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THE ETHICAL IMPERATIVES WHICH EMERGE FROM A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON DISINTEGRATION AT THE END OF LIFE

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THE ETHICAL IMPERATIVES WHICH EMERGE FROM A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON DISINTEGRATION AT THE END OF LIFE

by

LEONORA RYAN MONTGOMERY

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE:

James E. Sellers, Professor of Religious Studies

Niels C. Nielsen, Jr., Professor and Chairman, Religious Studies

William C. Martin, Professor of Sociology

Houston, Texas

December, 1984
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1985
ABSTRACT

THE ETHICAL IMPERATIVES WHICH EMERGE
FROM A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON DISINTEGRATION
AT THE END OF LIFE

by

Leonora Ryan Montgomery

For aged people the end of life can be expected to
include a period of physical and sometimes mental
disintegration. In America these people are often isolated;
they become social outcasts. Their plight has grave
consequences for the maintaining of community and creates
dread of the future in all the community's members.

Physiology studies, social science research, and
biographical accounts suggest that social attitudes toward
disintegration of the frail elderly worsen their morale and
physical condition, diminishing the potential of their
lives. In Judaeo-Christian doctrine persons are to care for
one another universally, regardless of condition. This
universalism has not been adequately extended to the end of
the life span. Judaeo-Christian doctrine also teaches that
all human beings are alienated from the divinity of which
they are a part—an alienation which calls for continuous
reconciliation with the Creator and with fellow creatures,
even to the end of life under physical and mental 
limitations.

Reconciliation is here translated as *homecoming*, a term 
which has both a transcendent and worldly significance. The 
Judaeo-Christian doctrines of universalism and of 
reconciliation establish an imperative to create an 
environment for the elderly in which reconciliations can 
take place. Analysis of space, time and interpersonal needs 
suggest that the best site for very old people is the good 
home. A barrier to providing this environment for the frail 
elderly is identified as a misunderstanding in American 
society of the values ascribed to intellect and to 
vocational achievement. These values are valid, but not as 
criteria of human worth across the life span. A 
realignment, placing greater value on family, home, home-
making and home-sustaining, would result in different 
decisions in the care of the disintegrating elderly, and a 
shift in the focus of technology to support families caring 
at home for an elder which would allow for a better chance 
of homecoming, of belongingness, and of greater contentment 
at the end of life. It should also result in reducing the 
guilt and anxiety of those charged with care of the elderly 
and reassurance about their own future.
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

To the memory of
my husband and life partner
Jeff.

My husband, from whom I never needed to be liberated, took pleasure in this scholarship enterprise of mine from the beginning and systematically restrained from prodding when my progress slowed. He left that to a few close friends and I appreciated both kinds of help.

I am grateful also for the contribution of the seven grandchildren I picked up along the way for buffering me from that depression which normally threatens when the end is not in sight. It was fun for me to see the pride my children and in-law children began to exhibit as I approached completion (even as I was touched by the daughter who gave me permission not to finish.)

I wonder whether Drs. Sellers, Nielsen and Kelber will ever know how much I appreciated the riches of their classes and how much encouragement I received from a quiet, timely comment here and there. Thanks, finally, to my young colleagues, who shared trials, successes, scholarship finds, critical ideas, and enduring friendship--my comrades in dissertation writing.
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... when you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go."
"
--John 21:18
INTRODUCTION

Rationale

The Problem

For aged people the end of life can be expected to include a period of physical or mental disintegration, sometimes both. In American society these people are often isolated; they become social outcasts. Their plight is having grave consequences for the maintaining of community and is creating dread of the future in all the community's members. Until theories of human nature and of the human life span take disintegration into account they will not reflect the universality theme and the doctrine of reconciliation with the outcast which are part of the Judaeo-Christian teachings. What are the pressures on the American family that a decision to separate mentally deteriorating old people has become normal?

Need for a Shift in the American Ethos

To rectify the situation there must be a shift of emphasis in the American ethos from its present valuation of intellect and achievement toward a strengthening of its valuation of home. Home making and home sustaining
presently give way to the demands of vocational progress and the importance of rational thought. The limits of these latter values need to be reconsidered in the light of Judaeco-Christian doctrines of human nature. The theological understanding of human beings includes the assertion that God calls human creatures to reconciliation with their creator. This reconciliation presupposes a deep and primal alienation. Reconciliation is interpreted in this dissertation for contemporary purposes as homecoming. Homecoming furnishes here the basis for a doctrine of human life more faithful to Christian principles and more fruitful for the aged. If the ultimate vocation of human beings—all of them, even the old who are mind-impaired—is homecoming, then Christian ethics in its dimension of social responsibility must call for secular environments in which spiritual homecoming is possible. Earthly homes, whether they be family homes, hometowns, homes for the aged, or nursing homes, are called upon to approximate the place where the impaired, aged person can feel the belongingness which the Christian faith promises. These homes must at the same time create an environment in which other inhabitants as well as the aged can move toward reunion with God and one another.

The term homecoming suggests, first of all, a place—an environment, a space, an identifiable area. It also implies a place shared by one's own people, thus a place where one
belongs or has belonged. Homecoming, however, may have sole reference to a group with a focal point—thus it may refer to a family with enduring identity even though that family shifts from place to place, just as it may conjure a place deserted by a family. Homecoming may mean the voyage toward home, a dynamic movement. For some people this movement is conceived as a movement forward toward a planned-for future. For others it is thought of as a rounding upon one's past, a circling back toward whence one came. Homecoming is also used in a sense of wholeness, of satisfaction at last, of welcome, of reunion, of reconciliation, of wholehearted mutual acceptance between the self and those who matter to the self in greatest intimacy. Reference to homecoming as the place of life after death will not be used in this dissertation unless so stated. Specific meanings of the term "homecoming" will be identified either by context or, when necessary, explicitly.

It is possible to recover from the history of earlier societal and individual allegiances, facets of the metaphors of home, intellect and achievements which are neglected in contemporary American life. Such analysis must consider the relationships between these metaphors and determine what their relative strengths for calling forth human action have been and what they should be. When these valences are realigned, a human partnership can develop in which the aged, even the confused and memory-impaired, may find a more
contented place and those who have not suffered this
deterioration will cease to live their lives as ones who
dread the future.

Inadequacy of Secular Meaning Systems

The social sciences in the past decade, together with
social services, have repeatedly called for reform in
attitudes toward the aged, but in a fragmentary way. These
need the unifying rationale and the communal support of a
shared larger vision which can only be provided, it will be
argued, within the religious meaning system. This goal
offers an appropriate task for Christian ethics.

Contemporary meaning systems are largely secular,
especially among the schooled middle class. People
understand themselves, their relationships, in the parlance
of physiology, psychology, sociology--through the prisms of
the sciences and the social sciences, popularly transmitted
by way of the communications media. But in America at the
same time another way of looking at the world is operant, or
at least there is a historical memory of it. This is the
religious meaning system (Berger, 1967:25), which has
Judaean-Christian roots and incorporates a "protestant
principle" (Tillich; 1951:37; 1957:4, 245). This principle
allows it for purposes of ethics to be open-ended and able
to interpret anew its traditional theological symbols
without destruction of the total meaning system. Christian
ethics assumes the responsibility, therefore, for pointing out erroneous understandings which invariably result in some form of alienation of individuals or groups from the transcendental source of their being and concomitantly (and more visibly) from each other.

Social attitudes are fostered by the meaning system within which they are held (Winter, 1966: 140). Shared meaning is often distilled in metaphors which represent value to members of society and which in turn promulgate certain values. Metaphors, therefore, are tillable soil for ethical analysis, for there one can uncover what is being valued in American attitudes and given allegiance in societal and individual conduct (Parks: 14-35; Sellers, 1976:101, 115). If attachment to certain metaphors is working against the ultimate best interests of some people, they are morally inadequate and need to be de-emphasized, re-aligned, or sometimes cast aside. On the other hand, if there are metaphors important to human welfare slipping out of the moral consciousness of the people, the religious ethics analyst can attempt to restore these to public awareness and explain their significance for the general welfare. It is contended here that the metaphors of progress and achievement, and of reason and intellect are exemplars of the first category; their limits need to be defined and the excesses done in their name revealed. Additionally it is here claimed that among metaphors which
have lost ground in the American psyche, leaving a pervasive discontent, is the metaphor home—or, in its more dynamic form, homecoming. It has its place in secular and in theological thinking and therefore lends itself to religious ethical analysis.

Method

Lonergan's Method

The method to be followed as this dissertation proceeds will seem at first complex. It can best be explained as an adaptation of Bernard Francis Lonergan's method in theology, outlined in his book by that name.

Lonergan's claim begins with nature, with what is given to human beings in their constitution. Lonergan finds that there is in all persons a basic pattern of operations—that human consciousness has four "levels". These levels he identifies as the empirical, the intellectual, the rational, and the responsible. Thus our consciousness of the world operates in four stages. (These stages are not necessarily sequential; they are sometimes nearly simultaneous.) In the first stage every person turns his or her attention to selected parts of a constant flow of empirical data all about. Thus we attend, or pay attention to, through our senses, certain aspects of the world. We do more; in the second stage we endow them with meaning, taking them into a
meaning system by virtue of our intellect and the work of our intelligence. This is not all, however. In the third stage we submit that meaning to a rational process because we are gifted with reason. That is, we test our understanding of that which has been attended for truth and validity. For example, on seeing what appears to be a stick half-submerged in a pool we are conscious of more than visual perceptions of light and form variations. We recognize stick-in-water, a stick which appears as bent. Having, in addition to the power to attend and the power to assign meaning, also the power of reason to assess the former, we are able to correct the impression that the stick is bent when in fact it is not, but only appears to be so in the water. The final stage is to be responsible: to respond in attitude and behavior in view of what was seen, understood, and validated (Lonergan: 16 and chapter 5). It is clear, however, that the success of the last depends upon the first three stages. To be morally responsible—that is, to be able to respond as one should—will be unlikely if inadequate attention, intelligence or rationality is exercised.

An interpolation is called for here, as a contradiction may appear to the reader. Because ethical analysis is an intellectual process this does not invalidate the thesis that intellect is wrongly used as a lifetime (lifelong) test of a human being's worth. A person can live the life of a
moral human being, it will be argued later, even without access to full intellectual power. The work of an ethical analyst belongs only to that part of his or her lifetime which permits of such intellectual work.

Adaptation for Ethics

Lonergan's method thus suggests a derivative method for doing ethics, that one must attend, assign meaning, validate or invalidate that meaning, and act in accordance with the results. Relying upon this formula, I will first make use of the descriptive sciences and social sciences to determine the situation of the mentally impaired aged in contemporary American life. Some of this material will reflect the status of aged people in America whether or not mentally impaired before narrowing to the sub-group. It will be important to identify the meaning system within which this research has been done and in which it is presented for us. In addition, I will consult the self descriptions of the old (Blythe; Sarton; Beauvoir; Knierim). With the help of the last descriptions, and in compliance with Lonergan's stage three, I will suggest a more suitable system than the social sciences by which to give meaning to what we experience when old, or when dealing with the impaired elderly. Finally I will propose what responsible actions are called for in view of this truer understanding.
Accordingly, the outline of my dissertation moves from Chapter One, attention to some of the descriptive data of the physiological and social sciences together with some autobiographical views from the elderly, through Chapter Two, a theological perspective on human nature and human behavior derived from Judaeo-Christian doctrines, to a final Chapter Three, on the ethical imperatives which emerge from seeing the descriptive data in theological perspective. In other words, the plan I have set out is a natural progression from problem, through theological perspective which sets the stage for a different societal attitude about aging, with an analysis of the barriers hampering such a change. Lønnergan's method in theology offers both a physiological and a theological foundation for this method, which provides a corroborative warrant for proceeding as I do.

**On Chapter One: Descriptive Data**

Chapter One will provide descriptive data regarding the mentally impaired aged and the interaction of these people with others. First, however, I want to explain my choice of this sub-group of the aged population. Why dwell especially on those old people who are mentally impaired?
Reason for Choice of Mentally Impaired

When a middle aged person in America is asked, "Would you like to live a long life?", the answer is almost invariably some version of, "Yes, but only if I have my health and my wits." The fear of losing one's health is often engendered by the consequent dependency on the care of others which is perceived as an unwanted and unfair burden upon one's children, friends or marriage partner. If it is a threat to one's self esteem to be dependent on others, it is a terrifying threat to think of being mentally impaired. Failure of rational thought, conversation, and behavior is humiliating in an achievement-oriented, scientific society. The specter of losing one's mental powers is grounded in the subsequent loss of connectedness with people, places, order and one's past. It is compounded by anxiety over a particular kind of demanding care which irrational persons are seen to require of their caretakers. Moreover, both conditions ignite a dread in the core of each of us--that we might be removed from the place of our choice to spend years in a nursing home surrounded by helpless and "senile" old people with all the losses of freedom and depression of one's spirits which that entails. It is these images, I believe, which inform American attitudes toward aging, even while we try to celebrate and take consolation from that sizable group of old people who so far remain mentally alert and manage to retain their energies, and therefore their
choices, into late age. I choose the hard case, not simply because it is almost never addressed in problems of aging or ethical issues (except in a medical context, which is perilously limited in scope), but because I think it is the key to a mature view of human life. Any life not truncated by accident ends not in wisdom and integrity. With rare exceptions it ends in disintegration (or "decentralization"; Bakan, 1968: 31-53)—a process which may be fairly short or may be prolonged over years. Human finitude is not marked solely by death; it is made up of a series of final irretrievable losses, most of which are entwined with, if not constituted of, disintegration of mind and body at the end. How should we think of ourselves in view of this likelihood? How shall we deal with each other as these conditions overtake one after another of us? Are there any earthly alienations as fearsome as that which presently sets in between the mentally impaired elderly and others? If this is the possible future for any one of us, then we must gamely give attention to that reality. Such reality reopens questions about the meaning of life. Can Judaeo-Christian doctrines provide an adequate response? We are constantly faced with decisions as those we care about deteriorate in late life and as we prepare for our own futures. Is it enough for Christian ethics to secure itself behind injunctions to be fair and to be caring?
I have, pursuant to these reflections, concluded that what we must squarely look at in American society is the plight of the mentally impaired aged. They must be rescued from alienation; and we must be rescued from a self-limiting understanding of the human situation.

**Old Individuals**

**Physiology of Aging**

Fortunately there are disciplines of study which, aiming to be value-free and consequently non-judgmental, have attempted objective descriptions of the aged population. These descriptions include the very old who show sensory deficits and whose behavior reflects the changed relationships with the world which usually follow. One result of this research is that medical science no longer so easily ascribes the cause of patient symptoms merely to old age but increasingly looks for pathologies to treat /1/. Deterioration in each of the body systems can be described, with its disruptions and effects on the life of the old person. Diseases which plague old age are investigated and documented in medical literature. Much attention is being given to sensory losses. In this fashion many ailments and deficiencies considered irreversible have responded to treatment or to adaptive devices with improved well-being for the afflicted old person (Birren, 1978a; 27).
Physicians, however, are caught by their society in a vicious circle. If they can improve the physical condition of a patient with irreversible mental impairment they know that they are prolonging the life of a difficult, often depressed, patient, one who will require a particularly skillful and long-suffering kind of care. Such care may be very expensive, pre-empting funds needed elsewhere. Consideration of family and caretakers may result in a physician's recommending nursing home care. Some physicians also ask themselves: would benign neglect of the physical ailment be a wiser and more compassionate course? At this point the physician has moved into the field of ethics informed by medical science.

Data from the physical sciences is useful for our inquiry in two additional contexts. Advances in medical technology show how diet, exercise, and stress reduction can help prevent or slow the advance of some diseases which lead to physical and mental impairment in time, as, for example, circulatory disorders. To what extent hereafter will the aged be responsible for the indulgences of earlier years? Other technological advances show how some afflictions once thought incurable can be treated with ameliorating consequences. They help distinguish between what can and cannot be helped. In another context medical information reveals how dependent almost every person is on physicians for avoidance of pain and prolongation of life, how
physicians and patients are caught in a web of expectation and response far beyond the reasonable acceptance of the boundaries of disability and mortality (Illich, Becker). Consideration of the medical profession and its power in American society and over the American psyche, buttressed by the demands of the general public, reveals furthermore the priority given to medical technology for the treatment of institutionalized patients, rather than to the patients themselves. This focus on technology in the interest of the patient's health rather than on more inclusive concerns for the patient's goals, of which health may be only one, is characterized by the objection of some medical societies to the establishment of hospices for the care of the dying.

Research in the physical sciences provides, however, an underlying, uncompromising picture of aging, eventually deteriorating body systems which include the functioning of the brain within the nervous system (Lipton; Ratzen, 36). I will not address the theory that old age is merely a disease and that in time, with enough physiological know-how, life can be prolonged indefinitely. Even if realistic, such theories are no warrant for turning away from the dilemmas created by our present and near-future conditions. The biological disintegrations which are under-way with advancing years may affect sensory capacities, control over body functions, and the individual's mobility (Eisdorfer: 1978). The concern of the physiological sciences is to
determine the nature and causes of these negative changes in
order to show how they may be avoided or postponed by
preventive medicine or change in personal life habits and to
show how they may be reversed or counteracted through
treatment or the help of adaptive devices (dentures, lenses,
artificial limbs and prostheses, hearing aids, etc.).
Physical science does not take up the assignment of
prescribing for acceptance of the finitude of life itself.
Research does sometimes report on the physiological effects
on the course of disease by differing attitudes held by the
elderly ill toward their illness.

Psychology of Aging

The studies of psychology and psychiatry inquire into
the interpersonal relations of the old and into the morale
of people as they become old and incapacitated. This
literature describes the impact of losses of all kinds,
including the depression characteristic of so many very old
people (Berezin and Stanley; Eisdorfer and Powell; Lipton
and Nemeroff). It also investigates the adaptability of
some who fare better. The interaction between those old
persons whose behavior has changed with sensory losses and
slipping morale, and those who serve or associate with them,
is of special concern for ethics. The descriptive data
deals with the psyche of the old—-the loss of self-esteem,
shifts of identity and sense of selfhood, loss of internal
and external controls. This research lifts the curtain dropped by the word "senility" and shows us, often inadvertently, how those who deal with the aged are implicated in their depression and anti-social behavior.

Sociology of Aging

Sociology views the problem of the aged with a view to the larger social setting. Social roles ascribed to all individuals in a group reveal the interdependence of the group's members and what cooperative sharing of tasks will allow each member of the group to thrive. The elderly come off no better viewed sociologically. The social description of the old in America is generally characterized by discussion of loss of roles, loss of status, loss of power, anomie (non-recognition of the rules of society) and anti-social behavior. This data suggests that society as a whole has a responsibility for the malaise of any sub-group (Burgess; Butler; 1975, 1978).

Anthropology of Aging

Anthropology studies seek to show us not only some cross cultural traits of aging but also how the biological event of aging is influenced by the cultural setting in which it occurs. It is this discipline which undertakes to describe efforts to adapt to aging in the broadest social context and to show the extent to which adaptation is the
result of cultural conditioning. Eisdorfer and Lawton, in recommendations to the 1971 White House Conference on Aging, referred to the stereotyped attitudes of the public toward aging and the negative attitudes of the elderly toward themselves (1973, Introduction ix-xiv). As Clark and Anderson put it, "What are the shared symbolic understandings—the beliefs, values, goals, and even perceptions of reality—that bind us together into one vast society with uncountable interdependencies?" Anthropology has only in recent years asked about the meaning of old age in this culture.

Scholars in these disciplines sometimes worry, however, about the potential narrowness or limits to their views and thus the adequacy of their explanations of human behavior. This modesty has spurred several interdisciplinary approaches in the sciences of human behavior. One of these is the field theory approach in which behavior is looked at through several lenses: the physical (body as well as outer environment), the social setting and the cultural milieu (Yinger). Encounter with broader views than the strictly medical one has brought forth another approach called holistic, or wholistic, medicine. The field of psychology has given rise to a concern of some of its members who have organized a "humanistic psychology"—an effort to break out of a tendency to fragment the view of a human being through psychological research specialization. In introducing the
book The Psychology of Adult Development and Aging, its editors Carl Eisdorfer and M. Powell Lawton point out that in contrast to the traditional approach of describing behavioral changes in aging the book gains from incorporating several etiological models. They recognize a need for an interdisciplinary approach so that the results of basic research can be translated into applied programs (v).

Ethology and Aging

The study called ethology proposes that there are certain genetic imperatives characteristic of human beings (such as territoriality, hiding and venturing forth, aggression) which impel people to behave in certain ways. Unless these compulsions are recognized and understood, they may result in unfair expectations by society of the elderly whose freedom to behave as desired by their caretakers may be limited by these traits (Senn and Steiner).

Autobiography and Aging

An entirely different way to learn what it is to be old, even old and mind-impaired, is to let these people speak for themselves. This phenomenological method fits what Lonergan had in mind when he spoke of attending a phenomenon. It is a way to let the preconceived notions, mindsets, limiting theoretical stances, fall away and to
listen with empathy at the feeling level, to the old person (Rogers). There are diaries, journals, autobiographical works, expressive old friends to help. In almost a new literary genre Ronald Blythe, in his book *The View in Winter*, brings together an extraordinary collection of life histories, philosophies and attitudes, descriptions of reality, and views of the past and present from an elderly population in an English village. His vignettes pile one upon another to correct the impression of stereotypes one may get from folklore and even from social science research, which after all looks for patterns in the behavior of many individuals. While he documents the gradual decline of physical and mental powers, Blythe convincingly shows the uniqueness, the endless complexity and variety of experiences of old age. Until quite recently this wisdom has been unvalued, unrecognized, and untapped in America. The Smithsonian Institution recently sent representatives on a national tour, one purpose of which was to teach communities how to interview the elderly members of a family in order to recover family chronicles.

In addition to descriptive data about the old and the mentally impaired old it will be necessary for this study to consider those who deal with these people at the personal level—primarily those persons on whom they are dependent, their caretakers (Zarit; Birren: 106). These latter have rights as well as duties, they suffer their own alienations
and are on the same search for reconciliation or belongingness as those they care for. Moreover, since the difficulties of the old are often in relation to others it is this relationship which calls for scrutiny. The suppressed guilt of their children is not a small cost of our present way of dealing with aged parents.

Society and Old People

Furthermore, society itself must be taken into account and held accountable. For instance, social policy in expending public money for programs for the aged is ambivalent about whose responsibility it is to care for the dependent elderly. The social matter of security in one's home and in streets and public places is critical to the independent living of the very old and of growing concern to their children and neighbors. Frequently, aged people who could still manage alone in their own residences are moved because others have a concern for their safety. Welfare payments in the form of social security and Medicare and Medicaid are criticized on the one hand for being inadequate and on the other hand for threatening to bankrupt the public treasury allotted to that sector and driving up medical costs. There are counter claims upon the public purse.

Finally, one of the highest social costs of the plight of the impaired aged is the general anxiety about their own future which is engendered in younger members of the group.
First comes denial, then a foreshortened view of life's realities and finally loss of self-esteem as one passes into the social oblivion of the very old. This social isolation tempts exploitation and cruelty toward the helpless, compounded by resentment and guilt on both sides.

Theories Underlying Social Sciences

The view of human nature implicit in much of the descriptive sciences is limiting for the purpose of ethics. While ethics needs the information they provide and benefits from knowledge of the broader context in which they present their data, the empirical studies neither purport to nor are able to provide criteria for choices in an ethical dilemma. It is against the rules of the paradigm to raise questions about free will or refer to ultimate destiny or reality. The social sciences are descriptive. They suggest social reform but it is not in their purview to provide criteria for such reform (Bulmer). This suggests a shift to a religious meaning system.

On Chapter Two: The Theological Perspective

Movement from Social Science to Theology

Peter Berger's discourse in The Social Construction of Reality on meaning systems will provide the basis for explaining the shift from Chapter One to Chapter Two. Without making a case for the religious meaning system he
concedes that it has certain advantages. These advantages disclose the limitations and the risks of secular meaning systems and opens up for consideration the merits of a system which incorporates a transcending ultimate value. I will argue that only a religious meaning system allows the human imagination to transcend what is given in known or hitherto observed phenomena in order to consider what might be and, in view of that, what we might be called on to change. Only an imaginative glimpse of the perfect which surpasses what we find in secular existence can provide a critique of human action /2/.

Judaean-Christian Doctrines

America's understanding of human nature must change before we can resolve the problem of the impaired aged. Recognizing that our attitudes and conduct have roots in Judaean-Christian precepts, I will use these as a starting point. The section which follows will undertake to show that certain doctrines have not been faithfully observed—the doctrines of universality, of alienation and of reconciliation which began with the creation myths of Genesis. For discussion of the theological doctrines mentioned I rely on theologians John Macquarrie and Paul Tillich and the theoretical work of sociologist, Peter Berger.
Results of Searching the Literature

After a search of the literature to determine whether these long studied and analyzed doctrines of Christian theology have been applied to the problem of the isolated aged of our time, I find no direct applications. In reviewing theologies of aging or essays on this subject, I will discuss what meaning is given to aging and how it may be related to doctrines of alienation and reconciliation.

A theology of aging by James Luther Adams and essays toward a theology of aging edited by Seward Hiltner have emerged in my search, as well as one letter by a Catholic theologian, Paul Claudel, to the inmates of a French Hospital for Incurables, which constitutes a brief theology of suffering. While I have not found any theology of "homecoming" as such /3/, contemporary theologians do incorporate interpretations of reconciliation in their writings. The use of such terms as reconciliation, salvation, fulfillment, reunion, wholeness, and belonging sometimes correlate with my use of the term "homecoming". I have chosen to explore John Macquarrie's treatment of Christian reconciliation (especially 1966, 268-73), Paul Tillich's writing on reunion (1967, III, 266-94) and James Sellers' on wholeness (1966:54-65).

It is my contention, however, that any theology of homecoming must take into account the possibility of physical or mental disintegration at the end of life. Such
a statement is a radical one as it would require a shift in our societal value system, if true. If human beings have worth in the sight of God their whole lives through, in every condition, they must have value in each other's sight their whole lives through.

On Chapter Three: Homecoming and the Ethical Imperative

The meaning of homecoming emerges in relating its theological to its secular uses.

Since any Christian doctrine of human nature must take into account the human state of existential alienation—shall we say, the longing for something inestimably better—and its correlate, the universal call to reconciliation—that for each of us it can yet be very good—then a theology of homecoming must include all persons of all conditions, even the mentally impaired aged.

If the isolation of so many old people can be relieved, if all people want to see them fare better and feel assured that they in their time will fare better, why is this society moving in that direction so slowly?

Barriers to Homecoming

While no person can guarantee his own or another's homecoming, it appears that there are barriers created by individuals and groups which impede such progress. It is
the task of social ethics to look for these; they should be identified and removed.

Change in the attitude of society toward the impairments of old age and in the attitude of the old toward their own conditions cannot be helped until there is a change in the American psyche about home, home-making and sustaining home over time. The proper valuation of home will not happen until the limits to the value of achievement and intellect are identified and accepted.

Vocational Achievement as Metaphor

Achievement and intellect are selected as metaphors, or value clusters, which operate as particular barriers for the well being of the mentally impaired aged because they represent for them irreplaceable losses and losses of powers which carry high value in American society and technology. These metaphors need analysis if we are to see when and to what extent they should be valued and how social esteem for them should be balanced against esteem for home and the activities which sustain the home. In this analysis I will discuss limitations to the value of achievement and intellect, comparing these to the universality across time and human condition of the concept of homecoming.
Achievement as a Distorted Value

In an analysis of the metaphor of achievement the focus here is on vocational achievement. If the whole society values those who earn their way in the world by producing goods and services or otherwise providing for the needs and wants of others in return for provisions for themselves and their dependents, then the person who is able to achieve this economic goal has worth for society. This valuation may be extended to include derivatively those who enable the provider to achieve. If, however, vocational achievement is the key criterion of worth in this society, there is the possibility that each of us will outgrow his or her worth—that when one can never be employed again, or serve as a volunteer, a producer without pay, that person's value diminishes in his or her own mind as well as in the view of those whose approval sustains and nourishes the aging person. The opposing theories of disengagement and activity as theories which seek to explain contentment or discontent in old people throw light on this matter (Cumming and Henry, Havighurst, Neugarten and Tobin).

Intellect as Metaphor

In like manner we need to analyze the metaphor of intellect showing how society and its members are indebted to the Enlightenment and its repercussions and then how, nevertheless, a valuing of intellect can be distorted with
negative results in the estimations of worth of some human beings. "Intellect" as a metaphor will refer to that group of meanings associated with intelligence, rational thought, clear thinking—those activities of human reason understood as the necessary origin of the fruits of our communal life—political, economic and domestic.

In contending that reason and the intellect are inadequate criteria for valuing human worth I am not arguing for the affective dimension of human nature as opposed to the cognitive. Nor is it an argument for intellectual egalitarianism in line with one recurring strain of "anti-intellectualism" (Hofstadter). It is not a claim that American society fully values either intellect or reason. Indeed, there are times of national confusion (Vietnam, public assassinations, Watergate) when reason seems to run to cover. The case argued here is for recognition of the limitation appropriate to the valuing of intellect.

Relating Intellect and Achievement

In justifying my choice of intellect and achievement as distorted values which constitute barriers to homecoming it remains to show the relation between these two values. The American ethos has been notably shaped by the American pragmatists. John Dewey, an exemplar, argued, for instance, that intelligence was not the original shaper or final cause of things but acts as the purposeful, energetic reshaper of
what obstructs the well being of society (51). He saw experience as the proper originating ground of new truth; experience is the test of its validity. Reason is thus employed to enrich experience. Dewey taught that a proposed principle of truth could be tested by considering its usefulness to society. Thus achievement could not emerge without the use of reason and reason must be employed to enrich individual and group experience, keeping the future open for reform and achievement. Accordingly, individuals were taught by their society to emulate achievers and clear thinkers. To this day we laud most among old people those who retain a foothold in the climb toward achievement and whose faculties, by good health care and heredity, remain alert. There are good societal reasons for rewarding mental acuity and activity into late life. Even so, we have neglected to acknowledge that one's place in the life cycle is an indispensable coordinate in the valuation of human worth.

The Ethical Imperatives

If vocational achievement and intellectual power are insufficient measures of a person's worth into old age, what then is a more enduring criterion? If, consistent with Judaeo-Christian teaching, the lasting goal is reconciliation with God and fellow creatures, and if this is experienced in the secular world as being at home where one
is, then creating and taking one's part in maintaining the good home should be the enduring criterion for valuing human worth.

The third chapter proposes that home-making and home-sustaining are necessary for the possibility of reconciliation with God. Home will be discussed as the earthly analogue to the place where the meaning of existence finds fulfillment. It will be argued that home has the best chance of being the place where "heaven and earth come together" and one feels a belonging to this earth, its people, its artifacts.

The Best Site for Reconciliation

Home is dynamic and therefore holds potential for continuing change and thus redemption. This also leaves its members free to make home the center of demonic influences: neglect, exploitation, exclusion, suffocation.

Home is, in addition, the communal arrangement which can nurture the dependents of society, the very young, the very old, the ill, the disabled and it is the site where the protectors can most effectively provide protection. This calls for a fresh alignment in society's valuation of economic providers and nurturing home makers and caregivers. It suggests that the latter have equal value as partners in a cooperative enterprise. My claim is that the economic sphere serves the family, not the other way around. It also
implies that family members should cooperate in a division of labor or be able to interchange or share roles in the interest of the family group.

The Negative Potential

The question has to be investigated why so many old people do not want to live with their children (Butler, 1975:105). Is this an insistence on freedom or a dread of going where one is not welcome?

Alternative Homes

The chapter will also discuss alternatives to home living. When an old person can no longer or wishes no longer to live in his or her own home and the home of a family member is not available, then the institutional home which takes the responsibility ought to be modeled on the family home. Too often these convalescent and nursing homes are organized on the hospital model; they are hierarchical, authoritarian environments. The loss of freedom which can be tolerated by the patient in hospital care in the expectation of an early recovery and release, in the final care nursing home makes life, for many, an incarceration.

Criteria for the Good Home

Finally, Chapter Three will discuss the characteristics of home which provide the possibility for spiritual
homecoming for all its members including the mentally impaired aged. Using the categories of time, place and relationships the final section offers the criteria for the home which could meet the test of providing universally for people in any condition the setting in which alienations are reconciled and its members live with a sense of belongingness.
NOTES

INTRODUCTION

/1/ See Busse, especially his distinction between primary and secondary aging: 1977:9-10.

/2/ For a similar view with Old Testament references and interpretations see James Luther Adams (10).

/3/ In an unpublished master's thesis titled Spirituality and Homecoming: On the Way Toward Being at Home Where One Is, M. Gemma Pepera (1978) relates her theme to the vows of a sister in temporary vows in the novitiate. She discusses two aspects of homecoming to God—one as dwelling and one as journeying.
CHAPTER ONE

DESCRIPTIONS OF AGING

A brief account of the history of efforts to analyze the physiology of advancing old age will show that scientists, even today, have not settled on a simple cause or set of causes, much less a "cure" for the aging of the human body. It is an irreversible process which, barring sudden, accidental death, carries each of us along. Following the discourse on the physiology of aging is an exercise in looking at these described phenomena from the point of view of psychology, sociology, ethology and anthropology and through anecdotal descriptions from old persons themselves. Physiological changes are inevitable but the inroads they make on the health of an individual depend partly on the person's habits like exercise, diet and stress control, and partly on the individual's response to factors beyond his own initiating, like public attitudes toward aging which affect institutional arrangements and social and cultural norms. The purpose of this first chapter, therefore, is to show that physical degeneration adversely affecting the body and the brain is a predictable condition of old age in some degree; and at the same time to show that social attitudes and behavior can unnecessarily hamper the old individual's adjustment to these deficits and
even add to deterioration. Chapter two will deal with the need for change implicit in Judaeo-Christian values. In the third chapter there will be a discussion of the changes needed and of underlying attitudes which are a barrier to such changes. Until we have an honest understanding of what can and cannot be changed about old age can we know how to spell out a response to theologically grounded ethical demands upon us regarding our own old age and that of others who grow old in our company.

