Re-Empowering Pride and Anger in the Christian Tradition

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Religion 399

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Dedicated to myself,
my sister,
and all others who have struggled to
give themselves the love and respect
that we all deserve.

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INTRODUCTION

"You do not have to be good. / You do not have to walk on your knees /
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting. /
You only have to let the soft animal of your body / love what it loves. /
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine. / Meanwhile the world goes on."
~Mary Oliver

After years of being a good Christian girl and strictly following all the rules, I became apathetic. I lost care for myself, compassion for those around me, and consideration for God. Although God was not dead, I was convinced that God's people had screwed me up, and I was not too pleased with my own decision to be involved in what eventually harmed me. My Christian mentors insisted that imitating Jesus, especially his example of humility, was the life goal of Christians. I strived to lived a perfectly humble life, and things got out of hand. Through overvaluing humility, I forgot how to listen to my own feelings and how to value myself. Humility meant submitting myself entirely to the service of God and others. It meant denying my own feelings, especially the "negative" emotions like anger. I followed what I thought to be God's will and turned into an apathetic non-self.

When my apathetic non-self got sick and tired of trying to reach the impossible state of perfect humility, it began to wonder why it was trying. And when my apathetic non-self realized that it had wasted a lot of time continually failing to reach a ridiculous goal and feeling miserably worthless, it got pissed. That was the point when I realized that I actually cared that I did not love myself. My anger was a sign that there was something inside this non-self that was not so apathetic. After suppressing my emotions and denying value to myself for such a long time, I had come to realize that the relationships I had with myself, others, and the Sacred were inauthentic. This is

essentially my point and my focus. Pride and anger can be rehabilitated to empower positive change in the world creating authentic relationships. It was a period of dramatic change for me while moving from my teens and into my twenties. During this time, I learned about the vast amount of oppression in the world around me.

While sexism and heterosexism became central struggles during this revelatory period in my own life, I also knew that I came from a very privileged background. Growing up, I was well fed, clothed, sheltered, and loved by my parents. My family was white, well educated, wealthy, and we went to church every Sunday. I was a happy kid and content with life. After graduating from high school, I began to realize how naïve I was about the rest of the world. The summer before I began college, I lived and worked in New York City. I witnessed classism, racism, and sexism in the daily lives of those around me, but I did not understand the systemic implications of these oppressions. At that point, I just wanted to help people and serve God.

Entering college was like turning the faucet on full blast. I was overwhelmed at first, but I was quickly surprised at how thirsty I was for knowledge. I knew what I was most passionate about learning, and at the end of my first year, I declared my Religion major. At the end of my first year, I was still very sure of myself and my beliefs. One year later, I was a completely different person. At the end of my sophomore year, I was questioning everything that I had been taught about God and my position in the world.

Digging Up the Root of My Problem

In high school, I just wanted to be accepted. I became involved in a very conservative Christian group of friends because they liked me. We attended church,

Bible studies, and many other Christian functions together. Under their influence and without any instructions to do otherwise from my parents, I found my place in the hierarchy of a fundamentalist Christian faith. By my senior year in high school, I had learned to base all my decision on this hierarchy: God came first, others came second, and I came last. My ultimate goal was to live a humble life like Jesus, who submitted to God's will. When I read, "Wives, be subject to your husbands, as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior," (Ephesians 5:22-23).[1] I intended to take it literally when the time came. In fact, I took every word of the Bible literally, like a good fundamentalist.

Submission became my middle name. For me, God was to be obeyed at all costs. I never had the final say in a decision. Decision-making became easier when I did not have to take on the responsibility of making a choice and facing its consequences. If God was making the decisions, I simply followed and never needed to explain myself except to say that I was doing God's will. At that time in my life, I thought I could easily discern God's will. If I had not studied for a big test the next day, and there was some church activity to attend, I went because I believed that God wanted me to go, and my purpose in life was to please God.

I strived to reach perfection in humility. My goal was to become like Jesus even though I knew that I would never be able to reach his perfection. This was frustrating, but I got used to it. No matter what I did, I would never be good enough. I continually called myself worthless. Humility was my goal, but I believed that I would never attain its perfection because I made so many mistakes. I had a very strict notion of humility. If I placed *any* value or focus on myself, I was being proud. Humility meant constant self-

[1] The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) will be used in paper.

annihilation and self-sacrifice. I avoided any and all forms of pride because I was suppose to live as perfectly sinless as possible. I was constantly condemning myself as if this was the way to heaven.

Submission also meant adjusting my own feelings to accommodate the needs, wants, or opinions of others. When my friends asked me what I wanted to do on Friday night, I always answered, "I don't care." I had learned the importance of flexibility from my own family; however, I took this lesson a dramatic step further. Mainly, I stopped listening to the negative emotions; however, this altered, the nature of the positive emotions. I could no longer tell if I, in a good mood, was authentically happy or just faking it. I was apathetic, but I could not determine this because I forced my feelings to fit in whatever situation. Mom wanted a pleasant household, so if I was crabby or angry, I went to my room or tried to change my feelings, but this only fed my emotions. Also, in attempt to make friends, I tried to be as nice as possible, that sweet girl whom everyone likes. I laughed at everyone's jokes, agreed with everyone's opinions, and did whatever they told me to do. After a while, I began to hate to be in a bad mood, so I learned to brush my feelings off. I became good at reflecting the emotions of whomever I was with. I thought it all fit into my fundamental Christian values.

In one sense, I was proud of my humility. I believed that I knew God's will, and I condemned others when their interpretation of God's will did not correspond with mine. In retrospect, however, my problem was not that I was perpetually prideful. My problem was that I did not have a self, and when I acknowledged the self I had, I did not like it. I honestly valued all other human life except for my own. It was okay to build up the confidence of others but not my own. In time, I lost my ability to relate to people. I had

a hard time enjoying the company of others when I was either silently judging them or determining their needs and opinions, so that I could suitably respond.

The day I realized that I did not love myself, I wept. It was the first day of a lot of change to come. If I did not love myself, how could I love and care for my neighbor?

Assessing the Damage and Planting New Seeds

I was tired of listening, following, and pleasing everyone else. I was not satisfied with my life, so I did some reevaluating. I had a lot of work to do, and I had no idea how to begin taking care of myself. I did not know how to take responsibility for my own life, since I had always relied on others to tell me what to do or say or think. I was, on the one hand, annoyed at those who had convinced me to uphold such damaging ideals. On the other side, I was very frustrated with my own susceptibility. Why was I such a follower? Why did I think that my opinions or feelings were of no value to myself or the world?

In order to reverse the cycle of self-hate, I began paying more attention to myself. I asked my own opinion. I asked how I was feeling, and if I was angry, I accepted the presence of the feeling instead of trying to change it. Validation was the biggest step toward accepting my own worth again. I needed to be believed and trusted. I needed the very basic recognition of having feelings and opinions. When I began recognizing my feelings, I broadened the range of feelings that were acceptable to me. All the feelings I had learned to dismiss and ignore, I began accepting. I allowed myself to be angry. I allowed myself to be proud of myself. I stopped expecting myself to be perfect. I allowed myself to be whole. I accepted my mistakes and successes as wholly part of my human self.

As I permitted all these feelings and experiences to exist in my own life, I also acknowledged the existence of these things in the lives of others. I could be honest with myself and with others about the reality of my feelings. I stopped judging myself and others against high standards of perfection that neither of us could reach. As I became more authentic, my relationships became more authentic as well.

I knew that it was possible to be excessively angry and feel excessive pride. I have known that all my life; however, I was just a beginner. I did not yet know how to feel these feelings deeply. Finding a balance would be necessary eventually, but rehabilitating my feelings was the first step.

