

FUTURE DESIGNS FOR AMERICAN LIBERAL THEOLOGY*

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Friedrich Schleiermacher gave liberal theology a foundation no one could find. He accomplished this amazing feat by making a neurological fact of consciousness the foundational referent for his new theological system. Schleiermacher called this neural material *Affekt* [affect] and defined it as the product of stimulated “nerves or whatever else is the first ground and seat of motions in the human body.”¹ But the science needed to find this *neurological* fact of consciousness was established two centuries later.

The results are well known: Modern liberal theology has appeared foundation-less since its inception.² With the establishment of affective neuroscience and the publication of its first textbook in 1998,³ however, the location of liberal theology’s foundation was disclosed exactly where Schleiermacher had placed it: outside the theological domain.

The present essay shows how this discovery of liberal theology’s foundation by affective neuroscience gives American liberal theology new access to its own foundational design. More precisely, this paper shows how the *use* of this access point by American liberal theology will produce two results. *First, emotional relevance.* American liberal theology will be able to reconcile conflicting religious sentiments in an America increasingly defined by Protestants and post-Protestants who “pick and choose” their religious affiliations based on feelings rather than by traditional denominational creeds.⁴ *Second, collective power.* American liberal theology will be able to identify the common ground of the ever-widening diversity within its own academic field and consolidate its power for the common good.

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¹ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Freedom*, trans. Albert L. Blackwell (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992,) 131.

² The origin of the foundation problem in liberal religion is described as Schleiermacher’s misbegotten attempt to define “the real essence of religion.” Wayne Proudfoot highlights this standard view of Schleiermacher’s project in *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). Schleiermacher failed in his attempt because as Proudfoot puts it, “There is no such essence to capture” (179). Schleiermacher, Proudfoot insists, confused experience with description:

Schleiermacher’s insistence on the immediacy of religious experience is descriptively accurate, but it is theoretically inadequate. . . . The experience seems to the subject to be immediate and noninferential, but it is not independent of concepts, beliefs, and practices. This confusion between the phenomenological and theoretical senses of *immediate* is central to Schleiermacher’s program and is important for understanding contemporary religious thought and the study of religion(3).

³ Jaak Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience: The Foundations of Human and Animal Emotions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁴ Luis Lugo, Sandra Stencel, John Green, Gregory Smith, Dan Cox, Allison Pond, Tracy Miller, Elizabeth Podrebarac, Michelle Ralston, Hilary Ramp, Andrew Kohut, Paul Taylor, and Scott Keeter, *U.S Religious Landscape Survey, Religious Beliefs and Practices: Diverse and Politically Relevant. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life*. <http://religions.pewforum.org/>, 22 (accessed February 25, 2008).

Such is the twofold task of this present essay. As a work in constructive liberal theology, this essay uses historical analysis, neuroscientific insights, and examples taken from contemporary liberal religious studies and the American public square. This essay begins with historical reconstructions of the lost and found story of liberal theology's foundational design.

IA. Schleiermacher's Design and its Three Design Problems

Friedrich Schleiermacher designed liberal theology to find and affirm the common ground of faith for the Lutheran and Reformed Protestant traditions in nineteenth-century Prussia.⁵ As Schleiermacher noted in his Preface to the second edition of *The Christian Faith*, he sought to clarify the meaning of the Evangelical Church of Prussia by showing how this Union of these two distinct Protestant traditions did not require “any dogmatic adjustment between the two sides, still less . . . a new Confession.”⁶

To this end, Schleiermacher identified pious feelings rather than creedal claims, church tradition, the Bible, reason, the conscience, or revelation, as their common foundation.⁷ Moreover, Schleiermacher established his new theological system as a non-confessional, self-contained academic field of inquiry at the University of Berlin.⁸

But Schleiermacher seemed to make his new, non-confessional, secular, academic discipline dependent upon philosophy, ethics, aesthetics, and psychology for knowledge of its own foundation.⁹ He thus seemed to confound his own claim that liberal theology was an independent academic field of inquiry.¹⁰

Thus a **dependency problem** came to the fore: Liberal theology, as a self-defined independent academic field, seemed dependent upon secular science for the clarification of its own foundation in human experience.

⁵ Friedrich Schleiermacher, Author's Preface to the Second Edition, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. Mackintosh and James Stuart Stewart (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928. Reprint, with a forward by B. A. Gerrish, 1999), xiii-xiv; *Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhang dargestellt* (1830-31), ed. Rolf Schäfer (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 3-4. The German edition is subsequently referred to as KGA 1.13 in this essay.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.* Proposition 3.4.

⁸ As Terrence Tice and Edwina Lawler have persuasively argued, “Schleiermacher deserves to be regarded with [Wilhelm] von Humboldt as the co-founder of the University of Berlin.” Not only did Schleiermacher establish “the theology faculty—which he claimed must be as rigorously scientific in its work as any other while, like law, serving “positive” aims [he also] served in a series of relatively ancillary but powerful positions over all of these years—roughly 1807 to 1816” in the creation of this university. Schleiermacher's own induction into the University of Berlin occurred on May 10, 1810. Terrence Tice with Edwina Lawler, Preface to Friedrich Schleiermacher's text, *Occasional Thoughts on Universities in the German Sense with an Appendix Regarding a University Soon to be Established* (Lewiston, PA: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991), ii. Thomas Albert Howard, in his remarkable book, *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), makes a similar point when noting that Schleiermacher's “models of university and theology helped establish the institutional conditions for renewed legitimation and ‘scientization’ . . . of theology in the nineteenth century—though the process provoked strong reactions from those less sanguine about the marriage of theology and science” (133).

