

BEYOND PAUL TILlich AND MARK C. TAYLOR:

Gordon D. Kaufman's Attempt at Avoiding the
Theological Extremes of Objectivism and Relativism

Patrick E. Lutter
May 1, 1990
Religion Senior Seminar
With acknowledgements to:
Dr. Jack Clark, Dr. William Dean,
Dr. Conrad Hyers, Alan Olson
and Michael Regnier

The philosophical stance of relativism is typically contrasted with that of objectivism. While sheer relativism leaves us without a real basis for action, objectivism typically yields equally undesirable results. Where there are objectivistic claims that universal, ahistorical knowledge is possible, there are always those who maintain that they have found it. Here, absolutist claims abound. Yet, relativism yields anarchy.

Objectivism and relativism are often portrayed as the only real choices. In Beyond Objectivism and Relativism, Richard Bernstein has attempted to temper the two sides of the issue for philosophy. Postmodern theology has often been characterized as the enterprise which seeks to deny universal, absolute and fully objective bases for God. I will use Paul Tillich to characterize this objectivistic option. As he describes faith as a centering activity, Tillich claims that faith must absolutize its object. Indeed, "In the very term 'center' a critique of relativism is expressed" (Systematic Theology III, p.364).

Postmodern theology has also been accused of being merely relativistic. Mark C. Taylor characterizes this position with his notion of God as "non-identity itself" and "eternal play". Can postmodern theology stop short of this relativism also and help us move beyond the two extremes? I intend to argue that the postmodern theology of Gordon Kaufman provides a strong attempt at finding a ground between objectivism and relativism; yet, he does seem to

retain questionable objectivistic standards just as the modernists did. I hope to spell out some aspects of a more viable postmodern theism, without an appeal to absolute foundations, and yet retain a ground for meaningful religious activity.

The importance of the above enterprise has been spelled out by Gordon D. Kaufman in his book Theology For a Nuclear Age. He argues that our current situation is no longer aided by objectivist theologies, since they provide no meaningful way by which to account for human responsibility with regard to possible nuclear destruction. However, Kaufman does not want to propose a relativistic, nihilistic answer (such as Taylor does).

The three basic parts of the paper will be :

- 1) A description of the manner in which relativism and objectivism present themselves to theology (Tillich and Taylor).
- 2) Gordon Kaufman's attempt at avoiding the extremes and its failure.
- 3) My attempts to understand the issue in a new way.

Before placing the label "objectivist" on Paul Tillich it seems necessary to sketch some of the features of the form of objectivism which has been drawn for me. Often described as "the quest for universal...norms" (Ommen, p.291), objectivism yields truth claims by those who feel that they have "stepped outside of their skins... and

compared themselves with something absolute" (Rorty, p.xiv). I would qualify this by stating that some objectivists do not claim to have actually reached this level, but rather they argue that they are nearer than others. Also, objectivists need not be absolutists, but history has often proven them to be so; and Tillich's form of objectivism exhibits this. Indeed, why posit objectivistic norms if no one can attain them (or at least get close)?

However, at the same time, it seems that, for the objectivist, the absolute retains its form despite the contact (or near contact) with the temporal world. The Absolute is beyond the realm of history and change (I call this ahistorical). Although the objectivists claim that the finite and infinite interact, one is left wondering how far we are from Aristotle's Unmoved Mover.

To summarize, the form of objectivism with which I am dealing has three major components. First, is the claim that there are universally valid norms (more than our own creation). Second, is the epistemological claim that some people can (at least partially) have knowledge of these norms. Third, comes the idea that God and these norms (as divine or as not subject to change over time) cannot be affected by humanity or any part of the historical realm.

Thus defined, the objectivist position has largely fallen out of favor (Ommen, p.293). Does anyone actually advance this view? When such definitions are used, the term "fundamentalist" comes to mind. However, the objectivist

label seems to stick to them too easily. A more interesting attempt will be to examine a theology which seeks to avoid the above position of objectivism.

It seems that Paul Tillich was aware of the problems of objectivism and relativism; and he felt that he had incorporated the beneficial parts of both into his theology, without going to one extreme. Tillich speaks directly to this issue in his Systematic Theology (especially volume one). Final revelation "liberates reason from the conflict between absolutism and relativism by appearing in the form of a concrete absolute" (Tillich:ST:I, p.150). This final revelation does not give us absolute doctrines, but only examples which point to that which is absolute. The examples are not absolute in themselves. Indeed, the very words of Jesus and the Apostles are "all conditioned, relative, open to change and additions" (Tillich:ST:I, p.151).

For Tillich, one of the two basic perspectives on God is that provided by the final revelation of Jesus as the Christ. God manifests Godself "in a final way through a particular set of symbols" (Dean:Univ, p.279). The other perspective on God is that of the ontological scheme which characterizes God as "being-itself." "The being of God is being-itself" (Tillich:ST:I, p.235). It is through both of these perspectives that Tillich is an objectivist.