Relating to Wild Flowers

While it became easier for me to relate to relatives and friends with whom I had never had a close relationship, I found it more difficult to relate with those whom I had previously been very close. This became evident in a recent phone conversation with my sister. This conversation illustrated the place from where I have come and the different languages that my sister and I now speak because of our different beliefs. I am saddened that our relationship has become less authentic, and I am concerned about the way that my sister talks about herself and humankind in general. I am worried about how I will be able to relate to her.

After I told my sister, Katy, what my thesis was about, her response and our discussion shocked and disturbed me. My sister, a fundamentalist Christian, told me that it is too prideful for us, human beings, to think we have intrinsic worth. To say that I value myself is prideful and thus, sinful, to her. She reasoned that I was not giving credit

to God for my worth. According to Katy, God and only God can think I am worth something; however, neither I nor anyone else could think or say so. God is so powerfully holy and above us that we cannot in any way trust our own ability to know or feel that we are valuable and capable creatures; to do so would be an attempt to subvert God. We are "scum" and do not deserve to be valued by anyone, let alone God. Katy's life has focused on the idea that humans will never amount to anything unless we depend solely on God's grace, which we do not even deserve. Even after we are "saved" we strive to become like Jesus, who was perfect, knowing that we will always fail and never be good enough.

My sister also asserted that self-hatred is a form of pride because it focuses on the self. Katy argued that those who are insecure, anorexic, or even suicidal are just trying to get attention because they think they deserve to be more important. For Katy, pride is focusing on oneself in any way. I am afraid to find out how many would agree, but I know that she is not alone in this belief.

Like other fundamentalist Christians, my sister did not think that the humans who wrote the Bible were as imperfect as the rest of us. They had some special gift from God because they were close to God, which gave them the ability to write the truth and will of God. No matter what I said, she would not be persuaded. It is hard for her to be convinced of something different when her world makes sense; she has no need to question it. When she was exposed to my opposing perspective, she did not listen and consider an alternative belief; her goal has been to "save" the lost and misguided. Her truth is the only truth.

This conversation has led me to wonder where she got these ideas, and on what basis I can constructively discusses these issues with her. How do I get my point across? How do I make logical arguments that she will find credible? How do I express how damaging I believe her views are to the well being of a person? Before I am further able to effectively talk about these issues with my sister, I need to do some research of my own. In this paper, I will first look at the concepts of pride and anger historically in order to determine how these concepts have been specifically characterized. Then, I will address the critiques of three women, who respond to traditional notions of pride and anger. Finally, I will make an effort to rehabilitate the emotions of pride and anger with the help and influence of a feminist theologian.

CHAPTER 1—Pride and Anger in Our Family Tree: Traditional Christian Notions

"Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you." ~Ephesians 4:31-32

While growing up, the message I usually received from church emphasized humility and love as the most important Christian values while leaving out a place for concepts such as pride and anger. If pride and anger were mentioned at all, it was with the utmost caution against their temptation toward sin. While I respected the value of humility and love, I have been concerned that they have been placed in opposition to, instead of in balance with, pride and anger. I have been curious to know who influenced such a disdain for pride and anger, and how far back in our Christian tradition does this belief stretch. In whose hands have we placed the authority to judge these emotions?

Throughout history, many theologians have categorized these emotions as sinful. This belief goes as far back as Gregory the Great, who preached on the Seven Deadly Sins. Pride and anger were on the list of deadly sins, and the assertion that pride and anger are sins has also been defended biblically:

> And he [Jesus] said, "It is what comes out of a person that defiles. For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person (Mark 7:20-23).

Christian tradition has maintained that the emotions of pride and anger have consistently energized harmful acts in the world. Even in a discussion about these emotions in a college classroom full of senior Religion majors, many were leery of validating the value

of pride and anger.[2] They quickly called pride and anger the cause of violence, which must be avoided.

I must ask, where has this judgment come from? I understand the emergence of the urge to react on account of the energy that anger and pride evoke, but why is this reaction usually associated with destruction? We cannot avoid pride and anger simply because we assume they result in violence. If we continue to stick our heads in the sand instead of addressing our fears concerning powerful emotions, theology and ourselves will lack a vital source of empowerment, which pride and anger can also inspire and result in positive ways.

To situate pride and anger within the context of a Christian doctrine of sin, I will look at two theologians who have greatly influenced contemporary theology. I will begin with St. Augustine (354-430 CE) in order to show how far back this doctrine stretches. Augustine has a lot to say about the notion of pride, given that he bases most of his doctrine of sin on it. As for anger, his view of this emotion is more tucked away in his doctrine, but his opinion is clear.

Next, I will discuss Reinhold Niebuhr's doctrine of sin to illustrate a more contemporary perspective on Augustine's theology. Niebuhr, like Augustine, has plenty to say about pride as it is a large focus of his doctrine of sin as well. As for anger, his view reflects many of his ideas concerning pride. The range of theological opinions on the concepts of pride and anger have varied throughout time and are still present today. I will only look at two theologians, who have very similar perspectives. This is to show the durability of this particular perspective, which has endured through time.

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[2] REL-399, Discussion on Beverly Wildung Harrison, "The Power of Anger in the Work of Love," 18 February, 2002.

Pride Begets Chaos and the Disorder of Anger

St. Augustine[3] lived from 354-430 CE and wrote *City of God*, the text we will look most closely at, around the time of the collapse of Rome in 410. His experience with the nature of sin sprang out of the events of his time. In his doctrine of sin, Augustine attempts to explain why God created humans knowing that they will disobey God. Augustine asserts that "the earth itself and all earthly matter are derived from nothing at all; and when man was made, God gave to his body a soul which was created out of nothing."[4] Though humans are made in God's image, we are unlike God in our origin. We were created by God out of nothingness, and therefore have an affinity for nothingness. According to Augustine, humans move closer to this nothingness when we sin. Augustine's assertion seems reasonable in relation to biblical text such as: "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep" (Genesis 1:1). His concept of nothingness has great potential in explaining the variety of our human sin.

Augustine brings pride into the picture early. He quotes Sirach 10:13a: "For the beginning of pride is sin, and the one who clings to it pours out abominations.'"[5] Both pride and the willingness to act on it are evil: "For they would not have arrived at the evil act if an evil will had not preceded it. Now, could anything but pride have been the start of the evil will?"[6] Pride initiated Chaos and the trail of sins to follow, which Augustine calls lusts or disordered emotions. He leaves little room for positive actions to

[3] A tremendous thanks to Dr. Deborah Goodwin, the diehard Augustinian fan and scholar, for her insight and help with this section.
[4] Augustine, City of God, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Classics, 1984), 568.
[5] As quoted in Augustine, City of God, 571.
[6] Ibid.

come from the feeling of pride; instead, he emphasizes humility: "it is good to 'lift up your heart', and to exalt your thoughts, yet not in the self-worship of pride, but in the worship of God. This is a sign of obedience,...[which] can belong only to the humble."[7]

Augustine chiefly speaks about pride in contrast to humility. He alludes to Matthew 23:12 when he explains that "there is something in humility to exalt the mind, and something in exaltation to abase it."[8] Humility is holy because it suggests submission to God. Augustine goes on to say that pride is primarily the worst evil. Before the actual sinful act, humans put their trust in themselves instead of God. Pride "happens when a man is too pleased with himself: and a man is self-complacent when he deserts that changeless Good in which, rather than in himself, he ought to have found his satisfaction."[9]

Augustine's problem with pride is that it turns humans away from God, allowing humans to worship themselves instead of God. Pride places self-love in conflict with the love of God. The sin of pride, Augustine argues, honors one's self-interest instead of the interest of God. Unfortunately, Augustine does not partner pride with an opposite. Self-annihilation, for instance, partnered with pride would give Augustine's notion of nothingness a more developed definition. On one hand, we fall into nothingness on account of forgetting God through overvaluing ourselves, which Augustine calls pride. On the other hand, we fall into nothingness on account of forgetting God through undervaluing ourselves, which I call self-annihilation.[10] We have the opportunity to deny

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[7] Ibid., 572.
[8] Ibid. "All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted" (Matthew 23:12).
[9] Augustine, City of God, 571-572.
[10] By self-annihilation, I mean the effort to escape from or eliminate one's self.

our place in God's creation, which God calls good, and to deny that we are made in God's image.

