

**The Metaphysics of Power:
Reflections on the Basic Framework of
Psychology, Community, Politics and Spiritual Formation**

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July, 2012 (revised July, 2014)

This document serves two functions. First, it is a way for me to look at the progression of my thought--and especially my philosophical perspectives concerning reality and the realities of experience: personal, corporate and spiritual--so that I have a clear enough reference point from which to develop things in the future. This essay is a way of temporarily organizing the clutter in the garage of my mind so that I know where to find things when I want to use them again. I don't think that my ideas on these matters are fully formed yet. Nonetheless, I have a feeling that the only way forward is for me to get some of my thoughts down and then to revise as things develop. Second, I am writing this essay in order to make available to others a sketch of the basic interpretive framework I use to make sense of things. I expect to be producing material in the future that is in one way or another dependent on the framework I am presenting here. I suspect that there will be no appropriate opportunity in those works for me to adequately present that framework. And because my metaphysical perspective is not common, I can imagine someone reading something and (rightly) asking the question, "Now how did he get *there*?" This present essay is my answer to that question. I am here trying, both for my own sake and for others who may be interested, to trace some of the development of my thought. I will do a fair

amount of making reference to my own writings as I want to draw together thoughts I have collected here and there over many years. Some of these writings are published and others are not. Because this is somewhat of an intellectual journal and somewhat of a general outline for the public, I will not identify precise sources of ideas and such. Likewise, I will not provide background or footnotes for figures and movements. I will not be providing stories or illustrations. This would take way too much time and work. My aim here is not elaboration but rather simply to provide a bare sketch of the way I currently see things. Consequently, this essay is not easy reading. Furthermore, I will not make much reference to biblical sources or theological material until the final chapter. This is not because I have not studied these subjects from a biblical/theological perspective, but rather because I am assuming this perspective in those chapters and to develop those ideas would take much too long at this point to articulate. I have developed my reflections throughout the whole of my life by means of an interdisciplinary approach and at times have felt it necessary to articulate things from one or another perspective somewhat independently of interdisciplinary coordination. This is one of those moments. For an example of how I have linked coordinated disciplines together see my *Affirming the Touch of God* and *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*, chapters 2-5. I also suspect that I will have greater opportunity to pursue the biblical/theological sides of things in other venues. I will develop this essay by means of a series of chapters and points in which the insights of the latter points emerge from an understanding of the earlier points. Figures related to portions of this essay are placed at the end of the essay after the appendix.

Chapter One:

Introducing Reality/Experience in General

1. Reality (Experience) is a dynamic interplay of distinct elements.

Philosophers have used concepts like substance, process, existence, and even absolute nothingness to identify the primary category of metaphysics. Following American philosophy more generally and Don Gelpi more specifically, I like to think of the real in terms of "experience." It is my way of getting around subject/object difficulties without getting stuck in a fruitless relativism. Experience is more than a thing (whether physical or spiritual). It is more than subjective perception or mere existence. Experience is full, rich, and can be verified by others. The point of the matter for this essay, however, is that experience (the real and *all* real) is an interplay, a nexus of active characteristics or features or elements, and that this interplay is best understood dynamically, as relationship in movement, as mutual influence, even as "power." To explain this, it is first necessary to introduce the primary elements of experience individually and then to say something about their interaction. In this first point I am largely repeating what I presented in *The Brazos Introduction*, 78-81. Nonetheless, I think it important to start with an understanding of these elements, for I see in them not only a way of understanding metaphysics, but also epistemology, language, ethics and more. As one will notice, I am

drawing from Charles S. Peirce in this point.

1a. Element One: "Quality" or Firstness

Firstness is notoriously difficult to explain. It is the mere "suchness" of things. Take atomic experience for example. One part of the atom recognizes the *quality* of another parts such that each atom holds together in a certain way. Photosynthesis is part of plant experience because the plant responds to the presence of sunlight. It enters into the experience of that plant being a plant. Human experience is made up of sights, feelings, intuitions, and so on. Each of these bears a kind of quality or "suchness" to the experience of being human (or an atom, or a plant). Each experience arises as qualities emerge. I look out and see small patches of white moving. In the next moment I recognize them as the white paws of our cat. This is part of what our cat is within my experience -- it is one arising of the cat-Evan experience. All experience is experience of *something*, and under this something is the vague presence of quality itself. Firstness. Most philosophers do not spend much time talking about firstness, though it is present when people talk about subjectivity. Often it is just quietly assumed. But firstness is much too significant to be wiped away through a cavalier dismissing of "the subjective." Suchness is the stuff not merely of all appearance, but of all reality. Different experiences are associated with their own world of suchness.

1b. Element Two: "Force" or Secondness

Simply the mere presence of suchness or quality does not give rise to experience. The hydrogen atom is what it is because the qualities present therein demand a response. The qualities present in hydrogen-atom experience confront the atom with a kind of *force*. Indeed, we speak specifically about positively and negatively "charged" sub-atomic particles. This notion of charge means that other parts of an atom are influenced by the active presence of this particular part of the atom. It is a matter of

dynamic relationship. Consider again our flower, specifically a sunflower. That sunflower moves as it does because the sunlight has a specific kind of influence on the plant, an influence that may not be present in a hydrogen atom. When I step on a nail (point up), the nail enters into my experience as an element that demands response. It enters my experience with force. The movement of the cat's paws enters my visual experience and I *notice* our cat. I look at my wife and am "moved" with love. Philosophers often talk about this element by using terms like "object" or "thing," but really these terms are much too shallow to describe the rich interpenetration that gives rise to any experience whatever and thus to explain all reality.

What this means is that reality (experience) is fundamentally relational. No. Reality is fundamentally *relationship*, and dynamic relationship to boot. Some philosophers smell this and, in their own ways, work it into the foundations of their systems. Levinas sees ethics as first philosophy because it is really how we respond to what (who) confronts us that shapes our being. Marx identifies conflict as the root of economics. Buddhists speak of dependent co-origination. Christians conceive of God as a dynamically interrelated Trinity. And so on. What we think of as "thing" is really a currently configured pattern of elements configured through the dynamics of relational force.

And furthermore, this means that reality is already and always in motion. My aim in this essay is not to defend or nuance my position in the context of all the historical debates (e.g. Heraclitus vs. Parmenides, and so on). If one reads my *Love Wisdom: A Global and Practical Introduction to Philosophy* carefully (if and when it finally appears), one can catch some of this. The point here is simply to try and give expression to my position. And my position is that experience is somewhat fluid, always already in motion. In western culture we are only just beginning to think about studying "change" as a topic in itself. We have generally talked about energy, force, work, power as characteristic habits of "things" and not as part of the mutuality of reality itself (on these terms in physics see <http://hyperphysics.phy-astr.gsu.edu/hbase/Indx.html>). But times are changing and people

are beginning to explore the nature of change and motion itself.

1c. Element Three: "Tendencies" or Thirdness

But reality is not merely a random connection between subjects and perceptions, between qualities and force. Experience emerges when (or because) qualities arise with *tendency*. Some of these tendencies are rather rigid. An atom seems to know quite clearly the difference between a positively charged particle and a negatively charged particle. Plants seem to know the difference between light and sound. Chemical bonds of both ionic and covalent types shape the character of the most fundamental stuff of our universe. Green has a tendency to reflect certain waves of light and to look a certain way to many people. And most of us identify with a love song because we know something of the ways (tendencies) of love. Every aspect of reality, every element of experience, is what it is because of its presence in a certain pattern, habit, or tendency. This is not the place to develop the different characteristics of Thirdness: how patterns are not necessarily unrevisable "laws" and what this means for science, philosophy, and metaphysics. My point here is simply to say that this dynamic, relational experience which is reality is not absolute chaos or mere impermanence or momentary connection. The fluidity of experience must be acknowledged in harmony with the continuity of experience. This is why it is possible to identify an experiential "flow." Without Thirdness, there would not be fluidity, but random absurdity.

In *Affirming the Touch of God* (2000) I began my account of Christian discernment with a model of human and Christian experience. In *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality* (2008) I moved from a brief presentation of the three elements of Experience--similar to the above--directly to an exploration of human experience. Now I find it necessary to explore further the character of "experience in general" more fully. I find this necessary not only for clarification of my philosophical

understanding of metaphysics (what is real), but as I hope to demonstrate in the chapters ahead, also for a clear understanding of human experience, of spiritual formation, of politics, of spiritual warfare, and much more. Consequently, points 2-8 are largely new material and express the development of my thought on experience since 2008.

2. This dynamic interplay of elements (Experience) arises with variety. Consequently, there are different spheres or modes of experience.

Atomic electrical charge is different from light is different from love. Different tendencies correlate with one another in different mutually informing contexts. We can imagine the possibility of an elephant with a green head because "elephant shape" and "green" are both features of a mutually correlative human visual experience. We cannot imagine, however, "smelling the color nine." We engage our emotions differently than we engage our breakfast. Experience arises within discreet worlds. The natural world engages physical, chemical and biological tendencies. The intellectual world engages spatial, verbal, conceptual and deliberative tendencies. The affective world engages stuff from other worlds along with its own distinct characteristics: mood and emotion with all their bodily, cognitive and phenomenological correlates. Is spiritual experience merely a matter of the particular qualities discerned in other elements of experience or are we more accurate to speak of a distinct mode of experience identifiable as "the spiritual"? Scholars of religion and religious people I talk to give me the impression that it may be hard to say.

In any case, these different worlds of tendencies in turn give rise to different "spheres" of reality and consequently a range of contexts. This is why we think of a "thing" as different from an "idea" as different from a "possibility" as different from an "angel" and so on. Buddhist thought, for example, often describes things in terms of Five Broad Spheres within which their causal principle works:

physical (inorganic), physical (organic), thought or mental life, social and moral sphere, higher spiritual life. In all of these worlds and spheres the tendencies are greater than perceived, of course. Perception both distorts and highlights our awareness of select tendencies. Time and community (intersubjectivity) compares experience and confirms the real (not just human community, but the intersubjectivity of all experience). I cannot develop my theory of intersubjective confirmation here. This is an essay on metaphysics, not epistemology.

I do, however, believe in novelty and in absolute ignorance. In novelty firstness or secondness are primary and the connection with tendency may be hard to identify. In some situations--if there is very little connection at some point with habit or pattern or capacity--the event simply "doesn't exist" or "don't know what it is" within the experience in view. But most often novelty arises as a change within pattern. Much of the event is within a frame of experience, yet with a little difference. It strikes us as strange or unique at first, but over time we adapt to novelty and it is no longer novel. There are also events which occur outside an experience's processing framework. To use human experience as an example, perhaps there are sounds or smells present around me all the time at pitches or olfactory qualities I am unable to perceive. These sounds and smells usually simply "do not exist" within my experience. But I can invent some device that measures them and interprets their presence within the framework of my own experience. I can be trained to perceive smells (or spiritual entities) regarding which I was previously unaware. Even the very frameworks of our experience can be altered. Then our range of experience changes and what is real shifts. We can be born again, and again.

3. The dynamism of Experience within its different spheres necessarily involves--and can be seen as--change, influence and power.

Relationship, interplay, experience necessarily involve influence and change. I have already

stated this above, that reality is dynamic, but I need to develop the idea at this point--particularly with regard to the quality or character of change--in order to move forward. Whether we are talking about atomic experience, sunflower experience, or the experience of love, one must always be aware of the movement, influences, and change present within the experience itself (here it might be better to think of experience or reality less as a "thing" and more as an "event"). Experience possesses stability (thirdness), intensity (secondness), and character (firstness). All of these elements are in motion within experience. Even the tendencies themselves are fluid, though not random. Consequently, I find it best to think of stability as a kind of trajectory-habit-tendency.

Most importantly for this essay, then, is the fact that change happens, influence happens. Power is reality and to understand reality we must understand the dynamics of power, change, and influence. We must understand reality as the coalescing of multiple factors in a constant process of stability and change giving rise to somewhat recognizable states of affairs.

3a. Change, influence and power alter the motion of an experience. If experience or the real is the current trajectory of things--a kind of "state of affairs"--then influence or power alters the state of affairs, however slight. Even stability influences a state of affairs by reinforcing a given trajectory. Factors or bits of this or that entering into experience either reinforce or redirect a trajectory or disposition. Pesticides (or pests) alter the patterns of plant life. Love alters the trajectory of human experience. Certain electrons coming within a certain distance of an atom changes the character of an atom. We can study the history of ideas because of this reality.

3b. Change, influence and power operate within a framework of counterfactuals or possibilities. As I mentioned above, different experiences are associated with their own world of suchness. Each experience develops within its own range of firstness and secondness. Changes in electrical charge, in

photosynthetic intensity, in shade of color, or in the "feel" of romance, are made, evaluated and responded to in a framework of interpretation of possibilities. This is why particular chemicals are used to influence the workings of a depressed person's brain. The human brain already has a spectrum of chemical responses that are part of its vocabulary of influence-ability. Our vocabulary and grammar of influence-ability (later I will call this our response-ability) can be developed. Nonetheless, for the most part the mutual interpenetration of the forces and factors of experience is conducted within a range of counterfactuals appropriate to that sphere of experience, and even within that particular instantiation of experience.

3c. They produce difference of the same

Experience (which is reality) which is stability in motion, is really a simultaneous production of being and non-being. It is a confluence of many factors giving rise to something that both is what was and is-not what was. When I press my finger on a particular button of the keyboard of my computer I become what I was not the moment before (without finger on that button), yet in continuity with what I was the moment before (writing). Experience is always an expression of difference and same. What is the most real thing about a that tree in front of me? Is it the fact that this tree can be identified with a particular species and family? Or is the tree the unique features of *this* experience in front of me? Most Western philosophical discussions concerning form and alterity do not, to my satisfaction address the radical being/non-being character of reality. What becomes is what was not. What grows is what was and is and is to come. This is true for atoms, plants, humans, ideas, societies and God's plan for the universe.

