ETHICAL BECOMING:
ADULT ETHICAL DEVELOPMENT
IN CHRISTIAN CONGREGATIONS

A Dissertation in
Adult Education

by
Davin J. Carr-Chellman

© 2011 Davin J. Carr-Chellman

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
May 2011
The dissertation of Davin J. Carr-Chellman was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Fred Schied  
Associate Professor of Education and  
Co-Professor-in-Charge of Adult Education  
Dissertation Adviser  
Chair of Committee

Ian Baptiste  
Associate Professor of Education

Edgar I. Farmer  
Professor of Education

Leland Glenna  
Assistant Professor of Rural Sociology and  
Science, Technology, and Society

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School
Abstract

This is a study of adult ethical development in Christian congregations. Using an empirical hermeneutic phenomenological methodology, this study examined how five pastors understand and encourage ethical development, developing an in-depth analysis and interpretation of their perceptions of the phenomenon of adult ethical development. Two primary themes emerged, with several significant sub-themes contributing to those primary themes: 1) the integrity of ethical and spiritual development; and 2) the relational nature of ethical development. The sub-themes of theme one include the nature of spiritual development, the nature of ethical development, indicators of ethical development, and best practices for ethical development. The sub-themes of theme two include the centrality of the desert experience, the relationships that matter, and relationships give us value because they teach us to love.

Drawing on a theoretical background of neo-pragmatic appropriations of both value theory and cognitive science, the relational nature of adult ethical development that emerges from this study makes contributions to the field of adult education in its understanding of the richness of the concrete spiritual context, the importance of informal learning environments, and the breadth of intersubjective experience that serves to incubate adult ethical development.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

- Introduction 1
- The Problem 1
- Locating Myself as a Researcher 6

## CHAPTER 2: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

- Introduction 11
- Habermas and Dewey’s Perspectives on Ethics 36
  - *What is Intersubjectivity?* 37
  - *Dewey’s Ethics* 41
  - *Habermas’ Ethics* 50
  - *Communicative Rationality, Discourse Ethics, and the Rescue of the Lifeworld* 53
  - “Learning Our Way Out” 64
- Chapter Summary 70

## CHAPTER 3: METHOD

- Introduction 71
- Research Question 71
- Methodological Framework 72
  - An Empirical Hermeneutic Phenomenology 72
  - Approach to the Research Question 72
- Research Site and Participants 90
  - Entering the Field 90
  - Gatekeepers 91
  - Research Participants 93
- Data Collection 95
  - Interviewing 95
- Data Analysis and Synthesis 99
  - Description and Interpretation 100
- Chapter Summary 105

## CHAPTER 4: THE PASTORS

- Introduction 106
- Individual Portraits 108
  - Debra 108
  - Hiram 116
  - Joshua 124
Acknowledgements

I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to the members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Ian Baptiste, Dr. Edgar Farmer, and Dr. Leland Glenna, for their intellectual and personal generosity, for their guidance, for their patience, and for their friendship. Additionally, a special thanks goes to Dr. Fred Schied, my committee chair, advisor, and friend. His insight, encouragement, and support over the years have been invaluable.

I am grateful, as well, to the five pastors who so graciously gave of their time, in the midst of busy schedules, to spend hours with me, sharing their stories and wisdom. This study bears their respective marks and it would not have been possible without their enthusiastic participation.

My family has been helpful and patient in nearly superhuman ways. My children, Asher, Jules, and Aila, have been waiting for their Daddy to finish his dissertation for far too long, and they may be even happier at its completion than he is. My parents, Barbara and Alva, and my grandparents, John and Susan, have been last minute babysitters and have even mowed my yard when the commitments of the dissertation kept me too busy. Their graciousness, support, and love have been constants my entire life, as appreciated and needed now as they have always been.

My wife, Ali, has courageously withstood a super-size dose of ethics
and ethical development. Even more, though, she has been a consistent and
dedicated colleague, critiquing where necessary, but always encouraging and
supportive. Many days this process was too much for me alone; her calm and
confident refrain, “You’re doing great!” made all the difference.
This work is dedicated to several of my teachers who most helped me to understand that my ideas could be more important than my batting average:

Mrs. Maureen Kenney Fleck
The Rev. Dr. Carl A. Synan
Dr. John J. Stuhr

And, also, to my Grandparents – four of my earliest teachers: John Frederick Keck and Susan Guyon Keck, and Edward Nels Chellman and Mildred Bailey Chellman, who always told me that a strong back can be broken, but not a strong mind.
Chapter 1
Introduction to the Study and Problem Statement

Introduction

Chapter one outlines the purpose and scope of this study. In this chapter I introduce the basic concepts that support the study of pastors’ perceptions of ethical development: ethical development, teaching, learning, and spirituality. I start with a brief statement of the problem and outline ways in which this study contributes to the body of literature in spirituality and ethical formation in adult education.

The Problem

Ethical development is not commonly addressed in the field of adult education. This fact is not to suggest that ethical development is an under-studied phenomenon: several academic journals focus specifically on ethics, occasionally publishing works that address ethical development. (Journal of College and Character, Ethics, Nursing Ethics, Journal of Moral Education). Many of these studies have been interesting and useful. In a few rare instances, these journals have published research that, although not self-identified as within the field of adult education, make use of adult education concepts and approaches (Clare 2006). Historically, however, ethical development is truly a topic that was the sole purview of philosophy for
millennia. Plato and Aristotle mark the start of a philosophical tradition that addresses more than just meta-ethical concerns abstracted from human experience and growth, but always attempts to concretize the abstract through discussions of human development. For example, my favorite commentary on Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics bears the illustrative title, “Taking Life Seriously,” indicating that Aristotle meant for his work to actually make life better, not just to contemplate the good and bad in the abstract (Sparshott 1994). This ancient tradition moved in an empirical direction most famously and effectively with various psychologists such as Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan (Kohlberg 1981, 1983; Gilligan 1982). In reality, the study of ethical development has not advanced much beyond what these two seminal researchers published in the 1970’s and 1980’s. This inertia characterizes adult education’s approach to ethical development as well. Understandably, learning theory and the study of learners more generally has occupied much of the adult education literature. Contemporary studies that focus on the somewhat narrower concern of ethical development within adult education are limited to Brookfield’s examination of the status of this focus within the field, which is really a review of the literature with suggestions for future development (1993) and Sandlin and Walther’s piece on moral identity formation and social movement learning, which - interestingly enough -- cites absolutely no sources on ethical development or
moral identity (2009). Ethical development as a research focus is unfashionable: by definition it seeks to discriminate between what is good or not good, or between what works or does not work. Discrimination, though difficult, is essential to life, but still tends to make people squirm a bit. And for good reason: studies of ethical development smack of prescription and judgment, especially in some very sensitive and personal areas of life. This sensitivity combined with a checkered past in the service of malicious ideologies has given ethical development a few black eyes, making it easy to declare unfashionable. However, being unfashionable does not mean unimportant.

This study advances the literature of ethical development within adult education by probing its interface with spirituality, specifically pastors’ perceptions of adult ethical development in a spiritual context. As such it taps the deeper literature within adult education on teaching and learning, as well as the burgeoning study of spirituality. The lens through which ethical development is interpreted for this study reveals that development as a type of learning. Even more, this lens reveals it as a type of learning that can be taught in distinct ways, depending on the context. This contextualization is why the concept of spirituality is also part of this study: as an emerging, if fledgling, area of interest within adult education, spirituality has important contributions to make to our understanding of
ethical development.

Much of the existing literature on ethical development, especially the research flowing from Kohlberg, has been either speculative/non-empirical or positivistic. In light of this situation, this study adds the dimension of empirically based, thick description to a literature that is focused mostly on breadth rather than depth. This study investigates pastors’ perceptions of ethical development by exploring their experiences as teachers, leaders, and learners of ethics. The main goal for the study is to provide a holistic and substantive view of the phenomenon of pastors’ perceptions of adult ethical development in a spiritual context.

To approach this goal, I have focused on the following research question: how do religious professionals perceive ethical development. To explore this phenomenon, I interviewed five Protestant pastors of congregations in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States.

Empirical hermeneutic phenomenology is an appropriate approach for this study because it fits the area of inquiry. Investigations of ethical development in adult education are few and mostly conceptually narrow. Brookfield (1998) argues that ". . .despite the centrality of moral concerns to the practice of adult education, the concept of moral learning is curiously absent from the literature of the field" (p. 283). Even more than this absence,
adult education has tended to cede this territory to studies in developmental psychology, which overwhelmingly follow a more positivistic model. In this case, interpretive inquiry can begin to broaden the field from the researcher's perspective and can broaden our sense of what ethical formation in practice looks like. In an effort to improve adult education, asking questions about morality, learning, and ethical development from an interpretive perspective is important because interpretation is part and parcel of our experience of these phenomena. Also the kinds of questions that can help us improve the practice of ethical formation are often interpretive in nature, e.g. 'What is the meaning of ethical development?;' 'How is ethical development relevant to your practice as an educator of adults?' Asking pastors to describe what something is like, to explain how something feels, to interpret a particular experience requires an interpretive/hermeneutic lens.

In support of this claim, Koch (1999) argues that "[Her] position is that, through hermeneutics, interpretation has become part of our cultural self-understanding. Not only does hermeneutics locate us historically and culturally, we can articulate ourselves in relation to others and the world in general" (p.21). This approach to understanding ethical development in the context of adult religious education is particularly relevant given the history of the adult education field, its interest in enabling transformative educative experiences, and the current surge of interest in spirituality.
Locating Myself as a Researcher

My perspective on ethical development is informed by a nearly lifelong engagement with issues of character, learning, and spirituality. I identify myself as a deeply committed Christian with a strong appreciation for the spiritual elements of my experience. I was raised in a United Methodist church, with appropriate emphasis on both the intellectual and experiential components of the life of faith. My hometown of about 500 people had two thriving United Methodist churches, one originally from the Evangelical United Brethren half of the “United” Methodist Church, and the other -- my church -- originally from the Methodist Church half of the “United” Methodist Church. This may seem insignificant, but culturally and practically the difference was huge. The Methodist Church was historically more liturgical and less charismatic, more justice oriented and less evangelical. These characteristics became deeply imbedded in me as I matured. In college, social justice as a witness of faith became my top priority, which led me to join the United Church of Christ -- a denomination with remarkable clarity and strength on social issues.

As an educator and learning theorist, I am a constructivist. Following Guba and Lincoln's (1989) framework, I will explain my framework via the conceptual categories of ontology, epistemology, and methodology. My ontological perspective is that reality is a shared endeavor, always in
process and becoming something different through social construction. The reality I experience is inescapably 'my' reality, idiosyncratic and unique to the experiencing subject. However, the social nature of reality, as described by American pragmatists Dewey and Mead, is such that what I refer to as 'my' experience/interpretation is always shaped by transactions with a) my prior experiences; b) my social context; c) my physical environment. Hence, what I describe as 'my' reality is always already a construction of intersubjective experience. This ontological framework has implications for my understanding of knowledge and truth, i.e. epistemology. My epistemological perspective on social phenomena is non-foundationalist and radically empirical in that social, moral, and political truths and knowledge are never permanently established, nor is a particular truth ever established for everyone in all places. All truths and knowledge are, as Denzin and Lincoln say, "...fitted to the pragmatic, ethical, and political contingencies of concrete situations" (2005, p. 910). This perspective is often simplistically dismissed as a narrow kind of relativism, inevitably leading us down a slippery slope toward nihilism and meaninglessness. I disagree. Rather, this perspective calls for a move "beyond relativism and objectivism" (Bernstein, 1983), requiring a more rigorous examination of one's moral landscape as it relates to the social realities of a given situation. Methodologically, the approach that best fits my understanding of reality is empirical hermeneutic
phenomenology, which is, appropriately, the method I used to conduct this study (which is developed in greater detail in Chapter 3). Even more, though, I cannot ignore that these characteristics I mention above have impacted this study. One of the truths of social science that I find particularly compelling is that a researcher cannot avoid imbedding part of him/herself onto that phenomenon which s/he studies, analyzes, and interprets. As such, the things I believe in my heart-of-hearts are most certainly reflected in my analysis and interpretation of the data I collected. As I moved through the process of constant comparative analysis and the threads of meanings began to emerge from the data, I was surprised and a bit concerned that my primary themes connected directly to relational ethics, exactly the approach to ethics I try to express in part of my literature review. In particular, I try to flesh-out the intersubjective/relational ethics of Dewey and Habermas as being relevant to adult education and adult ethical development. With this in-mind, I worked very conscientiously to ensure that I was not forcing my interpretations onto the data. Initially, I tried to reframe my analysis and interpretations, but felt frustrated because these different interpretations were not what the data were saying to me. Eventually, I came to accept that it is appropriate and, in fact, good that my themes reflect who I am and what I believe. With that said, I also believe that anyone reading my transcripts would also develop nearly the same themes. Of course, greater detail of my
data analysis is in Chapter 3.

Throughout my interviews, I reflected to friends and family how much I was enjoying the process. And I really did: the people I interviewed were fascinating to me and, in nearly every case, really dug deep to provide incredibly substantive and thoughtful responses to my questions. Sessions with my participants were usually very long and provided tremendous opportunity to get to know each other as well as explore the phenomenon of adult ethical development. In several cases, my participants were so involved with their stories and responses that they became very emotional. Likewise, I found myself identifying very closely with nearly all of my participants, so much so that I also had a few moments of heavy emotion as I was interpreting their responses, extracting themes, and bringing them together to tell a coherent story. I can say with complete confidence that these people have changed me; they’ve changed my sense of faith, spirituality, and ethics. So, in the case of this study, it isn’t just the researcher leaving his mark on the data. It is also the data changing the researcher. For this I am extremely grateful.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I outlined the purpose and scope of this study. I also introduced the basic concepts that support the study of pastors’ perceptions of
ethical development: ethical development, teaching, learning, and spirituality. A brief statement of the problem started the chapter, followed by an outline of the ways in which this study contributes to the body of literature in spirituality and ethical formation in adult education.
Chapter 2
A Review of the Literature

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the resurgence of the scholarship of spirituality and ethics in adult education as a foundation for this study of religious leaders’ perceptions of ethical development. I start with a deeper understanding of the focus of the literature on spirituality in adult education and then turn to some of the critiques. I connect spirituality to adult learning and share my own position on the state of this literature as it leads to a useful connection for this study. I then discuss ethical development with a focus on both Habermas and Dewey’s perspectives on ethics, especially as these perspectives bear upon ethical development. Also relevant to this study is the current nexus of cognitive science and ethics, which I highlight because Habermas and Dewey are the theoretical engines driving this fruitful approach.

Michael Newman has a decidedly un-spiritual approach to adult education, but he has served as an inspiration for my scholarship nonetheless. His thinking strikes me as uniquely clear, while also addressing topics of great importance in sophisticated ways. In a recent article (2008), he describes himself as a secular soul, who has been, "...required...to
acknowledge the burgeoning literature on spirituality and adult learning" (295). Reading this admission felt like a confirmation: spirituality, it seems, is an unavoidable topic in adult education for the foreseeable future. There is nothing short of a blossoming of interest and publishing in this area, leading one prominent adult educator/spiritualist to write, "Spirituality! Like dandelions in the spring, the term is cropping up everywhere." (English and Gillen, 2000). Written ten years ago, their creative description of the state of the field is no less accurate today, as a quick search in Google Scholar or ProQuest, etc. will indicate. Identifying the seeds of this contemporary resurgence is a revealing exercise in terms of the current foci of the literature. Many adult education spiritualists highlight their motivations for pursuing this theme in their scholarship, which helps -- a bit -- to clarify what constitutes the current focus in this area. English, Fenwick, and Parsons (2003) exemplify this trend with the following explanation: "Spurred partly by popular culture's interest and partly by an interest in returning to a concern for the common good, spirituality in adult education and training is an emerging topic. There is a stirring inside, and adult educators and trainers are responding by meditating aloud upon their own spirituality and bringing this spirituality to bear in their teaching and learning encounters" (p. 1). Clearly, the literature base is expanding, as the number of researchers pursuing this topic is growing. This development brings a refreshing, but
thin, layer of complexity and subtlety to the dialog that has been missing due to the relatively shallow pool of writing. This also makes it a bit more difficult to essentialize the literature, but several distinguishing features do stand out. Looking at the researchers within adult education who address spirituality (Dirkx, 1997; English and Gillen, 2000; English, Fenwick, & Parson, 2003; Fenwick, 2001; Fenwick & Lange, 1998; Gillen & English, 2000; Groen, 2002; Hooks, 1999; Horton & Freire, 1990; Milacci, 2003; Milacci & Howell, 2002; J. Miller, 2000; L. Miller, 2000; Schaufelle & Baptiste, 2000; Tisdell, 2000b; Tisdell, 2003; Tisdell, Tolliver, & Villa, 2001; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2002), a few stand out as exemplifying theoretically grounded, logically consistent efforts at understanding the role and relevance of spirituality to a rigorous conception of adult learning (e.g. Milacci, 2003; Schaufelle & Baptiste, 2000). On the other hand, many stand out as atheoretical attempts to justify the contemplation of one's navel as an aid to meditation, i.e. "navel gazing." These are the scholars I will refer to throughout as 'adult education spiritualists,' or just 'spiritualists.' Several common spiritualist themes seem to have emerged: 1) a yearning for or a revisitation of the past; 2) a dull, but heavily emphasized distinction between 'spiritual' and 'religious;' 3) an emphasis on 'holism;' 4) a focus on the connection between spirituality and social justice.
**Adult Education Spiritualist Themes**

*Yearning for the Past*

Beginning with the first theme, the focus of current research on spirituality in adult education finds much of its inspiration in the past. In May 1953, just a month after the death of Eduard Lindeman, W.C. Hallenback wrote a paper entitled, "Building working philosophies in adult education" (1953), in which he affirmed adult education's role as senior partner to democracy:

Activities of adult education take place in a community, the world of first responsibility of people. The responsibility of individuals to their communities of citizenship is an important part of personality development. The community then becomes the focus for adult education in order to make its opportunities available to all of the community's people, in order to concern itself with the development of the community, and in order to help increase the expressions of citizenship responsibility of individuals and their groups in cooperative action.

This paper was seen as the culmination of several years of soul searching in the budding field of adult education with the expressed purpose of "Building principles which should guide the American Adult Education Movement" (Pell, 1952). The conversation is, of course, meaningful and fascinating in retrospect, but the matter was of some urgency at the time. Adult education was seen as gaining broader significance in the post WWII world, with access
to more government and private funds, as well as stronger organizations (the AEA/USA and it's successor, the AAACE). Many of its seminal thinkers, though, were disappointed with the results: the working conditions of the adult educator produced successful, but, apolitical, courses that marginalized the seminal humanistic and social impulses of the adult education movement. This sentiment -- what many leaders in the field at that time decried as the segregation of human purposes through increased specialization and professionalization -- seemed to gain currency over the next decade. In spite of their efforts to the contrary, this "movement" cum "field of study" was drinking from the trough of post-sputnik investments in the scientific pursuit of knowledge at the expense of the humanistic and democratic purposes originally envisioned by many early adult educators, such as Eduard Lindeman. 1964 brought the publishing of Adult Education: Outlines of an Emerging Field of University Study (Jensen, Liveright, and Hallenbeck, 1964), which seemed to solidify the case for adult education as a unique discipline, but also seemed to seal its fate as far removed from the democratizing and liberatory impulses of the prior generation's luminaries. This shift was to last until at least the 1980's, when there seemed to be "something of a return to the concern for examining the connections between adult education and social change. . ." (Brookfield, 1987). These historical currents and shifts are the seedbed out of which grew the current
resurgence of spirituality within adult education. But if these shifts and currents inspire the spiritualists, it is the religious roots of adult education that begin to complicate their perspective.

Many early adult educators and adult education communities / organizations were rooted in religion. Eduard Lindeman is the most well-known example, but Basil Yeaxlee of the YMCA, Everett Dean Martin of the People's Institute of New York, and Moses Coady of the Antigonish Movement are also examples of the religious impulse at the heart of the early adult education movement. They were inspired by the sense of agency, quality of action, and proclivity to a common purpose provided by their respective religious orientations. Subsequently, these experiences were read into more general adult education goals and practices, helping to guide the organic, humanitarian direction of the field prior to the 1960's. The ensuing shift in direction away from these humanitarian orientations has had lasting effects on the field, one of which is the current interest in spirituality within adult education: it has done much to influence and shape -- in both explicit and implicit ways -- the current resurgence of research in spirituality and adult education. The spiritualists understand their current work as bridging the chasm between the religious, social, and democratic roots of the field and contemporary research and practice. The language used by adult education's current spiritualists mirrors closely the language of the early luminaries: a
quest to bridge and heal the divisions of contemporary life, a quest that cannot be separated from a more generous focus on healing the world. In this way, what we are witnessing is not new, and can, in fact, be understood as a kind of yearning for what once was. In a different, but related way the spiritualism in adult education is a reaction to a field that had become absorbed by overly technical methodology, beholden to fragmentary, scientific models, and removed from issues of social significance. Spirituality is assumed to provide a perspective on adult education and training that can escape this pattern. The early adult education movement and its primary activists provide a model of what once was and can be again. A good example of this theme is English & Gillen (2000), "The search for a vision of life that transcends contemporary social conventions -- the spiritual quest -- is not unique to the current times. Pioneers in the field of adult education, such as Basil Yeaxlee (1925) and Moses Coady (1939), consciously or not, drew on thousands of years of spiritual thought in formulating their operational principles and sets of assumptions. . . The ideas of justice, service, caring, cooperation, and the dignity of the person are the bedrock on which the field of adult education is built" (p.2). Even more, English, Fenwick, and Parsons (2003) argue that, "The history of early adult education movements such as Chautauqua, Antigonish, Highlander, and Mondragon. . .show the original spiritual purpose. We develop the argument that the fields of adult
education and training need to recover some of their early concerns for holistic, spiritually informed, and socially responsible practice (p.vii).

Clearly, the spiritualists identify their work with the roots of the field.

*Spiritual or Religious*

Fidelity to the interests and concerns of early adult educators only goes so far, however. Current adult education spiritualists maintain that the original spiritual purpose, while admirable, was simply too provincial; too religious, not enough spiritual. Basil Yeaxlee, for example, is easily dismissed for his lack of sophistication: "Part of the power of spirituality is its many rich layers, meanings, and expressions. Early 20th century adult educator Basil Yeaxlee (1925). . .saw spirituality as synonymous with religion. . .However, . . .[w]hatever it is, spirituality. . .has certainly grown larger than a focus on religion" (English et al., 2003, p.5). Almost across the board, this sentiment is remarkably consistent. According to my review, within the literature of adult education, only Milacci (2003) and Schaufelle and Baptiste (2000) actually situate their appropriation of spirituality within a specific, concrete context and tradition. For the spiritualists, it is common to make a passing reference to one's tradition, but this is usually done to highlight the universality of the spiritualist sentiment. Vogel, for example, declares, "No matter what family or faith tradition we grew up in (mine was
Christian, United Methodist), there are stories and dreams, hopes and fears, gifts and wounds that make us who we are. This is true whether we grew up in a church, synagogue, mosque, temple, or shrine and still claim it as home, or if we reject past family or religious experience as no longer home. Some of us may never have participated in a religious community or tradition" (2000, p. 18). This interpretation portrays religion as irrelevant. Tisdell agrees, and puts a finer point on the argument, "spirituality is not the same as religion; religion is an organized community of faith that has written codes of regulatory behavior, whereas spirituality is more about one's personal belief and experience of a higher power or higher purpose" (2000, p. 309). The emphasis on this separation seems less like a description of actual belief and practice, and more like a reification of sentimentality for the purposes of casting a wider, apparently more relevant net. Separating religion from spirituality permits a greater generalization of spiritual ideas and practices, while also presenting fewer opportunities for disagreement or exclusion. On this view, religion, especially the religion of many early adult educators, is quaint, unappealing, and exclusive. In this vein, English and Gillen comment on Basil Yeaxlee's writing: ". . .we speculate that this was the reason that Yeaxlee's book, written seventy-five years ago with a decidedly religious outlook, did not have enduring value" (p. 87).
Holism

Much more appealing to a 'post-modern' audience is an emphasis on holism, which, according to the spiritualists, escapes particular religious agendas and emphasizes pluralism, while also tapping into an interesting and important thread of adult learning theory that moves beyond a narrow obsession with technique and method. The holistic emphasis is partially an expression of yearning for the past, as mentioned above; a hearkening to days-gone-by when the field's priorities were presumably clear and true and just. Moving beyond the corrupting influence of technical rationality and the scientific method is paramount: technicist ideology and professionalization has dominated the field since the 1950's (Collins, 1991), and, as Milacci quotes English et al., "Somewhere in the past fifty years adult education and training have become more about teaching techniques and learning styles than about inspiration, aspiration, and consecration" (2003, p. 25). Holism, broadly speaking, "...mean[s] both educators and learners are more than the sum of their physical, emotional, social, or cognitive parts" (English et al., 2003, p. 79). Heron (1999) refers to holistic learning as "whole person" learning, which engages a person as a "spiritually, energetically, and physically endowed being encompassing feeling and emotion, intuition and imaging, reflection and discrimination, intention and action" (p. 1).

Following this model, MacKeracher (1996) describes learning as a
"kaleidoscope" (p. 243) in which the combination of colors and shapes matter much more than the individual pieces by themselves. This brings out the central emphasis within the holistic approach on the whole being greater than the sum of its parts. In a very real way, this emphasis on holism is an important movement within adult education, and my general disregard for much of the spiritualist literature notwithstanding, it is an important utilization and interpretation of our best learning theories, e.g. Dewey, Vygotsky, and some of the scholars who have followed closely in their footsteps. Consequently, the recognition that "humans' spiritual dimension holds significant potential for enhancing teaching-learning situations" (Schaufelle & Baptiste, 2000, p. 448), represents a very positive development in the adult education literature. Clearly, theoretical and empirical investigations of this piece of spirituality in adult education are worth pursuing, especially as they are grounded in rigorous conceptualizations of the learning transaction.

*Spirituality and Social Justice*

This holistic emphasis lends itself very easily to a focus on the connection between spirituality and social action: understanding the learning transaction as involving the whole person implicates the activities of the whole person, in particular the activities that strive to make the world a
better place, reflecting one's values. English et al refer to this as a "spirituality of action" (p. 99). Again, this piece of the spiritualist's approach stands on some solid ground: Michael Newman in *Maeler's Regard* (1999), and Griff Foley in *Learning in Social Action* (1999) are both referenced in the spiritualist literature as supporting their claims to the important mutual influence between learning and struggle, and, hence, spirituality and action. Newman and Foley represent important contributions to a long tradition of scholarship within adult education that understands social action as a context of informal learning in which we not only learn effectively, but also ethically. Tisdell stands out as a representative of this theme: much of her recent work has focused on how spirituality informs the emancipatory work of female adult educators (2000; 1998). Despite this recent work, this area is heavily under-theorized, lacking a strong grounding in what we know of how people learn. There is some effort to draw-on newer models of transformational learning, such as Cranton's work (1994) and Dirkx's (1997), but, in general, the interpretation is highly speculative.

**Critiques of the Adult Education Spiritualists**

I anticipate that these latter two themes in the spiritualist literature will provide fertile ground for future study -- I would argue that these are legitimate and important areas of inquiry. The connection between adult
learning and spirituality has solid grounding in learning theory, and is just recently being incorporated as an extension of that theory (Schaufelle & Baptiste, 2000; English, 2000; English et al, 2003). On the other hand, as I tried to make clear above, there are serious flaws with much of what has been written in this area. I will highlight several of these flaws, but I want to orient this discussion with some interesting observations from a colleague, Fred Milacci.

Milacci's (2003) critique of spirituality in adult education begins with an initial, visceral response to the very generic nature of what he encountered at the 42nd annual Adult Education Research Conference. Having heard that spirituality was gaining some credibility in the field, he attended a session devoted to the topic, "Toward a culturally relevant and spiritually grounded theory of teaching for social transformation and transformational learning" (Tisdell, Tolliver, and Vella, 2001). His reflections provide a broad point of access to the critiques of spirituality now current in adult education -- his own as well as others:

Forty minutes later, out of sheer frustration, I left before the session was even completed. The spirituality discussed in that room was ethereal, devoid of and completely disconnected from any etymological, historical, or theological moorings I knew (because of my theological training) to be connected with the term. Even more disturbing was the underlying assumption that this brand of spirituality was deliberately watered down so it might be palatable to all. It was not palatable to
me. I knew that the supposedly benign activities being conducted in that session -- candle lighting, meditation, and choreographed breathing -- were rituals rooted in religious tradition, no different than the prayers or responsive Scripture readings we do each week in church. (2003, p. 10)

Clearly something about this topic in general and this presentation in particular struck a chord -- a nerve -- with Milacci, a response not limited to him alone. Spirituality is a deeply personal matter -- even for those who deny any spirituality at all -- making deep impressions on adult education, and education more broadly (Glazer, 1999; Palmer, 1998). The result is an area of inquiry that can, on the one hand, easily alienate observers, and can, on the other, forcefully compel its investigators. The common denominator seems to be the magnitude of sensitivity at the heart of the different reactions. The conference presentation Milacci attended was a product of the formative years of spirituality's resurgence in adult education. As such his reflections provide a useful lens through which the critiques of this trend can be viewed.

Following Milacci's observations, I will categorize the critiques of adult education spiritualism in three ways: 1) the parallel to the beginnings of adult education is overstated and inaccurate; 2) The end-point or goal of the focus on spirituality is misguided. I call this the teleological thread-- it questions the end or purpose of spirituality as it has been represented, and,
subsequently, what conceptualization/construction of the term has permitted such a use or purpose? Milacci (2003) and Fenwick (2001) are representative of this approach; 3) the logical development of many spiritualist's arguments are flawed. I call this the logico-philosophical thread. It questions the internal consistency of claims to spirituality and transcendence in light of the author's claims and the historical development of ideas. Newman (2008) and Stuhr (2003) are representative of this approach.

Regarding the parallels to early adult educators, we cannot saddle our ancestors with all the baggage carried by the field's current spiritual direction. There are several important differences: whereas early adult educators progressed in a Jamesian (William James) direction that saw the "Will to Believe" as source of agency, energy, and common purpose, many current spiritualists fetishize spirituality as a goal unto itself; whereas early adult educators understood the social gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch as an ethical imperative rooted in a concrete, specific context and tradition, current spiritualists operate in an abstract conceptual sphere with no identifiable ethical core as a guide to action. While these differences point to the teleological and logico-philosophical critiques I'll discuss next, they also highlight the reactionary nature of many spiritualist's use of, for example, Yeaxlee and Coady: the significance of these early educators and activists is not so much that they illuminate an important approach to adult education,
but that they approached it in a way we – as spiritualists -- will not. In large measure, this reactionary approach contributes to the flaws identified by the teleological and logico-philosophical critiques.

The teleological critique looks at the literature of spirituality as either overly abstract and removed from reality, or painfully concrete and removed from crucial conceptual grounding. The heart of this critique is definitional and theological: what does the term spirituality mean for the researcher in question and what evidence of its usefulness as defined actually exists? The teleological thread sees danger in the nebulous, often shallow, nature of spirituality; it is squishy, slippery and not easy to grasp, characteristics which, in the hands of the intellectually careless, lazy, or malicious, generate poor, at times unethical, scholarship (not rigorous or intellectually honest). Claims about spirituality are easy to make because a researcher can always escape to the clouds, speak in ethereal tones, and wax philosophic about 'oneness' and 'wholeness.' Any debate can be solved with a darkened room, a few scented candles, and guided meditation through deep breathing exercises (see. . . don’t you feel better? ).

This squishiness is disconcerting because it represents an amoral core that permits and can argue in favor of multiple uses and purposes. In particular, Milacci (2002) and Fenwick (2001) concentrate on the corporate
adoption of spirituality via human resources development. The teleological argument contends that, because adult education spiritualists ignore the historical, etymological, and religious context of spirituality, it can, in essence, mean *anything to anyone*, and can be used by anyone to accomplish anything. As Milacci says, "...this type of decontextualization of religion, which fails to understand notions of the sacred implicit in the term... may make the concept of spirituality more palatable to a wider readership, but it also serves to eviscerate the term, leaving it with no real meaning. It also makes it much easier for the term to be co-opted, commodified, and misused" (2003, page 31). Fenwick and Lange (1998) initiated this critical examination of the (mis)uses of spirituality in HRD, which regards workers' spirits as an untapped resource with remarkable potential for improving productivity. The new corporate interest in spirituality is easily presented to employees as a natural outgrowth of HRD's humanistic caring for its organization's workers. And once the domain of the spiritual is admissible in the corporate training mission, it becomes subject to the ideological control of corporate high priests (p. 1).