One derivative of pride, for Augustine, is anger. He categorizes anger as a lust: "the lust for vengeance, called anger."[11] Lust is simply the name for any kind of unhealthy emotion. Augustine notes that these unhealthy emotions, such as anger, did not exist in Paradise; they emerged as disordered emotions as a result of the Fall.[12] Unhealthy emotions are problematic for Augustine because they are "inciting us to acts which wisdom forbids, and therefore needing mind and reason to moderate them."[13] Augustine does not see godly or life-giving activities coming from emotions like anger. A flawed and irrational human will inspires the activities of unhealthy emotions, which causes them to be irrational: "no one who utters a word in anger, or, indeed, strikes another, could do so if his tongue or hand were not in someway set in motion by the command of his will."[14]

For Augustine, anger is not the worst sin of all, but it is still a sin. This is not to suggest that Augustine promoted apathy. He wrote, "Such citizens feel fear and desire, pain and gladness, but in a manner consistent with the Holy Scriptures and wholesome doctrine; and because their love is righteous, all these emotions are righteous in them."[15] Augustine believed that those who were disobedient to godly righteousness expressed their emotions inappropriately.[16] For Augustine, righteous behavior, otherwise known as submission to God's will, was a guiding purpose. However, Augustine recognizes the

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[11] Ibid., 576.
[12] St. Augustine, The City of God against the pagans, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought. ed. and trans. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 618.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid., 597.
[16] Ibid., 601.

reality of this world with its "diseases and upheavals."[17] He comments on those who ignore or avoid their own responsive feelings:

> Some of those people may display as empty complacency...which makes them so charmed with this achievement in themselves that they are not stirred or excited by any emotions at all, not swayed or influenced by any feelings. If so, they rather lose every shred of humanity than achieve a true tranquility. For hardness does not necessarily imply rectitude, and insensibility is not a guarantee of health.[18]

A person's apathy in response to the realities of the world is not righteous behavior according to Augustine. If this is true, Augustine's view that anger is an unhealthy emotion contradicts his view that apathy toward the world is wrong. If evil occurs, anger is a natural response. If I deny my anger as a response to an evil in the world, I become apathetic. Anger must be validated in this situation.

Pride as Primary and the Validation of Anger

Reinhold Niebuhr's ideas about sin are rooted in St. Augustine's theology. Niebuhr wrote during the 1940s around the time of World War II and the Holocaust. The world was full of violent actions and mass devastation, and it was difficult to have a positive outlook on the involvement that people had in the world.

In The Nature and Destiny of Man (1949), Niebuhr describes his doctrine of sin beginning with his notion of human nature. He sets up the paradox of human life: "Man is both strong and weak, both free and bound, both blind and far-seeing. He stands at the juncture of nature and spirit; and is involved in both freedom and necessity."[19] Humans uniquely hold rational capacity and are also able to transcend the natural realm into a

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[17] Augustine, City of God, 566.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), 1:181.

higher spiritual realm, which "stands outside of nature, life, himself, his reason and the world."[20] However, humans are not immortal but born into the boundaries of the natural world. In the natural world, we are creatures who are "subject to its vicissitudes, compelled by its necessities, driven by its impulses, and confined within the brevity of the years which nature permits its varied organic form."[21] In short, humans have certain freedoms and limitations in life.

Niebuhr tries not to value one realm over another; however, the natural realm needs more justification for Niebuhr: "*Ideally* the hope of the resurrection, this Christian confidence in the fulfillment of life beyond the limitations of temporal existence, does not stand in contradiction to the Biblical interpretation of the temporal order as essentially good and not evil."[22] Niebuhr looks to biblical text and knew that creation was valuable: "And God saw everything that he [God] had made, and indeed, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31a).[23] Niebuhr also knew how much evil had come through our humanness in the world: "the vitalities and the unities of nature may play a more negative part in the human destructiveness than those of spirit."[24] Truly, Niebuhr values both the worldly and spiritual realms; however, he found it difficult to fully embrace our creatureliness. When he discusses human freedoms and limitations, he always associates our freedoms to the spiritual realm while he associates our limitations to the natural world. We are held down by the world as if it serves no other purpose but to restrain our desires to transcend it.

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[20] Ibid., 1:3.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid., 1:177. Emphasis mine.
[23] As quoted by Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, 1:167.
[24] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, 1:27.

The freedoms and limitations of human life acquaint us with our possible temptations that would lead to sin. This tension between boundaries in the physical world and boundlessness in spiritualness creates what Niebuhr calls human anxiety. For Niebuhr, anxiety is "the internal precondition of sin."[25] Anxiety, itself, is not a sin, but it is the point at which one is tempted to fall into sin. Niebuhr explains, "It [anxiety] must not be identified with sin because there is always the *ideal* possibility that faith would purge anxiety of the tendency toward sinful self-assertion."[26] Niebuhr gives credit to anxiety's power to inspire human creativity. For Niebuhr, humans stand on the edge of the cliff of anxiety and are either pulled into the abyss of its negative temptations, or we figure out how to positively and creatively resist these temptations. In this paper, I will give more attention to the negative effects of anxiety that Niebuhr discusses. Anxiety's negative tendencies present humans with the temptation to actively relieve ourselves from anxiety through sin in two ways: "either to deny the contingent character of [our] existence (in pride and self-love) or to escape from [our] freedom (in sensuality)."[27]

For Niebuhr, as well as Augustine, sin is essentially what occurs "when man seeks to make himself the centre and source of his life."[28] Niebuhr acknowledges the sins of both pride and sensuality, but like Augustine, he emphasizes pride as the primary sin. Niebuhr describes several forms of pride, including the pride of power, knowledge, virtue, and spiritual pride. The pride of power affects both people who are unaware of their dependent nature and those who try to gain power in order to relieve their insecurities. The pride of knowledge is "the pride of reason which forgets that it is

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[25] Ibid., 1:182.
[26] Ibid., 1:182-183. Emphasis mine.
[27] Ibid., 1:185.
[28] Ibid., 1:16.

involved in a temporal process and imagines itself in complete transcendence over history."[29] The pride of virtue includes people who believe that their principles and opinions are the only truth. Finally, spiritual pride is the idea that one believes her or his ideals are divinely intended. We see that Niebuhr includes many forms of pride within his definition, just as Augustine did under his idea of lust. This is important to note because, in the end, Niebuhr's definition of pride encompasses so many facets that pride becomes his entire definition of sin instead of a segment of sin.

With historical Christian thought to back him up, especially Augustinian theology, Niebuhr calls pride more fundamental than the sin of sensuality.[30] Niebuhr first defines sensuality as the "escape from the freedom and the infinite possibilities of spirit by becoming lost in the detailed processes, activities and interests of existence, an effort which results inevitably in unlimited devotion to limited values."[31] Niebuhr gives some specific examples of sensuality, such as gluttony, sexual passion, drunkenness, etc. These are examples a person engaging in the sin of sensuality might choose in order to escape from freedom as Niebuhr defines it. However, Niebuhr's specificity concerning the areas that people become lost in as a result of their escape from freedom is limiting. Again, Niebuhr's notion of freedom is wrapped in its connection to the spiritual world as if freedom does not exist in the natural world and the escape from freedom would not occur through being lost in the spiritual world. The concept of freedom seems to be less black and white than Niebuhr supposes. Broadening the arena in which freedom exists, to include aspects of the natural world, might also bring a more positive view to the natural world as holding opportunities for humans.

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[29] Ibid., 1:195.
[30] Ibid., 1:186.
[31] Ibid., 1:185.