⁹ Thandeka, “Schleiermacher's *Affekt* Theology,” *The International Journal of Practical Theology*, Vol. 9 (2005), 197-216.

¹⁰ Karl Barth made this point forcefully when questioning the appropriateness of a theology as an academic science in a secular university, in his 1922 address, “The Word of God and the Task of Religion,” stating: It is the paradoxical but undeniable truth that as a science like other sciences theology has *no* right to its place: for it becomes then a wholly unnecessary duplication of the disciplines of knowledge belonging to the other faculties. Only when a *theological* faculty undertakes to say, or at least points out the need for saying, what the others . . . dare not say, or dare not say aloud, only when it keeps reminding them that a chaos, though wonderful, is not a cosmos, only when it is a question mark and an exclamation point at the outmost edge of scientific possibility—or rather, in contrast to the philosophical faculty, beyond the outermost edge—only then is there a *reason* for it.” “Das Wort Gottes als Aufgabe der Theologie,” in Karl Barth, *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten, 1922-1925*, 155-57. This passage is cited and translated by Howard, in his book *Protestant Theology*, 412-13.

Moreover, the foundation of liberal theology was obscure to the readers of Schleiermacher's *Christian Faith*. As noted to his friend Dr. Friedrich Lücke, Schleiermacher had assumed that the non-rational, affective state of self-consciousness foundational to his theological system as well as to his explanation of Christian faith would be immediately self-evident to his readers. It was not. Writes Schleiermacher:

I presumed—and I did not fail to say so—that all would somehow bring along with them in their immediate self-consciousness what was missing [in his text], so that no one would feel short-changed, even though the content was not presented in dogmatic form until later. But all these hints were overlooked because, as I said, many who were interested in the book . . . *did not bring with them anything that they would not receive first from dogmatics*. Should I not have rather begun my work with a description of Christian consciousness in its entirety?¹¹

This **obscurity problem** of the foundational reference, when linked to the dependency problem, created a third structural problem for Schleiermacher's new theological system: the **problem of self-contradiction**.

The complex structure of independence and dependence coupled with the obscurity of its foundational affective reference in human consciousness set off self-contradictory perceptions of Schleiermacher's liberal theology in its reviewers' minds. More precisely, Schleiermacher's liberal theology appeared to both assert and deny its own independence as an academic field of inquiry. It also seemed to hide this contradiction in non-Christian, emotional obscurity.

And so a barrage of mutually contradictory claims about Schleiermacher, his theology, and its foundation followed. Schleiermacher's work was called self-contradictory, a reintroduction of paganism, a system perfectly compatible with the papal system of the Roman church, and a venture that made faith in God inconsistent with Schleiermacher's own position.¹² Moreover, Schleiermacher, himself, was called a Gnostic, an Alexandrian, a proponent of monastic morality, a Cyrenian, someone influenced by Schelling, or by Jacobi.¹³

Two centuries later, the barrage of conflicting claims about Schleiermacher's theological project continues.¹⁴ Modern and contemporary scholars, as Ulrich Barth's survey reveals, believe Schleiermacher's explanation of the foundation of his theological claims and its reference to Christian doctrine is basically adequate (Friedrich Wilhelm Gess); psychological (Christoph von Sigwart); pantheistic (Wilhelm Bender); ontological (Martin E. Miller; a specific mode of time-consciousness (Hans-Richard Reuter); the basis for interpreting religion as mystical, anti-moral and anti-intellectual (Emil Brunner); the basis for a system of aesthetics as the process of an ethical activity (Rudolf Odebrecht); inadequate as the basis for a philosophic doctrine of art (Edmund Husserl); platonic (Bernard Tiddt); Kantian (Wilhelm Dilthey); Fichtean (Immanuel Hermann Fichte); Spinozistic and Schellingian (Christoph von Sigwart); or Jacobian (Eilert Herms).¹⁵

This is the modern context from which postmodern atheological studies emerged proclaiming "the ineradicable duplicity of knowledge, shiftiness of truth, and undecidability of value."¹⁶ This is also the context in which women began to notice what all of the disparate claims

¹¹ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre: Two Letters to Dr. Lücke*, trans. James Duke and Francis Fiorenza (Chico: Scholars Press, 1981), 57. Emphasis added. See also Thandeka, *The Embodied Self: Friedrich Schleiermacher's Solution to Kant's Problem of the Empirical Self* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 8-9.

¹² Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre*, 34-35.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁴ Ulrich Barth, *Christentum und Selbstbewußtsein* (Göttingen: Vandenhöck & Ruprecht, 1983), 7-27.

¹⁵ This paragraph is taken from the present author's book, *The Embodied Self*, 9.