With regard to God, the Particular (the final revelation of Jesus as the Christ), it seems that Tillich

accepts the second component of objectivism which I have spelled out. The problem lies in Tillich's insistence on Jesus as the final revelation for all of humankind. What a coincidence that Tillich's own ultimate is the universal ultimate! This absolutist claim of universal validity for one's ultimate leads to a problem in justice which Tillich fails to deal with. "Some men, through no fault of their own, have been unable to receive the revelation of Jesus as the Christ, and it seems that they have been treated unjustly by God" (Dean:Univ, p.284).

This picture of God also comes into conflict with Tillich's other perspective on God (God as universal and being-itself). As Dean points out "On the one hand, the ontological scheme implies that all men have necessary and basically equivalent relations to God. On the other hand, Tillich's notion of final revelation, permits only a small proportion of all men to relate to God through the most adequate...revelation - the revelation of Jesus as the Christ" (Dean:Univ, p.284). Though Tillich often stresses our finitude, it seems that he has here introduced an absolutistic claim. Final revelation allows us to attain a truer level (salvation) and, thus, come nearer to the unchanging God. Rather than allowing ourselves to be carried downstream by the current of relativities, we may be tempted to grasp this piece of the absolute for dear life.

The other perspective (God as being-itself) is not without its own objectivistic claims. The only non-symbolic

description of God, for Tillich, is "being-itself."

However, "Professor Tillich often speaks, indeed, almost as though 'absolute', 'unconditioned', 'infinite', 'eternal' were synonyms for 'being-itself' and equally literal in application to deity" (Kegley, p.198). They all seem to imply a God which is radically and fully other.

Being-itself or ground of being seems to lie beyond our finitude in such a way that historical circumstances have no effect on God. However, Tillich does grant our historical realm some significance by stating that God "gives man the power of transforming himself and the world" (Tillich:ST:I, p.256). Also "objective reason is the rational structure of reality which the mind can grasp and according to which it can shape reality" (Tillich:ST:I, p.77). So it seems that humanity does maintain some importance.

Yet, the historical realm has absolutely no bearing on God. This may be what prompted Reinhold Niebuhr to refer to Tillich's system as "really a Neoplatonic version of Christianity" in which "history and all temporal events were involved in evil" (Niebuhr, p.131). Indeed, it seems that "creation was really the fall" (Niebuhr, p.130). There is nothing positive or ultimately important about the human situation!

We shape reality, yet the ground of being lies beyond reality. "Reality" is a concept which is "less universal than being but more universal than...any concept designating a realm of beings" (Tillich:ST:I, p.164). "Being-itself is

not infinity; it is that which lies beyond the polarity of finitude and infinite transcendence" (Tillich:ST:I, p.191). Tillich also sees being-itself as "beyond finitude and infinity" (Tillich:ST:I, p.144). Historical circumstances do not, then, affect God. Indeed, "God transcends every being and also the totality of beings - the world" (Tillich:ST:I, p.237). This obviously allows Tillich to avoid a relativistic "puppet-God", but it is at the cost of human significance.

Mary Ann Stenger has recently argued that Tillich's notion of theological norms allows him to avoid relativism. I would agree with this but would add that he fails to stop short of objectivism. In System of Sciences, Tillich speaks of norms as spiritual creations which are created when a principle is made concrete. "The norm for a theological system is created in a process which considers past theological norms in relation to the present culture and historical situation" (Stenger, p.361). The norm guides the theological system toward the "universally valid" (Stenger, p.363), but is also tied to the historical situation. The problem for this position lies in the fact that the historically created norm is unable to contribute anything to the divine. We can only approach or absorb those truths which are universal; we cannot impact them!

The above view lies in direct contrast with the following relativist position. In order to characterize the position of relativism as it arises in theology, I will

first identify subjectivism as the solipsistic and anarchical assertion that knowledge is justified only in terms of an individual. Relativism is simply subjectivism at the level of a society, culture, theoretical framework, or paradigm. Here, there are no standards of truth which overlap all cultures or systems. Any standards are as valid as any other.

God, as the embodiment of the ultimate truth, would thus be contained within our self-constructed frameworks and would be fully subject to our manipulations. "The relativist sees no clear distinction between what is really true, good, rational or just, on the one hand, and what is locally accepted as true, good, rational, or just, on the other" (Ommen, p.291). Thus defined, objectivism and relativism are, indeed, opposites with subjectivism being a special case of relativism (individual level). Theological relativism is asserted by theologians such as Mark C. Taylor.

In Erring: A Postmodern A/theology, Mark C. Taylor attempts to deconstruct our "Western thought." He feels that our logical framework sets up dualities and that we can only imagine one or the other side of the duality dominating. The constructive part of the book attempts to "create a new opening for the religious imagination" without our old system of polarities (Taylor, p.11). Taylor attempts to undermine epistemological certainty (even in the case of God) by placing it on the same side of the fence as

infinite, meaning, eternity and truth in the list of dualities. So, perhaps my attempt at pinning down Taylor's position on God is misguided, for I will never be able to attain certainty.

However, it seems that my interpretation is not subject to any limitations by Taylor's own work. Taylor sees truth as lying in the constant interaction between the signified (that which is being interpreted) and the signifier (the interpreter). Yet, the interpreter seems to be totally free to interpret as she/he sees fit, since one is not limited by that which we interpret. As Taylor says "The signified is neither independent of nor superior to the signifier. To the contrary, the signified is a signifier" (Taylor, p.105). I take this to mean that our interpretations are truly unguided by history, since we can never get at that history.