This difference of the same that is experience is productive. The nature of being, of experience is to co-produce being through mutual interpenetration. Experience is transformative. Reality is transformation. I mean this literally. The productive character of experience means that experience as

event produces results: arising of being, alteration of being (for example, attraction, absorption, decay, repulsion, mutual presence of alterity), or cessation of being.

Change, influence, or "power" is characteristic of reality. Experience is the mutual interpenetration of a variety of dynamic factors which emerge generally out of a range of counterfactuals, which serve various functions, and which alter the character and trajectory of experience itself, producing a kind of difference of the same as the event of experience develops.

4. Experience is mediated, both to itself, and with other experience.

Experience is not entirely self-isolated, but is co-experienced with other experience(s). Mediation is the transfer of one piece of experience to another experience. This is largely due to the sharing which occurs between various spheres and events of experience. There is a cooperation between the nerves, brain and other biological systems such that pain is comprehended appropriately throughout the human experience. Pain is actually progressively "communicated" throughout the human person as it is experienced. Chemical changes that occur within a given range of conditions also seem to produce a kind of "self-communication" such that the system responds appropriately as a whole within its environment. Likewise, social crises are often signaled by various behavior habits and patterns in social life. What this means is that reality (or the dynamic character of experience) is mediated within experience itself. But this is not all. It also appears that experience can also be mediated at times outside itself to other experience. Humans can learn the cues by which animals signal aggression or submission. Animals often sense developments in weather patterns before humans recognize them. In ordinary--and at times in mysterious ways (consider the strange world of quantum

physics), experience is communicated, mediated from one place to another. What this means according to what I have already said, is that influence "passes" from one experience to another. Change effects change. Power causes power.

This is an essay on metaphysics, not language philosophy. Consequently, no space will be given for a thorough development of semiotics. Suffice it to say that I find Charles S. Peirce's triadic semiotic a good deal more "true" (if I may use such a term here) than Saussure or his followers (at least as I understand them). What this means is that I see experience developing (both within and between experience) through a mediation of experience itself by means of sets of interpretant-symbols. Experience is characteristically disclosive, revealing both within itself and outside (to certain extents) the state or features of the experience. A sunflower may not *intend* on showing my wife that it has not had enough water lately. Yet we can interpret the sign of wilted leaves to indicate to us that state of affairs. The wilted leaves mediate (unintentionally) the experience of the sunflower. Part of this fact is that our capacities of sight are coordinate with the sunflower's capacity of leaf stiffness and looseness to make this kind of mediation. Humans and plants "share" features of our experience such that some of the experience can be transferred from the plant to a human. Mediation also involves the possibility of comparison and imitation, for symbols cannot serve their function of mediating experience apart from the ability of experience to distinguish, recognize, and imitate (even within its own interpretive system) the "meaning" of a given symbol. Can I transfer my experience of love to a sunflower? I am less confident that humans and plants share enough elements of experience for that part of human experience to be mediated to the plant. Yet obviously within the human context of intention, mediation and communication can be understood ever more clearly.

The process of mediation is conducted for each sphere of experience within its own set of appropriate symbols. Emotion is communicated through heart rate, galvanic skin response, emotional "heat" and other signs. Intellectual activity is communicated through spacial and verbal symbols. Social

activity is communicated through tone of voice, gesture, words, actions and so on. Chemical activity is communicated in part through the production of different kinds of bonds. Indeed, it might be helpful to image all mediation as the production, transformation, and cessation of various "bonds" within and between experience. This is semiosis. The variety of symbol systems enables us to identify, for example:

- physical mediation - effects produced by various entities through primary forces (gravitation, chemistry and so on) and recognized through common patterns or relationships.
- organic mediation - effects produced by the transformation or communication of "life" (self-initiating, reproductive ?) from one to another.
- linguistic mediation - language and symbol
- affective mediation - communication of affect through expression and more (and here we must distinguish expression and communication of affectivity - see on this my essays on aesthetics as well)
- volitional mediation - blend of the above two with a desire to produce a given effect (what am I saying, what am I doing - conscious and unconscious intent); resulting in blend of "selves" producing effects; or selves embedded within selves consciously or unconsciously intending to produce given effects (note: intention usually operates within a perception of co-present forces - on this see further below)
- "spiritual" or "psychic" mediation - effects produced in condition or cause, or expression/communication between one and another by means of symbol systems resembling, but not identified with above (e.g. intuition, telepathy). Again, here I find a combination of identifying (1) the precise character of elements within ordinary experience and (2) a distinct way of knowing or distinct set of elements present in experience

- embodied, enacted mediation - expression and communication through living itself, simultaneously producing effects at all kinds of levels.
- Is there such a thing as unmediated mediation?

The point here is to see that there is a unique system (patterns, tendencies) of symbols transmitting mediation for each type of experience. Needless to say, as the sphere of experience grows, the symbol systems involved expand accordingly. Thus, social life will involve all of the above forms of mediation and more.

5. The mediation of Experience--and indeed, the dynamic character of experience itself--is multifactorial. Life is a complex dynamic system.

I have mentioned this before, that experience is the co-inherence of a multiplicity of factors, or that reality is the mutual interpenetration of things giving rise to the suchness and force of any given event of experience itself. But I need to develop this point further in order to illustrate the importance of respecting the complexity of experience. Western medicine has only recently, it seems, caught on to this point as nutrition, social stress, microbes and even spiritual health are understood as contributing to the progress of our health or disease. Ecology is a field of study that majors in just such respect for complexity, recognizing the wide range of subtle factors that influence the flourishing of a given form of life.

Let us use an example to illustrate this point. What is involved in understanding what someone else is saying to us? This is a simple question of linguistic mediation - how thoughts, feelings and such are communicated from one person to another. The list below identifies a select collection of factors

involved in (influencing! - they have power to change) our comprehension of ordinary language:

- one's fund of terms and concepts
- development of culture (metaphors dead and alive , changing . . .)
- personal place vis-a-vis the culture
- pronunciation, morphology, grammar, and such
- grammars of tone, gesture and such
- ambiguities in terms, grammars, representation (conscious, unconscious and “no other choice”),
- intention (e.g. multiple intentions), “subject,” and “object”
- the environment of mediation (distinguish cause and condition)

I could go on and on here. The point is to see the variety of forces at work, forces we must grasp if we are to communicate with others (as any diplomat or foreign ambassador is keenly aware). Different factors affect one's experience differently. For example, some of these factors in our example affect our perception of language (pronunciation and hearing). Some factors affect our re-presentation (grammar and vocabulary). Other factors affect our presentation (culture and intention). Still others will affect the reception of language (the environment of the mediation itself - for example, the way the room is arranged and so on). Wise communication must attend to all of these factors. Similarly, wise understanding of reality must attend to the dynamic complexity of experience.

5a. Important features of the complex dynamic character of experience and its mediation:

- Direct and indirect influence - Some influences within or between experience is due to the trajectory (general or specific) within an experience. Other influences shaping experience are due to other contextual factors (within human experience, we might call these factors "unforseen")

- Levels of depth (on this feature within human experience, see the *Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*, 102) - Shallow forces produce little influence; deep forces produce greater influence
- The degree of influence is a function of a variety of factors: duration, intensity, proximity, co-presence of other factors, and so on. A force that achieves a high degree of influence could be said to “gain dominance” over other forces present - control, power
- The fruit of this process is, to use a Buddhist phrase, a “causal nexus” (objectivity, necessity, invariability, conditionality)

6. Co-present forces exhibit particular functions within or between different spheres. Thus, influence, power and change serve, in their various expressions, various “roles”.

Each feature of experience, and each event of experience, and the whole of experience in every sphere and all spheres, function somewhat uniquely within any given experience. Soil, water, sunlight, the presence (or absence) of pests, and other factors all combine to produce the experience of a sunflower. Family, culture, personal history, social preferences, biological urges, divine revelation and more all combine to produce the experience of love. Each influence influences an experience in its own way. This gives rise to creation, oversight, provision, nurture, protection, direction, redirection, ordering, correction of (dis)order, strengthening, edifying, healing, repairing, restoring, connecting, reconciling, awakening, driving, renewing, freeing up, elimination, and destruction. As philosophers have noticed throughout history ontology and causality are intimately connected. The nature of the "being" of experience is comprehended by an awareness of the varieties of causal relations (influence

or power(s)) present in that experience. Modern Western philosophy has floundered in a shallow interpretation of efficient and material causality. I find greater potential in a broader and more nuanced view of causality and being. Aristotle spoke of *four* types of cause: formal, efficient, material, and final. Each of these is significant for understanding the dynamism of reality. Hindus and Buddhists speak of various kinds of mutual interdependence: for example, self-causation vs. divine or other-causation, how one moment is connected to the next. Sarvastivadins speak of both (a) unchanging substratum underlying a moment and (b) causal efficiency connected to the preceding moment. Sautrantikans, and later Theravadins, criticized a and adopted b. And so on.

Consequently, just as it is important to recognize the multiplicity and complexity of forces mutually interpenetrating the arising of experience, so also we must give careful regard to the multiplicity of functions which various factors serve within or between experience. Co-present factors can function as:

- grounds (rules, material/elements, trajectories . . .)
- pressures (positive or negative)
- surrounding factors
- triggers
- contexts
- conditions
- motives
- drives
- form(s)
- purposes used and comprehended

- potencies
- consciousness (which both conditions and is conditioned)
- “excess”

and I could go on and on.

Western culture has done an excellent job of analyzing a few of these factors with regard to the behavior of natural reality. I feel like we are just starting to broaden our understanding of both the wide range of factors that influence experience/reality and the wider range of spheres of experience that interpenetrate one another to give rise to the state of affairs we call "real."

Just to give a couple of real small examples of these dynamics. Let us simply take the influence of context upon water. I place water in a freezer. What happens? I place water in a 300 degree oven. What happens? The mere placing of the water in a given context changes the experience that is water. This is the nature of influence. Now expand this illustration to consider the dynamics of mass psychology. What is it like for a person to be present in a "cold" social atmosphere? What is it like to walk into a "heated discussion"? Again, this is a simple illustration of one factor. I could develop each of those listed above. As I sit outside currently, thinking about this topic, I look up and see a spider's web glimmering in the sun, but slightly waving in the wind (hints of rainbow colors here and there changing as the wind blows). I realize that the spider, the sun, the angle of the web, the historical development of this species of spider and how it creates a web, the wind, my eye cones, my brain, and so much more are involved in just my perception of this web waving. Each factor influences the character and development of my experience in a unique way. To understand the spider's web one must look from multiple perspectives, one must integrate--or at least must include--a wide range of factors. The complexity of reality results in (*is*) a complexity of influence. Power is exercised differently within different spheres of experience or even within different moments or features of experience. To

understand and respond to reality we must learn how to face the nuances of power. For an outline of my understanding of the dynamics of grounds, surrounding pressures, and triggers/seeds (and as a prelude to my discussion of the currently constructed self presented in the next chapter) see "Appendix One: On The Formation of Experience: Functions and Roles of Diverse Forces" below.

7. **Power** must be understood in the context of this dynamic perspective of reality/experience itself.

Power has been defined differently by people within different spheres. Nevertheless, there is a common thread between it all. All indicate that power is the ability to produce or effect change. In physics, power is the ability to produce work, to create motion. In business, power is seen as the ability to coerce or bring forth action. In the history of ideas, a "powerful" idea is one which has influenced a large number of people over time. Consider also the power of particular forms of expression. Poetry, for example, has a unique power to communicate and to move people in ways that other literary genres do not. The ability to influence resides within the form. I could expand this here and include all that I have developed in my writing on aesthetics. The beautiful is powerful. It changes things. A powerful chemical is one which has the potential of effecting a lot of change in other substances. Power is influence.

As we have learned so far, reality or experience is the mutual interpenetration of a variety of forces and qualities within a set of tendencies. The interpenetration of these elements involves influence and mediation, a transfer of something of experience from one to another. At least some of this transfer of movement from one to another is properly understood as an exercise of power.

Now these influence-dynamics arise in the context of multiple factors and multiple roles within which the factors function. Consequently an assessment of influence-ability (or power) in a given context of possibilities will give rise to a limited range of perceived consequences (as the limits of

trajectories are shaped by particular influences). This is estimated power, potential energy, and the like. Furthermore, because influences tend to have their own shape and character, different forces will serve different functions and we will be able to identify different "roles" that different factors (or powers) play in experience.

This, then, will lead to the identification of different types of influence or "power." For example, in human experience we can identify:

- physical power (sheer strength)
- intellectual power (expertise in a subject)
- economic power (ability to influence through use of money or possessions)
- charismatic (powerful) personality (ability to influence through own personal character or cultural appeal)
- position as power (ability to effect change through authority presumed)
- and so on

I will address power within human personal and social experience more fully below

8. Experience organizes/arises around both fluid and stable tendencies--Interdependent Independence; Independent Interdependence. Experience is inhabited by stable/fluid "selves."