We are not far into life before we learn that we will die. Even barring fatal accident we know that our bodies are mortal. Excepting accidental death can we further say that each life which endures to old age ends in a period of disintegration? Certainly some form of physiological disintegration must supply the cause of death. Yet, this may be limited to one organic system unattended by loss of cognitive functioning and may have an outward manifestation so precipitous that such a terminally ill person may be thought of more as ill than as disintegrating. In very old age such circumstances, however, are unusual. And more and more of us may be expected to join the rapidly growing numbers of those who survive to late age. Does what is known of the physiology of aging for this age group force us to conclude that long life typically ends in a period of physical disintegration?
Physiology and Aging

Simone de Beauvoir reviews the history of the biology of old age in her work *The Coming of Age* (17-37). Hippocrates, she reports, was the first to separate medicine from magic and included old age in his comprehensive observations. He likened late age to winter and set its beginning at fifty-six. He accepted Pythagoras' view that the body incorporates the four humours--blood, phlegm, choler and black choler and theorized that old age, like illness, is explained by an imbalance in those humours. Aristotle thought that necessary inner heat was lost with aging. To the present time observers of old age have had a hard time deciding what characteristics of old persons were due to illness and what, if any, were due to "pure aging". Galen in the second century placed old age as somewhere between illness and health, not quite pathological but characterized by reduced physiological functions. The School of Salerno was the birthplace of Western medicine. The emphasis there was on preventive medicine; its physician's encouraged regimens for health and long life.

In the thirteenth century, however, Beauvoir continues, Roger Bacon asserted that old age was a disease. The study of anatomy, revived during a renaissance of science at the end of the fifteenth century, provided information about the physiology of old age but other aspects of medicine added little. Paracelsus, in the next century, held that human
beings were formed of a chemical compound and that old age was due to auto-intoxication, a theory echoed in today's study of immunology. David Pomis of Venice wrote the first clear descriptions of these diseases afflicting the old, including high blood pressure.

In the eighteenth century Gerard Van Swieten, a follower of Galen, wrote of the process of aging, looking upon it as an incurable disease. He was followed by those influenced by rationalistic and mechanistic thinking who claimed—a contention now thought to be mistaken—that the human organism is like a machine which wears out with use. Stahl viewed old age according to his vitalistic theory—it was explained by a weakening of an entity he called the vital principle. The Russian, Fischer, described the senile degeneration of the organs and the Italian, Morgani, correlated the clinical symptoms among the old to post-mortem findings. In the last decades of the eighteenth century, according to Beauvoir's review, the American physician Rush, a German, Hufeland, and Seiler published additions to the growing fields of works on the physical characteristics of late age. The first half of the nineteenth century saw advances in physiology and some comprehensive studies of old age were completed.

By the latter half of the century in France two large institutions for the care of the ill and the aged were established and provided the first large population of old
people for scientific clinical studies. In 1886 Charcot's lectures (given at one of these institutions) were published. The interest now shifted from regimens of prevention to the treatment of diseases of old age. By the twentieth century some research scientists were seeking causes for observed deterioration in old age. Some adopted the theory that it resulted from degeneration of the sexual glands; others that aging arteries was the cause; and still others that it resulted from a lowering of the metabolism.

The American Nascher, born in Vienna and reared in New York, organized the Society of Geriatrics. However, the subject matter of his first published findings was considered uninteresting. Later in the 20th century another science called Gerontology was developed. Whereas geriatrics was concerned with the pathology of old age, gerontology focused on the aging process in all its aspects. But until about 1930, according to Beauvoir, the subject was almost taboo. At that time, with the rising pressures of a growing over-65 population, industrial societies began to focus attention on the biological, psychological and sociological aspects of aging. After World War II active work in the field burgeoned. Associations formed, journals were published, international conferences held, research projects were provided with funds. Beauvoir points out the positivistic bias of this activity; it did not seek to explain the reasons but to give a synthetic description of
the phenomena attending old age. She concluded in 1972 that modern science looks on aging as "inherent in the life process, forming part of it in the same way as birth, growth, reproduction and death" (24).

As early, however, as 1922, during that period in America in which, according to Beauvoir, the subject was taboo, G. Stanley Hall, a well respected educator and psychologist, wrote a comprehensive work on aging, unfortunately no longer in print. He called it *Senescence; The Second Half of Life*. This was the culminating volume of a study which carried his scholarly attention across the life cycle from birth to old age. It was remarkable for the range of its perspectives, for the integrating principle behind his observations, and for the fact that he assembled the research and wrote his book when he himself was in his retirement years. He had previously served for thirty-one years as President of Clark University and was a pioneer in developmental psychology. Hall considered that he had entered old age at seventy when he was writing the book. The integrating principle of his study is his view of the potential social value of senescence (old age) and senectitude (very late age). His view is at odds with the twentieth century social attitude toward the elderly according to which old people have glided into a peaceful harbor and have only to cast anchor and be at rest.
Hall claims:

On the contrary, we feel that we have made landfall on a new continent where we must not only disembark but explore and make new departures and institutions and give a better interpretation to human life. Instead of descending toward a deep, dark valley, we stand in fact, before a delectable mountain, from the summit of which, if we can only reach it, we can view the world in a clearer light and in truer perspective than the race has yet attained (382).

Hall admitted to the great proviso, the question of strength and endurance. In all other essentials, the old person, he claimed, is more fit than ever before. "Age and death are nothing but fatigue advancing and finally conquering life" (382).

Hall devoted seventy pages to reviewing the contributions of biology and physiology to an understanding of old age. He examined one after another of the views of the causes of disintegration in the human organism: cells, body fluid, nervous system, vascular system, digestive and eliminating systems.

In a summary critique of these, he dismissed the following theories: keeping the tissues of the body young and growing by permanently lowering the temperature within the body, by differentiation of organs or functions (which would result in evolutionary regression). He acknowledged the partial truth value in various theories: that life
departs with breath; that oxidation of tissues is necessary to life; that "it is the brain or nervous system that dies first"; and that many human ills and deaths are amenable to cure or postponement by mind healers because they are mind-made. But only one theory held faint hope for "easement from the hardships of senescence and for the postponement of death." It was the faint and tentative hope that "some mitigation of the terrors of old age and death may be found by glandular implantation or perhaps even by the injection of the secretions of certain glands" (316-17). This in 1922.

Hall concluded:

Some of us will die from the top down with dementia more or less developed, while for others some vegetative organ will collapse and drag down with it all the rest of our powers, which might otherwise go on for a decade or two. These are the things that often make the old pessimistic. They are the secrets of age which must be kept from the young lest they interfere with their joy of life and which religion and philosophy have done their best from the beginning of history to mitigate (197).

Hall did add an encouraging reminder that:

The infirmities often attached to age may, each of them, in single cases be absent and therefore any one of them is far less prevalent than is generally supposed (202).
In a contemporary collection of essays on aging titled *Aging in America*, one of its editors, Cary S. Kart, outlined the physiology of aging (179-83). He emphasized the fact that biological aging occurs at different ages among individuals and at different rates. He also took note that the senescence we observe is not only a product of biology but also of demographic, economic, psychological and social factors.

His description of biological aging which can be observed in a typical population of old people began with the skin, which becomes rough, dry and wrinkled. He noted skeletal-muscular changes: stiffening of the joints, stooped posture, reduced height, decrease in muscle tissue, strength and coordination. Muscular efficiency, however, does not decline. The senses and reflexes deteriorate: vision, hearing, taste, smell and touch are adversely affected. Short-term memory is reduced "although long-term memory seems to be retained". There is about an eight percent loss of brain weight between ages 30 and 75. Occlusion or hardening of arteries causes circulatory problems in the brain with impaired speed of nerve impulses. Reaction times are slower and strokes, senility and psychological impairments often occur. Circulatory problems are a common cause of illness and death. Lung capacity decreases so that the typically maximum breathing capacity at age 75 is only forty-three percent of that at age 30.
While digestive difficulties often result from teeth and denture problems there is also a decrease in peristalsis of the intestines and mobility of the stomach causing deterioration of the digestive system. Furthermore, there are declines in the productive, temperature control and kidney filtration systems, the last being at age 75 about sixty percent of the rate at age 30. These comments and figures applied of course, to a group profile. Individuals manifest variations of these aging deficiencies.

The same collection of essays described the health of those centenarians of Abkhasia, the Soviet Georgian territory which produces a high percentage of men and women over age 90 in remarkably vigorous health /1/. These people rarely suffer arterial degeneration and are not prey to cancer. Their language does not have a phrase for old people; centenarians there are simply called "long living people." They attribute their successful aging to diet, work and active sexual life. Still, research observers report that in late age they "seem to lose strength gradually, wither in size and finally die" (Benet, 212-26). At least two other such communities have been discovered--both isolated, rural and situated in mountainous terrain.

Biological theories of aging in the present state of research still vary and overlap. Busse and Pfeiffer selected some of these to describe from the past as well as present (16-18). Busse points out that the human body is
composed of three components—dividing cells, non-dividing cells and interstitial material. Some theories focus on one or another of these three components of the body. An early biological explanation was the exhaustion theory—that the organism contained an amount of energy which dissipated over its lifetime. Another theory, no longer well supported is the accumulation of deleterious material. Yet it is akin to Henry's description of foreign substances in the brain which "plug up the works" (28). There is continuing controversy over whether the living organism has deliberate biological programming. One theory, derived from an engineering concept, is that of mean time to failure—that the organism's life is determined by the durability of its parts and that unless the parts are totally replaced the machine will inevitably fail. Associated with this is the accumulation of copying errors theory which proposes that duplicating cells occasionally develop errors which in time make it hard for the organism to repair itself. Cell studies have resulted in a variety of stochastic theories. These point to "a process or a series of events for which the estimate of the probability of certain outcomes approaches the true probability as the number of events increases". Thus radiation, by killing or causing mutation of cells, seems to accelerate aging. The composite theory developed by Howard J. Curtis holds that the body ages because of accumulating defective cells in organs where
cells are non-dividing. He defines aging as the increasing possibility of developing a degenerative disease. Finally, Busse reviews the cross-linkage theories which developed from the study of collagen, a major part of the body's connective tissue. Over time the ester bonds in collagen switch from within to between the collagen molecules, changing its elastic properties. There are, additionally, theories about the deleterious effects of changes over time in the body's immune system.

The year after Busse and Pfeiffer published their summary of the theories of aging current among physiologists investigating the aging process, Roy J. Shephard published Physical Activity and Aging in which he first reviewed in brief but technical detail the cellular considerations underlying the aging process (24-51). Shephard highlighted those issues which especially affect physical activity, the central concern of his book (126-35). The scientific progress described here was in the genetics of aging, the molecular basis, the metabolism of aging cells, tissue energy reserves and micro-structural alterations. On the cellular basis of aging Shephard concluded that there were so many hypotheses that no current view offered a complete explanation of the known facts of gerontology. Shephard did not think that future research would reveal a unitarian concept. "The death of an individual cell is a cumulative response to life's insults," he wrote. "Death of the whole
organism is the end-result of a progressive deterioration of function: death or malfunction of key cells gives an ever poorer homeostatic response, until a minor infection, a sudden exertion or a change in the external environment become sufficient to terminate life" (37). Shephard detailed the same general trend across the life span of the organism in system after system--physical involution, degeneration, disintegration.

Cerebral function in the aging process holds special interest for the argument of this thesis. As to the basis of altered brain activity, it seemed to Shephard that "the prime cause was a progressive death of neurons, although viable cells may also perform more poorly due to a loss of chromodiol substance and an accumulation of pigment granules" (120).

Shephard also commented that there is a progressive decrease of cell count with age in the post-mitotic tissue of the brain. In 1955 Brody had made cell counts in various regions of the brain, and noted the greatest loss to occur in the superior temporal gyrus. While some cells die from cumulative metabolic errors, a second factor is anoxic death (oxygen deprivation), secondary to athero-sclerosis of the cerebral blood vessels. In 1963 McFarland drew attention to the parallel between the effects of oxygen lack in a young person and the mental changes of senescence; in his view,
much of cerebral aging is an expression of progressive anoxia (Shephard: 51).

Shephard pointed out that many research findings show some limited or specific area in which the old organism seems to suffer no deficit. Thus long-term memory, he reported, may be better than in younger persons /2/. However, short-term memory deteriorates, there is difficulty switching from one item of information to another and back again, it is increasingly hard to handle several pieces of information at a time and the system is more easily overloaded. Psychomotor tasks become more difficult to perform. More cellular losses are found in certain areas of the brain which, when their function is disturbed, can cause loss of co-ordination, emotional problems, and tremors. The ability to handle sequential tasks is more adversely affected than with spatial problems. Perceptual tasks take longer. Reaction and movement times are slower. In research which studied the ability to discriminate and choose between visually cued alternatives, older subjects found it harder to learn which cues were critical to discrimination and also to ignore irrelevancy in a display. Shephard lists three scientific reports suggesting that decrements in nervous system functioning might be reversed by specific therapies but concludes: "Despite such reports, it seems fair to conclude that no real cure has yet been
described for age-related changes in the function of the central nervous system" (133).

In reviewing the etiology of depression with reference to aging, Lipton and Nemeroff said (48) that the biological psychiatrist views depression as a consequence of disordered neurotransmitter function with associated neuroendocrine malfunction.

Butler points out that mental impairment accounts for urinary and fecal incontinence, disorientation and confusion, and wandering from home. These behaviors make severe demands on caretakers and in our society often result in sending the impaired person to a nursing home. It is nursing homes rather than mental hospitals which house most of these men and women. Research investigation of a group of nursing homes in 1962 showed that 87 percent of the residents suffered chronic brain syndrome (1975: 268).

These findings agree with a review of the research on geriatric organic brain diseases by the Texas Research Institute of Mental Sciences (1981). It estimates that 15 to 25 percent of persons over 65 have significant mental disorder. These include demential (organic disorders of the brain) as well as functional disorders like depression. Old men and women thus affected become increasingly dependent on the care of others. The dementias cause severe memory losses, other intellectual impairments and irreversible changes which often account for deterioration in the
victim's personality and capacity for independent living. "Although only five to six percent of the aged show clearly diagnosable senile dementia, the incidence rises with age to over twenty percent beyond the age of 80", the Institute reports. The fastest growing segment of the population at this time is the over-75 frail elderly. Therefore, the percentage of persons affected by these debilitating organic brain diseases can be expected to increase.

Recent brain research has discovered a sharp reduction in neurotransmitters in old brains. Acetylcholine, one of these transmitters which is believed to have a major role in the process of memory, has been shown to decrease as much as 70 percent in the healthy aged brain. According to Henig (254-55) the only negative biological changes in aging of the brain which are nearly universal are declines in memory and speed of response. These would be "rather benign and easily transcended" but for the social and cultural environment in which these changes occur and which turn the downward slope into an avalanche. Henig concludes that the social environment of the aged can actually create (or improve) senile behavior (236).

This selective review indicates what philosophers, physicians, and research scientists who have studied human physiology have believed and presently believe to be true about the progression of human organisms through old age toward eventual death. These gerontological investigators
rarely even hypothesize that there might be conditions under which humans who live into old age might expect to survive indefinitely without any physical degeneration. The conclusion of all investigations is that old people deteriorate physically and mentally even though as individuals they do so in different ways and at different rates. Medical science has much to offer to ameliorate the effects of degeneration. That those who live into late age can expect advancing body and brain disintegration, however, is incontrovertible.

A review of aging from a physiological view does not tell enough about the reality of being old, however. Psychology has much to add.

**Psychology and Aging**

A staff report of the Federal Council on Aging /3/ defines the frailty of elderly persons as "an accompaniment, however unwelcome, of increasing age . . . reduction of physical and emotional capacities and loss of social support system to the extent that the elderly individual becomes unable to maintain a household or social contacts without continuing assistance from others". The definition entails physical, psychological and social components. How do
geriatric psychologists and psychiatrists describe this frailty psychologically?

Much of the psychological literature is concerned with the impact of losses on the morale of the aged, the nature of these losses and the "defense mechanisms" developed by old people. Its data deals with loss of self-esteem, loss of identity and selfhood, loss of internal and external controls, disorientation and submergence in chaos.

In reviewing this material it is easy to lose one's sense of perspective about the good mental health of most old people. Stanley Cath, wrote of reactions in late life to depleting factors in the body, body image and mind. But he reminded his readers that re-appraisal of our image of old people is in order in view of advances in education and medical care. More people do survive into old age and are often in better health and better educated than those of similar age in past decades, so that both the quantity and the quality of this relatively intact and ever-increasing group have changed radically (22-23). Cath acknowledges that the number of those who are severely disturbed and neurotic has also increased inasmuch as more people are susceptible to senile organic processes. What he deplores is that the increasingly larger group of vigorous, alert aged people are treated in the same way as those disabled by lifelong maladjustments or advancing physical degeneration. He questions whether for everyone, regardless of condition,
25 percent of one's lifespan—in infancy, first, then late age—need be spent in dependency without a useful function.

Butler is also concerned about this. He points out that we pay lip service to idealized images of venerable, wise patriarchs and matriarchs but at the same time disparage old age with images of decay, decrepitude, and disgusting dependency (1975: xi).

In its recommendations to the White House Conference on Aging in 1971, the American Psychoanalytic Association's Task Force on Aging took note of the stereotyped attitudes of the public toward old people and the negative attitudes of these people toward themselves, calling attention to the detrimental effects on morale. The task force argued that the observed decline in intellectual functioning of old people was largely due to poor health, social isolation, economic distress, limited education, lowered motivation and other variables not intrinsically related to the aging process (ix). Moreover, in the early stages of what is called senile dementia there is often fluctuation of its severity. One day a person so afflicted cannot understand a problem; the next day the confusion lifts and the subject is clear-minded. Clouding the issue may be the influence of medication to calm the patient, associative psychiatric illness, and the senile dementia itself (Birren and Schaie, 38; Butler, 1975: 268). Tibbles also finds that the all or none judgment of incompetency is inappropriate in view of
the gradations found in clinical geriatric practice (127-51).

A surveyor of the literature of geriatric psychiatry noted that psychological and social data "did not bear the clear-cut relation to age" that physiological data did (Moss). Another gerontologist defined aging as a process of continuing loss. But since all losses cannot be attributed merely to the passage of time, he adopted the term primary aging to refer to changes wrought by the passage of time on the human organism associated with a decline in functioning which were apparently hereditary, biologic processes, and secondary aging to refer to loss which is the result of trauma or disease (Busse, 1977: 9-10; 1978: 130). The distinction is useful but it is often the case that the events of "primary" and "secondary" aging interact.

As losses overtake a person growing into old age some react more "successfully" than others. Success is variously measured: by reports of life satisfaction (Leonard), by good health, by activity and involvement with others, by a demonstrated ability to pursue life's goals or by other criteria which are usually culturally shared as goods. Others react with such negative affects as paranoia, anxiety, depression, despair—reactions which mean pain to themselves, and bring pain to others. To the degree that affective disorders can be distinguished from organic brain diseases there is the possibility that they are reversible.
Birren and Woodruff believe, however, on the basis of experience, that among old people despair or depletion, as discussed below, may be an exception. There is a high prospect of recovery from the affective disorders with therapeutic intervention. But they also observe that community mental health programs often have neither the money nor the interest to deal with these older people (1978: 27).

Planning committees setting service priorities for agencies serving the aged and their families sometimes have to resort to triage for those with emotional disorders in old age. Someone must choose who most needs the service. Psychotherapy for one person, especially when the person needs to be seen in his or her home, is too demanding of limited resources /4/. Butler points out that many aged people could benefit from psychological therapy. The reminiscence which is a part of such therapy is especially appropriate /5/. Butler found that therapy works in a surprisingly short time, perhaps because the patient may have a sense that time is running out. Group therapy, he adds, overcomes loneliness and family therapy can resolve old conflicts and heal rifts. Moreover, Butler concludes, therapy is often helpful even where there is chronic brain disorder (1978: 14).

Another form of therapy for which the old person would have to be trained and take responsibility was believed by
Birren and Woodruff to hold much promise. Could biofeedback be used to compensate deleterious age changes? Nowlis, in 1970, had speculated that with control over certain brain wave rhythms an aged person might be able to extend the periods of mental alertness and stave off losses in cognitive functioning.

If it is difficult to distinguish between degeneration of the body/brain as a result of "pure aging" and degeneration caused by trauma or disease, it is fully as difficult to assign the causes of mental disorders among the aged to somatic changes as opposed to psychological. Wiesman, the geriatric psychiatrist, thought it was unnecessary to worry about distinctions between the psychological and the organic. He considered it a false issue (Berezin and Cath: 230-31).

For purposes of an ethics inquiry, however, this is of crucial interest. We want to know what ills of aging are irreversible and what can be avoided or reversed. We want facts to help determine what an individual's responsibility is to his or her own mental and physical hygiene, and what is beyond control in the normal inevitable process of aging. And we want to know what part of the environment, including interpersonal relations, affects the well-being of the old person and can be maintained or changed by others. While problems may not yield to mere analysis it will be helpful
to review some research findings on paranoia, depression, anxiety, and despair among old people.

One of the "successful" defenses raised against an unbearable loss of self-esteem is paranoia (Klopfer: 42). Since losses accrue so rapidly in old age and self-esteem is consequently so battered, it is not uncommon to find at least temporary episodes of paranoia. These are marked by false beliefs of persecution; of being under attack. It has been noted that there is generally a core of truth in the facts which are interpreted by the paranoid as deliberate attacks upon him or her. For example, the old woman may hide her scissors and forget where, or inadvertently brush them off the table where they fall unnoticed into a wastebasket. Accusations follow: "Mary, you and I are the only ones here. My scissors were right on the table an hour ago and now they are gone. My things have been disappearing lately. How do you explain it?" Or, to give an example of a delusion less in touch with reality: An old man reports at breakfast that "a group entered my bedroom and attacked me last night. I think I know who my enemy is. I need a gun." Such behavior creates widening rings of dissension in a group unless the pattern and underlying causes are well understood. The temptation to theft in hospitals and nursing homes by staff, patients and visitors is of continuing concern to institutional administrators. It becomes then very difficult to ascertain the truth about accusations.
Deafness apparently exacerbates any paranoid tendency inasmuch as the deaf rightly perceive they are being talked about, often in lowered tones—"Mother doesn't hear well, you'll have to speak up." It is only one more step to conclude, "They are plotting against me." If it is unbearable to acknowledge one's physical deficits, one's "no good any more" status, then creating an external enemy who has caused these problems, something other than the self on which to cast one's disgust and hate, can be a saving relief. To the extent that caring others can find a way to bolster the old person's self-esteem the paranoid behavior can be expected to wane. Arguing about the facts only confirms the paranoid in false beliefs.

Perhaps the most diagnosed and discussed emotional disorder among older adults is depression. Berezin admits that a clear cut diagnosis of depression is "most difficult" (Berezin and Cath: 13-20). Organic brain disorders resemble depression and compulsive-obsessive characters may appear as depressed. It is debatable, he suggests, whether terms like "masked depression" or "underlying depression" should be used, inasmuch as behavior which masks may be one's way of counteracting depression. Likewise clinicians often see paranoid ideations as a defense against depression in the aged. Gradations of depression also cloud the diagnosis.

Freud identified ego inhibition and lowered self-esteem as characteristic of depression. Bibring added helplessness
as another characteristic. In depression, loss or threatened loss paralyzes the ego when it finds itself unable to meet the danger. In *Mourning and Melancholia*, Freud discusses loss of a loved person and also loss of some abstraction like liberty, country, or an ideal which had come to substitute for the lost person (Berezin: 18-19). Berezin mentions other losses which are idiosyncratic to aging: job, status, money, bodily functions, independence, self-respect. Of bodily capabilities he mentions vision, hearing, skin elasticity, sex drive, locomotion, cardiac function, memory and other intellectual capacities. Cath's observations, although related primarily to the middle years, would add loss of children from the home, of body image, of "attractiveness", of authority and the role of servant (35-36). Kastenbaum discusses also loss of a previous faster rate of recovery from bodily injury or illness. Cath points out that even a minor event may throw an aged person into depression. Those who are old need anchorages—which are often anchoring relationships (34). Clinical diagnosis of depression includes any several of the following: loss of appetite, insomnia, tearfulness, sadness, irritability, energy loss, slowed thinking, suicidal thoughts, inappropriate quiet, psychomotor retardation (Lipton & Nemeroff: 53). Lavin, however, claims that a state of depression often goes unrecognized whether mild or severe. This accounts for the reaction of the friends
of suicides who protest that they did not even know the friend was depressed. Levin believes that depression increases with age and that mild depressions take a somewhat different form from that in younger persons. In old age it is characterized by a state of apathy. These individuals appear to be uninterested in their surroundings; they sit with a vacant stare; they are preoccupied. The diagnosis may be clouded by the fact that there may be present underlying organic changes and a false assumption that there are atherosclerotic changes. Mental confusion from other causes may conceal depression. Yet, sometimes the confusion may be relieved if the depression is appropriately treated.

Berezin has a similar difficulty about the term depression applied to old people. Observing a group of old people sitting immobilized on a porch, showing no visible signs of mental awareness, he asks himself searching questions about their complete disengagement and what is really transpiring with these old people (Berezin and Cath, 134). He moves from observed phenomena to attempted explanation within his meaning system. "What," he asks, "are all the variables that account for this 'vegetation'"? He questions the standard diagnosis of depression but puzzles over what a more accurate diagnosis might be.

Are these people depressed, or are they suffering from loss, or is there some other process going on in them . . . Is passivity one of the determinants . . .?
[T]hey seem to have no contact. There may be a scale of passivity, relating to a masochistic situation with respect to an absence of pleasure of any sort, that these people seem to have. A diagnosis must also take into account the kind of person who is chronically compulsive, with an overwhelming mechanism of isolation, so that there is no affect invest or affect appreciation of any kind.

Berezin suspects also a sort of surrender to helplessness "in a midway state before dying." He considers the extremes and admits that there are in-between and gradient situations. He acknowledges in his professional conjecturing that there are diverse and miscellaneous considerations.

Levin adds new dimensions to the understanding of depression in the elderly when he directs our attention from losses to three additional concepts: attack, restraint and threats.

"Attack" is any external force causing discomfort, pain or injury. It can be physical or psychological. On a psychological level it can vary from a mild criticism to severe hostility. Levin points out that older people are subjected not only to numerous forms of physical attack derived from illness, but also to numerous forms of subtle psychological attack. Many of the latter happen because of the common prejudices toward the aged (1965: 210).
Psychological attacks can take the form of rejection, ridicule and scorn (220).

"Restraint" refers to any external force which restricts those actions requisite for satisfying instinctual needs. A coronary patient may become depressed because of the heart attack but also because of prolonged bed rest. Release from bed often lifts the spirits. Restraint limits freedom to obtain gratifications. The freedom to wander into the kitchen for a snack when hungry may be important for morale.

"Threat" is that which warns of the danger of future loss, attack or restraint. It may reflect the old person's interpretation of reality more than the external reality of matters. Levin lists as major threats those which suggest impending desertion, suffering, disability, or death. He points out that as life progresses and realistic threats increase, the "depressogenic" significance of reality also increases. Consequently, threats not only contribute to depression, but depression often increases one's feeling of being threatened.

Levin views depression as a disturbance of libido equilibrium and finds that disequilibrium always triggers efforts toward restoring equilibrium. If one has invested libido in an object or function of the self which is lost, the ego will try to reinvest the libido in a different object or function. Thus the depressed person may be viewed
as the carrier of a "powerful anger in search of an outlet"
or as the carrier of a "powerful libido in search ofgratification." While both, Levin feels, are correct, hebelieves the latter more fundamental (225).

An affective disorder almost opposite to depression inits symptoms is anxiety neurosis. According to Bibring(Berezin: 19) anxiety as a reaction to external or internaldanger indicates the ego's desire to survive, while indepression the ego is paralyzed because it cannot find anyway to meet the danger. The wish to live which is revealedin anxiety is, in extreme cases, replaced by the wish to diein depressed old people. Freud listed three kinds ofanxiety: objective, neurotic, and moral. The last wasexperienced as guilt aroused in the ego by the perception ofdanger from the conscience. Conscience he defined as theinternalized voice of parental authority which consisted ofprohibitions against sensuality and disobedience. Guiltthus was the expression of tension between the ego and thesuperego. The superego, in Freudian doctrine, is thevehicle of tradition; it is the seat of self-observation, ofconscience, of maintaining the ideal and striving forperfection. How does one who is aware that much of one'sallotted time is past and that one's bodily and mentalcapacities are dwindling cope with the demands of thesuperego? Is it any wonder that one hears a man in hisnineties say anxiously, "Did I get it right?" Is it
surprising that others give up trying, become dependent and passive and consequently easier to care for?

Rosen and Bibring found no significant association between old age and anxiety (211). They thought this might be because of the relaxation of the inhibitor role of the superego which in turn may be explained by the lessening of instinctual drives which activate inhibition.

A negative affect ascribed to the old, especially the irreversibly ill, is despair. Weisman had objected to too broad a clinical definition of depression (Berezin and Cath, 230-31); he suggested that there was something else that could be called despair. He included here apathy, absence of meaning, loss of aim—"a kind of primary anxiety, as opposed to those fears we call secondary anxiety." He contrasted despair with depression, suggesting that the latter could occur, as an incident in the course of despair. He found despair, or primary anxiety, characteristic among the aged and particularly among dying patients.

Weisman and Cath's references call to mind Erik Erikson's stages of psychological development. The final developmental task of life in Erikson's analysis is to win through to integrity. This task failed, one ends in despair "which expresses the feeling that the time is now . . . too short for the attempt to start another life and to try out
alternate roads ...." (1963: 269). (Erikson's theory will be discussed in Chapter Two).

Hackett uses a phrase, "blind alley behavior," to describe what can develop in those persons who perceive, for whatever cause, that they have gone as far as possible in life. This is similar to the state labeled by Wolf "the end of the rope" syndrome, which ends slowly with death (Holmes: 168).

These descriptions, however, are also reminiscent of Kübler-Ross's discussion (1969) of the final stage of grief, to be found in some terminally-ill patients. When she describes final resignation it is usually in the nature of acceptance, not vanquishment. Hackett and Weisman report on patients who predicted their own deaths and were generally free from conflict, tension, anxiety, or depression (Holmes: 168).

The symptomatic descriptions offered by these gerontologists differ little. Interpretations differ widely.

Beyond depression, according to Cath, is depletion. He distinguishes it from depression (42). ... In depletion narcissistically important aims are altered, abandoned; self-reproach is rare; and the introject of depressions may be lacking or be once more externalized. Most significantly there is an ensemble of mechanisms that may or may not include the affect and symptoms of depressions. The tension
between superego and ego is gone. Depletion appears then to be another, more primitive state of regressive adaptation. 

"In such extreme regression" he writes, "the superego, the latest acquisition of the psychic structure, may be de-energized first, and the apparent lack of guilt noted by other observers . . . would thus be explained."

Depletion, then is reminiscent of, perhaps identical with, Weisman's term, "despair". These terms seem to refer to a dismantling of the psychic structure of some human beings in their late age as life's blows accumulate.

But some old people weather these storms longer. They somehow cope, they endure in the face of fated losses. Palmore in 1982 claimed that for most people stresses which have been considered extreme, such as retirement, children leaving home and widowhood, are typically short-term, leaving no lasting, negative effect. Most people, he found, return to a homeostatic level after a period /6/. It should be noted, however, that normally the losses he lists occur in late middle age, less often in the 80s and later. Why is it that some older adults who seem to suffer the same loss—physical impairment, death of a loved spouse, termination of wanted employment—adjust well while others "regress" and are defeated? Berezin has noted that "some people 'learn' how to undergo a normal human experience by being subjected to it, while others, of course, do not."
If we attend the psychological mechanisms at work here, we should acquire more data requisite for informed decisions about interpersonal obligations as we grow older together.

Severity of negative reactions to loss will partly depend, obviously, on how important the object was to the loser. Another factor is the accumulation of losses—is this "the last straw?" The depth of loss cannot ever be exactly calculated by outside observers. Nevertheless, efforts have been made by those with professional learning to discover patterns in what keeps some people from giving up or being overwhelmed.

Cath discusses some of the barriers to regression (44-55). Whatever helps one maintain self-esteem enables that person to weather adversities. From one's past there may be a reservoir which brings to the traumatic moment the strength of a sense of self worth. There may be "a storehouse of shared experiences" and the ability to tolerate hostility, anxiety and regression in others. But these, he points out, depend upon relationships with others, or objects which serve as the equivalent. Moreover, the ego must usually also have present sources of fulfillment and renewal. There is a sort of replenishment of the self which may come from a sense of belonging to or meaning something to someone in the family, neighborhood, or group. Cath thought this capacity for replenishment was related to the earliest prototype of human relations—"the mother-child
equation" and could suffice for long periods for some people. A definite and sustained identity, the equivalent of "I am something to someone" results in a strengthening of this storehouse (44-45).

If the loss, however, is of one upon whom the bereaved always leaned, or if the bereaved has no significant other person to provide a source of strengthening, the result, Cath declares, can be fatal. He also takes note of the ability some people have to permit strengthening of the self by the non-self.

Other help, Cath believes, lies in various sublimations which allow "free, neutralized energy" with which to cope with each crisis. Temporary withdrawal in the service of the ego works for some people--a day of sleep, a vacation, a change of setting--some change which provides a periodic alternative in the feedback situation. This relief from energy-sapping family interactions or from occupational drudgery can be restorative.

Sometimes identification with the lost person is helpful as when a widow is appointed to public office which was held by her deceased spouse. The need for feedback of positive aspects of the self from others never ends.

Counterbalancing maneuvers may also include turning outward in political or social reform activities; associating with or supporting those who are creative in the arts and, although relatively rarely, according to Cath,
renewed interest in religion. "Anxiety about annihilation of the self is dissipated by the assumption of a nucleus of the self—the soul—that is ongoing" (50).

Neugarten, Crotty and Tobin (1964) investigated personality types in an aged population with results which implied that as people move from middle age to aging they maintain their characteristic personality patterns. Some of the oldest retained integrated personalities and some of the youngest manifested unintegrated. They concluded that it is not age which accounts for personality disintegration; it is probably more closely related to health and biological loss, or social and psychological losses. They found their results consistent with other contemporary studies.

A normal and self-limiting reaction to loss is grief or mourning. It is a period of sadness followed in good time by the mourner's reinvestment of libido, of life interest, in other persons, objects or causes. A facilitating factor is that testing of reality which convinces the bereaved that the object lost no longer exists. It is not hard to see that as sensory deficits accumulate, feedback from reality—from the day-to-day details which continually remind a person how things really are—may wane. For such a person healthy grief becomes more chancy. As activity decreases, moreover, so do many opportunities to find other persons, causes and objects to reinvest in.
In the psychological view "successful aging" means simply suffering losses with no more than temporary emotional disorder. It becomes clear that an aging person must have another or others or associations or institutions comprised of others to be able to maintain an ongoing vital attitude. As one speaker told his audience: "Ladies and gentlemen, it is this simple: in old age, you make friends or you go to the hospital!" (Peterson).