There is no basis for accepting or rejecting any claim (short of personal preference). "Since every interpretation is irreducibly perspectival, no single sign or set of signs can be consistently capitalized and no individual code can be privileged" (Taylor, p.172). "Consciousness, therefore, deals only with signs and never reaches the thing itself...The thing itself... is itself a sign" (Taylor, p.105). It seems that we are caught up in the never ending interaction between the signified and the signifier.

"Truth, however, is never totally present...The sword of certainty never falls, for behind every veil one discovers not an 'adomic structure' but another veil" (Taylor, p.176).

If, then, all history is interpretation and there is no objective history, what can we have as a criterion for testing the value of an interpretation? Taylor makes a mistake here. While he does not simply want to align his God with the typical, objective, eternal side of the polarities (Western thought), he has now gone over to the other side (relativity and subjectivity). He gives no criteria for making judgements. He would argue that my critique "seeks metaphysical answers" which he refuses to give. Taylor may have a tough time converting "Western thinkers" to his system, since we are so wrapped-up in polarities.

For Taylor, God works in the chain of interpretation which constitutes history. God is "writing" (Taylor, p.13) and the chain of interpretations is the "divine milieu" (Taylor, p.113). He has attempted to deny the notion of a transcendent God. But there is a large difference between saying that there is no static truth and saying that there is no truth at all. "To deny truth is to affirm a world 'freed from the ties of gravity, a world made of moving and light surfaces where the incessant shifting of masks is named laughter, dance, game'" (Taylor, p.177). "Taylor seems to conclude that the proper religious stance is purely playful, that now the religious person is to go on forever erring, both deconstructing past logocentric constructions and wandering aimlessly, purposely in the play of words" (Dean: HMH, p.136). I concur with Dean's assessment in that

Taylor seems to abandon any possibility for religious interpretation. Taylor allows for nothing to be fixed and there is no consistency over time.

Although he tries to maintain a notion of God, it too is subject to interpretation. "This wavering, vibration, piercing force, and irresistible medium (milieu) in which everything arises and passes away but which does not itself arise or pass away is the 'ever-never-changing-same'" (Taylor, p.113). God seems to be that which allows or guides the "infinite play of interpretation" (Taylor, p.103). Yet, for Taylor, God cannot be totally fixed. According to Taylor's other assertions, we are allowed to interpret God as we see fit. And since interpretation is all that a "signified" actually is, Taylor is a relativist. God can be nothing more than a signified to religious interpreters. Otherwise, God would be Western theology's untouchable objective entity. "While not always explicitly named God, the transcendental signified functions as the purported locus of truth that is supposed to stabilize all meaningful words" (Taylor, p.105). But Taylor later speaks of the disappearance of the transcendental character of the signified. So God seems to be just another signified, since "**everything** is already interpretation" (Taylor, p.172). As long as we are in the bounds of the constant play of interpretation, anything goes!

In the words of H.N. Wieman, "The bomb that fell on Hiroshima cut history in two like a knife. Before and after

are two different worlds. That cut is more abrupt, decisive and revolutionary than the cut made by the star over Bethlehem...it is more swiftly transformative of human existence than anything else that has ever happened"

(Source, p.37). The novelty lies in the possibility that human beings themselves might put an end to human history (Bauckham, p.583). This is the justification underlying Gordon Kaufman's recent appropriation of theology as imaginative construction.

Kaufman's program is delineated in three recent books, An Essay on Theological Method, The Theological Imagination, and Theology for a Nuclear Age. In An Essay, Kaufman begins by asserting that God cannot be an object which we experience in an unqualified, neutral manner. In Kuhnian style, Kaufman states, "The raw pre-conceptual and pre-linguistic ground of religious experience is simply not available to us for direct exploration, description or interpretation, and therefore, it cannot provide us with a starting-point for theological work" (Essay, p.7). God is, rather, "the ultimate point of reference or orientation for all life" (Essay, p.13). Thus, "theological concepts are fundamentally imaginative constructs rather than abstractions or generalizations or deductions from precepts" (Essay, p.57). Theology is a process of construction - not of description.

If we see theology as a human endeavor, done for human purposes, we can redefine God such that we account for our

power and responsibility. This may or may not avert the polarities of relativism and objectivism as I have defined them. I will first look at the manner in which Kaufman attempts to avoid relativism.

A common critique of The Essay is its denial of revelation as a starting point. Kaufman says, "I do not believe this model of theological work [revelation] is serviceable any longer" (Theol. Imag., p.100). Kevin J. Sharpe argues that, for Kaufman, theologies cannot initiate themselves in religious experience, "Since all experience depends on and is molded by language, and to start with religious experience presupposes concepts whose meanings and uses should be scrutinized" (Sharpe, p.175).

A problem lies in the regulation of the use of imagination. If all religious experience presupposes concepts such as God, then how do we avoid arbitrariness in our imaginative constructs? Put another way, if there is no pre-linguistic experience, how is our linguistic system itself regulated?