Fenwick and Lange provide examples of specific spiritually-based corporate training programs that ultimately use the good-will of spirituality to manipulate employees and workers for the benefit of the company. Milacci and Howell (2002) built upon and extended this argument to provide an interesting analysis of current business and HRD literature. They argue that
the primary themes of these popular writings "enable broader and subtler means of worker control" (Milacci, 2003, p.34).

The teleological thread also sees much spiritualist literature as fetishizing spirituality. Even a cursory look at this literature reveals an overwhelming emphasis on self-definition and meaningless abstractions born solely for the purpose of “being spiritual.” Fenwick and Lange (1998) define spirituality as "a yearning to connect with a community, a higher power, or a transcendent energy -- and to liberate this energy within one's self" (p.64). English and Gillen (2000) build on this definition, saying that spirituality is "an awareness of something greater than ourselves. . .[that] moves one outward to others as an expression of one's spiritual experiences" (p.1). These broad definitions received further support and corroboration a few years later from English, Fenwick, and Parsons (2003), affirming their appreciation for their own work they say, "Such a broad definition represents a secular or public spirituality [Berry, 1988], as distinguished from religious spirituality. This broad definition. . .reflects our belief that, if one is to understand the current impact of spirituality, one's definition should be as inclusive as possible while embedding a sense of movement, relationship, and mystery. The concept should be broadly defined and accept many authentic expressions" (p.6). The literature is literally saturated with similar expressions of and attempts at definition, which provide an initial indicator
that the spiritualist's goal is primarily to "be spiritual" rather than to understand spirituality's role in producing, for example, more effective learning environments, more highly motivated learners, or more ethical people. It is, as most fetishes are, a kind of escapism – in this instance an escape from any kind of commitment.

Moving towards a more substantive illustration of spirituality as a fetish, a common theme of the current movement is to elaborate and embellish the methods and approaches that promote a spiritual dimension. Vogel waxes poetic that work for social justice helps us become more spiritual: "A yearning toward light and wholeness leads many adult educators towards rituals, common stories of faith and hope, symbols and images, and a sense that there is more to life than who we are or can ever be. When we are drawn to visions of justice, compassion, righteousness, and peace, we embrace more than the material and mundane, or the here and now" (p.18). The goal is clearly to become more spiritual through upright actions, with a strong implication that such acts are an effective means to the end of greater "light and wholeness" on the part of the adult educator.

English, Fenwick, and Parsons are more explicit:

We believe that the most straightforward way to promote a spiritual dimension in teaching and learning is to make a deliberate attempt to think and act ethically. Almost every daily decision in the learning environment has an ethical component. Teachers can also
raise deliberate and provocative questions that spark conversation and evoke comments from learners. These common activities are the heart of ethical teaching because they are based on those choices and decisions fundamental to teaching and learning. . . . Ethical choices implicitly include a basic recognition of the person as spiritual" (pp. 3-4).

Again, the scholarship of spirituality in adult education is saturated with this kind of language, in which we make ethical decisions, work for social justice, exercise compassion for others not because they are important in their own right, but because they help us become more spiritual.

This fetishizing is counterintuitive, and effectively removes any sense of a serious connection to adult learning theory. It ignores the fundamental questions that would offer it a strong theoretical grounding, i.e. what does this connection look like?, how does it happen?, etc. More often than not, the attempt to establish relevance to the learning transaction looks like a chimera, a ghost that attaches itself to an activity accidentally, or is read back into the experience after the fact. To an informed observer, this lack of relevance to the learning transaction is an obvious consequence of the contextual void in which the spiritualists operate. With no concrete context on which to base one’s spirituality, one is liberated from the need to be relevant to anyone or thing other than oneself.

The logico-philosophical thread of critiques of spirituality comes to similar conclusions as the teleological thread, i.e. the nebulous, formal shell
of spirituality is hollow at its core, and this is at least unacceptable, at most deceitful and dangerous. This is especially true given the social activist thrust of so much current spiritualist literature: Tisdell (2000, 2003), Tisdell, Tolliver, and Villa (2001), English and Gillen (2000), Tolliver and Tisdell (2002) share several common messages, one of which is the deep connection between spirituality and activism for social justice. Ultimately, the logico-philosophical critics argue, the scholarship of spirituality is specious because it lacks the internal consistency to support its claims with the evidence provided: spiritualism is, at its core, a logical fallacy.

Michael Newman (2008) provides a gentle nudge and a wink as he expounds "doubts" about a spiritualist approach to self-development, while John J. Stuhr (2003) provides a blunt, swift kick, arguing against "transcendence." To essentialize Newman's argument as it relates to a transcendental approach to self-development: he focuses on his understanding that consciousness is generated in relationship with our social and material worlds, not a spiritual world. This, in turn, implies a dialectical relationship between the self and the material/social world. An emphasis on the spiritual takes away the material and social, resulting in a loss of meaning. The dialectical relationship also belies the narcissism within much spiritualism: the focus on the self and personal change ignores the importance of working to change one's context. An example ". . . is the
workplace stress reduction program that teaches employees relaxation techniques but does nothing to reduce the causes of stress in the work itself" (2008, p.290). Newman's most powerful argument is that an empty spirituality permits anything because it has no moral core. Building on the teleological argument, Newman reveals the illogical core of the spiritualist approach. A non-specific, commitment-less, context-less spirituality necessarily focuses on the self -- there is nothing else to provide guidance in the absence of religious tradition or schools of thought. This narcissism frees one of responsibility and accountability, and signals a commitment to moral relativism. Ultimately, this generic spirituality will justify any behavior that develops spirituality, helps you relax, connects you with God, etc. "In the interest of a spurious kind of self-development, we adopt a non-judgmental position. We abandon our responsibilities to construct and apply a moral, and so cease being fully human ourselves. . .In the worst case scenario, then, we would have no clear moral boundaries to apply. . .[to] a liar, a petty thief, a drug dealer,. . .or a murderer" (Newman, 2008, p. 292). Ultimately, spirituality in this sense is a contradiction.

Building on this contradiction, Stuhr is calling into question the entire spiritualist enterprise in a very powerful way, arguing that the living-out of a melioristic orientation to the universe is not advanced through spirituality, but mitigated by it. This represents a powerful critique of the connection
between spirituality and social action in that the foundations of the concepts
are not just different, but logically mutually exclusive, i.e. action for social
justice concerns itself with ordinary human life and corporeality, material
and temporal concerns, while spirituality concerns itself with all that
transcends these limited categories.

Stuhr argues that,

\[ \ldots \text{to live without spirituality is to live without the immaterial,}
\]
without the non-corporeal, without the supernatural, without the
omniscient or omnipotent or eternal, without the divine. (Put
positively, it is to live \emph{with} all these withouts.) Life without
spirituality is life that is material, corporeal, natural, fallible, limited,
temporal, and human. . . .In definition, the essence of spirituality is
nenegation, absence, lack: Spirituality is defined traditionally as non-
natural or supernatural, non-material or immaterial, non-corporeal or
soul rather than body, non-human or divine. A life of spirituality,
accordingly, is a life that goes beyond matter, body, nature, ignorance,
weakness, time, and ordinary human life. It is a life of transcendence.
This is a life defined as one that goes beyond, climbs over, surmounts,
becomes above, exceeds limits, becomes independent, excels, unifies,
and ascends beyond the otherwise limits of human reason, experience,
and values. The pragmatic meaning of spirituality is
transcendence. Philosophical issues about spirituality, when genuine,
are living, practical issues about prospects for transcendence of or in
our reason, language, experience, meaning, and values. Accordingly, a
life without spirituality, if it is possible, requires a philosophy without

In short, if you want to change God and the immaterial aspects of your
experience, become spiritual. If you want to make the world a better place,
keep your focus on the terrestrial and humble elements of your experience.

My own perspective is very suspicious of the adult education spiritualists, a suspicion which is bound-up with the important ways that spirituality actually can be part of the adult learning process or transaction.

At a very basic -- and anecdotal -- level, it's simply uninteresting to address spirituality in the abstract. Appreciating that there is a common sense of "being part of something greater," is perhaps a useful starting point; much as it is in various 12 step programs, such as alcoholics anonymous (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2002). For 12 step programs it is, however, only the second step, and shouldn't be much more than that for other adult education endeavors either. Digging into the nitty gritty details of the socio-cultural, anthropological, historical, economic, and theological realities of one's own and one another's belief systems is where the real work begins. At the very least, we should relish the opportunities to engage significant religious differences in an honest attempt to understand one another. In fact, there is increasing evidence that shying away from these differences or even lightly addressing them is counterproductive and tends to increase prejudice and misunderstanding (Cotton, 1993), while there are important arguments to be made for the social benefits of deeply engaging these differences (Farmer, 2003).
At a less basic level, I agree with much of what the two critical threads discussed above identify as problematic. Coming at this as a deeply committed Christian with a strong sentiment that the life of the spirit can be integral to adult learning, I argue that much of the current literature is headed in the wrong direction and, if unaltered, will invite a quick exit from the stage of relevance. This unfortunate, but well-deserved, plunge toward irrelevance is a mostly benign consequence: the field suffers an academic bruise for having missed the mark, but otherwise we are no worse for the wear. My greater fear is that the consequences of our wrong-headedness will be less benign. A serious examination of the logic at the heart of the spiritualist movement reveals a deeply problematic ideology that we have seen before, and need to guard against.

Taking over where Stuhr stopped, the compulsion to transcend is not only dismissive, elitist, and condescending, it is also a narrow ideology masquerading as intellectual generosity and sophistication. Stuhr is a Pragmatist using the tools of critical theory to resist the surrendering of the particular to the universal: spiritualists would have us be "whole," while-- in reality -- the stuff of life is inescapably idiosyncratic and particular. Perhaps unwittingly, the adult education spiritualists have joined a long tradition of movements that willingly surrender the responsibilities of freedom for the sake of ideology, the genuine stuff of human meaning-making for the
grandeur of transcendence. Ironically, the result is a reification of the
spiritual, i.e. the attribution of concrete real characteristics to an abstraction
-- a hallmark of instrumental, technical rationality. Adorno referred to this
as "identity thinking," and it has real, verifiable negative consequences for
human relations.

Habermas and Dewey’s Perspectives on Ethics

The relevance of Dewey and Habermas' ethics for adult education
is grounded in epistemology and learning, in particular delineating the
centrality of ethics -- normative conceptions of right and wrong -- to how we
come to know and understand the world, generate meaning, and hence,
learn. There has been interesting and important research into how we learn
about ethics: from Kohlberg to Brookfield, social science has provided some
guidance for those of us seeking to teach and learn about ethics. An
important corollary to this scholarly pursuit, and one of particular interest to
adult education, turns this model on its head somewhat by focusing instead
on the ethics of learning: understanding better what happens when we learn,
while also fleshing out the relevance of ethics for the quality of that
learning. My argument is that the heart of the relationship between ethics
and learning is intersubjectivity, or what I will call the ethics of
intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity, in this context of this study, highlights
the relational nature of ethics, particularly as we grow and develop through
communication and community. Following this notion, Dewey and Habermas both have ethical theories that are grounded in epistemological intersubjectivity, or the notion that our knowledge of the world and ourselves is social in origin, the upshot being that our capacity and opportunities to learn are directly tied to the nature of our social relations. In a very straightforward way, learning is clearly important to ethical development in that we learn how to be more (or less) ethical. What we should also consider is how the ethical character and quality of our intersubjectivity directs how well and to what extent we learn. Theorizing learning this way has deep implications for the moral and emancipatory potential of our social institutions.

*What is Intersubjectivity?*

The initial entry into the nexus of Dewey and Habermas' ethics and adult educations is intersubjectivity. "It is this that is Hegel's great idea since it reveals how ethical life matters independent of any particular moral norms, laws, ideals, principles, or ends. Ethical life is not, in the first instance, about moral principles, but about the ways in which both particular actions and whole forms of action injure, wound, and deform recipient and actor alike; it is about the secret bonds connecting our weal and woe to the lives of all those around us" (Bernstein, 2003, p.1).
Intersubjectivity is a core notion in late 20th - early 21st century social theory, perhaps the core notion (Lotz, 2006). Questions at the heart of this inquiry into intersubjectivity include, for example: who is the other?, What is the other?, and Does the other precede me? Any serious approach to social philosophy must reckon with the content of this area. The argument around which these questions revolve declares that concepts such as consciousness, self, and subjectivity only make sense if they are viewed as social concepts: the colloquially solipsistic characteristics of consciousness, i.e. “I have consciousness of the turkey dinner in front of me;” self, i.e. “I understand myself as an empathetic creature;” and subjectivity, i.e. “I have subjectivity because my interpretation of events is most powerful in my world view;” are only useful and ameliorative to society if understood as primarily generated through other things. For Dewey and Habermas, experience -- generated through other things -- is mediated (not immediate), causing Copernican turns in our epistemological foundations. In other words, coming to know things about ourselves (consciousness) and coming to know things about the world requires an-other to read back to us the meaning of our actions. The common thread between Dewey and Habermas is Hegel and the mediated nature of self-consciousness that he outlines in the Phenomenology of Spirit (1979). This common thread constitutes the ethics of intersubjectivity.

For Habermas, the Hegelian influence of the dialectic of
intersubjectivity is well-documented and foundational to his approach to communicative rationality and ethics as a direct antidote to instrumental rationality. J.M. Bernstein, a prominent scholar of Habermas and Critical Theory, makes this apparent,

Whereas the validity of rules of instrumental action has an empirical backing, the validity of social norms 'is grounded in the intersubjectivity of the mutual understanding of intentions and secured by the general recognition of obligations.' In the domain of instrumental reason, then, the world is constituted in terms of a polarity of subject and object, where what makes something an 'object' is precisely the application of instrumental rules and reasoning to it; while in communicative action there is always an assumption of reciprocity between self and other, ego and alter-ego. According to Habermas, all human subjectivity, that is, all experiences by individuals of themselves as distinct persons, is grounded in intersubjectivity. Self-awareness does not arise through isolated, private acts of introspection or self-reflection. Rather, one begins to see oneself only through becoming aware of how others see one. Self-consciousness, and, hence, subjectivity, is a social accomplishment wherein through acts of reciprocal acknowledgement individual subjects ('I') become aware of themselves as different from other subjects ('you'), all of whom are linked together through a recognition of their shared mutuality ('we'). This complex accomplishment occurs above all through language. The framework of communicative action is that within which human beings are constituted as self-conscious subjects (1995, 42-43).

As opposed to Habermas, Dewey was not part of the tradition of critical theory that guided Habermas, and he did not inherit the notion of identity thinking and instrumental rationality as a primary ethical problem, even more, Dewey had very little to say about Marx and the Marxist intellectual
tradition. Another important difference is that, while Habermas and Dewey share a common intellectual forebear in Hegel, Dewey struggled throughout his long professional life to become an anti-dialectical thinker, working to overcome dualities rather than engage them. An argument can be made that this was also at the heart of Hegel's project, the dialectic being the mode to overcoming any dichotomy or split. The fact remains, however, that Dewey documented his efforts to escape Hegelianism. Consequently, the intellectual relationship between Dewey and Hegel, and also Dewey and Habermas is more complicated. But the relationship is there, and does carry significant potential for emancipatory adult education. There exists a common phenomenological beginning -- Hegel's Phenomenology -- which highlights the Hegelian movement at the heart of Dewey and Habermas’ ethics: the causality of fate which pushes ethics into the primary position -- ethics as first philosophy. This means that what Hegel had to say about knowledge, reason, and objectivity, for example, must be read through the dynamics of ethical life. The Hegelian causality of fate lives on in Habermas and Dewey via the central notion of the intersubjective origins of self-consciousness and the relational nature of ethics.
Dewey's Ethics

John Dewey's ethical theory, often maligned as narrowly instrumental and consequentialist (Aiken, 1962, p.83), provides remarkably provocative and fertile ground on which to base a fresh interpretation and theory of the learning transaction such that human subjectivity is enhanced rather than diminished. It also provides interesting points of contact with Habermasian ethical theory, as we will see below. "The problem," says Dewey, "of restoring integration and cooperation between man's (sic) beliefs about the world in which he lives and his beliefs about the values and purposes that should direct his conduct is the deepest problem of modern life. It is the problem of any philosophy that is not isolated from that life" (Dewey, 1960a, p. 255). At an important juncture in his development as a scholar, Dewey fell under the influence of William James' *Principles of Psychology* (1952), marking the final point of departure from Hegelianism to pragmatism. James showed that all mental activity is purposeful, and that this purposefulness originates in and is guided by the efforts of a living creature to adapt him or herself to the changing conditions of his or her environment. For Dewey, this marks the beginning of his mature ethical philosophy in which a detailed analysis of the actual processes of inquiry lead to the formation of particular moral judgments. The ultimate goal for Dewey was to conceive of ethical theory, indeed all theory, as something generated from within practice and in
response to practice. He wished to illuminate the human situation as *radically experiential* such that the inherent resources and constraints of such experience could be located and utilized. The result would be individuals and communities better equipped to solve their own problems by constructing more satisfactory situations. As such, theory is no longer imposed on practice from the outside, but becomes instead a genuine part of the means for the intelligent amelioration of practice. Consequently, one cannot determine what an adequate ethical theory will be without examining what kind of moral theory works better in our actual lives. Accordingly, Dewey did not prescribe universal moral imperatives, rather he elucidated and explained forms of behavior most beneficial to human beings in coping with problematic situations. "To find the guidance for rectifying a particular situation, it is necessary to give up looking for a universal theoretical formula and get on to the difficult task of studying, 'the needs and alternative possibilities lying within a unique and localized situation' [Dewey, 1930, p. 196]" (Pappas, 1998, p. 105). Dewey thus advocated an approach to moral decision-making that may be termed 'situational.' The implication is not that we ignore or deny any ethical knowledge or guidance (because experience *is* intellectually cumulative -- there are stabilities in experience, something Dewey referred to as *continuity*), but that this prior experience alone does not have normative force: it must meet the demands of the current problematic
situation, i.e. the work of intelligence cannot be completed once and for all, operating according to acontextual universal, normative directives. Pappas characterizes Dewey's ethical theory as advocating a moral life that is intelligent, aesthetic, and democratic: intelligent because it educates itself, refusing to rely on authority, custom, coercive force, imitation, caprice, or drift; aesthetic because it is proceeds via an inherently meaningful mode of engagement that is flexible, vital, and growing, as opposed to mechanical, fragmentary, and non-integrated; democratic because it involves a certain way of interacting with others, a certain kind of community, and a certain kind of communication (1998, p. 116). Christopher Johnstone elaborates on these characteristics:

We might summarize [Dewey's] thinking as follows: In attempting to respond to the problematic in experience, do in any situation that which, after careful inquiry, reflection, and deliberation, seems to hold the greatest promise for satisfying existing lacks, maintaining opportunities for fuller, more significant experience, and facilitating the growth of those affected by the act. On this view, practical wisdom is a disposition to choose conduct based upon an awareness of an attentiveness to its implications for the quality of subsequent experience and for the continued enhancement of this very disposition, in oneself and in others (Johnstone, 1983, p. 192-193).

Clarifying this broad expression of Dewey's ethical philosophy requires a brief elaboration of a few important concepts and conceptual moves: 1) what is a problematic situation?; 2) How do moral judgments construct
consummatory experiences that ameliorate the relationship between humans and each other, and between humans and their environments?; 3) why are the methods of science applicable to the analysis of values?

A problematic situation is one in which problems of conduct become apparent in a particular, concrete circumstance. In this circumstance, specific values, conflicts, obstacles, and potentialities characterize each particular situation. Agents involved in the situation desire a change or transformation from a problematic situation to a more unifying situation in which these conflicting characteristics coalesce via a mode of activity that can more completely fulfill the operative interests of everyone involved. This more unified situation is the result of successful inquiry into the constituents and possibilities of the situation (not every inquiry is successful, after all), producing a plan of action. "The features of the situation which are experienced as immediately attractive (or unattractive) prior to inquiry, Dewey calls problematic goods. The particular action that is expected to integrate the situation he calls the end-in-view, and the unified activity itself he calls value proper, or consummatory experience" (Gouinlock, 1978, p. 219). The transformative plan of action is called a moral judgment. These terms are analyzed in much greater detail in James Gouinlock's *John Dewey's Philosophy of Value* (1972). In this way, problematic situations are ameliorated through moral judgments, which brings us to our second
important conceptual move. In order to understand how moral judgments construct consummatory experiences that ameliorate the relationship between humans, and between humans and their environments, we need to have a sense of Dewey's aversion to dualisms. This is perhaps the most characteristic feature of Dewey's general philosophic orientation, and, as such, also has a crucial role to play in his ethics. Returning to James' *Principles*, the purposeful nature of human consciousness grounded in environmental adaptation also portended the *radical empiricism* of the later pragmatisms and pragmatists. This is an empiricism that overthrows the fundamental assumptions of modern philosophy (also an empiricism that Husserl knew very well through his knowledge of James' work, hence the similarities to Phenomenology). As Dewey describes in *Experience and Nature* (1925/1981), as well as in *Human Nature and Conduct* (1930), human nature, i.e. "experience," and physical nature, i.e. "nature," formed a dualism that severely clouded the true potential of the relationship between humans and nature. Consequently, the continuities of existence and the characteristics of human experience that are crucial to understanding, transforming, and growing via moral judgments remained hidden. "For Dewey, experience is not to be understood in terms of the experiencing subject, or as the interaction of a subject and object that exist separate from either interaction. Instead, Dewey's view is radically empirical: experience is
an activity in which subject and object are unified and constituted as partial features and relations within this ongoing, unanalyzed unity. Dewey warns us not to misconstrue aspects of this unified experience-activity: distinctions made in reflection do not refer to things that exist as separate substances prior to and outside of that reflection" (Stuhr, 1987, p. 328). Modern philosophy is guilty of this exact confusion, as Dewey declares,

What has been completely divided in philosophical discourse into man and world, inner and outer, self and not-self, subject and object, individual and social, private and public, etc., are in actuality parties in life-transactions. The philosophical 'problem' of trying to get them together is artificial. On the basis of fact, it needs to be replaced by considerations of the conditions under which they occur as distinctions, and of special uses served by the distinctions (Dewey, 1949, p. 276).

For modern philosophy, the Cartesian separation between body and mind has led to a fundamental error that understands "[e]xperience. . .to be subjective - - an impenetrable veil between subject and object. . .[that], . . .therefore, give[s] no clue to the continuities of the processes of nature. The domain of value was regarded as either subjective or transcendent. In the former case. . .the events of nature have no implication for value. The latter case was like the former, in that the alleged transcendent norms of morality provided no guidance regarding the sequences and possibilities of natural events"

(Gouinlock, 1978, 221). Understanding the radically empirical nature of experience in which there exists interaction and continuity in the mutual
constitution of 'knowing' subject and 'known' object, clarifies the means at our disposal for ameliorating problematic situations. This conception of experience allows Dewey to argue that "... human nature and value are functions of processes inclusive of organism and environment. . ." (Gouinlock, 1978, p. 221). This convergence of value and environment has deep epistemological implications, not the least of which is that moral judgments -- as products of inquiry in problematic situations -- have ameliorative power, and are not simply subjective or transcendent. Another epistemological implication is that we can arrive at moral judgments using the methods of science: and this brings us to our third conceptual move: why are the methods of science applicable to the analysis of values?

Under the Cartesian misconceptions of modern philosophy, experience is understood as a barrier to knowledge rather than a condition of knowledge, as Dewey argues (1960a). Traditional empiricists understand all ideas -- the foundation of knowledge, as entirely produced by past experience, while rationalists understand all ideas as a kind of gestalt -- produced exclusively through an intellectual grasp of the reality's essence. Dewey argues that both schools of thought are misguided: "...[ideas] are not copies of the antecedently given structure of reality. Ideas . . . are instrumental . . . [and] direct us from present to future experiences by stating the conditions upon which the institution of future events is contingent" (Gouinlock, 1978, p.
Given that moral judgments are no longer dismissed as solipsistic and subjective (and hence relativistic) or as transcendental and objective (and hence universal), Dewey provides for us a very different perspective in which values are functions of the transaction and mutual constitution of experience and nature, subject and object, organism and environment. As such, Dewey's ethical theory becomes a methodology rather than a mythology, in which we construct values through inquiry into problematic situations. This is the scientific method, or 'the method of intelligence,' as applied to the analysis of values:

A moral situation is one in which judgment and choice are required antecedently to overt action. The practical meaning of the situation -- that is to say the action needed to satisfy it -- is not self-evident. It has to be searched for. There are conflicting desires and alternative apparent goods. What is needed is to find the right course of action, the right good. Hence, inquiry is exacted; observation of the detailed makeup of the situation; analysis into its diverse factors; clarification of what is obscure; discounting the more insistent and vivid traits; tracing the consequences of the various modes of action that suggest themselves; regarding the decision reached as hypothetical and tentative until the anticipated or supposed consequences which led to its adoption have been squared with actual consequences. This inquiry is intelligence (Dewey, 1957, p. 163-164).

The ultimate goal for Dewey was solving the genuine problems of human beings by increasing opportunities for growth: "The central factor in moral judgment is the growth of the self: the cultivation of habits and dispositions that will sustain the capacity for intelligent choice" (Johnstone, 190). Conduct
is understood as a product of the self. "The real moral question is what kind of a self is being furthered and formed. And this question arises with respect to both one's own self and the selves of others" (Dewey, 1960b, p. 159).

Johnstone goes on to explain the moral imperative of Dewey's notion of 'the growth of the self':

The quest for growth becomes the moral imperative that should guide all practical deliberation and choice: 'We set up this end and that end to be reached, but the end is growth itself' [Dewey, 1960b, p. 172].\' The self is formed, Dewey argues by the choices it makes and by the experiences that flow from them. The very act of choosing forms character because, as a mode of conduct, it reinforces certain habits of mind at the expense of others. In deciding how to respond to the difficulties encountered in living, we reinforce in ourselves as habits and dispositions certain ways of inquiring, of reasoning, of choosing and acting. Choice also forms the self by determining the nature of the experience to which it will be led by its own acts. On this view, any choice can give formative impulse to the developing self, and thus can have moral import. When we attempt to remake the world in ways that will institute our values, we remake ourselves. Because growth is the 'only moral end,' the obligation attending any attempt to respond to the problematic in life is to look for methods of doing so that will respect the demand for growth (Johnstone, 190).

The moral imperative of growth, as it is pursued through inquiry and the method of intelligence, is also inescapably social: problematic situations are by nature social situations. Dewey, especially in his educational writings, constantly emphasizes that the growth of the personality and the generation of the conditions most conducive to that growth is fundamentally
a social quest: "Morality is social [because] the formation of habits of belief, desire, and judgment is going on at every moment under the influence of conditions set by men's [sic] contact, intercourse, and association's with one another" (Dewey, 1930, p. 295). Clearly Dewey's radical empiricism necessarily entails intersubjectivity, but we can really see it working in the social, or relational, nature of morality. Intersubjectivity is the mutual constitution of subject and object on the social level. Implicit in Dewey's understanding of experience as radically empirical is the mediated and social formation of intelligence. The upshot is that Dewey focuses on communication as necessary to maximizing our potential as learners, and, consequently, as ethical creatures. This characteristic, with remnants of the Hegelian dialectic, had direct influence on George Herbert Mead. In turn, Mead and American pragmatism carried great influence on the ethics of Jurgen Habermas.

**Habermas' Ethics**

Jurgen Habermas is arguably the most influential philosopher and social theorist of the last 30 years. His ideas, particularly the notion of communicative rationality and ethics, have been adopted by scholars in nearly every sphere of the human and social sciences. In the field of adult education, his influence on Mezirow's theory of transformational learning has
been prominent, but, in the last decade or so, Habermas's influence has moved beyond transformational learning -- even as that focus within adult education has also broadened significantly -- to other scholars seeking to open pathways to emancipatory education. Perhaps the most well-known and representative product of this Habermasian movement in adult education is Michael Welton's edited text, *In Defense of the Lifeworld: Critical Perspectives on Adult Learning* (1995). Welton's own essay in the text offers some explanation of Habermas' significance to adult education: "Habermas' work is of central importance for critical educational theory and practice. Of all contemporary theorists, Habermas is the one person who has consistently and consciously placed individual and social learning processes at the core of his massive project" (p. 136). And, in a different piece of scholarship, Welton continues this argument: "I have argued elsewhere that Habermas' theory helps us think about how adult educators can assist in creating developmental, learner-centered, and emancipatory institutions within which individuals can find purpose and identity" (Welton, 1995, p. 148). Writing more recently, Stephen Brookfield argues that adult learning is an integral part of Habermas' move beyond Marx in reconstructing society in the twenty-first century, "Here the centrality of learning -- particularly adult learning -- clearly emerges. If a distinguishing characteristic of humans is their capacity to learn, then social science and educational theoreticians need to focus much
more centrally on how adults learn to create a more moral, just democracy" (2005, p. 223). Characteristically, Welton makes this notion more concrete by arguing that, "Habermas' sociological theory (his dualistic model of the system and the lifeworld) and theory of rationalization (his view of the historical unfolding of learning potential in modernity) provide us with the necessary boundary frame and constituent conceptual elements for the study of social learning processes" (1995, p. 134). Not to be confused with Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), Welton's notion of social learning is very Deweyan/Habermasian in scope: "The new, or emergent social learning paradigm, would construct the boundary of the field as wide as society itself, and would include everything that forms the outlook, character, and actions of communicative agents in space and time. All of society is a vast school" (1995, p. 134).

Accordingly, much like Dewey, ethics is central to Habermas' entire philosophy, which makes it both difficult to tease-out or differentiate, and also tremendously important for his potential application to adult learning. "For Habermas, then, 'a critical theory of society can no longer be constructed in the exclusive form of a critique of political economy' [quoting Habermas, 1970, P. 120]. It must broaden its concern to investigate matters of morality and communication and how a democratic society might organize itself to promote the fullest and freest communication possible among its members. .
This has led him to engage with American pragmatism. " (Brookfield, 2005, P. 224). Sounding very much like Dewey, it has also led him to affirm the possibility of reestablishing reason to serve the creation of humane democracy. "In Postmetaphysical Thinking (Habermas, 1992b. p. 114), he states as his aim, 'to defend and make fruitful for social theory a concept of reason that attends to the phenomenon of the lifeworld and permits the consciousness of society as a whole. . .to be reformulated on a basis of a theory of intersubjectivity. . . Habermas' view of critical theory ' retains a concept of reason which asserts itself simultaneously against both scientific mutilation and existentialist downgrading, and which is furthermore also critically applied to itself' (Habermas, 1992a, p. 55)" (Brookfield, 2005, p. 227). Using a theory of intersubjectivity, Habermas develops his communicative rationality and discourse ethics as the primary method of rescuing the 'lifeworld' from the deadening force of instrumental reason.

*Communicative Rationality, Discourse Ethics, and the Rescue of the Lifeworld.*

The ethical core of Habermasian communicative rationality is as follows: in communicating to achieve understanding, we are always already moving toward truth as a unity, while also necessarily remaining open to
infinite non-identical others and other perspectives which may become relevant to the emergent practical truth of the communication act. Coles carries this further when he says, "In the idealizing supposition of a consensus open to criticism, the possibility for diverse voices on a given issue is not repressed, but rather the very condition of possibility for the legitimacy of the agreement. 'The intersubjectivity of linguistically achieved understanding is by nature porous, and linguistically attained consensus does not eradicate from the accord the differences in speaker perspectives but rather presupposes them as ineliminable' (Habermas, 1992b, p. 48)" (Coles, 1995, p. 25). The foundation of communicative rationality for Habermas is located in everyday speech acts governed by the restrictions of practicality and the need to make decisions. In other words, we live through communication, usually purposive communication requiring mutual agreement of one degree or another to accomplish a particular goal.