Psychology's data on aging is historically more sensitive to what disturbs the psyche. Inasmuch as physical deficits increase with age, traumatic life events multiply and supportive resources seem to diminish or become less accessible, these studies are helpful in understanding the etiology of mentally impaired old persons.

It should now be clear that the psychology and physiology of an old person are inextricably related. Berezin and Cath refer to the very powerful interactions between these variables in aging (135).

Lowenthal suggests that physical illness may be the critical antecedent to both the isolation of a mentally ill old person and his or her mental illness (Neugarten, 1968: 193). Milgram claims that all psychological events rest on a biological substrate and that frequently the most lasting solutions to psychological problems exist on the level of biochemistry. He adds that if biology has been shown to regulate behavior, the reverse has also been shown to be
true (50). It has also been hard for physiologists and psychologists to describe old people without reference to the community in which they live, the group of people which nurtured their notions of what was right and valuable and whose attitudes toward them as aged people so pervasively affect their morale.

In 1975 Charles Gaitz and Roy Varner offered a multidisciplinary mental health model for community-based comprehensive geriatric services. On their chart of common precipitating stresses and strains on old persons they showed three groups: psychological, physiological and socio-environmental. Impaired cognitive functions, loss of authority/self-esteem and depression/ agitation comprised the first category. Grouped under physiological were: brain deterioration, greater risk of injury, acute medical disorders, normal catabolic changes, chronic physical diseases, impaired homeostatic mechanisms, and idiopathic degenerative processes. Gaitz and Varner round out their wheel with as comprehensive a list of commonly noted socio-environmental factors in American society which affect the elderly as might be found. They list inflation, substandard housing, loss of job/work role, communication breakdowns, inadequate transportation, social isolation/rejection, loss of loved ones/associates, increased dependence on others, insufficient retirement benefits.
How do sociologists describe this last area—the reciprocal impact of old people and society?

**Sociology and Aging**

A human is always a social being in the view of sociology. Sociologists Berger and Luckman insist that society is a human product, that society is an objective reality and that human beings are social products (1967, 61). Every aged person, then, helps to form the society or community of which he or she is a part, but is also shaped and affected by that society. Society is, even for the mentally impaired very old, a potent reality whether that fact is part of his consciousness or not. If we have learned anything from behaviorists, it is that the behavior of one person can account for the behavior of another. Behavior is shaped by contingencies and reinforcements in the environment. The action of others is part of that environment. To explain human behavior sociologists observe the interactions between persons and between individuals and groups. To discuss patterns which they find in social groups they speak of roles and networks. Every person takes many roles. One woman can be single parent of a family, patron of a public transportation system, worker in a factory, and church choir director. These roles and the expectations of others concerning the roles she takes not only strongly influence her day-to-day activities and
attitudes, they also provide her with reward and satisfaction or deprive her of such social supports. When a number of people who can be identified as a group by virtue of similar sex, age, cultural background, employment or other shared attributes become in any sense a problem to society, they attract the special attention of sociologists who often look first to their social roles. So it has been with the aged as they increase in number, become an identifiable voting bloc, lay claim increasingly to limited medical resources and become a dependent concern to their families. Moreover, by several social indices—suicide rates among aged men, life satisfaction among those retired, rationale for allocation of scarce medical resources—too often they count themselves, or are counted by others, less worthy than they used to be. Sociologists look for social explanations of variations in human behavior. They attempt to discover the social setting in which some fare well and the setting, interactions, and attitudes which might account for the fact that others are unhappy as old people in American society. As an extension of interest in the roles persons maintain, acquire, or lose as they age, sociologists also give attention to the social network surrounding an individual. As physical and mental capabilities diminish, the network of other human beings—all those who regularly come into contact with the aging person—becomes important as a potential support system. This may include the checker
at the nearest grocery store, the meals-on-wheels delivery person, the receptionist at the clinic, or the neighbor child who visits, as well as a daughter, a spouse, a close friend. Changes in the network can account for changes in contentment.

There are a number of theories about the status of old people in their social groups (Usding and Hofling, 139). One proposes that the position of the elders will be high in static or traditional societies but tends to decline with rapid social change. It is contended by some theorists that in societies where the aged are few in number their status will be high and that as they become a greater portion of the total population it declines. Another theory holds that even where old persons show physical infirmity they can retain respect and a valued position if they are able to perform socially valued and useful tasks. If these theories are well founded, it is to be expected that in the United States—where even the young suffer "future shock", where the proportion of frail elderly is the most rapidly growing segment of the population and where early retirement and industry obsolescence flourishes—the elderly people would have problems.

Among the variety of theories are two much debated theories in the study of adjustment to old age in the western society. The continuity/discontinuity theory and the activity/disengagement theory have caused serious
reappraisal of assumptions and interpretations among social scientists studying old people and the aging process.

In searching for reasons why some old people adjust well to dysjunctive experiences and others do not, some sociologists claim that, if there is continuity of life patterns through earlier periods of the person's life into old age, then adjustment will be good; but if there have been earlier instabilities, disruptions and shifts in life pattern, poor adjustment can be predicted. This is generally called the continuity/discontinuity theory (Kaiser, Peters and Babchuk). In studies of personality this theory can imply a "fixing" of traits in earlier adulthood and childhood. It claims that observations of present behavior or psychological orientations reflect lifelong patterns. The definition, however, may be less rigid. If continuity refers to a "career"--a flow of constantly moving occurrences with references to the past and predictions for the future--then the concept may fit more aging persons. Fox points to three categories in which the issue of continuity has been addressed: situational/environmental, levels of activity, and psychological.

Situational and environmental factors are those usually considered beyond the control of the individual and to which he or she must respond. Occupational retirement, death of a spouse, declining income, illness, surgery--these are
typical. Yet, age-related changes of this kind are not universal; they are not inevitable crises for each individual. Some people work full time until their deaths; those who never marry or who predecease their spouses never suffer widowhood; and not everyone's income declines. Some remain well until near the close of their lives. Furthermore, these situational factors have a variety of effects in any observed group of older people. Fox concludes that aging for most people can hardly be characterized as continuous or "stable" (101-2).

Sociologists suspecting that sharp discontinuities in life might explain dissatisfaction among elders have undertaken to analyze continuity and discontinuity. Some research findings purport to show that activity levels and "rates of participation" in late life reflect those developed in younger stages and that those who were not earlier participants remained apart in old age. As one retiree said impatiently, "I never was a 'joiner'; don't expect me to be one now." Fox delves into this research and raises questions about the data and its interpretation. Decreases in one category of reported activity may be offset by increases in another resulting in confusion between level of participation and continuity. One researcher found that the five activities retirees most often engaged in were those which they preferred before retirement, ignoring a
significant increase in post-retirement leisure activities. Can these data be said to demonstrate continuity?

Psychological continuity suggests that attitudes toward self, beliefs, values, preferences and goals can remain largely stable over time and that this would account for the life satisfaction of some elderly people. Fox points out, however, that it is difficult to be sure which personalities one encounters among the aged were unchanged from early life. There is much evidence that goals and interests change over time. Which attitudes toward self can remain stable in view of societal attitudes toward different ages would be hard to say. Inasmuch as there has been little research into political and religious beliefs (as distinct from behaviors) over the lifespan among older people it cannot be shown that there are those whose psychological continuity is expressed in this way. Thus, Fox finds conceptual and operational problems in this research. The data, according to Fox, have not determined the degree to which behaviors and interests among the aged are "continuous". Nor did she find that continuity is necessarily adaptive. Yet she calls for better concepts and definitions of continuity and believes that whether the term is developed as a descriptive one or as a facilitator of adaptation, it is a variable with potential still to be charted.
Kaiser, Peters and Babchuk found the concept of continuity a useful analytic tool in determining the adjustment to retirement from an institution. They believed that work institutions could favorably affect satisfaction among its retirees to the extent that they provide for continuous involvement. The authors acknowledge, somewhat parenthetically, that the use retirees make of the opportunity for involvement may depend on "subjective responses" to the conditions they encountered while they were still working.

While there is a good deal of confusion in psychological and sociological literature as to the meaning of continuity in areas of a person's life for satisfaction in old age, the issue is an interesting one for ethics on three grounds. First is the basic question of how an ethicist or any decision maker is to make use of social sciences literature in his or her deliberations. This issue will be addressed at the end of this chapter. The second consideration is the question raised here as to what is the best, most satisfying, fruitful, adaptive stance in old age. Is continuity the goal one should seek? Or is there a case to be made for discontinuity? Thirdly, the research problems strongly suggest that the continuity/discontinuity theory runs aground when the complexity of human motivations, influences and behaviors are compounded by the freedom, however, circumscribed, of human beings to choose
what they will do. The ethicist more than the social scientist can take into consideration the issue of free will.

What of the activity/disengagement theory debate /7/? Fox, referring on the first count to Hochschild and on the second to Lemon, Bengston and Peterson, asserts that the disengagement theory proved in the end to be unfalsifiable, and it took twenty years to find the activity theory wanting. Yet the controversy fueled much useful investigation into the process of aging.

It has generally been assumed (by younger people) that in old age the more active a person is, the greater the chance for high morale. Activity would seem to correlate with—perhaps even promote—better health, stimulus from the environment, interaction with others, less dependency and higher self-esteem. In 1961, however, Cumming and Henry published the book Growing Old with a foreword by Talcott Parsons in which he called their work "the most serious attempt so far to put forward a general theoretical interpretation of the social and psychological nature of the aging process" (v).

Cumming and Henry proposed their theory as an alternative to what they label "the implicit theory." The implicit theory incorporates a cluster of notions: that old age falls abruptly upon people, that people age individually rather than with a cohort, that old people have low morale
if they do not believe they can any longer be "useful" to others, and that the criterion for successful old age is general activity. Cumming and Henry warn that the criteria inherent in such notions may be the bench marks belonging to the young and middle-aged. They offer a different view of what it means to be growing old and propose it as cross-culturally valid with the qualification that the form it takes will always be culture-bound. They confine their research to healthy, economically stable Americans (13-23) /8/. Their theory, like the one it challenges, is a "common-sense theory" but they present extensive data from the Kansas City Studies of Adult Life to affirm it. They describe their theory this way:

... [A]ging is an inevitable mutual withdrawal or disengagement, resulting in decreased interaction between the aging person and others in the social systems he belongs to. The process may be initiated by the individual or by others in the situation. The aging person may withdraw more markedly from some classes of people while remaining relatively close to others. His withdrawal may be accompanied from the outset by an increased preoccupation with himself; certain institutions in society may make this withdrawal easy for him. When the aging process is complete, the equilibrium which existed in middle life between the individual and his society has given way to a new equilibrium characterized by a greater distance and an altered type of relationship (14-15).
At the end of their book they comment that "when a middle-aged man dies, he is torn from the fabric of life, when an old man dies, he has already unraveled the web of interaction so much that he can slip from life unnoticed . . . By the end of his life, his bonds have all been severed—disengagement is complete, he is free to die, and death is the last logical step in the process of living" (226-27).

If the Cumming and Henry theory of disengagement is valid, then the others in the old person's immediate environment—family, friends, former work colleagues, social workers—should accept a degree of passivity, inactivity, withdrawal as normative and not to be interrupted. If their theory is only characteristic of some, however—if as others found, activity or interaction in old age is more apt to correlate with contentment—then all those concerned for the well being of aged persons should try to encourage and provide the means for social involvement for all who might respond.

Arnold Rose distinguishes three criticisms of disengagement theory (186). The first makes use of continuity theory, arguing that those aged persons who distance themselves from society are only evincing a life-long social—psychological characteristic; they always did tend toward social non-engagement. Others, whose pattern showed a high level of interaction continue to stay engaged to the extent physically possible.
The second criticism Rose notes is that which takes issue with the implicit value-judgment in the theory: disengagement is more desirable for the old person and for his or her social group.

The third criticism analyzes disengagement in a historical-cultural context, concluding that it does not give reasonable and adequate explanation for the facts. This will be expanded below in a discussion of social science theories. Suffice it to say here that these objectors find the disengagement theorists guilty of ethnocentrism and blind to social trends.

Maddox simply objects to the Cumming-Henry conclusions by observing that those old people who disengage are either those whose style of non-engagement preceded old age or the very old whose poor health necessitates reduction of interaction with others (1968, 18).

Levin doubts the interpretation given of disengaged very old people. Cumming and Henry have described them as "leading static, tranquil, somewhat self-centered lives, which suit them very well and appear to provide smooth passage from a long life to an inevitable death" (209). Levin did not think such individuals were as happy as they appeared. He suspected that the self-centeredness to which these authors referred is frequently a manifestation of narcissistic regression characteristic of an apathetic type of depression, often reversible (208).
Disengagement theory and the dispute it engendered among those who study and work with old people raises a crucial question: Is American society with its publicly and privately funded service programs helping to make it possible to age successfully by assuming that more activity is better, when it ought to adopt an attitude of "let be"? Or is American society negligent and self-serving in assuming that passivity is the preference of its aged members and beneficial to the group?

Researchers in the interplay between personality and social history also look for patterns to help explain human behavior. Reichard, Livson and Petersen studied a population of older men faced with adjusting to retirement. In their study sample they identified five personality types, two of which represented unsuccessful aging. Of the latter they divided the group, which shared a sense of failure to meet their life goals, into those who turned their resentment outward and those who turned their anger inward. The former were termed "angry men," the latter "self haters." Of those who successfully adapted to retirement one type were "mature"—free of conflict, satisfied with their past. A second group they called "rocking chair men" who appeared generally passive. A third group were designated "armored" in order to cover their fear of growing old. These social scientists were not ready to
say that this typology also might fit women and the population at large.

Gaitz observes that the old person's capacity for homeostasis (the mechanism which makes mental and physiological equilibrium possible after disruptions) gradually declines and that the range of adaptation to new circumstances narrows (207-8). "Because of physical and mental frailties . . . the lifelong capacity to cope effectively with stress may diminish late in life, when remaining mental and physical strengths are unequal to coping with intense and frequent demands for adjustment" (209). Reisman divides old people by three types of reaction: the adjusted, the anomic, and the autonomous. The "adjusted" do not carry within them the psychological sources of self-renewal. Their culture provides them with a sort of preservative, provided by their work, power and social status, which sustains them as long as these remain protective. Reisman thinks this describes most members of American society. Another group, divested of or never endowed with these supports, simply decays. These he calls "anomic"—the norms of society have no meaning for them. But there are some he calls "autonomous" and most arresting of the three is this last group. Bertrand Russell and Arturo Toscanini are exemplars. Aging brings for them accretions of wisdom without loss of spontaneity. Their sense of autonomy from others immunizes them to societal
norms and they do not accept the definition of others about who they are, what they can and cannot do. "As long as the body does not actually prevent, these men are immortal because of their ability to renew themselves" (380). They demonstrate an essential vitality of spirit which overrides physiological disintegration until finally overwhelmed. Reisman does not call them the exception to the rule. Nor does he suggest that these autonomous old people became so as a function of aging itself—gradually casting off the restraining garments of social regulations and of the expectations of others. He does not claim that they had less reason to cooperate as they became more economically independent or secure—or as their life goals shifted with diminishing responsibilities toward others. These people attained autonomy earlier.

The sociology of aging points up the extraordinary complexity of all people, a complexity not diminishing in old age. To find a pattern in the process of aging in a non-traditional society like America's leads researchers to replication difficulties or to arguments about interpretation of research data. Sociology illuminates the influential interaction between old people and their groups. Yet even here the patterns vary with the degree of autonomy characteristic of an individual's personality.
Anthropology and Aging

The impact of the society and the culture often merge in research findings. Yet anthropology, the study of man in his culture, has had, as a separate discipline, much to say about aging. One of its tasks is to examine the likeness and difference between cultures.

Simone de Beauvoir in her studies of aging reviewed the literature of anthropologists that described the status of old people in various cultures (38-87). At first there seemed no pattern to the ways old people were treated, even among primitive tribes. Beauvoir reported, however, that in agricultural tribes there is a well-defined image shared by almost every old person. He or she will be found to have officially acknowledged status in the group. In nomadic bands, on the other hand, the status of an old person is "merely fortuitous". The esteem enjoyed will vary among similar groups and will vary from old person to old person within the group. Beauvoir finds the latter description also true of industrial societies. She tentatively concludes that more old people will survive in a wealthy society than in a poor and in a settled group than a nomadic. There are exceptions, nevertheless. The inland Chukchee who lead a harsh life somehow manage to transport their aged people with them as they migrate, while some agricultural societies, not always the poorest, let their elderly die of hunger. She does not consider prosperity of
the group to be the decisive factor; in nomadic and
industrialized cultures the chief security of old people
lies in the extent to which they are loved by their progeny.
Where resentment of childhood neglect is alive in the memory
of their children parental neglect in old age is likely.
Beauvoir speaks of two vicious circles. Children who grow
up deprived of food and attention become adults full of
resentment, anger and fear. When their parents are no
longer helpful, the grown children will be negligent and
sometimes aggressive toward them. Thus a neglected
dependent child becomes a neglecting adult child. At the
same time another malevolent factor is operant. Parents who
are unable to feed their children, are often themselves
malnourished, worn out with labor, have early infirmities
and cannot carry on. They become a burden instead of an
asset to their struggling group and their situation in the
group is often desperate.

Kimmel, too, has made a cross-cultural comparison of
how old people fare in industrial and pre-industrial
cultures, in poor and prosperous communities, in traditional
and future-oriented societies (440-78). He concludes that
there is enormous diversity in patterns of aging--in the
meaning, status and experience of being old from one culture
to another. He finds no conclusive evidence that old people
in historical or pre-industrial societies had it better or
worse, as a whole, than old people in Western society today.
It is clear, however, that growing old is intertwined with the nature and structure of the culture. In some groups aging was good if the old person had money, power, or magic-things valued in that culture. In other societies old people were treated contemptuously if they were no longer useful to the economic or social welfare of their group (unless they were under the protection of family members with power). Nor could Kimmel find in research literature any consensus about the factors that differentiate cultures to make them positive or negative for their aged members. With modest candor he concluded that there is too much complexity in any culture for such generalizations.

The question of whether industrialization brings greater devaluation of old people needs continued research, Kimmel believes. Many studies indicate that the prestige of the elderly is lower in industrial than in traditional societies. In the Bakongo culture, for instance, old people have the full respect of the villagers. Tribal life is exclusively domestic and agricultural and the old people rely upon the traditional wisdom of the elders to sustain life in both realms (Missine 283-96). Conversely, in industrial societies, for many old men there is a devastating obsolescence of information, skills, know-how, and technical "wisdom", all indispensable in a technological society. Moreover, the sheer numbers of the elderly in American society make survivors less unique and admired.
Yet research data also show that in comparing rural to urban elderly, those old persons with greater contact with modern life had more positive attitudes toward their aging. Clearly other factors intervene to cloud the answer to the question.

Kimmel, however, agrees with many other students of the interaction of culture with old people that among the factors in a culture which often correlate with a more contented old age are community prosperity, a general respect for wise counseling and knowledge of the past, and a good level of public health.

The geriatric psychiatrists, Berezin and Cath, note that the way men and women deal with the changes brought into their lives with old age should be studied from the point of view of cultural expectations as well as biological imperatives (121). Reisman noted that reactions to aging are "largely governed by norms which vary according to social groups" (379).

Little has been said here about the differences between men and women in old age. At the level of culture studies one great difference emerges and challenges the anthropologists' skills of interpretation. That is the fact that in the United States (since women today rarely die in childbirth or related problems), life expectancy for women has surpassed that of men. Busse reports (1978, 155) that there are nearly 139 older women per 100 older men and the differential continues to increase. He ascribes this to a
complicated interaction between genetically determined physical differences arising from chromosomal patterns, socioeconomic factors and cultural values and expectations and environmental conditions that expose men to more accidents than women.

Busse also discusses sexual behavior and attitudes among aged people in this country. He describes the stereotype of the elderly as an asexual group and decries the fact that the women's liberation group had neglected the topic of the sexual needs of older women. Busse describes the important anatomic changes which overtake men and women in old age. Sexual activity between marital partners, according to various research data, tends to continue past the age of 75. Sixty percent of married elderly couples retain sexual activity. After 75 coitus declines to about 30 percent of married couples. Physical and mental health of the partners is a critical factor. Among the elderly unmarried only 7 percent have sexual relations, with a rapid decline in advancing old age because of reduced accessibility to sex partners. Two-thirds of men 65 and over have wives but only one-third of women in this age group have husbands. Cultural attitudes regarding the role of men and women in courtship has its effect. There are nearly four times as many widows as widowers. The number of marriages of people 65 and over is increasing although two-fifths of the older men have wives under 65. This reflects
the cultural tradition for men to marry younger women.
Hospital admission rates and lengths of stay among the
unmarried elderly exceed those of the married. Busse
expects social attitudes toward sex and marriage in old age
to change in the direction of liberality (157-62). Kimmel
takes care to point out that the physiological differences
between the sexes which begin at conception may account for
male and female differences in predisposition to respond to
social stimuli but he does not think these differences
determine behavior (171). Sex differences, he asserts,
arise in an interaction between this internal or body
environment and the external or social environment.

Cumming and Henry observed, as had many other students
of American culture, that work is man's central role and
marriage and family is central for women. At one point they
rephrased this: the central role for the American male is
instrumental and the central role for the female is socio-
emotional (214-15). Rose, making the same assumption,
marked the difference between aging men and aging women as
to availability of these chief roles in late life (187).

Kimmel (172) carries his observations about the male
worker role and the female wife/mother role even farther:

Women and men appear to have differing
sources of self-esteem and motivation.
Interpersonal rewards and affiliation
motivation (the desire for esteem from
others) have been found to be more
important for women; in contrast, men
tend to base their self-esteem on their
accomplishments or achievements and tend to be motivated by achievement motivation (the desire for reaching internal standards of excellence).

These researchers have, of course, been studying those now old who were young at an earlier time in the history of our work and family patterns. As the percentage of women entering the work force continues to climb, as women who plan their families postpone childbirth and as men assume nurturing father roles with the applause of their family and friends, these "central role" differences may shift. Or will the sex differences inherent from conception carry more weight in the long run?

Cath, the geriatric psychiatrist, declared that there were certain basic "anchorages" throughout life, implying that these are cross-cultural. All old people, he reported, are anchored by an intact body and body image, an acceptable home, a socio-economic anchorage, and a meaningful identity and purpose of life (25).

Interpretation of the data of the Kansas City Studies of Adult Life presented four dimensions of successful aging: amount of activity in which the individual engaged, the ability to disengage from society, satisfaction with past life, and integration of personality (Ryff 209). Ryff notes that Williams and Wirths in 1961 added two additional views: a balanced exchange of energy between the individual and the social system and a stable social system. The latter two
requisites focus attention on the responsibility which society has in providing the environment for successful aging of its elderly.

One effective way in which men and women resolve certain mid-life crises is to adjust their value priorities with age. Some people are able to deemphasize the importance to them of certain events which are becoming unattainable, replacing them with emphasis on objectives which are still feasible. Thus a man nearing retirement or suffering a chronic illness may give up his dream of becoming foreman and decide to become more involved in the lives of his grandchildren. Much will depend on how he is affected by the attitudes of the fellow members of his group and whether they allow such a shift with acquiescence or react critically.

In popular culture the breakdown of the family as the pivotal institution in American society is often lamented. Children and old people are believed to be neglected. Old people are not taken into the homes of their children, extended families are no longer in fashion, and a nuclear family, even when the nest is empty, is not ready to "regress" toward a condition in which it once again becomes the nurturing site for dependency. Depressingly, the termination of this dependence is death, which may be weeks or decades away. Shanias claims, in contrast, that what is basic to America's social system is a modified extended
family and supportive kin network (296-365). Her data reinforce the position of Sussman, and Burchinal who found this true of American urban society. It is characteristic of old people who need help of various kinds—food, housekeeping, transportation, home repairs, medical attention—to be living in proximity to children or kinfolk who can provide help. But the extent and kinds of help may vary with the variety of socio-cultural groups in America.

The seminal work of Clark and Anderson forced attention to the interaction between the elderly and the American culture, which they helped to shape and which shaped them. They searched for the core values of our culture and developed the following list:

- acquisition and exploitation
- struggles for self-advancement
- doing
- control of others
- competition

These anthropologists then derived from the life stories of 400 old subjects a list of the attributes which help the old adjust to the state of being old with reasonable contentment. These attributes they counterpose to the first list (here included in parentheses):

- conservation
- self acceptance
- being
- congeniality, love,
- concern for others
- cooperation

(acquisition, exploitation)
(struggle for advancement)
(doing)
(control of others)
(competition)
They conclude that those of advanced years have had to shift from one value orientation to another. Yet the old people who are moving toward a more advanced value system are still living in a society which declares: "To be a person is to be independent and self respecting, and thereby worthy of concern and respect in one's own right." The individualism, so valued in America and which served it well in its early history, produces a particular definition of personal identity which is less and less matched to what people are as they age. Clark and Anderson believe that we alienate ourselves by clinging to the notion of individual rights rather than freedom to establish new and wider relationships (328-33). Thus they not only describe the older person's experience in American society; they interpret, and they plead for a shift in our value system.

Ethology and Aging

Ethologists assume that within the framework of evolution human beings, like animals, have some species determinants of overt behavior. They do not claim that these necessitate or dictate particular human behavior; they claim that there are "predestined behavioral components of animal origin"--exemplified by behavior patterns and motivational tendencies which contribute, or normally could be expected to contribute, to the structuring of human activities (Senn and Steiner). Ethologists hold that there
are three antecedents of human behavior: innate factors springing from the history of the species, developmental experiences and environmental circumstances. The last two are ontogenetic but the first is phylogenetic, that is to say, it is carried forward genetically through the species. It is this which interests ethologists. Infant sucking is such a behavior. Innate components of behavior are found in three areas: aggression, territoriality, and exploration and mastery. The environment provides the stimulus which acts as "releaser" of an innate behavior pattern.

Senn and Steiner proposed a creative adaptation of exploration and mastery theory to the behavior of newly institutionalized old people. Inasmuch as the ethological perspective gives more weight to inherent human nature (as opposed to learned behavior) than do most social science theories, the implication is that the potential for altering the behavior of other people may be more limited than often assumed. It is not hard, then, to imagine a collision course between managerial efforts of the caretakers and the responses to newly arrived old people.

Senn and Steiner asserted that a genetically induced human reaction to a strange place is characteristically to hide, to venture forth, to withdraw again, to venture forth again. To obstruct this (or any other biologically grounded innate behavior) is an attack upon human dignity. Thus to insist that a newcomer to a nursing home attend common meals
in a congregate setting may arouse feelings of distress and of "being tread upon". "Acceptance of the limits a person has in controlling his or her behavior is similar to the acceptance of a person's physical limitations," Senn and Steiner warned (427). Caretakers may succeed in eliminating learned behavior but trying to eliminate innate behavior patterns is an unjust affront to the old person's dignity.

There are assumptions in some other aging studies that the behavior of old people is not necessarily the result only of personality, physical condition, or external environment. Can one speak of "basic life tendencies" or "fundamental aspects of human motivation" without an underlying conviction that some components of behavior are given at birth? The gerontologist Ryff describes Buhler's formulations of basic life tendencies. Buhler first pondered the goal of the human organism, concluding that it was to be active and productive in a reality that allowed for accomplishments. Buhler therefore proposed four basic life tendencies: need satisfaction, self-limiting adaptation, creative expansion and upholding internal order (211).

Stage theories of personal development imply a genetically predetermined progression. Data which do not fit the described stages are generally accounted for as failures to progress. Ryff asserts that a developmental orientation tries to identify the higher, more
differentiated growth processes that occur with aging. Such studies will have to include "statements about desirable goals or end-states of behavior" as other researchers summarize one developmental mode. Do these studies of aging mean to say that the developmental stages they seek to determine are variable movements along a line agreed upon by society—a product of human beings in cultural consensus? Or are they assuming a somehow already determined pathway to which each person has an inclination as a gift of nature?

Gutmann is candid about this (63).

The life-cycle perspective reveals an evolutionary plan, a species shape within individual lives . . . as individuals we are all finally part of a species, products of evolutionary sequences that long predate our individuality and our particular social situation. Much of what we impute to individual psychology or cultural circumstances is in fact the expression (or the derailment) of a species design.

Failure to acknowledge ambiguities in our understandings of the nature of being human may work hardship on the aged inasmuch as they may, in their dependency, be forced into molds alien to their human nature.

Interdisciplinary Work

Those who study aging, even when their investigations are narrow and highly specialized, are aware to one degree
or another that other factors are probably at work in explaining the behavior under study. Indeed they go to great lengths, whenever possible, to control for other influences upon their findings (8). Such work is useful in trying to isolate what specific interventions—by friends, caregivers, or social policymakers—might alleviate problems of old age. At the same time such isolated maneuvers tend to overlook the complexity of internal and external events and reactions to events which can account for problems of old age.

Interdisciplinary approaches, therefore, are increasingly used in the human sciences. Sociologists are aware of the interaction between biology and the human being's social world. Berger and Luckman (48) tell us that biological development, which in animals occurs in utero, is carried out in human infants outside the womb during the first year of life while the infant is already existing in and interacting with its world environment. Thus one unique part of the human experience is that a larger part of its biological being is subject to continuing socially-determined influences. In human beings the line between biology and society blurs. So also Birren, the geriatric psychiatrist, acknowledges that social psychology processes may affect the consequences of changing health and other characteristics of an old individual (106). It was necessary in his research on 47 aged men to study a
constellation of variables called environmental loss. Birren reported concerning his research results that they pointed to "very powerful interactions between psychological and physiological variables in aging" (135). Shephard draws attention to a connection between internal and external stresses and a weakening of both neural and hormonal controls (136). Parsons and White wrote a chapter called "The Link Between Character and Society" in a book titled Social Structure and Personality.

Hall sees a connection from a different stance. He suggests thinking of life as the sum of all the forces that resist death. Consequently, he believes that it is to biology we should turn for normative ideas of both life and death. Not only must we consult the copious data (of 1922) of the physical sciences but also "the instrument that defines, delivers, and interprets them, namely the mind." He wrote that psychology should henceforth be second only to biology in formulating conclusions.

Evidence of interdisciplinary concern in accounting for the behavior of old people is also to be found in holistic medicine which looks at the whole person, including the external as well as the internal environment, in an effort to influence, restore or maintain good health. Field theory approaches in the social sciences also attempt a theoretical framework which encompasses personality, culture, and society as determinants of behavior. Yinger says that the
final concern of most researchers is not to isolate independent relationships but to understand and predict behavior. Even researchers who do try to isolate a variable, he claims, rarely escape the temptation to try to explain behavior thereby (5-6). Multi-disciplinary concerns are also reflected in the terminology of research and study fields: bio-ethics, psycho-sociology, social psychology, psycho-biology, psychological ecology, socio-cultural. At the social policy level a holistic view of old persons is attempted. In 1981 a plan for research on aging of the Texas Research Institute of Mental Sciences acknowledged that interaction of biological, psychological, and socio-environmental factors in the aging process requires multi-disciplinary studies, involving diverse scientific and clinical specialties (5).

Additionally, Gestalt psychology questions whether the study of detailed problems in separate disciplines can yield knowledge of psychology as a whole. The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences points out, in its discussion of Gestalt theory, that facts in a limited area may be misleading and misinterpreted if not tied to a wider scheme (6:174). Underlying the Gestalt theory is the conviction that exclusive attention to those questions that can be studied in exact ways risks a neglect of the subject.
Is there another way to learn about old people in American society and how it is for them as their bodies deteriorate?

The Old Speak for Themselves

To let the old speak for themselves, to watch and listen for what an old person is "saying" requires a shift toward a phenomenological view. Husserl forced us to see the way in which each of us "attends" to the flow of data which lies all around. We author our worlds as we choose what, of all the impressions we might pay attention to, we do in fact, pay attention to. Sometimes, in some moods, in some circumstances, in some settings, we notice her smile, in others her pallor, in others her clothes, in others her pulse, in others her voice, in others her words. Normally we absorb a myriad of impressions. Were others also possible? Even when old people speak, each of us hears something different. All facts are interpreted.

It is in confidences, letters, autobiographies, journals and diaries that people reveal how it is with them. I have chosen from this literature four samples which disclose the way in which a singular person experienced some form of disintegration toward the end of his or her life. They were deliberately chosen for their wide variation, partly to avoid the mistake of stereotyping the experience
of growing old, partly to show what impact one's history and societal environment has upon individual ways of coping.

Simone de Beauvoir quotes from Léautaud's *Journal* (340-45). The Frenchman Léautaud commented on his satisfaction with his personal appearance at age forty-one, his face "not so ugly . . . rather expressive." Twelve years later a railway official referred to him as "a little old gentleman" and he explodes with fury in his journal. He denied the possibility, seeing himself as "an exceedingly well-preserved fifty-year old." At fifty-nine he began to lament the fact that his face did not reflect his mental and physical condition. "What a pity my face does not match! Above all my lack of teeth! . . . It is my lack of teeth that spoils everything; I shall never dare to make love to a woman again." Léautaud was unusually self-sufficient; he took care of his home, its provisions, his daily tasks; he always felt younger inside than his years and his appearance represented. Gradually, however, he accepted advancing age. He took a certain pride in being unusually supple and alert for his years. He wanted to retain his wisdom and maturity, wishing that his body were, at the same time, only fifty. "The unpleasant side of being a certain age," he wrote in his journal, "is that the least indisposition makes one wonder what disaster is going to strike us . . . it is attrition, ruin, the downward slope that can only grow
steeper." He was saddened by the feeling of irreversibility that comes as one grows older.

At the age of fifty Léautaud had met a woman, older than he, with whom he had formed a passionate attachment. "Perhaps madame is right: my perpetual desire to make love may be somewhat pathological . . . I put it down to a lifetime's moderation—it lasted until I was over forty—and also to my intense feeling for her, which makes me want to make love to her when I see so much as a square inch of her body." His obsession with love-making, his concern that it tired him and that his doctors had advised him to give it up, his disappointment as his sexual powers waned—all this preoccupied him. His amorous desires tormented him: "I watch myself in this state with curiosity and anxiety." He chose a variety of reactions to his deteriorations: erotic correspondence, masturbation, sexual episodes with madame, a temporary liaison with a younger woman, fantasies and dreams. His affair with madame lasted until he was sixty-three. He mourned, "I miss women and love terribly." Still later he wrote, "It is no use giving yourself over to love-making when the physical side is dead or nearly so. Even the pleasure of seeing and fondling is soon over, and there is not the least eagerness to begin again. For the real appreciation of all these things, there must be the heat of physical passion." When his health failed, at the very end of his life, in his mid-seventies, he was in despair, "I
have lost my energy and all my illusions. Pleasure, even five minutes of pleasure, is over for me." French culture, affluent place in society, narcissistic personality, freedom of opportunity, mortal flesh--all combined to make Léautaud's old age what it uniquely was.