Kaufman does not see a problem here since, according to Bruce McCormack, he feels that, "Words cannot simply be invested with meaning by individuals at their whim, but rather, they are given meaning by their societies - by cultures" (McCormack, p.437). Kaufman, thus, wants us to look at the historical meaning of words as symbols.

"Theology is the disciplined effort to see what we are trying to do and say with these complexes of meaning...it

searches out rules governing the use of such talk" (Essay, p.9). This, however, merely postpones the question. How, then, do societies determine the meaning of words; in short, how do we avoid subjectivism at the cultural level (relativism)?

The Theological Imagination begins in the same tone as An Essay as he says, "Theology is (and always has been) essentially a constructive work of the human imagination" (Theo. Imag., p.11). He goes beyond the Essay, however, when he attempts, "to work...at the central theological task, which I would now formulate as constructing toward God" (Theo. Imag., p.12). Again, since Kaufman assumes that our concepts precede our experience, then how are our concepts of God bounded? How is Kaufman's construct guided?

Kaufman states, "To live in a house is no more imaginary or inauthentic than to live in a cave; it is, in fact, to live in a context more adequately ordered to human purposes and needs" (Essay, p.32). The concept of God is not at our disposal to construct as we wish. "The notion of God has already been highly developed through the imaginative work of many preceding generations" (Theo. Imag., p.23). We are the recipients of a long tradition of theology, with definite rules. The notion of God is already highly developed. But, could not the first imaginative construct, upon which our current theology is built, have been a fantasy (since he denies religious experience as primary)?

Kaufman answers this by seeing in God a movement toward humanization. God "continually transforms individuals and societies toward fulfillment" (Theo. Imag., p.321). There is "a fundamental telos in the universe toward the humane" (Theo. Imag., p.55). Mary Ann Stenger feels that Kaufman's criterion of humanization rightfully "focuses on the human level (rather than divine) and posits the need for a more humane world order as a common point shared by all" (Stenger, p.319).

Humanization provides a cross-cultural basis for judging religious phenomena. Indeed, he asks, "How shall we build a new and more humane world for all peoples of the world" (Theo. Imag., p.181)? So, the criteria of humanization, is universal in scope. An accurate concept of God must include this notion and must make possible modes of life which are humane. Sheila Greeve Davaney's review of The Theological Imagination states, "Our inherited traditions are fallible resources which must be creatively re-imagined in light of present human needs" (Greeve Davaney, p.199). "The criterion by which all frameworks are to be judged, as well as the criterion by which imaginative reconstruction of the symbol 'God' is to be judged - is the criterion of humanization" (McCormack, p.442). However, Kaufman has left us in the dark as to what the definition of humanization is and where it comes from.

Kaufman attempts to state his notion of humanization (Theo. Imag., p.169), yet, it "does not guarantee any

particular conception of the human" (McMormack, p.443). Some argue this push toward humanization lacks specific content, thus, it seems an unlikely criteria for judging our imaginative constructs. Are, then, our imaginative constructs simply a projection of our wishes? Kaufman admits some truth to Feuerbach's claim that theology is an extension of anthropology (Essay, p.55). However, he argues that we also need "to break loose from enslavement to our wishes and desires, to break out of that tight circle that is centered on us, becoming open and significantly related to that which is beyond us" (Theo. Imag., p.284).

Does the criteria of humanization accurately portray God? In other words, can we have knowledge of that which is beyond us - how do we know that humanization is a valid criterion? "Contemporary theologians need to realize that these terms do not refer directly to 'objects' or 'realities'" (Theo. Imag., p.29). "God in himself is simply not knowable and not even able to be spoken of" in Kaufman's scheme (Craighead, p.213). Kaufman seems to agree, somewhat, with Tillich that God is highly transcendent and, thus, all of our constructs are inadequate. Since God is not a datum available for our inspection, we are fully dependent on the image of God - which is "put together by the mind" (Theo. Imag., p.21). Again, what, then is his justification of humanization as a truth test for theology?

Kaufman also introduces a pragmatic test for the truth of our constructs which may justify the criterion of

humanization. In the epilogue to the Essay, he seems to suggest "that we measure the constructs of 'God' and 'world' by their ability to enrich and inform our lives" (Alexander, p.59). Due to Kaufman's denial of initial revelation, McCormack argues that, "experience does not have the first word in theology, but it does have the last word" (McCormack, p.437). "He suggests that a pragmatic criterion for evaluating our own traditions and those of others is in order" (Greeve Davaney, p.199). Kaufman places his trust in community when he argues that, "Theology also serves human purposes and needs, and it should be judged in terms of the adequacy with which it is fulfilling the objectives we humans set for it" (Nuclear Age, p.19). All religious ideas are made to serve us - to further our humanization/salvation. However, the ideas are not fully subject to our manipulation.

In attempting to avoid relativism, Kaufman stresses that we need to get beyond ourselves. "Belief in God's existing over against us is essential to God's functioning as a center of orientation and devotion which can draw us out of ourselves" (Theo. Imag., p.37) For Kaufman, this God is conceived as "the source and fulfiller of our humaneness" or "hidden creativity".