Niebuhr's concept of sensuality is like Augustine's concept of lust. Augustine's definition of lust comes directly from the Bible, which speaks of lust in its broadest sense without limiting it to sex:

> For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men....And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless (Romans 1:26-30).[32]

In accordance with Augustine, Niebuhr discusses sensuality as "a derivative of the more primal sin of self-love."[33] However, Niebuhr also questions this hierarchal relationship between "sensuality" and "self-love" by asking, "Is sensuality, in other words, a form of idolatry which makes the self god; or is it an alternative idolatry in which the self, conscious of the inadequacy of its self-worship, seeks escape by finding some other god?"[34] Niebuhr seems to be open to the possibility that these concepts may stand in opposition, which would include the opposite of self-love, or self-annihilation as I call it, into sensuality's definition. The inclusion of self-annihilation adds another possible form of escape from freedom to broaden the scope of sensuality.

Niebuhr admits to the complexity of sensuality and sin that perpetuates some confusion about their definition.[35] With this in mind, Niebuhr's final characterization of sensuality is: "first another...form of self-love, secondly an effort to escape self-love by the deification of another and finally as an escape from the futilities of both forms of

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[32] As quoted by Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, 1:230.
[33] Ibid., 1:233. When Niebuhr writes "self-love," he is referring to pride.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid., 1:239.

idolatry by a plunge into unconsciousness."[36] Niebuhr's biggest concern about the loss of self in one's worldly experience is that one will forget the spiritual realm altogether.

Reinhold Niebuhr's view of anger is much more balanced than I expected. Niebuhr notes the positive and negative effects that come from the emotion of anger: "Anger is the root of both righteousness and sin."[37] On one hand, "We are aroused anger when men take advantage of us or of those for whom we are concerned; when they violate the dignity of man; or when they commit some flagrant wrong."[38] Niebuhr honestly validated anger as an appropriate emotion, which is experienced on account of the reality of this world. Niebuhr explains the existence of anger and also cautions against its temptations: "We ought to be angry when wrong is done; but we must learn the difficult art of being angry without sinning."[39] Vengeance and hatred are the two temptations that Niebuhr names as the negative effects of anger. Vengeance has to do with the "egoistic corruption of the sense of justice," when we seek retaliation because of a wrong that was done to us.[40] Hatred, the other temptation of anger, is a result of perpetual anger over time from built-up emotions that lack moral judgment.[41]

Overall, Niebuhr, like Augustine, was invested in the experiences of the world.[42] They both called detachment an immoral attitude toward our interactions with the world. In our existence in the world and care for it, anger is a reaction we may experience in

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[36] Ibid.
[37] Reinhold Niebuhr, Discerning the Signs of the Times: Sermons for To-day and To-morrow (London: The Camelot Press Limited, 1946), 26. A special thanks to Rev. Cynthia Jarvis from the Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill in Philadelphia, PA, for suggesting this book and to Dr. Deborah Goodwin for pointing me to Rev. Cynthia Jarvis' homily describing Niebuhr's view of anger.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid., 28.
[40] Ibid., 27.
[41] Ibid.
[42] This is true despite their difficulty valuing creatureliness with the same significance as spiritual self-transcendence. See Augustine's view of apathy in his section above.

response to evil. Niebuhr wrote, "Only a perversely detached person can view the commitment of a wrong without anger; and only a morally callous and indifferent person contemplates evil-doing without emotion,"[43] and Augustine would strongly agree. They reasonably warns us against the danger of anger's temptations. However, neither offers an example of anger's possibility for positive results. If Niebuhr extended his notion of freedom to include the natural world, in that the natural world offers positive opportunities for humans, he might more easily envision anger's ability to effect humans positively.

[43] Niebuhr, Discerning..., 26.

CHAPTER 2—Reassessing Pride in Our Family Tree: Three Feminist Perspectives

"To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God."
~Romans 8:6-8

Just as my sister had said on the phone, we are "scum." We are filthy and worthless piles of rotting sin. At least, that is what I believed four years ago. No matter how hard we try, we will never be perfect. We are always making mistakes and never doing anything right. At that point in my life, I, like Niebuhr, had a hard time finding freedom or opportunity in the natural world. Through time, my beliefs changed, but it did not happen all at once. Once I figured out that I wanted to love myself, I slowly learned to validate my own feelings. As I accepted my feelings, I began to enjoy my own honest company. As I learned to value myself more, I began to appreciate my opportunity to be authentic in the world and have authentic relationships.

In this chapter, I will focus on three critiques of Reinhold Niebuhr's doctrine of sin written by women. Valerie Saiving first published what became a landmark essay "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," in 1960. Judith Plaskow, in her book Sex, Sin and Grace: Women's Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich (1980), adopted, investigated, and expanded the issues that Saiving raised. After these two women, Susan Dunfee wrote "The Sin of Hiding: A Feminist Critique of Reinhold Niebuhr's Account of the Sin of Pride" in 1982. These three women raise interesting questions in response to Niebuhr's notion of sin.

Pride as Not Inclusive: Recalling a Missing Experience

In her essay "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," Valerie Saiving begins by simply noting that it is "a well-known fact that theology has been written almost exclusively by men," which leads her to assert, "This alone should put us on guard, especially since contemporary theologians constantly remind us that one of man's strongest temptations is to identify his own limited perspective with universal truth."[44] In her essay, Saiving looks at the theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Anders Nygren. She believes these two theologians exemplify a theological assumption, which is "man's predicament as rising from his separateness and the anxiety occasioned by it and to identify sin with self-assertion and love with selflessness."[45]

In her overview of theological notions of human nature and sin, she describes theology's typical notion of sin as the "imperialistic drive to close the gap between the individual, separate self and others by reducing those others to the status of mere objects which can then be treated as appendages of the self and manipulated accordingly."[46] In other words, sin is pride. In contrast to sin, love is complete self-sacrifice in the ideas of the theologians Saiving describes. As an alternative to these views, Saiving asserts, "If human nature and the human situation are not as described by the theologians in question, then the assertions that self-giving love is the law of man's being is irrelevant and may even be untrue."[47] She goes on to say that men and women have different experiences, which poses a problem in theology if its notions of sin and love have been based solely on the male experience. Simply, she suggests that such a theology is not fully developed.

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[44] Valerie Saiving, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion, ed. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), 25.
[45] Ibid., 26.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid., 27.

Saiving views the differences between men and women's experiences by explaining "masculinity is an endless process of *becoming*, while in femininity the emphasis is on *being*. Another way of putting this distinction is that woman is more closely bound to nature than is man."[48] For women, this is both a beneficial and unfavorable position. Saiving suggests that the benefits are that women are less likely to feel anxious, and thus sin, because they are securely grounded in nature. On the other side, Saiving notes Niebuhr's understanding of the difference between men and women: "Yet if it is true, as Niebuhr says, that man stands at the juncture of nature and spirit, then woman's closeness to nature is a measure of the distance she must travel to reach spirit."[49] Unfortunately for women and their position, Niebuhr struggled to call the natural world as valuable as the spiritual world.[50] Saiving further notes, "this modern era....was a masculine era, too, in the degree to which it devalued the functions of women and children and the whole reproductive process."[51] Saiving explains that women have the chance to deny their attachment to nature, which would enable them to transcend into the more preferred spiritual realm, but in doing so, they would also deny their femininity.

Keeping in mind that this was written in 1960, Saiving's perspective on the natural and spiritual world and a woman's place in it, has been viewed as women living in a double bind. First, their closeness to the nature is devalued, but they are unable to separate themselves from what binds them to nature: pregnancy, motherhood, etc.

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[48] Ibid., 32.
[49] Ibid., 32-33. Saiving does not cite Niebuhr here.
[50] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, 1:27. Niebuhr wrote, "The resources of nature may be more negative. The vitalities of nature and its forms may be the indispensable presuppositions of human creativity rather than its active agents."
[51] Saiving, 35.

without losing their identities. Also, women live farther from the favorable spiritual world because they are inevitably attached to the natural world, so they are farther from God than men.