In short, the pressure to decide in everyday communicatively coordinated action engenders constraints within which participants must strive toward an idealized consensus that facilitates such action. These pressure-engendered idealizations manifest themselves as a 'concern to give one's contribution an informative shape, to say what is relevant, to be straightforward and to avoid obscure, ambiguous, and prolix utterances (Habermas, 1987, p. 204),' and they structurally determine the character of everyday communication such that learning processes with independent logics can develop that allow us increasingly to master the world's difficulties (Coles, p. 24).
As a species, we depend upon linguistically coordinated actions to carry out the business of living, e.g. building houses, fixing watches, taking examinations, going to dinner, and driving through an intersection. To carry out the business of life, we rely on certain context-independent or context-transcending maxims that "always already presuppose those very relationships of reciprocity and mutual recognition around which all moral ideals revolve in everyday life no less than in philosophical ethics" (Habermas, 1990, p.130). This is an ethics of intersubjectivity that gets at genuine melioristic human activity -- activity working to make the world better. Accordingly, the dialectic that drives the ethics of intersubjectivity is based on four primary validity claims that are always already implicit in any action designed to reach understanding. In other words, these validity claims are universal: every genuine communicative act, regardless of time or place, presupposes these truths: 1) "The comprehensibility of the utterance" (Habermas, 1973, p. 18); 2) "The truth of its propositional component" (p.18); 3) "[T]he correctness and appropriateness of its performatory component" (p.18); 4) "The authenticity of the speaking subject" (p. 18). These validity claims are not arbitrary; they are logically necessary. These are rules we cannot deny without committing a performative contradiction. This a priori universality is the Kantian element in Habermas that is so frequently criticized, but, without these validity claims, the interaction is not considered
an act of communicative rationality exhibiting discourse ethics. But within
the context of genuine communicative rationality, these universal validity
claims guarantee the emergence of increasingly greater and more diverse
particularities -- dialectically, the intersubjectivity of communicative
rationality breaks free from the death bound identity thinking of the dialectic
of enlightenment (more on identity thinking below).

"These different speaker perspectives infuse intersubjective accord
with a 'porosity' that is more than hypothetical, for in spite of
idealizing suppositions of identical ascriptions of meaning and
agreement, the 'shadow of difference is cast' by 'the fact that the
intentions of speakers diverge again and again from the standard
meanings' (Habermas, 1992b, p. 140). This point is bolstered by his
reflections on the effects of the movement toward greater universalism,
the most important of which he summarizes in the following: 'The
transitory unity that is generated in the porous and refracted
intersubjectivity of a linguistically mediated consensus not only
supports but furthers and accelerates the pluralization of forms of life
and the individualization of lifestyles. More discourse means more
contradiction and difference. The more abstract the agreements
become, the more diverse the disagreements with which we can non-

This Kant-like Habermasian dialectic of subject and object, particular and
universal, implies an ethics of intersubjectivity that empowers and
enables human agency over and against a sociocultural sphere organized
increasingly to stamp it out.
Interestingly enough, it is precisely the 'call and response,' 'pitch and catch' characteristics of communication that Habermas identifies as the motive force in individual moral development: the development of the Habermasian "moral point of view" -- largely coterminous with Kohlberg's third and final stage of moral development called post-conventional interaction (Kohlberg et al., 1983) -- describes individuals capable of recognizing the fallible nature of their convictions even as they continue to act on them, always enlightening their own self-understandings with the perspectives of others. This is the very same intersubjective core operating in Dewey's ethics, resulting in a very strong sense that, for Dewey and Habermas, to the extent we are able to act with a constant reference to mutuality, recognition, and reciprocity in our communication, we will learn/grow most effectively.

Welton and Brookfield each point to Habermas as opening doors for truly emancipatory institutions within a more moral democracy. I argue that Dewey, properly interpreted and creatively applied, stands shoulder-to-shoulder with Habermas in this work. Illustrating more precisely how their ethical theories open these doors and why adult learning is the engine driving the process will take more work. To understand the relevance of Dewey and Habermas' ethics to adult education, let's look at an ethical problem; an ethical problem that is, at the same time, a learning problem. As adult
educators, I will argue that this ethical problem is among the most pernicious and debilitating of any we currently face, and, consequently, if we are to "Learn our way out" (Finger & Asun, 2001) we need to recognize it, understand it better, and address it. This ethical problem is the broadly experienced ignorance or avoidance of the inherent risk of any act of genuine human subjectivity.

By risk, I don't mean, for example, the risk of losing one's job or of social alienation because of one's political activities (although these are often very real risks). Rather, the risk I'm highlighting is prior to any action or activity on our part; it is an ontological risk -- part and parcel of our very being. The stakes are high: denial of this risk is at the very source of the dehumanizing tendencies so prominent in late modern or post modern existence, as exemplified by the bureaucratic rationalization and commodification of nearly every slice of contemporary life. "The world is not made up of certainties (2003, p. 361)," Freire says, but the urge to harness and tease some certainties out of our uncertain human raw material -- the urge to eliminate the risk of living a human life -- brings us to a blind reliance on science, technology, and statistics (for example), as well as an uninformed dispassionate acceptance of existing, reified power structures. Maybe this drive to overcome human entropy is ingrained in our DNA, but I don't think so. Certainly, we are constantly striving to better understand the
world, to make sense of the apparently arbitrary events that happen to us, whether it be a bout with cancer, a car accident, a devastating tornado, or a student's refusal to engage classroom material. But this honest striving to understand has morphed into deterministic scientism, creating for us lives and social contexts that, while appearing entirely rational, in fact only serve to alienate us one from another, and one from him or her self. Walker Percy, a physician, novelist, and philosopher, describes the alienating process of human objectification by saying, "science cannot utter a single word about an individual molecule, thing, or creature insofar as it is an individual, but only insofar as it is like other individuals" (1975, p. ). Put another way, he means that your cancer is only understandable and, thus, treatable, to the extent that it is statistically and clinically like other episodes of cancer. Your particular and individual cancer is meaningless. This logic has useful results for some things and purposes, but certainly not all -- or even most -- things and purposes, and most certainly not most human things and purposes. This logic represses the idiosyncratic nature of the best of what we call human, performing a dangerous ideological violence on all upsurges of genuine individuality or genuine subjectivity, i.e. individualities and subjectivities that arise, exist, and remain outside of reified power structures. Never mind that it attempts to overcome a fundamental reality of human existence: change, uncertainty, risk, or what Freire describes when he says that "the
world is made of the tension between the certain and the uncertain" (2003, p. 361). This logic is called instrumental rationality, and, while it has generated economic wealth and scientific advances for some, it has done so at great cost, moving dialectically from the instrumental rationality that produces knowledge/wealth to the irrationality that dominates and controls. By way of example, our urge to avoid the uncertainty of human life through instrumental rationality has cast a shroud over even the most genuinely subjective (and idiosyncratic, and uncertain, and risky) of human activities: sex. This inescapably intimate manifestation of one's subjectivity has been entirely reconstituted, not simply as a commodity (because -- as they say -- selling sex is the world's oldest profession), but now also as vicarious intimacy with virtual partners via human-computer interaction. The radically un-technological act of a sexual encounter has been hyper-rationalized via technology, transforming it dialectically into an irrational act. We are "free subjects" (as Althusser states, ironically) (1970, p. 56) who buy into, and thus perpetuate, a way of thinking that dominates and controls our choices. At the risk of overstating the case, in this situation, the irrationality we associate with something like fascist totalitarianism is already present within the action of subjective rationality and self-expression. Genuine subjectivity is impossible because we are all already subsumed by ideological subjectivity; witness the prevalence of self-
expression in the form of conspicuous consumption, e.g. "the car I drive says a lot about who I am."

There is some very strong corroboration of my claims about our fear of human subjectivity --we run from it at every turn. For example, Henry Giroux diagnoses the same ethical problem, but identifies a narrower culprit in the specific manifestation of enlightenment rationality referred to as 'neoliberal free market economics:

Moreover, any politically relevant notion of resistance cannot be reduced to what goes on in schools but must be understood – while having different registers – in terms of wider configurations of economic, political, and social forces that exacerbate tensions between those who value such institutions as public goods and those advocates of neoliberalism who see market culture as a master design for all human affairs. The breathless rhetoric of the global victory of free market rationality . . . has found material expression in an all-out attack on democratic values and on the very notion of the public. Within the discourse of neoliberalism, issues regarding schooling and social justice, persistent poverty, inadequate health care, racial apartheid in the inner cities, and the growing inequalities between the rich and the poor have been either removed from the inventory of public discourse and public policy or factored into talk show spectacles that highlight private woes bearing little relationship either to public life or to potential remedies that demand collective action. As the laws of the marketplace take precedence over the laws of the state as guardians of the public good, politics is increasingly removed from power. The state offers little help in mediating the interface between the advance of capital and its rapacious commercial interests, on the one hand, and those non-commodified interests and nonmarket spheres that create the political, economic, and social conditions vital for critical citizenship and democratic public life on the other. Within
the prevailing discourse of neoliberalism that has taken hold of the public imagination, there is no vocabulary for political or social transformation, no collective vision, no social agency to challenge the privatization and commercialization of schooling, the ruthless downsizing of jobs, the ongoing liquidation of job security, or space from which to struggle against the elimination of benefits for people now hired on a strictly part-time basis. In the midst of this concerted attack on the public, the market driven consumer juggernaut continues to mobilize desires in the interest of producing market identities and market relationships that ultimately appear as, Theodor Adorno once put it, nothing less than ‘a prohibition on thinking itself’” (Giroux 2001, xxii).

As Giroux argues, this ‘prohibition on thinking’ is experienced as a general lack of agency or efficacy in controlling the choices in one's life. Cornel West (1993) sees a direct connection between this lack of agency and strong nihilistic trends in certain segments of western society. In developing this notion of our collective disengagement from social and cultural production and the subsequent poverty of our democratic institutions, he describes a widespread lived experience of meaninglessness growing out of America’s failures in this regard: “Nihilism is to be understood here not as a philosophic doctrine that there are no rational grounds for legitimate standards or authority; it is, far more, the lived-experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and (most important) lovelessness” (14; italics in original). Judith Green (1998) continues this thread, describing a disease of the soul, the very same nihilism that West describes,
as a concentrated, highly virulent form of a dangerous malaise that has spread across differing geopolitical and cultural locations within American society, even among the relatively privileged, manifesting itself in a generalized insecurity; a shared loss of the sense of agency previously associated with democratic citizenship that once allowed diverse people to believe that they could participate in shaping the public terms of social life; and a shared lack of meaningfulness and permanence in personal life commitments and activities that leads many people to focus on pleasure-seeking and pain-killing rather than to risk a more complex pursuit of happiness (p. 431).

Acts of genuine human subjectivity are not only difficult to engage, but are, more often than not, co-opted. Consequently, the pursuit of happiness comes to resemble, as Green says, pleasure-seeking and pain killing. We are alienated from many of the qualities that most accurately define human being. Diner (1993) elaborates this alienation further when he says, "... that the origins of the decay of reason lie in the particular, dominant form of reason: a rationality that serves as a means to attain ends and thereby dissociates itself from a more encompassing reason grounded in being" (p. 345). And, consequently, precludes forms of reason that empower individuals to imagine deep notions of democracy and justice. This is an ethical problem with an educational solution.
"Learning Our Way Out"

Marxism has handed-down to us two important additions to our more traditional notions of liberty: "firstly, not only actions, but persons may be subject to coercion; and, secondly, an agent's lack of freedom need not be the outcome of another agent's deliberate actions, but may equally be the outcome of the operation of impersonal social forces" (Bernstein, 1995, p. 35). Our social and cultural institutions provide endless examples of this "escape from freedom" (Fromm, 1941) and our conscious and unconscious drives to avoid the inherent risks of genuine human subjectivity: those of us committed to what might be called an emancipatory adult education practice need to understand this important ethical challenge to learning, theorize the learning transaction in a way that recognizes and seeks to ameliorate the ethical challenge of enlightenment rationality, and develops practices that reassert the uncertainty of human existence (the life of desire, emotion, and belief). Freire has coined an apt phrase for what kind of learning must happen: we must "learn to read the world before learning to read the word" (Freire, P. & Macedo, D., 2003). By learning to read the world, we can make explicit the history of cultural production and reproduction that has arbitrarily constructed a particular social position based on race, class, gender, or sexuality. Reading the world in this way communicates a sense of agency to those who have been arbitrarily, yet systematically, disempowered by the
reified social structures created by enlightenment rationality.

The work of Habermas in developing communicative rationality -- as opposed to instrumental rationality -- has been the primary theoretical move to locate 'a more encompassing reason grounded in being.' In this way (and in many others), Habermas remains a product of the Frankfurt School, an intellectual heir to Horkheimer and Adorno, and a (perhaps the) luminary in contemporary Critical Theory. But Habermas has also moved in broader directions to aid his search for a new type of rationality: appropriately enough, he came to the new world for a fresh theoretical perspective, relying on a Chicago Pragmatist as a foundational piece for his vision -- George Herbert Mead. Consequently, the groundwork has been set for a strong ethical antidote to our fear of genuine human subjectivity. Through the interstices of Deweyan and Habermasian ethics we can arrive at a Freirean emancipatory adult education: it is precisely a Freirean "reading of the world," that Dewey and Habermas' ethics can help us approach. In this direction, a solid beginning point is the recognition that emancipatory education is about communication. Freire's pedagogy of freedom is an elegant and humane form of communication that seeks to provide some substance to our claims of emancipation. For Freire, critical, emancipatory pedagogy is both a producer and a product of democracy, while communication is the *modus operandi* through which the dialectic of
"learner" and "teacher," and "subject" and "object" operates and constructs the genuine subjectivity required for substantive democracy to be realized. Freire says, "To think correctly implies the existence of subjects whose thinking is mediated by objects that provoke and modify the thinking subject. Thinking correctly is, in other words, not an isolated act. . .but an act of communication. . .something that belongs essentially to the process of co participation" (1998, p. 42). To put this dialectical and dialogical process another way, Thomas Alexander, a Dewey scholar, says,

There is no common neurosystem linking one communicant to another. The medium here is symbolization and expression. Both Dewey and his colleague George Herbert Mead worked out a sophisticated analysis of how communication requires that all members of the process imaginatively project themselves into the situation from the other's standpoint and so that they can interpret the response of meaning of their own possible actions. If I am throwing the ball to you, I must try to see myself as you to gauge my pitch; you as the catcher must project yourself into my role as pitcher. I understand myself as 'pitcher' only by incorporating imaginatively how you respond to my possible actions as catcher. This is how I try to grasp the meaning of my possible gestures or actions, and vice versa. Most communication, of course, is far more subtle and complex than this example indicates. But . . . there is mutual adjustment and coordination whereby a vague or indeterminate situation becomes clearer. . . . The process of communication is possible because of the use of social imagination in reconstructing experience (1998, p.82).

Communication understood this way involves us constantly in a "permanent process of social and historical construction and reconstruction" (Freire, 1998,
This process *is* critical self-reflection, and, accordingly, its participants understand that it can only be realized, not simply through other people, but through other people necessarily regarded and respected as 'subjects,' equal participants in the creation of knowledge and the educative experience. The "...mutual adjustment and coordination whereby a vague or indeterminate situation becomes clearer," as Alexander paraphrases Dewey above, is the product of a critical and emancipatory pedagogy; the very same pedagogy that Freire calls a pedagogy of freedom. The designation 'freedom' is earned when the participants in this process can look back on their pedagogical *intersubjective transaction* and see that they have made the world better by communicating in a non-authoritarian, mutually beneficial way; a way that, by default, recognizes and respects the deeply contextual nature of learning. This pedagogy of freedom can't help but add some substance to our formal democracy, chipping away -- perhaps -- at the ideological edifice of instrumental rationality.

There is a strong argument to be made that Freire’s pedagogy of freedom and the use of social imagination in the reconstruction of experience (as described by Dewey and Habermas) presents an idealized image of both *learning to be ethical* and *learning ethically*: they present an image of genuine ethical development through acts of genuine human subjectivity. It is a relational ethic. If a 21st Century existence is to ever engage an act of
genuine human subjectivity, I would argue this image captures its essence. This characterization of ethical development also highlights the relevance of spirituality to the conversation: as adult educators search for contexts in which ethical development actually occurs, concrete religious experience arises as a tangible and realistic engine of moral growth.

Looking at the existing literature of ethical development, especially the body of literature flowing from Kohlberg and Gilligan, there is some support for my arguments. Strong evidence exists that certain patterns of moral reasoning are unique to adulthood. Using Kohlberg’s stages of moral development, Lavell argues that we do not truly find our true moral voice before the age of 35. There is also a strong correlation between experiences that build empathy and higher stages of moral reasoning. Aierbe et al (2010) argue that mature moral reasoning is achieved through social processes and moral dilemmas related to local political controversies. An important extension of this thread of research flows from studies of correctional education programs. Swanson (2009) continues to extrapolate from Kohlberg’s studies, finding a strong correlation between faith and moral development. More importantly, though, she establishes convincing evidence that moral growth is directly related to strong community relationships.

Moving into the body of literature addressing the convergence of
cognitive science and ethics, the support for my argument is even stronger. Research on the nature of mind, thought, and body is directly related to our understanding of morality and ethical development and the implications are tremendous. Mark Johnson, with the occasional support of George Lakoff, has established a stream of research showing that “...our abstract moral concepts are grounded in our bodily experience, are defined relative to prototypes, are structured by metaphor, and are tied to emotions” (p. 147). These conclusions provide direct support to Dewey and Habermas’ notion that mind is necessarily embodied, which reveals important similarities between moral reasoning and what Dewey called aesthetic judgment. Johnson says that, “Moral reasoning is an imaginative process of problem solving” (p. 147). In terms of ethical development, these notions indicate the deep connection between our experiences and our moral reasoning. In other words, ethical problem solving that is solution-oriented and growth-producing necessarily generates more meaningful results. “Moral reasoning of this sort is situated (historically, culturally, and personally), shaped by emotions, and reconstructive of our ongoing experience” (Johnson, p. 150). Cognitive Science is telling us that ethical development has little to do with abstract concepts and much to do with social processes, much like Freire’s pedagogy of freedom. In this light, spirituality and religious experience become obvious venues for ethical development.
Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a review of the relevant literature forming the background of this study. Understanding adult ethical development in Christian congregations necessarily draws on the growing body of literature about spirituality within the field of adult education. Additionally, the literature of ethics and ethical development -- with a focus on John Dewey and Jurgan Habermas -- while minimal within the field of adult education, is broad and deep in other fields, and has gone a long way to informing this study.
Chapter 3

Method

Introduction

In this chapter I lay out the methodology for the study of religious professionals’ perceptions of ethical development using an empirical hermeneutic phenomenology approach. I will first briefly discuss the specific research question followed by the definitions that support the question. I then will take a long foray into the methodological framework, which I feel is essential in order to firmly establish the philosophical underpinnings of my method in approaching this study. Finally I discuss the specific details of the study from the respondents to the interview questions and will end with my researcher identity.

Research Question

My research question is how religious professionals perceive ethical development. To explore this phenomenon, I interviewed five Protestant pastors of congregations in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. By perception I mean the process of attaining awareness or understanding of sensory information. In particular, I investigated my participants’ apprehension and interpretation of their own experiences of ethical
development, both within their congregations and congregants as well as
their own personal ethical development. Pastors are not necessarily trained
to be teachers, although it is understood to be one of the primary roles of a
congregational leader. The teaching role of a pastor is described in very
formal terms: teaching from the pulpit and teaching in small group sessions
such as Bible study groups, and in individual counseling. Based on prior
studies of ethics pedagogy, however, many researchers argue that people
learn about ethics best in informal settings. Based on my experiences as a
pastor, educator, and ethics researcher, my study focused on the following
subquestions: How do people learn to be ethical?; how is spirituality or
religious affiliation relevant to ethical development?

Methodological Framework

An Empirical Hermeneutic Phenomenology Approach to the Research
Question

Phenomenology is used most frequently in the contemporary academic
world, especially in the human and social sciences, as a qualitative research
methodology. My framework for this study is from the Heideggarian
tradition, empirical hermeneutic phenomenology (EHP), or what is more
traditionally called interpretivist phenomenology. Before defining the
parameters of the study, it is important to recognize that the philosophy
behind this methodology is fundamental: as has been recognized by certain
qualitative methodologists, many such studies are impoverished by a lack of familiarity with the philosophy of phenomenology (Cohen & Omery 1994, Osborne 1994, Ray 1994, Draucker 2001). Draucker (2001) offers an interesting analysis of the existing literature in phenomenological studies within the nursing field. Her guiding questions are: "First, do the reports reflect a convergence of researcher understanding and participant narratives as called for by the Heideggerian tradition? Second, do Heideggerian ideas inform and enrich the studies' findings?" (p. 360). Draucker goes on to describe the wide variations she finds through her analysis, ultimately concluding that nursing researchers need to either construct a new paradigm that permits the more flexible and creative approaches, i.e. don't call yourself a Heideggarian if you're really not, or get a better understanding of Heidegger before pursuing Heideggarian research. An additional criticism she offers rings true with my own experience of some of the educational EHP studies: "Many studies failed to provide a robust description of the processes of interpretive research" (p.371). Clearly, in pursuing a phenomenological study, whether descriptive/transcendental or interpretive/hermeneutic, it is easy to get caught in a swirl of mixed messages. As Cohen and Omery (1994) explain, the literature concerning phenomenology in education often lacks the necessary discussion of methodology, sometimes using methods that are contradictory to phenomenology. Consequently, Osborne (1994) emphasizes
the necessity of one's research methodology flowing from and remaining true to its underlying philosophy and philosophical framework. In support of this claim, Ray (1994) argues, "To attempt a phenomenological study without having knowledge of its philosophical foundations and, especially, the practice of the analytic process of reflection would invalidate or severely impede a study's credibility" (p. 123). In light of this well-substantiated concern, this chapter begins by unpacking the genesis of EHP through the ideas of three significant philosophers: Descartes, Husserl, and Heidegger.

Descartes’ legacy to the human quest for knowledge is remarkable and notorious: he has become the whipping boy for every budding epistemologist since at least 1859 (the year Darwin's *Origin of Species* was published, and consequently changed our sense of human development). As much as we love to hate Descartes for imparting to us the mind-body duality according to which the foundation of knowledge is a very solipsistic sense of our own clear and distinct ideas and nothing else, we cannot ignore the question he's passed down to us: how do we know that the world exists as we -- with our clear and distinct ideas as our only guide -- suppose it does? Put another way, if all we know for certain is the content of our own minds, how do we relate that content with the non-mental stuff outside our minds? Historically, responding to this question is the guiding purpose of phenomenology, and is a significant common thread between
Husserl's transcendental phenomenology and the hermeneutic phenomenology of Heidegger and Gadamer. Understanding EHP as a research paradigm requires an understanding of the phenomenological response to this fundamental Cartesian dilemma: this question provides the background and framework out of which the contemporary search for knowledge and understanding through empirical research rises. EHP, as one method of empirical research, proceeds according to a certain response to this Cartesian dilemma, a response that grew out of Husserl's phenomenology and finds its theoretical core in the works of Heidegger, Gadamer, and, to a lesser extent, Ricouer. This response is not so much an answer to Descartes' question, but an outright rejection of it.

Trained as a mathematician, Husserl's stated goal was to establish an all-embracing science grounded on an absolute foundation (Husserl, 1988). His initial work in this area was focused on eliminating the psychologism of logical and mathematical structures (the attribution of logical and mathematical truths to psychological phenomena), which led him to Franz Brentano and William James. From Brentano and James, Husserl adapted what would become a groundbreaking concept: the intentionality of consciousness and its relationship to our knowledge of reality (Edie, 1987). Initially, intentionality meant, very broadly, that human consciousness is always consciousness of something. Over time, intentionality came to take on
a much more Kantian sense of a transcendental ego that, through its consciousness of something, constructs the intelligibility of that something (Warnock, 1970). Through this process, the essences of which the intending subject becomes aware form an indubitable foundation for our knowledge of human experience.

While there are several important concepts that carry forward from Husserl's transcendental phenomenology (TP) to current qualitative methodological approaches, intentionality, phenomenological or transcendental reduction -- also referred to as 'bracketing' -- and description among them, the central concept that holds them all together is the lifeworld, or *lebenswelt*.

The lifeworld is a very complex concept for Husserl, and, not surprisingly, played a vital role in his phenomenology. At it's most basic level, "[t]he lifeworld can be viewed as the rational structure underlying...[one's]...'natural attitude.' That is to say: a given subject's lifeworld consists of the beliefs against which his everyday attitude towards himself, the objective world and others, receive their ultimate justification" (Beyer, 2007, July). To use a Kantian term, the lifeworld is the *a priori* structure that provides meaning to actions and thoughts as we go through our daily lives. A significant role of the lifeworld for Husserl is that it permitted the
existence of objective essences, or generalizable and universal characteristics of phenomena. An ancient, philosophically heavy term over which much ink has been 'spilt,' essence, for Husserl is what generates meaning and understanding. Without essences, we would live in a world of minute sense impressions that abandon us to meaningless experiences. An example of the role essence plays (Husserl's example, actually) is listening to music: when listening to a musical note, the second-by-second awareness of the note is meaningless -- it is simple awareness of sound. Until that sound is experienced as pointing to a sustained note made up of simple moments, past and future, we can grasp no significance or meaning of the experience. This leaves our awareness unintelligible and without understanding (Husserl, 1970). The lifeworld makes the meaningful experience of this sound possible; it makes possible "...a special kind of experience, which is genuinely immediate experience, in which universals or general essences are grasped. He did not deny that one arrives at the notion of whiteness from the observation of many particular white objects. But he argued that in seeing a particular white object one is in fact seeing the essence; one is, that is to say, seeing whiteness" (Warnock, 1970, p 31). Explanations or descriptions of this Husserlian sense of essences is often accompanied by a discussion of Platonic Ideas, a separate, higher realm of existing substances, knowledge of which enables us to understand with greater force and abstraction the
individual moments and things that we encounter. An essential part of
Plato's epistemology, and integrally connected to his ontology and ethics, this
realm of Ideas is tremendously important in the history of Western thought
(and is the inspiration behind the first part of the title of this study, as I
describe in Chapter 5 below: *ethical becoming*). However, Husserl, especially
by the time of his later writings, cannot be considered a Platonist. Rather,
Husserl is describing essences as part and parcel of our experience, not a
separate realm of existence. In this spirit, he unearths the notion of the
lifeworld as a way to grant this kind of generalization of experience to the
objects of our consciousness. Husserl argued that essences, and, hence,
meaning, are not possible without time (duration/history/objectivity) and
intersubjectivity (the experiencing of someone else), both of which are aspects
of the lifeworld. The transcendental ego, Husserl's term for a subject within
the epoché, grasps essences because it understands time, e.g. the perception
of sound as implying the past and the future of that sound to make music.
Even more, the transcendental ego has an awareness of others: "The
existence-sense of the world and of Nature in particular as Objective Nature,
includes. . .thereness for everyone. This is always cointended whenever we
speak of Objective actuality. In addition, Objects with spiritual predicates
belong to the experienced world. These objects, in respect of their origin and
sense, refer us to subjects, usually other subjects, and their actively
constituting intentionality. Thus it is in the case of all cultural objects (books, tools, works of any kind, and so forth) which moreover carry with them at the same time the experiential sense of thereness-for-everyone (that is everyone belonging to the corresponding cultural community, such as European or perhaps more narrowly, the French cultural community, and so forth" (Husserl, 1988, v, p.92). Part of my intuition of an object of my consciousness is the awareness that I could not experience it as I do if it were not also the object of others' consciousnesses. This 'thereness-for-everyone' is an obdurate trait of the objective world, but it is more specifically a trait of a specific social group. Part of the significance of the lifeworld is its expression of a group of people, sharing a history, a future, and a set of cultural presuppositions without which our world would not be our world. For Husserl, the objectivity of science is impossible without the lifeworld to help us make sense of our conceptual framework, the preconditions that make our experience unique. Consequently, the lifeworld, properly examined and understood, can be bracketed. The meanings gleaned through our grasp of essences can now become part of what we must rid ourselves to accurately analyze objects of our consciousness with the purpose of knowing their essences. This 'bracketing' of the lifeworld creates something of a dilemma for Husserl which is broadly recognized, i.e. if our perception depends upon the lifeworld and the natural attitude, once we bracket-out these
preconceptions, what constitutes our intentionality? (Beyer, 2007, July; Kersten, 1989). The solutions to this dilemma are legion. Suffice it to say that TP, as it has been handed down to us and especially how we use it in empirical inquiry, is closer to the spirit of Husserl's descriptive method than it is to the letter.

It is this descriptive method that made the TP endeavor foundational and scientific -- Husserl even referred to himself as a positivist (Sinha, 1963). For Husserl, genuine intuitions of the objects of our consciousness are had by virtue of description, not interpretation. Unless we perform the transcendental reduction, putting the lifeworld and natural attitude in brackets, creating the epoché, our intuitions will carry the distorting burden of interpretation. "The true aim of the phenomenological epoché can perhaps be seen to be the unraveling of the constitution of objects. In attempting to rid ourselves of all preconceptions, and in particular of preconceptions about the reality or otherwise of objects in our world, we uncover the way in which these objects have been constructed by us (or have constructed themselves) as the sense or meaning of our immediate experiences" (Warnock, p. 36). The goal is to escape interpretation; a goal we have inherited with a continued emphasis on bracketing our preconceptions in the methodology of contemporary TP inquiry.
Allen (1995) argues that a clear distinction does not exist between TP and EHP. I disagree. EHP’s philosophical origins are in Heidegger's split with Husserl, and what follows that split is much different theoretical territory. Likewise, the contemporary methodological manifestations of that theoretical territory are also unique. Heidegger rejected Husserl's phenomenological reduction, as well as his theories of the constitution of the objective world. His response to the Cartesian dilemma goes a step further than Husserl, not simply rejecting the dichotomy, but also arguing that we are ontologically part of the lifeworld. The important exploration, then, is not how we come to know the world, but how we exist in the world. And for Heidegger our existence is indissoluble from the existence of the world. Husserl, commenting on Heidegger's Kant text, said that with this move toward Being/Dasein, Heidegger had turned phenomenology into anthropology (Warnock, 1970).

Initially, it is easy to see much of Husserl in Heidegger's general approach in *Being and Time*, especially as Heidegger seems to continue relying on the lifeworld to carry a heavy conceptual load: lived experience and its exploration is still a central theme, and the goal of this exploration remains the creation of meaning (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991). Consciousness is a formation of historically lived experience. This historically lived experience, or historicality, includes one's culture and
cultural history, which frame one's understanding of the world (Koch, 1995). It is "[t]he way this exploration of lived experienced proceeds . . . where Husserl and Heidegger disagreed. While Husserl focused on understanding beings or phenomena, Heidegger focused on 'Dasein' . . ." (Laverty, p. 7)

7) 'Being There', or Dasein, is Heidegger's encapsulation of the nature of human existence as inextricably situated in the world; fixed and immersed in the temporal, physical world. We are "being-in-the-world" and, as such cannot be understood at all except as being an existent in the middle of a world amongst other things (Warnock 1970). Dasein as a being-in-the-world is also the central guiding principle for EHP, i.e. when doing research following the methodology of an hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher understands him or her self as inextricably situated within the context of the research; always, already influencing and influenced by the subjects of the investigation -- bracketing is impossible. This Heideggarian move toward Being and Dasein, and away from the Husserlian epistemology of the "lifeworld," marks a fundamental, if not the fundamental, difference between transcendental phenomenology (TP) and empirical hermeneutic phenomenology (EHP) -- bringing with it the shift from bracketing, or the generation of the epoché through transcendental reduction, to interpretation and situatedness. Dasein is also the center around which future developments in hermeneutic phenomenology revolve, in particular
Gadamer's introduction of the 'fusion of horizons' and the 'hermeneutic circle,' and Ricouer's hermeneutic of suspicion.