In his *View in Winter* Blythe interviewed a group of old men in England whose economic situation in old age differs markedly from that of all working men (237-67). These were the elderly monks residing in the community of the Cowley Fathers, members of the Society of Saint John the Evangelist at Oxford. They had absolute economic and social security. They never retired: they were expected, Blythe said, to face up to life at the end, finding something positive there. Unlike the majority of professional people, these aged religious were never cut off from the special language of their profession or driven into a lay wilderness. Even so, at the disintegrating end of life they suffered a painful loss; there was an attrition of spiritual passion.

Father Luke at 75 (251-54) had made a certain peace with his failure to celebrate the mass, to participate in worship, to pray with earnestness. He felt that he now gave God what he had to give and that God gave him what He had to give and that he was thankful. Sometimes what he gave or received was nothing. "What one has to learn is to use the nothing . . . . I have to be honest and tell myself that often
I hear and feel nothing. Then I have to make it something by acknowledging its nothingness. My nothing. The alternative is despair and I would never choose that. There is nothing in despair either, but nothing without despair is an emptiness into which you just might manage to put something. This is what an old man like me says to himself" (251).

Father Luke rued his failure to read more. "I pour out such a lot but don't have a sufficient taking-in." Aware that everything about him had altered "so much lately," gently puzzled that "things which I thought were essential (were) being put on one side," he was forced to look at things differently. Yet he was not sure whether things were really changing so much or whether it was because he was getting old.

"I care less," he declared. He was tempted to leave everything in the hands of God and rest on that. He didn't care two hoots about lots of things anymore. Except for the other passengers he wouldn't really care if the airplane went down on the trip to South Africa he was planning. Yet, he was not wholly confident that he was ready for death. It did not create anxiety in him that he lived with a little doubt. "In fact, it is very healthy; if you didn't sometimes doubt, you'd go all over the place. Having been given a firm background, I now feel that I can doubt what I like. But as I grow old, I find that the background stays
firm." Father Luke, living in a slow-moving, traditional community, aware of fundamental change in the outer world which he traveled was sustained by his faith. Yet change impinged, there was a new atmosphere, noticeable (painful?) to an old priest: "--now we have brought the altar down!. My Christ was Christ the King and now my Christ has to be Christ the Carpenter."

Growing old is easier for people who have no job from which to retire at a given age, May Sarton wrote in her journal The House by the Sea. A poet, she was continuing her chosen task--"to sort out and shape experience." She pondered how one may approach being old besides growing old. The opposite, it occurred to her, was to wither. She assumed it was easy to wither into old age, hard to grow into it. Another alternative to growth is regression and she probed this notion: "Maybe growing old is accepting regression as part of the whole mysterious process. The child in the old person is a precious part of his being able to handle the slow imprisonment. As he is able to do less, he enjoys everything in the present, with a childlike enjoyment. It is a saving grace, and I see it when Judy is with me here."

Judy was a beloved friend, now living in a nursing home, exhibiting mental degeneration. Sarton brought her home for holidays at some physical and emotional cost but
also with occasional unpredictable rewards. At Thanksgiving, Sarton had Judy visit but it was a trying time. "I have such sadness about Judy. She is going from me, from us all, little by little, and I feel helpless and often terribly irritated by her repeating the same phrase over and over as she does." Then she received this letter from a friend who had known Judy in earlier days (45):

Dear Modiglianish, always there, sensitive, receptive Judy. She was so wonderfully kind and accepting in those years of pain and mess. Death comes by installments but sometimes the first installment can be very steep, perhaps much more painful to those around them than to the person. I do cherish her so; can you maintain the image of life when so much has gone?

Sarton was confronted with the possibility of her own degeneration by that of her friend and felt fear (53):

By the time one is sixty there is a deeper anxiety that has to be dealt with, and that is the fear of death . . . or rather, I should say, the fear of dying in some inappropriate or gruesome way, such as a long illness requiring care . . . "Why talk about it?" I say "talk about it" because these are the things we bury and never do bring out into the open. And what is a journal for if they are never mentioned?

She became aware that for the last few years she had been conscious that from now on she was preparing to die. She vowed to think about it as she must do it well.
Reflecting upon the past she came to see that it was never static, never "placed". As we grow and change, we understand things and the people who have influenced us in new ways" (95). Again she wrote: "Growing old is, of all things we experience, that which takes the most courage, and at a time when we have the least resources, especially with which to meet frustrations" (128). Three good friends died during the year of her journal and one by one the members of her parents' generation were dying. She noted that the basic pattern of a life changes radically when there is no one left who remembers one as a child. "Each such death is an earthquake that buries a little more of the past forever" (81).

The turmoil of the year took its toll and by spring she found a need to reduce her activities. She chose to take on fewer lectures. Her choice aligned with her deepening sense of who she was and what was important. "To give even one public lecture makes deep inroads into what I really mean about my life . . . [Lecturing] is to be "in the world" and that is just what I feel I can refuse to be in . . . " (87).

The move from her New Hampshire house to the house by the sea in Maine was a wrenching change in which the giving up and the taking on were both inner and spatial. She claimed that the decision to make "this radical change" was made on instinct and that change played its part. The old house was "too exposed, too many strangers found their way
to my door." She refers to a traumatic personal experience which left the house itself "contaminated by pain". She recalls her depressions: "I seemed to be at a dead end in my own life." She "dreamed herself into the change" over a two-year span. The new house was larger, the garden and fields expansive and the distant pound of the sea suggested a broader, limitless vista. "I have slipped into these wide spaces, this atmosphere of salt and amplitude, this amazing piece of natural Heaven and haven, like a ship slipping into her berth." She achieves a reintegration of her life through a values reassessment: "Without long periods here alone, especially in winter when visits are rare, I would have nothing to give, and would be less open to the gifts offered me." Solitude replaced the passionate relationship which had previously focused her life. She trusted that solitude would not fail her if her own powers of creation diminished. "For growing into solitude is one way of growing to the end" (14).

In a New York Times interview the following year, asked about her experience of old age, Sarton observed that the only diminution she saw was in sustained energy but that it was more than compensated for by knowing better how to handle herself. She saw old age not as an illness, but as a timeless ascent. "As power diminishes, we grow toward more light."
One's actions can often represent one's values more clearly than verbal or written reflections. Robert Moses entered his eighties in the decade of the 1970es. His life—his immense energy, his restless, bright mind, his driving ambition had been spent as a master builder of public works for New York--bridges, buildings, roads, parks--bringing into being vast projects for the great metropolis of America. He dealt with contractors, labor leaders, engineers, politicians. He was a power broker and he wielded great power in the course of his life work (Caro 146-62).

Retired at seventy-nine from company chairman to consultant, still surrounded by a coterie of his men, he continued to hurl himself into the Atlantic breakers, swim far out to sea and stay so long that the younger men attended him for safety's sake in relays, "young steers unable to keep up with the old bull." Moses could not accept the fact that his power to get things done was irrevocably gone. He made vast plans for mass transit, for bridges and roads, for replacing slums, and he used every wile learned in a long career to get his projects adopted by those who had inherited the power but who had other plans.

"He's getting edgy. He tells you he knows he's being kept out of things ... He's a hard, crusty old guy, but he's sensitive ... the sad thing is that a lot of people who like Bob Moses are saying he's too old and it's not a
bad idea to ease him out because of that. But he's not too old. He's got fantastic ideas on housing," reported one of his friends in the industry (1148-49).

As his loss of power confronted him over the next several years, he suffered the humiliation of learning that people knew that he no longer had power, his biographer observed.

His deafness worsened, liver spots marred his skin, he developed a paunch. But his arms were muscular, his shoulders broad, his physical presence still dominating. Mentally he remained alert and this fueled his frustration. Admiring DeGaulle and Adenauer as well as a grandmother who died mentally alert at ninety-three, he would not accept the limitations of age.

Freed from daily work responsibilities he simply dreamed greater projects. He worked out a city-wide program with specific sites and a projected cost of five billion dollars. Of the plan his biographer says (1151): "It was a typical Moses plan: no consideration of the city investment required to provide facilities for these new, isolated communities, or of whether the city could afford such investment, no concern that by isolating low-income people by the tens of thousands he would be creating new ghettos. But, he did not see these flaws." He generated other plans with a growing concern that there were so many things left undone, so much left to do (1152). He felt that his city,
the one he had created, was being destroyed by the men who had succeeded him in power. He schemed and twisted and turned to get the power he needed to carry out his plan for the salvation of the city. His frustration as he was kept on the shelf turned from impatience into a gnawing bitterness. As he realized that he had been seventy-nine when he lost power and that he was now eighty-two (or eighty-three or eighty-four), he fell into violent rages, we are told by his biographer. He would not accept offers to write or to publish an autobiography, he clung to his desperate attempts to recover the power which advancing years had robbed him of. For him, "hell was the continued urgent, desperate, insatiable need for accomplishment and power--combined with the inability to satisfy even a little part of that need (1155)."

Gradually his mail thinned, the requests for speeches no longer came, others received the accolades he thought were due him and in his own time, surrounded by the monuments of his life work, he was forgotten--to spend his last years in rage and bitterness. At the dedication of a great marble bench he turned to a high church official and said, over the public address system "Someday, let us sit on this bench and reflect on the gratitude of man" (1162).

Blythe interviewed an eighty-six year old widow of an underground mining repairer. She was very ill, dying, well
cared for by her daughters, interested in the drama of which she was the center. She reflected on the past and present (170-71):

We don't know what's in front of us, do we? So give me the old days every time. There wasn't a lot of money about, but life was about. Life. I don't think I would change what I had, if I could. I wish I was a couple of years younger, mind. Oh, but I don't know... It's terrible today, isn't it? Money, money, money, all the time (Amnesia.) That's what happens to me now. I go on as normal, then my head will go like that and I'm lost. I used to try to stop it, but we make a laugh of it now. I used to grumble about it, but now I see it as a bit of rest.

I say to myself, now today, so-and-so. Then later I say, I won't worry about that today—I'll do it tomorrow! And I get away with it! I've got beyond that state of caring too much. Same with looking. Even though a thing can be close to me, I can't always tell you what it is. I like children talking. I like looking at them. I know what a thing is, but I can't tell you what is it. Words, I mean. They have to come to me. I can't find them when I'm looking for them, they're not there.

The Caregivers

I have described the frail elderly at a physically disintegrating time of their lives from the view of physical research, psychology, sociology, anthropology and ethology. I have also tried to let the deteriorating old speak for themselves. One other view ought to be considered among the preceding descriptions. Inasmuch as their condition makes
all these persons dependent on caregivers to one degree or another, one cannot get a full picture without taking into consideration the interplay between them and their helpers. For purposes of ethical considerations in Chapter Three below, the role and rights of caregivers should also be taken into account.

Blythe (103-21), after familiarizing himself with the County Home for old people in his English village, a home he preferred to more modern ones, wrote that the best kind of old people's home is small, discreetly controlled, with a latch-key for one's own room and some furnishings from the past. The worst kind were "the geriatric barracks" with picture windows, "cheerful" lounge, long halls, numbered doors, in which the aesthetics and sensitivities peculiar to old age, though well known, are neglected. He reported that the old suffer terribly from enforced television and muzak, telephones, central heating, noisy appliances and the foolish way they are spoken to by some attendants. The home he had chosen to observe would be typed an "intermediate care facility" in the United States. He saw men and women who could have been in their own homes or in the homes of their children. "What is clearly wrong," he wrote, "is that when we grow old we should be extracted from home to the home" (104). In the United States the population group which is increasing fastest is the past-seventy-five age group (Dickman: 43-45), often called the "frail elderly."
Ten percent of these are patients in long-term care facilities and it is variously estimated that while only five percent of the elderly, meaning sixty-five and over, are institutionalized at a given time, there is a fifteen to twenty percent chance that those who live into old age will spend time in a nursing home or convalescent center.

Dickman, in writing of these, comments: "To think that the very best of our nursing homes (and I am privileged to work in one of them) can ever replace a 'real home' makes no sense at all." Dickman cites United States research data claiming that over fifty percent of nursing home residents can be cared for in different settings (43). Single persons—the widowed, the divorced, the never married—fill more beds in institutions, suggesting that those with living spouses and children may receive the care they need from these family connections while remaining in the community (Birren: 106). Butler warns against generalizing about whether old people get along better with people of all ages or with their own age groups (120). Eisenstadt, surveying industrial and primitive cultures, concluded that groupings by age exist in "universalistic" societies, that is, societies in which the family is not the basic unit of the social division of labor (15-17). Western industrial nations are "universalistic." Can we assume that it could be more acceptable in the United States to place the frail elderly with the frail age-mates? There are some old people
who adapt well to the new setting when transferred to a
custodial care center. For some the meals, the physical
care, the rescue from isolation and the relief from efforts
at coping without assistance promote higher morale.

Institutional caregivers are often untrained, poorly
educated and paid at a minimum level. Research reveals that
nurses and attendants in nursing homes enter most frequently
the rooms of those patients who are the most responsive.
Those severely debilitated are generally those least able to
provide social reward to their caretakers.

Public outcry is bringing improved conditions in many
nursing homes following exposure in the media. Findings of
an undercover nurse in Florida was given national press
attention in 1980. "I wasn't expecting the blatant,
terrible conditions I found," reported the nurse informer.
She found "homes" where people lay in their own excrement
because there was no linen, and where food was unpalatable
on a $1-1.50 budget per patient daily. At night sometimes
an inexperienced nurse was on duty for sixty patients
resulting in frequent sedation of the old men and women.
Ten percent of the patients had visitors on a regular basis
and another ten percent came on holidays only. After an
eighteen-month inquiry, the grand jury for Duval County,
Texas concluded that regulators were ineffective, charged
the nursing homes with unhealthy conditions, and criticized
doctors and relatives for abandoning the elderly in such
homes. The report was criticized by the president of the Health Care Association for "painting the industry with a broad brush" instead of naming the specific homes ("Undercover Nurse Recalls Frightening Death Threat").

The general image of families deserting their elderly is, however, not substantiated according to research done by Sussman (Maddox 1978: 33-36).

Social workers whose sympathy lies with caregiver families support the extension of nursing home funding. Those who are chiefly concerned with old people however, seek alternatives to institutions: foster homes, congregate housing, hospices, familial home care (Dickman: 43-44).

But do the social science researchers understand the human costs of giving home care or home-like care to the frail elderly? As the functioning of the degenerating body slows down--its nervous system, its cardio-vascular, gastro-intestinal, pulmonary, genito-urinary systems--the person needs physical assistance. The help is often "dirty work." It involves personal care of the person, extra cleaning of person, clothes, rooms, bathrooms. This kind of care can be made easier by appropriate equipment, but at considerable cost. It may demand special care in food preparation--extra work--and in feeding. It may require cleaning up after spitting, spilling, urinary and fecal incontinence. These matters are not exceptional; they are commonplace in the care of the person whose body is in advanced stages of
degeneration. The older the person, the more likely is the person to suffer such conditions.

If the physical deteriorations also bring with them impairment of mental function, then the care of the patient becomes still more demanding. Often cooperation cannot be elicited. The old person makes constant mistakes. He hides valuables and cannot find them, tries to swallow what is inedible, doesn't toilet himself properly, takes and uses what is not his, falls asleep with a cigarette smoking. Or she turns on the stove and forgets, fails to check the water temperature before bathing, answers the phone, intercepting and confusing communication, eats for a snack what was saved for dinner. Add to these difficulties for the caregiver a variety of psychological factors: depression which depresses also the caring attendants, anger and obstinacy regarding the necessary activities of the day, refusal to take the medicine which would alleviate problems, tears of unhappiness, verbal abuse toward those trying to help, unreasoning hostility, and paranoid accusations. When a father cleans up after a vomiting child he acts in the expectation that the child will be well and running again. When a mother diapers a messy infant she can count on a developmental course to liberate her from the task in a fixed time. Moreover a dry infant and a feeling-better child proffer immediate rewards of appreciation to perceptive parents. A mentally confused, helpless, frail
parent may offer no direct rewards at all. It is not useful to be sentimental about these care needs.

For those people, many themselves old, who care for deteriorating and ill spouses or siblings at home, the help that counts first is practical. The know-how for such care is locked up in the individual experiences of those who have cared for the aged at home. Such knowledge is of immeasurable value in a community's treasury of folk wisdom. Home nursing manuals (not widely distributed) collect and preserve some of it. The motivation for such care by a spouse, a brother or sister, a child or friend—is caring. This caring may manifest itself as guilt, as obligation, as religious duty, as altruism; yet somewhere along the continuum from love for this person and a generalized devotion to an ideal community rests this caring. Martin Luther declared in the sixteenth century that the Roman church canonized those who withdrew from the world but the real saints were those who put up with squalling babies and shrewish wives and drunken husbands. Their work was God's work (Atkinson: 13). Today Luther would have to include an additional category: those who care for the frail elderly.

Curiously, a research project reported by Zarit found that caregivers to elderly persons with senile dementia felt burdened, not according to the physical condition of their charges, but according to their own degree of isolation. Of all the variables which were expected to affect caregiver
morale only the frequency of visits from other members of
the family had a significant positive effect (654).

The Texas Research Institute of Mental Sciences voiced
a concern growing out of its responsibility toward mental
health in the community. Conceding that home care for the
dependent elderly generally was preferable, it observed that
the burden of care on other family members can increase the
total amount of mental health problems in the community if
adequate family supports and services are not made
available.

Volunteer workers are a critical component in the
American care delivery system for the dependent elderly.
They work at several levels. Volunteers serve on overseer
and advisory boards at national, state, county and local
levels. They serve two functions: to provide a wide variety
of expertise and knowledgeable judgments about programs; and
to represent the provider, consumers and taxpayers in a
pluralistic society. Volunteers also provide hands-on
services. They may form service cadres in care facilities
to serve meals, distribute and read mail, wash and dress
hair, give monthly birthday parties, arrange flowers. Some
social service agencies train nursing home visitors.
Outside of institutions they may deliver meals-on-wheels to
homebound elderly, assist at congregate meal sites, and make
daily telephone reassurance calls. They form a vast network
in services to the elderly and represent a critical
component in efforts to help frail elderly to live in the least restrictive environment possible. Such volunteers are usually recruited, trained and assigned by agencies receiving funds from the United Way. America's long tradition of social charity is manifested in a sophisticated partnership between volunteers and the paid staffs of helping agencies.

Paid caretakers provide services to the elderly in institutions, in family homes, in day care centers and at meal sites. They may work for minimum pay and are all too often inadequately trained. Care of the confused elderly, where there is no supervision of the help, offers a dangerous temptation to exploit or neglect the old person.

Public Policy

It is at the public policy level, usually synonymous with public funding level, that the claims of the elderly for help confront the needs of others under conditions of limited resources. Maddox (1978) pointed out that concern for the aged as a social problem accompanied emergence of concerns about modernization, industrialization and urbanization. Older people seemed more vulnerable than others to society's "disintegrative forces." Rapid change, for example, was harder on old people. Maddox wrote that a society will begin to address a social problem when a basic social value is challenged, when the problem appears to be
avoidable and when there is a possibility of a social consensus about how to work on a solution. While some people worked on biochemistry and medical science to improve health in old age, others saw the problem as institutional barriers to meeting the needs of old people. A third perspective was taken by those who found the roots in our culture's value systems. It looks toward social preferences and distribution of power. Reformers argue from each of these perspectives.

The English Poor Law of 1607 which influenced the American colonists was the basis for public welfare, according to Albert and Zarit, until the depression of the 1930s. The early consensus was that anyone with enough determination could be a success, that the care of the needy was the obligation of relatives, and indigent people should not travel. Old age pensions were not favored. A former President, Ulysses Grant, was living in poverty at the end of his life. Attempts to provide federal assistance to the elderly in 1910 and 1911 failed.

In 1934 a committee appointed by Roosevelt looked at data indicating that perhaps a third of the elderly population had no income at all and that nearly half had annual incomes under $300. Almshouses had shocking deficiencies in funding and treatment, with persons who had various forms of disability thrown together. As a result of this report Congress passed the Social Security bill by a
large margin in both houses. Wages only were taxed, the employer and employee paying equal amounts. Originally the tax rate totalled two percent of wages up to $16,500; in 1984 it totalled thirteen and seven tenths percent of wages. The concept of income maintenance was a break with our cultural and social history of rugged individualism.

In 1974 the Supplemental Income program federalized categorical public assistance for the blind, disabled and aged poor to augment social security payments. Medicare, a national health insurance program, was inaugurated by Congress in 1965 to relieve the elderly of a major part of medical costs of hospitalization, surgery and lengthy recovery. These benefits are indexed to the cost of living and have risen with inflation since their inception. Medicare leaves twenty percent of those bills covered to be paid by the beneficiary in addition to other medical expenses not covered.

Medicare is financed through the Social Security tax and from the general fund. Medicaid is an additional health insurance federal program for the indigent, a third of its dollars are spent for skilled nursing home care.

A majority of older persons are now able to meet basic needs and live comfortably according to Albert and Zarit but a sizable group still struggle at a minimum level. Social policy reflects a commitment to guarantee a pension and health care to the elderly.
There were two ways in which the social security system might have been financed (Keyfitz). One is a plan to have each cohort of population pay for itself. In this system each worker would save and secure the expected benefit of that saving. A substantial amount would accrue during the person's lifetime, draw interest at the market rate and the accumulated fund would provide the pension. At the time such legislation passes, those already old would have to continue without help or be financed, on a one-group-only basis through other tax sources. But the Social Security Act, for political expediency and ease of passage, chose the other means. In our present system the pension of the retired generation is always paid for by the working generation which follows. The premium or tax is calculated in such a way that little is left at year's end. It is a simple transfer scheme from the working population to the retired. Keyfitz compares this to a chain letter. What is wrong is that eventually we run out of people. If there continued to be four workers of forty-five for every former worker of 70 the scheme would be stable. But changes in family size have painful repercussions, threatening to bankrupt a cohort of few children. If a cohort has few children it may not receive the promised benefits. The act assumed a population increasing forever. The actual situation can set up bitter conflicts between generations. Whether it is possible to rectify this mistake is doubtful;
the present elderly generation would have to be paid from new taxes.

This problem plagues the social security system. In addition the health care program creates economical and public turmoil. The health bill for the elderly is growing, numbers of clients increasing, and taxed citizens grow restive under transfer payments which reduce their consumer power.

The Social Sciences and Ethical Imperatives

In this section I wish to explain why one cannot go directly from social scientists' descriptions, even when attended by admonitions, to considerations of how the old should behave, how others should behave toward the old, and what environmental changes are called for. This will entail first a discussion of the assumed task of the social sciences and some alternative perceptions of that task among its members. It will further entail an examination of a few theories about aging with an analysis of the difficulties which arise with competing values. Finally this section will propose that the bridge between where we are and where we should be in the matter of physically failing old people is a consideration of what has ultimate value. Another way to say this is that only religious ethics can help a society line up its priorities so that old people fare better.
The Task of the Social Sciences

In 1906 Harvard College taught sociology under "Social Ethics". At that time in Great Britain professors of sociology also believed that sociologists should prescribe for social improvement. While that approach persisted in Britain, in the United States the period after World War I brought a shift of emphasis. Fashioned largely on the scientific model, and in line with positivistic thinking which had current appeal, the academic study of sociology adopted an objective, detached, and scientific character. These later social scientists stressed scientific and analytic ends. Moral and prescriptive conclusions had little place. As Bulmer put it (35), moral concerns were regarded as "an intrusion more characteristic of muckkners do-gooders, and reformers than appropriate to new disciplines striving for professional status" (35). Those who make use of social science research data today are indebted to that era and to efforts toward prejudice-free investigation techniques which came from it and remain the goal in research methodology.

The detached attitude and the scientific model, however, gradually came under criticism. Was it possible, really, to have value-free studies? And, if not, should social studies purport to be "value-free"? The scientific model called for the formulation of hypotheses and theory. Theory was formulated from observed data. It was argued,
however, that the theories proposed were influenced by the particular stance of the observer as well as the persons under observation. Moreover, the theorist who used these data to formulate a theory was directed by his or her own preconceived values. The very choice of what to observe was a value judgment, informed by the social scientist's personal history, beliefs about human nature and the realities of the world. For example, a report in a Harvard Medical School Health Letter on alcoholism asserts that the dispute about curing alcoholics existed "because honorable investigators have obtained different answers, depending on how they asked the question. The debate has been passionate because the subject is terribly important and because both sides are defending political and social viewpoints as well as attempting to solve a complex factual problem." One's world view, even when dynamic and changing, is laced with convictions about what is more and less worthwhile.

Furthermore, theorists have sometimes disagreed on fundamental premises. For instance, the social sciences have been confronted with the same question philosophy has long struggled with: Under the rational surface of the world is there any rational underlying structure?

For the past century, according to Daniel Bell, the negative response to that question permeated every doctrine in the social sciences. Yet about twenty years ago a reversal was apparent as Levi-Strauss and Chomsky
independently argued that behind the flux of the world, the variety of languages and cultures, is a substructure of order. They believed that the properties of the mind and the nature of linguistics provide the evidence. Structural anthropology, Levi-Strauss said, was the search for invariances in society and culture. His theory has met with resistance. Bell reports that sociological relativists reject Levi-Strauss' idea of a universal human nature, the functionalists reject his insistence that the coherence of a culture lies in its underlying structure rather than in the interdependencies of daily life, and the materialists and evolutionists decry his "mentalistic" approach. These debates which persist among theorists are grounded in different beliefs about human nature. They lead inexorably to different value judgments about the behavior of human beings, about what needs to be studied and toward what end for society. Even the application for research grants involves one's judgments of what matters most.

Whatever the determination was at one time for the social scientist to remain detached, and however reluctant some may be today to have their findings translated into public policy, the fact is that there is a continuing clamor for application to public policy and to institutional activity of the interpretations of research data from the behavioral sciences. Some of the pressure for application has come from within the disciplines. Often this movement
comes from a sense of unmet responsibility to right social wrongs identified in new findings. The "radical sociology" of the turbulent sixties decade demanded application. Psychology, following the medical model, had long had treatment tied to its research. For example, Berezin, the geriatric psychiatrist, asked of his colleagues that empirical and clinical data be as clear-cut and as precise as possible in order that theoretical formulations, which must derive from them, be reasonably precise and valid (16). He reminded them at the same time that, "theory and treatment go hand in hand, and if useful observations and theories emerge, management and treatment may then become more definitive" (14). Zimbardo, discussing the task of psychologists, wrote that they must be willing to translate their abstract knowledge into a concrete mundane form so that the average consumer of psychology can understand. He went further and said that some researchers would have to adopt the role of advocate for social and personal change--"they will have to go beyond the data to recommend plans of action" (59-8). Eisdorfer, working on problems of aging, called for interdisciplinary efforts of experimental, developmental and clinical psychology approaches so that the results of basic research could be translated into applied programs (1973:v).

Whether the social scientists should remain aloof from applications of their findings or assume a moral obligation
to use their findings in social action, they are subjected to criticism. Atkinson looked to these disciplines for help in her investigation of American family life. She complained that the figures, the facts, the statistics were reported everywhere but she could find little agreement on their interpretation. Unable to pin down even a definition of the family she concluded, "The figures are difficult to interpret and even more to act upon, for such decisions are not the work of sociologists or psychologists, but ultimately of politicians" (10).

The literature of the social sciences sometimes acknowledges the interweaving of value judgments. Berezin, as an example, commented in a discussion on geriatric problems, "We are governed here also by certain value judgments as to which may be considered 'good' or 'bad' coping."

Furthermore, there have been opposing theoretical conclusions in the field of aging which point in opposite directions for social policy. The most notable example of this is the debate between the theorists of disengagement and those who hold to the position that activity in old age leads to greater life satisfaction (Rosow, 1967: 102-08). Cumming and Henry felt that their data showed that disengagement between an old person and society was not a tragedy to be opposed by efforts at reengagement. Disengagement was functional for both the older person and
that person's community. It brought satisfaction to the old person enabling her or him to accomplish a suitable, gradual withdrawal. It was a preparatory phase for the time ahead when one's powers would wane and less activity would be necessary. Their evidence of the healthy, mentally alert population of elderly "disengaged persons" supported their theory. The activity theory, however, had its supporting evidence. There was a clear correlation between those older people who scored high in life satisfaction and those who were most active. This debate has ended in a stand-off which can only be resolved in another approach. Laying aside methodological issues, it seems clear that a choice of whether disengagement or prolonged activity provides the best framework for understanding aging depends upon one's understanding of what is the meaning of life and one's relationship at the end of life to the world and to others in it. When one is old do contemplation of one's death or realization of diminishing powers have special meaning and provide special motivation toward or away from activity?

To take another example: Bakan (1968) has offered a radically different theory of disease, pain, and suffering. He perceived the movement toward death as a "teleological decentralization" and believed that the work of Selye and of Freud fit his notion. Conceiving of telos as a goal, Bakan asserts that both mentally and physically in a healthy organism there is a higher telos which tends to dominate all
lower tele. Disease, then, he conceives of as a decentralization of this higher telos of the organism with a loss of dominance over the lower tele. His theory can be applied to the disintegration which accompanies late age, evident in the comment of a mentally deteriorating old man, aware of his unreliable mental processes: "I can't seem to hold my world together any more." Bakan's theory assumes a great deal about human life. Indeed Bakan says that his line of thought leads to religion, to the realm of ultimate concern, to use Paul Tillich's term, and to the Bible as one of its major expressions (96).

Social ethics concerns itself with what ought to be in the relations between people and groups. It cannot do its work from an ivory tower. Good work in the reporting of human behavior and motivations, provided by social sciences, helps ethicists avoid myopic errors of observation. Good work in the social sciences expands the vista of ethicists, allows them to take into consideration the claims from forces beyond one's field of vision, the rights of people hitherto not considered.

However, the criteria by which people make choices and develop their attitudes toward themselves and others, the criteria by which societies are shaped as they are, and the values of the underlying culture—these must be examined and themselves judged from a stance beyond the descriptive literature about people and societies. This is the business
of the discipline which calls upon the most sacred ideas about the human experience—ideas inspired by the faith that there is something which transcends all that presently exists in the world—and to apply these insights to the problems of time. The problem of being old and disintegrating in American society should also be addressed from a theological perspective.
NOTES

CHAPTER ONE

/1/ The Russian scientist Z.A. Medvedev, however, was not convinced about the actual ages of those Abkhazians and Hunzukuts said to be past 100. Lack of birth records, the rapid increase in the members claiming to be past 100, the greater number of men in the category, and the discrepancy with the life expectancy of others in the territory caused him to have serious doubts. See Busse, Ewald, W. and Pfeiffer, Eric, (eds.). Behavior and Adaptation in Late Life 9 Medvedev, Z.A. "Aging and Longevity: New Approaches and New Perspectives." Gerontologist 15: 196, 1975.

/2/ Eisdorfer, however, says that short term memory and long term memory seem to be overlapping constructs. He asserts: "The widespread belief that very long-term memory remains intact in the aged is not supportable" (1978, 114).

/3/ Reported in the Joint Committee on Long Term Care Alternatives of the State of Texas, Technical Report VI, Austin: Fall, 1978, 15, and adopted for use by that committee and in subsequent local service programs.

/4/ An example can be found in priorities set for the Long Range Plan of Sheltering Arms, an agency serving older adults in Houston, Texas.

/5/ However, Perotta and Meacham found no positive evidence for life review as a successful therapy for depression or restoring self-esteem among the aged. Their research left open the possibility of its positive effects on ego integrity, life satisfaction, and adjustment (27-29).

/6/ Most gerontologists fail to make distinctions in such conclusions between the young old, the middle old, and the frail or very old. There is a great deal of difference in the health one can expect in seventy year olds in American society and that to be expected among their parents' generation now in their nineties.

/7/ Sometimes presented as interactionist/disengagement controversy, Cumming and Henry called the activity theory the "implicit theory".
Cumming and Henry were sometimes criticized for their selective sample in the study which is the basis of their disengagement theory. They deliberately chose healthy, economically secure persons in order to rule out the physical disability rationale for disengagement and in an effort to show disengagement as a preparatory phase which preceded physical disintegration.
CHAPTER TWO

THE THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Having taken a view of old age that emphasized the physical disintegration that sooner or later attends it, from the perspective of biology, the behavioral sciences, and biography, I propose in this chapter to shift to a theological perspective. Why is this necessary?

To move from a description of ongoing social processes to statements of how things ought to be requires a paradigm different from that of the social sciences. If we are to arrive at ethical analysis and suggest alterations in moral prescriptions regarding old age, we must find a way to view all that has so far been described from the highest possible vantage point. That is to say, what would it be like in old age in the best of worlds? This exercise requires the religious imagination—an imagination stimulated and sharpened by the most developed religious thought of the culture in which we are imbedded. Even in the pluralistic American society this is still largely the Judaeo-Christian faith with its various Catholic and Protestant forms. These forms are rooted in biblical literature and biblical traditions continuously stultified or revitalized in orthodox and liberal interpretations.
Sociology of Religion

Before examining certain doctrines which should be fruitful for questioning the present relationship of old people to this society, let us step back and view this enterprise from outside the theological circle. I propose first to make use of Peter Berger's and Thomas Luckmann's theory of the sociology of knowledge (1966, especially 92-104).

There are three statements, they say, which may be made about society. Society is produced by human beings. Society, thereafter, is a discrete reality. Human beings, in turn, are products of that society. Therefore, societies cannot exist without human beings nor can humans exist without society. Berger and Luckmann analyze this dialectic process further. Society is a human product through the mechanism of externalization of ideas on the part of individuals. Through language people order their world into objects to be apprehended as reality. What results is an objectivization in which society comes to be a reality. In turn, human beings, as they grow and develop socially, internalize the reality. As that understanding of reality is made their own it shapes their lives and thoughts and they become "products" of that society. In other words, if individuals had no community, they would be threatened with chaos, living without order in a meaningless, anomic world. In externalizing they introduce an orderly reality; that
reality then reciprocally orders their world. Inasmuch as we know no time when an individual was born into a world not previously ordered (by those who lived before) it is perhaps easier to understand the internalization process than the externalization. We are already familiar with the education or socialization of children.