Again, each of these points develops from--and is implied within--the previous. I have been talking about "atoms," "sunflowers," and "people" all through this chapter. The point here is that I see reality in these experiences. I do not see them as mere illusions or as momentary configurations of skandha. Yet neither do I see reality as concrete substances. I hold neither to a position of "no self"

(*anatman*) nor a strong, unchanging, substantial notion of self. To me, a tree is a tree and possesses a degree of identity. Yet that identity itself is due to the somewhat stable pattern of mutually interpenetrating shifts and changes of forces. Experience tends to self-organize around somewhat stable habits or tendencies. A rock is what it is because of the physical and chemical characteristics as received in the context of other experience. One rock might be identified as different from a rock six inches away because of different self-organizing habits of influence. Likewise sunflowers, people, cats, ideas, angels and feelings also tend to self-organize around particular tendencies. My elation over an accomplishment the other day had a self-organized "life" from its rise, through a development, and a fading stage. This is how one understands the "individual." I see individuals not as mere instances of chance development, nor merely as a concrete expression of infinite mind. An individual person has a story, a body, an image, a future--as does an individual plant. That experience we call an individual is never truly individual, because it is what it is because of an influence of a wide range of forces (including itself as a force -- on this later) and because it is what it is *to* another experience (mediation), as well as within its own experience.

What this means is that I see "self" and identity as the product of experience. Experience is the event of reality which constantly produces interconnected independent-interdependent selves. I will treat the relationships of power and self more fully below. Nonetheless a few comments should be made about selves more generally at this point.

8.1 Individuals and a whole both arise as this combination of co-dependent origination and own-self-ness

I see this interesting tension in Heidegger's *Dasein*: in-the-world, yet acting towards one's ownmost possibilities. I see it in Aristotle's metaphysics: fourfold causes bringing rise to substantial reality. I see it in Alfred North Whitehead's process and reality wherein concrescence brings rise to

momentary being. I also see it in Buddhist philosophies (however interpreted) and their notions of arising, decay, cessation: arising from dependent origination and yet having some shape such that “the next” is formed in part from “the previous.” (even the fact of the "personalist" debates give evidence of their own struggles with this ambiguity of self and no self). Kitaro Nishida particularly speaks of the arising of self as itself somewhat self-perpetuating and yet also somewhat transforming and denying at the same time. Post-structuralism struggles to move from the modern affirmation of the whole to an articulation of fragmented selves. Husserl speaks of "constitution," Nishida of the movement from the formed to the forming, and so on.

I neither see self as merely fragmented, or momentary, or ephemeral (and here I speak not only of human self, but also that of atoms, plants, ideas and societies). But at the same time I do not see the self in such constricted categories as modern Western philosophy. Selves arise within and from the fluid coherence of experience. That is what gives the dynamics and power of selves their particular character.

Conclusion -

In this chapter I have summarized my views on metaphysics more generally. I see reality to be best understood through the category of Experience where experience is understood as the nexus of mutually interpenetrating qualities and forces within a framework of tendencies or habits. Experience gives rise to various distinct spheres of reality (social, spiritual, personal, biological). The change or influences that is/are identified with experience have a character: altering the motion of experience within a framework of possibilities or counterfactuals and producing an arising of difference within the same. Experience is mediated. It is inherently semiotic, transferring something within and between experience through the means of symbolic systems. We can examine such features and the depth, degree, directness, breadth, and fruit of the influences of experience. It is inherently multifactorial and complex. The co-present forces within experience often take on particular functions or roles within a

given experience. Power, then, is to be understood as one concept through which the dynamics of reality and experience can be explored. Reality then, can be beneficially understood as the dynamics of power instantiated within a given event. What inhabits experience is a mutually interpenetrating collection of selves.

Chapter Two:

Human Experience and the Framework of Psychology

In *Affirming the Touch of God* I began my account of Christian discernment with a model of human experience (pp. 293-303). There I summarized a way of looking at human experience that was capable of interpreting material from history, cognitive psychology and Christian theology. I described three *operations or systems* (cognitive, affective, volitional), a model of experiential process consisting of six stages (Being Aware, Experiencing, Understanding, Judging, Deciding and Acting, World-view Adjusting), and a web of relationships involving relationship with self, others, nature, and the transcendent.

In *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*, I explored human experience in terms of the following thesis:

Human experience arises as embodied soul/mind/self/spirit, constituted by the somewhat integrated arising of various mental-biological operations or systems of operations, which ordinarily proceed in generally definable stages and develop in time and space, within the context of a web of relationships and at various levels of depth, while maintaining its own unique being.

In elaborating this thesis, I developed my thinking about human experience. First, I added the section on the embodied self/soul/mind/spirit. This section was an initial foray into the mind-body questions which are inevitably a part of a philosophical reflection on Christian spirituality. The section was also an introduction to the dialogue in Christian spirituality about "embodiment" and the importance for

understanding *soul* of comprehending *body*. It also, as we shall see, opened up the possibility of talking about human "selves" both individual and corporate. Second, I largely repeated--in slightly expanded form--my account of the operations/systems and the stages of human experience, changing only my designation of the final stage from "World-view Adjusting" to "Integrating." I altered my account of the web of relationships slightly, dividing the notion of "transcendent" into distinct categories of *spiritual realities* and the *divine*, more faithfully reflecting the ontology of the historic Christian Church. I also added sections on corporate experience, depth, and the developing and unique character of human experience, each of which addressed material undeveloped in my dissertation and which opened up possibilities for interpreting the character of Christian spirituality more broadly and clearly.

I am still comfortable with much of what I have written so far and with the direction of that work. I find myself nowadays using the term "Evaluating" rather than "Judging" for the fourth stage of human experience. The connection to historic philosophical (and particularly Lonerganian) discussions is lost on my students and the notions of "judging" and "judgment(al)" have such a negative connotation that use of the term seems to stand in the way of communicating the value of logical and discerning evaluation. I would now also loosen somewhat my understanding of "Integration." I think that it is an adequate term to describe what I am envisioning for this stage of human experience--far better than World view Adjusting to interpret, for example, affective reconfiguration. And yet use of the term may erroneously incline a reader toward an over-modernist understanding of the human project. Rather than thinking of Integration in terms of some neatly packaged, wholly unified, system of thought/feeling/intention, I would now describe Integration as a "loosely packaged" construction of thought/feeling/intention that tends to employ all the modes of resolution I described on pp. 42-43 of *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*.

Nevertheless, there was still much that remained undeveloped in my understanding of human

experience. I think I had grasped something about the breadth of human experience and had captured some of the fundamental dynamics of the divine-human relationship (and consequently was able to share something about the richness of whole-gospel spirituality). Yet I had not really yet explored the place of influence, power, conflict or other similar notions with relationship to spirituality and Christian living. But my studies of Scripture (and my habit of meditatively reading the Psalms) confronted me with the pervasiveness of conflict. My teaching and writing in philosophy showed me the importance of alterity, ambiguity, movement, complex causality and other similar notions. And my personal, social, and political relations only heightened my sensitivity to power(s) at a variety of levels and spheres of human experience. What follows, then, is a summary of where I find myself now, in light of current reflection on the issues described above. In this chapter I will consider the interplay of forces and the construction of the individual (or intrapersonal) self. In the next chapter I will address the corporate (or interpersonal) self.

9. Human experience develops as the ongoing construction of a self, a construction which is often expressed at a nearly conscious or just conscious level of depth. This construction instantiates the integration (as I have clarified integration above) of context, surrounding pressures and so on in human experience.

A few years ago, in the context of teaching introduction to philosophy, I discovered what I called (and still call) *the place of the currently constructed self*. What follows below is what I wrote at that time. These reflections mark the beginnings of a shift in my view of human experience.

Reflections on the Place of the Currently Constructed Self

1. Introduction

In the midst of my philosophical, psychological, and religious studies of the self, I have discovered a “middle place” of human experience. Whereas ordinary experience lives in a world of actions, thoughts, feelings, beliefs, emotions, habits; and whereas philosophical inquiry lives in a world of obscure questions and clinical psychology lives in a world of deep unconscious drives (I don’t know what to make of the lifestyle thing here - not many ask about this at all, except perhaps a few anthropologists and cultural analysts), I seem to have bumped into this mediating place of “being.” Perhaps it is the place from which most movies are made. It is a place just above and just below consciousness, a place which can almost be articulated, but not too clearly (and so we communicate in story, in metaphor, in ritual/action). And yet it is from here that we perhaps define our selves most basically (of course, we all have differing abilities of self-awareness and self-expression). I’m calling it *the place of the currently constructed self*.

2. Definition

But what do I mean by this phrase? I will unpack the phrase word by word:

Self - On the one hand, I take “self” to mean any or every aspect of every level of human experience: operations, stages, relationships, developmental changes, degrees of depth and so on. My general understanding of self is neither as nebulous as the Buddhist nor as solid as the Thomist. And perhaps this debate is unimportant at this point. What *is* important is this: however we define the “self,” I think I have found a level of awareness and communication wherein we often summarize or define who we are (all this experience) as a somewhat-unified whole. Here, in this place, “self” points to the

shape of the way things are. However we define the self, it is defined in this place (for example, the modern understanding/experience of self and the postmodern understanding/experience of self are both at least basically articulated in this place).

Place - I say “in this *place*.” What I think I have discovered is a “place” within human experience. Perhaps we could talk about a way of speaking during certain levels of awareness or discussion. But the metaphor of “place” feels better to me. If we consider the whole of human experience as a continuum of depth, there is a segment of that continuum (at the play of the boundary between the second and third levels of depths and between conscious and unconscious operation) wherein lies our basic sense of self (see Figure 1).

Constructed - Whether or not there is some “essential” self created by God or evolution is not my concern here. Some speak of discovering their true self. This is not what I am speaking about. What I have discovered is the place of the *constructed* self. But by the term “constructed” I do not mean simply an “image” of the self, or some “persona.” I am thinking in terms of the reality of who we are, as formed and constructed by (and also as forming and creating) a variety of factors.

Currently - Again, as *constructed* self, we are not thinking of some unchanging substance. Rather what I am looking at is how we identify--*here and now*--our self as presently experienced.

3. The Place of “Who Am I?”

The place of the currently constructed self is the place from which we find ourselves answering the question, “Who are you?” We think a little bit and then we summarize ourselves as a somewhat-whole.

We summarize (or express, reveal) that self in a few different ways. We use image or metaphor. “I’m a carpenter.” “I’m an entrepreneur,” “I’m a mother.” These are social roles, but they are often described and perceived in terms of an image, an important metaphor of life. Sometimes we use adjectives to present an image. I am small, bald, inquisitive, and so on. At times we use these images to identify surface features. Yet if one were to probe beneath this level and ask, “No, really, who *are* you?” we would present deeper images (although sometimes “inquisitive” or “mother” *is* the deeper image). By attending to the images or metaphors others use as they speak of themselves, we learn about their self as currently constructed. We also use narrative. We tell our “story.” We see ourselves both *as* a story and *as inhabiting* a story. As with images and metaphors, if we listen carefully to another person's story, we can discover their self as currently constructed, even without asking. We also present models. At times we use a model as an image to summarize our self (I’m a wanna-be Michael Jordan). Often we present our models more subtly. We talk about our heroes. We mention what we wish this or that would be like. We comment on the state of things. The areas mentioned and the values expressed also give evidence of the self as currently constructed.

Embedded within these expressions are the guiding values, the emotional concerns, and the well-established habits that govern our lives at a just-conscious or just-below-conscious level. Though Joe may not have thought about the philosophical ins and outs of the meaning of life, he can probably tell you that “getting ahead in life” is one of his guiding values. Adriana may not be able to unearth her emotional history, but she can probably tell you that “safety” is a concern of hers. CJ may not have consciously constructed a fully consistent lifestyle, but he can probably tell you that he is a habitual “counter.” Here are a few examples of what could be communicated in these ways:

- ° Guiding Values

- getting ahead in life

- family
- security
- reason
- ° Emotional Concerns
 - safety
 - excitement
 - approval
 - order
- ° Well-established Habits
 - time alone
 - forms of entertainment
 - alcohol
 - diet

Yet our values, concerns, and habits are at this place not really distinct. It is important to remember the permeability of this level of depth of experience. Values are established, in part, to protect emotional concerns (which may, in turn, be shaped by deeper unconscious unmet needs in our past). Emotional concerns may function to maintain well-established habits (even habits we wish we did not have). Basic habits may be formed in the context of deeply rooted values. And so on. Just below this level of the basic “self” as currently communicable lies an ambiguous entanglement of one and another aspect of history, experience, and life.

This is also the place from which we generally express our desire, our sense of “happiness” (in the philosophical sense), our sense of meaning. What we want in life is often communicated in terms of

who we are through our stories, values, images and such. The objects of desire, the strength of movement, and the habituated means of satisfaction are perceived here (at greater or lesser degrees of clarity by different individuals/communities). The “dis-connects” we may have can be noticed here as tensions between value and habit (for example, our “second bests” as described in David Wilcox's song "Eye of the Hurricane"), story and concern (for example, emotional reactions which do not fit with the story of one’s life we have heard), or other manifestations.

4. The Context and Sources of the Self

The origins of this currently constructed self are exceptionally complex and cannot be presented in any detail. Nonetheless, a few examples of our *context* arising from the interplay of factors in the formation of the currently constructed self can be ventured as follows:

Historical - The “modern” self (both the understanding of the self and the self as experienced) differs from the “postmodern” self with relation to a variety of factors (individualism, rationalism, oral/visual . . .). People who lived in one era are different people than others

Geographical - Note: the distinction I just made above about historical context applies primarily to the West, but not to the East.

Cultural - Consider one arising from Jewish culture(s). Different sensibilities will be more pronounced for this one than one rising from another culture.

Communal - Furthermore, one arising from a large Hasidic family in New York City will have other unique sensibilities.

Physical - Our own physical development (sex, stature, build, medical status, and so

on) shapes the currently constructed self.

Personal - As do our personal histories and experiences (rejection as a child by peers, growing up during the Holocaust, or the like).

Spiritual - One's unique relationship with (or without) God as a post-Holocaust Jew plays a role in our self-construction.