Saiving goes on to describe the current state of many women:

> Women have been able been enabled, through personal experience and education, to transcend the boundaries of a purely feminine identity. They now stand closer to the juncture of nature and spirit than was possible for most women in the past. They believe in the values of self-differentiation, challenge, and adventure and are not strangers to the "divine discontent" which has always driven men. Yet these same women value their femininity also; they do not wish to discard their sexual identity but rather to gather it up into a higher unity. They want, in other words, to be both women *and* full human beings.[52]

In many ways, Saiving stands in agreement with Niebuhr's essentialist view of women in that the femininity of women is exists essentially in nature. Niebuhr writes, "The natural fact that the woman bears the child binds her to the child and partially limits the freedom of her choice in the development of various potentialities of character not related to the vocation of motherhood."[53] Just as Saiving notes contemporary women who have transcended the natural world with which they are closely attached, Niebuhr also recognizes, "A rationalistic feminism is undoubtedly inclined to transgress inexorable bounds set by nature."[54] Saiving, again like Niebuhr, separates a woman's femininity from the spiritual world. They seems to be saying that femininity does not exist at the spiritual level.

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[52] Ibid., 36.

[53] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, 1:282. Niebuhr suggests one factor: "It is important to realize that no definition of the natural law between the sexes can be made without embodying something of the sin of male arrogance into the standard."

[54] Ibid. Niebuhr again reminds us that our flawed human nature often gets in the way of the effort of feminists: "any premature fixation of certain historical standards in regard to the family will inevitably tend to reinforce male arrogance and to retard justified efforts on the part of the female to achieve such freedom as in not incompatible with the primary function of motherhood."

Saiving distinguishes herself from Niebuhr by writing, "the temptations of woman *as woman* are not the same as the temptations of man *as man*, and the specifically feminine forms of sin...have a quality which can never be encompassed by such terms as 'pride' and 'will-to-power.'"[55] Saiving asserts that theologians who emphasize pride do not fully address the temptations that she calls "feminine sins."[56] Within these theologies, women are caught between their femininity and self-transcendence:

> If such a woman believes the theologians....She will believe that, having chosen marriage and children and thus being face to face with the needs of her family for love, refreshment, and forgiveness, she has not right to ask anything for herself but must submit without qualification to the strictly feminine role.[57]

Saiving asserts the need for theology to be more sensitive to the experiences of women by reassessing "its estimate of the human condition and redefine its categories of sin and redemption. For a feminine society will have its own special potentialities for good and evil, to which a theology based solely on masculine experience may well be irrelevant."[58] Judith Plaskow next assumes her assertion.

Pride as Not Primary and Raising Up Creatureliness

Judith Plaskow's critique of Reinhold Niebuhr's doctrine of sin, in her book Sex, Sin and Grace: Women's Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich, focuses on his notions of human nature and his emphasis on the sin of pride. She begins by saying that Niebuhr's doctrine of sin lacks fullness. Valerie Saiving noted this

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[55] Saiving, 37.
[56] Ibid. Saiving describes her idea of typical "feminine sins" as: "triviality, distractibility, and diffuseness; lack of an organizing center or focus; dependence another for one's own self-definition; tolerance at the expense of standards of excellence; inability to respect the boundaries of privacy; sentimentality, gossipy sociability, and mistrust of reason—in short, underdevelopment or negation of the self."
[57] Ibid., 39.
[58] Ibid., 41.

same sense of inadequacy, "theological doctrines of love [as entirely self-giving] do not provide an adequate interpretation of the situation of women—nor, for that matter, of men."[59] Plaskow, like Saiving, raises concern for a missing component in traditional doctrines of love and sin. Their concern is for the experiences of those that traditional doctrines do not address.

Plaskow argues that Niebuhr's emphasis on the sin of pride suggests that he views pride as a more problematic sin than sensuality. She maintains that Niebuhr describes sensuality as a less significant sin and, essentially, a derivative of pride. In order to give a fuller account of human nature and of sin, Plaskow points to the experiences of those she believes Niebuhr forgot, which are primarily what she calls "women's experience."

Plaskow explains that the experiences of women are largely influenced by societal expectations: "Women are steered toward certain functions from the time they are born and taught to see these functions as expressing their true female nature."[60] These essential feminine roles were determined by society on account of a woman's "biological nature," and Plaskow argues "given society's expectations concerning them [women], they are more liable to 'become lost in the detailed processes, activities, and interests of existence.'"[61] She goes on to suggest, "It would not be surprising, therefore, if the particular sin of women were the adoption of society's view of themselves to the detriment of their freedom."[62] In short, she argues from women's experience to assert that sensuality is the leading sin of women as opposed to pride.

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[59] Ibid., 27.
[60] Plaskow, 64
[61] Ibid., 63-64.
[62] Ibid., 64.

The problem that Plaskow has with Niebuhr's doctrine of sin and notion of human nature is that "In dealing with sin, he seems to forget the burdensomeness of freedom and to concentrate on the exaltation of it."[63] Plaskow points out that there are some women who have "not yet become a self and will not take the responsibility for becoming one."[64] Her major concern is that Niebuhr does not give sensuality enough credit as a sin. Considering Niebuhr's text, it appears that he regards sensuality secondary to that of pride: "Biblical and Christian thought has maintained...that pride is more basic than sensuality and that the latter is, in some way, derived from the former."[65]

Plaskow suggests that Niebuhr was not wholly able to see the depth of sensuality when he had difficulty envisioning the positive side of creatureliness. According to Plaskow, Niebuhr undervalued human creatureliness when he wrote: "The resources of nature may be more negative. The vitalities of nature and its forms may be the indispensable presuppositions of human creativity rather than its active agents."[66] She connects Niebuhr's hesitancy to esteem creatureliness with his underrating of sensuality:

> Niebuhr's concern with the negative side of creatureliness may be part of what leads him to underestimate the sin of sensuality....Not seeing human beings as continually, positively involved in the world's vitalities, he is less likely to view loss of self in some aspect of these vitalities as a clear and ever present danger.[67]

Plaskow, like Niebuhr, recognizes the temptation to lose one's self in the world's vitalities. However, Plaskow asserts that placing more value on human creatureliness and our involvement in the world increases the potential of this temptation. By devaluing creatureliness, Niebuhr also misses, in Plaskow's opinion, the helpfulness of

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[63] Ibid., 66.
[64] Ibid., 67.
[65] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, 1:186.
[66] Ibid., 1:27. As quoted by Plaskow, 69.
[67] Plaskow, 69.

creatureliness in preventing harmful human acts: "a human creativity cognizant of its positive relation to human creatureliness on every level might be far less likely to trespass on nature's dominion."[68]

The tension in Niebuhr's notion of sin and human nature between the natural world and the spiritual world has been an important focus for women to critique. While this tension does exist, Plaskow may be exaggerating Niebuhr's intentions that, she argues, aim to exclude the experiences of women. Niebuhr was fully aware that, "A rationalistic feminism is undoubtedly inclined to transgress inexorable bounds set by nature,"[69] despite his underestimation of nature.

To counter Niebuhr, Plaskow, like many feminists, has worked to increase the value of creatureliness. While addressing the importance of creatureliness, Plaskow reveals another spin on her view of women within this context:

> It could be that women, because they have been associated with nature and natural functions [pregnancy, motherhood, etc.], have necessarily developed a more positive contentful sense of human creatureliness than Niebuhr....If this is so, then women's experiences may again provide a corrective to an understanding of human nature which is otherwise onesided.[70]

Though Plaskow earlier noted the detrimental effects that viewing women as essentially close to nature have caused, she also seems to be saying that this view has been beneficial in that women have learned to value creatureliness. With this alternative perspective, Plaskow would likely agree with Niebuhr when he wrote "The natural fact that the woman bears the child binds her to the child and partially limits the freedom of her choice in the development of various potentialities of character not related to the vocation

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[68] Ibid., 70.
[69] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, 1:282.
[70] Plaskow, 71.

of motherhood."[71] She might even add an endorsement to this limited freedom saying that it has allowed women the necessary chance to value creatureliness. On this note, Susan Dunfee takes up the reigns.