¹⁶ Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1984), 16.

about liberal theology's foundation had in common: men. Thanks to the professionalism of theology in the nineteenth-century spearheaded by Schleiermacher, "scientific" theology had assumed the nature of an academic guild that excluded women¹⁷ and analyzed the human condition from the point of view of men.¹⁸ From these insights about liberal theology's male formulations, feminist theology arose as "advocacy theology"¹⁹ for the liberation of women from the vested, androcentric interests of men. Add to this the racial, ethnic, class, and gender issues linked to the exclusion of others from the original "guild"; late twentieth-century American liberal theology did not search for its original foundation but created new foundations rooted in self-defined advocacy interests and issues. Liberal theology in America was thus prodigious in its creation of offspring: postliberal and postcolonial theologies, gender, racial, and ethnically defined identity-based theologies, and more.²⁰

Garry Dorrien has documented this modern context in fine detail. The main achievement of American liberal theology toward the end of the twentieth century, Dorrien observes, was diversity. And as American liberal theology became progressively "more liberationist, feminist, environmentalist, multiculturalist, and postmodernist," Dorrien concludes, the contested pronouncements of these contested theologies revealed the present impossibility of American liberal theology claiming for itself an uncontested foundation of and for liberal Christian theological studies as a secular, academic field of inquiry.²¹ The requirements for academic membership in these respective theological guilds also created a gap, as Carter Heyward at Episcopal Divinity School observed, between the theological studies of students in the progressive seminaries spawned by liberal theology's heirs and the ability of these students upon graduation to communicate with the congregations they were hired to serve. As Heyward pointedly puts it, the students "spoke of transgressing religious and cultural boundaries while American politics and religion moved to the right."²² Seminaries, theology schools, and religious studies programs became progressive collections of interest groups without a shared foundational ground.

This is a story of American liberal theology linked inextricably to three basic structural problems that made it seem as if liberal theology, from its inception, was congenitally flawed. The solution to this problem was either to abandon the search for a foundation or to establish one linked to specific interests. In this way, the secular academic field of liberal theology increasingly resembled any other "disciplinary community," in which professors were not "subject to any motive other than their own scientific conscience and a desire for the respect of their fellow-experts."²³

A **measurement problem** also arose. The measuring rod used by many of liberal theology's nineteenth-century Protestant evaluators judged Schleiermacher's system by the standard from which he had intentionally discharged it of duties: the doctrines of human nature formulated by Martin Luther or John Calvin. Both of these Reformers included their doctrine of

¹⁷ Janet Martin Soskice and Diana Lipton, "General Introduction," in *Feminism and Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 5.

¹⁸ Ibid. As the authors note, this conclusion was reached by Valerie Saiving Goldstein in her article, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," *Journal of Religion* 40 (April 1960), 100-12.

¹⁹ Soskice and Lipton, 6.

²⁰ Gary Dorrien, "Introduction," *The Making of American Liberal Theology: 1950-2005* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 1-8.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 529. See Carter Heyward, "We're Here, We're Queer: Teaching Sex in Seminary," in *Body and Soul: Rethinking Sexuality as Justice-Love*, ed. Marvin M. Ellison and Sylvia Thorson-Smith (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2003) 78-96, quote, 93.

²³ Louis Joughin, ed., "The 1915 Declaration of Principles," in *Academic Freedom and Tenure: A Handbook for the American Association of University Professors* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 162. Cited by Mark U. Edwards Jr., *Religion On Our Campuses: A Professor's Guide to Communities, Conflicts, and Promising Conversations* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 114.

human nature *within* their theological systems. Their use of conscience was the lynchpin here.²⁴ In contrast, Schleiermacher established liberal theology's foundation (i.e., its doctrine of human nature) *outside* his theological system. His liberal theology's human foundation was *not* part of his theological structure. The importance of this difference cannot be over-emphasized.

Unlike the use of *conscience* by Luther and Calvin, Schleiermacher did not make *Affekt* an innate *religious* capacity implanted in human nature by God as a link between God and human beings. Rather, *Affekt*, in Schleiermacher's system, is an aspect of human nature that can be determined piously but is not in itself pious. It is simply a neurological impulse.

IB. *Affekt*: Schleiermacher's Neurological Fact of Consciousness, Historically Reconsidered

Schleiermacher tried to bring religion back to its emotional senses by making the foundation of his new theological system a neurological fact of consciousness: *Affekt*.²⁵ The rational theology of Kant (among others) made Reason the organizing principle of religious experience. Left out of this rational, Enlightenment scheme of religion were human feelings of joy, regeneration, and celebration as foundational affective material for religious life and thought. Schleiermacher retrieved these feelings through his doctrine of human affections, which can also be called the foundational level of his doctrine of the human soul.²⁶ He did not want to replace

²⁴Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 1535, Chapters 1-4*, Jaroslav Pelikan, ed., *Luther's Works* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 26: 120. Luther, for example, in his *Lectures on Galatians*, defined conscience as the bride of Christ designed by God:

Let [the Christian] permit the Law to rule his body and its members but not his conscience. For that queen and bride must not be polluted by the Law but must be kept pure for Christ, her one and only husband; as Paul says elsewhere (2 Cor. 11:2): "I betrothed you to one husband." Therefore let the conscience have its bridal chamber, not deep in the valley but high on the mountain. Here let only Christ lie and reign, Christ, who does not terrify sinners and afflict them, but who comforts them, forgives their sins, and saves them.