The emphasis on Being in Heidegger, as opposed to knowing in Husserl, entailed an emphasis on pre-understanding or 'fore-structure': this emphasis is similar to Husserl's conception of the lifeworld in that it consists of our culturally, socially, and historically formed preconceived notions of the world; however, Heidegger emphasized that we cannot step out of our pre-understanding. There is an immutable, ongoing transaction between the individual and the world as they constitute and are constituted by each other (Munhall, 1989), hence meaning is created as we engage and interpret our being, rather than bracket it. From this ontological orientation, bracketing isn't even a possibility. It follows from this indissoluble unity of person and world that 'to be human is to interpret' (Heidegger, 1927/1962). Moreover, our interpretation -- for Heidegger, the very act of living -- requires ever greater awareness of the fore-structures shaping one's being. As indicated above, fore-structures are the mostly implicit background layers of our experience. There are three layers of this pre-understanding or fore-structure (and in appropriate Heideggerian style, each is hyphenated): 1. Fore-having, which constitutes our general grasp of the whole situation or context; 2. fore-sight, which constitutes our unique perspective on the situation, and; 3. Fore-concept, which constitutes our
conceptual grasp of the correct interpretation of the situation (Guignon, 1993). In any given act of interpretation, all three of these fore-structures are in-play and active, and 'meaningfulness' is dependent upon interpretation informed by these fore-structures. Following Heidegger's lead, as well as Gadamer's influential interpretations of Heidegger, the methodological hermeneutic maxim is "no knowledge without foreknowledge" (Diesing, p. 108). The constant process of utilizing one's fore-structures in interpretation is what leads the hermeneutical tradition to develop the notion of the hermeneutic circle. Based on our fore-structures, we have expectations and presumptions about our inquiry which are part of our interpretation. As we analyze our texts and subsequent interpretations, a back and forth process evolves in which our original perspectives and interpretations are revised leading to re-interpretation and further inquiry, which, in turn, leads to further revision until the depth of engagement with the 'text' is such that sensible meaning has been maximized and inner contradictions have been minimized. For Heidegger, this was an ontological necessity, but it is also easy to envision its application to EHP. The hermeneutic circle began with Heidegger, but it was Gadamer's debate with Habermas that really pushed this notion into popular use (Misgeld, 1976). The hermeneutic circle after Gadamer is really a process of making explicit and concrete the researcher's role in making the data (Koch, 1999). Other important Gadamerian concepts
follow logically from the application of the hermeneutic circle to empirical 'texts'. In the process of inquiry, a clear reflexive relationship develops, a kind of feedback loop which highlights the co-emergence of interpreter and text: two ontologically separate Beings begin to coordinate in the generation of meanings. In a compelling turn-of-phrase (refreshing after Heidegger), Gadamer calls this the "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer, 1976). A dialogue with the goal of mutual understanding emerges.

Where we find ourselves after examining Husserl and TP on the one hand, and Heidegger, Gadamer, and EHP on the other hand, is with what appears to be two very different responses to the Cartesian question and two very different approaches to inquiry. As a research methodology growing out of Husserl's philosophy, TP inquiry is, of course, descriptive, focusing on an unadulterated presentation of the object of inquiry. Ideally, the result is a clear emergence of the structures of experience as they are had by the object of inquiry, with no interference from the lifeworld of the inquirer (Kvale, 1996; Osborne, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1983). Allen (1995) frames TP as foundationalist in that it seeks a correct answer in the form of a valid description of texts not dependent on the preconceptions or positions of the interpreter. This is Husserl's famous "bracketing:" the transcendental reduction producing the epoché which allows the researcher to set aside his or her preconceived notions about the investigation. Laverty (2003) states
that "This awareness is seen as a protection from imposing the assumptions or biases of the researcher on the study" (p. 17). On the other hand, the methodology of EHP grows out of Heidegger's move away from epistemology toward ontology. Therefore, it is interpretive and focused on the development of historical meanings, especially as those meanings have affected individuals or social structures. The interpretation is guided by the inquirers fore-structures, which is made as explicit as possible through dialogue, the fusion of horizons, and the hermeneutic circle (Barclay, 1992).

The landscape is not so simple, however. van Manen (2003) argues that the difference between TP and EHP can be considered two 'elements' or 'functions' of a work. He draws on Gadamer to explain that, often, description is a kind of interpretation, and that ultimately, "[i]n this text we will simply use the term 'description' to include both the interpretive (hermeneutic) as well as the descriptive (phenomenological) element" (p. 26). In recognition of this situation, I will defend EHP's appropriateness for my intended area of study with solid reference to the Heideggarian/Gadamerian tradition.

I will curb my enthusiasm, however, because there are important and relevant critiques of EHP. Walters (1995) argues that there "clearly are good, bad, and even worse analyses in phenomenological research" (p.795).
Walter's and Draucker's evaluations move generously beyond the more traditional critiques of EHP that rely on standards usually rejected by most EHP researchers such as reliability, generalizability, external validity, replicability, etc. These more traditional, and somewhat tired critiques, are still important though, especially given the increasing political exercise of power over research agendas and the generation of knowledge (Smith and Hodkinson, 2005). Examples of this critique using positivist standards include Rubinstein (1983), who asserts that "for hermeneutics confirmation is not necessary --- all interpretations are valid if they fit the text" (p.117). Likewise, Eagle (1983, n. 5) says that in hermeneutics truth is irrelevant, and all interpretations are equally valid. These types of critiques can be categorized as Popperian, in reference to Karl Popper (1935) -- the philosopher of science most famous for establishing that testing could involve falsification as well as verification. However, this is, in some ways unfair to Popper, who actually worked out a hermeneutics of his own, suggesting that "Popperian and hermeneutic philosophies of science are compatible in various ways. . ." (Diesing, 1991, p. 143). As opposed to these more positivist standards, EHP deals with rigor by addressing such procedural criteria as multiple stages of interpretation to allow patterns to emerge, a thorough discussion of how interpretations come out of the data, and the internal consistency of interpretive process itself (Koch, 1995). But, still, as Laverty
states, "Issues of rigor in interpretive inquiry are confusing to discuss, at times, as there is not an agreed upon language used to describe it or one universal set of criteria used to assess its presence" (p.24). A very reasonable approach to these concerns and criticisms about the rigor of EHP comes from Habermas and Apel (Habermas, 1971, Appendix). By reasonable, I mean well-informed, non-polemical, and constructive; I do not mean beyond critique. They argue that positivistic approaches such as logical empiricism are appropriate to any science whose implicit goal is to find causal or statistical laws that enable us to control something. "Prediction and deductive explanation are corollaries of control" (Diesing, 1991, p. 141). Habermas and Apel juxtapose this with hermeneutics which is appropriate for any inquiry whose goal is to improve communication and mutual understanding.

Something remains to be said about the use of the term 'empirical' to modify hermeneutic phenomenology. It is common to refer to Qualitative research in general, phenomenology in the broad sense, and especially hermeneutic phenomenology, as non-empirical. According to my experience and study, this is often done in an effort to aid understanding of the various quantitative and qualitative research traditions, schools, and approaches. Simplifying the explanation of complicated concepts and perspectives by essentializing, exaggerating, and juxtaposing various approaches can be
helpful for those just learning about research methods and methodologies. I would also speculate that another source of this mischaracterization is the historical effort to offer an alternative to more positivistic approaches to inquiry -- traditionally the standard bearers for empiricism. For example, Laverty (2003) begins her otherwise competent piece by characterizing empirical research, on the one hand, and qualitative research on the other: "Historically, many areas of academic research have utilized quantitative or empirical methods. In general the emphasis of this research is...focus[ed] primarily on those areas and questions that are amenable to the adherence of empirical methods of inquiry..." (p. 2). She cites several scholars in support of her claim (Gergen, 1985; Valle, King, and Halling, 1989; Polkinghorne, 1983). This colloquial sense of phenomenology as non-empirical does not stand up to scrutiny, however, and it is time for scholars to stop ceding this empirical territory. Hermeneutical phenomenology seeks to clarify and interpret the meaning of texts, and, as 'phenomenology' implies, these texts include human actions, products, and expressions -- most of which are empirical, observable/experiential phenomena.

This, naturally, brings us full-circle conceptually, as the positivist tradition in the philosophy of science is the most direct intellectual descendent of Descartes. The mind/body dualism lives-on triumphantly in the correspondence theory of truth, the subject/object duality, and the
disinterested pursuit of knowledge (Munhall, 1989). This 'received' view of
science (Polkinghorne, 1983) operates according to an absolute separation
between the inquirer and the object of inquiry. EHP, while still empirical,
has been the beneficiary of Descartes' Cogito in a very different way.

Emphasizing intentionality, situatedness, reflexivity, and interpretation puts
EHP in a position to reject the Cartesian dilemma. As Heidegger made use of
Husserl's phenomenology, opening the door for a new Continental
hermeneutical tradition based on Being, EHP inherits an ethos of empirical
inquiry that is constantly evolving, and hopefully improving.

Having provided both historical contexts and philosophical foundations
for the EHP methodology, the following section describes the
phenomenological investigation of religious professional’s perceptions of
ethical development.

Research Site and Participants

Entering the Field

Investigating perceptions of ethical development lends itself very well
to the EHP paradigm. It enables the exploration of participants’ experiences
with further abstraction and interpretation by the researcher based on his or
her expertise, knowledge and experiences. “Hermeneutics adds the
interpretive element to explicate meanings and assumptions in the
participants’ texts that participants themselves may have difficulty in articulating, for example, tacit practice knowledge” (Crotty, 1998). Learning, communication, and language are intertwined and hermeneutics offers a way of understanding such human experiences captured through language and in context (van Manen, 1997). EHP offers me a tremendous opportunity as a researcher to unpack a phenomenon that is deeply contextual and often implicit. I am able to use my knowledge and experience of the phenomenon to help generate understanding.

Ethics and ethical development have always been centerpieces of my concerns: the very first course I ever taught – two weeks after I finished my bachelor’s degree – was an ethics course for college freshmen. Since that time, I have taught many ethics courses in formal settings, while also recognizing that ethical formation happens outside academic environments as well. Many community organizations claim this kind of focus such as the Boy Scouts, the Masons, Knights of Columbus, and, perhaps most prominently, churches.

Gatekeepers

According to Street (1992), entering the field successfully requires permission from gatekeepers. Generally speaking, pastors have significant autonomy and are able to meet at their own discretion, according to their
schedule, and without prior approval from governing boards, etc.

Consequently, the true gatekeeper for each participant in my study was the pastor him or herself. Successful entry into the field of my study was very nearly wholly dependent upon access to pastors. Street (1992) also refers to “unwritten rules which support the formalized written procedures,” and draw upon “. . .informal sources of power, which may not appear to have a corresponding formalized authority within the hierarchy (129). This caveat is important for my study because, despite pastors’ autonomy, the social, cultural, and organizational context in which every pastor works is different and unique. In my study of pastors’ perceptions of ethical development, every participant required a different approach according to the idiosyncrasies of the situation. I initially used snowball sampling in which one participant provided possible additional participants. This initial participant was contacted through e-mail to solicit participation. Secondary contact was our first face-to-face interview. At that first meeting, this participant provided a list of several possible additional participants. With that participant’s permission, I contacted the names on the list, of which two agreed to participate. My other participants emerged from various contacts and relationships I developed through several years working in ministry. Initial contact with these participants was also established through e-mail, following the same exact pattern of my initial participant. In all cases but one,
secondary contact was our first face-to-face interview. In the one exception, we needed a phone conversation to establish a meeting time and location.

Research Participants

The goal of hermeneutic phenomenological research is to develop a rich or dense description of the phenomenon being investigated in a particular context (van Manen, 1997). It is not conducted with generalizability as a goal, which has significant impacts on the sampling and selection of research participants. Conventional sampling would require random and representative sampling of a population under study. Gaining a rich understanding of a phenomenon – in this case pastors’ perceptions of ethical development necessitates a sampling strategy which selects participants who provide the greatest opportunity for discovery (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, Strauss and Corbin, 1998). This is often referred to as theoretical or purposeful sampling. This method of sampling is consistent with interpretive paradigm research (Llewellyn, Sullivan, & Minichiello, 1999). As compared to random sampling, theoretical sampling is explorative, as Charmez (2002) says, because “researchers cannot know exactly what the most significant social and psychological processes are in a particular setting” until some exploration has been conducted. Baptiste (2008) mentions “three sets of sampling-related tasks associated with every research inquiry: selecting units of analysis, selecting units of observation, and selecting artifacts
associated with the units of analysis and units of observations.” My unit of analysis in this study is religious professionals, specifically experienced, professional Christian pastors, whose full-time occupations are leading and teaching a group of believers. This unit of analysis is best able to express the phenomena I have investigated, i.e. their perceptions of ethical development. This is the only criterion I used for my study, which does, nonetheless, make this criterion-based, or purposeful, sampling. More specifically, I used snowball sampling as described above -- a type of convenience sampling (Merriam 1998). In looking for experienced professional pastors, this method is very appropriate because experts or professionals are most likely to know who the other experts or professionals are. I recruited five religious professionals to participate in the study, and achieved saturation after 15 hours of interviews. In partial explanation of the sample size, let me elaborate on the appropriateness of smaller sampling groups in qualitative research, especially empirical hermeneutic phenomenology (EHP) research. Educational anthropologist Harry F. Wolcott defends smaller sample sizes in the third edition of his book, Writing up Qualitative Research (2008), and has famously said, “What can you learn by studying just one of anything? All you can!” In the EHP paradigm, given its epistemological orientation, developing a large sample size is not simply unimportant, it can be counterproductive. With the goal of thick, rich, description in the interest of understanding and
interpreting a given phenomenon, EHP studies would be impractical with a large sample size: deep understanding flowing from intimate interpretation and description would be mitigated by the complexity and sheer volume of data. Also, in studies with high-quality data, saturation is often reached well before the sample is exhausted. For example, Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) developed a qualitative study involving 60 interviews, but theme saturation was achieved after 12. In this study, my methods and procedures are embedded in my philosophical position toward inquiry as developed earlier in this chapter. Following this approach, a sample size of five is appropriate. Having said that, it’s important to mention that five participants provided a remarkable depth of experience from which data could be generated and themes could emerge.

**Data Collection**

*Interviewing*

Interviewing is the primary means of data collection in phenomenological studies and is congruent with the philosophical framework of EHP. Interviews offer the advantage of unique access to the participants’ experiences. Additionally, in hermeneutic phenomenology the interview serves very specific purposes. First, it is used as a means for exploring and gathering of narratives (or stories) of lived experiences. Second, it is a vehicle by which to develop a conversational relationship with the participant about
the meaning of an experience. This may be achieved through reflection with
the participant on the topic at hand (van Manen, 1997). Interviews also allow
participants to share their stories in their own words.

Although, there are various ways of conducting research interviews,
including structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews, I chose
semi-structured for this study. This format provided the advantages of both
the unstructured and structured formats, while mitigating some of their
disadvantages. “Semi-structured interviews provide greater breadth or
richness in data compared with structured interviews, and allow participants
freedom to respond to questions and probes, and to narrate their experiences
without being tied down to specific answers” (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). Another
significant advantage of the semi-structured format is providing the
researcher common questions and points-of-reference across and among the
different interviews, which facilitates comparison. In following Seidman’s
three-series phenomenological interview format (1998), I found that my
interviews ran much longer than anticipated (usually longer than 90
minutes, with a few exceptions) and produced an extraordinarily rich and
wide-ranging data set. Through constant comparative analysis, it became
clear after my first round of interviews that the volume and quality of data
generated was tremendous, much more so than my prior experiences and
study would lead me to expect. As round two came to a conclusion, I
determined a third round of interviews wasn’t necessary. In this light, I conducted two semi-structured interviews for each of four participants and one interview with a fifth participant. The success of this process illustrates that slavishly following a structured interview format would have made the data suffer tremendously.

It is important for future research in this area for me to say more about my fifth participant. My interview with this fifth participant was a qualitatively different experience than my other interviews. Philip presented me with a dilemma: I could have made this data fit the story my themes tell. If one merely read the text of my interview with Philip, there would have been appropriate supporting evidence of my themes. However, this would have been a misrepresentation of the data, because the experience of Philip was so divergent from my experiences with the other informants. Obviously, I chose not to include Philip’s data set as part of my findings. Not including my fifth participant was also a difficult choice because he was very interesting, so much so that I believe he represents an important in-road to a different study altogether. Philip, my fifth participant, is a charismatic Pentecostal pastor and proceeded through the first interview in a very closed way -- closed in terms of sharing information -- that it would have been difficult to formulate a coherent biography, let alone discern meaningful connections to ethical development as it emerged in this study. However,
from what I can interpret from my transcript and field notes, Philip’s notion of ethical development is not developmental at all, it is instantaneous at the moment of conversion. Regardless, this is a phenomenon deserving of further exploration independent of this current study. Additionally, my experience with Philip seems to initially support two of my conclusions in Chapter 6: 1) that this type of study needs to be done using specific religious traditions as a criterion because this concrete context carries significant weight in how adult ethical development is perceived as a phenomenon; and 2) that abstracted notions of spirituality are meaningless.

To elaborate more on Philip, he was very gracious and generous with his time – as were all of my participants, for which I am grateful – but his responses often focused on very tangential and impersonal situations. Even more, in response to several very important questions, he simply refused to offer specific examples. In very polite and creative ways, I tried to open these topics for additional exploration, but Philip would circumvent the matter by, for example, telling a story about a trip or recounting a joke he used in a sermon.

Ultimately, I was unable to get the information I needed because I made mistakes in establishing rapport with Philip. In retrospect, the burden on me as an interviewer was heavier with Philip because there was greater
initial suspicion on the part of the interviewee, something I didn’t recognize until it was too late. To explain further, historically, the Pentecostal traditions have not been treated well by academia and more “mainline” Christian traditions: the attitude has often been condescending and dismissive. Although (and perhaps because), this was not my attitude, nor was it the lens through which I viewed my relationship with Philip, I didn’t anticipate this barrier. Consequently, I didn’t take enough time to build my relationship with Philip before launching into heavy, content-oriented questions and material.

**Data Analysis and Synthesis**

Data analysis in phenomenological studies is often imbued with mystical properties, the mechanisms of which apparently cannot be explained, described, or defined in useful ways. Too often, researchers hover over the concrete details of the process, but never actually communicate them. For example, themes “emerge” as if transcripts could be left in a dark room for an hour with clear results at the end. The esteemed phenomenologist and educational researcher Van Manen provides another example when he says our aim is to “transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence” (Van Manen, 1997, p. 36). This enigmatic phrase is poetic, but represents a kind of transubstantiation that is more an act of faith than a concrete step in a systematic empirical investigation of phenomena.
In spite of many characterizations, qualitative data analysis and synthesis is not enigmatic or mystical; it is laborious, rigorous, and systematic. With this situation in mind, it is clear that my EHP study of perceptions of ethical development drew on my philosophical foundations to define its data analysis procedures. As such, the analytic procedures for this study were both descriptive -- from the phenomenological strand -- and interpretive -- from the hermeneutic strand, as described in more detail below.

**Description and Interpretation**

The transformation of lived experience into a textual expression of its essence begins with the thick, rich description for which phenomenology is famous. The goal is to generate an animating, evocative textual description of human phenomena, i.e. experiences, behaviors, intentions, actions, that will invoke *recognition* in readers. The themes that emerge from this description call to mind Husserl’s structures of experience in that they unify, frame, define, and characterize the disparate and separate elements of a phenomenon. But these structures and themes do not emerge wholesale from description. Instead, an act (or many acts) of interpretation are required as well. The text is generated by the researcher through the interpretation of the data -- it is an act of communication between the text and the researcher. Gadamer's hermeneutical circle is fundamental to this dialogue: a continual, interpretive feedback loop moving from researcher to text and back again,
illuminating both the parts/data and the whole/evolving sense of the phenomenon at the same time. This is why Bontekoe argues that the act of interpretation itself represents a gradual convergence of insight on the part of the researcher and the text (1996).

My basic method was constant comparative, a method of analyzing qualitative data where the information gathered was coded into emergent themes or codes (Glaser, 1965). The data was constantly revisited after initial coding, until it became clear that no new themes emerged. In this study, all stages of the data analysis constituted ongoing interpretation of the research text and the phenomenon of perceptions of adult ethical development. In addition, I continually tested my pre-research assumptions about the phenomena by comparing and contrasting these assumptions with the findings in the research text. This approach allowed me to address any prejudices developed from my knowledge and personal experience. This constant cross-checking of interpretation with the original transcripts is suggested by Lincoln and Guba (2000) as a way to ground interpretation in the data, maintain closeness to the participant’s descriptions, and develop authenticity in the text. This is also a part of my data analysis procedure that I pursued very carefully and conscientiously because, as my analysis proceeded, my emergent themes meshed so closely with my pre-research experience and knowledge. As I alluded to in Chapter 1, discussing my
identity as a researcher, I eventually concluded that my themes were not a
function of prejudice, but, were, in fact, an accurate interpretation of my
participants’ perceptions.

I followed the basic procedure outlined by Moustakas (1994), including
horizontalization, thematizing, and textural description, but I have also
drawn from the work of Titchen & McIntyre (1993) to fill-in the holes
Moustakas leaves in his procedure. The interface of the constant
comparative method with Moustakas’ procedure required continual revisiting
of the horizontalization and thematization stages until saturation was
achieved.

To provide more insight into my data analysis, my first step was
Moustakas’ horizontalization. Generally speaking, this was a process of
reflecting on the interviews, not just after the interview was completed, but
also during the interview: writing down my impressions and thoughts,
engaging this part of the hermeneutic circle as deeply as possible. During the
interviews, I would take extensive and detailed handwritten notes about the
participant’s vocal inflection, speech rhythm, emotions, humor and laughter.
For example, a smile followed by a laugh is usually an indication that
something important is being said, but the context of this response can
completely change its interpretation, i.e. the smile could be an indication of
pleasure and happiness, but it is just as likely to be an indication of discomfort with the topic of conversation. These detailed notes enabled me to read my transcripts with great sensitivity and proximity to the context of the interview itself. As I performed my analysis, my interview notes were right beside my transcripts, allowing me to continually compare my reflections during the interview to my reflections at a later point. It is impossible to overstate the importance of this approach to my analysis.

My approach to horizontalization looked a great deal like Strauss and Corbin’s process of open coding (1990). It is a kind of inductive analysis in which concepts, themes, and codes emerge from the data in a way that is not pre-determined, but, instead, rise from the data by striking the researcher as relevant or important. Making reference to my raw data sample, Appendix B, this part of my analysis can be seen in the underlined portions of the transcript.

The end result of this process of horizontalization is a data horizon. As each interview was completed, I would produce one data horizon with my notes. Once the transcript of that same interview was completed, I would produce another, independent (independent of the interview notes), data horizon. I would then compare the data horizons, reading the two side-by-side, as I described above.
Step two in my data analysis was Moustakas’ thematization. The basic approach to this part of the data analysis was to cluster invariant expressions of the experience. This involved looking at the data horizons or horizons of meaning that emerged through the horizontalization process, putting them together in new ways or identifying the ones that appeared as invariant or consistent expressions of the experience. I understand my approach in this regard to be very similar to axial coding as described by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Looking at the raw data example, the thematization process is exemplified by the bracketed phrases and extracted terms and concepts.

The third step in my data analysis is textual description as described by Moustakas. In my understanding, this is very similar to what Strauss and Corbin (1990) refer to as selective coding. This is a process of organizing the consistent themes that were collected in the thematization process into coherent textual descriptions of the phenomenon. The core parts of this process include selecting the central themes of categories that have emerged and have been thematized, systematically relating them to other, more subordinate categories or themes, validating the relationships that have been established, and, lastly, filling-in the categories needing further refinement and development. Looking at the raw data example, this third step in my data analysis is represented by the highlighted, circled, and arrowed text.
As I sought to make sense of the data, Moustakas’ process and Strauss and Corbin’s approach often left me wanting more as a student of data analysis. The holes in the process that I often sensed were filled-in nicely by Titchen and McIntyre (1993). They broke the phenomenological data analysis process into six parts: 1) Immersion; 2) Understanding; 3) Abstraction; 4) Synthesis and theme development; 5) Illumination and illustration of the phenomenon; 6) Integration and critique of the findings. While I didn’t follow their procedure as the primary guide and model for my study, the detail with which they described their procedure was very helpful when I felt that either Moustakas or Strauss and Corbin had fallen short of the guidance or detail I needed.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I described the research question and the ways in which my methodological framework informed that question within the EHP tradition. I discussed the participants of this study, as well as the basic approach or procedures of phenomenological data analysis that I used, including a three round interview protocol and processes of horizontalization, thematization, and textual description. I also discussed my own researcher identity and the impacts that identity had on my data collection.
Chapter 4

The Pastors

Introduction

The five individuals who participated in this study share some important common characteristics aside from the specific criteria used for selection. On a more superficial level, each was born and raised in the United States, one in the Midwest, and the others from the Mid-Atlantic or Northeastern States. Each is a very experienced pastor of a Christian congregation: among them the years of ordination varies from 15 to more than 25; regardless, if I can editorialize a bit, the accumulated knowledge and wisdom of this group is impressive and humbling. As I interviewed and observed these remarkable professionals, aside from my intrinsic interest in this topic, I often found myself intrigued and wanting to learn more about and from them. Each has become what might be called in other professions, “successful.” In churches, success is viewed differently, of course, than in most other vocational contexts, but these individuals have done the work of ministry that has earned them tremendous respect and admiration among their congregants as well as in their larger communities. On a more substantive level, perhaps, each of these pastors expressed deep gratitude for their early church and family experiences; experiences which inspired and
developed gifts that would eventually be used to inspire, build, and encourage new generations. All five participants, Seth, Debra, Hiram, Joshua, and Philip, spoke of the role these early experiences played in their subsequent and current professional roles. Hiram is nicely representative of this common sentiment:

I often think to myself, how can somebody come close to death, be in a situation where they have to, in some way, shape, or form, hear the word of God, hear the Holy Spirit speaking to them, and just throw up a wall and not respond They're not responding to the desert experience, and, um, the only answer I have for that. . .[is that] I think, along the way, beginning at a very young age, I experienced God in different ways, and I experienced God because of the foundations that I had as a child.

Based on the many and various similar expressions of this appreciation of early experiences, it would not be an overstatement to say that my participants each entered their profession with a profound awareness of the importance of early family experiences in building conscientious, caring, and ethical people. Even more, it is clear, looking back on the interviews, on the time I spent observing each participant, and on the data analysis, that the current perceptions these professionals have of ethical development follows remarkably clear threads and themes that have deep connections to their childhood, adolescent, and early professional experiences and memories. At the same time, each participant followed a somewhat circuitous route into the professional ministry. Nobody discussed an explicit rejection of the pastoral
vocation, but, in a more passive way, each pursued different career paths before eventually acquiescing to the “call,” as they might say.

As I reflect on the time I spent with Debra, Joshua, Hiram, Seth, and Philip, I am not surprised by the unique and well-considered perspectives they brought to the matter of adult ethical development in a spiritual context.

**Individual Portraits**

**Debra**

Debra currently serves as pastor of a midsize Christian Congregation in a university town in the Northeastern United States. She was born in a university town in the Northeast, but in a more urbanized, industrial environment. She is one of six children raised in a very religious, but very loving and close-knit household. Listening to Debra discuss her childhood, it was easy to sense the great respect she has for her parents, who seemed to have maintained an important balance between independence and orthodoxy. The love she felt and the freedom she experienced, all within the context of strict religious observance, is expressed well in the following quote in which she describes a time when she felt like she wasn’t “in the fold” on many issues of concern to her family,

. . .they didn’t feel as if they needed to change me. I mean, in a way,
there was this sense that I had a right to this opinion. . .[T]hey might have worried about me a little bit, but I don’t think they felt I was completely wrong. . .Even today, I really do have excellent relationships with the family, and we really enjoy being together.

Looking forward to Debra’s perceptions of ethical development, there were several elements of her early experience that seem significant: her father’s religiosity, her church-centric activities, and her exposure to religious and economic diversity. Much of Debra’s focus in discussing her family was on her father, who was an electrical engineer, but also spent time as a part-time pastor serving a poor church in another part of town.

. . .but I think my father kind of felt like the Methodist Church was a little too liberal, and was not taking his conversion experience seriously. . .He was always a very serious churchgoer, I mean he taught Sunday School, and there’s a later time in his life when – even though he was an electrical engineer, where, there was this little church out by a trailer park, north of us, and my dad went to classes to learn Hebrew and Greek so that he could go and pastor that church.

Her father’s bi-vocational efforts had an impact on Debra’s activities as well:

. . .we had four girls in the family who were each about two years apart. . .so the four older daughters, we did a lot of things together, and, when my dad was pastoring this church, I had an aunt who said, ‘Well, if you have four girls like that, that’s a perfect quartet.’ And, so, that’s what we did, we were the music for the church.

Even though her father’s convictions brought her into a service capacity with the church, clearly, it was her father’s conversion at the hands of Billy
Graham that stands out as memorable and lasting. Their family was Methodist, and both parents had gone to a Methodist university on Methodist scholarships, but,

. . .what really happened is that, when I was in grade school, Billy Graham came to town and someone had invited my dad to. . .a series of rallies, and so my dad went and had a conversion experience. And what that meant for him, well, the way I experienced it is that my parents had always played cards and they had a lot of friends over and my father smoked at a certain time, and they gave up playing cards and gave up smoking. . .And, in the summer time, there was no Sunday School [at the Methodist church] and so my father felt very strongly about the children being in Sunday School, so, after the Billy Graham experience, he looked around for a place. You know, we didn’t leave the Methodist Church, but he looked around for a place for Sunday School for kids and there was a church not too far away . . .it was a Pentecostal Church.

This episode highlights another important element in Debra’s early life, her exposure to religious and economic diversity. In this regard, a few of the episodes highlighted above are relevant, in particular her experience at the Pentecostal church broadened her sense of her social milieu:

And, so, we went to the Pentecostal church, which to us was, I mean, I think we were kind of on the edge of our seats at times, because we were, you know, kind of very middle class Anglo, you know, Protestant, reserved sort of people, and there was a lot that went on in a Pentecostal church that. . .blew us away. . .[W]e saw. . .faith healings and we saw people fainting and we saw a lot of emotion, [and] speaking in tongues.

Based on her descriptions, this brush with Pentecostalism exposed her, albeit
temporarily, to social, economic, and religious diversity, something that foreshadows her generous understanding of adult ethical development. While her Pentecostal experience may be the most dramatic, it isn’t the end of Debra’s exposure to religious diversity. Her family eventually settled in the Presbyterian Church, and Debra remembers the prominence of the local Roman Catholic Church and School in her neighborhood: “. . .when I went to Junior High, we would pass the Catholic church and school on our way, there was an interesting kind of dynamic in that we had many Catholic friends, people in the neighborhood, [and] in the schools, but when John F. Kennedy was on the docket to be President, my father was absolutely positively strongly against him because he was Catholic.” Again, this exposure to the challenges of religious diversity, and, even more, living together in light of and in spite of these differences, set an important example to Debra of attitudes she would bring to her professional life.

Debra’s parents also had a habit of bringing missionaries home for dinner on Sundays. As she recounts, “One of the things I remember growing up is that my parents would bring people home for Sunday dinner and, often, it would be missionaries. So that was kind of interesting, for someone in a somewhat small world, um, remember missionaries coming home.

So much of Debra’s childhood activity was centered in and around the
church that, she says -- with a smile and much laughter, “I went to church so much that I actually have my quota. . .if there’s a certain number of services that everybody should have in their lifetime, I’ve made it.” I assumed this would signal a certain alienation from church life, but Debra, again, expressed deep appreciation for these early and active church experiences. These were times of togetherness and community that ultimately shaped Debra’s sense of the value of relationships in church life (as I’ll discuss in Chapter 5). Elaborating on this, Debra continues,

. . .we went to church every Sunday morning, and, of course, we had Sunday School. . .and then we went to church every Sunday evening, and, as I got older, we went to church every Wednesday evening because that was prayer meeting, and then I was in the choir, and, in those days my elementary school was across the street from the church. . .and we had, I believe, it was once a week children had a time in the school day for religious education. . .if you belonged to a church. . .within walking distance, you had, uh, release time. . .So church was kind of big. . .[it] played a positive role.

The sixties were coming to a close as Debra finished college and moved into her early career as a math teacher. She describes this period as a kind of ‘coming of age,’ as she discovered where her true passions would lead her. Her relationship with her parents continued to be formative during this period, but the social environment took prominence as she struggled with generational conflicts characteristic of the late 1960’s and early 1970’s.
Illustrating this shift of influence, Debra was, as she says, “kicked out of the Presbyterian Church,” something that marked genuine independence.