Pride's Partner Sensuality: Renaming and Expanding

Susan Dunfee begins "The Sin of Hiding" by describing a woman's daily battle with guilt. No matter what a woman does, she faces criticisms about how she should act and what she should value based on societal pressures about marriage and motherhood. If she does not meet society's expectations, it is her fault. Dunfee brings to light a struggle that women do not often address: "violence against women...is also being etched into the secret lives of women who turn against themselves in self-hatred; who lose themselves in alcohol, drugs, starvation diets—or in the frantic activity of trying to please everyone else."[72]

Guilt is the emotional response when one does something wrong. Guilt implies being at fault, but sometimes it is hard to discern who is at fault. Dunfee connects guilt to sin saying, "[guilt] is the result of the perception of our sinfulness in relationship to God."[73] Fortunately, the guilt of human sin in Christianity is usually countered by "the forgiveness and mercy of God which lead to regeneration and new life."[74] However, this "redemptive promise" does not seem to enter the equation when it comes to a woman's

[71] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, 1:282.
[72] Susan Dunfee, "The Sin of Hiding: A Feminist Critique of Reinhold Niebuhr's Account of the Sin of Pride," Soundings 65 (Fall 1982): 316.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid., 317.

guilt. The reason for this lies in Dunfee's question, "Why has she been locked into cycles of guilt, self-hatred, and violence against herself?"[75]

Susan Dunfee suggests the problem of Christian theology has been "its failure to develop fully what I shall call the sin of hiding—a sin which I believe to be the primary form of sin for woman."[76] Dunfee believes that by not recognizing the sin of hiding, Christianity's whole notion of sin is inadequate. Dunfee focuses on Reinhold Niebuhr's doctrine of sin. She justifies her choice by saying, "he is an appropriate example both because he sees himself as standing within the mainstream of Christian theology, and because his work has been a major influence upon Christian thinkers in this century."[77] Dunfee's theory is that "by encouraging woman to confess the wrong sin, and by failing to judge her in her actual sin, Christianity has both added to woman's guilt and failed to call her into her full humanity."[78]

In looking at Niebuhr's doctrine of sin, Dunfee focuses on the sin of sensuality. Dunfee prefers "the expression 'the sin of hiding,' which focuses more on the act, or nonact, of escaping" as opposed to Niebuhr's sin of sensuality, which Dunfee associates with "the locus to which one escapes."[79] Dunfee associates the sin of hiding with Niebuhr's words "escape *from* one's freedom," but then she wonders why Niebuhr "narrows his focus to the 'forms of physical desire,' thus turning his emphasis from hiding to sensuality."[80] Dunfee favors "sin of hiding" because it includes all possible

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[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid., 318.
[80] Ibid.

types of escape including the escape into "one's own physical cravings" as well as the "loss of one's self in other finite persons, institutions, or causes."[81]

For Dunfee, her problem with Niebuhr is a question of emphasis. Dunfee argues that Niebuhr focuses too much on his narrower definition of sensuality, which Niebuhr describes as "the destruction of harmony within the self, by the self's undue identification with and devotion to particular impulses and desires within the self."[82] Niebuhr overlaps this narrower definition of sensuality with an aspect of his definition of the sin of pride, so that sensuality is, in part, characterized by "self-centeredness."[83] Dunfee argues that Niebuhr overemphasizes sensuality's association with the sin of pride. As a result, according to Dunfee, he loses sight of and credibility for his broader definition that Dunfee term's "sin of hiding," which is described as "the escape from freedom—not *in* freedom—into nothingness. And this state of nothingness carries the connotation of dissipation rather than the notion of the fear of becoming someone."[84] Dunfee concludes that Niebuhr falls short in fully developing the sin of hiding, and thus, "the sin of hiding becoming for him not a real possibility."[85]

Who experiences the sin of hiding? Dunfee asserts that the sin of hiding exists among women who have "denied her sense of self in total submission to husband/father/boss or in total self-giving to children, job, or family."[86] The lack of emphasis on this sin, therefore, perpetuates a woman's "bondage to her hiddenness" and

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[81] Ibid., 319.
[82] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, 1:228. Dunfee also asserts that Niebuhr overemphasizes self-sacrifice as a virtue, which adds to the problem: "by making self-sacrificial love the ultimate Christian virtue, one makes the sin of hiding into a virtue as well, and thereby encourages those already committing the sin of hiding to stay in that state. One then becomes glorified for never truly seeking to become fully human." Dunfee, 321.
[83] Dunfee, 319.
[84] Ibid., 320.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid., 322.

contributes to her inferior place in society.[87] When "self-assertion is equated with the sin of pride," Dunfee argues that "the knowledge of her desire to be a self is often experienced by a woman with guilt and anxiety."[88] On account of this circumstance, Dunfee points to the conflict between being a "good woman" and developing a self.[89]

Another reason that Dunfee re-names Niebuhr's concept of sensuality as the "sin of hiding" is that the word "sensuality" has been problematic for women. Some biblical text supports the emphasis of the spirit over the body: "To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8:6-8). The body represents nature, the realm of sensuality, where emotions exist, in conflict with spiritual forces.

Women have been typically associated with being closer to nature. Women have been expected to have children and be mothers, which many have denoted as closer to nature. A woman's connection to nature detracts from the possibility of transcendence from the body toward the higher realm of the spirit. For Dunfee, a theology that does not resolve this conflict,

> sets the stage for a patriarchal culture to name her [woman] the source of all carnality. And so, she is caught in her bondage to guilt: the guilt of desiring to be more fully human that the patriarchal culture tells her she should be; the guilt of Eve, the seductress, the carnal one; and the deepest guilt of all, the guilt of not becoming a self[90]

Looking again to Niebuhr, Dunfee's perspective on Niebuhr's sense of creatureliness and sensuality is very similar to Judith Plaskow's. Both of these women have rightly

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[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid. By using the term "good woman," Dunfee is referring to society's definition, which she describes as the "good wife and mother."
[90] Ibid., 323.

raised a concern for the value of creatureliness, which Niebuhr struggles to embrace fully. Dunfee argues that devaluing creatureliness encourages women to escape into hiding. A doctrine of sin cannot be one-sided; it must include a fully developed concept of the sin of hiding.

The cycle of guilt and destruction of the self will not go away, Dunfee asserts, until women acknowledge their sin of hiding. For Dunfee, women, who struggle with the sin of hiding, must confess their sin even though it "is a deeply threatening thing for any woman to do. We have believed for so long that femininity and assertiveness cannot be held together."[91] Though this confession reveals a woman's uncertainties, Dunfee suggests that it also allows a woman to take control over her own life. For a woman to take responsibility for her life "is to be the person one *is*, whoever and whatever that may be, with the talents and weaknesses she had, with the network of relations that she has built....who seeks not to live only for herself, but who seeks both to care for and to be cared for by others."[92] Theology must know how to encourage us toward the restoration of our selves. Once we are accountable to a God who rejects any temptation to empty our selves and who encourages us to live authentically, then we can find "the courage to demand that the world be transformed, that oppression and bondage be named and fought wherever they exist."[93]

Dunfee's message is powerful call for women to take responsibility for their lives; however, I wonder if all women are in the position to take hold of this *assumed* freedom called their life. I am concern that those women, who are trapped under layers of oppressive systems without certain privileges, do not have the free capability to emerge

[91] Ibid., 324.
[92] Ibid., 325.
[93] Ibid., 326.

from the sin of hiding in an effort to challenge theological doctrines or a patriarchal society.

