediated by God's eternal love.

Suchocki's vision offers a metaphysical understanding of forgiveness in terms of the relational nature of existence which brings together in a coherent way redemptive activity and emancipative activity. According to the metaphysics upon which she bases her argument this redemptive activity is not *restricted* to the divine. That which occurs within the world has a direct influence upon all that is taken up into the divine. That which occurs within the divine has a direct influence upon this-worldly relationships. A salvific response to the divine will can help to promote this-worldly emancipation. The interconnectedness of existence binds "heaven" and "earth."

I have argued that Ruether's understanding of the process of liberation as the fulfillment of justice falls short of providing a satisfactory ethical model. I think, however, that Suchocki's argument, which is predicated on her understanding of subjective immortality, can provide a way to conceptualize the

requirement that for there to be justice there must be forgiveness, and for there to be forgiveness there must be reconciliation.

As the values of justice become more embodied within the world, their influence will not only serve to restore that which has been harmed but also to promote "careful" relationships, that is, relationships which proceed with caution, mindful of the demands of justice, so as to try to avoid harm and promote well-being. These values are in turn taken back into God to help promote the fulfillment of justice. The three aspects of the process of liberation, salvation, emancipation and redemption coalesce around the concept of forgiveness as the fulfillment of justice.

In Suchocki's view subjective immortality is not a way to serve the individual ego, nor is it an idolatrous attempt to be like God. Moreover, her formulation of subjective immortality does not result in trivializing or degrading the world. Her view is thus not so vulnerable to prevalent modern critiques of subjective immortality as are the more traditional conceptions. Subjective immortality is a way in which to bring persons into right relationships through the reconciliatory process of forgiveness.

I would venture to say, albeit very guardedly, that the tension which I noted in Ruether's work concerning immortality may arise from her recognition, although she does not state it explicitly, that hope cannot be offered, that justice cannot be fulfilled without the retention of consciousness. Ruether's early intuitions that led to her rejection of the concept of an immortal self as the source of injustice may at this later stage of her theological development be giving way to intuitions of the need for some form of a concept of an immortal self to allow for the fulfillment of justice.

It is, as I indicated, impossible on the basis of textual evidence to defend this position with any assurance. If, however, Ruether in fact is entertaining the possibility of admitting that some form of subjective immortality is admissible within feminist theology, it may be an influential move. This is certainly not to suggest that there would be an immediate acceptance of the concept by feminist theologians, but I think that because of her status within the field of feminist theology her admission of the possible moral and intellectual credibility of subjective immortality would help to advance discussion of the concept.

While Suchocki's argument is to date unique within the field of feminist theology, I contend that it warrants serious and wider consideration. Suchocki's argument serves to suggest persuasively that subjective immortality is not necessarily a gendered concept. While subjective immortality can, and has been, interpreted in deleterious ways, Suchocki's view does not lend itself to such interpretations. Her view moreover reflects the inherently relational nature of existence, which is a central concern of feminist thought.²⁶

While I contend that Suchocki presents a more satisfactory view of the process of liberation, I do not think that Suchocki's and Ruether's views of the fulfillment of justice are entirely at odds. With any assurance it is only possible to say that neither theologian is willing to dismiss the need for some form of divine redemptive activity, be that Suchocki's reliance on subjective immortality or

²⁶ In his essay "Woman and Last Things" Peter Phan offers an important insight when he suggests that "feminist theology would do well to retrieve the eschatologies in writings such as Mechthild of Magdeburg and Gertrude of Helfta, as well as in feminist science fiction. The former writings provide glimpses into how medieval women, despite the androcentric tendency of their age, succeeded in carving out for themselves a vision of eternal life that gave dignity to them as women (or more precisely, as virgins), and the latter offer a subversive vision of the eschaton, a utopia that refuses to validate the status quo and emphasizes relationality and connectedness." 223.

Ruether's reliance on objective immortality. Neither theologian is content to leave humanity adrift on the sea of tragedy without some access to divine succor.

The primary issues around which their views differ remain their differing views of the nature of God and their understandings of the nature of the self. While there may be intimations in Ruether's work that she may be perhaps willing to admit to the possibility that for the fulfillment of justice to occur consciousness must in some way be retained, there can be no doubt that she is very reluctant to incorporate the concept of subjective immortality into her theology. Throughout her work she continues to insist on the pernicious nature of the concept of the immortal self.

Ruether's concern that subjective immortality is inherently detrimental to women cannot be taken lightly. It would seem however that Suchocki's revision of the concept of subjective immortality provides a commendable alternative which does not present the problems of subjective immortality as traditionally conceived and propounded. Ruether's objections to the concept of an immortal self do not hold against Suchocki's view of subjective immortality, a view which neither deprecates women, nor diminishes the need for this-worldly emancipation.

A Final Word

In the modern age in particular, the concept of subjective immortality has been under attack on two fronts: its conceivability and its morality. John Cobb quite rightly states, "I know of no doctrine of God [and we could extend this to include the concept of subjective immortality] in any tradition which is not beset with problems... the question, then, is not whether [the doctrine of God, or the

concept of subjective immortality] is problem free, but whether it is sufficiently cogent and fruitful to warrant continuing work."²⁷

In my view, Suchocki's understanding of God's redemptive activity and her view of subjective immortality are "sufficiently cogent and fruitful to warrant continuing work."²⁸ Her views have helped us to see how the concept of subjective immortality can be conceived so as to eliminate many of its most morally objectionable features, most of which are associated with radical individualism. Moreover, she has helped us to appreciate the moral considerations that favour belief in subjective immortality, concerns also shared by Ruether.

Put differently, Suchocki has forcefully argued that liberation requires not only emancipation and salvation but also redemption, and that redemption requires subjective immortality. That is, her vision is not a self-centered, individualistic pie-in-the-sky. Her concern is for the fulfillment of justice, which requires forgiveness, which in turn requires restoration. Restoration, however, requires more than this earthly life alone can provide. Even though Ruether argues forcefully against traditional ideas of immortality, her argument seems not to hold against Suchocki's revisionary position. Indeed some of her own concerns seem to be resolved by Suchocki's path of thinking. However, that path, I believe, is a path and not a final resting place. Challenges remain and unfinished tasks beckon. Nevertheless it seems to me that Suchocki's formulation of subjective immortality and the fulfillment of justice are certainly headed in the right direction.

²⁷ John B. Cobb, Jr., Charles Hartshorne, and Lewis S. Ford, "Three Responses to Neville's *Creativity and God*," *Process Studies* 10/3-4 (Fall-Winter 1980), 98 as quoted in Suchocki, "Evil, Eschatology and God: Response to David Griffin," 65.

²⁸ John B. Cobb, Jr., Charles Hartshorne, and Lewis S. Ford, "Three Responses to Neville's *Creativity and God*," *Process Studies* 10/3-4 (Fall-Winter 1980), 98, as quoted in Suchocki, "Evil, Eschatology and God: Response to David Griffin," 65.

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