Calvin also defined conscience as a divinely constructed mean between man and God. Defining *conscience* in the *Institutes*, Calvin writes:

it first behooves us to comprehend what conscience is: we must seek the definition from the derivative of the word. For just as when through the mind and understanding men grasp a knowledge of things, and from this are said "to know," this is the source of the word "knowledge," so also when they have a sense of divine judgment, as a witness joined to them, which does not allow them to hide their sins from being accused before the Judge's tribunal, this sense is called "conscience." For it is a certain mean between God and man, because it does not allow man to suppress within himself what he knows, but pursues him to the point of convicting him. This is what Paul understands when he teaches that conscience also testifies to men, where their thought either accuses or excuses them in God's judgment (Rom. 2:15-16). A simple knowledge could reside, so to speak, closed up in man. Therefore this awareness which hales man before God's judgment is a sort of guardian appointed for man to note and spy out all his secrets that nothing may remain buried in darkness.

John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John T. McNeill, ed., *The Library of Christian Classics* vol. XX (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 3.19.2. See Randall C. Zachman's *The Assurance of Faith: Conscience in the Theology of Martin Luther and John Calvin* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) for a lucid analysis of the respective differences in the use of *conscience* by these two Reformers. For further elucidation of this overall problem see the present author's essay, "Schleiermacher's *Affekt* Theology, 206ff.

²⁵ Thandeka, *The Embodied Self*, 15-37.

²⁶ See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Über den Umfang des Begriffs der Kunst in Bezug auf die Theorie derselben* [*On the Scope of the Concept of Art in Relation to its Theory*], in *Friedrich Schleiermachers sämtliche Werke* III.3, 181-224, especially 183. For further elaboration, also see the present author's essay "Schleiermacher, Feminisms, and Liberation Theologies: A Key," *The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher*, ed. Jacqueline Mariña (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 289ff.

Kant's system. He wanted to fix it, give balance to it, by establishing reason *and* physical, emotional feelings as both worthy constituents of human nature and religious experience.²⁷

Moreover, Schleiermacher made a division within emotional feelings. An example highlights this distinction.

Imagine two persons who have just experienced the same shocking event and as a result anger is triggered within them. Both persons display the same initial spontaneous movements: their jaw muscles tighten; their eyes bulge; and their lips turn downward. But there the similarities end because of the ways the two persons immediately handle their triggered anger. One person has an emotional volatile personality and begins to rant and rave, flailing arms, shouting, and punching at the air. The other person tends toward emotional quiescence so the anger does not peak with a bang but ends with a whimper, a sigh of sadness, and a tear of remorse.

The point of this example is that there is a difference between (1) the triggered anger with its spontaneous somatic displays (the facial expressions, etc.) by the two persons, and (2) the way the anger was then handled by their respective dominant and pervasive emotional dispositions.²⁸

Schleiermacher noted this difference. Moreover, he used two different German terms to describe it: *Affekt* and *Gefühl*. He called the stirred up impulse with its spontaneous physical expressions—*affect*, and the overarching dispositional emotional state that modified the physical experience and determined its emotional valence—*feeling* [*Gefühl*].

According to Schleiermacher, affects are the ways in which a shift in disposition is first noted in the body. This shift is first felt like a clenched jaw or a downturn of the lips, or a heartbeat quickened. Unlike other philosophers and affect theorists in his own era, Schleiermacher accordingly described affect as a physical, neurological process rather than as a strictly disembodied mental/spiritual state.²⁹

Moreover, *how* this affective state is transformed into a motive for action, Schleiermacher argued, is determined by feeling. Schleiermacher designed his new theological system to take note of *how* one particular kind of feeling—pious feeling [*Frömmigkeit*—is created within individuals and communities. Pious feeling, Schleiermacher argued, is the essential element of faith of a particular religious community.³⁰ For Christians, the common element, according to Schleiermacher, is the feeling of redemption wrought by Jesus of Nazareth. Schleiermacher

²⁷ Thandeka, *The Embodied Self*, 12ff. Schleiermacher, *On Freedom*, 33ff.

²⁸ As neurologist Antonio Damasio notes in *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (San Diego: Harcourt Inc., 1999), the pervasive affective states give our lives and thoughts definition and color. They are our body's native tongue and are observable as "body postures, the shape and design of our movements, and even the tone of our voices and the prosody in our speech as we communicate thoughts that may have little to do with the background emotions" (286). Schleiermacher made a similar distinction between the background *feeling* and the foreground immediate *affective* shifts in subjective self-awareness.

²⁹ For details see the present author's essay, "Schleiermacher's *Affekt* Theology," 211. As noted in this essay: "Schleiermacher's creation of his own theory of *Affekt*, as (Gunter) Scholtz points out, was different from that of his era's regnant theories (such as that of Hegel) because Schleiermacher identified *Affekt* as the means by which human subjectivity changed into artistic activity. A sheerly mental depiction of this transition point, Scholtz notes, was for Schleiermacher vacuous. (See Gunter Scholtz, *Schleiermachers Musikphilosophie* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981], 93.) Tones, from this standpoint, are expressions of the natural world *astir* within us. As Scholtz observes, the sounds become the harmonics, and our affections become the rhythmic movements of our own impassioned nature. The structures of the natural world (e.g., sounds) and human feelings meet. "Schleiermacher brought these two sides together in his work: artistic feeling and the natural world." See Gunter Scholtz, *Ethik und Hermeneutik: Schleiermachers Grundlegung der Geisteswissenschaften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995), 217. For Schleiermacher, the essence of art was thus the feeling of movement within the self transformed into measure and rule. Sound (as well as physical gesture), Schleiermacher argued, is a natural expression of any internal movement of excited human affections." See Schleiermacher, *Über den Umfang*, 192-93.