Dunfee's thorough discussion of the sin of hiding brings clarity to what Niebuhr sought to express but found difficult to clarify. In Niebuhr's final definition of sensuality, he characterizes it as a form self-love as well as an escape from self-love. Admitting the complexity of sensuality and sin, Niebuhr worked hard to synthesized his thoughts into an inclusive perspective, calling sensuality a "form of self-love,...an effort to escape self-love by the deification of another and finally as an escape from the futilities of both forms of idolatry by a plunge into unconsciousness."[94] Dunfee helps clarify by renaming Niebuhr's concept of sensuality to her term "sin of hiding," which more fully explicates the definition of the concept that Niebuhr explains as the "escape from freedom." Through this renaming, Dunfee allows a wider range of experiences, especially the experiences of many women, to fit inside this concept of sin.

[94] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, 1:239.

CHAPTER THREE—Re-Empowering Pride and Anger

"Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air, / are heading home again. / Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, / the world offers itself to your imagination, / calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting— / over and over announcing your place / in the family of things." ~Mary Oliver

In sermons, articles, and other forms of response to the events of September 11th, 2001, pastors, authors, and others quoted Niebuhr: "The proper attitude toward evil is anger."[95] Responding with anger to horrific incidents that occur all over the world is appropriate. Immediately after this emotion had been affirmed in our own country, President George W. Bush decided it was time to take action. This meant retaliating by bombing Afghanistan, an example of the negative aspect of anger that Niebuhr calls vengeance. Our government was reacting very quickly. We had not fully mourned our dead and let our anger at their passing run its course.

Some people in the U.S. disagreed with President Bush's actions, and shifted their anger to the problems that the government was causing. I turned to apathy because, on one hand, I was completely overwhelmed with my anger and sadness for the loss of life in the U.S. One the other hand, I was deeply overcome by my anger and sadness on account of our government's quick reaction to bomb Afghanistan. I could not completely process either event; things were happening very quickly. Due to the reaction of our country after September 11th, 2001 fitting Niebuhr's notion of vengeance, two very important emotions were set in contrast to one another. While our country responded with vengeance, a temptation of anger, many hesitated claiming our response to evil should be influenced by love: "But we must avoid what Niebuhr saw as anger's two

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[95] Niebuhr, Discerning..., 29. As quoted in a sermon by Rev. Cynthia Jarvis from Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill, an article in The Christian Century, etc.

temptations, hatred and vengeance, and instead allow love, justice and integrity to shape our response to evil."[96] Anger and love were, thus, two separate and very different approaches to evil.

Many were rushing to stop our anger for fear of what it might do. For these people, anger had to stop before love and peace could begin. It is interesting that Niebuhr specifically noted the negative effects of anger, but he does not go further into the positive effects of anger except to validate this feeling when evil exists. I believe anger is more than just a passing stage. What if the energy of our anger could produce positive change in the world instead of perpetuating destruction? What if our anger represented our positive investment in the world?

Reclaiming Sensuality

In her article "The Power of Anger in the Work of Love: Christian Ethics for Women and Other Strangers," Beverly Wildung Harrison rehabilitates the positive force of anger. This involves narrowing the split between the spiritual and the natural world by lifting up the importance of the natural world. She reiterates our own findings: "fewer men in the field of Christian ethics have grasped the connection between body/mind dualism and the assumption many moral theologians make that we are most moral when most detached and disengaged from life-struggle."[97] Like Augustine, she finds it essential that women remain present to the world despite all its flaws, because leaving it to live an otherworldly life does not help fix the problems in the natural world; it only ignores them. Harrison states that her

[96] "WHAT DOES GOD INTEND?" The Christian Century, September 26-October 3, 2001, <http://www.pulpit.org/articles/supplement.asp> (10 April 2002).
[97] Beverly Wildung Harrison, "The Power of Anger in the Work of Love," Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics, ed. Carol S. Robb (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 13.

> basic ethical thesis is that women, and other marginated people, are less cut off from the real, material conditions of life than are those who enjoy the privileges of patriarchy and that, as a result, an otherworldly spirituality is far removed from the life experience of women....Our need is for a moral theology shaped and informed by women's actual historical struggle.[98]

Before she argues for the value of creatureliness, she expresses her concern for "otherworldliness." For those who are poor, despair about the present and extremely difficult conditions of the world leads them to live beyond the present in a dream that, somewhere else and at some other time, a better world exists. For the wealthy whose privileges are threatened, otherworldliness perpetuates the status quo through complacency and avoidance. Harrison asserts that "a feminist metaethic must not fail to affirm and generate our power to affect the existing world. We must wrest this power of action from our very rightful anger at what has been done to us and to our sisters and to brothers who do not meet patriarchy's expectations."[99]

She embraces the positive energy of anger and its ability to create positive changes by saying, "The creative power of anger is shaped by owning this great strength of women and of others who have struggled for the full gift of life against structures of oppression."[100] Further, Harrison redefines and reclaims the concept of sensuality and the woman's relationship to it. She argues that feminists live intimately connected to the world and have the opportunity to enact change in it for its own good and the good of those who live in the world. She calls the feminist ethic "a spirituality of sensuality."[101] With a positive image of creatureliness, we are able to value of our opportunity to invest in the world. This is a radical reclaiming of sensuality as Niebuhr described it.

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[98] Ibid., 6.
[99] Ibid., 7.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid., 8.

Harrison recognizes the powerful energy that anger generates. She also confirms that "Our world and our faith are transformed, for good or ill, through human activity."[102] We do not always lose our selves in the world and thus, become separate from God as Niebuhr suspected. When the energy that anger releases informs positive actions, the opportunity for change exists, which benefits the world and our faith. These positive actions, or acts of love, are powerful enough to "act-each-other-into-well-being," however, the negative actions are also powerful enough to "thwart life and to maim each other."[103] One problem that Harrison sees in the world is the lack of communication between people, which is one type of loving action. This lack of communication is harming and killing people. If this act of love, communication, were tended to, we would "become self-respecting and other-regarding persons, and we cannot be one without the other."[104]

Harrison defines her concept of sensuality by noting that "all our knowledge, including our moral knowledge, is body-mediated knowledge. All knowledge is rooted in our sensuality."[105] Therefore, our image of the world and all that is in it has a lot to do with how we perceive the world through our senses and feelings. Our ability to perceive the world allows us to give value to what we feel. Problems arise when people live too much in their heads. We literally lose touch with life, and we lose our connection with the world, and our ability to be ethical people.

Harrison believes that there are no good or bad feelings. There are no feelings that people should be compelled to avoid. Feelings should be respected because they can

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[102] Ibid., 10.
[103] Ibid., 11.
[104] Ibid., 12.
[105] Ibid., 13.

be vehicles toward ethical actions. Unfortunately, "contemporary Christianity is impaled between a subjectivist and sentimental piety that results from fear of strong feeling, especially strong negative feeling, and an objectivist, wooden piety that suppresses feeling under pretentious conceptual detachment."[106] Harrison's main point is that "we Christians have come very close to killing love precisely because we have understood anger to be a deadly sin."[107] Anger, like all feelings, is a way to be in relation with the world. Anger is "a sign of some resistance in ourselves to the moral quality of the social relations in which we are immersed."[108] Anger generates an energy that people often convert into both positive and negative actions. Beverly Harrison recognizes its potential to have a powerfully positive impact on problems that are signaling a need for change. If anger is rejected, it "masks itself as boredom, ennui, low energy, or it expresses itself in passive-aggressive activity or in moralistic self-righteousness and blaming," however, "Anger expressed directly is a mode of taking the other seriously, of caring."[109]

Another problem Harrison raises is Christianity's overemphasis of sacrifice, which has confused our notion of relating to one another in the world. Harrison points to a better virtue within Christianity: "Life Jesus, we are called to a radical activity of love, to way of being in the world that deepen relation, embodies and extends community, passes on the gift of life."[110] We are to use our anger to confront wrongs and repair relationships. We are called to live in this world, know its joy, and offer it our care: "none of us were born only to die,...we were meant to have the gift of life, to know the

[106] Ibid., 14.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid., 15.
[110] Ibid., 18.

power of relation and to pass it on."[111] Harrison's view of the world and our place in it is realistic and authentic. If we renew our sense of creatureliness and reclaim sensuality, we find new and authentic meaning in our selves, our relationships, and the Sacred.