For D.F. Ottati, anyone who rejects this on the grounds that it is too anthropocentric, also rejects the confidence that "the dominant direction for the world historical process is ultimately receptive to the struggle for

reconciliation on the basis of a reordered or transformed vision of human nature and fulfillment" (Ottati, p.226). Unlike Taylor, Kaufman can, on the basis of humanization, allow that same interpretations are more valid than others, yet not eternally.

Yet, it seems that Kaufman is not tied to the past interpretations in any way. In other words, Kaufman does run into relativistic problems not unlike Mark C. Taylor's (above), since that which we interpret is not authoritative. Kaufman wants to "deemphasize the role of the past in order to highlight the autonomy and creativity of the theologian" (Cady, p.209).

However, Kaufman avoids relativism by claiming that theological reconstruction should retain the historical roles for God, simply out of pragmatic necessity. Since theology is seeking to provide a more adequate orientation for human life, it is forced to revise the symbolic worlds which people already inhabit. This is the reason Kaufman reconstructs the fundamental Christian symbols. Without connection to religious traditions, a theology will have little influence.

Can we can simply reconstruct traditional religious symbols in terms of humanization and treat them as universalistic and final? In short, how does Kaufman avoid objectivism, as I have defined it?

Humanization, itself, is a thoroughly human norm which may or may not be reflective of God - we can never know,

according to Kaufman. God does exist; we simply cannot know God. We can only know "God" the construct. "He rejects the notion that we can ever finally determine which picture of reality is most accurate and denies as well that these various historically developed visions all spring from a common human experience of the divine in relation to which their adequacy might be evaluated". The norm of humanization must be "historically derived and open to challenge" (Greeve Davaney, p.199).

Some see this as problematic; "The problem with Kaufman's starting point is that it is also relative and may be surpassed" (Sharpe, p.183). Others see it as positive; Alexander argues that Kaufman's God, as humanizer is real in that it "points to a quality of life which mythical and parabolic statements are able to produce and not to some objective reality standing over and against us... 'God' is over and against us as an ideal; he is in and with us as we strive for that ideal" (Alexander, p.60). I maintain that this is key if Kaufman is to avoid objectivism as I have defined it.

One of the main problems with Tillich was his insistence on Jesus as the most adequate revelation possible for all of humankind. While Jesus is certainly important for Kaufman, he would not claim that one needs to be informed only by the example of Jesus in order to more accurately point toward the divine. Surely, there are other constructs which embody humanization. "The position that

the Christian faith holds final religious truth while other religious traditions may approximate that truth in varying degrees does not recognize the sophistication of other traditions..." (Stenger, "Cross-Cult.", p.319).

In fact, Kaufman must admit, as we stated above, that even his criterion of humanization is surpassable. If not, then his criterion will assume the absolute and final role which Jesus does for Tillich, and will leave Kaufman stamped as an objectivist. Kaufman only hints at this when he states, "In the search for God we must press on, never resting content with what we have discovered or expressed...Whenever we suppose that God has become directly available to us...We can be certain it is not God" (Essay, p.51-52).

The other major problem for Tillich is that he implies that God is totally other, in such a way that historical circumstances have no impact on deity. Kaufman avoids this third component of objectivism by stating, "Our efforts toward building a more humane world are not simply our own, but are themselves the expression of deeper hidden forces working in nature and in life" (Theo. Imag., p.50). There is a sense in which we are actually helping God. Without our help, God would be less effective.

Kaufman flirts with this in Theology for a Nuclear Age, when he denies the idea of God as omnipotent. He claims that we need to take responsibility for our own power. R. Bauckham argues that Kaufman gives us "a doctrine of

providence which upholds and includes human freedom and responsibility, and doctrine which can actually motivate responsible use of human freedom by giving it its proper place in the outworking of the divine purpose" (Bauckham, p. 595).

We have, thus, seen how Kaufman has attempted to move beyond relativism and objectivism. But, has he succeeded? This is the next question to which I shall turn.

It seems, in the end, that Kaufman does not neatly fit into the holes which I dug at the beginning of this paper. Kaufman can neither be called solely an objectivist, nor solely a subjectivist; yet neither can he be said to move beyond their problems. I will analyze his system based on my earlier definitions of the problem and proceed with my own constructive work.

The first side of the objectivist triangle which I drew earlier is the assertion that universally valid norms exist. Tillich represents this view when he claims, "it [final revelation] means the decisive, fulfilling, unsurpassable revelation, that which is the criterion of all the others" (Tillich:ST:I, p.133). Also, "the choice of a center of history is universal wherever history is taken seriously" (Tillich:ST:III, p.367).

Kaufman rejects a cultural religious relativist position (i.e. Troeltsch) on the ground that "it [goes] so far as to despair of an ultimate unity of religious truth" (Theol. Imag., p.174). Troeltsch suggested that each

religion "is appropriate to its own culture, but none can claim finality for all of humankind" (Theol. Imag., p.174). This view, according to Kaufman, only weakens the authority of religion.