Toward the end of this part of our interview, Debra’s descriptions of her influences focus much less on her parents and social movements and much more on her colleagues and friends. Appropriately, this period of independence and coming-of-age seems to have culminated with her divorce and subsequent settlement into parish ministry. However, in the mean time, Debra developed a strong sense of herself as she became involved in and responded to the Vietnam War, race relations, and the burgeoning feminist movement. As I look closely at her descriptions of this time period (exemplified in the quote below), though, and particularly in light of her current perceptions of adult ethical development, Debra seems to possess a unique perspective that combines her childhood experiences with the relational emphasis of her mother and the principled perspective of her father. As she elaborated on her involvement in the social movements of the Vietnam era, she described herself less as a protester and much more as a teacher with a quiet passion for changing minds and living one’s principles. In her own words, she, “. . .tended to not be the kind of person that liked to go out in the streets yelling my perspective. . .So. . .I wasn’t a protester, in that sense, but the engagement was more through other means.” She continues her thought:
I think that my education. . .and cultural background, um, is attuned to looking at things from different perspectives, being in dialogue, being aware. . .that one single perspective doesn’t always say it all. . .I, too, did not feel that all you do is play around with perspectives and say everything is relative and that’s adequate, so, but, on the other hand, um, I find that even going way back to the days in Chicago, of worshipping with Reba Place and being involved with the Post American, I really wanted to be able to think through and have dialogue with people who differed from me, instead of the kind of confrontational [approach], where you’re not so much trying to understand and maybe influence someone else, you’re just sort of shouting at them, ‘you’re wrong, I’m right,’ and, you know, um ‘agree with me.’

Debra goes on to describe her approach to those social movements as “dialogical,” and this is an approach she has maintained into her current pastoral work. In her current work, Debra talks about right living and right relation as a matter of principle and integrity as one makes decisions about what is right and what is wrong, that is, decisions about ethics. Her approach seems shaped very much by the principles and integrity of her father, but also by the relational perspective of her mother. In discussing how her mother handled the tumult of the Vietnam era, Debra said,

---

1 Reba Place is an intentional Christian community in inner-city Chicago and Evanston, Illinois that started in 1957 and continues today. The Post-American was the forerunner publication of what is now published as Sojourners magazine. This was published by a different Christian community in Deerfield, Illinois, revolving around a theological student named Jim Wallis, that eventually became what is currently known as the Sojourners community in Washington, D.C., (the publishers of Sojourners magazine). To my knowledge, these communities are unrelated, except that Debra was involved with both during her time in the Chicago area.
for her the person was much more important than the perspective, in a way, it still is today. I mean, you know, we can have very different political perspectives, and we do, and religious perspectives, and yet, um, you know there’s a very strong sense of loving and caring for each other. . .and this is where things get complicated. . .if you asked her today, ‘should women be pastors?’, she might either say ‘no, I kind of don’t think so’, or ‘not really sure, but I’m not real comfortable with it’. But that her daughter is a pastor is OK.

For Debra, she seems to take from her father an emphasis on principle and consistency as guides for life, but, as you can see from the above quote, she seems to take from her mother, not a neglect of principle, but an overwhelming emphasis on relationships and right relations as guides for living.

The picture I get of Debra is focused on living with integrity, meaning that a life well-lived is a life of authenticity and consistency with respect to one’s actions, values, and beliefs: personal choices inspired and enforced not by artificial external standards, but by the movement of one’s own conscience. An example she provided for this type of life was the Assistant Pastor of the Presbyterian Church she eventually quit:

The assistant pastor was this really wonderful guy, we all really loved him and he loved us. And he came and explained to us one time that he was going to be going down south and joining a march. Now for us, this was completely outside the realm of our understanding. . .but he went down and he marched with Dr. King. . .But then he came back and he wasn’t boasting or anything, but kind of explained to us why it was he did that and he was. . .during that period of my life I really
thought of him as a model, an ethical model because he was. . .and you
know, when you’re working with kids that age, they can really sense a
fake, and, so, you know, he had personal integrity, personal humility to
him. I can even remember the time that, um, we were talking about
people on the streets who would ask for money and. . .I remember him
saying to us, well, what’s the difference between that person and us?
And we’d have this big conversation and he said, well, I want to tell
you, there but for the love of Christ go I. I mean it was very powerful
and he really meant it. So it was not terribly popular with the senior
minister that he went on that march, or that he came back and got the
youth interested in this.

Hiram

Hiram is a retired pastor who remains active in ministry with several
congregations in a midsize northeastern university community. He was born
and raised in a different northeastern city from his current location, in a very
urban context. The middle of five siblings, Hiram says he is the only one who
ventured beyond the city for his profession: “Well, I grew up. . . and went to
public school in the city, one of five children. I’m in the middle, I have two
older siblings and two younger; all of whom still live in the city.” He is still
very connected to his family, often talking about visits with them or using
them in anecdotes about something important in his own life or thought. For
example, as he discusses the importance of early family relationships in adult
ethical development, Hiram says, “. . .[I] think another important aspect of
ministry is really, somehow in an ongoing way, communicating to parents the
responsibility they have to their children. . .[because]. . .I grew up in a family that was filled with love and a mother who’s faith just, if you came anywhere near her, it had to transform you in some way. . .” As this quote illustrates, the centrality of family relationships for Hiram, as it was for Debra and as it was for all of my participants, signals an important conceptual thread of this study. Throughout my interviews with Hiram, he referred to his mother even more frequently than the rest of his family, often alluding to the powerful influence she had on him:

My mother was a very strong influence on my life. . .extremely, um, she was a woman. . .[with]. . .deep, deep faith and commitment to Christ and the church. It was more of a silent type of faith, she never really cornered any of her children, and dictated to them, or, you know, was dogmatic or aggressive in terms of what she believed in and how she felt that we should react to that. But she was a woman of prayer and, when I was in high school, she told me that the Lord informed her that I was called into the ministry.

This quote is significant because it highlights a consistent theme in Hiram’s thoughts about ethical development in a spiritual context: the significance of love, relationships, and catharsis in shaping a genuinely ethical life. To highlight these threads, Hiram discusses what he believes makes the difference between a person who not only survives the challenges of a “desert experience” (as Hiram refers to times of spiritual emptiness and uncertainty, such as severe health problems, very difficult marital problems, or an
overwhelming sense of meaninglessness or loss of purpose), but also grows from such experiences:

I know people that have gone through a lot of what I would call, in one way or another, a desert experience. . .and they never changed. In other words, in that experience, they didn’t respond to that in a spiritual way that led to any spiritual regeneration or spiritual formation. . .I often think to myself, ‘how can somebody come close to death, be in a situation where they have to, in some way, shape, or form, hear the word of God, hear the Holy Spirit talking to them, and just throw-up a wall and not respond?’ They’re not responding to the desert experience, and, um, the only answer I have for that, and I don’t know whether it’s a good answer, I think along the way, beginning at a very young age, I experienced God in different ways. . .and I experienced God because of the foundations that I had as a child.

As these quotations show (and as I will develop further in chapter 5), I interpret the core of Hiram’s perceptions of ethical development as revolving around authentic loving relationships, whether the relationship is parental, spousal, or even the Holy Spirit of the Christian Trinity. As indicated above, these relationships plant seeds and have a redemptive quality that make the difference between someone who wallows in self-doubt and self-destructive meaninglessness and someone who masters his/her weakness to become a better person.

It was clear that Hiram had deep experiences with this phenomenon. Having served ten years as a prison chaplain in a high security facility, he had witnessed what he described as true evil as well as the converse, true
redemption.

It’s been a long journey, and, I think, influences on me. . .a lot of the inmates at the prison, who certainly deserved to be incarcerated – no excuses here for what they did – but so many of them. . .just were witnesses to me not only in terms of their faith and endurance in such a difficult environment. . .but when I was going through all my marital problems, ‘course the word gets out in prison right away, they were coming over to me, to try to console, to council me. I mean people that were in for some pretty heavy crimes. . .And, uh, you know, you [also] come to realize that there are people in this world who are just ugly people or they choose a criminal life style for one reason or another, greed, or just anger, or whatever. . .but every once in a while you come across individuals that are just different than that even. . .the evil just pours out of them.

For Hiram, it often sounded like the truly evil individual might be beyond redemption, but, as he and I talked during one of our interviews, he told an amazing story that cuts the other way: Hiram’s replacement at the Penitentiary didn’t last very long and the institution soon found itself facing a potential execution without a chaplain. For some obvious and other not so obvious reasons, a chaplain is required for these unfortunate events and the Institution asked Hiram to return to serve as Chaplain for this execution. As Hiram recounts the story, he didn’t sleep for the 36 hours leading up to the execution because the inmate needed him to be present. As they prayed together and talked, it became clear to Hiram that the inmate had a deep, pure, and authentic faith: he didn’t fear death; in fact he became a calming presence to the anxious professionals buzzing around him in preparation for
the lethal injection. The inmate had become a Christian in prison and told Hiram that he was the only pastor he’d ever had. Hiram describes the inmate’s faith as so strong, that the death chamber – the darkest of all dark places – seemed heavy, not with the shroud of execution, but with the presence of God. Hiram says that, after the inmate’s heart stopped beating and everyone did what they had to do, there was unanimous agreement that God was there.

So it isn’t at all clear, in terms of ethical development, if someone is ever irredeemable. Again, for Hiram, the turning point rests in these relationships. Speaking of the source of ethics as well as this turning point, Hiram focused on a relationship with Christ, but, this particular relationship is also emblematic of the type of human relationship Hiram would call redemptive:

It’s like the old saying, you can’t prevent a bird from flying over your head, but you can prevent a bird from building a nest in your hair, and I think that relates directly to the holy spirit within us, the temptations are gonna come right past us, but when you’re rooted in spirit and you’re walking in the spirit you have the power, you have the love of Christ, now you don’t walk very well, you know you can use your free will in another way, but, uh, I think, for the most part, people that are really rooted in Christ and walking in the spirit, although there are times and moments and brief periods where they get off-course, they bring it back on the other way. Because God is so real in their lives.
For Hiram, these turning points were not just points of detached observation, he had lived the redemption of which he spoke. In particular, Hiram emphasized his transition from police work – he had advanced to the rank of detective – to full-time Christian ministry as a long, difficult process.

So, you know, almost immediately, I jumped into the deep water: the hours were extremely long, but I got caught up in. . .the marriage was already weak and I got caught-up in this sub-culture, uh, this police culture. Uh, when you’re a detective, you have very little supervisions over you. There might be two or three detectives assigned to a homicide and you just, you know, you’re just given money by the county and, you know, you’re given some guidance, but, essentially, you’re on your own. . .and you report back to the chief once a week or something. . .and during that time my life really went down the hill, really went down the tubes: I began to drink a lot and staying up all hours of the day and night with the guys I was working with. In fact, none of them went home until wo or three in the morning. We lived in the bars, and, um, that’s where our information was coming from and we were street people, not much different from the people that we were arresting. That’s important because, uh, that brought me to a crossroads in my life. I was in my early thirties and I just felt as though my life was falling apart. I often thought about my mother and her influence, her expectations to a point and I felt like I was failing her, um, like my life was completely off-track, and I recall one evening, I was working late, and I came back to the courthouse. I was the only one there, I had some reports to do; so here’s a detective’s office with 15 desks and I’m the only one in there and it was probably ten o’clock at night, and, uh, I went into a state of depression. I can’t say that I was suicidal. . .but certainly I was looking at my life with disdain and, you know, just wondering at that point, who am I, what have I done to my life, where am I headed. And I was sitting there, almost in a trance, I remember, and I heard somebody singing and the sound kept getting louder, and, here, as I was looking out into the hallway there was an old black gentleman, a janitor who was pushing one of these wide mops and he was singing, and he was singing Amazing Grace. And I just sat there and as he passed the door he looked over at me and he waved – like this – it was almost, it was surreal and he kept singing this amazing grace, and, I, um, sat there and I thought amazing grace,
amazing grace, amazing grace, and everything seemed to come together for me, my upbringing, not only the interest, but the need for a spiritual life and how I wandered off the path, way off the path, and at that point I really had to look at myself and I almost knew that, although police work does not lead people into sin and, uh, a lifestyle that you know is damaging to other people. But, in my case, I came under an influence and it took me in the wrong direction, and, uh, my marriage at that point was down the tubes, um, you know, I had really made a lot of mistakes and I knew at that point that I had to get out of police work. That, uh, I was either too weak and couldn’t handle the temptations, or whatever, but I had to change my lifestyle completely if I was going to survive and do anything with my life.

As Hiram and I discussed this cathartic, and yet surreal, moment, I had the impression that his memory of the black janitor is of an angelic character, a person sent by God to help rescue him. Hiram didn’t express this sense explicitly, rather, his tone and demeanor told me that he thought this was a moment of divine intervention in his life. Also, significant in Hiram’s story is the presence of his mother and the reality of that relationship in light of his mistakes and lifestyle. Out of this catharsis, Hiram emerged determined to change his life, and he did. Hiram left police work to become a Park Ranger for the State, “. . .it was a simple, very basic job, nothing technical about it, mostly a PR job during the summer,” and kind of a maintenance and security job in the winter.

I don’t know how long I was at the park, it was the first year. . .and I remember sitting in this pick-up truck in this parking lot and all of a sudden this feeling of being overwhelmed with all the things that I had done, um, feeling guilt, feeling separated from God, feeling lost, it was
just like I was in a mist, and in the midst of all these emotions and I literally started crying.

Hiram refers to this period time as his desert experience. He continues, “. . .I remember that tears were falling down my face and I prayed, I said, Lord, I need help. . .and I felt a peace come over me.”

Over the next several years, Hiram joined a church, and began studying for an undergraduate degree. The pastor of his church proved extremely influential: as Hiram says, “He became a mentor for me, um, kind of took my mother’s place.”

Looking forward to Hiram’s contemporary perceptions of ethical development in a spiritual context, his catharsis and desert experience are very telling. As I’ll discuss in more depth in chapter 5, Hiram believes the prime movers of adult ethical development are these periods of challenge, temptation, and reflection, as well as the loving relationships that help us grow out of these desert experiences.
Joshua

Joshua had a Midwestern upbringing, encompassing both rural and urban experiences as his father changed jobs during his adolescence, forcing a move from the country to the city. Joshua describes the change as looming large in his formative years:

My father’s job change was very significant because we moved from a nice, comfortable place where everything made sense to me to...[the city]...where very little made sense, including my father’s job — he used to work from home in the manse, which was right next to the church, and I knew what he did. I knew he was respected and I thought what he did was important — people listened to him and thought he was smart. In...[the city]...he would leave in the morning, come home at night, and I had no idea what he did and he didn’t talk about it. My parent’s relationship became rocky. Eventually, my father left the church altogether to sell real estate — later in life.

Joshua’s father was a pastor and, as he mentions above, later changed focus and location to become an administrator at the regional level within the denomination. Even though this change clearly impacted Joshua, in retrospect he seems to understand it as part of the slow degradation of his parent’s relationship. As he indicates, this change in occupational focus continued as his father, though still a committed Christian, left professional church work to sell real estate. Joshua’s mother stayed at home, but had been trained as a Christian educator, which remains her passion — she
continued her schooling later in life and is now headmaster at a prestigious private school. As Joshua explains, “. . .they met in college and church and my father went on to attend [a Midwestern seminary]. It was a Midwestern upbringing, both of my parents were from the Midwest.” His emphasis on “Midwestern” sparked my interest, so I asked him to elaborate:

My father and mother both exemplified the Puritan/Protestant work ethic, but my mother lived it to an unhealthy degree in that work could never be fun – there was always a strict separation between work and play, and work always had to be completed before any fun could be had. She grew up on a farm in [the Midwest] – her father farmed for 100 years; he lived to 102 and worked literally until the day he died – and this work ethic was a necessity in farm life: you had to finish your work before any play could happen because your life and livelihood depended on it.

What I took from this comment was that there is an association for Joshua between the Midwest, or at least his Midwestern childhood, and this work ethic; a work ethic that seems at once very important to him, but also a source of some unhappy memories. As his comments indicate, his memory is of both parents as hard-working, but his mother perhaps to an unhealthy degree. Ultimately, as I think about Joshua’s perceptions of adult ethical development in a spiritual context – which I’ll discuss more below – his memories of a familial work ethic seem influential.

Joshua’s parents divorced when he was nearly finished with college,
and he focused mostly on his father when describing his early choices regarding school and employment. “He was fun-loving and hard-working, and we have developed a very close relationship over the years.” His relationship with his mother isn’t as close, although he emphasized how much he has learned about himself through the evolving relationships he has with his parents. His mother, though, seems to have presented the greatest challenge to him in terms of his self-understanding:

My mother was always attentive and present; she loved children and studied to work with kids. . .I have a lot of qualities like her: her strong moral compass was guided by a powerful concern for others. She always needed to do things right for God’s sake, not just for the sake of doing it well.

This particular comment is also very meaningful for Joshua’s current perceptions of adult ethical development. He seems to understand how his mother’s influence, in particular needing to do things right for God’s sake, has impacted his current perspective in both the positive sense, i.e. his sense of living authentically and being who we’re meant to be in the eyes of God, and the negative sense, i.e. his sense of wanting to move beyond the normative social pressures that tend to govern our ethical choices. This sensitive and reflective conceptual engagement with his mother illustrates some important aspects of Joshua’s perspective, generally speaking: throughout our time together, Joshua’s depth of self-understanding, self-
reflection, and emotional presence was remarkable. Accordingly, he understands and articulates the complicated relationship his current perceptions have to his mother’s influence.

Even more, there is a certain irony, given the work ethic in his upbringing, that Joshua chose to make play his profession after college: He played a sport at a high level in college and continued this path after graduation, becoming a college-level coach. Even after having decided to pursue ministry as a profession, Joshua would still take play very seriously:

I, uh, used to coach and athletics was a huge part of my life growing up. . .and, uh, I just can’t go more than a couple days without needing to sweat. So I bike to work on occasion, I’m a member of the [gym] downtown. . .and I lift weights and get on the treadmill or run around [the]. . .park. . .or I play basketball. . ., and, um, you know, at this point in my life it, sometimes there are moments where it feels like it’s too important, that, if – I was joking with someone the other day – that if I had put the energy that I’ve put into that over the years into something else, I might have changed the world.

Again, this kind of self-reflection was typical of my discussions and observations of Joshua. Growing up, Joshua described three pillars in his life: faith, athletics, and music. It was clear that faith was not just an abstract concept for his family: faith was something to be lived and realized through how you live -- the choices you make. Social concerns are wrapped-up with faith. “How you vote is a faith issue,” Joshua declared. Elaborating
on this comment, he told a story about his grandmother’s understanding of abortion, which has less to do with right choices and wrong choices, and everything to do with the health of people. He remembered, as well, Vietnam-era conscientious objectors that his father would counsel and care for, saying, “Grace is tangible through Dad. . .he is loving and non-judgmental.” Of course, as the child of a pastor, church attendance had always been taken for granted – it was part of life. Even more, though, Joshua’s parents emphasized that church was about life: your gifts are from God, so what you do with those gifts is of tremendous importance. Joshua mentioned this in the context of his decision to stop coaching professionally for the sake of a pastoral vocation. His mother was very proud of his ordination, which he juxtaposed to her difficulties with his sister’s professional struggles. At this, Joshua explained, “Appearances matter, appearances are important to her.” His father, on the other hand, seemed to anticipate Joshua’s occupational shift. As Joshua described, his father emphasized the gifts he has for effective ministry and thought it was a good occupational fit.

Joshua’s perceptions on adult ethical development in a spiritual context bear-out his memories of his relationships with his parents and his upbringing in complicated, but direct ways. In particular, two emphases seem important in this regard: 1) Ethics is not about choices and behavior, it is about wanting to love God and wanting to be loved; 2) Conformity and fear
of vulnerability are the primary blocks to consistent, authentic, and real experiences of love.

Joshua clarifies this first emphasis when he explains how ethical lapses are really expressions of our need for spiritual connection with God through loving relationships with other people.

The real point is not praying the hours, it’s getting to the point where you don’t have to pray the hours, where your life is a prayer, and you’re living it constantly connected, you know, with another that you’re with or with the world around you, but the idea is that all of that is God. . .and God is always present in us and how do we stayed tuned to that, and again, I don’t know how to do that, other than I believe it’s part of my calling as a human being, that’s sort of, probably, what it means to be human, you know. . .What was helpful to me was. . .that even the things that I feel, um, drawn to in, in, sometimes a healthy way, sometimes a not healthy way. . .it doesn’t matter whether you see it as good or bad or whether the culture sees it as good or bad, but that desire, that seduction, is partly descriptive of our need for God or our ultimate desire to be love. . .[F]or me it just, kind of, helped me stop beating myself up and it also has helped as a reminder that when I feel myself drawn to something that feels distracting, to stop and remember, well, what is it I really want? Is it three more Hershey’s kisses or is it, like, just wanna be loved, I want love.

Echoing his father’s graciousness and his grandmother’s focus on health rather than the politics of abortion, Joshua articulates a strong relational ethical position:

. . .I think that it gets to the question of what’s right now and what is sin, what is, what’s ultimately important to us. . .[C]ertain behaviors
are not as important as we may, as I think we, act. . .Like, if you avoid that behavior, you’re a good person. . .I think in this context that the behaviors are just, they’re reminders that we, in our tradition, that we need God, that. . .there’s something bigger, there’s something more important, there’s something more viable, and that we can place too much emphasis on the wrong things. . .And in doing that, we can do something that’s, that’s, um, destructive.

Joshua argues that “. . .we miss the boat by thinking the behavior’s the problem,” when, instead, we should be looking at what it really means to be human and, once we start to understand that, how can we start living out of that understanding. Joshua continues,

You know, Paul talked about this spirit praying in us, and I thing that’s what’s happening even when we’re not aware of it, but we’re invited to be aware of it, and when we’re aware of it, that’s a step towards aligning ourselves with it. And when we do that, we’re more truly who we were meant to be and then we start living out of that and that’s where I think the ethical expression comes about that we then can make some decisions based on love, about, ‘Is this loving?’

As I look back on my discussion with Joshua, this is where his second major emphasis begins to emerge. His critique of the behavioral focus of our ethical judgment really puts us in a gray and fuzzy area, a fact he appreciates and thinks is essential to ethical development:

. . .that’s a big leap for our society, I think, and for me too, you know, for all of us. It’s kind of a, ‘Well, how do you know?’ It’s more nebulous and it’s a gray area, and it requires some forgiveness and some patience. . .It’s risky. . .It requires vulnerability. It’s about trusting. . .about being vulnerable.
But clearly this vulnerability and openness to risk is not culturally something we’re habituated to. Many times in our conversations, Joshua would compare things that are culturally acceptable, but ethically and spiritually bad for us on the one hand, and culturally unacceptable, but ethically and spiritually good for us, on the other. For example, he compared some of the more social reasons people may attend church, e.g. it looks good, it’s what’s expected, they have convenient programs for our kids, to some more substantive reasons such as getting to really know and love people in the context of the Christian Gospel. Another great example is the following lengthy statement about Jesus:

[Jesus is]...one who was unassuming, unpretentious, almost, you know, he wasn’t noticed by most people. He must’ve walked through and a few people were following this guy is incredible. The other people were like, who’s that loser over there, or they didn’t even know he was there...There were only like twelve guys that really hung out with him after all that time, and that’s pretty minimal compared to what was going on, and yet we’ve aggrandized it so much that I think we’ve missed something about...the kind of humility that he possessed and that he calls us to...And Jesus was a loser, if we’re gonna be honest about it. For the way we live and what we express and expect of life, he was not successful, and yet we say he’s our Lord and Savior, and yet we worship winning...I think spiritual growth involves a willingness to lose, to fail, and to discover that, in our failure, in our dying, we are born again...that there’s something that’s not the end of the story, as we think it is. And I think we play it safe to avoid losing and when we do that we’re not fully who we’re meant to be. I mean certainly we don’t give anything near what we’re capable of giving to the world. We’re just kind of going through life cautiously, you know, and Jesus let it go, and he changed lives and people were
healed, and they felt loved, and beautiful things happened, and they killed him for it. You know, as people of faith, we know that’s not the end of the story – here we are talking about it 2000 years later, and if we really, really, really believe that, would we be willing to take more risks?

This is a really clear statement of Joshua’s second emphasis, that conformity and fear of vulnerability are the primary blocks to consistent, authentic, and real experiences of love, which, consequently, stunts our ethical development.

At these moments in our conversations -- because there were several in which he provided clear expressions of this phenomenon – I would think of his mother, for whom, he emphasized, “appearances are important.”

As our conversations developed over time, it became clear that these emphases really do guide Joshua’s practice of ministry as well as his efforts at helping adults grow ethically.

Where it becomes real, I guess, as I see it, is in where people are willing to make a commitment to spend time together, and, um, and it happens, I see it in our youth program where we have adults who have committed themselves to working with these young people for years, and there’s a core group that’s been doing it literally for years together. . .And in that process, it’s brought out, you know, um, it’s been challenging because we’ve had to work together and fail together, and I think the idea of vulnerability is the place where it becomes real, where people are, they’re so committed, that they’re willing to risk being themselves and learning and growing together, and it’s out of that. . .that there’s a deep level of commitment, there’s a deep willingness to be vulnerable, to expose ourselves, to see our weaknesses as well as our strengths, and, and, . . .central to all that is a faith commitment that we’re here because God loves us and because
we love God and we’re willing to love others.

For Joshua, adult ethical development occurs in situations where faith becomes real. In the setting of a Christian congregation, this happens mostly in small groups where people can really get to know each other: “. . .that is where it’s real, you know, and I think, again, uh, you know, that that’s the challenge for the church, is why can’t we all be like that, that’s what I sometimes think, . . .and I think that small group ministries in a church this size are critical. . .And, you know, a lot of people will choose not to do that, I’m convinced it’s to their detriment if they don’t.”

Seth

Seth was born and raised in a suburban environment in a rural area of the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. As he expresses in the quote below, his home life was very stable and supportive, something he referred to many times as having tremendous impact on him. He said the same of his local community, which he described as a typical baby-boomer town:

There were 31 kids in my neighborhood. . .I was right in the middle. . .in terms of age. In the neighborhood, I was just accepted, I was one of the guys, one of the kids, and I had a wonderful time, and my neighborhood taught me much in terms of how to live, how to love, how to fight, how to compromise, how to get along. And my parents, my family, just augmented all that and supported all that, and gave me a wonderful secure base to go from. . .
He emphasized this sense of security because he endured a significant amount of social ostracism and bullying in his early childhood. For reasons of confidentiality, I won’t discuss the causes of these challenges, but, suffice it to say, Seth was accepted by his neighborhood friends and was not easily accepted by his new acquaintances in school. He remembers first grade as being particularly difficult in this regard:

...any way, when I went to first grade, my mother had, I remember, said, ‘this might be a little bit difficult for you’ cause there are going to be kids who you don’t know, and most of them don’t know you...and they’ll be observing [you] and they’ll be commenting about that, and they’ll be letting you know that you’re different. So, you know, they did the best they could to prepare me for that, but nothin’s gonna prepare you for that except to do it and to go through it...I didn’t understand what they meant...When I went to first grade, it was an eye opener: I wasn’t used to being questioned or judged just because of just walking into a room without them even knowing who I was; I mean kids can be extremely curious and it can come-off as being cruel to people who are on the other end of that curiosity, and it was very difficult for me. I was a very active kid, I loved recess, I loved to go out and play, but I hated it in school because, in the classroom it was controlled, [but] at recess I’d go out and people would just get around me, make a circle, and point and yell.

Seth describes these experiences as having a tremendous impact on him at the time, but even more as he grew into adolescence and young adulthood, reflecting back on all that had happened. In particular, he describes a sense of deep sadness at the emotional shock he was forced to endure, but also
tremendous gratitude for the support his family and neighborhood friends provided:

So, you know, I would get into fights, and it would just make me sad, and the kids in my neighborhood that knew me, they would defend me, and I never asked for that, but they would, and a big memory I have, and it made me feel good, but it also made me feel, not guilty, just a little sheepish, uh, if you got in a fight on the playground you were sent in, and there was this bench. . .that they would place you on, and, when recess was over. . .everybody else who was filing in from recess had to go by you. So, they would sort of look at you and realize you got in trouble. Honest, honest. . .many days in the week, many days in the week, I filed past one of my neighborhood kids who were fighting because of me, and it was difficult. But it also made an extreme loyalty and love.

He describes having a similar experience with his sister who was seven years older than he was: “. . .[W]hen I was going through this difficult time in first grade. . .my mother and dad would pray with me. . . and my sister. . .I felt bad for my sister because she was 13 and I was 6, and the whole focus of the family was on me, and God bless her! I have a very close relationship [with her].” Ultimately, though, he points to his parents and his church as creating a strong, stable, supportive environment that enabled him to feel an unbounded sense of security:

So, it was a wonderful, loving family, they supported me and made me feel so secure, so secure, I think, that’s, to me, a key feeling -- so secure in the love of my family, and then, there was my Christian family. So, I was raised in the church from early on, early on, I mean, I don’t remember not being in the church. . .I can tell you when my
baptismal day was, and I was raised in the church and I was made to feel so secure: if my parents loved me, and Jesus loved me, to me, that’s the basis for much for me. The security I had because of the foundation my parents laid for me, and the love they had for me and the love that Jesus has for me, It makes me feel secure enough to risk.

This last line is central for Seth: his theology, his core beliefs about what makes life worth living, and, more to the point, his perceptions about adult ethical development in a spiritual context all share the common foundation of being secure enough to risk. In particular, there are two primary foci of Seth’s perceptions in this regard: 1) A sense of existential and emotional security is the source of an individual’s spiritual and ethical development, and this security comes from God; 2) The evidence of spiritual and ethical development is humble service and living a more selfless life.

As I observed Seth in the context of his congregation and worship, it became clear how much his life is permeated with the ideas he discussed during our interviews. His energy and enthusiasm are infectious, but, even more, he is very authentic -- he seems to be an embodiment of what he believes. When I visited Seth’s church to attend his worship service, the bulletin on this particular Sunday morning had a cover quoting a verse from the Gospel of Luke: “All who humble themselves will be exalted” (Chapter 18, verse 14), which reflects Seth’s theology, something also very evident in the sermon he delivered. The heart of his message was building trust in God, a
shift from our usual pattern of dependency on nothing but ourselves. Self-sufficiency is our usual God, something we worship every day of the week, not just Sunday. We pride ourselves on our self-sufficiency, seeking security in alarm systems, insurance policies, and pension plans, but the real need expressed through this drive for security is a need for love and help. This notion connects very concretely to Seth’s overall perceptions of adult ethical development in which sinfulness, or behavior that separates one from God’s presence, is the source of our need for greater and greater self-sufficiency.

The solution to our ethical problem is devotion to humble service out of love and appreciation for the gifts God has provided for us. Perpetual faith only in ourselves – in self-sufficiency – is like chasing the wind, an effort in futility that only leaves us feeling empty and tired. Seth echoes in his sermon what he has discussed during our interviews: with faith in a God who provides all the security we need, our future is secure: we are liberated from the rat race of self-sufficiency – life lived in service to ourselves, a self-centered life – to pursue another centered life of humble service. For Seth, this kind of faith enables ethical development. Without this kind of faith, we are just one more cog in the wheel, living a life for which humans were not meant.
Chapter Summary

The stories of these four individuals are the heart of the story I am telling about adult ethical development in Christian congregations. Their stories have remarkable parallels that express significant meaning for their individual perceptions of the phenomenon of adult ethical development, which is why I have invested so much time and effort unpacking their personal histories, as well as how those personal histories form the fertile soil out of which grew their perceptions. Across the board, early childhood experiences in communities, churches, and schools, relationships with siblings, friends, and parents, and personal challenges had direct bearing on each individual’s perceptions of adult ethical development. The next chapter will draw-out how these stories coalesce into a recognizable pattern of themes that together paint an intricate portrait of the phenomenon of adult ethical development in a spiritual context.
Chapter 5

The Lived Experience of Adult Ethical Development

Introduction

As this study progressed, clear patterns emerged in the data, and with each successive interview and subsequent analysis of that interview data, my sense of the data was confirmed with greater strength. As I hope to illustrate and explain in the coming pages, my participants provide an interesting and non-traditional picture – non-traditional for the field of ethics and studies of ethical development, of adult ethical development in a spiritual context.