"Marginal situations,"--profoundly disturbing and challenging situations such as suffering of the innocent, injustice, personal betrayal, and above all, death--threaten even this humanly produced order and social reality. The given social reality of the world, to be satisfactory, must account for and integrate various provinces of meaning which would otherwise remain enclaves within the reality of everyday life. They are ordered in terms of a hierarchy of qualities, thereby becoming intelligible and less threatening. It is in the nature of human beings to strive for order in a world which threatens chaos (1966, 94-96). The first level is an incipient stage which involves transmitting a system of linguistic objectifications of human experience. Without a relevant vocabulary this would be impossible. A second level involves a rudimentary form of theoretical propositions--explanatory schemes which relay objectifications, for example, proverbs, maxims, and wise sayings. The third level is the development of explicit theories by which an institutional sector is legitimated in terms of a differentiated body of knowledge. A specialized
personnel usually develops to maintain this body of knowledge and this sphere may take on an autonomous life of its own—for example, the law, with its schools and courts, or religion with its churches and seminaries. The fourth and highest level is symbolic universes—bodies of theoretical tradition that integrate different provinces of meaning and form a symbolic totality. Symbolic processes are processes of signification that refer to realities beyond every day experience. All human experience can thereafter be conceived as taking place within that symbolic universe. Religion, art, philosophy and science are identified as the most important symbol systems (40). Language not only constructs symbols that are abstracted from everyday experience, but returns them to participants of the everyday world thereby ordering those experiences. Symbols, thus, are essential to the apprehension of the reality of the everyday world.

According to Berger and Luckmann legitimation produces new meanings that serve to integrate the meanings already attached to disparate institutional processes. This integration process must provide subjective plausibility at two levels. The first is "horizontal" and refers to the way the totality of the institutional order relates to its members. The second is of paramount interest for this discussion. These sociologists insist that "the totality of the individual's life, the successive passing through
various orders of the institutional order, must be made subjectively meaningful" (emphasis mine). The individual must be able to make meaning of all the various stages of his or her life. This they call the "vertical" level (92-93).

In reviewing one of Berger's books, Cobb points out that to the extent that a person recognizes that belief in God is a function of the particular social context in which he or she has been reared, that belief is weakened. Indeed Cobb finds that our increasing awareness that our values and beliefs are sociologically conditioned explains one of the deepest crises of our times.

Berger wrote A Rumor of Angels in an attempt to set forth and defend his own positive faith and to show that his sociology of knowledge is not a warrant for cynicism. He points out that every possible faith position is equally relativized; one cannot, therefore, use his and Luckmann's doctrine of the sociology of religion to undercut those who have faith in God without understanding that those who believe there is no God are holding a belief equally relativized. The fact that a faith position is explicable in terms of the sociology of knowledge does not say yea or nay to the truth value of the position. Berger then offers a rational explication of his personal faith: He has found that approaching religion through anthropology points him toward the sacred. In common human experiences, like
ordering, play, hope, humor and outrage, he finds "signals of transcendence."

I do not wish here to offer Berger's reasons for belief in God as a sufficiently plausible platform of faith. What I do concur in, rather, is that the sociology of knowledge outlined by Berger and Luckmann does not invalidate the religious symbolic universe as being merely man-made or socially fabricated myth without truth content. Neither does it speak for its truth content. Understanding the social construction of reality and of the religious symbol system is useful here when we apply the Judaeo-Christian religious teachings to the "marginal situation" or existential problem of growing old and losing one's powers in American society. The preceding chapter showed at some length that disintegrating old people too often have tragic end-of-life periods, burdening their children with dread and guilt as well as physical care. The situation may at the broad societal level be new to our time, but it is evident that Judaeo-Christian teachings either have not been applied or have not adequately explained the empirical phenomenon at hand as Berger and Luckmann say is the function of a symbol system. This phenomenon challenges us at the level of the everyday world of lived experiences and threatens us with chaos. The legitimations of neither science, the social sciences, nor religion to date have justified or explained the experience of our frail, dependent elderly. If the
individual biography in its successive phases must show a meaning that makes the whole subjectively plausible, then, under the changed conditions of our time, the symbolic universe of the Judaeo-Christian faith seems inadequate. What order can we produce or discover to accommodate and reinterpret this phenomenon? On what basis can we reorder society to take into account and relieve the sadness, the unfairness, and the general anxiety attending disintegration at the end of life?

Theology, as Macquarrie has pointed out, is not an end in itself, not a disinterested philosophy of religion; it is a way to moral theology or Christian ethics (1966, 34-39). Theology speaks of the holy or of that reality to which all things are related as to an ever-present origin, in terms of which meaning or explanation is given, and by which situations are judged. This is true of all religions. For the Christian faith the holy refers to God the Creator, Judge, and Redeemer. According to Reinhold Niebuhr every estimate of values involves some criterion of value which cannot be arrived at empirically (Niebuhr, Christianity and Power Politics, 203). Even if one does not share a Christian stance or a faith in the presence of a living God, one can still consider the truth of these claims.

For those who take a secular point of view, a disavowal of the sacred, then presumably those life crises which confront each adult with questions about the meaning of
existence will force the individual to seek answers in a meaning system other than religion's. Neither art nor science has offered satisfying answers. When Zorba asks his professor friend to explain how it was that such a terrible thing as the village stoning of a young woman could happen, the young professor answers, "I don't know." Zorba berates him. "What the hell good are all your books if they can't tell you that?" "They tell me," replies the suffering young man, "of the agony of men who ask questions such as yours." Art gives us insight, deepens our understanding, but it is descriptive. Science attempts to describe nature as it presents itself. If one asks, why do the innocent suffer? Why do people grow old and lose their memories? Science answers, "This is how it is." Here again there is no satisfaction. As for philosophy, Tillich claims that philosophy poses the question, theology offers the answers. Philosophy can offer help in analysis of the issues. When, however, it offers solutions based upon criteria which are only sustainable upon taking a faith position concerning the ultimate justification for value it leads in the direction of theology. Faith positions are the realm of theology.

The Advantage of Theology as a Symbol System

The symbol system which has the best chance of offering a resolution to the existential condition of end life deterioration is theology. The deterioration we speak of
is, for living beings, the marginal situation in its purest form. The final disintegration of the body—unto death—is "the blight man was born for." We face here the last conscious time before death, holding in hand the death warrant. Nothing in the everyday world (except the debatable reports of some who have had near-death, "out of body" experiences) gives us any evidence that life does not blot out at death. With so much unfinished business for so many, with so much grief over an irrevocable separation, with loss of being itself—all of which death threatens—any explanation must transcend the plane of the everyday world. Only theology purports to do this.

Yet in western, rational, post-Enlightenment science-oriented society, can a person adopt a theological stance without selling one's intellectual integrity?

Neither science nor the social sciences call upon us to transcend through imagination our world of empirical findings. The religious meaning system does. The Judaic roots of the Christian religion teach one God, a God in history. Such a God is dynamic and can serve as the ground for a critique of human action which is both lofty and open to the future. Moreover, skeptics, who doubt even as they give consideration to this faith, benefit when their imagination is stimulated by its historic symbols and interpretations.
It is possible to be knowledgeable through science about nature and the human body, aware through the behavioral sciences of patterns of action and response from which we can choose to be free, liberated through historical understanding from the past, courageous in giving up superstitions and outmoded wisdom and rituals bequeathed by those we venerated and were dependent on—all this which makes us modern, propelling us into the fresh start of a new world—and yet either maintain a religious faith or seriously entertain the possibility that at the center of things is a sacred core, a divine source. One can combine an insistence on rational thought and investigation with deep reflection which springs from revelation of or a search for the holy, without destroying one's integrity. If theological inquiry does not endanger our integrity but rather shows us possibilities for integrating our lives with enduring value then we have an obligation to reflect upon the sacred.

We do well to become familiar with the symbols of the past so that we may learn from the sages of earlier and intervening centuries what they conceived to be true of God and his works. Why should we start from ground zero when with use of available scholarship we might sift wisdom for our time from the culture-bound events and language it is embedded in? Contemporary Christians ought not separate their spiritual from their worldly dialogue and thoughts
simply to feel faithful to the traditional. Tradition atrophies when it is protected that way. Religious tradition has been handed along a live thing; it is not to be memorialized while we are its stewards.

Sources of Theology

John Macquarrie, in the introduction to his book *Principles of Christian Theology* speaks of sources—which he prefers to call formative factors—of theology (4-17). He lists six which he thinks are to be found in all religions but not uniformly emphasized: experience, revelation, tradition, scripture, culture, and reason. He finds a basic element in the many forms of religious experience. In a faith community its members experience a quest which Macquarrie finds inherent in our human existence. The quest is for "the opening up of the dimension of the holy," a presence which addresses, judges, renews, and otherwise responds. Even this experience, however, must be kept in a relationship—sometimes of tension—with other formative factors. Revelation is the subjective experience of the holy and, as such, is tied to experience. It falls to scripture and reason to make sense of such experiences. In this, scripture stands as a guard against individualism and enthusiasm. But scripture itself, if used as some sects do, can be elevated to exclusive authority, interpreted
individually as opposed to interpretation with the help of
the church's tradition.

Tradition, according to Macquarrie, encompasses the
oral tradition about Jesus which supplied the narratives for
the New Testament and the conclusions continuously arrived
at in the church community. Tradition's task today is to
rethink the ancient formulas, consider what in their
original historical context they were trying to establish or
guard against, then reapply them to our modern situation.

The cultural factor as discussed by Macquarrie requires
that theology use the language of the culture in which it is
undertaken. This is tantamount to saying that there is no
final theology. The formulations of Christianity were
culturally conditioned and must be kept alive by each
succeeding age, addressing the problems of that age in the
language of that age. Thus in escaping the risk of
stultifying the Christian message, the theologian assumes
the risk of modernity, of submerging the content of the
message under the cultural forms so that it becomes
subordinate.

Reason is to be seen as an ally of revelation, not as
in one recurring historical position, its enemy. If reason
is used to lay down rigid theories, subordinating revelation
and experience, as speculative reason has been accused of,
then reason becomes suspect. Reason should, according to
Macquarrie, be used to construct rational wholes or systems
of ideas by imaginative leaps, not deductively. Theology must, furthermore, include critical reason as a formative factor. In its capacity of elucidating revelation, reason analyzes, expounds, sifts through and clarifies. The other aspect of critical reason is corrective: corrective reason is brought to bear directly upon the alleged revelation itself to confirm it or to renounce what may be in conflict with other convictions upheld by the community. Without the critical dimension of reason, we would be at the mercy of religious pretensions. Macquarrie shies away from rational religion which he defines as founded upon a rational metaphysic, in favor of a reasonable religion, which continuously exercise critical reason.

Exaggeration of any one of these formative factors will lead to theological distortion.

It should now be clearer in what follows that we are making use of revelation and experience in both tradition and scripture, the first two often found in the last two, that with critical reason we examine them in the historical context of their time, that we make use of intermediate interpretations spawned by later historical contexts, and finally that we take into account the modern cultural milieu in making these Christian truths our own. Theology, so described, is a human enterprise.

Macquarrie divides systematic theology into three divisions. The first is philosophical. This is descriptive
rather than deductive as in old-style theology. It is fundamental in the sense that it claims to have foundations in the universal structures of existence and experience. Macquarrie here makes use of existential as well as phenomenological thought.

His second division he calls symbolical theology and for him it is the core of theology. It entails the interpretation--the "unfolding"--of the great symbols and images of Christianity in which the revealed truths of Christianity are put forth.

The third major discussion is applied theology--the expression of faith in the concrete existence of the community.

If one turns to the Judaeo-Christian religion there are two paths available--the evangelical with its scriptural fidelity, its nurture of the spirit in spirit-filled communities, and its belief in the need for individual reconciliation with God by each sinner; and the liberal path which seeks religious truth in human experience and finds there continuing revelation of God. Some Christians find one so compatible and truth-laden that they are wont to consider the other heretical or blind. I take the position that both paths are potentially revelatory. One of them seems to begin with God and move toward mankind. The other begins with creatures and reaches toward the Creator or toward ultimate being. The dialogue between them can be the
best internal correction of the risks inherent in each position. For liberal Christians may become preoccupied with the secular world and lose that passion for the Sacred which nourishes and elevates human sights, while more orthodox Christians may fall into the hubris of believing that their community alone knows God and understands the Bible and its prescriptions for living. The latter risks diminishing the power of the protestant principle over all secular forms. It must be conceded here, however, that the very use of a dialogue approach is more characteristic of liberal Protestantism.

Biblical texts are the touchstone of the Christian tradition. They provide the symbols for the symbolic world view. From the beginning they have been and still are variously interpreted although certain strands or themes lay the basis for a common faith. Is there a Judaeo-Christian basic view of human nature? Does it correspond to a contemporary view? Can this view apply to very old, failing people?

The Creation Narratives

Since historically American social and political life and often its domestic life, has had its roots in Judaeo-Christianity, the two Old Testament myths of creation, which form the basis of a particular view of human nature, are the starting point. The Genesis narratives speak directly
although mythically, to the three questions eventually raised by all human beings: What is the nature of humankind? Where did we come from? What is our destiny? Being creatures who can reflect upon ourselves we have repetitive, urgent inquiries about present reality, about what has already happened and about what lies ahead. These seminal creation myths have constituted an explanation for Jews and Christians which have permeated our Judaeo-Christian culture. Through the centuries exegetes have mined a variety of doctrines from these texts.

Universalism

The creation narrative attributed to the Priestly Code, established the primacy of God, the creatureliness of humans and their connection to God as the source of their being. Of equal impact is the support given by the narrative to the doctrine of universalism. Born in the image of God, all members of our species, in spite of the differences we perceive, lay claim to the same aristocracy and, derivatively, owe an equal respect to each other. These themes together symbolically anchor the truth of our genetic connectedness to God and our kinship loyalty to each other universally. As the Old Testament unfolds, the connectedness to God is described as more than a past, originating event; it is dynamic and recurring.
Alienation

A second great theme of Christian doctrine emerges in the second creation narrative—that of alienation. It offers an account of the origin and definition of sin and disobedience to God. But it contains a counterposing theme: The creation of woman, as interpreted by Daniélou, spoke to the question of man as a social being, needing his own kind—the beginning of community (not merely fecundity or the transmission of life) (88).

John Macquarrie gives an existentialist interpretation of the second narrative's drama of sin and salvation, of alienation and the problem of reconciliation. Macquarrie does not think the creation narratives are addressing the question of how the world began but rather, What does it mean to be a creature? Macquarrie points out that analogies may be the only way we can speak of the holy but that analogies have to be taken dialectically and their inappropriate features denied (1966: 214). He takes the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo to show that every human being stands, so to speak, between nothing and Being. Therefore, Macquarrie contends, nullity is an essential constituent of creaturehood. When primordial Being moves out through expressive Being into the openness of creation there is the risk that beings may get lost in nothing. This accounts for the two-fold possibility of all creaturely being to move toward fuller being or to slip back into nothingness from
which it was created. This is an important doctrine to recall later for discussion of the frail elderly in Chapter III. For the risk of slipping into nothingness mounts when one is frail and dependent, if that condition results in isolation.

Paul Tillich, another existentialist theologian, shares Macquarrie's view that the narrative of the Fall has universal validity (1957, II: 29-44). Tillich argues that mankind's essential nature is present in all stages of development but inasmuch as what we experience is always in the state of existence (existential) the essential nature which belongs to humans is always in existential distortion. This is the meaning of alienation and is the proper interpretation of Adam and Eve's separation from Paradise. To summarize Tillich's analysis of the Genesis narrative: humans participate in an "essential" (as opposed to existential) being which has the character of mere potentiality (Adam in Paradise); human finite freedom makes possible the transition to existence (implied by God's warning); aroused awareness of the finite power of self to choose puts the human creature between two possibilities either of which threatens the loss of self (hesitation whether to take or leave the apple); and in conclusion freedom is exercised in favor of self-actualization with concomitant tragic estrangement, guilt, and responsibility (the expulsion and separation into the world of pain and
toil.) Existence is rooted in ethical freedom and in tragic destiny. Psychology and sociology show that destiny and freedom, tragedy and responsibility are entwined in personal biography and in social groups. He claims that the Christian church has maintained a stable balance in its description of the human condition. In what seems almost an addendum in this analysis Tillich cautions that theology must emphasize the positive valuation of man in his essential nature: "It must join classical humanism in protecting man's created goodness against naturalistic and existentialistic denials of his greatness and dignity (1957, II, 38)."

The existentialist theologians, Macquarrie and Tillich, make accessible to our time the creation narrative. They establish anew the relationship between what is uniquely individual in a person and that part of a person which "participates" in the divine. They emphasize the dynamism, the continually advancing nature of this relationship and they reawaken in us the sense that all creatures are related to each other inasmuch as each is somehow connected with the same source of being. This latter reinforces the doctrine of universalism--all creatures participate in divine being and all participate continuously.

Reconciliation

The theme of alienation running through the latter
part of the second biblical creation narrative is not followed by any scene of reconciliation or hope of reconciliation. The reason advanced for the rejection from Eden is disobedience to God. Adam and Eve's responsibility is unrelieved by the serpent's entrapment, by absence of intent, shared culpability, or circumstantial evidence. Obedience to God was the condition for living in the estate of pristine simplicity, beauty, security and abundance. No clues are given in the myth as to how to regain paradise. Resolution of the problem of alienation is left open.

Von Rad finds that the Old Testament as a whole serves a preparatory function for the New Testament with its ultimate saving event of the Christ (1965: VIII). If, for Christianity, the Old Testament prepares the way for the New, it was not that the events of Jesus' time were historically prescient to Old Testament prophets. Rather a deepening, advancing religious growth was coming to fruition making it possible for the life and ministry of the divine man Jesus of Nazareth to be proclaimed the Christ by at least some of the people of the covenant /1/. It is at the nadir of their religio-political hope, but conditioned by a faith which had taught a God in history, a God accessible to secular events, that the Jew Paul and the successive authors of the four gospels discover in the Jesus tradition the center of a regenerated faith. In the life of an authentic and extraordinary human being they find the essence of the
divine—not in an ark, a tent or a temple, not on a mountain top, but released forever from finite place and, in their faith in his resurrection and ascension, released also from time. That the core of the Christian faith was characterized by infinity and eternity was not unique; other religions share those theological assumptions. What was profoundly new was that worship of God was vividly directed toward the life, words and deeds of one who was first a historical person.

**Contemporary Analyses of Christian Doctrines Applicable to Aging**

It is said that every religion must speak to the issue of suffering. Alienation is the deepest form of suffering. It intensifies anxiety, with psychological, physical and social costs. One sociological definition calls it separation from that to which one once had the deepest love and attachment. How could the Jesus tradition, later become a Christ tradition, counter the suffering of alienation? And how can it be so interpreted that it applies to contemporary forms of alienation? The Christian way toward reconciliation must make sense to moderns and must apply to all forms of estrangement, universally, if it is to be a living faith.

It was the view of life of the existentialists which matched the mood of the mid-twentieth century and caught the
attention of a group of modern Christian theologians. Macquarrie in England, Tillich, on the boundary between Germany and the United States, and Reinhold Niebuhr, friend of Tillich and perhaps much influenced by him, made use of the deep concern in existentialism for the multifarious kinds of human estrangement experienced by human beings. Tillich was the most aggressive and creative in incorporating existential thought into a Christian theology ontologically rooted.

Let me interpolate here the reason for choosing the theologian Paul Tillich to pursue discussion of the Christian doctrines of universalism and of alienation and reconciliation. Tillich's theology is basically an apology for the Christian message to a people educated by modern science and in the social sciences in such a way as to repudiate the New Testament narratives or to lead lives of dual commitment. Tillich claimed that the event in which Christianity was born—the whole experience and early tradition of Jesus' life, ministry, teachings, and death—has central significance for human beings universally. But he did not think the message was accessible to his time. Therefore he left off biblical language and offered an existentialist interpretation. If he succeeds in his aim, then he has done the Christian message and those who find it an anachronism, a very great service. In short, I find Tillich's interpretation a useful bridge between the truths
of the Christian faith and the plight of the degenerating elderly which is the concern of this essay.

For Tillich, particular beings, that is human beings, are separated from that to which they belong and which lies at the core of what they are and are meant to be. The significance of the creation myths for Tillich, it will be recalled, is the mythical description of man's existential nature in relation to his essential nature. Human beings are thrown into a world in which they are estranged and yearn for ways to regain their essential nature. Yet it is in culture, a culture in which one is confronted with the ambiguities of life (with positive and negative elements inextricably mixed) that one must make decisions. There is no way that human finitude and anxiety can be avoided; but they can be taken up into courage. Fallenness, for Tillich, is the failure to exercise that courage.

In the structures of life Tillich recognizes three functions. The first he calls self-integration which takes place, he asserts, under the principal of centeredness. The movement begins with a certain identification of self, moves outward to those persons, events and places which are other ("alterations") in such a way that the centeredness is not lost, followed by a circular return to one's self—a total process which actualizes the potential of a person. The second function he calls self-creation. Under the predominance of self-alteration the self moves forward in a
"horizontal direction". Maintaining its centeredness the self nevertheless creates new centers beyond the circle of self-integration. This accounts for growth. He adds that the creation exercised is given us by the Creator. The third direction in the self's actualization of its potential is vertical. While there is self-transcendence in the two functions already described, they are within existential confines. In the third instance the transcendence is the thrust of the self toward that which is beyond--the drive toward the ultimately great, the sublime, the high.

Tillich assigns his pairs of ontological polarities to these as follows: self-integration, under the principle of centeredness, to the polar tensions of individualization and participation; self-creation, under the principle of growth, to the polarities of dynamics and form; and self-transcendence, under the principle of sublimity, to freedom and destiny (III: 300-32).

In his analysis of estrangement Tillich tells us that the term begins with Hegel. It is only biblical by implication. Sin is estrangement from God, from other persons or from self. Any act which does not proceed from faith, from unity with God, is, according to Paul, sinful. He who turns away from God and toward the world is guilty of "unbelief" and loses his essential unity with the ground of his being. In another discussion Tillich asserts that human beings are estranged when their centeredness shifts from
alignment of themselves with God to placing themselves at the center of their world without acknowledgment of their finitude. Such persons are guilty of hubris, of elevating themselves to the status which belongs only to God. A third element in estrangement is concupiscence—the temptation which arises in consciousness to use one's potential to take the whole of reality into oneself, using whatever one wishes to use. Unlimited striving for knowledge, sex, or power characterizes this form of estrangement.

The paradox about estrangement, Tillich says, is that it is both destined and it is the result of human freedom. That it is destined is revealed to modern students in science and the social sciences: physically, we are shown a mechanistic determinism, biologically the decadence of the biological process of life, psychologically, the compulsive force of the unconscious, sociologically by class domination, and culturally by failure of educational adjustment. None of these take into account personal freedom or account for feelings of personal guilt. They highlight destiny; they are blind to human freedom. Tillich's doctrine of universal estrangement does not negate a person's freedom and responsibility. It does free us from the unrealistic conviction that we are always free to decide whatever way we choose. Just as freedom limits destiny so destiny limits freedom.
One other aspect of estrangement is addressed by Tillich—the question of collective estrangement. Inasmuch as a social group has no natural center it cannot be said to be estranged. Leaders of the group determine the actions of the group; they can be held responsible. Nevertheless every group member participates in the destiny of the group without possibility of being excused, even if the member had protested a group decision. They are not guilty as individuals but they are guilty in the estranged destiny of man as a whole and of their group in particular. They are guilty of "contributing to the destiny in which these crimes happened" (II: 44-59).

We turn now to a discussion of how the Christian doctrine of reconciliation purports to offer an answer to the human condition of alienation. As we have already examined, except by implication, the Genesis narratives offer no neat prescription for re-entering paradise. The Old Testament as a whole, however, points a way through Yahweh's covenant with Israel and the progressive development and refinement of the themes of promise and fulfillment, of disobedience and chastisement, of the arrival of God into historical events and of God's absence. We see a growing expectation of a Redeemer sent by a gracious God who will come and save God's people from destruction and effect a reconciliation of God with the faithful. Thus the movement in the Old Testament is seen,

The intent of the New Testament is to show Jesus as the one who arrived, not as the historically anticipated son of David but socially and politically powerless. Astonishingly, he comes nevertheless sanctified in his message, his ministry, and his life course as the way to reconciliation and redemption. In Jesus words, though variously couched by the gospel writers, the individual's responsibility in the process of salvation lies in the two-sided commandment to love God and one's neighbor as oneself. Jesus' parables, his ministry to all who came to him, described in worldly terms what constituted love of neighbor. He explains that his healing power comes from God but that he is powerless where the people have turned away from God. Jesus consoles the people, assuring them that God is ever present and more ready than a good father to forgive.

Unless the scriptural messages are found meaningful in every phase of cultural condition the Christian message becomes a stultified and fading tradition.

For Tillich, Christian reconciliation is reunion of that which is separated or alienated. Reunion is the basis of ethics for him. However, he does not refer to a union of
self to others; rather, it is the reunification of self to the
ground of being, of others to their ground of being.

Kierkegaard had shown that the individual is not
reconciled, Marx that society is not reconciled, Nietzsche
and Schopenhauer that life as such is not reconciled. Thus,
Tillich writes, existence is estrangement, not
reconciliation; it is dehumanization and not the expression
of essential humanity. Existence is the process by which
man becomes a thing and ceases to be a person (II: 25).
Tillich is aware that this seems to portray a pessimistic
and despairing view of life. Paul also presented what
appears in isolation to be a hopeless view of life in Romans
chapters 1 and 7. But existential elements of life are
always combined ambiguously with essential elements. They
are abstractions from the concrete actuality of being,
namely, life. What defeats pessimism is Spiritual Presence.
Here Tillich is faithful to traditional Christian theology.
Spiritual Presence means God is present. Reconciliation
does not come about through human activity, not even human
action obedient to the will of God. Reconciliation, as the
author of Job depicts, as the Reformers made clear, as Barth
in this century insisted, initiates with God. Tillich
agrees. Yet reconciliation is a covenantal relationship
also—it requires two to have reconciliation. The estranged
individual, or the members of the estranged community, must
turn toward the Lord of their creation, out of their
lostness and anxiety, seeking a return to that which is separate and Holy but that in which, paradoxically, they participate by virtue of being creatures of the divine—by virtue of their "essential" natures. Human beings, must, therefore, turn toward God in faith in order to accept God's gracious act of redemption.

A Secular View of Alienation

Before leaving this discussion of alienation and reconciliation there is a secular view of alienation which challenges this endeavor.

In the sociological view of Peter Berger alienation has been a price often paid by the religious consciousness in its quest for a humanly meaningful universe (1967, 81-101). The alienation he speaks of, is a phenomenon of consciousness. He incorporates some of the thought of Mead, William James and Arnold Gehlen as well as adopting some of Marx' thought to his thesis. The way in which the self, in its very biological nature, externalizes itself, creating a social world, which then becomes an objective reality, at the same time internalizing that reality in the socializing process so that the produced social world becomes a constituent part of the subjective consciousness of the self, has already been reviewed in some detail. In this process Berger describes also a duplication of consciousness. One component of self is socialized, the
other is non-socialized. In this concept only one part of consciousness is shaped by the social world into the roles which mask the individual's subjective identity. The result of this duplication is that part of the self (or consciousness) which is formed by the internalization of the social world is distinguished from the subjective self and unites in "uneasy accommodation" with it. One then becomes aware that the social world is a reality unto itself and may also become aware that the social self is other than the subjective (or non-social self). This is a form of estrangement but it is anthropologically given in that man is a social being. Berger contends, however, that this estrangement may proceed in either of two ways. The strangeness of the world and of the socialized self may be "appropriated" as one recalls that both are, after all, products of one's own activity—a benign outcome. The other possibility is that the social world and socialized self continue to confront the subjective self as immutable facticities like those of nature because reappropriation is no longer possible. (He does not elucidate why). In the former case, as the individual matures he or she may become aware that those rules, ways, relationships which were taken as an unalterable "given"—as nature, as fate, as "simply the way things are"—are in fact human products. Human products are humanly maintained or can be humanly changed; they are not factual necessities, as they were first taken
to be /2/. To believe that human products are products beyond human control, as in the latter case, is false consciousness—"bad faith"—and results in an individual's alienation. That which in truth belongs to self is falsely believed to belong to the sphere of other, it becomes part of what is extraneous to one's self, it is strange. It is in the quest to impose order on chaos that we fall into this temptation to alienate what belongs to self. How much more secure it can be to accept events as externally determined than to assume the burden of maintenance, the risk of error, the responsibility for change!

The religions of the world have frequently been the most successful legitimators of this kind of alienation. In alienation the dialectical relationship between the individual and his world is lost to consciousness; the person is unaware that he is in truth co-producer of the social world. If then religion posits the presence in the world of beings and forces that are alien, the alienated individual is hospitable to the idea and continues to hold alien those realities which are human products. Berger repeatedly and emphatically asserts that he is not speaking here to the validity of religious assertions. He does, however, take religion to be a human product. Transcendent reality cannot be proved or disproved empirically or sociologically. Sociology does have a right, nevertheless, to object when a human product is falsely presented as
wholly other and is incomprehensible in human terms. The resolution of this alienation, a process of "de-alienation", happens when the self acknowledges its own participation in producing the social realities which seem at first--and which he may have been indoctrinated to believe--are externally created realities. Often life seems less simple, less comfortable, more anomic when the self cannot relax in dependence on an external scheme. The truth re-introduces chaos which human beings try to suppress or control at nearly any cost. Yet this alienation is an alienation from both truth and freedom. They who have this truth are liberated to change that which others find immutable.

The insights offered here by social psychology raise a number of issues for theology. His criticism of doctrinal tactics, which reinforce "bad faith", stands on its own. Furthermore, his analysis of the social consciousness and of de-alienation give good reason why, assuming a transcendent Divine Being, such Being acts and speaks on sacred initiative only and cannot be manipulated by acts, prayers, words, or gestures. These are human products; the acts of God are divine. They must not be confused. To do theology in our time we must take on the pain of de-alienation and religion should, as it can, reinforce that truth. Is there not precedent for this in the protestant principle?

One further comment I wish to make. Berger seems to believe that human conscience is formed in response to the
nomoi which are formed in human activity and then internalized. If so, conscience would reside in the objectivated, socialized self. I am not ready to concede this. In my opinion, the subjective consciousness, which precedes the process of socialization, is a human attribute which yearns for order, is characterized by curiosity, moves to enlarge its freedom and seeks others. This accounts, I think, for Berger's conclusion that if there is any cross-cultural trait of human nature it is openness and plasticity. It seems to me that conscience, then, may well belong to this subjective component of self. Conscience is a faculty able to transcend all socialized norms and question them.

Summary of Christian Themes

Let us now summarize the themes of Christian theology, both ancient and modern, which have been selected here to apply to the problem of disintegration in late life.

The teaching that the concern of God for mankind is universal, that all persons in the universe belong to God, and are meant to acknowledge this relationship, that derivatively all creatures universally are to have charity of heart toward one another is not disputed. The practice of universal caring for one another has, however, from the time of Jesus and before been in dispute. Social attitudes always challenge the universal theme; note the case of the
Samaritan, the Pharisee, the religious and political dissident, the criminal, the minority race, the poor, the unclean, the prostitute, the mentally retarded, the crippled, the emotionally disturbed, the drug user, the homosexual. Social groups seeking social cohesion challenge the Christian theme of universalism in application and yet we are all to love one another every one.

If we apply these doctrines to the plight of the very old in American society, we see first of all that this doctrine of universalism must be extended. It implies kinship level respect and concern across more than ethnic, gender, racial or religious divisions. It is a radical universalism and it applies to the changing conditions of each time. It may in the future challenge the creatures of this planet to express in respect their kinship with extra-terrestrial creatures. In our time, to be absolute, the doctrine must now extend across the life cycle to all those who, by reason of debilitating age, suffer degeneration of body and mind. This universal kinship does not have qualitative limitations. It is the radical condition of the Divine creation. Only very recently have we, in a few corners of our society, (primarily, among community and individual caretakers) universalized our caring to include those old people whose bodies or minds—or both—have so deteriorated that they are helpless to cope alone with daily living tasks.
The teaching that every human being suffers estrangement and that it is our very nature to be in search of reconciliation with our creator, with the origin of our being, is acknowledged in the community of faith. This community also believes that reconciliation with God is offered as a free act of forgiving love by God. Various Christian communities look to Jesus Christ as represented in scripture and as known in personal revelation as the Savior, the Redeemer, the model, for instruction in their own participation in reconciliation. Christian theology turns to Jesus' own admonition to love God and love the neighbor. Paradoxically, Christian theology holds that humankind is estranged throughout this existential life, that reconciliation is awaited, that there can be no realized eschatology, while at the same time holding that the Spiritual Presence is always forgiving and accessible and that Christians stand forgiven of their sins and reunited with God whenever they repent and turn toward the Divine. The central mandate of Christian life, therefore, is to seek reconciliation with God by loving God with heart, mind, soul and strength and by loving other people as ourselves, universally, as modeled for us by Jesus.

We need here to review contemporary efforts to develop a theology which adequately addresses this aspect of aging. We will look for what meaning is given to aging, how aging is related to doctrines of alienation and reconciliation,
and how well they apply under conditions of very frail old age.

Theologies Which Address Aging

James Luther Adams--Elements for a Theology of Aging

The liberal theologian James Luther Adams, himself an old man, wrote a theology of aging in an essay a decade ago. Borrowing from cultural anthropology he noted that status is acquired by persons on the basis of ascription or achievement and that while some cultures are less likely to ascribe status to old people than to grant status based on individual accomplishment, to a large extent in old age status is biologically conditioned and is ascribed by virtue of chronological age. This ascribed status is low relative to younger age groups. What counts, Adams noted, is what people believe you to be by reason of your years, not what you are.

Adams then recalled changes in contemporary society in the consumption of time and space which have resulted in segregations of many kinds, disbursement of extended families and the residual nuclear family whose members experience hyper-cathexis (affectionate attachments) rather than dispersed cathexis. The results are ambiguous, he reported. The strength of the family as a reference group is diminished. At the same time there is greater autonomy
on the part of the grandparent as well as the parent generations.

Against this backdrop Adams then defined theology as dealing with the meaning of life which is found in relatedness to some frame of reference. Religious meaning is relatedness to an ultimate source and resource—God.

The doctrine of Creation was his starting point for a theology of aging. God has created human beings, leaving them with finite freedom—the freedom even to reject their relationship to their creator—a freedom limited by a demand for justice. Man's relationship to God is based on love and loyalty. His love is directed ultimately to the Creator and not to the creatures. The distinction between Creator and creature allows a sanction for radical criticism of creaturely acts. The doctrine of creation also points to continuing divine creativity. Thus we are taught creation, fall and re-creation. Humanity as imago dei is given a strong positive evaluation. Persons of all degrees derive from this an inherent dignity. Human beings can at all times turn back from their deviant paths.