Kaufman, instead, seems to feel that he has found a cross-cultural (universal) criteria. He argues that "above all, it [humanization] is a universalistic criterion, directed toward all human beings and all societies no matter what their cultural or religious traditions and commitments" (Theol. Imag., p.198). "It [humanization] can claim a certain universality that none of the others can" (Theol. Imag., p.199) since it is a common denominator of all religions.

The second side of the objectivist triangle is the epistemological claim to knowledge of the universal norms. This is the assertion of specific knowledge as indicative of the entire world; and it represents the fundamental tension in what I have termed the objectivist view. The initial claim that all-encompassing truths exist runs into trouble when coupled with particular culturally derived expressions. Jesus exemplifies this knowledge for Tillich, while humanization is Kaufman's universal measuring device. While Kaufman may admit that humanization is a culturally derived criteria, I find it trouble some that he never mentions it when asserting it as a universal. In other words, it seems that he loses a bit of humility (which I feel is essential in avoiding objectivism) when speaking of humanization.

Paul Tillich's "final revelation" is demonstrative of a universal norm. Jesus, as final revelation, holds universal validity. "The final revelation, the revelation of Jesus as the Christ, is universally valid because it includes a criterion of every revelation and is the *finis* or *telos* (intrinsic aim) of all of them...It is the criterion of every religion and of every culture" (Tillich:ST:I, p.137). However, as I stated earlier, problems remain in attempting to transform a particular example into a universal one. The particular set of symbols (i.e. Jesus) may never be received by entire cultures.

Kaufman also attempts to transform a culturally bound norm into one with universal significance. Humanization functions, for Kaufman, much as Jesus does for Tillich. "Thus, the world is to be conceived as the proper context for our humanization, our being brought to full humanity (the norm of which is Christ)" (Theol. Imag., p.120). Kaufman is subject to the same problem as Tillich in claiming universal validity for his criterion of humanization. Kaufman himself agrees "there is little agreement among religious traditions on conception of the human or an understanding of what constitutes human fulfillment" (Theol. Imag., p.199).

The third side of the objectivist triangle is, for Kaufman, the most important. I envision a right triangle with the objectivistic claim that God is unaffected by history as its hypotenuse. This is key in Kaufman's theory

if we are going to fully realize our responsibility in cases such as nuclear weapons. Notions such as omnipotence no longer function for Kaufman. "The stark fact of total human responsibility for the earthly future of humanity, which a potential nuclear catastrophe symbolises, calls into question all this traditional talk - held together so tightly...in the symbol of the divine sovereignty" (Nuclear Age, p.8). However, a sovereign God is characteristic of a weak form of objectivism as I have stated it. Tillich does not maintain this traditional concept of omnipotence, yet he retains the third side of the objectivist triangle (history does not affect God).

Tillich represents a stronger form of objectivism since he admits that humanity has a good deal of power. However, this power does not extend as far as God. Opposite Tillich's "right" angle we saw that he does not allow the historical realm to have any effect on God. "Since God is the ground of being, he is the ground of the structure of being. He is not subject to this structure" (Tillich:ST:I, p.238). Kaufman feels that this is inconsistent with a humanizing God.

The notion of God as fully over and above history, in the above manner, is denied by Kaufman in the name of consistency. God, as that vector of history which urges us toward fuller humanization, is intimately tied to whether or not God's purpose is realized. "Our fate on earth has become God's" (Nuclear Age, p.45). We affect God to some extent (this view is shared with process theology).

Kaufman would argue that conceiving of God as that which humanizes us is essential for theology. "God has been worshipped as the saviour of humankind, the one who could and does bring human life to salvation and fulfillment" (Nuclear Age, p.34). If we are to understand God as that which humanizes us, we must also accept the fact that our decisions affect the degree to which God is successful.

With regard to the first two sides of the triangle I drew earlier, Kaufman is an objectivist in a manner not unlike Tillich. However, since Kaufman does allow for human impact on God, he is not an objectivist with regard to its third component. Does he, then, go to the other extreme and identify with the relativists (i.e. Taylor) on this score?

The theological construct of "God" is fully subject to our manipulations, and has no meaning without us, for Kaufman. But there is a God beyond our constructs, for Kaufman, which is independent of us. This is what he attempts to convey with his notion of "God as relativizer". This is that part of God which exists over and against us, and through which we receive our orientation. "The historical movement as a whole, and in particular its moving forward toward future possibilities which we cannot now envision but for which we must become open, can now be seen as that independent reality in relation to which our existence and activity must be oriented" (Theol. Imag., p.38). Kaufman is arguing that we need a center for devotion which lies outside of ourselves.

As we recall, Mark C. Taylor embodies the relativist position on this point since everything, for him, is able to be interpreted. An entity is nothing more than its interpretation. Therefore, as I stated, God is fully determined by our assertions. Kaufman moves beyond Taylor by suggesting that "Human existence is understood in terms of its relation to and dependence on a reality other than itself, a reality which calls it into being, sustains it in existence and gives a ground for hope of fulfillment" (Theol. Imag., p.38).