In analyzing the themes that emerged from the data in this study, I’ve drawn-out two overarching themes that get at the heart of pastors’ lived experience of adult ethical development. These broad themes include: 1) the integrity of spiritual and ethical development; and 2) the relational nature of adult ethical development in a spiritual context. Out of these broad themes, several sub themes are fundamental to describing the phenomenon. The sub-themes for theme 1 (the integrity of spiritual and ethical development) include: a) the nature of spiritual development; b) the nature of ethical development; c) indicators of ethical development; and d) best practices for
ethical development. The sub-themes for theme 2 (the relational nature of adult ethical development in a spiritual context) include: a) the centrality of the desert experience; b) relationships that matter; and c) relationships give us value because they teach us to love. In the sections that follow, I will first explain and elaborate a broad, primary theme, to be followed by the subthemes that form the substance of that particular broad theme.

**Theme One: The Integrity of Spiritual and Ethical Development**

This broad theme was mentioned by every participant and, so, was addressed, literally, dozens of times throughout the interview process. More significantly, though, is that this theme seemed to be woven throughout the participants’ comments on other subjects so that it formed an almost assumed foundation of other important ideas about ethical development. In general, the term spiritual was central to their perceptions of adult ethical development in that ethical development was either part and parcel of spiritual development, or would grow out of spiritual development.

Most commonly, the perception is that an ethically mature person, or someone who has attained a high level of ethical growth is someone who also exhibits the traits of a spiritually mature person, or someone who has
achieved high levels of spiritual growth. As Debra describes ethical luminaries in her life – people serving as role models for her, it is clear that spiritual growth is assumed as well:

You know, you think in days past, in some church circles, um, there’s a rigidness about it that neither of these people that I mention had. They were not judgmental of other people, they weren’t hard on themselves, they had a, you know, a kind of harmony with others and with life. . .[S]o you start off with the premise that – and I think this is a very Christian way of looking at things – you start with the premise that you have been the recipient of mercy, and, so, there’s a sense of gratitude for that, and, so, because you have been the recipient of mercy and you know how wonderful that is, you want to extend that to the next person. . .And for some people, that might seem a little less directive ‘cause you have to really think about it and you have to work on it, and talk with others and it’s not always clear. You don’t absolutely know in every situation exactly what are the things that, [for example], make for peace, but you’re challenged to do that, and you try to do that, and I would call that ethical. . .My ethics are the beatitudes and being merciful as God in heaven has been merciful to you: if that is an ethical foundational principle in a sense, it’s also very much of a faith principle. . .[I]f I’m talking about that in terms of one’s faith development, um, that would be as comfortable to me as saying, ‘Well, it’s also in terms of ethical development, out of learning how to become more merciful.’ And, of course, the premise is always of understanding oneself as having been the recipient of mercy. So, in my understanding of ethics. . .these are not two different kinds of journeys.

As my interviews progressed, it became very clear that the relationship between ethical development and spiritual development was very close for my participants, which also revealed some interesting subtleties in their perceptions of how such development happens. For example, Joshua captured
some of the subtleties of the phenomenon that Debra described above; he provided a nice description of how this parallel development of spirituality and ethics occurs:

And Jesus, earlier, says that God already knows what we need before we ask, and then he gives us this prayer, but, when I think of prayer, I think of it as not simply that but as a relationship, that this is the form of a relationship that we have with God that is about communion and community as well as communication, and that it’s not simply a dialogue or a monologue as we usually make it out to be. But, even more, it’s simply a presence to God and our being willing to listen as well as speak. And in that sense, when I think of Paul saying, ‘Pray without ceasing,’ to me the only way we can do that is if our life becomes prayer and, if there’s something about that relationship with God that is 24/7, it’s gotta be, you know, that cannot simply be a conscious verbal expression. . .You know and I know that there are some monks that try to do that: you pray, I’ll go to sleep, and I’ll pray when you go to sleep; but I think of it more as something built. Paul talked about this spirit praying in us, that I think it’s happening even when we’re not aware of it, but we’re invited to be aware of it. And when we’re aware of it, that that’s a step towards aligning ourselves with it, and, and, that, when we do, we’re more truly who we’re meant to be, and then we start living out of that and that’s where I think the ethical expression comes about, that we, then, can make some decisions based on love, about, ‘Is this loving?’

For Joshua and Debra, the integrity of spiritual and ethical development is expressed best as we witness how the values shaping our ethics are structured and generated by the depth of our spiritual life: a deeper, more mature, and well-developed spiritual life necessarily brings with it positive changes in behavior, i.e. ethical development. Hiram echoes this perspective
as well when he compares people he thought were spiritually remarkable with people he thought were ethically remarkable:

What were their ethics, well, I can’t imagine their ethics being separated from where they were spiritually. . .to me, it was all one. Uh, they would never want to do anything to hurt anybody, I mean, they always wanted to do what was proper. Of course, you know, older folks, they grew up in a different culture and mindset compared to things today. So they, I’m sure they gravitated back to those reference points when they made decisions about things, or how they perceived things, but, uh, you know. . .you meet a lot of wonderful people in the world, uh, Christians, non-Christians, but, I guess people that are exceptionally spiritual and loving, the Mother Theresa’s of the world. . .they’re the exception. . .they’re the minority. You’re talking about a level of spiritual growth and faith, and I think you know that knowledge is important, but knowledge without faith and a love of Christ is for what? I mean there are seminary professors that have a lot of knowledge, they have an interest in religion. . .but do they have faith and love of Christ in their current lives. I would say that these women probably had a limited knowledge in terms of theological terms. . .but they had that childlike faith in Christ’s love for them. That, that just, uh, transformed their hearts into loving people.

For Hiram, the women he was referring to lived remarkable lives because they were spiritually “off the charts,” as he would say. In the quote above, he clearly recognizes that their ethical perspectives were shaped by their socio-economic and socio-historical background, but, even with this recognition, he emphasizes that the real force in shaping and guiding their ethical perspectives was their relationship with God. It was transformative. To explore this a bit further, Hiram’s statement above indicates that clearly
these women would have made ethical decisions regardless of their spiritual condition because they were raised a certain way and had experienced certain things that made them ethical people. The key connection, though, between their spiritual lives and their ethical lives appears to be an intangible value-added that takes a good person and transforms him/her into a loving person, loving because s/he recognizes that s/he is truly loved by God.

Seth elaborates on this important distinction – the transformative aspect of the correlation between spiritual development and ethical development – in a very straightforward and clear way. Discussing how good ethics are developed in people, Seth says:

I think that’s as smoke follows fire, good ethics follow that foundation I’m talking about. Don’t get me wrong, I think pagan people, agnostic, atheistic people, humanistic people who don’t believe in the scripture, don’t believe in Jesus at all, don’t believe in God at all, can be very moral, very moral, and that’s fine. . .But I think Christian people who live good ethics have a life indicative of good ethics. To me it has to be as smoke follows fire, it has to be following the good news that they’ve heard about Jesus in their lives. They help the little old lady across the street, they keep the commandments, they do all that good stuff because Jesus first loved them. . . in the Christian life [ethics and spirituality] are related. . .good ethical decisions follow spiritual development, I’ve said that that’s true, I think, for Christians. In my experience and the experience of people in the congregations I’ve served,. . .I’ve never seen a person who moves from one place to another place in their spiritual development, in their faith journey, deepening their faith, I’ve never seen that happen without also a change in ethics. I don’t mean they become, all of a sudden they’re a
bad person become a good person, I don’t mean that at all, just more selfless, more humble. . . I see that all the time. I believe if there is a spiritual development and a strengthening faith journey, ethics will change.

Interestingly, Seth highlights the importance of gratitude and humility, much like Hiram. For now, this distinction highlights the qualitative difference in the motivations supporting one’s ethical decisions: Christians do good things because they are loved and want to show love, and this relationship establishes a strong correlation between ethical and spiritual development that represented a resounding theme throughout my interviews. This theme, though, begs many questions, the first of which concerns the participants’ understandings of spiritual development. I will unpack their perceptions of this phenomenon below, trying to demonstrate that it is central to describing and developing the notion that, for my participants, there is close integrity of ethical and spiritual development. This theme, of course, is a partial contribution to understanding their perceptions of adult ethical development in a spiritual context.

*The Nature of Spiritual Development*

As illustrated and explained above, even though spiritual and ethical development were occasionally conflated throughout my interviews with, and observations of, participants, ultimately the overwhelming sense was that these two phenomena are integral to each other rather than simply the same.
As I'll describe below, clearly, a unique and independent phenomenon called spiritual development emerged. At the heart of spiritual development is change, but this doesn’t differentiate it from ethical development, which also centered on notions of change -- as I'll describe in the following section. The difference really centers on the motivation driving one’s behavior in any given situation as well as the pangs of conscience in the wake of one’s behavior in any given situation. Hiram unpacks this difference in the following quote:

You know, we all know the difference between right and wrong. . .I mean, that’s a given, and where does that come from? Um, I think that’s a gift from God, your conscience, your sense of morality, um, I firmly believe that the Holy Spirit – although the Holy Spirit is unable to reside in many people -- the Holy Spirit moves upon everybody, trying to speak to their hearts, speak to their conscience. Um, I think some movement of the Spirit in the world, that lays the groundwork really for our ethics and what we perceive to be right and wrong. Um, you know, in my life, whether focusing on the specific teachings of Christ or thinking of God’s Word in a general sense, um, my ethics are really rooted in the scriptures. . .That doesn’t mean that apart from the scriptures I don’t know right and wrong, and I don’t know what’s ethical in a particular situation. I mean, if I were a business person, I’d know that, even if I were an atheist, that I shouldn’t be cheating somebody. Well, where does that come from? Does that float through the air? Or is that from a book that I read, or, or whatever, um, I think that is the movement of the Holy Spirit upon people, and I know it’s difficult to make delineations here, but, once you become a Christian, once you open up your heart in faith to Christ, and allow the Spirit into your life, then your sense of morality and ethics becomes so much stronger. For example, we all mess up; I mess up, we all do. The difference I think, when you’re a Christian, is that God’s Spirit is so rooted in your life, His Word is so real, that when I am curt to
somebody or I flash some sense of temper, something, I’m convicted right away. . .not with a hammer, but with the voice of love.

This is a complicated passage with many important messages about Hiram’s perceptions of ethical development, but, for our purposes right now, he is indicating that, for those willing and able to accept the movement of the Holy Spirit, i.e. those with some spiritual openness and maturity, the motivation to be ethical is fundamentally changed. The compulsion of conscience isn’t driven by self-interest (as in, “I’ll treat others well because I might need a favor from them at some point in the future.”) or even by notions of human rights (as in, “each person deserves to be treated with respect simply because they possess the freedom and dignity worthy of sentient creatures). Rather, one’s conscience is guided by love, which results in purer motivations as well as stronger and quicker guilt mechanisms after the fact. Ultimately, for Hiram, this change in ethical decision making is a product of one’s spiritual growth or development. Debra puts a finer point on the uniqueness of spiritual development by picking up where Hiram stopped; she expresses how one’s spiritual or faith development is not just about letting the Holy Spirit do its work, but is also about deeply engaging life’s challenges, emerging with a stronger trust in God and greater understanding of yourself:

[The] Death [of a loved one], obviously, is a big event in someone’s life, and it’s a time in which, for many people, they’re open to either questions [that] arise or there are emotions, and you know, in a way,
there’s a spiritual openness at a time like that, and by coming together here [at the church], there’s, if people are ready for it, and willing, there’s a kind of development, there’s a growth in understanding, there’s a growth in accepting death and entrusting somebody to God’s care. . .Whereas, maybe, throughout other parts of life, you just deny it, but at these moments, this is the time, this is it, when you try to address. . .things that you might not deal with at other times. . .I mean, I’m very aware of the role of the Spirit in faith development. . .and trusting that God’s spirit is gonna take ‘em to the next step. . .So it’s when things fall apart that the challenge is, ‘Oh my gosh, why did this happen?’, and, eventually, you have to fit these pieces into a new framework. I mean, going through a divorce, for me, was a huge thing, huge. ‘Cause it wasn’t in my life plan. . .[B]ut I can look back and, fortunately, even though I wouldn’t recommend that to anybody, I mean, you’ll really grow through a divorce. You’ll learn a lot about yourself and a lot about life. . .Hardship can be a real teacher. You know, I’m preaching on Dante now: ‘In the middle of life, I found myself in this dark wood;’ when you find yourself there, it’s a matter of risk, you know. You have to go through the inferno, you have to go down before you come up. And I think that is a real metaphor for growth, that the risk is that you really have to deal with difficult things in order to move into a different plateau of life. . .And. . .when I say faith development, I mean you would grow into a better understanding of yourself and a higher level of trust in God. So, I often do think, as much as we hate them, it’s often the things that are difficult in life that promote growth. Being able to trust in God is at a higher level of faith development, [while] I don’t know if it’s an either/or of relying on yourself or relying on God, because you might have more confidence in yourself and more confidence in your decisions, and yet have a growing trust in God. I don’t think that a greater trust in God is somehow where we begin to think less and less of ourselves until we become like a worm. . .I mean, in a sense, I think that, in faith development, you grow to have a deeper love for yourself as well, but love in the right sense.

This is a long quote, but I wanted to capture some the emotion of the moment
for Debra: she was really moved by this reflection, as was I. As her thoughts progressed, there is a nice movement from where Hiram stopped to a more concrete notion of spiritual development. Similar to Hiram’s quote above, Debra’s passage here is complicated, with multivalent meanings that apply to other important areas of this research, but, in terms of characterizing a unique phenomenon of spiritual growth, she focuses closely on a few central components that build nicely on Hiram’s notion: on the way to a sense of the Holy Spirit guiding one’s ethics through love, we need to dig deep into the difficult stuff of life, and both because of and in spite of those challenges, we develop a spiritual openness that allows us to be molded through, for example, introspection, prayer, questioning, or conversation. We emerge on the other side of that openness possessing something new -- something we didn’t have before: a fuller understanding of our place in the world and a stronger trust in God. As his quote above illustrates, it is from this point that Hiram recognizes the increased love in one’s life that facilitates ethical growth.

Seth provides a more instinctual analysis of the mechanism of spiritual development as one senses a greater trust in God and more love in one’s life:

The best thing, the best thing that one can fall back on is a sense of peace, a sense of call...[H]appiness is totally dependent, my happiness is totally dependent on outside forces: you can tell me this is the worst
interview you’ve ever had, and it’s gonna really hurt me, make me sad. You can affect my happiness. People all around me can affect my happiness, [but] you can’t affect my peace. You can’t affect my joy. You can kill me, and you don’t affect my peace or my joy. [What I mean is] this is like a bedrock you have, knowing that God loves you, God loves me. He sees me and you and everybody as the apple of his eye, he loves us. I’m OK in his eyes, in God’s eyes. No matter what happens, my future is good.

Much like Hiram and Debra, Seth views spiritual growth -- this bedrock, as he calls it, as a grand liberator for benevolence in the world: “I feel secure, [and] only because I feel secure, I take my mind off of me, and I think about you.”

These descriptions of spiritual growth beg the question, of course, of the nature of ethical development, which is where we turn next as we unpack the first theme of the integrity of spiritual development and ethical development.

*The Nature of Ethical Development*

The title of this study begins with the phrase, “Ethical Becoming,” because the big picture of adult ethical development in a spiritual context coming from these interviews is of a phenomenon that is never static: one never becomes ethical as a final destination. We cannot arrive at a purely ethical existence the way we might arrive at Walt Disney World for a family vacation. Rather, we are always on the way to becoming more, or less,
ethical, depending on the circumstances of the moment. We are works in progress, regardless of the state of our respective spirits. In my mind, this characterization was first described by Plato as he discussed pure being. Deriving mostly from several of his dialogues, specifically the Phaedo, the Republic, and Phaedrus, Plato posits that universal, abstract, and non-material Forms are the most fundamental kind of reality. The most famous illustration of this concept is in the Republic’s Allegory of the Cave (514a – 520a). If I were to paraphrase Plato’s theory of Forms as it relates to human beings, I would say, “Humans cannot be pure being. That designation is reserved for the realm of ideas. We are, rather, always becoming.” His meaning is that, as humans, we cannot escape the influence of our emotions and desires – they are as much a part of us as our skin and our hair. This limitation will always keep us removed from any kind of purity such as pure beauty, pure truth, pure goodness. These pure elements are called Plato’s Ideas or Forms because they are accessible to us only in that they are thought by human minds. Regardless, they form an image of perfection toward which we may strive all our lives.

So, as I examined my transcripts for this study, it became clear that, similar to Plato’s understanding of human being (as opposed to the Idea of pure being), these pastor’s notions of adult ethical development is one of always becoming. The perfect ethical specimen is as much an ideal toward
which we can aim as Plato’s Idea of the Good. Without that idea of the good, not much partial good can come from us, imperfect as it is. Similarly, ethical development, for my participants, though derivative of spiritual development to a certain extent, proceeds in imperfect fits-and-starts, recognizing it’s inadequacy in light of more perfect models. Hiram captures this metaphor nicely as he describes a bit of theology:

You know Wesley liked to talk about Christian perfection and Luther said, ‘Hey, you know, you cling to the cross. You always miss the mark. And then Wesley, not [actually] dialoguing with Luther, but Wesley would say, well, you know, um, that can be too fatalistic. I mean isn’t there more power in God, and in the Spirit moving in your life, that you can develop even more of a holy life. So, you have Luther kind of drinking from a keg of beer saying, ‘Hey, we’re all sinners, just hold on to the cross of faith.’ And Wesley’s saying, ‘Well, let’s, let’s move away a little bit and allow the Holy Spirit to keep changing us, sanctifying us.’ [A]nd they’re all right, they’re all correct, and it’s a matter of realizing that, hey, boy, you know, when I miss the mark a lot, boy, it’s grace, but do I really need to stay on a lower plain. . .[I]t’s through the power of the Holy Spirit and faith and prayer that we can move to a higher plain.

In the context of our interviews, the upshot of Hirams’ theological exploration was that we don’t ever stay on that higher plain because we are human and fallible. The consequence for us is that we are constantly caught between two forces as we live our lives: we are dependent upon grace because we are weak, but also empowered for better living through faith and prayer because we can change. My father called this phenomenon “backsliding,” in which we might
be sanctified, but we are still far from perfect, and, in reality, we will always be somewhere on the continuum between the two.

Even though ethical development was characterized as a backsliding process, it was also brought into further relief by descriptions of what ethical development is not.

Debra moves in this direction when she addresses certain rules for ethical behavior and how one might work to be considered ethically perfect:

[F]or some people to think of [the] ethically perfect, they would think it in a deontological way; that means that there’s a perfect set of rules. Let’s say for some people that’s the Ten Commandments, and the ethically perfect person would be the one who has never violated, I mean who lives life perfectly according to these commandments. First of all, that can’t be done: there’s not a perfect set of commandments. Second, if someone were to ask me if you at least came up with a list of something or other that was helpful as guideposts, I would probably turn more to the Beatitudes. . .[T]he Beatitudes, it’s not so much rule oriented, . . .it’s not so much, ‘Here’s the rule and you need to obey it to the absolute. I mean you have all those stories about ‘do not lie!’: OK, so what if you’re in Nazi Germany and someone comes to the door and knocks on the door and said, ‘Is this person here?’ Do you lie or do you not lie? I mean what’s the ethically perfect thing to do?. . .I mean the problem with that is that the whole paradigm is wrong. OK? So when you’re talking about ethics, and if you’re a strict deontologist . . .I don’t know how to get into that conversation. . .because there’s no perfect set of rules, and even if there were an imperfect set of rules, kind of dutifully and perfectly living by that, to me, is not the most ethical person.

Debra makes a very clear statement that a rule-based or deontological
approach to ethical living misses the point of what it means to be an ethical person. Her tone seemed to indicate that there is something deeply wrong with simply following rules on the path to an ethical life; that this is something a computer could do and, as a result, is dismissive of the truly human character of living ethically: we have the ability to sense emotion and context and, as a result, can approach ethics in a much more relational and imaginative fashion. This is a sentiment that was expressed by many of my participants and forms the foundation of the second major theme of this study. As such it is discussed in much greater depth later in this chapter. In the mean time, Joshua expresses a similar lack of interest in following the rules, even referring to the same relatively famous hypothetical story about Nazi Germany, although using different details:

[W]e were talking about the story of a monk who, uh, you know they were hiding somebody and the authorities came for this person and they lied to the authorities. They said, ‘Are you hiding so and so,’ and they lied because they knew they were gonna take this guy away. The story was told to indicate that sometimes lying might be the better thing because you could help this guy more than they could help him. And, yet, we would say, ‘well, lying’s bad,’ that’s unethical or that’s amoral or that’s morally vicious to tell an untruth, and I think there are times we miss the boat by thinking the behavior’s the problem. It’s more, well, you know, are you living your life out of love. Um, that’s a big leap for our society, I think, and for me too. . .because [it’s] more nebulous and it’s a gray area and it requires some forgiveness and some patience. It’s risky and it requires vulnerability. . .

Joshua argues that we are obsessed with behavior and etiquette, which really
misses the forest for the trees in that we focus on what is measurable and
easily identified, while neglecting the more profound good of pursuing the
path of love. For Joshua, behaviors we may consider unethical or unhealthy
aren't really about right or wrong. Instead, they are, as he says, "...reminders that we...need God, that we need something bigger, there’s
something more important, there’s something more viable, and that we can
place too much emphasis on the wrong things...acting like, if you avoid that
behavior, you're a good person.” When, in reality, for Joshua and Debra,
that’s not the case.

Seth was characteristically succinct in his agreement with Debra and
Joshua:

I don’t know what’s in a person’s head or heart, you can watch
behaviors...and there are people who live in a black and white world...people who take the scripture very literally, and everything [good and
bad is cut and dry], boom, boom, boom...[O]ther people, who love
Jesus just as much and maybe don’t live in the black and white world,
but maybe they’ve reduced all the Commandments -- all the Levitical
Code, the whole thing can be summed up to love God, love neighbor.
So, instead of filtering things through all those rules and laws, you
filter it through, ‘you come to a Y in the road or a decision to make,
[and ask] how can I best love God? How can I best love neighbor?’

Again, the defining characteristic of ethical decisions here is more what they
are not: they are not about following the rules. This clear movement beyond
ethical decisions as rule-bound and pre-determined according to certain
universal, decontextualized principles also brings into relief the current
broad theme of the integrity of spiritual and ethical development. According to these participants, in making more ethical decisions and becoming better people, we are simultaneously growing spiritually, becoming motivated more by love and gratitude than correct behavior. In fact, as several participants began to unpack what they imagined an ethically perfect person might be, they ultimately resolved that this person would also be a spiritually perfect person: ethical perfection and spiritual perfection, if such things were possible, are nearly identical. Seth’s comments exemplify this sentiment:

Only God knows that for sure [if someone is spiritually perfect]. All I can tell you are characteristics: a peace filled life, a selfless kind of living, a humble lifestyle. Those are the things that I see and they’re indicative to me that a person is walking along in close relationship with Jesus. Only Jesus knows that [someone is spiritually perfect] for sure, but those are indicative of a close relationship [with God], selfless, humble, giving, um, altruistic, those kind of things.

I noticed immediately that spiritual indicators like a peace-filled life and walking closely with Jesus, quickly became equal partners with more ethically oriented indicators such as selflessness and acting altruistically. This pattern was repeated with nearly every participant, and constitutes the next sub-theme, Indicators of Ethical Development.

*Indicators of Ethical Development*

Throughout the interviews, it was clear that each pastor had experienced people they believed had grown ethically and spiritually. As
Seth’s comment above illustrates, these respective indicators often became conflated with each other in meaningful ways.

A common starting point for the recognition of ethical and spiritual development was simple, gut-wrenching hardship. Debra discussed it earlier in terms of the nature of ethical development, in particular highlighting a sense of spiritual openness that seems, in many cases, to follow the rough patches of life. Seth alludes to this spiritual openness in the following comment:

It’s sad, it’s very sad to see people grieving, and we work with that. Uh. . .the hardest parts are when young people die, parents have to, to grieve. . .very difficult to work them through that. That’s hard. . .but it’s life giving to help families move-on that grief journey and then move from grief to acceptance and then on with their life. And I watch that all the time. I see it, I’m fortunate, it’s a real privilege for me as a pastor. . .to be able to be let-in people’s lives in these very intimate moments. . .It’s a privilege, to watch them move from a hard place to a better place is life-giving. . .yeah.

In the context of discussing the parts of ministry that are really life-giving to him, Seth seemed to stumble into a rather meaningful discussion of what some Christians refer to as “the whistling kettle” in which a nominal believer is moving closer and closer to the “boiling point” of belief at which they make the leap of faith, becoming truly converted (Allen, 2005). This is not the language that Seth used, but as his discussion moved in this direction it struck me as a nearly parallel phenomenon that illustrates how we know
whether someone has grown ethically and spiritually. Seth continues:

...[T]he most life-giving moments for me are when, during Bible studies or during worship when people are just, just, uh, part of my job as a pastor is to help move people along their faith journeys from one level of faith to maybe a deeper spiritual level or a closer relationship with Jesus, that’s what I do. And, so, I mean, you can watch people you know through Bible studies we have, through discussion groups, through helping people pray more, read the scriptures more, helping interpret that with them, you can get people like ‘aha!’ moments. Like ‘Wow!’ they’re moving right along in their faith journey. Life is better for them now because they’re better able to deal, because they have a few more arrows in their quiver, or a few more tools in their tool box, prayer or sacrament, you know, those are the kind of things that are tools that we can use to help us along, and when you can equip people; Ephesians talks about equipping the Saints for the work they’re gonna do, that’s really what I do. ...[A]nd that’s really, that’s the best: when you can watch people become more involved and active in the lives of the church and of their families because of their belief in Jesus and, and its deepening and becoming, developing a closer relationship, and, because of that, more prayer time, more Bible time, more family time, more, more, more, more abundant life, less worry, less anxiety, all that, that’s great stuff.

You can almost feel the boiling kettle getting ready to whistle as Seth finishes his statement with a hard crescendo of emotion. This experience was very real and very close to him; something he valued, it seemed to me at that moment, more than anything else. I pursued this idea further with him, that people who are ready to grow ethically and spiritually exhibit this spiritual openness, often as a result of a difficult experience. He provided a recent example of a woman who had moved through certain stages, from spiritual
openness to the whistling kettle to a remarkably changed life – it is a very illustrative example in terms of what he sees as indicators of ethical and spiritual development. In this passage and the previous passage above, actually, Seth also describes what I call best practices for ethical development – something I’ll refer to again in the next section. For my purpose here, this passage suggests a strong pattern of development:

...[O]ne woman in our congregation who is now a leader within our congregation, she started going to Bible studies about three years ago. And she was always a Christian person and always read scripture and prayed, but she started *intentionally* (his emphasis) to do that, and, uh, everyday, and she’d go to some Bible studies here, and we did a topical discussion on prayer, she heard that stuff, took it to heart, developed a prayer time everyday of about 15 – 20 minutes, and it changed her life. A sense of peace, a sense of call, less anxious, uh, it changed her life. She’s now a leader, and, as a leader, she is challenging other groups within our congregation to pray, to pray more, to make prayer a daily part of your life. It’s incredible. You’ve watched her move along, and she’s not any better person than she was before, it isn’t that at all. She’s not more loveable, she’s not more loved by God – not at all. It’s just that she has deepened her faith relationship with Jesus and because of that is a less anxious person, a stronger person. Does that mean bad things don’t happen to her – [they] happen to her all the time, just like you and me. It’s just that she’s better able to deal with them. . .One of the biggest things. . .I’ve seen [in people who have had similar experiences] is a selfless kind of life. They give up this idea that [it’s all about them], it’s a selfless thing, they don’t think of themselves much anymore. I don’t mean they don’t take care of themselves – they do, but they don’t worry, and they’re not selfish, and they move outside themselves. . .

There’s a clear indication here of a few things Seth believes need to happen
for growth to occur, but, just as remarkable, is that he clearly sees the initial curiosity, the openness as important. He also sees some willingness to extend effort and work as a significant indicator of growth. But most striking is his emphasis on the change in perspective this woman now has: she is simply better able to deal with the precariousness of life; and this strength is something others can witness. John Dewey discusses the precariousness of life in the second chapter of *Experience and Nature* (1958), after which he emphasizes the necessity of inquiry for creating some stability within our experience, thus enabling intelligent action. I couldn’t help but think about this as Seth described the stability this woman now possessed as a result of her particular inquiry. For Seth, her spiritual growth translates directly into ethical growth: she is secure enough to be selfless now. Her growth is realized in a tangibly new sense of how to treat other people.

Debra recognizes similar indicators of ethical and spiritual growth in a friend of hers, but without such a strong emphasis on religious discipline:

She is not a perfect person, but just an absolutely beautiful -- not externally beautiful, but beautiful in spirit, and she seemed to do things that, maybe this wasn’t always true for her, but her graciousness, her generosity, her, her genuine love for people. And she was sort of a free spirit, she was really kind, she didn’t care about conventional things, or, you know, didn’t care about what people thought you should do or say or whatever. [She is] A little odd – simplicity of living, [she] didn’t need things: [she had] basic things and that’s all she needed and all she wanted. In . . .[my denomination]. . .
we talk about extravagant welcome. . .she lived that. She really had, sort of, an extravagant generosity toward people and often. . .she took books out to the Amish farms, so that the girls who had been pulled out of school could continue reading and she went to the local prison and particularly worked with women prisoners. So, these are people that are not in sight of other people, . . .and she just seemed to do it, wasn’t like she had to sit down and think about it, and, um, you know, think, ‘Gee, I really ought to be doing something for someone else.’

At this thought, Debra laughed because it seemed so ridiculous that this woman, whom she’d seen grow into such an ethically and spiritually powerful person, might do anything other than selfless things, or need to do them conscientiously as opposed to naturally, in the normal course of life. She continues, embellishing her friend’s work in a way that highlights its ethical component:

I mean, it didn’t seem to come out of a sense of duty; it was just, you know, what she wanted to do. . .and it had this loveliness to it,. . .[that] she was able to see and to care about the marginal, [whereas] . . .an Amish child who’s been pulled out of school and a woman in prison are invisible to a lot of people.

The strong relational element in Debra’s description is immutable: clearly one true sign of ethical growth for her is the selfless and empathic relationship one develops with others. This element is very prominent throughout my interviews and observations, so much so, in fact, that it forms my second primary theme, which will be discussed later. Also, prominent, though, as it is for Seth’s example, is the absolute personal and emotional
security out of which her example’s behavior flowed: to be “odd” and to comfortably ignore certain social conventions requires a solid sense of security.

Joshua gets at the heart of this matter – this matter of security and focus facilitating ethical development -- quickly, by looking at it from a different angle:

There’s a lot in our culture that we just assume is normal, and,. . .like television watching; we don’t question it – it’s just sort of how we conform, how we live as a society, you know, what we’re fed, or. . .the internet, the computer, is probably a far more serious issue right now, that we just sort of accept things as normal, as normative. . .and it’s hard to not be distracted by those things. For me, I was just reading something – I wish I could think of what this was, but the word ‘desire’ came up, [and] just reminded [me] that it’s true, there are so many things, that it’s easy for me to desire things or people or positions or money, or, you know, to want what I don’t have and that’s just compelling and it’s a constant. We’re constantly bombarded by those kinds of challenges, um, day-to-day.

Joshua elaborated this important notion of what prevents us from ethical and spiritual growth by relating to his own experience:

. . .[I]t’s all the time, and I’m just aware of how. . .we want more, we gotta have more, we gotta have more. And that’s a perfect example of the excess and the way it prevents us from really being present to things that are more important – and I struggle with that as much as anybody.

For Joshua, our focus on material things, success, and keeping-up with what
is considered “normal,” is our biggest obstacle to authenticity and, as he says, “being who we’re meant to be.” An important step to ethical and spiritual growth, then, is a recognition of what truly gives us value as human beings and, subsequently, eliminating the disconnect between our values and our behavior. Debra laughed at the thought of her friend experiencing this kind of disconnect, expressing in that moment something very profound about how a spiritually and ethically mature person lives his or her life: there is very little expressed dissonance between values and behavior. Spiritual and ethical development is expressed in a lack of distraction by the things the rest of us consider “normal.” Joshua sees his father-in-law as falling in this category. The similarities to Debra’s friend are remarkable, I think:

[M]y father-in-law, he’s very unpretentious,. . .he’s been very successful professionally, but you wouldn’t know it to talk to him, he’s humble. And maybe that’s even more of a description,. . .success was almost an afterthought in his life, and it is, and it certainly is, if you talk to him you wouldn’t refer to that, you know, he might tell you what he did in his life and he’d be passionate about it, but he dresses very simply, he’s, he’s a little awkward. . .he doesn’t know that he’s a rare person. . .There’s nothing special about him as far as he knows, and, if anything, it’s, ‘Why did this happen to me, I don’t know. You know, why would I be good at this?’ There’s something very unassuming about him. . .And, I think, Jesus, you know, Jesus comes across that way to me. . .