Applying these Christian themes, Adams concluded that ascribed status by age group is subject to criticism in the light of the doctrine of creation. The young, as a group, are valued while the old are devalued. Inasmuch as at each age all people have a rendezvous with the elusive meaning of life, ethics demands that the valuation of old people be
elevated in the name of freedom and justice. Ascribed status, moreover, blocks recognition of achievement and potentiality—"no person can be crammed without remainder into a category." In light of the Reformation claim that every person stands without mediation before the Holy the theology of aging demands that each person is counted responsible and must be individually valued. All creatures have a vocation to open up ways in which depersonalization of old persons can be overcome and to promote integration of old people into the community.

Adams briefly distinguishes the "older old, say beyond 80" and recommends only encouraging a variety of life-styles and innovation of life-style for their freedom and greater benefit.

The meaning of aging as he summed up his theology of aging is the meaning of life—to love God and enjoy him. It must be pursued in collaboration: co-operate, or perish (1973).

Conference Attempt at a Theology of Aging

In 1974 a group of distinguished theologians and scholars was convened at the request of the National Retired Teachers Association and the American Association of Retired Persons in a Conference on the Theology of Aging. Participating were representatives of Jewish, Catholic and Protestant faiths. Four papers resulted and were published
under the title *Toward a Theology of Aging*, inasmuch as no one of the writers felt that theologians had not arrived at a theology of aging.

The three most promising of these papers are here examined in the search for statements which seem true to experience and true to Judaeo-Christian tradition if one considers the condition of deteriorating health of mind and body toward end of life.

Paul Pruysen--Gains vs. Losses in Aging

Paul Pruysen, Professor in the Department of Education of the Menninger Foundation, questioned the "iconic illusion" of our typical understanding of the ages of man as a peak flanked by two valleys--a rise from childhood to maturity and sloping off into old age. After listing the losses he sees in advancing old age and the gains or potential gains, Pruysen concludes that "life seems no longer to fit the iconic illusion of the low-high-low sequence." What are these losses and gains?

Loss of personal dignity is the first of four basic losses Pruysen catalogues. The aged are subjected to many indignities (addressed in Chapter One) with consequent lowering of feelings of self worth and of ability to maintain self regard. Loss of work is next in importance. Work, especially paid work, is one of the two pillars in mental health (along with loving, which he addresses under a
different heading) and finds that reduction or loss of work undermines the very structure of personality. He ties this closely to the theological concept of vocation. The third loss, astutely appraised by Pruys, is loss of independence—especially painful in a culture which prescribes self-sufficiency, self-help, competence in managing one's own affairs, strength in the face of adversity, skill in warding off pain, ability to earn one's own money and various other "virtues." Finally, he lists loss of time, in the special sense of a feeling of running out of time which, paradoxically, does not dissipate with increased amounts of leisure or optional time. Any of the listed losses can be experienced by the elder as abandonment.

In view of these, what gains can he attest to? He cites reports that an extraordinary proportion of over-sixty-five people in common walks of life claim that it is the happiest period of their lives. How is this possible in view of so many losses? He notes among many old people, first of all, a "gradual discovery of some good and wholesome adult dependencies." On reflection many elders conclude that they never were as independent from others in their lives as they liked to think, even those they deemed dependent on them; consequently, they can relax about their present dependencies. Furthermore, there is a satisfaction that comes to many on reviewing their lives and integrating
the events and activities and passages they have lived through. There is generativity (in Erikson's meaning) and its satisfactions. He also notes that with a reduction in "drive level" one's hypervigilance calms down (reduced competitive spirit?) which allows for a relaxation of defenses, yielding in turn a quantum of energy which can be put to freer use. Additionally, older people often seek or create work, sometimes remunerated, sometimes not, with a high ethical (altruistic?) component. They tend to live in the present, if they have accepted their past. They make identification with the idealism of youth. Characteristic of many is a new freedom for revealing one's innermost thoughts, permitting an unabashed sharing of personal credos (102-18).

Pruyser's analysis does not attempt to apply theological symbols to his observations. He does, however, find in human experience, warrant for a new way to symbolize old age—a positive movement pregnant with possibilities for gains which opens up the terrain for the application of Judaeo-Christian symbols.

Don Browning—On Concern and Care in Late Age

Don Browning, then associate Professor of Religion and Psychological Studies at the University of Chicago Divinity School, stated the theological task, as he saw it: the rational articulation of the meaning of life that answers
mankind's religious needs for holistic visions and orienting frameworks for the guidance of everyday practical activities. This involves the interpretation and correlations of two sources: common experience and the central themes in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. The former is as necessary to the enterprise as the latter. This method of correlation differs from Tillich's. Browning recommends beginning with a phenomenological analysis but what emerges is, he finds, too opaque and must be subjected to scientific and psychological analysis. This Browning proceeds to do and in so doing follows the same path Pruysers had taken, up to a final additional insight.

Browning notes that as a person becomes aware of oncoming old age he or she is filled with a variety of concerns. There is the possibility the individual senses of suffering the loss of the boundaries of the self and finally loss of self altogether in death. There is--a separate and additional concern--the possibility of losing the world with which the living being is related. In the exercise of human freedom one can refuse this news (denial) or accept it and maximize what is left. The latter course then offers two choices: the first is to try and care for oneself, the second for one's world. Browning's following analysis penetrates to a level of fresh insight. In trying to care for self and world, the concerned person soon discovers that his self-in-the-world situation is diminishing, which
prompts the need for a renewal. Self cannot be renewed; can the world? A scientific analysis of this perceived concern concludes that there is some thrust toward permanency and the unconditioned in our experience of aging—a telos which goes beyond the boundaries of individual life cycles. This would account for a need to care for the world. Browning then turns to historic religious symbols to enlarge our base of understanding of this "symbolic immortality." He turns to salvation and hope.

On what ground can I believe that my care (for the world) will have lasting significance?—he asks. Drawing upon the apocalyptic narratives surrounding Jesus and the apocalyptic vision, he recalls that "those who have faith in the coming of the Kingdom are expected to participate in God's salvatory activity of ushering in the Kingdom." The emphasis on apostolic vocation is the clue. For early Christians and their communities participation in the work of God made their work more than finite; it also had a transcendent aspect and value. This theme was always full of hope. Beyond apocalyptic destruction was always a new creation. The conclusion may be drawn, therefore, that even when vitality declines and the range of our contributions diminishes, our efforts will have objective meaning in the life of God and that activity toward the renewal of the world will go on beyond the cessation of our labors (152–67).
Thus Browning challenges, first, the idea that a person has worth only if gainfully employed and second, the idea that old age should be a time of "irrelevant comfort and preadolescent indulgence."

David Tracy--Time Perspectives on Aging

David Tracy, Associate Professor of Theology at the University of Chicago Divinity School at the time, also begins his essay with the claim that contemporary Christian theology is philosophical reflection on common human experience and language, and secondly, on the Christian tradition which is comprised of significant texts, symbols, gestures and personal witnesses of the Christian history. His is a method of correlation more complex than Tillich's. He thinks the task of Christian theology is to do a comparison of the questions and answers from experience as mediated by science, the human sciences and philosophy, with the questions and answers present in the Christian tradition.

Choosing the category of time, Tracy asks: How can we relate with authenticity to the temporality which defines the aging process and our life as experiencing human beings, rejecting the common "measured moments" attitude toward time? Modern consciousness, he believes, now understands that to derive meaning from events requires a past and a future consideration. He calls modern consciousness'
positive evaluation of human temporality "a permanent achievement." This understanding of time is operable in the specifically Christian symbols which could not respond to the question about the meaning of life without it.

Of the three modalities of time--past, present, future--any one of them may find authentic dominance for a particular person, society or culture at a particular moment. Tracy argues, however, that no one or even two modalities should be chosen as the only authentic source of human temporal meaning. Each of us is tempted to declare the major source of meaning that is being experienced at the time, as the only source. If we could open up the possibilities of the other modalities we could learn to revere the aging process itself (thus nature) inasmuch as aging has three modalities. We come to a clearer understanding of this as we follow Tracy's discourse on the Christian symbols inherent in eschatological symbols.

Emphasis on the past has a traditional orientation; for example, the Old Testament Priestly code. Here present meaning is mediated to a community through representation of the past through word or sacrament. A present orientation is represented in the prophetic literature which calls judgment on the present and demands reform now. Apocalyptic themes are, of course, future cast and are compatible with the revolutionary mind. When prophecy fails, apocalyptic takes over.
What Tracy calls for is recognition of the diversity of time frames. He has no objection to arguing the "relative adequacy" (priority?) of the one which is personally preferred, if we combine it with a genuine recognition of diversity. This attitude could require us to revere ourselves as a part of nature and respect the diversity of that temporal aging self (or other) in such a manner that the integrity or dignity of every human being is affirmed without qualification (119-33). Tracy's analysis could also be applied critically to a "youth-oriented society."

Paul Claudel--An Address to the Suffering Ill

In a further attempt to locate among the writings of Christian scholars some address to the plight of physically failing old people let us examine a letter of Paul Claudel addressed to the inmates of the Catholic hospital of Berck in France /2/. In 1928 the editor of a new hospital bulletin asked Claudel to write an open letter to the resident ill and chronically ill for the first edition. Two years later the letter was republished in Vigile for the edification of a wider public.

Claudel addressed himself to the malades of Berck, but especially the chronically and irreversibly ill--those who are not expecting relief but who, their plight accepted, turn the clear regard of Christian and philosopher on their strange condition and he asks them to meditate on this
"substantial" phrase: "My hope is on the side of my attention."

First he acknowledges their resistance to their situation. "Why? Why me? Why must I suffer? Others keep going, why am I immobilized? Others laugh, run, work, enjoy this wide, beautiful world, pursue a path, a career, produce a work, raise a family, are busy among themselves with useful and delicious things. What has happened to me? Why am I put aside, impotent, useless, stretched out from morning to night, for days, months, years on this same bed, accompanied by inconsequential events and with this matter of time which others aren't even aware of? Why have I been chosen? What earned me this nomination, this election to the role of the inactive, nailed to the side of my bed in this helpless program of torture—which is my lot, it seems, and the thing for which I was born?"

This complaint, Claudel reminds them, was Job's, too, and his insistent question finally brought God's answer: I haven't come to explain, to dissipate your doubts with an explanation, but to replenish you—to replace with my presence even the need for an explanation.

Claudel moves on to the New Testament. The son of God didn't come to eliminate suffering, but to suffer with us. Of all the specific privileges of humanity it was suffering which he chose for himself. Suffering was what seemed to him the essence of humanity. Through suffering he could
show us the way out, the possibility of transformation. To suffer was to join Christ in his work. From that time on suffering was not gratuitous, it was redeeming. There might not be freedom to reject the suffering but the sufferer was free to use it for redemption or to lose the possibility altogether. It is like the freedom we have to accept or reject grace.

After interpolating an apology for a lack of orderly, analytical progression in his thought—"I prefer the movement of diverse ideas . . . which come together only to separate themselves,"—he adds a poetic suggestion for their "bitter leisure." Isn't the taste of a bunch of cherries different for the social diner who, preoccupied, samples them at the end of a good dinner than for the hungry traveler who savors them not only with the mouth and palate but from the depths of his stomach and his heart? Doesn't a bouquet of fresh flowers, a plate overflowing with ripened grapes bring more joy to the bedside of a sick person than to the tea table of a Parisian lady? One enslaved to the market place doesn't have a minute to pause; he must stick to his task. But in the case of the immobilized there is communion, the solemn presence beside us of those beautiful things that God has made into something sacramental. The instrument of this communion is attention—l'attention; the strength in it is the need; the profound motive in it is the consenting—as in that sacrament par excellence, consent in
the sacrament of marriage. In this consenting we open ourselves to all the beautiful and good things offered us and which permit us to be what the Creator commanded us to be.

Finally he evokes the image of the cross. Today you will be with me in Paradise. "Lord, it is not tomorrow it is today, just as you said--yes, in this instant of supreme pain this comes; and I could only understand your word on the cross." Thus, Claudel has concluded by identifying those whose bodies have brought them suffering, with Jesus the suffering servant of God.

Theologies of Aging and the Test of Experience

What do this theology of suffering and these (partial) theologies of aging say to and about the human condition encountered by the rapidly increasing numbers of the frail, physically deteriorated aging?

Let us consider an elder whose senses are inadequate to mediate the stimuli of an interpersonal work--who is nearly blind, whose hearing is unreliable, whose memory is impaired to the point of disorientation and who, consequently must rely on the help of others for tasks of daily living.

In recalling James Luther Adams' contribution we must agree that status by ascription for old age, especially when physiological measures are attached to the meaning of old age, violates the doctrine of universal human worth which
derives from the Judaeo-Christian doctrine of creation. Adams objects that such general categories block recognition of achievement and potentiality. It is hard to see how this can bring comfort to the old person whose potential, especially for achievement, is radically diminished. If achievement is honored, it would have to be past achievement. Adams does not consider how this is to be done if memory fails. In commenting on the "older-old," those past 80, he recommends a dispensation of social norms by encouraging a variety of life styles and innovations "for their freedom." There is a suggestion here of what could be a significant contribution to any theology of aging, one that is applicable to those who are physically deteriorating, that is, a mandate to maximize their freedom.

Another theme ought to be enlarged upon and examined for its potential: One aspect of universalism which Adams incorporates in his essay, albeit briefly, is that each person regardless of age has "a rendezvous with the coy mistress" which is the elusive meaning of life. While it is not immediately clear how a mind-impaired person can pursue the meaning of life, this concept will be further developed in my later argument.

Pruyser's central argument is that if we catalogue real losses typical of old age we have to concede it is a downward, negative life course. But if we consider the gains some people are able to make—which embodies a shift
from inner and outer events to psychological events—the particular goods characteristic of advanced years distract from the losses. He does not evoke Christian symbols; he evokes an iconic diagram. The gains he lists, with two possible exceptions, apply to a time of life wherein one has time and reflective ability: reducing resistance to dependence through redefinition, life review and integration; altruistic activity focused beyond the home; relaxation of defenses with a lowering of competitive drive; living in the present; identifying with youthful ideals, sharing of personal credos. Sensory and energy losses, combined with reduced memory, block the opportunity to achieve these gains except perhaps in the case of relaxation of defenses—to the extent that it is the reaction to a lessening of drive—and living in the present—a present which, of course, may be happy or may be depressed.

Pruyser's analysis, nevertheless, of the gains which are experienced by many, offers us fruitful ground for a theological analysis in each case—a search for Christian themes which may symbolize these positive reactions in order that they be used to evoke positive rather than negative reactions among others.

One is faithful to God's vocation, claims Browning, even into life's declining years when it is recalled that any caring for the world puts one into God's own work and can outlast individual effort. As one's capacity for
expressing care dissipates with lost energies how can the very old person be valued? One suspects that Browning was not thinking of the person with advanced debilitation. This is not to rule out the possibility, however, and I will return to this. Browning offers us two valuable reminders: an individual's worth cannot be tied to gainful employment alone, and the suggestion that there is a lifelong imperative which negates irrelevant comfort and indulgence as appropriate to late life.

Tracy's analytical framework, using temporal modalities and eschatological symbols, can be applied to the plight of the frail elder, but Tracy has not done so. He applies it in one sense only—to restore a sense of respect for nature from one end of the aging process to the other and, derivatively, for the human creature including oneself in one's own old age. This attitude would certainly call on us to qualify the frail old person for equal attention. I cannot but wonder, however, whether respect for mere age would not be another ascribed status (even with positive assessment) which Adams warns us against. Where will personhood be attended?

Claudel strikes right at the heart of our dilemma. His malades are diminished, immobile, incapacitated. For his message to be fruitful the community of faith would already have to have a vivid sense of Christian symbols—of the cross, of the suffering servant, of the Redeemer Christ. I
venture that too many members of the American national community are ill-versed today in Christian symbols and that bridges must be built creatively if they are to be helped by unmediated invocation. Moreover, Claudel's consolation depends greatly on mental faculties and sensory organs being intact. Yet his theme of augmenting the significance of nature and nature's detail and his theme of being invited to pay attention--les invités à l'attentions--are not unlike phenomenological insights and uncover possibilities for ourselves and others in late age.

Insofar as these theologies fail to move past a reliance on one's capacity for activity and rationality they are inadequate to our need, for they do not address the plight of the physically depleted, the mentally impaired. What is needed is a theology of aging which allows for a new possibility for reconciliation--at the end of life--even if one's memory is no longer intact. It is not that it is too late for the new Creation, as almost all our physical and social scientists have concluded, followed by an implicit agreement by the theologians; it is just the opposite. For the very aged, the search for the finally true, necessarily a new, creation, has now developed crisis proportions because the end of life--this concrete life, this sole existence--draws near. In his or her human frailty, finitude is at last unavoidable. The individual comes upon the final, unexcused deadline. It is now or never.
If we shift our emphasis to a new metaphor a way may open in which the opportunity and the likelihood of following the Christian imperatives in very late age may be fulfilled. I propose that the human condition often experienced in late age, as well as those in other stages of human life, can best be addressed in a theology of homecoming.

Theological Corollaries of Homecoming

A theology of homecoming can encompass two imperatives; to ameliorate the problems of mental and physical impairment which are reversible because they result from isolation with concomitant loss of self-esteem; and to relieve the problems of mental and physical impairment when the deficit is irreversible through a fresh way of valuing such individuals.

There are no theologies of homecoming. We can, however, apply to doctrines which seem to have corollary significance. Homecoming, whether in a secular or a divine sense, is the journey back to where one belongs. Doctrines of reconciliation have some of the same meaning, though it is more usually taken in the sense of renewed faithfulness to the covenant or healing the breach. Reconciliation can be discussed in terms of salvation, fulfillment, reunion, wholeness, belonging— or homecoming.
I have chosen discussions of reconciliation by three theologians of the last half of the twentieth century.

Sellers on Wholeness

Let us first attend the work of James Sellers, contemporary social ethicist. Sellers, in expounding his own theological ethics, is intent on making Judaeo-Christian symbols come alive for his compatriots in an effort to rescue America from failed morality (1966). In this service Sellers often applies fresh terms not only to make Christian themes understandable to secular Americans but also to hone away aspects which are in fact barriers to the reality which stands behind them and subsequently to release its power for our time.

Instead of salvation or redemption as the stated goal of the members of the Christian community he chooses the term wholeness. Since ethics consist in "considered reflection about human actions from the point of view of some critical standard of excellence," one must clarify that point of view. Others have chosen duty, or happiness, or any of various points of departure. Sellers prefers, and defends his preference, promise and fulfillment. Among the sources of wisdom which he accepts (the Bible, if taken as first among equals, plus the community under the divine promise wherein he counts the church, and the person under the divine promise, including conscience) he believes that
the role of secular wisdom must be expanded. He is convinced that human experience plays a greater part in forming theology than European theologians took into account.

The adjective which highlights human nature for Sellers is ageric. The contemporary human being is the being who is active. One must look to the results of human action in the search for ethical wisdom. Theological symbols will function as criteria for judging human activity—individual and in groups—but the opposite must also be realized. Secular wisdom and human activity are the crucibles in which traditional doctrine proves to have or not to have meaning. Sellers looks beyond today’s denominations and churchly groups for guidance in ethical wisdom. The guiding role now belongs to ethically oriented agencies. This calls for constant dialogue—sometimes necessitating continuity, sometimes calling for a break with continuity—between Christian symbol and secular wisdom.

Is Sellers’ schema for ethics adaptable to the secular, social, urgent dilemma of the degenerating elderly? At first reflection his choice of the word ageric to describe mankind and his preference for the term wholeness would seem to be especially unfortunate. Do these terms not have to be strained beyond their usefulness to make them compatible with those who are increasingly immobilized and whose bodies and minds, rather than being on the way to wholeness
(integrity), are patently dis-integrating? Can we exclude from our vision the faltering end of the life cycle? For these reasons I find the terms limiting.

Aside from these terms, however, Sellers' shift in emphasis is valuable for our time. He is not only uniquely candid in testing traditional interpretations by the way things are found to be day by day, but he furnishes his proposals with a rich mosaic of contant reference to, and judgment, selection or discarding of time-honored precepts and interpretations from Judaeo-Christian history. He understands the skepticism of our time, of those born to a post-Enlightenment, scientific, electronic age, and concludes that the role of secular wisdom in ethics has to be expanded if there is to be communication.

What specifically can apply to our inquiry? First of all, one of Seller's reasons for a replacement for the word salvation was that the word, burdened with its own history of interpretation, suggested an unacceptable limitation: it sustains the notion that it is human destiny to be transported to some superterrestrial world after this one. Sellers invites the assumption that humans are to reach their goal under God "genuinely and actually in this monopolar reality, the world of time and space, which is the only reality we know." If we think of provisional goals on the way to the ultimate goal as, in fact, the only way to final salvation, redemption, wholeness, then our provisional
goals and the steps we take to meet them will satisfy the demands of ethical action. Sellers addresses this under the term compromise which he defines as a mutual promise to abide by a decision. We are continuously only on the road to realizing the wholeness Sellers speaks of. These arguments suggest that whatever solutions we offer must be in the world of space and time.

Additionally Sellers finds that the reality of human freedom is not well answered in the Bible. It reflected the earlier culture of the time of the scripture writings when human beings did not in fact exercise as much control over their lives. The givens of life were overwhelming in their power over the individual and scripture often argued dependence on God in view of creaturely helplessness. Today we are more taken with the American homily that God helps those who help themselves. Thus we can appreciate Sellers wish to call Americans ageric. Only the ageric are free to act on their decisions and assume responsibility. We must live with the clear sense that if the frail elderly suffer injustice, or if their plight alienates us all, then something can be done about it. This is not one of the things we cannot change and therefore must accept.

We are left however with this question: If the goal of life is wholeness in this life what hope can we have if we are headed for a very old age attended by disheartening infirmities?
Tillich on Reunion

Reunion, as noted above, is the basis of ethics for Paul Tillich. The reunion he speaks of is the ultimate reunion which can only be with God. When salvation is experienced, God as the unity of being is at the same time revealed. Thus Tillich argues that the history of salvation and revelation are the same. Revelation can be received only in the presence of salvation. The only experience which properly earns the designation of revelation is that experience which is earth-shattering—world-shattering—for the individual and which issues in a revolution of one's whole being, as with Paul on the road to Damascus. It restores one's being to wholeness, it brings about reunion between one's essential and one's existential being which would be tantamount to reunion with the ground of being itself. However, Tillich adds, revelation (and therefore salvation) as it is received by the human being under the conditions of existence is always fragmentary. In the saving event, in Christ the New Being, revelation and salvation are complete; with respect to persons they are always preliminary, fragmentary (I, 1951, 144-47). Tillich goes still farther in his claim about ultimate salvation. It cannot happen to an isolated individual. Fulfillment is universal. "One can be saved only within the Kingdom of God
which comprises the universe" (147). No one can be saved apart from the salvation of every one and everything.

Is salvation at all possible for the elder whose physical and psychic energies are running low toward the end of life, especially if his or her orientation is lost, or mind confused? Tillich carries his systematic argument into the existential realm. He does not carry his theological descriptions into the day by day arena of choice and activity except to clarify his sets of ontological polarities. That is to say, when he speaks of dynamics and form, or of individualization and participation, he may illustrate the danger of one's emphasizing the one polarity to the neglect of the other with historical examples. It is left to us to use his theology in ethics. If revelation and therefore salvation comes to the individual, but necessarily through the individual to the whole community, could it come to and through the mind-impaired individual? And when he describes original revelation he refers to ecstasy as well as mystery. This does not fit the retired religious described in Chapter One who regrets most about old age a loss of passion to the point where he "takes nothing into chapel" and "brings nothing out." Tillich's descriptions of the role of the individual as receiver of revelation hint of a role which reason plays. When speaking of dependent revelation (as opposed to original revelation) Tillich says that the church is the focus of dependent revelations and
that this is often called "illumination" (I: 126-27).
Illumination "points to the cognitive element in the process of actualizing the New Being." What cognitive powers does the elder with degenerating mind and body possess to receive this illumination? If there is a paradoxical fit here, it is not made clear. However, there is a fruitful possibility in the notion that "a dependent revelatory situation exists in every moment in which the divine Spirit grasps, shakes, and moves the human spirit." "Every prayer", he continues, "and meditation, if it fulfills its meaning, namely, to reunite the creature with its creative ground, is revelatory in this sense. The marks of revelation . . . are present in every true prayer." To be grasped by the Divine Spirit may not take strength of body or clarity of mind on the part of the one grasped. It is possible that the prayer of the receiver may be simply the outcry of a profound need or ultimate question, not depending upon rationality but emerging from the actual condition experienced by the old person at the moment of despair? "Why hast thou forsaken me!" And is it possible that another person can be the instrument of grace—the conduit of revelation, the dispenser of God's love, not merely the mediator's?

Macquarrie on Reconciliation

In John Macquarrie's theology reconciliation is the highest providential activity of God. He links creation,
providence, and reconciliation. One may speak of these activities of God sequentially only for analytic purposes. The creative process involves risk. God risks himself in pouring himself out into nothing in order to bring forth being. He takes the risk that Being may be dissolved into nothing, for a God who hoarded his being would be no God. Creation passes "without interruption" into providence and thereby the threat of dissolution is constantly overcome. Providence, moreover, is continuous with reconciliation. Thus reconciliation is the highest providential activity of Being. In reconciliation "the disorders of existence are healed, its imbalances redressed, its alienations bridged over" (1966: 234-246). Creation, reconciliation, and consummation are three moments in God's unitary action, Macquarrie declares,--one awe-inspiring movement of God--his love, or letting-be, "whereby he confers, sustains, and perfects the being of the creatures." God's saving activity is universal. It must be as wide as creation inasmuch as creation and reconciliation are moments of the same activity.

So far his doctrine is strongly oriented toward God's sole action, God as initiator in approaching particular beings. Yet Macquarrie analyzes the participation or responsibility of human beings as well as the initiation of God in his review of the Christian doctrine of salvation in a later discussion (1966: 294-305). Salvation, he writes,
has five elements. The individual must first be convinced of his or her own sin, which leads to the second stage of repentance--a turning away from sin toward the creator of his or her being. The next element is the election by God--an activity of God which is always awaiting the penitent--followed by God's forgiveness or "justification". The final stage is that experienced by the individual as sanctification, a progressive and continuous work in which the Holy Spirit increasingly conforms this life to Christ "deepening and extending it in faith, hope and love" (1966: 305-12).

The life on its way to sanctification is both one that receives such a life as a costly gift from God but must also be a co-worker in its own salvation. Such a life is lived between the gracious support of God and its own commitments in response to the demands upon it. Nor is the commitment to faith something that is done once and for all; it must be renewed continually in all life's changing circumstances. Among the fruits of life in the Spirit, central are those of faith, hope and love. The life of faith is constantly oriented to incarnation, cross and resurrection; the life in hope is eschatological--it looks ahead to the reconciliation and consummation inherent in the divine outcome of creation; and the life of love is not the drive to union, but letting-be. We must focus on this last doctrine.
The love he speaks of is primarily agape, not eros. It is letting-be in the image of the God who has let creation be in the senses of allowing life to them and leaving them alone in their freedom. This letting-be is helping a person into the full realization of his or her potentialities for being. And like God's, it will be accomplished at great cost, since it will be accomplished by the spending of one's own being. On the placement of rationality in the scheme of things, Macquarrie gives it emphasis. He finds that it has a central place in the essential character of the whole person and that no experience or conviction, no matter how intense, could be exempted from critical reason. Macquarrie's position is that people may be more than rational beings, but they are always at least rational beings. Again we must ask where this leaves us as we grow old, continuously on the way to salvation each of us, as promised in Old and New Testament and constantly interpreted to us anew as an ongoing promise within the Christian faith. Once there is atrophy of mind and body is all chance of reconciliation and salvation lost? If the answer is No, then there is some omission or fault in Macquarrie's reasoning.

Homecoming as the Final Developmental Task

We are ready now to return to the metaphor which I have proposed as more appropriate to end-life circumstances--
homecoming. A faith position that insists that every human creature is alienated and is called to reconciliation with his or her Creator, or that we are estranged from what we could be and were meant to be, and to be whole again we must turn toward that goodness in whose image we were made, must take into account all the various human conditions. How curious that we have ignored the very one which any of us might anticipate--late-life debility. We are concerned about the deformed, the mentally ill, the disabled, the culturally deprived, the poor, the criminals--but we have skipped over what is a personal possibility for any one of us. Thus the first step in a theology of homecoming is to recognize and face the human estate when the body deteriorates.

Erik Erikson, in his analysis of the eight stages of the life cycle, enabled psychoanalysts to consider the healthy personality in terms other than the opposite of a sick one. I choose to discuss Erikson's psycho-social view of the life cycle here, not because the psycho-social is peculiarly adapted to old age, and not even because he chooses the cycle metaphor which might seem to bring one back to the beginning, or to close the circle. I choose his theory because he speaks of the final, or eighth stage of life as the developmental task of winning through to integrity. It is ego integrity of which he speaks. His is an epigenetic view of personality development which
parallels to some extent an evolutionary view. He gives no warrant, however, that any stage of development of the ego will culminate in the "basic virtue" which correlates with that stage. It is his belief that evolution has "built, both into the ground plan of the life stages and into that of man's institutions" a blueprint of essential strengths (1963: 274f). Erikson describes the final stage of life as one in which success is marked by integration and I have described the final stage of life in which one might well anticipate disintegration of mind or body. Are these views incompatible or can we accommodate both?

Erikson, as the result of fifteen years of practice and research, proposed a theory of the psychosocial development of the human ego (1963). He theorized that along with the stage of psychosexual stages as described by Freud there were psychosocial stages in which the individual has to achieve continually new orientations to his or her social world. His theory also incorporated the idea that personality development occurred throughout the life cycle and that it had both positive and negative outcome possibilities. Each stage is considered to have its own developmental task, which, if achieved, prepares one well for the primary task of the next stage of development. Moreover, each stage is an interaction of the genetically staged and developing human being with his or her social
environment, including, of course, the role expectations of one's group.

The stage with which we are concerned here is the "final" stage. Erikson's descriptions of this stage are poetic but brief. Those persons who have "taken care of things and people" and who have "adapted to the triumphs and disappointments adherent to being" may hope to win slowly the ripened fruit of the earlier stages. He chooses the words ego integrity to denote this achievement and lists a few constituents of this stage. The human tendency toward order and meaning has brought through the years some ego assurance. There is a post-narcissistic love of the human ego (not of the self) which brings with it a sense of the spiritual and of world order. This state is also characterized by an acceptance of one's own life "as something that had to be and . . . permitted of no substitutions." Erikson says that this allows a new and different love of one's parents. There is a sense of comradeship with other and different lifestyles and their contributions. But the person who has achieved integrity "is ready to defend the dignity of his own lifestyle against all physical and economic threats." He sees that every life is an accidental coincidence with one segment of history and that "all human integrity stands or falls with the one style of integrity of which he partakes." The integrity style of his culture becomes the "patrimony of his
soul." Integrity at the end of life, as Erikson understands it, becomes a consolidation in which death loses its sting (1966, 268).

The loss of ego integrity at this stage, however, or the failure to achieve it, culminates in "despair." It is signified by fear of death. The time is now too short for the attempt to start another life and try to find an alternate path to integrity. This condition is often characterized by "disgust," or a thousand little disgusts.

In order to approach integrity an individual has to be "a follower of image-bearers in religion and politics, in the economic order and in technology, in artistocratic living and in the arts and sciences." Integrity, in Erikson's sense, implies participation as a follower and taking responsibility as a leader.

Erikson also formulated a list of essential strengths, "the lasting outcomes of the 'favorable ratios' mentioned at every stage of psychosocial stages." With ego integrity vs. despair the strengths which he finds to emerge from integrity are "renunciation and wisdom." He italicizes wisdom as a basic virtue; without the reemergence of these from generation to generation all other more changeable human values lose their spirit and relevance (1963: 274f).

Erikson wants to be sure that we do not pull out one stage of growth and present it as if, once achieved, it is guaranteed throughout life. Such is not the case. He means
to emphasize that a quality of ego strength will have its critical stage at some point in the development of an individual even though the quality exists in some form before its critical time arrives and may need to be rewon at later times. If this is true, then one might anticipate that there will be at the final stage of life no guarantee against the onslaught of the negative possibilities—of mistrust, of shame and doubt, of guilt, inferiority, role confusion, isolation and stagnation, as well as despair. Even so, one will be better prepared to ward them off if the ego has developed strengths along the way. Can these strengths in any sense be retained if the body and mind are in a state of disrepair?

A further aspect of his discussion is pertinent. Erikson's first stage of ego development is that which comes in infancy and is called trust. It depends upon whether the caring adult is trustworthy. Erikson sees that there is a circular path here. He suggests that "healthy children will not fear life if their elders have integrity enough not to fear death."

Homecoming Under Conditions of Disintegration

How can Erikson's last stage of ego development be correlated with my thesis that the last stage of life is characterized by disintegration?
One might, of course, argue that Erikson was limiting himself to a discussion of ego development and that we would be mixing apples and oranges to compare it to a theory of the disintegration which comes from physical causes. Erikson's theory, however, is not limited. While he focuses upon personality development, his is a holistic view which takes into account the physical epigenetic pattern of human being and the impact of the society in which an individual lives and the historical moment of that individual's existence on earth.

I do not think that physiological descriptions of late age disprove Erikson's thesis nor that his theory would make my thesis insupportable. Erikson's developmental stages theory is an enormously fruitful (and optimistic or challenging) one. It simply fails to take into account a final period of life for increasing numbers of people. Even so, we might accommodate the two notions of the end of life by extending his view of the life cycle. Therefore, I propose that the search for integrity is not or at any rate, for increasing numbers it is not, the final stage of the life cycle. It is the penultimate stage. The final stage is what the ego is able to do under conditions of disintegration, even of mind. This stage is the ultimate stage. It is characterized by what I would call alienation at one extreme and by reconciliation at the other. These terms belong both to theological discourse and to
psychosocial discourse and their recent emphasis is indebted to existentialist thought.

In this final stage—for those who reach it—there is in the genetic pattern the "dismantling" of aspects of personality which is observed by geriatric psychiatrists. Ego can no longer hold its world together. There begins a telic decentralization in Bakan's terms. The relationship between the person and those about the person, of the person and the environment of his or her site—these now become critical. For the old person is now dependent—for physical care, for social stimuli, for mobility, for entertainment, for spiritual nourishment, for orientation to place and time, in other words for agape, the loving care of the others.

Reconciliation, I have said, is the successful outcome of the challenge of the final stage of life. I have said this in the context of the view of a social psychologist, even though I have chosen one whose ideas and words range well beyond those usually associated with his discipline. But now I return to a theological perspective.