Each of these (and more) informs the others. For example, an experience of tremendous pain we may have suffered (the loss of relatives in the Holocaust) informs our guiding values (family) or our basic story (a story of community survival). Every factor plays a part. We are not simply "determined" by the forces that co-construct the self. But neither do we construct this self of our selves, *ex nihilo*. We arise from a context.

Some of these factors become (consciously or unconsciously) strong "sources" of wisdom for us over time. These strong sources, consequently, play a unique role in forming the self. Key individuals (a parent), key institutions (school), key expressions of culture (television), even physical factors (a disability) are trusted (again, consciously or unconsciously) to inform, in a foundational way, the basic features of our world view, core affective concerns, and lifestyle. These basic features, in turn--and in dialogue with the specifics of our history, experience, and community--coalesce to form the dominant tendencies of our current self-construction. We define ourselves in terms of them.

5. Relationships Between the "Place" of the Currently Constructed Self and Other "Places"

The place of the currently constructed self is the most basic communicable level of self-presentation. It is just-conscious or nearly-conscious. If we think about it a little, most of us can state who we are at this level. It is this synthesis, this "current construction" that informs, in a fundamental way, the beliefs, emotions, and habits of our conscious life (which, in turn shape the thoughts, feelings,

and choices of our moment-by-moment living). But just as there is ongoing dialogue between the currently constructed self and conscious life, so also there is interaction between the currently constructed self and less-conscious elements of human experience.

Nearer and Deeper Levels of Unconscious Experience

On the one hand, there are things we simply have never considered or have forgotten. "It never entered my mind to consider why our family always went to the cemetery on Memorial Day." "I had forgotten that neither mom nor dad wore wedding rings." "I have never thought through just why I believe in God." We may remember the details later in life (and then we may discover their significance). We may consider the questions of life in the future. But at the moment things are simply unavailable. On the other hand, some of our experience is "kept" unconscious for our own protection (we don't want to experience the hurt of a particular memory). And some of our experience is present in the form of unconsciously held assumptions (such as the un-examined belief in God). As I have described in my treatment of the depth of human experience, there is an increasing degree of permeability between elements of experience as we go deeper. Changes in one system (a basic component of world view [cognitive], for example), is bound to have an effect on other systems (we will likely find our nuclear concerns shifting a bit [affective]). A powerful healing of the soul will have its effects on our lifestyle. Consequently, examinations and transformations of the place of the current construction of the self, insofar as they navigate and negotiate "below," will predispose change of the self in certain directions. One must be prepared for change.

World views and the More Philosophical Questions

Whether we reflect on them or not, our guiding values (in the place of the currently constructed self) point us (deeper) to the more philosophical questions about the nature of being, truth, right, beauty

and so on. As we examine our guiding value about “getting ahead in life,” we may discover that underneath this belief is a philosophical egoist ethic, a belief that it is natural or right to advance one’s own interests. As we examine our values of family, we may discover that we hold a fundamental belief that humans are essentially social beings, reflecting the character of a social God. When we take the step of examining our lives, we find ourselves exploring a wide range of often unexplored questions and issues. And perhaps--if we find ourselves reframing our world views as a result of an examination of key questions related to our guiding values--we will find ourselves in the middle of a change of concern and lifestyle as well.

Nuclear Emotional Concerns and Inner Healing

Similarly, when we look below our emotional concerns, we may discover deeply ingrained nuclear concerns established in the context of fundamental needs, perceptions, and affective skills. We peek beneath our concern for safety and recognize painful experiences in childhood (or later) that triggered a deeply held concern for preservation. We examine our interest in approval and identify a deep perception of ourselves as unsatisfactory. We explore our interest in excitement and we find a combination of physiological factors (lots of energy), social factors (a very quiet home), and affective skills (we never felt comfortable sharing with others, whereas privately performed activities provided fulfillment). Perhaps after evaluating the complex of fulfilled satisfactions we have called “happiness” for so long, we find a need for change. And in this change we reconstruct ourselves in terms of a kind of healing, a healing which may have its own effects on our habits of life and our view of the world.

Lifestyle

We seldom make large changes in our lifestyle. Perhaps it is in relocating our residence or through changes in marital status where lifestyle changes are most prominent. Religious conversions

have also been known to facilitate lifestyle change. At times we have occasion to re-consider our basic habits of life: eating, housing, relationships, use of time, money and so on. And we decide to re-order our style of life itself. We decide to do things differently. Interesting enough, we often express these kinds of changes in the place of the currently constructed self: “I’m going to be a different person.” Our practice of life here *is* our life. Needless to say, changes here are bound to affect other areas of life.

The World of Mystery

Finally, I think that it is worth wondering about another level (levels?) of human experience “below” world view, nuclear concern, and lifestyle, a place where philosophical analysis, emotional healing, and style of life have no “place,” and yet from which all places have their place. Whereas the place of the currently constructed self (and even more the place of our lifestyles, nuclear emotional concerns, and world views) is often ambiguous, some are compelled into places of absolute mystery to find (or to rediscover--or to permit the deconstruction and reconstruction of) the S(s)elf.

10. The construction of an individual self is not merely a passive coalescing of various forces (mere conditioning), but is also an active and interested construction.

My “Reflections on the Place of the Currently Constructed Self,” above, along with the chart on “Mutually Penetrating Factors in the Formation of Life” (see Figures 2-4) provides a first look at some of the dynamics involved in seeing human experience not only in terms of the breadth of what it is, but now also in terms of the dynamics of how it behaves. I think of this construction of the self as a

continual process - as life itself (arising through the manifestation of a number of spheres: body, intellect, social, spirit, and so on). Yet what was missing from my earlier reflections on the constructed self, however, was (1) a developed account of the enaction, expression, and embodiment of the constructed self in the immediate future moment and (2) a clear account of the place of "interest" (sense of threat, advantage, concern, orientation and the like). Accounting for both of these features brings me closer and closer to a treatment of the metaphysics of power within individual human experience. A variety of factors must be considered in order to make progress on this front:

- the development of patterns “gaining dominance” through habituation, absence of other factors, perceived unmet needs, salience, . . .
 - in turn, leading to the development of an inclination, or a “will” toward a direction. cf. Gelpi, *Firstborn* III, 302, “In a metaphysics of experience, however, “will” does not mean a power of the spiritual soul with a formal object, as it does in Thomistic Aristotelianism. It means instead a developing tendency to decide in specific ways.”
- immediate or remote contextual factors each constraining “freedom” in some form or another (physiology, patterns and range of consciousness, social setting/expectations, cultural/historical, divine initiative, mood, attraction/avoidance preferences, demonic activity . . .). Note - constraining but not eliminating freedom (a nod to Heidegger and Sartre here)
- the role of various psychologically motivating factors, for example:
 - drive presence or need reduction (physiology, safety, belonging, esteem, actualization . . .)
 - arousal
 - reasoning and (at times faulty) heuristics - do we understand the situation?
- the strength (or lack of strength) of other forces (strongly held beliefs, trusted relationships . . .),

giving rise to key “Sources” for a self

- an assessment of one’s freedoms and possibilities (counterfactuals). We do not construct a self apart from a sense of what “possible selves” are realistically available. “Free-will” is not exercised apart from real and imagined freedoms.
- goals, ends, and personal motives
 - fundamental aim - what do we hope to gain (for oneself, for another)?
 - personal motives - fear, gratitude, reward, identity, purpose, desire . . . There is the will to power, the will to surrender, and then there is the breaking or remaking of the will itself
 - expected results - perceived consequences of an act

Patterns or habits of thoughts, feelings and so on gain dominance as a function of the precise interplay of all of the above factors. These dominant patterns can be discerned as a kind of cathexis or a “concern” that, consciously or unconsciously, drives one’s self construction and action. Some of these concerns can be described as simple preferences. Others, however are reinforced by many factors at a deep level of experience. The deeper concerns define basic aspects of our currently constructed self. For example, as a scholar I have seen scholars adopt, revise, or abandon beliefs or viewpoints not merely with the clarity or persuasiveness of a position in mind, but also (though we might not consciously admit it) driven by an interest (concern) in maintaining or managing their role and place among their academic peers.

Still broader than concerns, however, is the more basic or general orientation that serves as a compass and engine of human existence. Thus we might speak of self- and other- orientation in self-construction. Sometimes it is all about our own advantage, or the perceived fulfillment of a deep need (so, for example, some lead "private lives" at great risk to fill perceived needs). Self-orientation

organizes, for example, around some aspects of self-concern; consequently certain patterns gain dominance and we protect them by particular habits. The concerns--or the habits used to protect them--at times can be identified with Platonic (or Pauline, or desert elders') "passions." At times, our beliefs are supervised by desires (or vice versa). We can also act out of an other-orientation (not that the good for the other ultimately works for our good, but rather than at times we act strictly from a sense of the worth of or obligation to the other). In the latter case, reasoning, emotional inclinations, arousal, personal motives and such develop within the context of a fundamental arrangement of our concerns around another. Needless to say, it is common to act with varying degrees of self- and other- orientation simultaneously operating. Prudence is, in part, the art of distinguishing elements and nuances of each in a given situation.

Creativity, chance, play - There are also aspects of our embodiment that I believe are just whims. They have nothing to do with "the strongest reason." We just act and see what happens.

11. Resolving conflicts within our own person involves paying attention to the various forces at play within us.

Needless to say, the act of self-construction can be very conflicted. At times rational forces take the lead. At other times, unconscious drives express a self we hardly know or want to admit. Social pressure, natural conditions, personal expectations, and a whole lot more play their part in the mix. Some parts have greater "authority" over our lives at different times. At times we confess that we are "controlled," or "powerless" to a given pattern. One way of looking at this is to see human experience as a conflict of parts (for example, id, ego, superego). This gives rise to the notion of life as "struggle"

(here not only the Christian notion but also Platonic “chariot” and other approaches). One can also see life as an incomplete construction regarding which we ourselves can play a role (following, for example, the lead of positive psychology). Indeed, there are a variety of ways of exploring the resolution of inner-personal conflicts. Do we "welcome the shadow side" of our personalities, finding in our disordered desires signs of the presence of the Spirit or do we "rid ourselves of the passions" which war against our truest construction of life, aggressively cooperating in a remaking of our deepest wants and desires such that our shadows turn to light?

I have plans to explore more deeply the themes of desire, practice and identity along with the theme of power. They are all related. I will leave a more thorough treatment of these issues until then. But this much needs to be said by way of articulating a foundation for psychology: First, human experience (as all experience) develops from (indeed, *is*) an interplay of diverse forces. Conflict is normal. Ordinary psychological health is not the elimination of inner conflicts but is rather a process by which we have increasing victory (however we want to define that word) in the midst of life's conflicts. True, by God's grace, there are times when victory is experienced so profoundly that in some areas we no longer even perceive the conflict within which we once suffered so severely. Nevertheless, at this point I recommend we aim at increasing victory and leave the elimination of conflict up to God's grace. Second, psychological health--and here I state a principle that I will repeat again and again--is not a matter of "fixing a thing" but rather of "responding appropriately to a state of affairs," of simply seeing and acting toward and in the midst of the various forces influencing our lives. The more we learn about our "problem," the more we discover that our problem is tied up with our history, our physiology, our relationships, our spirituality, and much more. In order to address the part, we are compelled to address the whole. In order to address the whole, we address part by part.

Chapter Three:

Corporate Experience and the Frameworks of Community and Politics

In this chapter we move to address corporate experience. I pondered having separate chapters on community (smaller scale interpersonal experience) and politics (larger scale interpersonal experience). On the one hand there are lots of overlaps between these two spheres. However, facing the conflicts in your family or community house is much different than confronting national poverty. Scale really changes things. But in the end I have decided to keep them as one chapter. My aim in this essay is to provide reflections on the *basic frameworks* of different areas of life, not to provide a comprehensive treatment of each area. Consequently, in this chapter I will focus on the general dynamics that arise when we address relatedness to others (whether in small or large groupings), making little journeys into social psychology or politics where appropriate.

12. Human experience is human experience not only in individuality, but also in relatedness. Human experience is--as *human* experience--also corporate experience.

Just as individuals are self-organized systems of somewhat independent life, uniting to a certain extent other systems and operations within its own experience (circulatory system, digestive system,

social history, emotional states and so on), so corporate entities (families, clubs, congregations, communities, nations and so on) are self-organized systems of somewhat independent life, uniting to a certain extent other systems and operations within their own experience (individuals, committees, corporate culture . . .). As with an individual self, a whole is made up of a fluid/stable set of patterns. Only in social reality these patterns are not experienced merely as particular *patterns* of feeling, thinking, acting and such, but rather as particular *people* with their own habits, gestures, vocabulary (or absence of communication) and such. In larger social realities the patterns are experienced through *groups of people*, *institutions* representing different ideals or interests and so on (other, unique dynamics are also introduced in groups - the whole is greater than the sum of its parts - see, for example the work of Zimbardo and others).

In the *Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality* I presented a somewhat semiotic account of corporate experience that was built upon my understanding of human experience at that time. I moved from the notion of human beings as fundamentally relational to develop a framework for comprehending corporate experience within such concepts as self-disclosure, symbolic expression, communication, comparison and imitation, sharedness, mutuality, identity, roles, corporate self-identity, community and culture. Imitation, common and shared layers of life, cultural institutions and such all combine to form the character of a given corporate "self." As distinct selves, corporate experiences can be thought to possess their own *mind* ("It is the opinion of this committee . . ."), *affectivity* ("The tribe rejoiced to hear that for once their treaty was honored"), and *volition* ("The family decided to move to a different town"). Stages, relational webs, depth dimensions and such apply to corporate experiences just as they do for individual experiences. Furthermore, though I did not develop this point earlier, I think it perfectly reasonable to transfer my approach to the currently constructed self from individual selves to corporate selves. Consequently, we can think in terms of a corporate "who am I" operating just above or below community consciousness, developed through a complex of context, surrounding

pressures and so on, expressed through story and such, and which articulates a fundamental sense of meaning to the group in the immediate future of group choice.