As Joshua discussed the powerful example his Father-in-law has provided him and his sons of how to live a good life, he became very emotional. My
sense is that the relationship has been very important for Joshua and he is grateful. His example of authenticity in spite of the temptations of success is illustrative: Joshua interprets the upshot of living authentically as a willingness to be vulnerable and to suffer the precariousness of life with greater confidence. Why might these people, these examples of ethical and spiritual development, be perceived as either kind of odd or, perhaps, a bit awkward? I think Seth, and Debra, and Joshua would say because they trust when it’s difficult to trust and they love when it’s dangerous to love; they are vulnerable and take risks, but don’t seem to experience it that way. It is, as Joshua says, that:

. . . vulnerability is at the heart of it all. We don’t want to be vulnerable. . . with anybody or anything because it’s too scary, I might get hurt. And, as Christians, we, you know it’s easy to say this, but we should expect to get hurt. You know life is gonna hurt us, but God is greater than man, you know, and, whatever it is, the example of Christ on the cross and his death and resurrection, that’s all about the greatest vulnerability of all, which is to love. . . to the point that you would die. And that’s just so foreign to us, in the broadest [sense], generally, culturally speaking, we don’t wanna take that kind of risk and, as a result, it backfires. We don’t, we can’t, we can’t really know what love is because we’re not willing to risk it all.

If we aren’t willing to risk, we lose our greatest opportunity for spiritual and ethical development. Joshua continues, emphasizing what he considers the most important indicator of ethical and spiritual development:
. . .[G]rowth involves a willingness to lose, to fail, and to know, to discover, that in our failure, that in our dying, that we were born again. . . [T]hat’s not the end of the story as we think it is, and when we play it safe to avoid losing and when we do that, we don’t, we’re not fully who we’re meant to be. I mean certainly we don’t give anything near what we’re capable of giving to the world. . .we’re just kinda going through life cautiously, you know, and Jesus let it go, and he changed lives, and people were healed, and they felt loved, and beautiful things happened, and they killed him for it.

Joshua’s reference to death above, “. . .that, in our dying, we are born again. . .” is a complicated phrase in light of his Christian point of reference. With Christ as an example of spiritual and ethical perfection, Christians have a horizon of meaning in which death is interpreted literally as well as figuratively. I take the above example to encompass both the literal and figurative meanings, with an emphasis on, as Seth would say, “dying to ourselves” so that our lives might be lived with less anxiety and greater moral strength in the service of others.

Ultimately, the picture we have of someone who has grown ethically and spiritually is, potentially, a loser by cultural and social standards. As we have seen, though, this is not necessarily the case. Certainly, we can say that adult ethical development in a spiritual context looks like someone who has grown through a sense of spiritual openness to a place where they are secure enough, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually, to live their lives with a sense of humility and commitment to the concerns of others.
The next question is how individuals arrive at this moment of ethical and spiritual maturity.

Best Practices for Ethical Development

As my participants discussed their perceptions of ethical development in a spiritual context, a clear distinction emerged between recognizing ethical development on the one hand and practices that encourage ethical development on the other. Interestingly, in many cases, comments and observations about one sub-theme would reveal sentiments and thoughts about the other. For example, Seth’s comments above moved seamlessly into the quote below.

As Seth continued his comments, he indicated that people need to hear the Gospel to truly grow spiritually and ethically: “It all goes back to the Gospel. . . I would say what moves people along in their spiritual journey, [their] faith journey, is hearing and believing the Gospel.” Hiram echoes this sentiment:

[S]o, when it comes to ethics, where we’re talking about immorality within the home, with family, with friends, between countries, I think, first of all, it’s the movement of the Holy Spirit in the world and moving upon people. And fortunately there are people who have received the Holy Spirit in their life. And these are the real peacemakers. These are the Jimmy Carters, and, um, the people who walk in the Spirit. So ethics and morality, to me, is directly related to the movement of the Holy Spirit and receiving the Holy Spirit. . . It’s
the Holy Spirit primarily within a person that even gives them the power to resist temptations, not just communicating a sense of morality or ethics. It gives them the power to live the life and resist the temptations, um, it doesn’t mean we’re not all tempted, I mean, we’re all tempted in terms of greed, materialism, lust, whatever it is. But it’s like the old saying, ‘you can’t prevent a bird from flying over your head, but you can prevent a bird from building a nest in your hair. And I think that relates directly to the Holy Spirit within us: the temptations come right past us, but, when you’re rooted in spirit and you’re walking in the Spirit, you have the power, you have the love of Christ, now, you don’t walk very well, you know you can use your free will in another way, but, for the most part, people that are really rooted in Christ and walking in the Spirit, although there are times and moments and brief periods where they get off-course, they bring it back the other way. . . because God is so real in their lives.

Hiram and Seth emphasize that the most important part of helping someone grow ethically and spiritually is “making God real” in their lives. This involves relationships primarily, as I’ll discuss in detail in another sub-theme below, but it also involves exposure to, or openness to, the Holy Spirit, and learning more about one’s connection to Jesus.

My participants revealed many different practical methods of “making God real” in people’s lives. In reference to these practical methods, Seth used a meaningful phrase: “arrows in their quiver.”

Life is better for them now because they’re better able to deal, because they have a few more arrows in their quiver. . .You know, those are the kind of things that are tools that we can use to help us along. . .It’s not about me, it’s all about hearing the Gospel, the Holy Spirit working in you, granting you this peace. It’s not mine, it comes from the outside.
into me. I didn’t make it up. I didn’t conjure it. I didn’t manufacture it. I did nothing. It’s not the good work I did, it’s just hearing and knowing that my life is securely in the hands of God and nothing can hurt me or take me away from him, not even death. Watching... [people] find [that peace], and watching them experience it, and watching them use it, even though they’re having difficult times, and knowing that came from the arrow of prayer, or the arrow of Bible reading, or the arrow of fellowship with other Christians, or the arrow of worship... [is extremely life-giving].

Hiram chose to focus on one of Seth’s quivers as particularly useful: worship.

In particular, Hiram is referring to elements of worship that make it effective as a tool for ethical and spiritual growth:

I think there should be a prayer of confession in the bulletin. Not just an invocation because how many people really look at themselves during the week... Hey, there are sins of omission, things we should do that we’re not doing and vice versa. You know, there’s anger, there’s jealousy, there’s pride that sneaks into our lives. I’m not saying we’re controlled by these things, but I think a prayer of confession not only brings us into a sense of awareness of ourselves, but also the fact that we realize that we need ongoing grace. And to continue to grow in Christ’s likeness... So, it’s, um, getting us back on the road again and we wanna make sure that you get back on the narrow path. So... I think a prayer of confession is asking not only for forgiveness, but for God’s grace to help us to continue to change and become victorious in those areas.

Hiram continued discussing the meaningful parts of worship, moving from a prayer of confession to what he considered most important: the Word of God.

After 27 years in ministry... I always... say, ‘what do I need, what do I need to hear?’ What words or what type of ministry has changed my life, and is continuing to change my life... The power is in the Word of
God. Even if you [just] hear somebody from the lectern reading God’s Word, lessons, and they read them from the heart. You know, there’s a difference. . .You feel the power, you feel the love. When I say power, transforming power, from somebody who can read it from the heart rather than blah, blah, blah, you know, it almost tells you where they’re at spiritually. . .So, to me, the power’s the Word of God.

Clearly, we hear that worship is one of the best practices for adult ethical development. More specifically, we hear that worship brings us humbly into the presence of God and God’s Word. Interestingly, as I listen to the transcripts and read between the lines of Hiram and Seth’s ideas about best practices, there seems to be an undertone of authenticity: worship and the Word of God and Confession are only really effective if they are approached and experienced authentically. This relates strongly to earlier sentiment from both Debra and Joshua.

Another common practice in encouraging ethical growth is confession and recognition that one’s life is in need of improvement. Just as Hiram emphasized prayers of confession in worship above, he extended the importance of confession beyond worship as well.

[I]t’s that sorrow for the sins that you’ve committed, the realization that your sins have had a negative impact on other people, sometimes a destructive impact on other people. It’s sorrow and this confessing that sorrow with the desire for God’s help to change course that brings about reconciliation, but it all begins with confession. . .the trigger is confession, the trigger is repentance. That begins the whole spiritual journey. And. . .when John was preaching, he was trying to prepare
the people for Christ, to receive Christ. And his whole ministry was making people look at their sins and that they were separated from God and the need for repentance, the need for confession because, once you saw yourself as a sinner, in need of grace, now you’re ready for the grace that’s Christ. . .And I know for a fact, not just from the scriptures, but I know for a fact, in reality, that the inmates that changed, or the people that repented, came to God confessing their sins. That was the door that opened them up to another life. . .[T]hat’s the beginning of a changed life.

Seth also has had experiences confirming this phenomenon. Speaking of a woman in his congregation who had made big changes in her life in terms of spiritual and ethical growth, while also using her as representative of what happens to all of us, he said,

[We do make big changes because] we love God and God commands it; God wants us to be closer to him, so you try all you can to do that. [Also], she might be needing something, maybe she realizes it or I realize it, that I’m wanting in that area, that I could be different, that I’m too anxious, [that] I don’t have that core peace that I hear people talk about; I don’t have it, I want it, so it’s a desire. . .[Y]ou hear about this peace and this comfort and this humanity and strength and direction that people get from prayer and scripture and sermons and worship, and, if you think, ‘I’m not getting that,’ then something’s going on here, and what can I do to get it, so you open yourself to, ‘What can I do?’ . . .It can be a lack or it can just be a desire for a love of Jesus, that I serve him better. I’m responding to all the wonderful things he’s done for me, he’s been so good to me, and promised me all this good future stuff, and now strength for the day. What can I do for you? How can I be a vessel for you today?

Similar to Hiram, Seth recognizes the need for repentance for ethical and spiritual development to occur, but he extends this basic requirement into the
realm of gratitude as well. In either case, these are basic attitudes and mindsets that seem to be a starting point for growth, especially as those mindsets move into a practice of personal or communal confession.

This kind of mindset comes about in different ways. As I showed above, Debra discussed the spiritual openness that seems to follow important events in one’s life such as the death of a loved one or a divorce. Seth sees this same mechanism at work:

I watch people in terms of death happening in that family: to know that it’s a very difficult time when someone dies, but to know that the person dies, the relatives believe that the person is totally in God’s care, and, you know, we’re not sure what happens in life. . .[but] it doesn’t matter. . .[J]ust to know that the person is totally in God’s care and that God loves them and has their best intentions at heart. And they are fine because they are in God’s care. It gives people tremendous peace and helps them work through their grief. And I’ve seen that, so that’s a good thing to see people move along.

I wasn’t entirely sure what Seth meant by “moving along” in his example. It sounded like a conflation of emotional health and ethical development, so I pushed further, asking what exactly helps people “move along” in his example. His response was helpful: “A sense of security, a sense of peace [helps them move along after death].” This was consistent with his theological perspective throughout our interviews and observations, and it reveals his belief that this existential and spiritual security liberates us and empowers us to operate out of gratitude as well as humility.
In addition to one’s relationship with God, Hiram also discussed certain human relationships that happen in the spiritual context as being very important practices for encouraging ethical and spiritual growth. Again, this is a prominent theme that will be developed in more detail in a different section below, but it is also relevant in the context of best practices for facilitating ethical and spiritual growth. Hiram is referring to a few women in his congregation who had a powerful influence on his ethical and spiritual growth:

I would say that these women had...a childlike faith in Christ’s love for them. That just transformed their hearts into loving people. And, um, I think about them a lot. . .you know, because they influenced me. Um, you know, when you spend time with people like that, it forces you to look at your own life. You know, maybe I’m the guy who has a little knowledge here or there, but, boy, do I have an inner peace? Do I have that childlike faith, and an acceptance of just knowing that God’ll work it out? Um, you know it’s real [when you spend time with these ladies]. You’ve experienced it, you’ve experienced that person’s presence, not just a personality, but their inner person, their life, you’ve experienced it. . . It’s experiential: I mean I can’t come up with a litany of things that they’ve done in their lives and say, well, you know, this is why they were saints, you know. It was being in their presence. . .They were Spirit-filled women. . .It was just that they were filled with the love of Christ.

Debra echoes Hiram’s sentiment that interacting and being in community with ethically and spiritually powerful people is a central role the church can play in helping people develop ethically and spiritually.
Um, well, one thing I’m very aware of in the church setting is that people teach each other. . .I think part of the reason why the church is so powerful. . .for ethical development. . .is the community interacting with each other, and people who have achieved a certain level of. . .faith development. . .from whom others can learn are in the community and in different ways, whether it’s within a more structured setting of a class, a Bible study, . . .[they]. . .can kind of be an inspiration to others.

So, in terms of best practices for adult ethical development in a spiritual context my participant were consistent in emphasizing certain specific states-of-mind which indicated readiness for growth, certain specific practices and habits which encourage growth, and certain specific relationships which inspire growth. It is this last element that was the most prominent and intriguing theme throughout my interviews, so my attention will now turn to address it more specifically.

**Theme Two: The Relational Nature of Ethical Development**

The second broad theme revealed itself very differently than the first broad theme of the integrity of spiritual and ethical development. I did not ask any questions specifically about relationships. Instead of receiving direct commentary from my participants regarding the relational nature of ethical development, it was a phenomenon that emerged from indirect comments and context: persistent reference to “relationships” as having impact or an insistence on ethical development as much different than, for example,
following rules, and much more like developing empathy. There was always a pervasive human element in most of my participant’s reflections on adult ethical development in a spiritual context, something which was usually juxtaposed with mechanistically following a code or set of laws; I was continually reminded of discussions on Star Trek between Captain Kirk and Spock in which it is the fallible and very human sense of intuition that ultimately saves the day for the intrepid voyageurs. Spock’s logic is essential, but always, somehow, falls short. The same can be said of the relational nature of ethical development: it is important to follow rules and laws and precepts – they exist for a reason, they keep us in-line, but they cannot help us grow ethically. For that to happen, we must have relationships. In this section of my study, I will describe how my participants experience and perceive this obdurate and pervasive element of adult ethical development in a spiritual context. Initially, I will unpack, explain, and describe the broad theme itself. Just as important, though, are the sub-themes that constitute the various elements of this broad theme. The sub-themes for theme two (the relational nature of adult ethical development in a spiritual context) include: a) the centrality of the desert experience; b) the relationships that matter; and c) relationships give us value because they teach us to love.

In many ways, the relational nature of ethical development has been touched on already in comments that emphasize broader notions of ethical
decision making, the importance of hardship in preparing someone for
growth, and the shifts in priorities that occur as a result of ethical
development, but I have not yet really unpacked how ethical development
genuinely happens through relationships for my five participants:
relationships are the engine driving any ethical and spiritual development or
growth that occurs. For me, this was the most striking part of what emerged
through my observations and interviews: I was prepared for an emphasis on
Bible studies, worship, prayer, and other elements of Christian discipline –
and these have played an important part, but, what emerged as well was a
sincere appreciation for the mysterious communion that occurs when two
people build a relationship. I am reminded of John Dewey’s remarkable
quote about human communication being greater than transubstantiation:

    Of all affairs, human communication is the most wonderful.
    That things should be able to pass from the plane of external pushing
    and pulling to that of revealing themselves to man, and thereby to
    themselves; and that the fruit of communication should be
    participation, sharing, is a wonder by the side of which
    transubstantiation pales (1925, p. 166).

The miracle of communication to which Dewey refers expresses a powerful
truth of human development: human interaction is required for human
development, and, for Dewey, this means it is also required for ethical
growth. Relationships are integral to this process. Now, relational ethics is
not something new. A quick study will reveal that H. Richard Niebuhr was
developing a type of relational ethics at the time of his death in 1962 (Keiser, 1996), but with a little effort and study, it becomes clear that this is a modified Aristotelian perspective that really finds its clearest statement in neo-pragmatist interpretations of John Dewey’s ethics. In particular, the contemporary research into “the moral imagination” is relevant to a relational ethic (Alexander, 1993; Fesmire, 2003; Johnson, 1993), but Carol Gilligan (1982) and, subsequently, Nel Noddings (1984), are also contemporary representatives of what could be called a relational ethic. In the social and human sciences, recent research on relational ethics is happening in the nursing field as they seek to understand what happens when nurses and other health professionals build relationships with patients (Bergum, 2005).

Let me be clear, none of my participants discussed this research, referred to Aristotle or Dewey, or even spoke the words “relational ethics” or “moral imagination.” However, the picture that emerges from my collected interviews and observations makes this conclusion nearly impossible to avoid or ignore. Relational ethics is an approach to ethics that is an alternative to the two primary traditions, deontological ethics and utilitarian ethics. As its name suggests, the focus is on relationships as the locus of ethical action. Most other traditions focus on justice as the locus of ethical action.
To illustrate this a bit more closely, Debra was discussing her faith-driven spirituality, meaning the particularly Christian way she experiences her spirituality, when she highlighted the nexus between relationships, spirituality, and relational ethics:

[Relationships are] . . .very important to [my spirituality]. [I]nstead of thinking of myself as an isolated individual [only] secondarily related, sort of like a pool ball on a pool table, I very much think of human beings as part of a larger context, social context, and not just a human context, but that, you know, we are part of the created order. And I think within Western Society we [are] prone to think of ourselves in a highly individualistic way, and we need to, um, shift that paradigm to a sense of who we are being very much integrated within our whole network of relationships. So I sometimes talk about this as ‘right relation’

Debra continues her commentary on relationships and spirituality, highlighting the ethical core of this spiritual notion of right relation:

So that network of relationships with other people, obviously, family, community, wider world, um, but also with God, with that mystery that always kind of pulls ourselves out of our little tiny habitats. And also the earth, and, there’s sort of a growing consciousness in these days of our relatedness to the earth. Of course, a lot of people are drawn to the Native American traditions, and other traditions that seem to have a sense of the sacredness of the earth and how spirituality is very much a part of your relationship to the earth as well as to other human beings. So I try to, so when you say spirituality, um the whole idea of right relations, instead of destructive relations, is important to me.

In the justice-oriented ethical traditions, right relation isn’t the concern as
much as fairness. In Debra’s ethical universe, on the other hand, right relation places the focus squarely on the relationship: the relationship is a source as well as a product of one’s spiritual life, and relationships that are out-of-harmony impact my well-being in significant ways. The effort to achieve right relations will, in due course, generate justice and fairness. In Debra’s description there is no sense of entitlement, just a sense that, with adequate understanding of our interconnected relationships, we will act with appropriate care and empathy.

_The Centrality of the Desert Experience_

Consistent among my participants was discussion of a kind of desert experience that played, or still plays, a formative role in their own ethical development, as well as in the ethical development of friends and parishioners. The desert experience is an important concept in the Christian tradition that refers primarily, but not exclusively, to both the ancient Hebrew’s time in the desert after the Exodus from Egypt and Jesus’ time in the desert prior to the start of his public ministry. These are times of isolation -- both physical and mental, that test the mettle of one’s resolve to do the right thing. Both the ancient Hebrews and Jesus were tempted during this time of isolation, which proved their dedication to the straight and narrow path of lives lived in the service of the one true God. Characteristics of the desert experience differ, but, ultimately, one enters the desert
uncertain of the outcome: the results could be unhappy and unexpected or they could be somewhat triumphant. It’s always possible, of course, that one might never emerge from the desert at all. The stakes are high, which is why these experiences are so meaningful to those who go through similar trials today. Emerging triumphant leaves one feeling confident, refreshed, and prepared for whatever challenges might lie ahead in life outside the desert.

This term is used mostly metaphorically today because a desert experience can happen anywhere, anytime, desert or no desert. As many city-dwellers can attest, isolation can happen even in the most densely populated area. Even more, temptation and hardship are universal qualities of the human condition, qualities that will often catalyze a “desert experience” when the suffering is particularly acute or painful.

For my participants, some related their own desert experiences, but everyone related the centrality of these desert experiences in helping adults develop ethically in a more general way. In particular, and perhaps most telling in terms of the relational nature of ethical development, was their collective emphasis on why some people emerge from desert experiences successful, while others are plunged into a desperate downward spiral of self-destruction. As a former prison chaplain, Hiram has the most dramatic experience with this phenomenon:
. . .[B]eing a police officer, and working homicide, and working the prison system, I’ve seen the responses of people who have no sense of the spirit at all. . .Um, I mean, in the prison system, I had men that came over to the chapel that firmly felt that they were possessed and they wanted exorcisms and I had inmates that told me they could just do nothing but evil to satisfy their sense of being evil. One in particular, I recall, just told that he just felt that he needed to stab somebody to feel some sense of accomplishment and power. He was in the hole, and I reported that [he said he was going to stab someone], and it was overlooked as him being somebody who always communicated this [kind of] thing. And he was out of the hole for about three days and he took a shank, a piece of metal that he’d sharpened down, and he stabbed somebody, just missed the heart. And he wanted me to know that he was going to do that. Why me? I’m clergy, I represent God. . .I mean that’s the ultimate: to tell me, to show me his power over me that he’s gonna do that. And he did it and when they locked him back up again before they transferred him out, Um, I went over to his cell, when he was in the hole and he came up to the front with this evil, evil smirk. And he looked at me, and the look was just unbelievable. It was chilling; it was like, ‘I told you I was gonna do it, man.’ And I said you certainly did. . .And there are other people, that, um, in parishes, in the church, in the prison system, that were living destructive lives, that were into heinous crimes, [and] really changed.

His point here was that this particular prisoner, who clearly had experienced some crises in his life and was in the midst of a desert experience called prison, was responding to that in a very destructive and, as Hiram says, evil way. On the other hand, though, he’s witnessed individuals who’ve come through the desert experience in a triumphant way:

[T]here was a guy named “Hector,” he was a Puerto Rican fellow and he was in [prison], I don’t know what was his exact sentence, he must
have been in there at least 10 years because he was there the whole time I was there, and, um, he had been involved in drugs and assaults, but I noticed he came, he was always in church and always at Bible studies, we had two Bible studies, Tuesdays and Thursdays. He was always there, very quiet, um, never got into much dialogue. You know, some of the fundamentalists would jump up and he was always kinda in the background observing, listening, taking notes. When I was at [my next parish], probably 2 or 3 years [after leaving the Prison], he called the church. And he told me, he said, ‘Do you remember me?’ I said, ‘Sure, I remember you. . .you out now?’ . . . He said ‘I’ve been out,’ and I said ‘What are doing with yourself now?’ And he said, ‘I just got out of seminary.’ . . . [H]e said he didn’t feel worthy of pastoring a church. . .[but was] involved in inner-city ministries and working with the poor and social work. . .and he came to church, and, um, he said, ‘Do you mind if I come to your church on Sundays?’ So I said, ‘I’d love to have you come.’ In fact, I introduced him to everybody. . .and I shared with the congregation how he changed his life, where he was right now.

Hector had emerged from prison – an extended desert experience, with a fresh commitment to a new and better life. But Hiram’s familiarity with the desert wasn’t limited to vicarious experience. He’s also had personal exposure:

When my life was off-center, you know I really was going down a path of destruction, and, um, my desert experiences were two-fold, I mean there were times that I had to spend time alone, force myself to spend time alone whether I liked it [or not]. The other was more geographical and environmental when I worked for the Park System, I was alone. You know, for 11 hours of the day, I was virtually alone in a park, and had time to think and to look at my life and, um, I did that in conjunction with the Word of God because it was at that period of time that I got back into the Word. So it wasn’t like sitting in a corner somewhere alone in the park at 3 O’Clock in the morning, saying ‘Oh
gee, you know I’ve done wrong,’ but you need the other component and that’s God’s words speaking to you as you are working with it and examining your life.

Debra addressed struggle and hardship very specifically as we talked. For her, clearly, these desert experiences are sources of spiritual openness, but not without significant risk:

...[H]ardship can be a real teacher. And I think that happens with people in a lot of different situations. You know, I just mentioned death, but death of any kind can be a growing experience. And I suppose, you know, it can also be devastating, so you have to ask what’s the difference between those who eventually move through it and out the other side, and those who don’t.

With this comment, Debra actually anticipated my next question for her. She continued:

I think a part of it is community, that it really does take that supportive network for helping you to not get stuck. And, um, and I, maybe part of it, I mean you really have to be open, you have to get out of the blame game, and open to, uh, you know it’s a humbling experience, of saying, ‘OK, so what did I do to contribute to the situation that I don’t want to be in.

Through this humility and reliance on others, Debra went-on to say, “there’s a better understanding of things,. . .of others, of life, and there’s a higher level of trust in God.” This is particularly significant for the relational nature of ethical development because it highlights the role of other people in helping us survive our desert experiences. With that said, our next sub-
theme is introduced, the relationships that matter.

_The Relationships that Matter_

In a side comment, almost unthinkingly, Seth synopsized the importance of relationships to ethical development. He was discussing the people he hires at his church, prospective employees, especially ones who will be engaged in ministry: “We can teach almost anything, but what I can’t teach, uh. . .the person. . .needs to be relational. They need to. . .be a people, relational, person.” If they aren’t, they will burn-out, because the spiritual and ethical development they are trying to encourage is highly relational: without relationships, ethical and spiritual development doesn’t happen very well. Further exploring the role of relationships in ethical development, Seth went on to say: . . .[E]ven when they’re having difficult times,. . .[they need to]. . .go and do something, just get outside yourself, lend yourself to somebody else.” It would be easy to get the sense that any kind of relationship passes muster for facilitating ethical and spiritual growth, and, while that may be true, my participants focused on several different types of relationships that make unique contributions to our development, especially as they help us through hard times or move us into, through, and out of our desert experiences. Debra provides an example of this situation in the following quote:
Um, well, one thing I’m very aware of in the church setting is that people teach each other, I mean I have the examples that I gave you of spiritual guides or of people that sort of inspired me and . . . , you know, you sort of even remember and [they] continue to be a guide even after they’re no longer here. And I think part of the reason the church is so powerful . . . for ethical development, you could say faith development, too, uh, is the community of faith interacting with each other, and people who have, uh, achieved a certain level of . . . faith development, you know, in this context, I think they . . . [ethical development and faith development] . . . are interchangeable, are in the community and in different ways, you know, whether it’s in a more structured setting of a class, a Bible study – you know we’ve had prayer groups here, now and then, but [those people] can be a kind of inspiration to others. . . But I recognize that, if there weren’t people like that in the community, that would be a real loss. But I know there are and always have been, and, so, in terms of faith development or ethical development, a lot of it has to do with interactions. Another thing is that some of those interactions that take place at a church in significant ways are, um, very important. A good example is where people gather at a time of death.

With this comment, Debra reiterated her belief that it’s the community that really pulls us through times of hardship and suffering. Without relationships, we are left at the mercy of our own limited and compromised resources. It was particularly interesting that Debra mentioned the guidance of people even after they’re no longer around. The power of someone’s example via memory is a kind of relationship that can be uniquely effective. Hiram spoke about this in terms of his mother, how her example and expectations for him really changed his life, but not until she was no longer around. At first he felt ashamed of what his life had become – he thought she
would be disappointed. This feeling grew into an appreciation for the powerful role families and familial relationships have for someone who is going through a desert experience. Hiram discusses this phenomenon in relation to his own desert experiences:

. . .[A]lthough we grew up poor, I grew up in a family that was filled with love and a mother who’s faith just, if you came anywhere near her, it had to transform you in some way or you had to think about it. . .[It makes me think that] . . .another important aspect of ministry is really, um, somehow, in an ongoing way, communicating to parents the responsibility they have to their children. Um, laying the foundations: I think the worst response I ever hear from parents is that ‘Oh, I’ll let the kids make their own decision.” Well, are you gonna let them make their own decision concerning going to school everyday, or concerning their health, and all that? The foundations need to be laid, the examples need to be set, and, um, to me that’s a big part of ministry, moving people in that direction, moving them into that spiritual mode.

Hiram’s comments became depersonalized here, but this is derivative of his own profound experience of being pulled both into and out of his own desert experiences by his memory of his mother, as he indicates here:

The desert experience has a purpose, um, and when I realized that my life was more than shaky, the Lord put me into a position where number 1, I was forced to look at myself. As I did that I recalled the foundations my parents had laid for me, the example. And that led me back into the scriptures. So, it was desert experience that led to personal reflection, parental example, in the Word of God. It wasn’t just me sitting, snoring, saying, ‘woe is me.’ . . .I often think to myself, how can somebody come close to death, be in a situation where they have to, in some way, shape, or form, hear the Word of God, hear the Holy Spirit speaking to them, and just throw-up a wall, and not
respond. They’re not responding to the desert experience, um, and the only answer I have for that [is that], I think, along the way, beginning at a very young age, I experienced God in different ways. And I experienced God because of the foundations that I had as child. . . [B]ecause the foundations were there, and because I had a certain level of understanding and spiritual insight and experience,. . .when I found myself in a difficult situation, that’s what I gravitated toward because I knew that it was a reality, because I had experienced it, however brief I had experienced it in the past. Couldn’t explain it, but because I was brought up in the church, even though I resisted, the seeds were still planted

Certainly familial relationships early-on are pivotal, but Joshua extends this logic to building relationships with the marginalized of our world, which can even include our relationship with ourselves:

. . . [E]verybody needs the Gospel, and Jesus came for the world, not just, you know, for the least of these, although we’re often the least of these: you know, we’re hungry, we’re thirsty, we’re naked, we’re starving, and. . .that’s speaking metaphorically. [It’s also true]. . .that we do have to care for those who are physically without those things. And that’s where Jesus was, I believe, and we take that for granted, or we forget that, I think, a lot of the Gospel just assumes that you’re always gonna have the poor among you; look, this is the way it is. It doesn’t mean you don’t care about the poor, it means you’re among the poor.

For Joshua, these relationships with the marginalized, even when it is we who are marginalized, focus us on the fact that we are loved regardless of where we are. As he says, “. . .regardless of the external circumstances, you know, whether I have money or not, or whether I’m safe or not safe,” we are made aware through these relationships that something greater is going on
here, “that you’re recognizing that you’re loved just as you are in this moment, and that out of that grace comes a response.”

Beyond family members, there are additional pivotal relationships my participants discussed. Broadly speaking, these are different ways of understanding one’s relationship with God. Interestingly, and, perhaps, appropriately, this relationship was described in many different ways, from a relationship with a text – the Bible – to a relationship with the Holy Spirit, to a relationship with a concept like truth. At first this next category of relationships seemed very difficult to communicate because it seemed very abstract, but, as I studied the transcripts and teased-out themes and important ideas, I began to feel much more comfortable that this phenomenon was very real for my participants.

Another significant, but more abstract relationship that was relevant to ethical and spiritual development was one’s relationship to truth. For Joshua this was very much a facet of one’s interest in being an authentic person who engages in relationships in an authentic way:

. . .my wife sometimes teases me . . .that I don’t live in the real world. And I know I don’t. I know that. My experience tells me that people are on their best behavior generally when they’re with me. And I’d like to say that’s because they like me and they just want to be nice, but I know that sometimes it’s because I’m a clergy person, and, when they’re around here, they’re showing their best selves. We see it with
the kids. I work with a lot of young people and it’s become clear over the years that. . .there’s a disconnect sometimes between how they treat people, what they’re into, and how they spend their time. When they’re here, they’re very loving and caring, compassionate, they’re not very competitive. They tend to be present, they’re generally very respectful about putting their phones away. And they tell me stories about things that go on outside of here, and I think, man, that doesn’t even sound like you. . .Or, I wonder sometimes about the congregation and about what it’s like when you go to work and are you the, you know, are you the one who’s most demanding and it’s all about the bottom line and you’re mean to people. . .I know that there are enough glimpses into that, that that’s sometime how people are, and I think that it’s not who we’re really meant to be, or who we want to be. . .And I guess I wonder about it more than I really know. . .I work in this environment where people are generally very nice to me and they’re good people and they’re wanting to do good things. . .But then, in their real life work place. . .there’s a competitive aspect to everything.