Suppose that a person wants to walk a straight line from point A to point B, and also, that there are obstructions in the intended path. If these obstructions are small enough, they can be walked over or moved. However, obstructions which are more substantial (such as mountains) must be dealt with in another manner (i.e. walked around). Kaufman is asserting that the humanizing force (God) can, at times, be eliminated by us. But, at other times, it will control us.

However, Kaufman remains a relativist with regard to the third component (our power). The problem arises due to his assertion that God is the movement of history toward the more humane. This seems to tie God's fate too closely to the will of humans. As I stated, God can overrule us in some cases, but Kaufman is unclear as to when.

Since we do not know when God will overrule our mistakes, we can only assume that our will is going to be

carried out. If not we could make a critical mistake with regard to nuclear weapons, for example. An optimistic hope that God would not allow nuclear war (after all, God is working for our humanization) is unfounded in Kaufman's scheme, since it denies our power. However, does it not give us an inflated sense of responsibility and power?

Indeed, if we allow nuclear disaster to occur, it will not merely be of consequence to our species. "It will be, rather, a disaster for all life...It will be, in short, a disaster for God" (Nuclear Age, p.45). If we no longer exist, that force which humanizes us will no longer exist either. We have the power to destroy God, according to this view. If God is only that which humanizes and occasionally relativizes us, our absence (which can be brought about by ourselves) necessitates the absence of God.

The above disagreement with Kaufman stems from his notion of God as tied only to certain human events (i.e. the process of humanization). I am arguing that we need to conceive God as the creative force within history as a whole, rather than as a particular vector of history (i.e. humanization force). If we think of God as having an existence over and above the process of humanization, we can lose Kaufman's relativistic tendency to infer that we can destroy God. In other words, God should be thought of as having interests in other things than humanity and should exist apart from us. This can be accomplished by claiming that God is that which urges everything in history toward

fuller actualization. God can in this way, signify that which humanizes us and also, that which is beyond our manipulations.

In order to further clarify my position, I will align it, somewhat, with the comments of Henry Nelson Wieman. In his Religious Experience and Scientific Method, Wieman identifies two poles of living. He considers science to be indicative of one side (efficiency and adaptation), and religion as indicative of the other (appreciation and creativity) (Rel. Exper., p.123). He goes on to argue that neither is superior to the other and that we need both of them. God seems to be that which promotes the creative side of life and, indeed, that which urges life forward.

Wieman's conception of God is unclear, at times. He seems to concur with Kaufman when he argues that "we are acquainted with certain masses of experience which have as an ingredient that which is more important for the safety and growth of human life than anything else...that object is God" (Rel. Exper., p.175). Yet, when he discusses A.N. Whitehead, he seems to argue that God is more than this. "Nature may very well be moved and sustained by the operation of a supreme mind or personality" (Rel. Exper., p.180). Wieman also speaks of the "creative advance to the whole of nature" and an operative mind throughout the whole of nature (Rel. Exper., p.181). These are the points at which I agree with Wieman.

This creative advance in nature is, for Wieman,

experienced objectively. I agree with his assessment insofar as our experience of God can override our conceptions of reality. It is this idea that would give us a "God as relativizer" such is what Kaufman wants (outside of ourselves). Indeed, Wieman says, "Our whole point has been to show that it [religious experience] is an experience of something not ourselves...It is just as much out there in the world of space-time as is the locomotive whistle that warns us to get off the track" (Rel. Exper., p.209).

Charles Hartshorne also argues that God has an existence over and against us with his notion of "Dual Transcendence" (Hartshorne, pp.44-46). However, I am most interested in his assertion of God as urging forward all of nature, including homo sapiens sapiens. He sees a "creative advance of the world" and states that he is "not convinced that all deniers of pervasive purpose in nature are adequately aware of how childish it is" (Hartshorne, p.85).

So, Hartshorne, too, would agree, at least, that we envision God as the creative force behind all of nature, not just behind humanity. This conception may also prove useful for eliminating Kaufman's objectivistic claims, and move him to a view beyond both relativism and objectivism.

As I argued earlier, Kaufman feels that humanization can serve as a universal criterion. I maintain that God as the force behind all of history allows us multiple conceptions of what is to be humane. Kaufman agrees when he argues, "because of this diversity in their ultimate courts

of appeal, and with respect to it, the different religions are very difficult to compare, and impartial judgments among them are virtually impossible" (Theol. Imag., p.199). This is the idea that we are culture-bound.

Kaufman argues that we need to have universal norms and that a pragmatic test can give this to us. "What is needed in this circumstance is to abstract from this diversity and relativity to the common point of interest in the human which all the religions share" (Theol. Imag., p.200). If there is a God beyond our constructs, it will be available to us though empirical testing. However, Kaufman needs to stress, more than he does, that we can never be certain that we are interpreting our experiences correctly. So, therefore, our conception of humanization is never final.

I advocate a view which denies Kaufman's call for universal standards with regard to religion. Kaufman admits that we cannot remove ourselves from our linguistic framework. Yet, he also feels that we have the ability to judge the adequacy of all religions (humanization). Naturally, religious traditions other than our own will seem threatening. But, to argue their falsity based on experiences conditioned by our own tradition yields circularity.