The terms alienation and reconciliation are not strange to Judaeo-Christian thought. We have seen that all persons, in every time of their lives, are continuously called upon to be reconciled to God. Christian doctrine refers us to Jesus' life and teachings and we recall that Jesus correlated love of God with love of neighbor as the chief
commandments. This is the bridge between theology and theological ethics and illuminates the relationship between the social sciences, theology and ethics. In the following chapter, which concerns itself with ethics--with what, therefore, we should do--we will develop the concept of reconciliation as it applies to the last stage of a long life and see what ethical imperatives emerge. In order to do this I will substitute for the term reconciliation the word homecoming.
NOTES
CHAPTER TWO

/1/ In discussing the appearance of Jesus as the Christ as the "center of history", Tillich speaks of the preparatory history of revelation and salvation as a movement from immaturity to maturity. A particular development was necessary--The Old Testament is the document of that development. "The Old Testament manifestations of the Kingdom of God produced the direct preconditions for its final manifestation in the Christ." (1963, III: 365).

The scholastic investigation of redemptive history has a long history of its own. I do not mean to imply in using the one presented here that it is the only one. Oscar Cullman provides a different schema which might have been used but not with different results for this thesis.

/2/ Alfred Schutz in his phenomenological analysis of the experience of the stranger shows precisely one way in which this comes about.

/3/ This letter was brought to the attention of the author by James Luther Adams.
CHAPTER THREE
THE ETHICAL IMPERATIVES

Homecoming in Its Theological and Secular Senses

Theologically, to be at home is to be where God is. Ethically, to be at home in existence is to create the home where there is mutual love with the neighbor, universally interpreted as all others. Consistent with Judaeo-Christian thought from the beginning is the understanding that life is dynamic, that the summons to our proper home is a continuous one and that we are on the way unless we have turned aside.

To shift the metaphor: We have been promised a perfect home and in the meantime we have promised to try and build one as near to it as we can. We even have the blueprints. But we have not yet discovered all the materials which are called for and we have not yet developed all the skills that are necessary in the builder and we know that we need help from others if we are to get it done. We are pretty sure that some of the work already done is faulty and, as in the past, may need to be dismantled and started over. We are never very sure of the relationship of the home we are building to the home we are promised; sometimes when all is going well and morale of all the builders is high we think they may prove to be the same...
If we borrow the language of Paul Tillich and say that existential nature is lured toward reunion with essential nature and we take this to be true of all human beings, a universal and shared vocation, then we arrive at a new understanding of love of neighbor as of self. It is my primary life task to be moving toward this reunion of self with God. In like manner I must take into account that everyone whose life I can influence is also on the way toward this reconciliation, or could be. If I am to love my neighbor I must care for his or her journey as well as my own. I cannot even make progress without the others. Homecoming, therefore, involves others in three ways: I cannot create the good home by leaving others out; they may not make it home without me in their dependent years; and I may not make it home without help in my dependent years.

What kind of home, then, can create the environment in which the frail elderly person has the best chance of accomplishing the final developmental task of making it home at the end?

Because homecoming for the aged lies at the very boundary of life it must be defined in the relationship between its theological and its secular meanings. I am not speaking here of paradise or of the home we go to after this earthly home. I am not speaking of the time after this time or of the place beyond this place. I am speaking of the last time I will know and the last place I will be in, in
relation to the timeless and the infinite. For these latter terms suggest the great mystery which surrounds the coming into and the leaving of this world and it suggests a transcendent dimension, taken on faith, rumored among the faithful, a remembered promise, a reasoned hope. Let us, at the very least, treasure religious imagination which enables us to ask with ultimate seriousness; "If we were righteous like God and therefore just, if we had the power of love ascribed to God, what would we do? If I am what I was meant to be, what am I doing? If this were the place where I felt I really belonged, what would it be like? If I were on the home stretch what would I be looking forward to?" The good home must be judged in the light of the home of religious imagination.

Homecoming in the secular sense can be an analogue to the dynamic concept of reconciliation in Judaeo-Christian theology. There is, however, one critical difference: the eschatological dimension of the secular. God's offer of reconciliation is a continuous unending offer. Yet every human being's life is finite and moving toward its own end. The older a person is, the closer the end of the life span looms. There is a greater uncertainty and anxiety about the duration of life (Clark & Anderson, 1967: 60). With every illness or accident the eschatological nature of human life approaches crisis proportions. There is, therefore, a sense of urgency with many old people. Sometimes this is greater
on the part of those who truly care for them than upon the old people themselves. An old person's past and future may cloud; but the caring participant may seek happiness for and with that old person "before it's too late." Life is running out. What can be accomplished before it's too late?

Joy and Anticipation

In order to qualify for the hospice program in some cities the patient's doctor must provide a statement that the patient is not expected to live more than six months, that the illness is believed to be irreversible. This raises the question: In view of this specific sentence of the doctor, what hope can a patient have who wants very much to live? An answer sometimes given is that hope takes many forms. Although the hospice workers "never, never discourage hope" the patient may make substitution. In place of the hope for a longer life, he or she may hope to live to see a son graduate from college, a daughter marry, or simply go home and be in the garden one more time /1/. Under conditions of physical dependency there is generally a sense of relief and often happiness in being at home whether it is the home of a loved person or one's own home with a caring helper. Or one may experience this feeling wherever he or she has a sense of being-at-home, of belongingness. Occasionally this feeling of where, at this time for me, I belong, may be satisfied by being returned to the familiar
hospital setting, even sometimes the security of the intensive care unit. It is sometimes discovered by children who take home for Thanksgiving a parent already settled in a long-term care institution only to discover that mother is tired and wants to return "home".

Some homecomings bring joyous contentment; for example, the gathering around of cherished relatives. Sometimes anticipation of such joy lifts up the person who has been given the promise to go home. Hope is the anticipation of joy.

In Judaeo-Christian doctrine hope is one of the three foundation stones of the Christian life—along with faith and love. Ernst Bloch sees Christian hope as the kernel of existence pressing on toward a future world that overcomes the limitations of the present, toward a "still unpossessed homeland" (Martin Marty: 98). With the belief that forgiveness comes with the acknowledgment of the need for forgiveness, a great hope surges that the burdens of the past may yet be laid down. In this hope there is awakened an anticipation of joy. This anticipation sometimes leads directly to joy, as it is experienced by some in a spirit-filled evangelical community. For others it may be a very private matter. Whatever the pathway—scriptural promise, the encouraging words of friends or other teachers, the family community, the narratives in one's own memory—there
is a reminder that joy is accessible. This is a powerful antidote to despair.

With the memory impaired elderly, however, when the pathways of memory can be blocked, when the psychic energy as well as the physical energy may be too low to do the work of initiating the penitential work or the active caring for others, where is the hope of joy or the experience of joy to be found? It is found through the mediation of the world of nature or artifacts, and of significant others—the ones who take care of the old person. Some physically diminished old people have a garden; some have one plant to tend. Consolation, if not joy, may come in handling certain objects with special meaning. It is often observed that the world of the elderly narrows. One's interests may pull in along with one's territorial or psychic space; not for all old people but for some. Some like to be driven about in order to enjoy the pageant of the everyday world. Frail, memory-damaged elders become interested in every morsel of food on their trays. It is not true of all old people but for some. A loving caregiver watches this process and is grateful that there is one thing still wanted, one thing that can be the conduit for joy—the meal—and that there is a chance of providing that joy two or three times a day. The preparation of food, with its sights and smells and sounds, lights up anticipation of the good event. As long as there are any paths of communication to the old person
there is the chance of discovering what brings temporal fulfillment.

Dread and the Tragic Sense

Nevertheless, Tillich is right and life is ambiguous. For if, in the case above, the desire for good or favorite food is frustrated, then this situation has demonic possibilities of a bitter kind. Without love and generosity in the giving, (more accurately sensed by the person who can no longer do the convoluted psychological work necessary to make excuses for the caregiver), then resentments mount, anger flares, there is temptation to control and the anxiety which it feeds. Past hurts are then recalled; and there is loss of self-esteem with all the consequent aggravations for the care of the elder as were catalogued in Chapter One. And all for want of love. All the love that might have been given by this old person in a lifetime and wasn't. All the love that might be given to this old person and isn't. It is not the experience of all old people but it is for too many. And it can be for any one of us. The specific example I have given while not universal, is not atypical. It is important to note that one must know an elder very well, must have shared a history with him or her, in order to know what exactly in his or her shrinking world has meaning and can mediate moments of grace--these moments which seem to hide in the very depths of us and can be
called forth up to the last moments of consciousness before death. "Let me be with him; You see, I know what he likes . . ." Is it any wonder that a nurse who had cared for many dying persons, when asked whether there was anything characteristic of dying people answered, "Every one dies his or her own unique death . . . well, they do seem to have one thing in common—a desire for connectedness" /2/.

In addition to shortfalls of sensitive caring for those physically dependent there are appalling sins of commission. Abuse of elders is one of the terrible human temptations to sin, alongside abuse of helpless children. Where this inclination of caregivers resides it is actualized in relation to the early history of the abuser, the stress felt by the abuser, the provocation felt by the caregiver in some immediate circumstance, and the surveillances surrounding the old person's care which may operate as a deterrent. It is also a function of the character of the caregiver. Welfare agencies hear increasingly of home abuse and foster or nursing home abuse of frail elders. From time to time the news media lift the curtain upon that from which we quickly avert our attention.

What we dread in old age is powerlessness, and beyond that the dread that those on whom we will depend will fail to exercise the power they have in our behalf. This is tragedy in the classic sense. It is the final detour of goodness. It means that the love we might have given to God
we no longer have the power to give; and the power to love and to receive the love we need from others has run out of time. It is the eschaton; it might have been.

Reciprocity Between Elder and Others

It is necessary here to digress for a particular clarification. In the realm of ethics we are always considering community—that is, relationships, communication, mutuality, exchanges, actions and reactions. Although our concern throughout this dissertation is with old people, it is an ethics concern. Chapter One focused upon what it meant to be old viewed through physiology, the social sciences and biography and at times concentrated on the oldness itself. Yet, even that discussion, certainly in psychology, sociology and anthropology, of necessity dealt with the old person in relation to others. In the following chapter on the theological perspectives it was impossible to discuss what it means to be old except in relation to the divine or to the others with whom the old person shares existence. In ethics this is even truer. Therefore, in a theological perspective on old persons it is impossible and would give a distorted view (one which is, however, typically taken) to write exclusively of their homecoming without moving back and forth between the old people and their caregivers, between old people and their society. It is in the very nature of the frail elderly to rely upon care
in the tasks of daily living (for some, one task, for others, a different set of tasks, to be sure) and these caregivers come in the range of our view for that reason. Furthermore, younger persons live with the future possibility of dependency in old age and must be equally addressed, and, at the same time their present claims for equitable time and space considered. Moreover, one can never take the old person out of the context of the community in which she or he is centered. Nor can we fail to deal with the society and power structures in which ultimately changes must occur in the direction called for in the present analysis. In summary, each reader in paying attention to old age must acknowledge: There is where I am headed and this is what I am presently doing about it.

**Barriers to Homecoming**

When late age is reflected upon impersonally, every American wants a better prospect for being old in our society. We abhor the blight of very old age; we are saddened if we see it in our parents or grandparents. We come to dread our own advanced old age more than death. When the time actually comes that physical degeneration is upon us, however, most of us are unlikely to prefer death. Vitality alone—merely to live—lays its desperate claim on human motivation. Yet while our powers are still vested we find the prospect of decline unbearable. This provides a
powerful fueling of medical efforts in the serial retreading of parts of the human body, and of holistic medicine's focus on teaching us ways to live healthily to the end of life. Nevertheless, the bottom line, which has become the party line in our society, is that our hope is to die early and avoid these terrible consequences. In other words, the motivation is there to change the way things are but we do not see how we can help the situation, and, helplessly, we hope to "luck out".

Suppose, however, that we look at the problem from the religious point of view rather than the physiological. Here we are provided with the framework which helps us use the sciences and the social sciences to analyze experiences of the frail elderly and to determine the social factors affecting their situation. And here we are provided with the motivation for making changes. If these changes threaten the way the culture or the society is presently geared to carry on, then the protestant principle of the Judaeco-Christian faith must be invoked. This is akin to the prophetic function of the church or of the agencies of reform. Our long history tells us that once again we may have to give up traditional ways in order to move along the path of homecoming. We are made in the image of God, open to new possibilities. Therefore, we dare to ask the question--What are the social barriers to homecoming in our present situation?--open to the possibility that these
barriers may be pilings we thought necessary to the very structure and stability of our American society.

What keeps us from maximizing happiness in old age under the conditions of physical and mental disintegration? It is not enough to reply: "The answer is obvious—it is dependency and ill health itself which precludes our happiness in old age." Are not children dependent? And do we not provide for much happiness for children? Are not most of us ill during our lifetime and are we not capable of weathering illness without automatic depression or misery and loss of self-esteem? Is it imminent death which blights our last days? Then why do so many accept dying, predict their deaths and slip quietly into the leave-taking? It is not the void of death which gives us anxiety, although for some doubters it could be the aseities which may lie beyond the grave. For those who dread the end of life, it is what lies this side of the grave which alarms them. Ivan Illich has said that the only pain which is unbearable is the pain which can be stopped. There is a clue here. Perhaps we know intuitively that the pain endured by so many old, memory-impaired people can be dissipated. It is this which makes it unendurable—for both the old person and the observer who is growing old. Are there removable barriers to homecoming in old age? Yes, but their removal will leave us with new responsibilities. It is this which we dread and do not wish to talk about.
To value an old person whose productive years are over and whose reason is irreversibly slipping away requires us to reexamine what it means to be a worthy human being—a human being who really counts, whose value is immeasurable. We have to reconsider some of our social attributes; we have to weigh again the value we have placed on vocational achievement and upon rationality.

The Value of Metaphor for Ethics

A metaphor is an aide to thought and it allows for transfer of meaning. The terms achievement and reason will be called metaphors here because they have, perhaps unconsciously, taken on pivotal meaning in American culture. They are metaphors in the sense of "a condensed shorthand, by which a great many properties can be attributed to an object (an idea) at once" (Beardsley: 285). Metaphors not only sum up meaning but, as they gain currency, they make meaning. They are valuable to ethics. As we dismantle the meaning in metaphor we can come to a better understanding of how we know ourselves. If this understanding needs revision, then we may suggest a shift in metaphor, a limitation of its use or a substitution. Metaphors, as James Sellers has pointed out, are the images we choose in order to conjure up that which we value (1976: 115). These two terms—achievement and reason—are exactly that. They tell something about how we identify ourselves and what we
think is important. While they are not the only barriers to homecoming they seem most relevant and least discussed /3/.

Achievement

In American culture the word achievement has a glow about it. Historically, do we not think of the survival in the wilderness of the pilgrim fathers, of the winning of the west by the settlers, of the building of the railroads, of the landing on the moon? Medically, does it not recall the polio vaccine, heart and kidney transplants? Does achievement not conjure up other triumphs of applied technology--the production of food so successfully that in addition to ourselves we help to feed the Third World and even our enemy? Then there is failure to achieve. We try to ameliorate the burden with words like "under-achievement." Does any word strike such feelings of guilt in the parents of school children? We try to bridge the gap between failure and achievement: If you don't succeed at first, try, try, again.

There is a deep cultural attachment to work. Laziness is almost a taboo, frivolity in the workplace a scandal in Anglo-American culture. Faithfulness to work is theologically affirmed. The endorsement in Western society goes back to the Old Testament creation narratives. Nature was placed under man's dominion and he is free to manipulate it through his own purposeful action. Toil is Adam's
punishment but it also has God's sanction. In Protestant history Luther's pronouncements on work are tied to his central doctrine of justification by faith. While human endeavor is not the price we pay to win salvation successful endeavor is the fruit of God's justification. No wonder that vocational success came to be a mark of God's election. It was the plight of workers and his fierce criticism of the capitalist organization of the workplace which caused Marx to lay a doctrinal basis for the greatest ideological warfare in international politics today. In our own time the Vatican has attempted a clarification of the meaning and value of work.

Achievement applies to many enterprises, of course. The prima ballerina achieves not only by virtue of the aesthetic experience she brings to her audience, but also because of her display of technique at which it marvels. The Olympic games, even (perhaps especially) when viewed on television, bring excitement and delight into the community of those who watch. It is a kind of participation in perfection. "The achieve of, the mastery of the thing!" (Hopkins).

For ballerina and athlete the achievement may also be vocational. Most of us in America, however, who strive for vocational achievement, think in terms of paid employment in the production of goods and services. Others justify their activities, or society justifies them, as a preparation for
producing goods or services (in education or training) or as a performance of duties to enable others to work in the marketplace (in homemaking). We nurture children to be future work achievers; how else could we guarantee future supply of goods and services—and how else could the child come to take a respected place in society when mature?

"Achievement," Woodrow Wilson said, "has come to be the only real patent of nobility in the modern world."

How can we take seriously the claim that in America we overvalue vocational achievement? In questioning the American valuation placed on achievement I must make clear that this is not an argument against a work ethic, much less against our present organization of economic life. This is not a critique of the goals of technology. I agree with Tillich when he wrote:

In contrast to much of what has been said and much of what I myself have said against technology, I want to speak for the saving power of the technical control of nature . . . Every technical invention elevates man above his animal stage, liberating him from much drudgery, conquering the narrow limits of his movements in time and space, saving him from innumerable smaller and greater evils to which he is subject as a part of nature, for instance unnecessary pain, unnecessary death . . . in the great feats of technical control we have a break-through of the eternal into the temporal; they cannot be ignored when we speak of saving power and salvation (1963: 118-19).
As Daniélou pointed out, nothing is more in conformity with the biblical vocation of man than work through which he changes the material world (40). Part II of Pope John Paul's *Laborem Exercens* is addressed to the "Work of Man" and provides a theology of creation and a theology of toil and suffering. In a criticism of this document, Hauerwas sees a danger in attempting to give our endeavors such a great theological status. He thinks it will result in "underwriting our already overwhelming temptation to attribute too much significance to our individual efforts" (96). He sees in work an opportunity of service to one another "reminding us of our need as a people for a redemption not accomplished through our work". Hauerwas calls the idea of work as co-creation found in the Pope's declaration "a remarkably bad idea," but Pryser refers to the theological concept of vocation, in which work is seen as making one a participant in creation and providence, and giving each person a definite place as well as a significant role in a cosmic plan. However he concedes that in this sense loss of work is a loss of vocation; it deprives a person of the concrete experience of values and meanings (108). To the extent that a person appreciates and values work as instrumental for producing and distributing the necessities of life and of providing for the aesthetic favors of life, to that extent the person will value his or her own participation in the work force. Retirement may
then be experienced as a deprivation of social and self esteem. It might temporarily ameliorate this problem to alter the institutional rules and allow for longer time to mandatory retirement with adaptation in the tasks assigned. For nearly all workers, however, retirement must come.

In their studies of culture and aging, Clark and Anderson concluded that there are certain major orientations of American culture which are eugenic for young people but which aggravate the problems of old people in our society. "In order to preserve ego strength, the aged must establish their identity on bases other than those of worker, builder, manager, or leader" (208).

The problem lies in applying vocational achievement as a criterion of worth across the life span. Those who are now old are as guilty of this error as are the young. If vocational achievement (or preparation for it, or service to the workers) is what makes a person worthy, then we are right to let those of us who can no longer work drop out of sight. If this is valid, then the Judaeo-Christian doctrine of universal value of all created persons from beginning to end of life is false. If it is false, tragedy awaits all of us who survive.

If the Judaeo-Christian doctrine is a true one—and it is respected both in the community of faith and in the society beyond, whose culture it has impregnated—then we are called upon to value those whose continued employment is
dysfunctional for society. And how are we to value those
whose physical disability has irreversibly rendered them
useless for the tasks they once performed?

Let me suggest the first correction necessary in our
present valuing of vocational achievement. We ought to
accept the fact that work for the marketplace has critical
social and ethical value for those physically and mentally
capable of it. Work beyond this point is not of value; in
fact, it may be worse than valueless--it may be obstructive.
One who overstays the appropriate time for retirement sows
confusion. The "appropriate" time in most places of
employment is a function of the capacity of the individual
worker matched to the capabilities required to perform the
task. A shift of assignment by the employer may prolong the
employment years of the aging person. If the task assigned
is gratuitous work, it is self-defeating; it serves neither
the self-esteem of aged persons nor the production
enterprise. The solution does not lie in the
"compassionate" treatment of the old person; it lies in
placing vocational achievement in a broader context--a
context in which it is not the societal goal but rather one
goal among many in a broader social enterprise.

Home and family are not there to serve the marketplace;
the marketplace is there to serve the home and the family.
Can such a claim be substantiated in an industrial society?
How can it be said that the great industries of America, for
instance, are there to serve the home?--the communication and transportation industries, the energy industries, the steel industry, the building of skyscrapers and bridges, government and military operations? It is not very hard to see the connection in many business enterprises. Much of the product of the steel industry goes into automobiles and into the housing industry--clearly consumption items for families. Any industries which indirectly or directly provide food, shelter, clothing and entertainment are serving the home and its residents. Bridges take people to their places of work. They also bring people home again. Bridges carry the trucks of commerce which provide the materials for the welfare of human beings. In every case we need to ask for what purpose. Human effort is for humanity. Human beings do not belong to their work and their workplaces. They belong to each other--Berger is right, we are social by nature--and they belong to those places where they come together, where they can be found over time, where they can let down and be--they belong to families and they belong to homes. These homes are not sacred, however. We may argue that they are the best analogue to what is sacred. Even so, it could be a better thing to serve others in the marketplace than to spend all one's efforts on the cleanliness or the material beautification of one's house in neglect of the needs of others who share the same domicile. Home is not automatically the good place; the family is not
per se the good community. Nevertheless the marketplace, in its broadest definition, is there to serve home, in its broadest definition. Once this is conceded it is not so difficult to see that service in the marketplace is of critical value to the home, but that an appropriate time comes when it is better to leave the marketplace.

There are many life histories among satisfied elders to attest that activity after retirement from paid, scheduled vocational achievement can center in the home. It may range from the kitchen, or the yard, to the neighborhood, or to the community at large—activities which supply the basic needs of human nature for creativity, service to others and exercise of freedom.

We are surrounded by examples of old people who meet the crucial needs of others quite outside the work force. There is the senior statesman called to advise a harried president of the nation; there is the old man who runs errands for his schoolteacher daughter during her work hours; there is the great-grandmother who babysits for a single parent; there is the master violinist who makes guest appearances and in the freedom of old age makes breathtakingly new sounds; there is the person who came through the depression who is consulted by the victims of some current economic recession; there is the true elder of the church who offers support to a floundering young minister; there is the old woman who teaches young
entrepreneurs how to quilt; there is the old woman who has survived divorce who counsels a despairing divorce-bound woman; there is the old man whose marriage endured who has something to say to the young man whose marriage is burdensome; there is the retired executive who volunteers his business acumen to help steer a community service agency; there is the former business man who advises a younger business man threatened with bankruptcy. It is, furthermore, elders in this time of their lives who may be of greatest service to their elders or to those whose health has not thrived to the same degree. They can provide transportation, sympathetic understanding, shared leisure time. These achievements are well beyond the vocational achievements of the marketplace.

Leonard Hayflick, professor of Medical Microbiology, conjectured about the goals of the inquiry into the biology of aging. "Is it so that the mechanisms of aging can be manipulated to the benefit of human beings?" he asked. If so, where would we choose to extend life? Not, he thinks, to extend the infirmities of old age by another decade or two. And not to extend that portion considered to be the most productive. "Most laborers would probably opt for an extension of their retirement years but before the onset of the infirmities of old age rather than those years in which they were working hardest" (4). As Stanley Hall had urged, these latter years before debilitating afflictions set in
can be immensely fruitful, not only for the individual but for the future of society. These old persons have had a chance to accrue wisdom which can be utilized in the service of finding personal and social solutions to the problems which rob us of freedom and satisfaction. What potential worth is drained off because we believe that the most valuable enterprise is taking part in the work force! What a truncated view of human potential!

We must begin to think of vocational achievement as oriented to one developmental time of life. In a Hindu myth there are several stages of life: the student years, the householder years, the forest (reflective) years, and the mendicant-beggar years. Vocational achievement belongs to a middle stage of life. We need to pull together fragmented themes of the enjoyments and contributions of late life stages. Retirement is the wrong label; it suggests drawing back. The senior years are not the time for drawing back, except from the marketplace to a higher calling. This is the integrative time of life, the time of wisdom, to use Erikson's phrases.

But it is not the last stage of life.

Those who are destined to live out their human life span, who are approaching 100, begin the steep downward slope of physical and mental loss of capacities. What difference does it make to them whether society has learned to value the integrative years as well as the vocational
years? They qualify neither for the one nor for the other. Yet, there are two important advantages to them. First of all, the physical deficits which are implicated in loss of self-esteem resulting from loss of vocational activity will be markedly reduced. Secondly, if the preceding years, the ones we have called integrative years, have been rich with non-vocational challenges well matched to early old age then psychological strengths and good habits will have been accrued for what is ahead. It is in this sense that the succeeding stages of life, as Erikson saw them through his investigation of personality, are developmental. When one's mental and physical powers are impaired, when memory is unreliable, what one experiences is not entirely divorced from what one did and had and was, up to that point. To acknowledge that vocational achievement is for the benefit of family and home rather than the reverse, is in the best interest of all of us as we move toward the end of life. This is, after all, the direction in which each of us is moving and none of us knows what the last days will be like. It places a heavier burden (as the economy is already feeling) upon the builders and the providers but it restores for them the worthy goal of their endeavors. It also clears the way for ethical consideration of the mutual claims the old and the producers have upon each other.

We come back to the question, How can we authentically identify value in the "diminués", to borrow Claudel's
descriptive word. The question must wait for an answer until we discuss still another barrier to the possibility of homecoming for the very old and for us all. This barrier is the way intellect is valued in American society.

Intellect

Intellect, as here used, encompasses the broad range of meanings in intellectual endeavor, rational thinking and reasoning. It requires that clear mind so espoused by the philosophers of the Enlightenment. It refers to orderly or logical thinking; it underlies all successful communication. Such clear-mindedness relies upon mental discrimination and, above all, on memory. It involves retrospective and prospective thinking.

As we saw in a review of some of the physiological studies of old age and the brain, memory and discrimination are frequently impaired in the frail elderly. Ordinarily an old person does not become mind-impaired all at once. The early stages include an awareness of the condition.

"How are you today, Mr. Jones?"
There's something wrong . . . I don't remember . . . ." "We all have the memory problem, don't we?"
"You don't understand. There's something gone . . .
(tapping his head) . . . up here."
This consciousness brings anxiety and embarrassment, even the feeling of guilt which comes from not measuring up to society's expectations.

Instead of asking, What value does such a deteriorating old man really have?, let us transcend the culture which invites the question and ask, How does it happen that we have come to devalue a person when diseased old age has robbed him or her of healthy mental processes?

Luther's success in liberating his followers from the intellectual authority of the church, which he endorsed with Christian doctrine, was one of the paving stones on the way to the Enlightenment. These French and English philosophers argued that anyone could have the proven truth about the empirical world by simply observing data carefully and using clear thinking. It is hard for us from this distance to imagine what a release of energy followed this idea and what a widespread impact it had. A surge of confidence about the mental capabilities of persons of any estate rose in the wake of the writing of the Enlightenment philosophers. Not only did a curtain go up on the modern world but it has been difficult ever since to put ourselves in the frame of mind of those who lived in cultures which predate the Enlightenment. The founding fathers of this country were, of course, much influenced by these European philosophers. The Enlightenment view was profoundly democratic in that the coin of the realm was a diligent and clear mind. In the New
World's commitment first to the education of pastors and soon to the public education of all children, the American people gave intellectual activity a very high place in its system of values. Irrational thinking could easily be equated with laziness. A dollar, a dollar, a ten o'clock scholar. Egalitarianism never applied to variance of intellect. Perhaps all societies are intolerant of foolishness but none more so than the American.

--He hasn't got the sense he was born with.
--A fool and his money are soon parted.
--You can't teach an old dog new tricks.
--He doesn't know sic'em from come back.
--No fool like an old fool.

Just before the turn of the century William James wrote his foundational essay in pragmatism, "The Sentiment of Rationality." He argued against Rationalism. To be acceptable, he claimed, a philosophy must convince a person that it is a reasonable position to take. It must satisfy two classes of human needs: theoretic and practical. The first simply means that we have a need to know; the second, that we have a need to act. He placed great emphasis on the authority of the person: only persons can authorize what is true of nature. Philosophies were referred to human nature, not to nature. Although he chose the term pragmatism for his views, it had been urged upon him that he use the term
"humanism". He had a pragmatic definition of rationality: "unimpeded mental function" (11).

James is of interest to us for two quite different reasons. On the one hand he is part of an important movement away from scientific rationalism as we shall see in the discussion of Dewey below. Additionally, in his discussion of the theoretical need—the need of a person to know—James, concerned with the seeker of knowledge, warns of the "unsatisfactoriness" of all philosophical speculations (7):

It is a monstrous abridgment of life, which, like all abridgments, is got by the absolute loss and casting out of real matter. This is why so few human beings truly care for philosophy. The particular determinations which she ignores are the real matter exciting needs, quite as potent and authoritative as hers. What does the moral enthusiast care for philosophical ethics. . . The entire man, who feels all needs by turns, will take nothing as an equivalent for life but the fullness of living itself.

The human being has a need to know more than a classification of things into their kinds and into their relationships; the need encompasses other kinds of knowing. And the need to know does not characterize the whole nature of a human being. This leaves the way open to consider that there are other needs than intellectual ones in memory.
impaired elders and thus other ways than cognitive to live in communion with them.

At the same time John Dewey, another chief proponent of Pragmatism, was taking his stand against the Rationalists. He viewed the roots of modern thought. Reformation teaching had its profoundest impact, he felt, in developing the idea of the personality of every human being as an end in itself. Luther's assertion that individuals were capable of a direct relationship with God without the intermediary of any church or other authority, even in matters of redemption and salvation, led to an understanding of a person who was not subordinate. This understanding rapidly spread into secular relationships. At the time of this radical break with antique and medieval thought, Dewey explained, the idea that it is reason that creates and constitutes the world was carried over, but it was combined with the conviction of the 17th and 18th century philosophers that reason operates through the human mind, either individual or collective. Finally, in Kant the idea became explicit that the knowable world is constituted through the thought which operates exclusively through the human knower. "Idealism ceased to be metaphysical and cosmic in order to be epistemological and personal" (50-51). It was evident to Dewey that this development represented a transitional stage. He proposed a philosophy in which he regarded intelligence not as the original shaper and final cause of thinking but as "the
purposeful energetic re-shaper of those phases of nature and life that obstruct social well-being. It esteems the individual not as an exaggeratedly self-sufficient Ego which by some magic creates the world, but as the agent who is responsible through initiative, inventiveness and intelligently directed labor for re-creating the world, transforming it into an instrument and possession of intelligence" (51).

Beginning with primitive man, advancing through medieval thought, redirected by Luther, affected by the liberating force of the Enlightenment, powerfully transformed on American shores through the Pragmatists, the relationship between reason and human thought was revamped and always strengthened. The American emphasis was placed upon the person who exercises reason. It is this which has created a problem for the intellectually slowed elders among us; but in its corollary emphasis on the person, it holds the promise of a resolution.

Freudian psychology, in its effort to get below the realm of the conscious into the realm of the unconscious acquainted us with, and gave us a language for, the nonrational in the psyche. Even so, analytic psychiatry depends upon bringing to the light of intellectual perusal those experiences which have been suppressed. Analytic psychiatry is rarely suggested for an old person unless his or her mentality is acute.
Sociology attempts to enlighten us about roles and interpersonal relations. Many of the evidences of role in a person are habitual, and signals from others about expected roles may be received with little mental effort. Yet when memory begins to falter it becomes increasingly difficult to play one's role. This becomes problematic on the part of an old person, for instance, who cannot remember whether he was ever married, does not remember that he is old and does not recognize himself in the mirror. When instinctual drives persist past the ability to regulate them, which centers in the brain, "desocialization" occurs and society, threatened with discontinuity of its patterns, finds ways to assert its managerial authority. He who goes outdoors to urinate—for convenience' sake? in recollection of some distant custom?—risks institutionalization in urban America.

Social psychologists have determined that role reciprocity may be lost in old age and that, when it is, the old person is perceived as "a burden." A lack of role reciprocity is socially defined as "having nothing of value to provide others in exchange for one's care" (Clark 1969: 65).

In western culture we have little tolerance for irrational behavior. Anthropologists show us that mental illness is always socially defined. The behavior that is crazy in one group may be accommodated in another. There are preindustrial societies in which mentally retarded
people wander the village freely, accepted, fed and housed as a matter of course, but industrial society is complex and pluralistic. Human beings are meaning-makers because they are order-seekers. It is not "in the order of things" in our society to tolerate irrational behavior. It may even be dangerous to the person of strange behavior as well as to others. It is the unpredictability which is frightening. Irrational, crazy behavior is not subject to explanation. So we institutionalize the condition under a label: mentally disturbed, mentally retarded, senile. Then chaos closes over and the rest of us can be in an orderly world again.

In addition to the Pragmatists' opposition to Rationalism in American philosophy, which certainly was not anti-intellectual, there has been among some psychologists a revolt against cognitive emphasis to the neglect of the affect dimension of personality. Manifestations of this swing toward the value of feeling reached almost licentious degrees in the decade of the sixties. Nevertheless, in its responsible mode this was a corrective feature in American psychology. The same trend was apparent in the left-wing churches where dissident groups reacted from their history of scientific rationalism and arid intellectualism. The authentic critique of one-sided rationalism, which intended to claim simply that human beings are feeling as well as thinking creatures, was too often expressed in normless behavior or fell into sentimentality. The revolutionary
fringes also exploited this theme because of their vested interest in chaos and disruption. Gradualism, which attempts reform on a more disappointing timetable but with less destruction, attempts reconciliations through understanding differences, cooperation with others, and responsible change. These in turn call upon intelligence, critical analysis, and logical thinking in addition to qualities of the spirit.

In this critique of the American valuation of intellect I am not making any anti-intellectual claim, directly or indirectly. This is not an argument for or against natural law, it is not participation in the debate about cognitive versus affective dimensions of human behavior, it is not an attack upon rational religion or 19th century liberal theology. Mine is simply an appeal to recognize that many Americans, as a result of the mortality of their bodies, which we all share, are incapable of vocational or intellectual accomplishment. Therefore, it seems clear that these values, great as they are, belong only to part of the life span of long-lived people.