13. The construction of a corporate self is not merely a passive coalescing of various forces, but is also an active and interested construction.

Just as I had left the some of the more active and conflictual dimensions of individual experience undeveloped in the *Brazos Introduction*--concentrating more on what experience *is* than what it *does* (which, in an account of experience as an interplay of a variety of forces, constitutes a serious lacuna), and have found the need to account for that aspect with regard to individual human experience, I have also found the need to explore the place of influence, power, conflict and similar notions with relationship to corporate experience. And once again, this takes me one more step into a metaphysics of power.

As with individual selves, corporate selves develop through seasons of conflict and resolution. Indeed, the very *reality* of corporate experience is a dynamism of qualities, forces, tendencies; groups, ideas, people and more. People take on different habits, roles, patterns, and all these establish themselves together as part of the “culture” of a community (large or small). This is why an alteration in the membership of a community (or changing the behavior patterns of a member) can threaten a community. The “self” of the whole is at risk. The delicate balance of forces that has held the self together is shifted and members’ concerns (conscious or unconscious) are threatened.

I need to do more thinking about the relationship between identity and power. There is a connection between, for example, Walter Wink and Miroslav Volf, but it is not a one-to-one correspondence. At present I see their ideas as overlapping but distinct. One can exercise an ability to

influence for the sake of self or other apart from any investment in identity (for example, out of a simple act of care in an emergency). One can energize aspects of identity without exercising any ability to influence (I nurse a hatred against “those” people who are different from me, without acting or even being able to act, that hatred out in any overt way). Quite often, however, identity and power are joined, further intensifying and complicating the dynamics of the mutual interpenetration of forces in corporate experience (as when my identification of an evil “other” is combined with the ability to exercise coercive action against the other’s own patterns of life - and so I employ smart bombs).

Nonetheless, as with individual experience, a wide range of actions--and even "interested" actions--are involved in the construction of corporate experience (an experience that develops through a mutual interpenetration not simply of vague elements or biological or psychological systems, but is here embodied in particular individual people and groups of people). Patterns (= *people*) gain dominance, various contextual factors constrain community freedoms, psychological motives (like corporate arousal or faulty heuristics) shape the development of experience, various respected Sources are consulted by various different individuals and groups, choices and embodiment of corporate life are made in light of perceived counterfactuals--estimates of what is possible for the group. And as with individual experience, our goals and ends shape the trajectory, our concerns and orientations shape the journey, and creativity and play offer an element of chance to the whole.

14. The movement of corporate experience is governed by a dynamic relationship of parts known as "leading."

Particular forces and qualities exercise distinct influences over individual experience, "leading" it to this or that action. For example, one's particular balance between rational analysis and emotional

reaction may "lead" one to make a decision in a certain way. I often speak of the "will" of an individual moving experience from one moment to the next. Furthermore, we understand what it means for ourselves to respond to this process of leadership governed by this balance or relationship between various parts of our experience (we can grasp what it means to yield ourselves to an emotional reaction). In a similar way the life of a given community develops through a balance of its parts that can be understood as "leadership." Remember, all experience develops from the interplay of such forces as influence, structure and consent/consensus in varying qualities. In corporate experience those forces and qualities are often embodied or manifest in individuals or groups of people. How an individual makes a decision is influenced by that person's habits, mental predispositions, wants, and so on. Nevertheless, an individual usually comes to decisions with a sense of the basic process--the concrete, practical *how*--a decision is made. In corporate experience, however, things are often not so clear. How does a group of people come to share an encounter, to understand a situation, to make a decision? The mediation of the parts constituting individual experience is lived out in corporate experience through communication and power. I covered the semiotic dimension (and touched on the subject of power) in *The Brazos Introduction*. Now I must address power more fully.

How is corporate experience *led* from one moment to the next? This varies from group to group. Assuming that leading corporate experience from moment to moment is accomplished in the context of the interplay of forces and such (conflicts), we can summarize insights from both conflict resolution research and political philosophy by speaking of different ways that groups are led. For example:

- some groups assign someone (or a group of someones) to lead (to make decisions, interpret information, etc.). To accomplish this, the group must together grasp something of the process or reasoning (or force) that authorizes the ruling entity(ies) to be the ruling entity(ies) (note

anarchist rejection of legitimacy, divine right, social contract . . .)

- voting or consensus or other similar democratic procedures may be used as a process of "leading" a group itself. Group process itself becomes the mechanism by which a group makes decisions, interprets information and so on.
- an individual or sub-group might make a decision (or other stage of experience) on behalf of the group apart from any "assignment" or democratic process
- some groups may (consciously or unconsciously) ignore their situation and the progress of corporate experience does not move forward from this point
- still others "work it out" and corporate experience *in* conflict is lived as the corporate experience *of* conflict.

Other questions are often addressed as corporate experience navigates its own way of proceeding:

- the relationship between common and private possessions, activities, roles, identities and other symbols of life
- the principles by which conflicts are adjudicated or leadership is determined and experience therefore proceeds
- likewise, the process by which (and the grounds upon which) these principles are determined
 - merit
 - natural law
 - utility
 - fairness
 - and so on - of course, this discussion leads to a discussion of one's sources of wisdom and other issues
- what kind of permission is granted for dissenters to express dissent and remain in the

community

15. Consequently, the reality of corporate experience is that it is a fluctuating nexus of a balance of power(s), and understanding corporate experience requires understanding the individuals, groups and other forces (contexts, surrounding pressures and so on) giving rise to the currently constructed corporate self.

I have already indicated in chapter one that I see power as the ability to produce or effect change. The sun has one kind of power to produce change in a plant. Water has another, as does soil. My imagination has the power to effect one kind of change in my individual experience. My habit of contemplative prayer has another. In each of these forms of power/influence there is an *agent* of power (producing the influence), a *structure* of power (a framework whereby the influence operates or is mediated) and a *response* to power (a permeability of experience to the forms of power being exercised). I see a similar character to corporate experience. In the *Brazos Introduction*, 352-54, I touched on the subject of power and authority in communities of care. In what follows I develop that material for the present essay.

Power is influence-ability, the capacity to transform something. First there is the simply ability to influence. I have power over my two-year-old in that I can express coercive force to make sure that she or he does not stick their hand on the hot stove. But there is also a way of speaking about “having power” over my two-year-old that describes not simply my *ability* to influence but of a feature of my *relationship* of influence over the child. I still “have power” over my child in this sense when the child continues to permit my influence through obedience. Even though I may still “have power” in terms of mere ability, I may “lose power” relationally, if my child refuses to comply with my coercion. Often

“power” is defined politically as the ability to command obedience. To my mind, the ability to command obedience is merely one form or expression of power. Power is also often distinguished from “authority” which is defined as the right to rule. Often in the literature these terms are muddled up. To me, “power” in a given corporate self, what we generally call *political power*, is the ability to influence the current construction of the community self as they are embodied within a given corporate experience. I prefer to speak of various kinds of power or ability to influence.

- The acquisition and maintenance of power - perhaps some of the differences between common distinctions between “power” and “authority” derive from various means of acquiring and maintaining the ability to influence. Some of these means are:
 - persuasion - the ability to convince another
 - position - having a position of importance (through fear, respect, a sense of social contract or some other motive) enables one to have greater influence over another; note social, economic, employment position
 - admiration and appreciation - at times the life of another person or community (or some particular aspect of that person or community) draws us to give that person or community permission to influence
 - expertise - related to the above three might be a kind of ability to influence through the knowledge of a given area gained through education or experience
 - possession - having something another needs gives one a certain ability to influence the other who may want it or something related to the possession (for example, land and resources on the land)
 - coercion - the ability to force another to comply through physical strength, economic control, social pressure, threat of pain, temptation

- sometimes position of power [permission to influence an event] is simply conceded to the person who volunteers to get something done

Needless to say, this all varies depending on the kind of influence involved (intellectual, affective, economic, relational . . .), the nuances used to express this influence (the mere looks in a small-group setting; the targeted investments in an economic setting . . .), the degree of depth, intensity, duration . . . of the influence, and so on.

- Authorities and authority figures - What we today call “authorities” or “authority figures” are, to me, those individuals or groups of individuals who symbolize the ability to influence a given area of life, no matter how that ability to influence has been gained. The sense of the acquisition of influence changes over time. For example, police have been viewed in previous decades by many as “public servants.” They have their authority for those who see them in this way by virtue of a kind of positional, appreciation mechanism and are perceived as other-oriented. But others see police as an expression of state coercion, instruments of those with the greatest economic-political influence (and self-oriented). What *is* an “authority,” an “authority figure”? It all depends. One's perception of (and even the *reality* of) authority develops in group experience from the relationship of the place, structure and response to power in a given experience. Just what authority did Ceasar wield over Jesus?
- The use and abuse of power - The ability to influence is itself a pattern, a reality that can be “used.” We can, as individuals or as groups (small associations, institutional structures, mass movements) *use* our ability to influence a larger reality in order to change it. The strategies of

just *how* that power is used (or best used, or ethically used) are particular to the setting involved (family, small group, economic corporation, mass movement). For example, one might consider:

- motive - *why* is power used (self- or other- orientation; specific aims)?
- virtue - *who* is using the power, what basic characteristics are embodied in a given expression?
- law - are there some basic principles governing how power ought to be used in certain situations?
- consequences - what is likely to happen if power is employed

These kinds of questions affect not only *who* uses power, *if* power is used and *why* power is used. Such considerations also can affect the *way* power is used. In *The Brazos Introduction*, 353-54, I suggest something of the positive use of power. Indeed, the entire chapter is on the life of care and one of my points in this chapter is to encourage the care-full use of power. But in the process, I also discuss the abuse of power. In particular, I mention:

- inattention - un care-full employment of my ability to influence which produces harm, apart from any malice
- oppression - to me, oppression takes things a step further than mere inattention. Withholding wages, unfair legal practices, leveraged buy-outs and such are more than ignorance. Yet there is not present a particular intention to cause damage to the other. With oppression it is more an unfair use of relationship with another for personal gain.
- persecution - with persecution, however, we have gone the full route, and the other becomes the intended object of attack

16. Resolving conflicts within corporate experience involves paying attention to the various forces at play within that experience and introducing change to one or more of the elements involved.

As with personal experience, so with corporate experience: First, human experience develops from (indeed, *is*) an interplay of diverse forces. Conflict is normal. Ordinary social health is not the elimination of conflict. Tensions in a family, factions in a church, parties in a political entity will rarely be completely eliminated. Second, social health is not a matter of "fixing a thing" but rather of "responding appropriately to a state of affairs," of simply seeing and acting toward and in the midst of the various forces influencing our lives. In smaller groups this is the subject of "family systems" theory or "small group conflict resolution" research. When we are talking about nations (or multinational corporations) with long histories and various lobbying interests and hosts of somewhat hidden networks and unforeseeable consequences, the matter is more complicated. Yet the framework is still the same: various co-present forces, some gaining more or less dominance, dominance being expressed in given recognizable patterns for the benefit of self or other (or various sub-selves). Contextual factors, goals, motives and so on are still considered; it is just that the forces manifest differently in a nation than in a community or an individual.

What I have not stated clearly enough thus far, is that "responding appropriately to a state of affairs" often involves the introduction of change. This is true at the level of plant care, at the level of inner-personal care, and at the level of care for a nation. As we have already stated, power changes. Power is the ability to produce change. Reality is a continual flux of forces and confrontations, each influencing another in creative and unique ways. Yet change and power are produced in various and

complex ways. I mentioned the dynamics of change in *The Brazos Introduction*, 355-57, outlining stages of change (leaving behind, neutral zone, new beginnings). I have much more work to do on this in the future. We introduce a new habit or pattern into the mix and a “butterfly effect” of change is introduced. What led to the fall of the Roman Empire? The bolshevik revolution? The fall of the Berlin wall? So many factors, so much preparation, but at critical moments, things happened. What led to the Protestant Reformation? There were reforming critiques of the Catholic Church centuries before Luther. Was he merely the right man at the right time? At times (both personally and corporately) the factors reach a tipping point and radical change happens very fast. Power changes. At times, quite rapidly. And, at other times, quite slowly. We introduce a discipline into our lives and over the years gradually that discipline begins to change us, not only in terms of our habits of action, but perhaps even in terms of our way of looking at the world. We introduce a new social structure, a new technology into the world, and over time it shapes not only our way of accomplishing particular tasks, but it informs our very expectations of life. Influence shifts from one thing to another, from one idea to another, from one person or group to another.

How power changes is very complicated. As we have mentioned, influence is spread over a variety of factors (grounds, surrounding pressures, seeds and triggers and so on), each responding uniquely to each environment and setting. The consequences of a shift in power in one area may affect the influences of other things in another area. This is the “ecology” of influence, of power. (Indeed, this is what ecology is about in the traditional sense). Wisdom requires paying careful attention, asking good questions, and practicing things well. Consequently, responding appropriately to a given state of affairs involves the introduction of a form of influence that is designed to "fit" the particular aspect of the interplay of forces and qualities present in any given corporate experience. In the political sphere we speak of political "strategy" or "tactics": boycotts, letters to officials, initiating referendums, direct actions, and so on. In family systems or small groups we speak of "forgiveness," "interventions," or

"having a meeting to talk about it." There are many ways, both subtle and bold, to influence the various forces of corporate experience. Sometimes the way to change a group is to invest in getting to know the individuals in the group with whom you disagree most. There are times to correct corrupt leadership. There are times to improve the structure of community life. And there are times when we must strengthen the culture or consensus of the body politic at large. The art of the life of wisdom is learning how to introduce change.