At times Kaufman does seem to be aware that humanization is a relative assertion, yet I would fault him for failing to stress it enough. Occasionally, he prefaces his sentences with "For those subscribing to it..." (Theol.

Imag., p.50). However, these prefaces seem odd, given his clear call for universals.

I argue, rather, that God be conceived of as history itself, so that God is inclusive of all religions. We cannot, here, align God only with our own views. We can, however, still make decisions based on our viewpoint. We must simply be aware of our limits.

This is not, however, a relativist position which argues that there are no truths which overlap all cultures. Unlike Kaufman, I feel that we do not need to come to a definite conclusion as to a specific universal norm. Kaufman asserts that we need a dialogue between the great religions to determine a criterion which is "directed toward the fulfillment of all human beings and all societies no matter what their cultural or religious traditions and commitments" (Theol. Imag., p.198).

I maintain that a common conception of humanization is unlikely, since each tradition will be arguing from its own assumed premises. Kaufman's belief in a culture-less religious statement reflects his feeling that we can eliminate our biases. Thus he says that we can insist "that each tradition give its interpretation of human existence and human fulfillment in terms of what is directly and publicly available to all" (Theol. Imag., p.200).

I suggest, rather, that we do not need to agree on a single conception of the aim of God (the creative historical process). We must remember that historical circumstances

themselves can veto (disconfirm) or pocket veto (neither confirm nor deny for a substantial time) our views from within our very own frameworks. Often times it is only God (the creative force in history) which can prove us wrong/right. In other words, we should allow the experiences of other cultures to determine the validity of their arguments for them, rather than asserting our own culturally derived traditions as universal. Akin to anomalies in a scientific paradigm, experiences can disconfirm our beliefs. The universal standards are only known by God.

We can (as a part of nature) provide testimonies to other religions as to our experiences and persuade them in this way. But, since we can never be sure as to the ultimate validity of our own claims, we must be cautious in this respect.

In conclusion, I have argued that conceiving of God as the creative force within all of natural history allows us to move beyond relativism, since God can have an existence independent of our actions. I then argued that universal norms do exist, but that we cannot assert them with our biased language. We cannot know if our beliefs are truly universal until we see them played out in history. This is my proposed route around objectivism.

WORKS CITED

- Alexander, Ronald G. "Theology as Creativity." Dialog 19 (Winter 1980): 56-60.
- Bauckham, R. "Theology After Hiroshima." Scottish Journal of Theology 38:583-601.
- Cady, Linell E. "A Model For A Public Theology." Harvard Theological Review 80:2 (1987):193-212.
- Craighead, Houston. "Rudolf Bultmann and the Impossibility of God-Talk." Faith and Philosophy 1:2 (April 1984): 203-215.
- Dean, William. History Making History: The New Historicism in American Religious Thought. Albany: State University of New York Press. 1988.
- Dean, William. "The Universal and The Particular In The Theology of Paul Tillich." Encounter: Creative Theological Scholarship 32 (Autumn 1971): 278-285.
- Greeve Davaney, Sheila. "Options in Post-modern Theology." Dialog 26:3 (summer 1987):196-200.
- Hartshorne, Charles. Omnipotence an Other Theological Mistakes. Albany: State University of New York Press. 1984.
- Kaufman, Gordon D. An Essay on Theological Method. Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press. 1979.
- Kaufman, Gordon D. The Theological Imagination: Constructing A Concept of God. Philadelphia: Westminster Press. 1981.
- Kaufman, Gordon D. Theology For A Nuclear Age. Philadelphia: Westminster Press. 1985.
- Kegley, Charles W. ed. The Theology of Paul Tillich. New York: The Pilgrim Press. 1982.
- McCormack, Bruce L. "Divine Revelation and Human Imagination: Must We Choose Between the Two?" Scottish Journal of Theology 37:431-455.
- Niebuhr, Reinhold. "Faith as the Sense of Meaning in Human Existence." Christianity and Crisis 26 (June 13, 1966): 127-131.
- Ommen, Thomas B. "Relativism, Objectivism and Theology." Horizons 13 (Fall 1986): 291-305.

- Ottati, Douglas F. "Reconstructing Christian Theology."
Religious Studies Review 9:3 (July, 1983):222-224.
- Rorty, Richard. Consequences of Pragmatism: Essays
1972-1980. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
1982.
- Sharpe, Kevin J. "Theological Method and Gordon Kaufman."
Religious Studies 15 (June 1979):173-190.
- Stenger, Mary Ann. "Paul Tillich's Theory of Theological
Norms and the Problems of Relativism and Subjectivism."
Journal of Religion 62 (October 1982): 359-375.
- Stenger, Mary Ann. "The Problem of Cross-Cultural Criteria
of Religious Truths." Modern Theology 3:4
(1987):315-332.
- Taylor, Mark C. Erring: A Postmodern A/theology. Chicago:
The University of Chicago Press. 1984.
- Tillich, Paul. Systematic Theology, 3 vols. Chicago: The
University of Chicago Press. 1951-63.
- Wieman, Henry Nelson. Religious Experience and Scientific
Method. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University
Press. 1926.
- Wieman, Henry Nelson. The Source of Human Good. Chicago:
The University of Chicago Press. 1946.