³⁰ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, propositions 3.4 and 11.1-2; Thandeka, "Schleiermacher's *Affekt* Theology," 205-7.

designed his theological system to study how triggered impulses (affects) are handled piously and expressed piously through ideas, actions, and speech.³¹

All pious feelings are thus, for Schleiermacher, culturally determined. Their affective ground, however, is not culturally determined. Culture can determine, for example, if an anger system of the brain is triggered, but biology and culture are not the same in Schleiermacher's scheme. Culture entrains that which precedes the acculturation process: affect. Affect is a neural fact of consciousness. Pious feeling mediates and modifies triggered affect. Pious feelings are a creation of a religious community and thus a cultural creation of human experiences in the world. This is why Schleiermacher claimed that any positive religious pronouncement always entails anthropomorphic claims: they pertain to human self-consciousness linked to experiences in the world.³² Christian doctrine, in Schleiermacher's system, always pertains to propositions that can be related back to piously determined affections.³³

By referring to the pious determination of *Affekt* as *Gefühl*, Schleiermacher thus made a fundamental distinction between a pious feeling (*Gefühl*) and its a-religious, material ground as a neurological shift in self-consciousness. In short, an affect.³⁴ Accordingly, Schleiermacher identified *Affekt* as the physical, material locus of immediate self-consciousness. The term *immediate self-consciousness* thus refers to a fundamental structural device: an affective shift in consciousness. The immediate awareness of this altered state of consciousness (i.e., the shift) is itself the felt affect. It is a peaked affective state within the organism. The unmediated awareness of this affective state (affective consciousness) is the experience of personal coherence of the self, affectively felt, and it functions as the transition point from one determinate moment of rational consciousness to the next.³⁵

Affect, in Schleiermacher's theological system, became bedrock for faith. Affect, however, was *not* a faith state per se. It was the neurological foundation of a faith state, i.e., the neurophysical material organized into a pious affection. Schleiermacher thus turned modern liberal theology into a rational study of human affect piously determined, expressed, and organized. But he assigned the investigation of the neural foundation of this foundational theological reference to ethics, psychology, philosophy, and aesthetics.

The investigation of affect was thus not something his liberal theology depended upon. Rather, it was something his theological system required knowledge of if it wanted to understand the emotional foundation of piety, and thus the primal human ground of the material referent for theology's own reasoned reflections.³⁶

³¹ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, proposition 3.4.

³² *Ibid.*, proposition 172.1.

³³ *Ibid.*, propositions 3.0, 3.1 and 3.4. Schleiermacher used the term "affect" and its related terms "being affected," "affection," a "moment of affection," and "affected" (*Affiziertsein*, *Affektion*, *Affektionsmoment*, *afficiert*) to refer to the physical, empirical condition of the individual's emotive, spiritual life. For further detail see Thandeka, "Schleiermacher, Feminism, and Liberation Theologies," 290ff. Karl Bernecker, in his book, *Kritische Darstellung der Geschichte des Affektbegriffes: Von Descartes bis zur Gegenwart*, traces the first appearances of the term *Affekt* (from the Latin root *affectus*) in the German language in the seventeenth century. As Bernecker notes, the terms *affect* (*Affekt*) and the *movement of the disposition* (*Gemütsbewegung*) of a person very quickly became equivalent terms. The German term *Affekt* was used to describe the spiritual condition (*vestige*) of a person. This term, however, was almost never used to describe the physical condition of a person (*körperliche Befinden*). Schleiermacher broke this rule. See Karl Bernecker, *Kritische Darstellung der Geschichte des Affektbegriffes (Von Descartes bis zur Gegenwart)*, Inaugural-Dissertation zur Erlangung der philosophischen Fakultät der Koeniglichen Universität Greifswald (Berlin: Druck von Otto Godemann, 1915), 1-3. The present author became aware of this text by Bernecker through a reference to it by Gunter Scholtz in his book *Schleiermachers Musikphilosophie*, 72n.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, proposition 3.4. Thandeka, "Schleiermacher's *Affekt* Theology," 205.

³⁵ For a fuller discussion, see the present author's essay, "Schleiermacher's *Affekt* Theology."

³⁶ Schleiermacher, for example, studied affect in his analysis of music. See Scholtz's groundbreaking book *Schleiermachers Musikphilosophie* for a fine investigation of Schleiermacher's work on music. See also Thandeka, "Schleiermacher, feminism, and liberation theologies," 288. As noted in this latter text, during Schleiermacher's era, "the hope was pervasive that music would regenerate the listener's sentiments, moods, feelings, and dispositions. The art and science of the use of music to stir the affections was called "the doctrine of human affections" (*Affektenlehre*).

Accordingly, when Schleiermacher made affect the foundational referent for liberal theological inquiry, he established his new academic discipline, at birth, as **an interdependent field**. He gave this new theological system its own distinct terrain: the investigation of the pious determinations of affect within a religious community's historical tradition. The **dependency problem**, from this perspective, was not a problem *within* Schleiermacher's original design: it was a problem for those who could not find the foundation where they looked for it (within his system) or for those who did not know what to look for (affective neurological states of self-consciousness). Moreover, when the interdependency of Schleiermacher's new system was not understood or acknowledged, Schleiermacher's liberal theology appeared **obscure** and **self-contradictory** by design. Schleiermacher's foundation of liberal theology was thus not *ill-conceived*; it was *not* perceived.