Chapter Four:

Christian Experience, The Divine-Human Relationship and the Frameworks of Christian Spiritual Formation and Spiritual Warfare

We are now at the place where we can begin to talk of relationship with God and other spiritual realities. And at this point I find myself returning more directly to the material presented in the *Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*. My interest now is to re-present that material (with a few new ideas) in light of the issues and perspective presented so far in this essay. But first, it might be helpful to review where we have been. Below is a list of the points we have covered so far:

1. Reality (Experience) is a dynamic interplay of distinct elements.
2. This dynamic interplay of elements (Experience) arises with variety. Consequently, there are different spheres or modes of experience.
3. The dynamism of Experience within its different spheres necessarily involves--and can be seen as--change, influence and power.
4. Experience is mediated, both to itself, and with other experience.
5. The mediation of experience--and indeed, the dynamic character of Experience itself--is multifactorial. Life is a complex dynamic system.
6. Co-present forces exhibit particular functions within or between different spheres. Thus,

influence, power and change serve, in their various expressions, various “roles”.

7. **Power** must be understood in the context of this dynamic perspective of reality/experience itself.

8. Experience organizes/arises around both fluid and stable tendencies--Interdependent Independence; Independent Interdependence. Experience is inhabited by stable/fluid "selves."

9. Human experience develops as the ongoing construction of a self, a construction which is often expressed at a nearly conscious or just conscious level of depth. This construction instantiates the integration (as I have clarified integration above) of context, surrounding pressures and so on in human experience.

10. The construction of an individual self is not merely a passive coalescing of various forces (mere conditioning), but is also an active and interested construction.

11. Resolving conflicts within our own person involves paying attention to the various forces at play within us.

12. Human experience is human experience not only in individuality, but also in relatedness. Human experience is--as *human* experience--also corporate experience.

13. The construction of a corporate self is not merely a passive coalescing of various forces, but is also an active and interested construction.

14. The movement of corporate experience is governed by a dynamic relationship of parts known as "leading."

15. Consequently, the reality of corporate experience is that it is a fluctuating nexus of a balance of power(s), and understanding corporate experience requires understanding the individuals, groups and other forces (contexts, surrounding pressures and so on) giving rise to the currently constructed corporate self.

16. Resolving conflicts within corporate experience involves paying attention to the various

forces at play within that experience and introducing change to one or more of the elements involved.

17. The Christian God is the most Real, the purest interpenetration of quality and force, stability and dynamics, and the Source for all other Experience.

I have covered this ground already in chapter four of the *Brazos Introduction*. God is self-existent Trinity. As such, the Christian God is by definition a dynamic interpenetration of persons. The term *perichoresis* is often used to identify the dynamic interplay between the persons of the Trinity. God both transcends non-divine Experience and is yet (*as* transcendent) imminently present in all Experience. One of the primary phrases within which humans perceive God is "the One who ____". God is *actively* present to Experience. God is the Source of the arising of Experience. All of what we perceive as Experience is merely a derivative from divine Experience. God is actively present in the transformation of Experience. God calls Experience to its cessation.

18. God mediates the divine Experience, particularly to humans.

From my perspective, as Source of Experience (Creator), God did not create a collection of "things" and then brought a few to life. Rather, God mediated his¹ own living dynamic interpenetration (influence) outward into the arising of other forms and spheres of mutual interpenetration. Inorganic material, organic reality, animal life, human persons, ideas, societies, spiritual beings and so on, all express in diverse ways the rich *perichoresis* of the divine life. The different spheres of Experience are expressions of God's creative activity. But as Source and Creator of human experience, God is also

¹ I use the masculine pronoun here only to reflect the language of Christian Scripture. Clearly the Christian God transcends, incorporates and is indeed the Source of all sexual diversity and gendered experience.

personal and mediates personal life within the Godhead and beyond. God is *disclosive*, revealing himself (remember what we have learned about "self" already - now think about a divine "self") from Son to Father and Father to Son and Spirit. As we shall see, God also manifests the divine life outside divine experience and within human experience. But as the character of mediation is multifaceted, we must expect the revelation of the divine to be embedded both within all of human experience and transcending that experience. Consequently, in Christian theology, we speak of both *general revelation* (that which is available to all humans by nature of their general access to divine mediation in all Experience) and *special revelation* (the transcendent disclosure of God, particularly through the events of Israelite history, the person of Christ, and the reflections on these two events as recorded in Christian Scripture). I might also add the notion of *pneumatic revelation* which transcends ordinary human experience. The condescending mediation of the infinite God to finite humankind gives rise to our use of analogy, metaphors, and images to speak of God.

19. God is "spirit," Holy Spirit," and communicates S/spirit to humans

Speaking of *pneumatic*, I am discovering that in order to have a clear understanding of God as "spirit" -- and an accurate understanding of (the) Holy Spirit -- it is helpful to reframe things in a non-substantialist metaphysic. A metaphysic of Experience offers a better way of accounting for the biblical, theological and phenomenological data regarding pneumatology.

What I mean is this -- Biblically, the Scriptures do not give a clear portrait of s/Spirit. The original words (*ruach, pneuma*) are translated variously, just as "spirit" is translated variously in other languages: wind, breath, spirit, Spirit, and so on. That itself is not a serious problem because lots of words have various meanings and context often indicates which is which. But such is not necessarily the case with s/Spirit. Sometimes the words are articular, at other times anarthrous. Old Testament references give greater emphasis on s/Spirit present with each living person (or being). Some New

Testament references speak as if no one "has the Spirit" until they are reborn at Christian conversion. Theologically, most traditional theologians speak of THE Holy Spirit as a reified substance: sometimes either some kind of invisible Jesus (conservatives) or a kind of pantheistic force (liberal/progressive). Some systematic theologians, such as Rahner (existentialist), identify S/spirit with the authentic core of a human person. Pentecostals understand the Spirit in terms of spontaneous outpourings. Not only the "what" but the "where" of S/pirit (everywhere vs. indwelling believers only) and the "when" of the s/Spirit (at birth vs. at rebirth vs. at the baptism of the Spirit) are in debate. Phenomenologically, the problem is that s/Spirit is acknowledged through attribution, signs (just like the wind). It is the character of a pattern seen in a person or situation that signals that s/Spirit, divine spirit, Holy Spirit is present or active. Secular authorities witness the life and anointing of Joseph or Daniel and recognize the presence of divine Spirit. The early church recognized the same in Stephen. I could go on and on with exegetical and historical illustrations of the relationship of signs to (the) s/Spirit.

Philosophically speaking, I think progress can be made by conceiving of Holy Spirit/holy spirit in terms of a Peircean metaphysic. When we talk about the "spirit" of a particular gathering--you know when you walk into a room and can just "feel" the relational dynamics-- we are talking about a pattern of emotional and interpersonal energy. We recognize both a "force" and something very personal, the character of the "self" that is that community at that moment. Quality, force, tendency. Once again we are in the world of Peircean metaphysics. Now it is not that I understand Holy Spirit entirely analogically with the idea of the "spirit" of a gathering. It's just that I seem to find a lot more traction thinking of (the) Spirit (outpourings of the Spirit, gifts/fruit of the Spirit, walking in the Spirit, and so on) in terms of a more dynamic metaphysic. In this I am following the lead of my mentor Don Gelpi and a student of a student of his, Amos Yong

20. God is all-powerful.

Needless to say, God is all-powerful. *Omnipotent* is the term theologians use to describe this aspect of God's nature. If we comprehend power as the ability to produce or effect change, there is simply no limit to the change that God is able to produce or effect. The influence of the active presence of God is without a set of bounded counterfactuals. There is no question, within divine experience, of what could be possible. There is only what is divinely willed. It is clear, however, that God has willed to limit activity in a number of areas. Patterns of nature proceed in predictable courses (that is why the occasional miracle is considered a miracle). Humans are ordinarily permitted to exercise "free" will (however we understand this). And yet God can and does act outside these habitual structures of reality, because the dynamics of the reality of the universe arise within the horizon of God's influence.

Yet God is not powerful simply in the cosmic sense. God is also power and powerful in the world of human Experience. We speak of being "led" by the Spirit. We speak of God as King. God is the supreme expert, the Source of all wisdom. Jesus is the quintessentially attractive model of life. God possesses supreme authority. Every kind of "power" reaches its pinnacle in the persons of the Godhead.

21. The divine-human relationship must be understood in light of the dynamics of both human experience and the Trinitarian God.

We have covered human experience (both individual and corporate) in chapters two and three above. And we have given a brief review of the character of the Trinitarian God in points 17-19. Now it is time to consider the dynamics of the relationship between God and human. And it is important at this point to remember that human experience is both individual and corporate. This is part of God's creative work. We cannot fully separate our relationship with God as individuals from our life as members of the people of God. We must think not only in terms of God's relationship with *me* but also

of God's relationship with *us*, a people, a community of the King. More on this later.

In point #15, I spoke about corporate experience arising with the exercise of an *agent* of power (producing the influence), a *structure* of power (a framework whereby the influence operates or is mediated) and a *response* to power (a permeability of experience to the forms of power being exercised). Without consciously thinking of this schema, I actually addressed it to a certain extent in my treatment of the fundamental patterns of the divine-human relationship in chapter six of the *Brazos Introduction* (I hadn't even got the idea of that schema when I wrote the *Brazos Introduction*). There I identified God's initiation, our response, and God's response to our response (IRR) as a fundamental pattern of God's way of relating to humans. Now when I look at that pattern in light of what I am thinking about here, I see the pattern (IRR) as an expression of God's mediated influence toward human Experience. God himself is the agent (as described in point 17-19 above) of power, exercising divine movement toward change mediated toward the weakness of human experience. The structure of power is embedded within God's initiation. God reveals, self-discloses. God's invitations are expressions of his grace. God invites us into relationship, into change through the offer of the Gospel (more on this below) and through the leadings of the Spirit. Our response to God's power is, of course, identified with the response to God's initiation: we resist, avoid. We exercise faith, obedience, openness. We yield. And so on. Our relationship with God is one more sphere of mutual interaction (along with our inner life and our relationships with others), one more navigation of power. At times, one more arena of conflict.

Not only can we divide God's self-disclosure into categories of "general" and "special" revelation, we can also divide God's initiations toward influence twofold. On the one hand there is the invitation that God offers to all humanity through the Gospel (both general and special revelation). Through the Gospel, God invites people--all people--into transformation, into a divinely-catalyzed change. I call this God's *general* invitation. And part of understanding the dynamics of the relationship between God and human is to grasp something of the breadth this general invitation God has called us

to. I treated this in chapters five and seven of the *Brazos Introduction*. God desires that every dimension of human experience be transformed. And in chapter eight I addressed this theme by talking about the *aims* of spiritual formation. Since the publication of the *Brazos Introduction* I have also found myself talking about "righteousness," "true religion," and the "mandates" of Scripture. This is the stuff of Prologues to monastic Rules - where are we going with all this monastic life? What is it *about*?

22. The aims of Christian formation identify those areas concerning which we perceive God's desire for transformation, and toward which we exercise some intention.

The fresh idea (or at least fresh to me) I have concerning formation, is that God is not merely in the business of forming *me*. This flows directly from what is above. God invites in a broad way and insofar as I participate in the broad invitations of God, I also am formed variously. To quote many, "It's not just about me." When I review the Christian Scriptures, I can identify a number of primary foci of God's formative work particularly with humans. God is in the business of forming:

- caring servants (Gen 1-2 and beyond)
- a model people (the Exodus story and beyond)
- followers of Jesus (see the Gospels and beyond)
- loving neighbors (see Jesus' teachings and beyond) - love God, love neighbor
- holy church (consider the work of the Spirit)
- agent of the kingdom (again, this is the work of the Spirit)

True, God is interested in the maturing of every dimension of my experience. True, God is interested in the transformation of my relationship with myself, with others, with God and so on. But God is not *merely* interested in me, no matter how broadly considered. God invites humanity (me included) to become a caring servant of this earth. God invites me to participate in becoming a model example of

humanity as best as possible. Consequently my care for the environment and for the poor is not simply a matter of my own personal spiritual discipline, part of what God is calling *me* into. Rather it is part of a larger (general) call by God to form a new people and earth. The breadth of the aims of spiritual formation must reflect the breadth of the invitation of God, not only with regard to the diversity of dimensions of human experience involved, but also with regard to the audience addressed by that call. God not only invites me as an individual by the Spirit to a particular embodiment of God's more general calling to humanity, but God also invites people corporately into new life. And in that light some of my own particular formation-aims are what they are in the context of my location with relationship to the communities and peoples within which I dwell and respond to God.

What this means is that I must rethink the language of formation. Terms like 'holiness,' 'sanctification,' 'perfection,' 'deification,' 'righteousness,' and 'true religion' need not be understood from an individualist perspective. Indeed, I do not think they were meant to be understood in this manner from the start. So part of my own task is to accept, adapt, and apply these terms anew for my own life, and particularly for my life as a part of a larger calling of God for the church and the world. I hear people focusing their lives around different aims: making a difference/a change, living an alternative life/being an alternative community, experiencing the transforming love of God, and so on. My suspicion is that each of these (and more) have a place in the fullness of God's invitation.

What this also means is that I cannot neatly separate my own spiritual maturity and formation from involvement in the inner-personal, community, spiritual, and national conflicts within which God's broad concerns are addressed.

22. Maturing relationship with God does not eliminate conflict, but rather strengthens us to navigate it appropriately and victoriously.