[111] Ibid., 20.

Conclusion (Revised)

In this paper, I have addressed a number of theological problems in relation to notions of human nature and sin. I have asked: Why and how are feminist theologians rehabilitating the typically sinful emotions of pride and anger in an effort to reestablish healthy connections with one's self, community, and the Sacred? We have seen doctrines of sin overemphasize the sin of pride, characterize the essentialism of women, and displace sensuality. Critics of these doctrines have misinterpreted, clarified, expanded, and reclaimed such problems. Finally, I have seen the development of reestablishing connections with myself, my sister, and the Sacred.

Now, what does all this mean for me as a feminist, a theologian, a sister, or a human? Simply, this all means that I do not have to choose between any of these roles. I can be the same person regardless of the role I find myself in at any particular time, and if I decide to wear all these hats at once, they will not contradict each other. I can be a woman without forcing a humility-focused theology on myself. I can be a theologian articulating my beliefs to a sister, who holds a very different perspective. I can be a sister living with a different notion of humanity and self-image. I can be proud, and I can be angry.

A few weeks ago, I sent Katy a letter directly addressing my feelings about our different opinions concerning Christianity and human nature. I told her that I am not the same person I used to be, and thus, we no longer agree on the same things that we once did. I told her that despite the fact that we are in different places, we can set our disagreements aside and find other ways to relate. I said that I felt judged by her at times

and that hurt me. My words were honest, and I ended by saying that I still love and respect her.

Her response, also in the form of a letter, confirmed the existence of our perpetual roadblock. Even after finally *telling* Katy that I was hurt when she, at times, judged me, she was still not able to respond without positioning herself above me in her hierarchy of who is right. She attempted to address my concern by saying "Please forgive me if I have made the impression of judging you in any way."[112] However, she followed this up with a contradicting statement about her real motive: "My intention is only to challenge you because I love you. I want the best for you....If you indeed respect me, as you say, please read what I have to say and do what I ask."[113] All I could think was: Am I playing follow the leader? To question authority, for Katy, is to act with pride; it is a sin.

Among others, Katy points to Proverbs 16:18: "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." Without knowing it, she asserts Augustine's claim that pride is the beginning of all sin.[114] Katy also cites Isaiah 2:11-12: "The haughty eyes of people shall be brought low and the pride of everyone shall be humbled; the Lord alone will be exalted in that day. For the Lord of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up and high." Again without knowing it, her ideas are like Augustine in noting pride's contrast to humility, which is Augustine's preferred way of submitting to God's will.

So now, how do I respond? Do I reply with verses like "[God] chose our heritage for us, the pride of Jacob whom he loves" (Psalm 47:4) or "I often boast about you; I

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[112] Katy Vicory, personal communication, May 13th, 2002.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Augustine quotes Sirach 10:13a: "For the beginning of pride is sin, and the one who clings to it pours out abominations.'"

have great pride in you; I am filled with consolation" (2 Corinthians 7:4) showing an alternative definition of the word? Most likely, this reply would only begin a petty fight where Bible verses were tossed around, which were essentially interpreted differently to begin with. This method of response would not be effective. Looking to our feminist critics, we find ideas about where to begin this discussion just as they began the discussion so long ago.

Valerie Saiving begins by saying that there is something missing if theology discusses notions of sin and human nature based solely on the male experience, which has been focused around the problem of pride.[115] She begins to note some things in the feminine experience, such as the "underdevelopment or negation of the self,"[116] that are not addressed by theology. Plaskow looks more closely at what is missing in the exclusion of women's experiences from theology, specifically in Reinhold Niebuhr's theology.

Plaskow argues that Niebuhr underemphasized the sin of sensuality in relation to his large emphasis on the sin of pride. She calls sensuality a woman's primary sin, in that society expects women to fulfill certain functions and their participation obeying and submitting to such expectations leads to women's dismissal of their own freedom. Also, Plaskow begins to expand sensuality's definition through lifting up creaturely activities as opportunities of positive engagement in the world: "the mother will have the

[115] The male experience and the problem of pride is modeled in Augustine's doctrine of sin and notion of human nature.
[116] Saiving, 37.

opportunity to appreciate in a concrete way the constant needs, the natural processes of growth and change, her child shares with other living things."[117]

Finally, Susan Dunfee renames and clarifies Niebuhr's notion of sensuality in an effort to include women's experiences more accurately in traditional theological definitions of sin. Dunfee renames Niebuhr's sin of sensuality the "sin of hiding," which she defines using Niebuhr's broadest sense of sensuality "the escape *from* one's freedom."[118] Dunfee asserts that this escape from freedom redirects one into nothingness, a concept Augustine understood but did not explicitly expand on as Dunfee does. For a woman to confess and be accountable to her sin of hiding, Dunfee argues, she is then able to enact change in a sexist world. All of these women would agree that loving one's self is essential in engaging in positive worldly experiences and enacting change toward justice in the world.

Though feminists have moved beyond many of the ideas that Valerie Saiving, Judith Plaskow, and Susan Dunfee bring to light, these three women have set the groundwork for our cyclical problem. People like my sister are not rare. Her belief that all self-assertion is pride and thus sinful, still exists in today's society. Many people still believe that anger only results in violence. In order to respond to those who have this belief, we cannot simply jump in quoting Beverly Harrison. Together, we must find a common place to meet and use a common language even if we do not collectively agree on all of the details. At the very least, we can build a bridge and wave to each other on opposite sides, and I am not trying to *set up* an "us" and "them" dichotomy. We have all

[117] Plaskow, 72. Plaskow reminds us, "This is not to suggest that the mother is the only one or the 'natural' one to care for the child, or that childcare is a 'natural' activity."
[118] Dunfee, 318.

categorized and created dichotomies for a long time with comments like: We are liberal, and they are conservative. We are right; they are wrong, and vice versa.

I am trying to set the scene for dialogue between such opposites. It is my hope that looking to these three feminists we will be able to begin enacting Harris's theology instead of just quoting it. Harrison, Niebuhr, and Augustine all call us to engage in the world. Saiving, Plaskow, and Dunfee give us the material to begin engaging with those who have different perspectives like my sister. Without these three women, a bridge would not exist between Augustine, Niebuhr (on one side), and Harrison (on the other). Though my sister and I may not yet be ready to meet each other at a common place to discuss these issues of pride and anger respectfully, we have started the conversation. The opportunity to positively invest in the world will exist when we collectively commit to learning from each other whether we agree or not.

Many times, concepts like pride and humility are used under the assumption the one's self is loved and cared for. We must not assume that this is the case. If we are told to "love your neighbor as yourself," (Leviticus 19:18b) what if one does not love one's self? To not properly care for one's self creates difficulty in caring for others. Relationships become inauthentic. A certain amount of pride in one's self is an essential component in forming authentic relationships with other, even with the Sacred. Finding one's anger is an effective step toward breaking the cycle of this "sin of hiding." If we live in the world and sense it, as Harrison suggests, it is very important that we recognize, validate, and attach our feelings to the broken relationships we have with our selves, others, and the Sacred.

I continue to move through apathy toward finding value in myself and the world, thus, creating authentic relationship with myself, with others, and with the Sacred. We can all learn how to communicate honestly without getting suspicious of powerful feelings and assuming that negative feelings cause destruction. We can discover that anger signifies a form of care and proves its care through positive actions that amend problems. Anger is a sign that we care about the world. It allows humans to take each other seriously and not to expect a perfect relationship. Self-annihilation can be transformed by the empowerment of pride and anger.

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