Moreover, Schleiermacher's liberal theology, by design, was a "positive" science: an empirical, culturally informed, historical science.³⁷ Accordingly, it had to reconcile absolute truth claims about God found within the Christian tradition with the academic protocol that all human pronouncements are relative, historical claims. Without a method for reconciling the absolute claims of faith with the relative perspectives of the academy, liberal theology lacked a "fundamental methodological integrity" and became structurally disoriented. This is Gerhard Spiegler's point, after reviewing the field of liberal theologies in the late 1960s. As he put it:

Disorientation in theology today suggests nothing less than that theology itself is in question. It is no longer any one theological point which is at issue but the point of theology: that is, its fundamental methodological integrity. Consequently, efforts to dispel theological disorientation can no longer presuppose a clear and distinct understanding of theology, for it is precisely the self-identity of theology which is in doubt. The confusion of contemporary theology is self-confusion, expressed in the shape of methodological chaos and uncertainty; and the task of confronting theology is the task of critical self-understanding.³⁸

A major source of this problem of "theological disorientation" as Spiegler notes in the above citation was indeed a self-confusion expressed in the shape of methodological chaos. The "self-confusion" was a foundation problem.

Schleiermacher knew that the primal affective states (e.g., rage, joy, anger, fear) are not relative. He also knew that the ways these states are determined and expressed are relative to the cultural and social environment in which they are acculturated. Accordingly, Schleiermacher turned the primal affective states into the non-relative foundation of liberal theology. And he made the way these neurological states are determined as "pious," the empirical, culturally-linked relative foundation of theology. His liberal theology was thus a cultural theology, but the foundation upon which it rested was not cultural. Critical self-understanding of the difference between piety and its affective foundation, as Schleiermacher discovered, was lacking among his readers.³⁹ So Schleiermacher's original foundation went unseen and with it a solid ground upon

The term *Affektenlehre* was coined by the German composer Johann Mattheson (1681-1764), who believed that different major and minor scales evoked different affective states within the listener. The basic claim of this doctrine was that music was resonant and thus stirred and altered dispositions. See Julie Ann Sadie, "Johann Mattheson," *Companion to Baroque Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 171-72, and George J. Buelow, "Johann Mattheson and the Invention of the Affektenlehre," *New Mattheson Studies*, ed. George J. Buelow and Hans Joachim Marx (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 393-407.

³⁷ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study*, ed. Terrence N. Tice (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press).

³⁸ Gerhard Spiegler, *The Eternal Covenant: Schleiermacher's Experiment in Cultural Theology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 2.

³⁹ As noted above regarding Schleiermacher's comment to his friend Dr. Lücke, *On the Glaubenslehre: Two Letters to Dr. Lücke*, 57.

which to build a viable theological method for the entire academic field lacked structural integrity.

Two centuries elapsed before a neuroscientific field was created adequate to the task of disclosing for liberal theology its own, non-relative, affective foundation.

II. Affective Neuroscience Investigates Affect and Thereby the Foundation of Schleiermacher's Liberal Theology

Jaak Panksepp did not create affective neuroscience or write its first textbook in order to help liberal theologians discover the foundation of their own field. Rather, he created it to show his own neuroscientific colleagues what they repeatedly overlooked: the affective foundations of human and animal emotions. He wanted to counter the regnant belief among brain scientists and philosophers that the subjective, affective experiences of human beings were “an impenetrable mystery to science.”⁴⁰

To study the non-rational, affective states of consciousness, Panksepp concluded, scientists simply have to enter the subcortical realm of emotional feelings,⁴¹ the areas schematized as the lower two portions of the human “triune brain.” And this is exactly where Jaak Panksepp went.

Accordingly, Panksepp's attention turned to the oldest and innermost core of the brain, the area Paul MacLean's model refers to as “the *reptilian brain*, or the *basal ganglia* or *extrapyramidal motor system*.”⁴² This is the realm, as Panksepp demonstrates, in which fear, anger, and sexuality neural circuitry are linked to core motor movements to ensure survival. The next layer of the brain in this triune schematic is the *limbic system* also referred to as the *visceral system*. Here, as Panksepp notes, “the various social emotions [are found,] including maternal acceptance and care, social bonding, separation distress, and rough-and-tumble play.” These two regions, as Panksepp observed, “are similarly organized in all mammals.”

Around these two regions, in evolutionary terms, the newest and highest level of the brain is found: the *neomammalian brain*, also referred to as the *neocortex*. Unlike the subcortical layers, the neocortex “is not a fundamental neural substrate for the generation of affective experience.”⁴³ Accordingly, to study the emotional operating systems of the brain and the ways in which these systems are affectively amplified into conscious but non-conceptual awareness, Panksepp studies these two lower regions of the human brain that produce feelings rather than thoughts.⁴⁴

Panksepp codified these affective states, i.e., the links between what goes on within the brain and how it shows up in the body and the mind. Affective neuropsychologist and theorist Douglas F. Watt calls his work with Panksepp on identifying these categories “a basic taxonomy of emotion.”⁴⁵ Drawing upon insights from thousands of research studies by scientists and psychologists engaged in affective studies, and also producing more than 300 published papers on

⁴⁰ Jaak Panksepp, “The Core Emotional Systems of the Mammalian Brain: The Fundamental Substrates of Human Emotions,” in *About a Body: Working with the Embodied Mind in Psychotherapy*, ed. Jenn Corrigan (New York: Routledge, 2006), 17.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 17-19.