As I said above, conflict is normal. Some of it is quite healthy. This is true for Christians as well as for unbelievers. And the more I read Scripture, the more I find the normative character of conflict. National conflicts, inner-personal struggles, interpersonal drama, national battles, class divisions, religious persecution: I could go on and on. These are all common in Scripture. I find no evidence that faith in Christ leads to the elimination of conflict. Indeed, quite the opposite. I find the authors of the Scriptures constantly to be instructing their readers regarding godly ways to handle this or that kind of conflict. We are always at war.

Humans have always fought those forces which have undue influence to the detriment of life. (and here a Christian can more specifically think of threats to the realization of the fullness of the kingdom of God). Distinct fields of study tend to explore the “warfare” of humanity in terms of different objects:

- anthropology and missiology often discuss warfare with spiritual forces
- modern science explored warfare with the harsh character of nature
- psychology ventures into warfare with the conflicts within the human psyche
- social psychology addresses conflict resolution among small groups and communities
- politics and economics and the warfare among nations and other economic powers

In each case it is a question of identifying forces of influence, discerning the character of the influence and how it hinders the fullness of life, and employing particular strategies to facilitate the shifts of influence in a more healthy direction. My suspicion, furthermore, is that the forces that work for un-life mutually interpenetrate one another just as the forces that work for life. Consequently, the war for the promotion of life must not be waged on a single front alone. The forces are too diverse and too intertwined to be defeated by a “single area” approach. In Christian terms, the world, the flesh, the devil and more all conspire against the kingdom of God. Components of one can be identified in the

others (the greed(s) in me and in international affairs, for example). What this means, of course, is that a resolution of conflict, even within the spiritual world, must be an honest and appropriate response to all the various forces at work. And this "all the forces" means not only spiritual forces, but the forces of each and all the spheres of Experience that mutually influence one another to give rise to the state of affairs that is present (the Real).

What this means is that if the ultimate aim of spiritual formation is a kind of "fit" within the full range of God's work on earth, the proximate aim of formation is the appropriate navigation of the particular configuration of conflicts within which one dwells. At times our background in small groups is front and center. At other times the fight is about what is within. At other times we are addressing demonic forces. And again there are times to face the fragmentation of the nation. Over time we also learn that to address only one or two of these to the neglect of the others is to set ourselves up for defeat. We must find some realistic way of keeping our eye on the whole even while expending appropriate amounts of energy to the different spheres as they have need and as the Spirit of God guides. Needless to say, we trust not in our own abilities here (there is simply too much to consider). We work out our own salvation in fear and trembling, but it is our omnipotent God who produces the real change.

Conclusion -

There are a number of areas I could go on to address: economic power, spiritual warfare, the character of care, the influences involved in intercessory prayer, and so on. I will have to deal with these later. My point in this essay was simply to explore the "metaphysics" of power: the basic principles by which the reality of the way things are can be more adequately understood. I have addressed all this with the language of "power" and "conflict." It is not that I see life is as

simply all about conflict, understood with a kind of negative connotation (much as Marx does). What I am thinking about throughout this whole essay is a dynamism of tensions and releases, movements, reconfigurations and so on. Reality to me is a complex dynamic system. And until we grasp this and begin to treat the Real as complex and dynamic, we will continue to polarize, to cause harm, and to miss the fullness of the life into which God invites us.

The Points of the Essay

1. Reality (Experience) is a dynamic interplay of distinct elements.
2. This dynamic interplay of elements (Experience) arises with variety. Consequently, there are different spheres or modes of experience.
3. The dynamism of Experience within its different spheres necessarily involves--and can be seen as--change, influence and power.
4. Experience is mediated, both to itself, and with other experience.
5. The mediation of experience--and indeed, the dynamic character of Experience itself--is multifactorial. Life is a complex dynamic system.
6. Co-present forces exhibit particular functions within or between different spheres. Thus, influence, power and change serve, in their various expressions, various "roles".
7. **Power** must be understood in the context of this dynamic perspective of reality/experience itself.
8. Experience organizes/arises around both fluid and stable tendencies--Interdependent Independence; Independent Interdependence. Experience is inhabited by stable/fluid "selves."
9. Human experience develops as the ongoing construction of a self, a construction which is often expressed at a nearly conscious or just conscious level of depth. This construction instantiates the integration (as I have clarified integration above) of context, surrounding pressures and so on in human experience.
10. The construction of a self is not merely a passive coalescing of various forces (mere conditioning), but is also an active and interested construction.
11. Resolving conflicts within our own person involves paying attention to the various forces at play within us.

12. Human experience is human experience not only in individuality, but also in relatedness. Human experience is--as *human* experience--also corporate experience.
13. The construction of a corporate self is not merely a passive coalescing of various forces, but is also an active and interested construction.
14. The movement of corporate experience is governed by a dynamic relationship of parts known as "leading."
15. Consequently, the reality of corporate experience is that it is a fluctuating nexus of a balance of power(s), and understanding corporate experience requires understanding the individuals, groups and other forces (contexts, surrounding pressures and so on) giving rise to the currently constructed corporate self.
16. Resolving conflicts within corporate experience involves paying attention to the various forces at play within that experience and introducing change to one or more of the elements involved.
17. The Christian God is the most Real, the purest interpenetration of quality and force, stability and dynamics, and the Source for all other Experience.
18. God mediates the divine Experience, particularly to humans.
19. God is "spirit," Holy Spirit," and communicates S/spirit to humans
20. God is all-powerful.
21. The divine-human relationship must be understood in light of the dynamics of both human experience and the Trinitarian God.
22. The aims of Christian formation identify those areas concerning which we perceive God's desire for transformation, and toward which we exercise some intention.
23. Maturing relationship with God does not eliminate conflict, but rather strengthens us to navigate it appropriately and victoriously.

Appendix One

On The Formation of Experience: Functions and Roles of Diverse Forces

In chapter one, point seven, I stated that "just as it is important to recognize the multiplicity and complexity of forces mutually interpenetrating the arising of experience, so also we must give careful regard to the multiplicity of functions which various factors serve within or between experience." I identified a list of different functions that the mutually interpenetrating forces of experience can serve within experience. As further illustration of how this mutual interpenetration of forces giving rise to the character of experience as it is (reality), I here present a simple outline of how one might comprehend the roles played by three of those roles or functions of forces (or you could think of these as different types of forces): grounds, surrounding pressures, and triggers/seeds.

Grounds

Basic Contexts (more remote)

- broad historical/geographical developments shaping the possibilities of experience and influence,
- and generally associated within recognizable spheres of life (intellectual, physical,

social, spiritual ...).

Environmental Conditions (less remote)

- contemporary interconnection of factors (social-geographic-intellectual . . .) each with their own dynamics (means of influence, consequences of influence)
- and each with “material” factors participating in the formation of the conditions,
- and somewhat (stable, fluid, unstable) established patterns of influence
 - ☐ attractions or repulsions
 - ☐ connections and bonds
 - ☐ creations, transformations, cessations
 - ☐ position, expertise, physical, and so on (to give an example from the social sphere)
- These conditions, in turn, more specifically govern the limits of experience,
- forming a web of relationships and, more particularly within the human social sphere, a set of “institutions” within which experience arises

Shape of the Arising State of Affairs (ready to hand) - This includes:

- the “material” and “form” of things (as immediately used, perceived, or more . . .),
- the “rules” of relationship within and between factors: for example,
 - ☐ the patterns of efficient causality (“laws” of motion . . .)
 - ☐ ordinary developmental process (instrumental causes)
 - ☐ the perceived trajectory of things (final cause, ends)
- and the “state” of the dynamics of interpenetration.
 - ☐ stable, fluid, or unstable motion (drives, direction and such)

- ☐ multiple connections or few connections
- ☐ depth of relationships
- ☐ short or long-term shape
- ☐ power and authority (potency, dominance, permission, areas of influence, patterns of conflict and the resolution of conflict, and so on)

NOTE 1 - There appears to be a dynamic of influence moving from the more remote basic context, through surrounding environmental conditions, to the more immediate shape of the arising state of affairs, such that we can identify, for example:

- the subtle historical development of contemporary assumed guiding values or the geographic-historical development of ethnic-cultural “moods” which, in turn, constrain our sense of the good life here and now (cf. Charles Taylor)
- the socio-economic factors (here understood in terms of conflicts of power) influencing the formation of cultural epistemes, which, in turn, govern the possibilities of our understanding of particular horizons of knowledge (cf. Marx and Foucault)
- the gender and embodied factors influencing the manifestation of felt concerns and philosophical frameworks, which, in turn influences our concerns and feelings about things (cf. Gilligan, Johnson) [how might we interpret contemporary teen boredom in terms of the intersection of physiological, social . . . factors]
- technological-social factors affecting the practice of life and the influence of practice upon the ways in which life’s expression and meaning are experienced (pomo research, Geertz)
- the ways in which small-scale relational factors (like family) can affect the formation of personality (family systems theory) in combination with basic genetic factors

- the dynamics of living in the midst of the various winds of the Spirit(s)

NOTE 2 - At the same time, each sphere of experience has its own particular kinds of influence upon each other sphere, differently at different levels of depth and in the midst of the influence of other spheres (and so on). For example:

- each particular set of philosophical beliefs has its own bearing on guiding values, practice of life and such
- each kind of technological development uniquely influences its own configuration of spheres of experience
- each universe of personal practice (for example, “eating”) itself influences the social and spiritual world of individuals and societies

The output of this arising shape is the “self” of the immediate past (or of the material present), either corporately or individually conceived.

☐ more or less “integrated,” “fragmented,” “creative,” etc.

☐ we could call this the “nearly-currently” constructed self

vaguely comprehended in terms of stories, images, models and such, but

not yet constructed into the immediate future-present

Surrounding Pressures

Habituation and state - itself is a “pressure” weighing upon the trajectory of the self.

It is roughly equivalent to the nearly currently constructed self” of the material present, but more particularly involves:

- orientation - large scale basic organizing factors or features of experience,
- concerns - medium scale patterns of anticipation,
 - ☐ salient elements
 - ☐ generally expected consequences
 - ☐ giving rise to systems of “motives”
- and roles - particular patterns of relationship and “fit” within given networks, institutions of interconnection and influence. Based on an assessment of self and surrounding society.

Habituation and state can be evaluated in terms of its “character” and “strength,” defining the nature of the influence upon the self. Each trigger or seed opens a range of possibilities. Yet each is planted in the soil of a network of environmental conditions, conflicts, and arising states. A given condition and state may or may not facilitate (or change) the kinds of effects produced by a given trigger-event.

Somewhat Internalized Sources

- tendencies of reference, return, and response
- either constructed or less-consciously inherited/absorbed.
- These influence the ways that other trigger-events, seeds, and other pressures affect the

developing self.

“External” Conditions, can involve a number of factors including (but not at all limited to):

- “need” presence or reduction (for example, hunger, self-actualization . . .)
- generalized arousal (for example, physiological drives, social excitement . . .)
- socio-economic forces (marriage, government collapse . . .) - more generally changes in the patterns of relationship or control of goods and services
- knowledge change (awareness . . . of new features of reality)
- technological change (development of internet, transportation alteration)
- spiritual dynamics (conversion, attack of enemies either small or large scale . . .)
- External conditions have more or less influence depending on depth of interconnection, mutual link with other factors, intensity of exposure and so on.

Whereas *context* provides a generalized constraint upon the arising of experience, *pressures* (state, sources, and external conditions) together provide a more particular environment within which various forces (triggers, seeds or such) possess a greater or lesser potential for a given kind of influence upon experience.

Triggers and Seeds

Movement from the immediate past to the present and immediate (or longer-term) future is change. And change, in turn, is influence of relationship. Time itself is change of consciousness (“now” to “new now”). And so with all change. From the ground and the pressures something arises. But often,

more immediate than the basic ground of experience or the various pressures surrounding present experience, there are particular triggers that confront the experience of the nearly-present present. Or there is a seed that is planted which grows of itself and bears fruit in the soil of experience. Frequently, we point to the trigger or to the seed and call it the “cause” of change (when, of course, the cause is really the entire configuration of developing experience itself - efficient cause may be particularly *inefficient* under different conditions).

These triggers and seeds come from the pressures of experience itself, one or more of them (for one reason or another) gaining a dominance over other influences sufficient to invoke a particular change in experience. Some change arises slow and subtle while other change is rapid and dramatic.

On Possibility - Simply a reminder: the formation of experience arises in the context of a range of counterfactuals or possibility. While this range is itself sometimes tested and changed, it still constrains the character of experience.

On Creativity, Chance, Play -

One factor that I have not addressed above is the factor of creativity or chance. Spontaneity happens. Yet it is not a matter of our nearly-present present. It is a matter of the present *as* present.

The *Currently* Constructed Self: Less-Conscious Construction, More Conscious Intention

The contexts and pressures of experience, at least in *human* experience, are then made to bear through the present upon the development of the immediate future. The factors are synthesized in a barely conscious and more or less integrated sense of self, a working notion of “who I am” (again, either individually or socially conceived). It involves the perceived nearly currently constructed self

along with an assessment of one's sources, freedoms and possibilities, roles, power and energy, threats, ends and such in the light of *this* moment, *this* situation, *this* decision. Contexts and pressures, self-assessment, and creativity join to move human experience forward.

The movement from the immediate past through present to immediate future appears to arise somewhere between two poles:

- Less Conscious Construction - the process of the development of experience simply “happens” and is received passively
- More Conscious Intention - the development of experience is directly influenced in some form by human *choice* or *intention*. Here there is some “active” initiation on the part of the self regarding the shape of the development of experience.