For Joshua, one’s relationship with truth really impacts the authenticity of one’s life. As he says to summarize his comments above, “If we’re going to grow-up, we’ve got to start seeing the failures.” Hiram also recognizes the significance of our relationship with truth:

. . .[W]hen I was in the prison system, I had to look at myself everyday. You know, I am a pastor to these guys, was I a pastor today? Or did I let the stress, did I let prejudice or some other things sneak in to take away that compassion – not that you want to be used or abused in any way, still you have to communicate compassion along with truth. So, whether it’s with your children, or whether it’s with your siblings, whether it’s with another family member, I think truth has to be mixed and intertwined with love and, when I see the teachings of Christ, that’s what I see. Jesus didn’t mince words, and the reason he
didn’t mince words is because of his love. He always opened up the door for forgiveness, he always opened up the door of compassion and mercy, but he told truth. He called sin, sin, he often alluded to temptations that destroy people’s souls, and I think, today, we tend to sugarcoat all of these things, we don’t want to offend. . .You know, we glean over all these teachings of Christ, or we don’t know ‘em or we haven’t read ‘em for awhile, and, really, the truth does set you free. The sugar coating thing, blinding people, side stepping the literal truths, those things don’t’ change people’s lives. . .You know, the truth does set you free.

Debra provides an interesting twist to the relationship with truth that Joshua and Hiram articulate above. For Debra, losing the truth and authenticity of a relationship with another person, losing “right relations,” as she says, affects one’s relationship with God in a negative way:

[Being a good friend] . . .is part of spirituality, because it’s part of good relationships. . .Speaking personally, I usually have a pretty keen sense of when I’m out of relationship. And that’s almost a stronger feeling, when things are askew or not right or damaged or whatever. So [feeling spiritually connected is] often a case of addressing that, and, maybe, being in the garden and [in] prayer is sort of coming to terms with that [conflict] . . .as a wheel that is off a little bit. And, in feeling that,. . .you know what is really wrong or what has gone wrong or what can you do to help bring that into more harmony. And by doing so, that is impacting because I think of the individual as a social, I forget what the right terminology is, but,. . .when I am in greater harmony with myself and with others and God, that impacts the world.

In expressing the importance of right relations, Debra indicates that the lack of right relations not only harms one’s spiritual well-being, but also one’s relationship with God. That she mentions the social nature of individual
development and how our relationships can actually impact the world, deeply implicates the quality of our relationships in the condition of broader social concerns and problems. Other participants also mentioned the importance of one’s relationship to God in relation to ethical development. Seth articulates this less tangible kind of relationship:

. . .[T]he core of it for me is hearing the Gospel. Uh, hearing that Jesus loves me, and that God guarantees my future and that God is with me each day to help me along, making decisions, guiding me, directing me – I can’t do it alone. And to know that he’s there helping me do that, I think that’s the core [of ethical and spiritual growth]. All the other arrows [in my quiver, helping me become a better person], prayer, Bible study, worship. . .that’s the core, that God loves me. You gotta hear that. You gotta hear that faith only comes from hearing the Gospel. You gotta hear that, and once you hear that and believe that, trust that, then that becomes kind of that core that you’ll always have that foundation of peace. It comes from hearing and believing the Gospel.

Hearing and believing, for Seth, in turn enables us to relate more strongly and empathically with other people: “And because I feel secure, only because I feel secure,. . .I take my mind off of me and think about you.” It is this sense of security resulting from a stronger relationship with God that helps move us out of complacency, out of the desert, and out of self-pity and into a more purposeful life lived for other people. Much as Debra connects our personal relationships to broader social concerns, my participants have all articulated and experienced, from their childhood memories through their current
beliefs, how relationship are the primary force in adult ethical development. For my participants, this is the essence of adult ethical development. It also brings us to another significant sub-theme, the sub-theme that really embellishes the essence of adult ethical development: relationships give us value because they teach us to love.

_Relationships Give Us Value Because They Teach Us to Love_

As I developed the earlier sub-themes of indicators of ethical development and the nature of ethical development (in light of the integrity of ethical and spiritual development), an important notion in my participants’ perceptions of adult ethical development was selfless living and strong feelings of love (for God, for oneself, for others, etc.). Now, as I unpack the broad theme of the relational nature of ethical development, these ideas and emotions again begin to play an important role. The relational nature of ethical development has been built through desert experiences and important relationships that can usher us into and through those difficult times. Even more, though, my participants, generally speaking, put a finer point on the role of these relationships; what do they do for us, or how do they help get us out of the desert? I synopsized their commentary with the title of this sub-theme: relationships give us value because they teach us to love. To provide more detail, my participants really emphasized four ideas and emotions in this regard: love, vulnerability, security, and risk. If the essence of the
phenomenon of adult ethical development in a spiritual context is that through relationships and feeling loved we become confident enough in our own worth and well-being that we can then reach out to help other people, these four terms are the core of that essence. Joshua affirms my assertion in a quote I used earlier as well, “. . .[T]hat there’s something greater happening here, and then that informs your life and your choices, that you’re responding to love somehow, that you’re recognizing that you’re loved just as you are in this very moment, and that out of that grace comes a response.” The response that Joshua refers to is more ethical action in the world: loving yourself more and loving your neighbor more. He continues, “[I] believe that it begins right where you are, with how you treat yourself, how you treat your co-worker.” Adult ethical development, in this example, is tangibly realized as living a more loving life. And living that way is a product of one’s response to feeling loved in the first place, even in spite of feeling unlovable.

Interestingly, looking back at best practices for ethical development, this articulation of the essence of adult ethical development really reinforces and supports those various activities. In each instance, the activities are designed to build one’s relationships, whether it’s a relationship with God, or with one’s parents, or with an acquaintance at church. More diligence in applying spiritual disciplines in one’s life makes one feel closer to God. If I attend a funeral for a friend’s spouse, I am interacting in a qualitatively
different way; a way that tends to build that relationship. If you run a church youth group with several other parishioners, that mutual commitment to those young people represents an unusual level of trust and vulnerability. The context and the activity cultivate loving relationships build a personal sense of security which, subsequently, permits personal vulnerability and risk-taking. Seth addresses the reason for the effectiveness of certain practices this way:

You know, the larger the congregation the more small groups you need, but, again, that isn’t a foundation, that’s not the bait, that’s just the tool that you get to get people to read scripture or pray. Uh, it’s actually hearing the scripture, praying, reading the Bible that’s the bait. If you find a better way than small groups, we’d abandon the small groups to do something else. It’s a tool, it’s a strategy. . . .But it’s the Gospel, it’s prayer. It’s just small groups are a good way to get people to do that. . .

This phenomenon works like this: Seth says, “. . .once you live into that prayer life, huge things happen.” And huge things happen because you have been empowered through the relationship to take risks and become vulnerable. Joshua often refers to this condition as being “more who we’re meant to be.” In other words, there is something authentic about the experience of living through vulnerability in this way. Joshua continues:

[I]t’s a challenge to create an environment where people can really get to know each other and can really be exposed to the Gospel and can really be exposed to another human being and to themselves, and let
themselves be out there, you know. And I see it happen, but it’s in little pockets, and I’m not part of all those pockets, but I have been here long enough that there’s something about that, about the commitment of time together to doing something other than just tending to me, and to the prayerfulness that God is working in our lives. That’s where I’ve grown in this ministry, I mean it’s why I’m still here, ‘cause it still feeds me, and I feel like I’m a very different person than I was when I got here, or, I’m more the person I was meant to be than when I first came, and,. . .it’s about all those people who were part of it. You know, I can sit here and read about it, and . . .it feels disconnected sometimes from the reality of the experience and what’s going on as when we’re together in it. The real preaching happens in the lives we’re living, and how, you know, we’re where the Gospel becomes real.

As he continued addressing how we become “more who we’re meant to be,” he introduced a specific example of a group of adults who have been working together to provide rites of passage to boys in their congregation.

. . .[T]hat process. . .has been challenging because we’ve had to work together and fail together, I think the idea of vulnerability is the place where it becomes real, where people are so committed that they’re willing to risk being themselves, and learning and growing together,. . .that it’s a symbiotic kind of experience. That there’s a deep level of commitment, there’s a deep willingness to be vulnerable, to expose ourselves, to see our weaknesses as well as our strengths. And, in that, central to that is a faith commitment that we’re here because God loves us and we love God and we’re willing to love others. And I think the other common denominator is there’s a willingness to contribute something to the bigger community and, for these adults, working with youth, it’s the youth. And so the attention is off of us. . .

The combination of elements in this particular setting illustrate this sub-theme as well as anything I heard or saw in my interviews and
observations. Relationships give us value because they teach us to love, and, in this group, Joshua really unpacks why this is the case, how it happens, and what value it provides to our lives. Debra was discussing the ingredients necessary for ethical growth to occur and Joshua hit them all: “. . .[You’ve got to] have both the motivation and the community and the nurturing and the inspiring examples.” With these ideas in mind, Hiram provides an appropriate sentiment on which to end: . . .[W]hen you’re a Christian, you realize that it’s only through love that people are changed. Now, we might have the strongest military in the world, but cannons don’t change the hearts of people. You can’t beat people into loving you. I mean forced love is not love at all, it’s resentment.”

Chapter Summary

In this Chapter I described the phenomenon of the lived experience of adult ethical development in a spiritual context as it was described by my participants. Based on the methodology described in Chapter Three, I recognized two primary themes emerging from the data: 1) the integrity of spiritual and ethical development; and 2) the relational nature of adult ethical development in a spiritual context. Out of these broad themes, several sub themes are fundamental to describing the phenomenon. The sub-themes for theme 1 (the integrity of spiritual and ethical development)
include: a) the nature of spiritual development; b) the nature of ethical development; c) indicators of ethical development; and d) best practices for ethical development. The sub-themes for theme 2 (the relational nature of adult ethical development in a spiritual context) include: a) the centrality of the desert experience; b) relationships that matter; and c) relationships give us value because they teach us to love.
Chapter 6

Conclusion: Relational Ethics, Spirituality, and Adult Education

Introduction

This study found and developed two primary themes that illustrate the nature of adult ethical development in a spiritual context: the integrity of spiritual and ethical development and the relational nature of ethical development. As explained in Chapter 5, these themes emerged as a result of my interpretations of the perceptions of 5 Christian clergy regarding this phenomenon. As I look closely at my findings, I think there are some significant implications of this research for the field of adult education. This chapter begins by discussing these conclusions, and then it reflects on the usefulness of these lessons for adult educators. Finally, I explore the potential for future research in light of the findings of this study.

Implications for the Field of Adult Education

How We Think About Ethics

To my way of thinking, one of the most interesting findings of this study was the relational nature of ethical development, or the centrality of relationships, community, and communication to how one develops ethically and spiritually. The fact that this finding corresponds with remarkable
affinity to the focus and conclusions of my literature review was a complete surprise to me. As I discuss at the end of Chapter 3, despite my background and familiarity with studies of ethics and ethical development, I didn’t know what to expect from my five clergy and certainly didn’t expect their perspectives to coalesce so strongly around this theme in particular. Looking back on this finding, I find it gratifying that the theoretical ethical perspective I identify with so closely is also part of some adult education practitioner’s worldviews. The flipside of this affinity is that, as this theme began to clearly emerge, I became very, very suspicious of my own, perhaps unconscious role in forcing this perspective onto the data through my interpretations. I second-guessed everything and worked twice as hard at my analysis to ensure clarity, accuracy, and authenticity in my descriptions and interpretations.

In light of these efforts, my way of thinking about ethics has shifted somewhat: while I have always been a Deweyan, arguing against the traditional deontological and utilitarian paradigms according to which we must “establish... universal principles and... apply... them to specific instances” (Alexander, 1993, 372), I had never seen it so clearly in action and application in the lives of real people (as opposed to the imagined people I manipulate in my mind as I write). My participants overwhelmingly returned to genuine, loving, risk-taking relationships as the foundation of
ethical and spiritual development. While I have always been a Habermasian, recognizing the dehumanizing threat of technical rationality and responding with the kind of hope that makes Adorno restless in his grave, I had never heard that threat expressed in so personal and profound a manner. As Joshua, Diane, Seth, and Hiram asserted the need to take risks for the sake of building authentic relationships – because authentic relationships don’t happen without vulnerability and risk – the implication is that too often we are simply afraid to be vulnerable, and, as Hiram so clearly illustrates in some of his prison stories, some people never reach this level of authenticity in their relationships, often to tragic ends. As I discuss in Chapter 2, this numbness, nihilism, and lack of purpose is a consequence of technical rationality: the kind of thinking that subsumes genuine acts of subjectivity to the needs and purposes of objectification. I am now convinced that relational ethics is not just a theoretical game, but has a genuine contribution to make in helping people live with greater meaning and purpose. Perhaps this is the brilliance and necessity of empirical research, I’m not certain – yet – but I am certain that adult education needs to take this type of ethics more seriously. To return to Thomas Alexander, “The key for. . .[this]. . .to work is an imaginative education which allows one to grasp different contexts and enter into the standpoint of the other (1993, p. 381). Alexander elaborates on this notion of an imaginative education:
It is just as important to insist again that imagination is a social activity. Just as we learn to talk to ourselves because others have talked to us, so we learn to reflect and deliberate before we act because we have been taught to. This is what education aims for, the internalization of social activities. We have to learn how to take others into our considerations and we do so through a variety of means, of which not the least are stories. The self is born from such a process of ‘taking the role of the other,’ as George Herbert Mead put it. One of the primary ways in which imagination is used is in understanding oneself in light of the other. By anticipating the responses of the other, we can control our own actions to communicate; gestures can thus become symbols. The personal imagination is a further refinement of the social imagination (p. 388).

The more we come to understand about how the human body works and how we really make ethical decisions, the more this perspective is affirmed.

Significantly, Antonio Damasio, Professor of neuroscience at the University of Southern California and author of several important works that are changing the way we think about the human mind (Damasio, 1994, 1999, 2003, 2010), implicates relational ethics in his demonstration that emotions play a central role in high-level cognition such as decision-making and provide the structure for our social cognition. Mark Johnson and George Lakoff have made important theoretical links between Pragmatic moral theory and Damasio’s work. It isn’t surprising that Thomas Alexander and Mark Johnson have worked and studied together.

The picture of relational ethics that emerges from my research connects well to many of the conclusions of these scholars, and adult
education as a field would benefit from extending this theoretical foundation to additional studies of adult development. Currently, as a field, we have no theoretical foundation for understanding ethical behavior or development (Brookfield 1998).

*The Significance of the Informal Learning Environment*

Although I didn’t address this content area specifically in my literature review, much of what I discuss touches on informal learning in some fashion. Even more, the notion of informal learning is implicit, I would argue, in any discussion of relational ethics. Additionally, theorists on whom I lean heavily in this study have also made significant contributions to research on informal learning. Stephen Brookfield has written about community education (1983). Habermas’ communicative rationality and the ideal speech act have been adopted by some contemporary research into informal education (1984, 1987a). Dewey’s notion of experience is a basic building block of informal education theory (1925), especially as it is read through Myles Horton (1990) and Eduard Lindeman (1926). Lastly, Paulo Freire is the pillar of popular education, a particular breed of informal education that focuses on the participation and empowerment of the more marginalized members of a society or group (1985).

In studying my participants’ perceptions of adult ethical development
in a spiritual context, it became clear that, in most cases, formal educational methods such as structured Bible study classes, counseling, or prayer groups played a secondary role to informal situations and contexts. For example, while Seth made frequent reference to “arrows in our quiver”, which usually meant a more formal educational context, it was always done in the service of improving relationships, which is what he believed really made the difference in someone’s life. Even more, as Debra discussed her role in her congregants’ ethical and spiritual development, she briefly mentioned her sermons, but focused mostly on her interactions with people in the wake of more formal events such as worship or a funeral. She really downplayed her role, though, wanting instead to emphasize that people really grow through their interactions with other members of the church. These relationships, built in the context of a group of people worshiping together and wanting to make the world a better place, transform lives. This theme, the relational nature of adult ethical development, emphasizes conversation, dialogue, community, and democratic deliberation in helping people engage a lifetime of learning. These emphases point to the importance of informal education in ethical development.

Another important connection to informal learning that appears in this study is the centrality of the desert experience and taking advantage of moments of spiritual openness as opportunities for growth and development.
While it is possible to cast these two types of experiences as products of formal learning environments, they are much more likely to occur informally, as we interact socially via conversation and dialogue and as we encounter the usual, but often painful, challenges of sentient life.

**Developing Concrete Notions of Spirituality**

As spirituality has grown into a cottage industry within the adult education and human resource management discourses, one of the primary critiques of the spiritualists I emphasized in chapter 2 is that this literature base is weakly or under theorized in terms of learning and, in a related way, suffers from a level of abstraction bordering on meaninglessness (Milacci 2003, Newman 2008). These two phenomena are connected because it is difficult to develop coherent theory without a concrete context out of which that theory grows. While my participants often used spiritualist language to describe spiritual phenomena, i.e. “the Holy Spirit at work in your life,” “your relationship with God,” etc.-- language describing experiences that are tremendously difficult to ground and analyze in a traditional academic sense-- they always emphasized that the heart of spirituality is the specific “symbolic universe” (to borrow a phrase from Debra) of the Christian tradition. For my participants, without the concrete context of a Christian congregation celebrating Christian rituals in the service of a Christian worldview, the notion of spirituality has no meaning (this sentence could also
be written replacing Christian with Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, or Jain, etc.). Even more, without the concrete context described above, spiritual development doesn’t happen and ethical development is handicapped. Drawing on Newman’s critique (2008), without a concrete context and tradition out of which spirituality grows, it becomes a sentiment without a heart and without a purpose – the moral compass is gone. Once a concrete context is introduced, spirituality becomes more than just a narcissistic fetish. It becomes accountable to certain traditions and responsible to socially and materially generated standards. As my participants have discussed, much as human consciousness develops socially, so, too, does our sense of closeness to God and our sense of right and wrong. Spiritualists describe this kind of responsibility and accountability as a limitation to the opportunities available through spiritual development (English and Gillen, 2000; English, Fenwick, & Parson, 2003; Fenwick, 2001; Fenwick & Lange, 1998; Gillen & English, 2000; Groen, 2002; J. Miller, 2000; L. Miller, 2000; Tisdell, 2000b; Tisdell, 2003; Tisdell, Tolliver, & Vella, 2001; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2002). The findings of my study cut the opposite way: as my participants have discussed, these standards and traditions do not mitigate innovation and opportunity: much to the contrary, they provide a point of reference from which genuine innovation and growth can flow. In light of these findings, fresh doubt is cast on the current direction of the spiritualists'
program. In chapter 2, I discuss the teleological and logico-philosophical objections to spiritualist discourse, and, while I do not want to generalize from my research in this study, it seems clear that abstract notions of spirituality find no place in my participants’ perspectives on adult ethical development.

Avenues and Opportunities for Further Research

Limitations of my Study and Opportunities for Further Research

There are several important limitations of my study that, fortunately, indicate interesting and potentially useful avenues for future research. The first limitation is the criteria for my participants. In this study I focused on Protestant Christian pastors with a depth and breadth of experience to provide the richest possible data. Pursuing this study with pastors from only one specific denomination might illuminate other aspects of this phenomenon. For example, recruiting only Lutheran pastors or only Charismatic Pentecostal pastors is likely to reveal new and different themes. Alternatively, the sample could use denominational diversity as its common denominator, recruiting pastors from a broad array of Christian traditions. Another approach that I find particularly interesting is to consider socioeconomic and geographic characteristics of particular congregations: how might pastors from primarily blue-collar, working-class Christian congregations describe this phenomenon? Or, how might pastors from
Appalachian Christian congregations describe this phenomenon? Lastly, in terms of the sample criteria, recruiting participants from different religions is important to broaden our sense of adult ethical development as it occurs within different belief systems or symbolic universes. Moving beyond a Christocentric orientation is useful for gaining perspective into the experiences of a diverse population.

A second limitation is the type of study I pursued. An empirical hermeneutic phenomenology does certain things well, but it would be useful to pursue adult ethical development through an ethnographic lens, focusing on a particular congregation or groups of people. Digging deeply into the social and cultural traits, not just of the religious professional, but also of the followers and congregants might illustrate different aspects of the phenomenon of adult ethical development. The holistic nature of ethnography is particularly appealing as it studies not just perceptions, but also places and patterns of living, habits, meals, rituals, and language. Additionally, a grounded theory approach is appealing given the strong direction my current study produced. My data indicate that the nature of adult ethical development is strongly relational, but an EHP study is not designed or conducted with the intent of generating explanatory theory. A grounded theory approach, though perhaps more positivistic than I am inclined to appreciate, would provide the framework to develop an
empirically grounded theory of adult ethical development.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I have discussed the most significant implications of this study for the field of adult education. In particular, important reflections on dualistic or minimalistic approaches to understanding ethics and ethical development have been discussed, especially as it highlights the need for a stronger theoretical foundation within adult education for the study of adult ethical development. Also, the central role played by an informal learning environment, emphasizing conversation, dialogue, community, and democratic deliberation, has been brought into relief. Lastly, the limitations of the study were addressed.

As I bring this study to a close, I am struck by the interesting nexus of academic disciplines that seems to be coalescing around our understanding of moral agency in general and adult ethical development in particular. Drawing on the strong traditions of virtue ethics, pragmatism and neo-pragmatism, and new developments in cognitive science, researchers of human and social phenomena have a blossoming chest of tools for their analytical work. Virtue theory, which reaches back to Aristotle and continues with renewed strength in the 20th and 21st Centuries as philosophers like Martha Nussbaum (1986, 1990) and Alasdair MacIntyre
(1989) renew the emphasis on emotion, imagination, and character in our ethical discernment, contemporary studies of ethical development, either empirical or theoretical, have fertile soil to till. This is even more so with the inclusion of the pragmatic and Frankfurt School traditions. As I’ve mentioned throughout this study, drawing on John Dewey, G.H. Mead, Hans Joas, and Jurgen Habermas, our sense of human development and social inquiry expands to include, as Dewey would say, the qualitative nature of experience in which the drive to objectify and control human activity is counterproductive. Efforts to build a strong theoretical grounding for adult ethical development have received an extra boost from the interface of these philosophical traditions with cognitive science. Building on the cognitive semantics of George Lakoff (1999, 2003), Mark Johnson describes a fundamentally Deweyan conception of morality:

We humans are imaginative creatures, from our most mundane, automatic acts of perception, all the way up to our most abstract conceptualization and reasoning. Consequently, our moral understanding depends in large measure on various structures of imagination, such as images, image schemas, metaphors, narratives, and so forth. Moral reasoning is thus basically an imaginative activity, because it uses imaginatively structured concepts and requires imagination to discern what is morally relevant in situations, to understand empathetically how others experience things, and to envision the full range of possibilities open to us in a particular case (Johnson, 1993, Preface).

Johnson’s conclusions are finding further confirmation in the neurological
work of Antonio Damasio, as I discussed earlier in this chapter.

My contention is that the relational perspective of ethical development that emerges from this study, while not intended to produce generalizable conclusions, fits strongly within this fertile disciplinary nexus. In this same vein, Thomas Alexander frames important new directions for the philosophical and empirical study of ethics:

The implications of taking such an approach are extensive. Not only might ethics as a philosophic discipline escape the arid discussions of the deontological-utilitarian debate, but the issue of how moral reasoning is developed through cultural symbols, stories, myths, and religious systems remains to be explored. Connections with cognitive semantics on the one hand and sociological and anthropological studies on the other would make the field of ethics a study of the imaginative and practical ways human beings actually construct and live meaningful lives. Nor would this remain a descriptive approach. The focus on imagination reveals that we are constantly creating our worlds, for better or worse, and that this is an art which must be attended to with care. Dewey once described democracy as the art of being able to listen to others. At least, listening to other people’s stories is the beginning of our ability to understand and communicate with them, and so is the first step of social intelligence (1993, p. 397).

It is precisely this type of growth-oriented social intelligence that I would argue has been captured by my participants’ relational understandings of adult ethical development. Through constantly creating and recreating our worlds, largely via our relationships with other people – real or imagined – we are ethical becoming.
References


Biesta, G. J. J. (2004). ‘Mind the gap!’ Communication and the educational


Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press.


Jones, A. (2001). Some experiences of professional practice and beneficial changes from clinical supervision by community Macmillan nurses. *European*
Journal of Cancer Care, 10(1), 21-31.


https://www.msu.edu/~lotz/classes/f2006intersubjectivity/.


Adult Education Quarterly, 58 (4), 284-298.


Tolliver, D. & Tisdell, E.J. (2002). Bridging across disciplines: Understanding the connections between cultural identity, spirituality, and sociopolitical development in teaching for transformation. *Proceedings of the*
43rd annual adult education research conference. Raleigh, NC: North Carolina State University.


Appendix A: Interview Guide

Common Setting

Interviewer: Davin Carr-Chellman

Interviewees: Christian Pastors

Interview Duration: 60 - 90 Minutes

Interview Location: Interviewee preference

Recording: Digital voice recorder

First Interview (Focused Life History)

Opening Comments:

Questionnaire:

1. Please state your name and tell me about your personal, educational, and professional background, going as far back as possible? (Not simply job description, qualifications, etc., but richer and more in-depth)
   a. Prompts
      i. Parental attitudes about important topics
      ii. Faith
      iii. Quality of Relationships
      iv. Purpose of significant activities, e.g. school/area of study choices, job choices, lifestyle choices
      v. Prominent Moral/ethical issue

2. Describe the primary forces shaping your spiritual perspective?

3. Describe the primary forces shaping your ethical perspective?

4. How did you become an ethical person?

5. Who is an ethical person you remember?
6. How do your faith perspective and ethical perspective influence each other?

Second Interview (Detailed Present Experience)

Questionnaire:

1. Tell me about your life/typical day outside of your work?
   a. Prompts:
      i. Church/religious experiences and activities
      ii. Family
      iii. Friends
      iv. Recreation, hobbies, outside interests
      v. Free time

2. How do you address ethical development in your role as a pastor?

3. From your professional experience, describe someone who has grown or developed ethically?

4. How/why did this ethical development occur?

5. How have you grown or developed ethically?

6. How/why did this ethical development occur?

7. What role does ethics play in your day-to-day experience?

8. What is required for ethical development to occur?

9. How are spirituality and ethical development related?

10. Any examples of this relationship?

11. How does your understanding of ethical development play into/fit the seminal aspects of your life?
Third Interview (Reflection on the meaning)

Questionnaire:

1. Given your life before becoming a pastor and how you’ve described your life now, how would you characterize ethical development in your life?

2. How would you describe a successful day
Appendix B: Example of Raw Data Analysis

J: We don't wanna be vulnerable.
D: Right
J: You know, I don't want to be vulnerable with anybody or anything because it's too scary, I might get hurt.
D: Yeah

And as Christians, we know it's easy to say this, but we should expect to get hurt. You know life is gonna hurt us, but God is greater than man. You know and whatever it is and the example of Christ on the cross and his death and resurrection that's all about his greatest vulnerability of all which is to love to the point that you would die. And uh and it was so that it was so foreign to us in the broadest general cultural speaking we don't wanna take that kind of risk and as a result it backfires. You know, we don't just say we can't really know what love is 'cause we're not willing to risk it all.

D: And what's the connection there to spiritual growth?

J: Can I just go back to... Cause well um let me think. I mean I think that that has everything to do with growth. I mean that love is at the heart of it. And that if we're so guarded that we're not gonna love, we're not willing to love. Because we're afraid we're gonna get our feelings hurt or that somebody's gonna take advantage of us or um or that somebody might decide they don't love me, or they're not gonna you know it's the same thing I guess. But um that that vulnerability is at the heart of that. Of what I think... is the example of Christ on the cross and his death and resurrection. This is the example of Christ on the cross and his death and resurrection. This is the greatest vulnerability of all which is to love to the point that you would die. And uh and it was so that it was so foreign to us in the broadest general cultural speaking we don't wanna take that kind of risk and as a result it backfires. You know, we don't just say we can't really know what love is 'cause we're not willing to risk it all.

D: Right
J: And Jesus was a loser. If we're gonna be honest about it.
D: Yeah

J: You know for all the you know the way we live and what we express and expect of life, he was not successful, and yet we say he's our Lord and savior, and yet we worship winning and he was OK in this article he talked about perpetrators and victims. The perpetrators are the winners and the victims are the losers, and he was in his country I think he was that's the language he was referring to. In this country it's winners and losers, and I know others talk about that too, but in terms of growth I think spiritual growth involves a willingness to lose, to fail and to know to discover that in our failure that in our giving that that we were born again. That there's something that that's that's not the end of the story as we think it is, and when we think we play it safe to avoid losing and when we do that we don't we're not fully who we're meant to be. I mean certainly we don't give anything near what we're capable of giving to the world. If just you're not going through life cautiously you know and Jesus let it go and he changed lives and people were healed, and they felt loved, and beautiful things happened, and they killed him for it.

D: Yeah
J: You know, but it wasn't we know as people of faith it's not the end of the story. You know, here we are talking about 2000 years later, and I think that's part of you know we really really believe that, would we be willing to take more risks?

D: Right,
J: And sort of say, it doesn't have to be just like this. Um
D: So the deepest person spiritually may be the person we see as the biggest loser.
J: I think so
D: Yeah
J: And I think that's the you know the ironic, certainly that one of the ironies of our faith, but it's certainly where would Jesus, you gotta consider well where would Jesus be today given what we know about where he was then.
D: Right
J: You know people answer that by saying he'd be with the prostitutes and you know these couple guys in our town who walk around homeless and and seem alone and scary
D: Right
J: And broken, and dirty, and um and they're losers, you know, by our society's standards
D: Right

Connect:
L: Living out of love
V: Vulnerability
F: Faith/Security
K: Risk
Appendix C: List of Main Themes and Sub-Themes

Theme One: The Integrity of Ethical and Spiritual Development

- The Nature of Spiritual Development
- The Nature of Ethical Development
- Indicators of Ethical Development
- Best Practices for Ethical Development

Theme Two: The Relational Nature of Ethical Development

- The Centrality of the Desert Experience
- The Relationships that Matter
- Relationships Give us Value because they Teach Us to Love
Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Perceptions of Ethical Development: A Phenomenological Study of Religious Professionals

Principal Investigator: Davin J. Carr-Chellman, Graduate Student
308 Sparks Building
University Park, PA 16802
(814) 863-0100; djc194@psu.edu

Advisor: Dr. Fred Schied
305E Keller Building
University Park, PA 16802
(814) 863-3499; fms3@psu.edu

1. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research study is to gain a deeper understanding of Christian pastors’ perceptions of ethical development. Also of interest is the role of spirituality in processes of ethical development.

2. Procedures to be followed: You will participate in up to three 60 – 90 minute, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. The interviews will be audio recorded.

3. Duration/Time: It will take about 60 – 90 minutes.

4. Statement of Confidentiality: Your participation in this research is confidential. The data will be stored and secured at 1387 Halfmoon Valley Road in a locked cabinet and on a password protected computer file. Audio records will be stored on a separate hard drive in a locked filing cabinet at 1387 Halfmoon Valley Road and only Davin Carr-Chellman will have access. This data will be destroyed one year from the date of study completion.
5. **Right to Ask Questions:** Please contact Davin Carr-Chellman at (814) 404-9163 with questions, complaints or concerns about this research.

6. **Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

___________________________________________________________________
Participant Signature  Date

___________________________________________________________________
Person Obtaining Consent  Date
CURRICULUM VITAE
Davin J. Carr-Chellman
djc194@psu.edu

Education
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

Ph.D. (Anticipated May 2011)
Doctoral Candidate (ABD), Department of Learning and Performance Systems
Major: Adult Education with a focus on organizational learning, informal learning, and ethical development
Dissertation: Ethical Becoming: Adult Ethical Development in Christian Congregations
Dr. Fred M. Schied, Committee Chair

M.A. (May 2002)
Major: Philosophy
Dr. John J. Stuhr, Thesis Adviser

B.A. Highest Distinction (May 1998)
Major: Philosophy
Transferred Fall 1995

Dickinson College, Carlisle, PA (1993-1995)
Major: Philosophy

Professional Experience
Lecturer, Department of Communication Arts and Sciences
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park Campus (2005 - Present)

Adjunct Lecturer, The Department of Philosophy
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park Campus (1999 – 2009)

Assistant Director, The Center for Ethics and Religious Affairs
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park Campus (2003 – 2005)

Director, United Campus Ministry at Penn State
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park Campus (2001 – 2003)

Pastor, Emmanuel United Church of Christ

Selected Publications