⁴² Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience*, 42-43.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁴⁴ The recent turn by neuroscientists to the subcortical, affective foundations of human consciousness is now challenging, as Panksepp notes, the typical scientific and academic valuation of rationality over emotionality. Accordingly, Panksepp believes we are now “on the verge of an ‘affective revolution’ that will be as important as the preceding ‘cognitive revolution’ in the development of a scientific psychology in the next few decades.” *Affective Neuroscience*, 348 (note 51).

⁴⁵ Douglas F. Watt, “Social Bonds and the Nature of Empathy,” *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 12, (August-October 2005): 188-212.

his own original research in this field, Panksepp created a brain science that goes from the stem of the brain upward rather than from the neocortex downward.⁴⁶

Panksepp found three basic types of affect: (1) affect that make us aware of the internal state of our body (e.g., hunger or fatigue); (2) affect that makes us aware of the type of emotional system that has been triggered and thus aroused (e.g., the awareness of being enraged); (3) affect that makes us aware as commentary on bodily sensations (e.g. tactile and visual stimulation from sources exterior to the body).⁴⁷

These affective commentaries on our sensations, emotions, and internal muscular and anatomical shifts, Panksepp concluded, are the way we initially, consciously but non-conceptually, take note or become aware of what has just happened to our body. This awareness is indeed a state of consciousness, defined here functionally as the “bare awareness of ‘something.’”⁴⁸

Referring to affects as “pre-propositional feelings,” Panksepp found that they alert us, not through ideas, but through a felt sense of life—called affective consciousness—about how we are faring in the world, within ourselves, and with others at the somatic level of our lives.⁴⁹ To be sure, Panksepp argues, these affective triggerings can be mediated by rational consideration as well as through dream work on alternative ways of responding behaviorally to the triggered feelings.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, they are a way in which the brain neurologically assesses the surrounding environment in order to make affective judgments, links to motor movements that dictate approach or retreat, seeking, rage, fear, play, lust or other neurochemical systems constructed as physical value judgments that prompt actions by the organism in its exterior environment, its world.

These genetically predetermined, trans-species feeling systems resonate as internal attention-getters, -stoppers, and -sustainers. They move human bodies to act before belief and rational reflection set in.

Moreover, Panksepp found primal affective links to social behavior. Biology is not necessarily destiny, Panksepp concluded, because, as he puts it, we do have the ability to make cognitive choices. But our neurobiology qualifies our destiny affectively. If, for example, the underlying groups of molecular structures produced by the brain that create our affective feelings of social solidarity, acceptance, nurturance, and love are compromised, our affective bonds with others will “probably remain shallow and without emotional intensity.”⁵¹ His findings concur with other recent brain investigations showing that “social bonding is rooted in various brain chemistries that are normally activated by friendly and supportive forms of social interaction.”⁵²

⁴⁶ Jaak Panksepp, “On the Embodied Neural Nature of Core Emotional Affects,” *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 12, (December 2005): 161-164; Panksepp, “The Core Emotional Systems of the Brain,” 18.

⁴⁷ Panksepp, “On the Embodied Neural Nature of Core Emotional Affects,” 169.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 169-170, *passim*.

⁵⁰ Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience*, 135.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 247-49.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 247-48. One example illustrates the enormous import of this work for future American social policy, specifically, its major strategy for handling drug addiction. The link between the activation of brain chemistries that enables social bonding and supportive social interactions led Panksepp to hypothesize that one reason certain people become addicts and are addicted to drugs like morphine and heroine is that these drugs artificially induce feelings of gratification similar to the feelings that their brains would have naturally activated by socially nurturing environments. Through drug use, people are thus able to “pharmacologically induce the positive feeling of connectedness that others derive from social interactions. . . . Indeed, opiate addiction in humans is most common in environments where social isolation and alienation are endemic. . . . These social problems are more understandable in light of the fact that positive social emotions and social bonds are, to some extent, mediated by opioid-based, naturally occurring addictive processes within the brain” (255). If this hypothesized link between addiction and social environment is borne out, an enormous shadow will be cast over the billions of dollars the American

These investigations revealed the role of affect in the creation of social bonds and the material content of what Schleiermacher called the human soul. It is here that the foundation of liberal theology is found and affirmed by affective neuroscience and its related fields in two basic ways.

First, affect as foundational for the creation of community. Affect, as Schleiermacher insisted, is foundational to religious community. Pious communities, he said, are created by the reproduction of affective states, “by means of facial expressions, gestures, tones, and (indirectly) words” such that the *contagion*⁵³ of collective affective displays becomes for others not only a revelation of the inward as foundational for religious community, but also creates and maintains pious communities through affective consciousness as an emotional “consciousness of kind.”⁵⁴

Schleiermacher’s fundamental claim here about “consciousness of kind” makes affect a foundational material enabling the creation and maintaining of community. Affective neuroscience and its related fields confirm Schleiermacher’s claim that the foundational material here is shared affect.