The Interdependency of the Values of Intellect and Achievement

There is patently a mutual dependence of intellect with vocational achievement. There are many ways to express this but perhaps the most timely symbol of it is the computer.
The computer enhances human capacities exponentially. It is a matter of machine speed over human speed. The efficacy of the machine, however, depends entirely upon programming the computer, which is an inexorably logical process. Very early the Harvard Business School taught that with computers, if human logic falters, it is "garbage in, garbage out." With credible rapidity, American vocational achievement is becoming enmeshed with the computer. The computer is capable of taking the mind of one clear thinker and putting it to manifold service in the marketplace. The tool itself, as well as the acceleration it brings with it, widens the chasm between the old and the rest of society. Still, I saw recently a young salesman instructing an elderly man and his wife in the purchase of a word processor. . .

Some computers are "user friendly." This is a disturbing term if it conjures up the notion that the computer may become a pseudo-human substitute for a friend. Conversely, however, it may be an enlightened term in that it suggests that someone (or a group of someones) behind the computer was concerned with the problem of communication, the problem of communicating with me and others like me who may be intimidated by computers. The producer's ultimate goal may be to sell me their computer. Their mediating goal acknowledges that if they don't take the person I am seriously, we won't get ahead in our larger joint
enterprises. Let us adopt the positive implications of the term. The tools of the marketplace should be through and through user-friendly. The products and services it offers should be, through and through, user friendly. Users are people and there is no way to be user friendly without paying attention to the user. If we elevate this idea to the level of vocational philosophy, we would have to say, following the pragmatism of William James, that the criterion for value in our economic life is what happens to the persons affected. The extensive emphasis on vocational achievement with its reliance in turn on scientific thinking and rational communication leaves society little time and interest for the ones whose physical condition excludes them from the competitive market of ideas and accomplishments.

The Ethics of Avoiding Deterioration in Old Age

America's pattern in problem solving is to assess the problem, reduce it where possible and deal creatively with what remains. Americans like Reinhold Niebuhr's prayer for help to change the things which can be changed, to accept the things which cannot be changed, and for the wisdom to know the difference. The first requirement of ethics regarding degeneration at the end of life is the obligation to minimize the physical decrements by eliminating or postponing their ravages. Preoccupation with reducing the
problem, however, is keeping our attention away from the
difficulties which remain.

Postponing the Appearance of Aging

In all societies shame is a chief sanction for
socializing its members. In American society the television
screen is probably the foremost shamer and arbiter of
manners and morals; it certainly is not the churches.
Television shows us a hundred ways to look younger than our
years would otherwise indicate. Put another way, a lot of
us look older than the norm established by television. To
the extent that use of cosmetics, skin toners, shampoos,
hair color, soaps, hair pieces, hormones, diets, exercise
regimens, vitamins (and the rest of the hundred products and
programs) help keep a person psychologically and physically
fit, to the extent that they enable rather than reduce to
narcissistic concern or feed anxiety about old age, to the
extent that the expenditures required do not take priority
over education, charity, cultivating the arts or other goods
beyond food, shelter, and clothing—they are justified. It
is not that I don't think "I'm worth it"; it is just that I
think, as a human being, I am worth a great deal more than
the "it" the media shows me. Television reflects back upon
America what a shame it is to be old.
Opposing Physical and Mental Decline

Alzheimer's disease affects the brain with severe negative effects on the communication and behavior of its victims, who are primarily old. Rising national concern about this disease and its repercussions was carefully orchestrated by the National Institutes of Health and a group of geriatricians. A good deal of progress had been made in the understanding of mental diseases of aging since 1955 when senility was believed by many people to be inevitable, untreatable, and probably due to the hardening of the arteries. A study by the National Institutes of Mental Health found, however, that atherosclerosis was not the most common cause of "senility." In the first round of investigation in the mid 1950's depression was misinterpreted as senility; five years later the same investigators discovered an absence of "senility" and a continuing history of depression. Moreover, the cases of depression were reversible. The result of the recent attention brought to bear on Alzheimer's disease has been the funding of research projects and of a consolidation of the body of knowledge on brain disease, for instance, in genetics, protein chemistry, concentration of metals in the brain, auto-immune phenomena, virology and cholinergic chemistry. Instrumental in this effort was Robert Butler, the founding Director of the National Institute on Aging. The effort to identify, publicize, develop funding for and
organize to eradicate Alzheimer's disease was, according to Dr. Butler, "politics at its best." He now calls for a variety of research centers, private support to match public support, research professorships and fellowships in geriatrics and gerontology, investigation of normal brain aging related to disease, human longitudinal studies and, of course, stability in funding. Because "we know so little about the brain" he calls for an inner-space program as a smaller version of our outer-space program (1984).

The effort against Alzheimer's disease is a prime example of what a total society may choose to do in eradication of part of the problem. Individuals can join in the goal in a more particular way. With an understanding of the results of scientific investigation of aging and its problems, individuals can take certain steps to improve their prospects of good health in old age. Medical schools are now offering through subscriptions the latest results of research to enhance health strategies of the general public, and hospitals distribute medically up-to-date health advice. These are responsible efforts. Conversely, faddish programs and products which exploit the anxiety of individuals over pain, old age and death, and which are unsubstantiated by medical or scientific investigation are demonic. They raise and dash hopes, they misdirect the attention and energy of human beings, and they undermine trust which is a critical
component of personality strength in old age and critical to the patient-doctor relationship.

Is the determination to conquer the diseases which afflict old age, and the optimistic view of healthy old age which sustains that determination, at war with the thesis of this paper—that we should acknowledge that degeneration is the physical characteristic to be expected at the end of the normal life span? In the politics of aging these two themes are certainly at war. A popular magazine titles an article: "Are We Programmed to Die?"; and its subtitle says, "By tinkering with the body's 'clock of aging' scientists hope to forestall the inevitable" (Rosenfeld). When we are promoting programs to improve the quality of life toward its end it is unwise to feed the human desire to bypass the signals of the end. This is not the way to maturity. The two themes ought to live side by side as we grow wiser: the determination to make the best of health and to support the efforts against curable diseases on the one hand, and the acknowledgment and acceptance of the coming time of dependency, on the other. When the ambitions of scientists raise false hopes, the disillusion which ensues can rob us of the courage to assert our being "in spite of" as Tillich would have it. After all, "sorrows springs are the same"; it is "the blight man was born for" (Hopkins: 50).

From the individual's point of view there will always be the tension in old age between what in phsyical
incapacity must be accepted and what is to be opposed. Old people are the repository of the multitudinous ways, short of resorting to medical help, to ameliorate the aches and pains and physical hindrances increasingly experienced. This is a folk wisdom underappreciated. It is responsible of old people to seek to keep themselves physically able to be independent as long as possible. As Stanley Hall expressed it, "Most of us are destined to become a real burden and this we should strive to delay and lighten and not to accelerate or increase, and we should not come to make a luxury of our sense of dependence" (369).

We are ready now to focus upon those whose physical degeneration in old age requires help from others in some of the tasks of daily living, upon the helpers and upon the setting where this help is given. This calls for an analysis of home.

Home-making and Home-sustaining

Home and the Meaning of Existence

Mircea Eliade, in speaking of sacred place, discusses a variety of symbols from different cultures. He considers the home dweller of the archaic culture of North America for whom the center post of the cabin is assimilated to the central axis which brings heaven and earth together (1969: 47-48). For the pioneer settler the chimney of the cabin may be taken as the mythic symbol of where heaven and earth
come together—not the chimney which carries away the smoke, but the chimney which signals far and near that here below is the hearthfire, the source of warmth, the provenance of life-sustaining food. Here is the hearth which draws the people together. "A flame is not merely something which warms or burns," wrote John Dewey, "but is a symbol of the enduring life of the household, of the abiding source of cheer, nourishment and shelter to which man returns from his casual wanderings" (1).

The idea of home always carries with it mystical dimensions. It points beyond itself, beyond its concrete forms, to that which it was in childish imagination. Berger and Luckman observe: "The world of childhood . . . remains the "home world", however far one may travel from it in later life into regions where one does not feel at home at all" (137). Moltmann says that in an industrial age religion "no longer offers man a home and an abiding shelter" (312). "Old age and death," Hall wrote, in his own old age, "are eloquent of voices that call us to come home or back to nature, the all-mother, and to the earth from which we sprang and which is the terminal resting place of all who have gone before, with whose remains our dust will mingle" (429). Psychiatrists and anthropologists who study aging speak of home in a manner not so different. "Home," says Butler, "is where all individuals feel most comfortable to be themselves, to drop social facades . . . Therefore,
home is whatever the concept of home means to an individual" (103). Kübler-Ross writes, "When a person is at home, he's in his own familiar environment, with his family and his children around him. Dying under these circumstances is . . . easier . . ." (101). The old Swiss immigrant, residing in San Francisco, who was interviewed in the study reported by Clark and Anderson, recalled that in the beginning he did not like the city: "I was lonesome for being in the open and homesick for the country, but I thought, "Well, I'm in it now and I'll stick to it." And later in his reminiscences, "I always like to be home at nighttime. You come out of the heat and there are the bridges wrapped up in cool fog and it's a welcoming sight. There's no place like home, and especially when you get old" (42).

In Eliade's discussion of the symbolism of the "center" his investigations have brought him to conclude that man can live only in a sacred place, at the heart of reality. The traditions he has studied tell him that it is human to have the desire to find oneself at the center. Only there will existence have meaning. This calls attention, he says, to something in the human condition he calls "nostalgia for Paradise"--the desire to find oneself always and without effort at the center of the world, to transcend the human condition and to recover the divine condition--"as a Christian would say, the condition before the Fall" (55).
Static and Dynamic Elements

Yet, as Tillich pointed out in his definition, symbol participates in that toward which it points. The concrete expression informs that to which it refers even as the reverse is true. Why do I claim here that home as we know it today has the best chance of being the setting in which reconciliations can take place?

In the first place, home is dynamic. Home as place must have stability, it must be permanent enough to be recognizable, familiar. When one moves from one place to another, the newcomer will unpack significant as well as utilitarian artifacts; these carry over continuity from the last place where home was known. The static dimensions of home are important. If, however, nothing else occurred, the place would not retain significance. Home is dynamic with the lived experiences of those who call it home, with the uses to which it is put, with the projects of those who share it, with the memories it enfolds; in other words, it endures over time. Home, as dynamic, allows for change, and thus for movement away from alienation.

In addition, home pulls in significant others. There is no possibility of reconciliation where the object of one's concern is not present. Reconciliation with God is available to the Christian because God's continual presence is promised. Earthly reconciliations between members of the
group require the presence of both. Toward the end of life
the eschatological element becomes increasingly crucial.
Time is running out on the possibilities for reconciliation.
One needs to have a place where one can be found by the
other. That place needs to be conducive to reconciliation
in all imaginable ways.

The Home of Human Origin

Ideally everyone knows what the yearned-for home is
because, as Butler and Berger have indicated, the childhood
place is where we felt belonging. Children who have no such
place cannot long thrive. Yet biologically we have in
common an in utero prenatal existence of which psychological
investigators tell us we have some preverbal memory (Fodor).
The womb was replete with all that in the first chapter of
one's life was needed. It was Tillich's "dreaming
innocence" and we all had it. This first home was with
mother. Home for the small child is where mother is.
Courts of law recognize this and rarely separate the two
even on claim of the child's father. Thus mother of the
small child has a radical responsibility—to enfold the
infant, to feed the infant, to be mother-at-home for the
infant. What setting is more conducive to fulfilling the
vital need of the small child than home? Stimulated as much
by the woman's movement as by her own ambition, the career
woman/mother who returns to the workplace soon after the
birth of her child, finds reward in the literature of the
anti-sexist movement and in recalling the rhetoric of the
classroom. When young mothers experience conflict attended
by "guilt feelings" about this separation from their
infants, it is often ascribed to taboos left over from a
sexist culture which deprived women of their place in the
work force. If the guilt feelings persist, they may consult
a network of other mothers who have more successfully
suppressed the instinct that tells them that they are not
where they ought to be. If the young mother fails to be
socialized into the new arrangement she may choose to give
up her work in favor of caring for her own child--
apologetically. Society needs a new definition of career.
Until then the criterion for the acceptability of alternates
to mother care should be: What person most nearly
approximates the mother whose love was intended to be bonded
to the child--father? grandmother? hired nurse? day care
center worker?--and what place most nearly approximates
home. The burden of proof that alternates to home care for
the small child are adequate lies with those who claim new
"rights" for the mother. In present-day discussions of
career-mother stress it is rare that the right of the small
child is taken into account until damage is done.

If this issue is examined through an analysis of trust,
the connection between child care and care of the elderly
will become apparent. The earliest of the eight stages of
human development in Erikson's theory is infancy. The opposing issues at risk at this stage are trust versus mistrust. If the needs inherent in infancy for milk, warmth, human contact and comfort are met, the child learns to trust and the value which emerges, to serve the growing personality well for future developmental tasks, is hope. Kimmel says that while Erikson's theory is difficult to test empirically, it has provided useful insights into human development (14). Perhaps Erikson's theory remains influential because it is an evolutionary, optimistic, view of the possibilities of personality growth and because the descriptions of the eight stages correspond with experience. If trust is the developmental task of infancy, then since the infant is helpless there is an obligation of the providers to give such benefits as are the ground of trust. At the young adulthood time of life in which many become parents, the sixth stage in Erikson's scheme, the developmental task is intimacy versus isolation and the successful outcome is love. Those who have undertaken the care of dependent children will, as they learn intimacy, develop trustworthiness. If they have learned trust in their own early dependency, and if they have developed trustworthiness as they minister to the needs of their children, then they will believe that caretakers can be trustworhty when they themselves grow old. And the converse is true. If it was their destiny in infancy to suffer
neglect at the free choice of their parents, and if, through acts of choice, they created a destiny of neglect for those in their charge when they had the role of caregiver, then the outlook for cooperation and contentment in the final dependent years is bleak. Those who care for a memory-impaired old person know that when trust in the caregiver breaks down, the relationship moves rapidly toward conflict. Hostile old people are usually admitted into institutional care where they will be controlled by restraints or drugs. Trust is critical to the cooperation of the dependent person. Without trust care will not be accepted. Erikson's theory shows one way a society in which dependents at the beginning of life are not well cared for is destined to become a society in which the dependent old members cannot expect to be well cared for. Judaeo-Christian hope promises that somewhere along this generational continuum there can be enough reconciling love to break the pattern.

"What is significant about the Christian ethic is precisely this," wrote Reinhold Niebuhr, "that it does not regard the historic as normative . . . only the law of love is normative" (214). Home is potentially the best communal arrangement to nurture the dependents of society: the very young, the very old, the ill, the disabled. It must, at one and the same time, be the haven in which the providers and nurturers are provided for and nurtured. This calls for a shift in value alignment; economic providing and homemaking
have equal value for the entire societal enterprise. However, when one task is unrewarding because undervalued then it is inevitable that those who have the unvalued tasks will drift toward other assignments and secondary ways will emerge for the fulfillment of the refused tasks. Substitutionary care of the very young and the very old, however, is unacceptable except in cases where it is the best of the alternatives, as with a single parent who must be homemaker and breadwinner. The enlarged freedom which comes from the ways being experimented with currently by young couples, in which domestic tasks and economic tasks are differently divided between the members of the family, may serve as a corrective to the problems which brought on a rebellion of some women against the homemaker role. The freedom is not the freedom to dismiss unappealing tasks; it is the freedom to negotiate the proration of tasks; it also allows for equitable distribution. The risk is that the task of making and maintaining an environment conducive to reconciliations—of making the good home—may be neglected. For if both adults in a nuclear family concentrate on the economic task of winning the bread, then home can become the place where each individual has time and energy only for such occupations as are instrumental for returning to the workplace. Such understandings of the relationship between home and the marketplace turn homes into breeding grounds for alienation. In a more hopeful light, it may well be
that we are moving through a transition from inadequate valuing of the homemaking enterprise to a fresh valuation by virtue of the involvement of so many fathers in domestic activities because their wives have careers and are spending fewer hours at home. To the extent that this becomes a role sharing and not merely a sacrificial role reversal it has potential for recreating the new home. People who have made creative adjustments in order to maintain an atmosphere of belongingness where they live are in the mold of all adult children who have made creative adjustments in order to bring their dependent elderly under their roof in workable arrangements. Those who learn these adjustments early have less to learn about themselves later. They have achieved competence, self-assurance, sympathy and a sense of equity in familial demands and services. They will have a knowledge of love and justice and participate in enlarging the world's supply of it.

The voluntary two-career family cited at some length above has been emphasized because it may be a pace-setter for the future and because, breaking as it does with the preceding family tradition, it holds potential for a better future for home life. (As I have indicated, some of its themes are erroneous in my opinion, and if so they frustrate the chance for amelioration of American familial life.) This particular pattern of family life, however, is one of a great variety. We are pluralistic by virtue of the cultural
variety in America. Although consumer demands are largely standardized and material goods such as televisions and automobiles widely distributed, varieties in home life also reflect varieties in income and in educational level. These are only some of the reasons one cannot universalize prescriptions for the domicile which, in every individual case, will offer the best chance for "home" for an elder. As Margaret Mead cautioned: "We must not lump together and confuse 65 with 75 years of age, for instance with being grandparents or great grandparents. Some are, some never were, some never will be. Don't mix the spinster with the woman who has borne many children. Don't mix either one with the woman who has been married and never had any children. Don't mix the man who is just hitting his stride and the man who is a master of a particular skill that is disappearing and treat them in the same way" (142).

Preference for One's Own Home

Many disabled old people, even when mind-impaired, have a strong preference for staying in their own homes. This can be accommodated in a number of ways depending on the aggregate of circumstances in the unique situation. Sometimes adequate care can be brought into the old person's home, a live-in companion, nurse aides, or daytime homemakers. Sometimes social services can make this possible: meals-on-wheels, homemakers, visiting nurses,
telephone reassurance. Family and neighbors constitute first defense resources. An 83-year-old woman, an eighth child of an eighth child, found herself at the end of her life a childless widow living on a fireman's pension and Social Security check, having outlived all members of her family but a distant cousin. She owned her home and took in stray dogs. Except for a friend whom she trusted, who without renumeration mowed her lawn, deposited her income checks and brought the groceries for her and her dogs, she was a recluse. She was mentally confused and sometimes forgot that her favorite dogs had died. She was afraid to flush the toilet and had rigged an inadequate alternative to her plumbing. Her friend cleaned her house from time to time. Because of her dogs she would not consider leaving her house to live in a nursing home. For six months, therefore, a community of understanding social workers brought to her the necessary services to make her continuation in her own home viable. Finally, however, on an icy night she went barefoot into the street in search of her lost dogs. The neighbors notified the police and the community of concerned people about her, of whom she was unaware, called her cousin in another state. Arrangements were made to put her in a nursing home although she resisted with great determination and sudden clarity of mind. "What have I done wrong? Didn't I keep my property looking well? Didn't Herbert keep it mowed? You don't understand--this is
my house, I own it. They can't make me leave. You leave now. I don't want you to come back here!" When the ambulance attendants came to take her she suddenly capitulated. In the nursing home she carried on a continuous, incoherent argument. Six months later she died.

Many older people, at least moderately affluent, are choosing to enter a sheltered environment with adjacent nursing care facility before they become dependent, one which will provide care for them whatever the eventualities. One octogenarian, a retired professor, who had never married, found that "life care" living arrangements solved her problems—social as well as physical. Another childless retired teacher who had moved into a life care retirement apartment when she felt she could no longer keep up her house, enjoyed her residence until she became frail. Near the end of her life, on parting company with a young friend, her voice suddenly broke and she said in tears, "You see . . . I just hate it here!"/4/.

It may be that when one's health fails in old age no place on earth feels like home. There are occasionally old people who will choose to enter a nursing home because they experience too much fatigue and stress in their former domicile—whether it be alone or with others. The help, the food, and sometimes the companionship may more than compensate for the regimentation of institutional living. Some old people are too ill to be aware of any but their
immediate surroundings. This can be exaggerated by family members struggling with guilt feelings and by nursing home attendants in efforts to console the worried adult children. Sometimes a dulled awareness results from drugs which are administered to keep the patient from being agitated.

The criterion for the choice of a residence for those who can no longer take care of themselves without assistance is the home one would wish for if one were chronically ill. Therefore, the model for any substitute for home should be the model of the good home, not of the good hospital. Hospitals are temporary abodes and they are largely planned for the convenience of the staffs which have undertaken to restore a person to health. To the extent that they are able to consider the convenience of the patient without interfering with the needs of doctors in carrying out their perceived professional responsibilities, they may do so. Most institutions bear little resemblance to a home atmosphere. Nursing homes have the problem of trying to keep patients and their surroundings clean, a formidable task with limited help. It is much to the credit of some nursing centers that they have accomplished so much toward that end: an attempt at granting privacy, accommodating privately owned furniture and furnishings to distinguish the old person's living quarters with artifacts of identity, and as many options as feasible in coming and going and having snacks. For some of these old persons it is a serious
deprivation not to be allowed to wander into the kitchen and get what they want to eat when they want it.

The home you would wish to go to if you were ill is the home where you can count on someone's caring. Robert Frost, in his poem "The Death of the Hired Man" says, "Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in." How many families feel this obligation? Yet the kind of care which is sensitive to discovering the individual needs of an old person whose sensory deficits may make communication a matter of intuition as well as attending on the part of the caregiver, is dependent on long acquaintance. Knowing and being known is requisite to good care. Where one is known, one is at home. The familial connection is typically the most enduring. Home is where the family is.

Family as the Cornerstone of Care

In an article written by a registered nurse and a social worker, whose field is the care of dependent elders, the family is referred to as "the cornerstone of care." Disabled old people need a range of services which may include personal care, shopping, household help, the arranging for and monitoring of community services, help in obtaining medical services and help with business affairs. These authors report that disability causes a disruption in the functioning of the family system. They note, however,
"families who have managed effectively are more apt to be
better prepared to assume the care of a disabled family
member . . . families that have been historically
dysfunctional, whose relationships have been characterized
by years of conflict, will be even more stressed by the
demands of caregiving" (Crossman and Kaljian: 44).

One historian claims that if we look at the past we see
that there never was an eternal family. She sees the so-
called private sphere constantly changing as business, war,
politics, and culture change. Domestic values have always
shifted along with society and technology (Atkinson: 11).
This dynamic understanding of family allows both for
divergence from old patterns and for new forms to reflect
worthwhile values of the past.

Since the environment most conducive for
reconciliations for the dependent elderly is with those,
like family members, who have had a caring relationship over
time, or those who can model their relationship on the true
family relationship, then we need a further analysis of the
relationship of the dependent old person and the person's
family. In order to examine the possibilities of such
family life we will consider the needs of physically and
mentally deteriorating old people as affected by time and
space; and we will discuss the possibilities in
interpersonal relations even when the relationship is
affected by the limitations of the old person.
The Very Old Person and Time

The responsibilities which adhere to the time in life being experienced by any caregiver do not usually allow him or her to be continuously present to the person being cared for. When, however, attention is turned to that old person it is more enriching for the caregiver and the care receiver if the caregiver can be wholly present to the old person. There are deterrents to this effort in individual cases. The old person sometimes demands more time and attention than the caregiver can give without neglecting responsibilities of equal value; or the old person does not want to receive attention on the younger person's timetable. Caregivers of old persons, however, like caregivers of children, learn how to adapt to such deterrents. For a person whose past has slipped beyond recalling because of mental deficiency, his or her ability to project into the future seems equally limited. Thus the present takes on paramount significance. Family members can react two ways to this limitation: They can take the mental limitation for evidence that, since the person is diminished, one's presence is not important. "It doesn't make any difference whether I visit dad or not, he never knows the next day that I was there." This conclusion is reinforced if the old person is unable to recall the last visit. Alternatively, a religious imagination might press a different conclusion.
If one sees the good moment in its timeless dimension then the present can be valued for itself and not for the extra qualities it provides for the person who can recall it or anticipate it. The person who, thereby, learns the value of being present to another in the present gains a certain depth for all other relationships.

The religious imagination of the provider is also called upon in developing an understanding of how past losses have diminished the present for the older person. Many of the supports of the old person's morale will have been outlived: the homeplace, the long time neighbors, the life-long friends, the spouse and siblings. Efforts made by caregivers to offer substitutions--familiar objects, small children, recollection of significant past accomplishments of this person--these efforts are movements toward reconciliation.

The foreshortened future of very old people, which is a great preoccupation of the end of life even for confused people, is the time dimension which defines old age itself. No one can watch the process in a person one cares about without pondering its significance in one's own life. Here again there are two choices: One can postpone dwelling on a morbid subject. Kastenbaum commented on this tendency:

It is possible that there are some things we really do not want to know about old men and women. Feifel (1959) and others have suggested that the aged
cue off our own death-related anxieties. Face to face with the old man's vulnerability we are reminded of our own mortality. Even more broadly, we may resist the prospect of being enveloped by the old person's world that one day will be our own. Why let ourselves in for vicarious suffering? Why borrow misery for the future? Aversion from intimate contact with the age is common (1973: 701).

The other choice is to attend, to say: "This path is a universal one; each of us travels it in turn. It is fair to offer help when I can and to receive help when I must. In the company of old people I may learn how to prepare for and face the end of my own life and, in doing so, learn to value the present."

Speed, the crowding of events into measured time, is anathema to old people. Those who "shift into low gear" with older people develop patience. Americans, "ageric people," tend to measure their worth by accomplishment against the clock. The winner is often the one who does more in less time. A profound philosophical change is called for if we are to value those whose performance should not be judged by the clock.

In short, how time is conceived by the old person, is a function of biological condition and nearness to death. There is promise of gain for the caregiver willing to attend this phenomenon. Conceptions of shared time necessary to the public world--the measured time relied on in the
workplace—need not always apply in the home where generosity is practiced.

The Very Old Person and Space

The division in theology of the categories of time and space become a false division in ethics. In existence a human being is always under the conditions of time and space simultaneously. Home suggests place first of all. Yet no home, not even a static photograph of the homeplace, calls to mind mere space; it sets off recollections of people and events in time. Nevertheless, we can better consider the needs of dependent old people if, for analytical purposes, we consider what special meanings space can have which differ from meanings in earlier life.

The American love affair with mobility has to do with a sense of freedom in space. There has been room for every kind of navigation of the seas and skies and for traversing the land. Perhaps on no other continent has human prosperity allowed such indulgence in satisfying one's curiosity about space. The generation old in the eighties still contains enough rural memories to be able to call up how it is when one has no automobile. That generation is fast dying, to be replaced by cohorts who carried on the earliest romance with the horseless carriage. These now immobilized Americans find it especially painful to give up their automobiles. It is the most wrenching loss of
independence, freedom and status. It immediately narrows the space in which they can operate. Often a disabled person can drive an automobile when unable to walk a block.

This is not, furthermore, the only price the dependent elderly pay for the commitment to mobility which characterizes vocational activity in this society. Children move away from their elders and when the time comes when the latter need help a decision must be made whether the old person is to stay in the familiar place or to go to the place where the family is. The very etymology of the word mandates that the familiar place should be one and the same with the family. This typical spatial separation is the new condition of post-rural, post-industrial America.

Until the time of complete dependency the advances in transportation may serve the separated members of the family well. One of the most difficult transitions the dependent elderly are called on to make, however, is the move from the familiar to the unfamiliar place. If the marketplace is to serve the family, then the desire to move workers about the country (and the world) may need to be limited, not only by the new situation in which two-career married couples refuse to separate when advance in the company seems to require it, but may also need to be limited in deference to other family separations which ensue. Certainly the need of the old members of the family to be near those who can support them needs equal consideration in family decisions. Nor should
proximity alone dictate that, of several children, one should have the sole care of dependent elderly parents. In frail old age the shift from the need for freedom in space seems to give way to the need for affective relationship, much as it does for a person temporarily unable to cope because of sickness. What good is spatial freedom if one cannot avail oneself of it?

As a person's world in space narrows to one house or to one room, then severe losses ensue. The first one is privacy. Caregivers who can be sensitive to this enhance the chance that this space can become a belonged-to space. Every human being needs solitude as well as communion; every human being needs haven as well as access to the life of the place. Inasmuch as this is true, all members who share the same abode have claims also to privacy and respite in fair measure.

David Parks makes an eloquent plea for Americans to recover from the metaphor of settlement the value to us all of the "practice of domestic permanence and the patriotism of place" (234). Parks points out that only a stable home allows us to measure our own transitory life against the permanent cycles of non-human nature and the man-made monuments of towns and cities (236).

One reason old persons are moved from the home of their choice, which may be, first of all, their own, and later the home of their children is the failure of American technology
to address itself adequately to the needs of caregiving. As pointed out in a recent journal article, "When the person's capabilities don't match the demands of the environment, the environment may need to be changed" (Faletti, 35). The concept of "human factors engineering" is being applied now to gerontology. It asks the question: What is the optimal fit between the human being with particular capability limitations and the demands of the environment? Examples are add-on shelves which can swing up or down and be mounted in existing cabinets, improvement in food packaging, and velcro closings instead of zippers, buttons and hooks (36-37). Most needed is technology's help in the management of bladder and bowel incontinence. Such technological aids can be instrumental for an old person in retaining a desired level of independence or can be helpful to those giving personal service. They hold promise for adjusting the environment to increase the freedom of the frail person to choose his or her own place. These changes, however, depend upon a realignment of social values.

Limited Mentality in Interpersonal Relations

The problem for the unimpaired person in dealing with the elder of impaired mentality is the unreliability or unpredictability of social exchange. Communication which misfires, messages which do not connect make the "normal" person uneasy. If the partner in the social encounter is
parent or spouse, one's uneasiness in the first experiences mounts to alarm. It is like an impenetrable glass curtain dropping forever between friends so that the other could be observed but not contacted. It seems like death by separation, not removal. Must one accept the living death of the other if destiny has rendered the other unable to reflect, respond or communicate?

This conclusion would be erroneous. It derives from an extension of a definition of interpersonal relating which belongs to some relationships but not to all—the definition that requires equity and mutuality of response. Suppose that we borrow from Alfred Schutz's thought, which was an effort to find a better way to interpret social reality. Influenced by Husserl and Bergson he applies phenomenology to the interpretation of society and analyzes the primary social relationship (II: ix). In the face-to-face experience the other is available to me in pre-reflection—a continuous and uninterrupted flow of consciousness. The face-to-face situation is a Thou-orientation. It refers to the "pure" experience of another Self as a human being, alive and conscious "while the specific content of that consciousness remains undefined." When the Thou-orientation becomes reciprocal a We-relation is constituted. "My experience of the fellow-man is direct as long as I am straightforwardly engaged in the We-relation... as long as I participate in the common stream of our experiences" (II:
It is only the other of whom I can have direct, immediate, vivid experience; my own self is not present to me in the same way. I apprehend the other more directly than I apprehend myself, which requires reflection. The We-relation is the sharing with some other of a common sector of time and space—"time" implying a genuine simultaneity of consciousness; "space" implying the appearance of the other to me in person including his body as "a unified field of expression . . . of concrete symptoms through which his conscious life manifests itself to me vividly" (II: 23-33).

There is nothing in this description so far which precludes a person with impaired mentality from being present to me. All that is required for the We-relation is a Thou-orientation on both our parts, which is conditioned upon consciousness not on intellect or memory. But if, because of the now inequitable balance of what I and the impaired other bring to the content of the We-relation, which is a next phase, I turn away, breaking the mutual Thou-Orientation, what have I done to the other who is dependent on Thou-orientations for world-orientations, for his or her life in community? And what have I done to my possibility of expansion, through caring, into a relationship of a new order?

Nowhere but home do the vectors of time and space and others allow a tiring old person a final belonging. As Schutz said, "Home is starting-point and terminus. It is
the null point of the system of coordinates which we ascribe to the world in order to find our bearings in it" (II: 107).

There is a uniqueness to the forms which disintegration of physical or mental powers takes for each individual who grows into very old age. Which powers drain away, which losses are accepted or protested, for what vestiges of life powers does the old one gather his or her remaining energies—these define the person, tell who this unique individual is at the end of life. This old person is worth knowing; in all her infirmities or his asocial behaviors anyone of them is worth intimate observance for the chance of intimate interaction. Such persons are full of surprises. They defy theories, patterns, ascriptions of cross-cultural characteristics. A spark of curiosity, of wonder, a flickering flame of passion, of gratitude, of tenderness, or righteous indignation lights up again and again the marvelous complexity of a human being as the flame of power burns lower and lower. Above all, the investment of final energies in freedom to choose, to stay or let go, to be in charge of some last core of being—this is worth learning about, knowing and pondering. It is well to be in on the homecoming. The awe of life one feels in witnessing its beginnings can be matched by that felt in witnessing its end.
What is Needed

In America the failure to include in the full community those elderly who could not maintain the capacity for vocational achievement and for intellectual clarity both reveals and, in turn, exacerbates a distorted value system. America's standards of achievement and intellect overrode its values of fairness and compassion. The flaw in our value system is rapidly becoming acute in view of America's changing demography. As greater percentages of us enter the "frail elderly" years, pressures for changes intensify not only because of the economic aspect but because of the perceived hardship and injustice for many elderly and because of the mounting dread of dependency and possible future institutionalization among those now in mid-life. Decisions for change ought to be grounded in the highest values shared in the community. It is family and community inclusiveness across the life cycle, which is grounded in Judaic-Christian doctrines of universalism which should first point the way. Additionally it is the continuous and universal need to be moving toward reconciliation with all that is essentially good which must be recalled. If the lifelong mandate for reconciliation, here translated as homecoming, is needed, then barriers which impede this progress must be removed. I have identified two of these--our present valuation of vocational achievement and of rational thinking and have illustrated with a number of
examples of specific actions how that shift might transpire, setting us, all together, on the path leading home.
NOTES

CHAPTER THREE

/1/ From a public discussion with workers from the New Age Hospice at the monthly Gerontology Forum of the Texas Research Institute of Mental Sciences, Houston, Texas, May, 1984.

/2/ From a classroom discussion with nurses at Boston University School of Nursing, summer, 1976.

/3/ Other candidates for analysis: individualism, the youth culture, American mobility, independence, technological expertise, emphasis on erotic sexuality, speed, denial of death. The Langley Porter Institute Studies on Aging resulted in a listing by Clark and Anderson of main problems which people encounter as they grow old. Of the seven identified one was "partial or total retirement from active duties" and another is "changes in intellectual functioning". Others were change in physical appearance, decreased energy, greater chance of illness, possible need for help, and uncertainty of life duration (60).

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