Intention and Change (the “examined” or “ordered” life)

- Process - It appears that certain skills or operations are involved in this more conscious intention (paying attention, asking questions, putting into practice - the stages of human experience). Models of change mention the need for:
 - ☐ careful attention
 - ☐ appropriate motivation (often involving a clear aim, concrete decision, and, at times, positive aggression)
 - ☐ integration (comprehending links with other spheres of experience)
 - ☐ addressing multiple factors
 - ☐ employing community involvement
 - ☐ making realistic steps of progress (realizable challenges)

- ☐ experimentation and revision
- ☐ maintenance

note - often there is needed a “dehabituation” to clear the way for a “rehabilitation”

At times the former is more difficult than the later.

- Object - It appears that these skills or operations can be directed to any matter of context, pressure, or trigger/seed. Furthermore, the skill or operation itself can function as a trigger or seed. for example:
 - ☐ right livelihood - intentionally adjusting one’s means of employment in order to shape the character of personal or social experience
 - ☐ flossing teeth - intentionally initiating a practice of life which is aimed at increased health in general
 - ☐ keeping a budget - intentionally paying attention to one’s expenses and income in order to evaluate and perhaps re-order finances in terms of ones values
 - ☐ political action aimed at transforming the course of history
 - ☐ meditation (paying attention to one’s thoughts) which gives rise to an honest perception of one’s own questions in life
 - ☐ exploring the credibility of the beliefs surrounding one’s relationship to the land (or to spiritual realities)

- Means - These skills or operations are employed often with relationship to a particular “means” or way by which something is introduced or applied to experience, like:

- ☐ the use of a budget system to document finances
 - ☐ the development and use of a regular habit of meditation
 - ☐ the introduction of a new practice (such as flossing)
 - ☐ the cultivation of new relationships (for political action or conversation about one's beliefs)

- Strength - The strength of intention or initiation can be measured by a mutual interpenetration of, for example:
 - ☐ intensity
 - ☐ duration
 - ☐ depth
 - ☐ factors employed or addressed simultaneously . . .

- Consequences - because human experience is subject to a wide range of contexts, pressures, and triggers, one may only guess at the consequences of any given intention. The seeds planted in one place and time may bear fruit in very unexpected ways.

Fig 1: The Currently Constructed Self

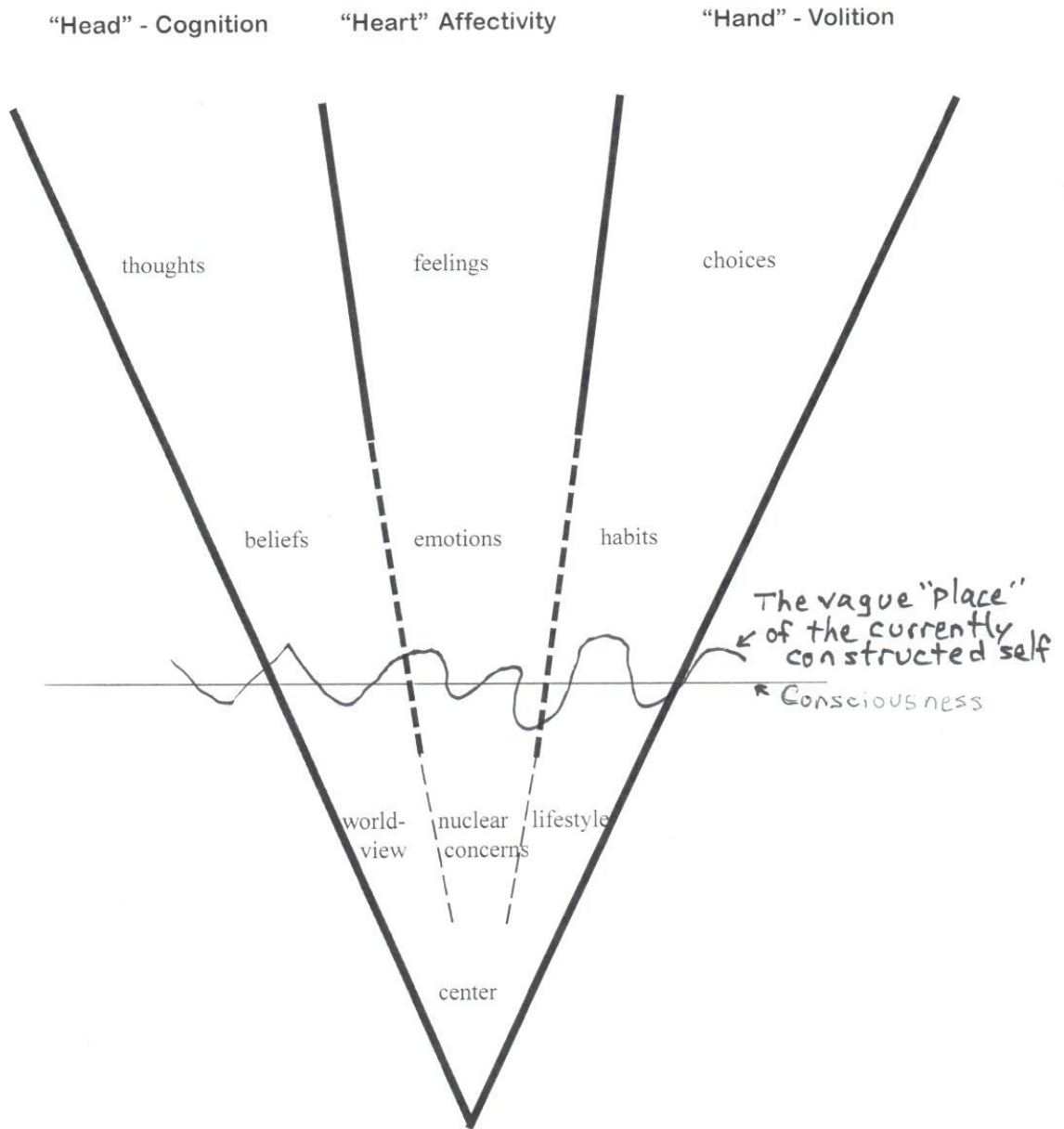


Figure 2
Sample of Dynamic Interaction of Factors in the Formation of Life

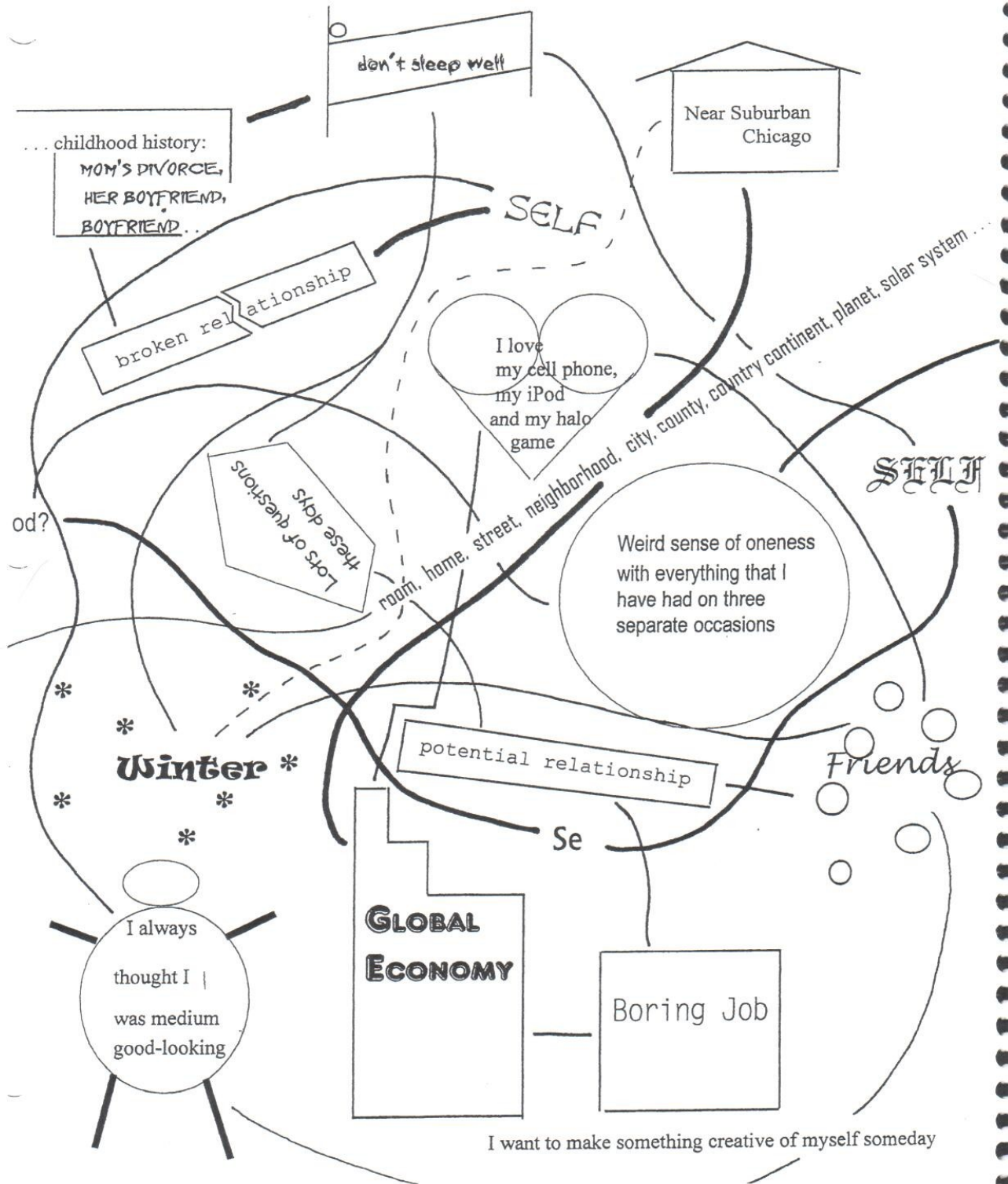


Figure 3
Mutually Interpenetrating Factors in the Formation of Life

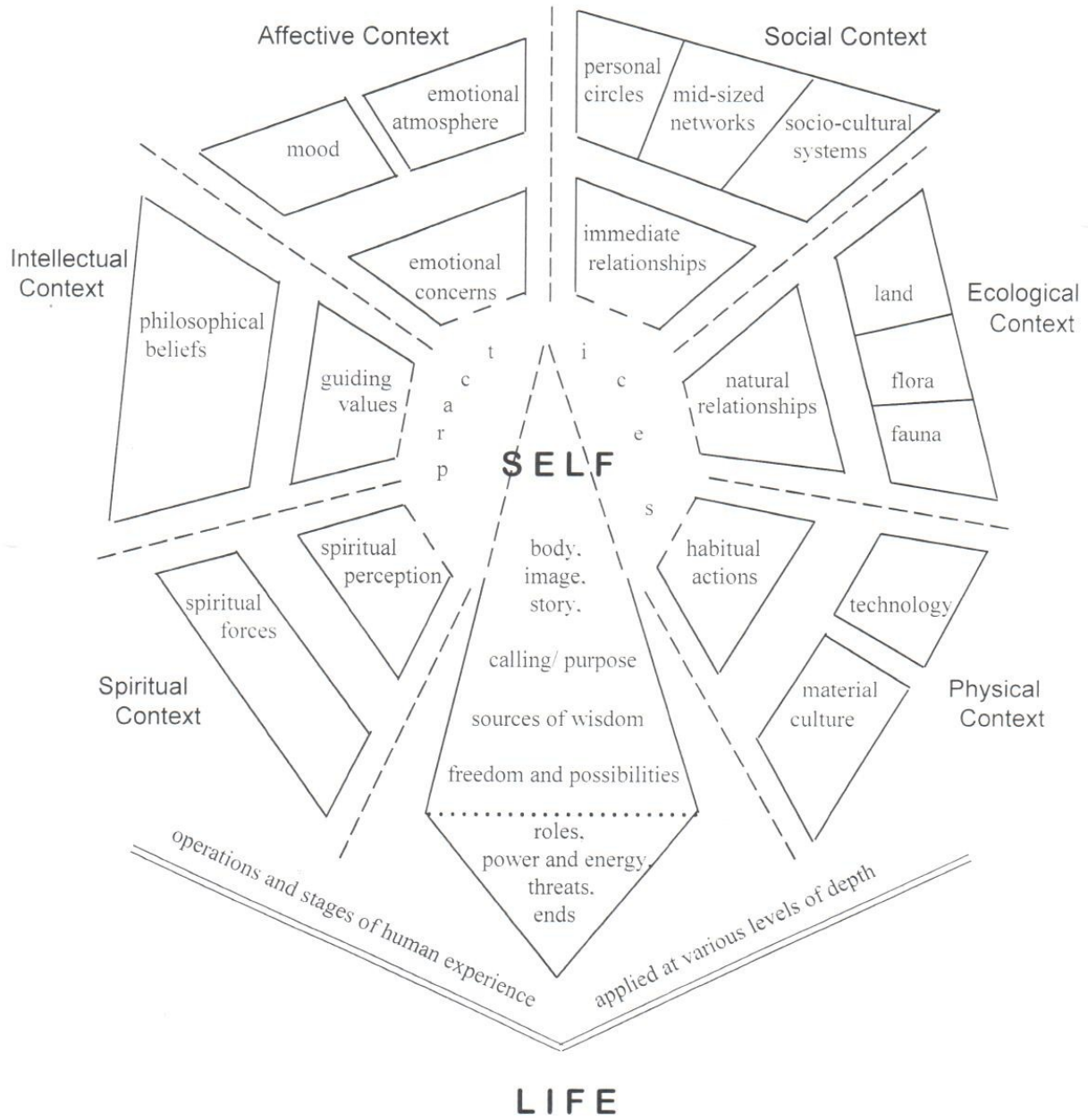


Figure 4

An "Ordered" Life