For Panksepp, consciousness of kind begins affectively. It is our “internal biological logic,” and it pertains to our “emotional minds.” Our emotional minds create our desire to express our deeply social nature to other human beings, Panksepp suggests, “especially those with whom we shared attachment bonds, and to mutually glory in the kinds of deeply feeling creatures that we are.”⁵⁵

Consciousness of kind thus entails an acculturation process. Clinical psychoanalyst and theorist John E. Gedo, who uses insights from Panksepp’s work, calls this acculturation process a “cybernetic loop between infant and caretaker.”⁵⁶ It pertains to the central nervous system of the infant and the caretaker as a dyad, Gedo observes. The unity of the self is thus a collaborative achievement.⁵⁷ Schleiermacher agrees.

As Schleiermacher succinctly put it, “We never do exist except along with another.” Human consciousness, Schleiermacher insisted, always entails the co-existence of an Other whose affective signals we have first received. Schleiermacher made this “cybernetic loop” foundational to the creation and sustaining of religious community.

Second, affect as the neural content of the soul. Schleiermacher, as noted above, called the study of the core affective level of human consciousness a study of the material impulses of the human soul.⁵⁸ Panksepp makes a strikingly similar claim.

government spends on destroying drugs in other countries rather than improving neighborhoods in this country.

⁵³ This use of the term *contagion* in the above text to refer to Schleiermacher’s notion, in *The Christian Faith*, proposition 6.2, of the way in which consciousness of kind passes over into living imitation or reproduction (*in lebendige Nachbildung*) is based on Douglas F. Watt’s important essay, “Toward a Neuroscience of Empathy: Integrating Affective and Cognitive Perspectives,” *Neuro-Psychoanalysis* 9 (2007): 130ff. In this essay, Watt discusses emotional contagion as a neurological process entailed in empathy.

⁵⁴ *The Christian Faith*, proposition 6.2

⁵⁵ Jaak Panksepp, “The Emotional Antecedents to the Evolution of Music and Language,” 9-10. *Musicae Scientiae*, in press. Page numbers from the original manuscript sent to the present author by Panksepp.

⁵⁶ John E. Gedo, *Psychoanalysis as Biological Science: A Comprehensive Theory* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 97. Writes Gedo:

Affectivity provides a cybernetic system of intrapsychic communication. In infancy, while executive control resides in the mother’s mind, the cyberspace loop must be completed through the caretaker’s ability to read the baby’s affective signals and by affective attunement within the dyad. One of the caretaker’s vital tasks is to teach the child the appropriate measures that will regulate affective intensities. Control of this kind is lacking in major affective disorders.

⁵⁷ D. W. Winnicott, “Physiotherapy and Human Relations,” in *D. W. Winnicott: Psycho-Analytic Explorations*, ed. Clare Winnicott, Ray Shepherd, Madeleine Davis (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 566.

⁵⁸ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, propositions 3.3 and 5.1.

At the foundational level of consciousness, Panksepp suggests, we are aware of “our ineffable sense of being alive and an active agent in the world.”⁵⁹ Panksepp describes this ineffable sense as the “primordial self-schema” or “self-representation,” and refers to “it” using the acronym, the “SELF—A Simple Ego-type Life Form”—to refer to this primordial structure of agency found “deep within the brain.”⁶⁰

Moreover, as Panksepp suggests, this foundational fact of non-rational, affective conscious awareness can be thought about as a “core self”—or even as a soul. Perhaps it is now appropriate, Panksepp suggests, to “entertain neuro-psychological conceptions of human and animal ‘souls’”⁶¹ Panksepp calls this primal material “a subcortical viscerosomatic homunculus,”⁶² a SELF, and a soul. Here, Panksepp and Schleiermacher meet.

Neurologist Antonio Damasio also investigates this primal, affective level of human experience. He, too, talks about a self— a “proto-self”—where consciousness begins. Moreover, Damasio affirms here Panksepp’s own work on the link between the body and the self “by means of an innate representation of the body in the brain stem.”⁶³ Damasio concludes that neither the mind nor the soul can be adequately discussed today without attending to a neurological analysis of the subcortical structures of consciousness.⁶⁴ Here, Damasio and Schleiermacher meet.

More broadly, Panksepp suggests that the analysis of affect is challenging regnant Western religious claims about the nature of the human soul and the human spirit as strictly rational entities. The human soul and the human spirit, like all other mammalian experiences, Panksepp insists, have neurological characteristics, constraints, and histories, and so they must no longer be described as disembodied, rational, emotion-less entities.⁶⁵ If the human soul and the human spirit are *human* experiences, Panksepp is asserting here, then they have to have *human* characteristics—and the foundations of such characteristics are neurological, affective states.

Panksepp is affirming basic claims made by Schleiermacher here without ever mentioning Schleiermacher’s name. And similarly to Schleiermacher, Panksepp’s claims are not proffered as theological claims or as creedal belief. Rather, they are presented as a neurological aspect of human consciousness that can be investigated by neuroscience.

In sum, affective neuroscience goes down under concepts, below doctrines and creeds, and investigates the ineffable sense of being alive. For Schleiermacher, this affective sense is not religion, but its inception: the “natal hour of everything living in religion.”⁶⁶ Schleiermacher did not make this sense the content of his theology. He made it the foundation of his theology. To reiterate, affective neuroscience found and affirmed this affective, ineffable sense exactly where Schleiermacher placed it: outside the theological domain.

III. The Future of American Liberal Theology

Affective neuroscience has revealed the cogency of original claims by Schleiermacher about liberal theology’s affective foundation. American liberal theology can reveal the promise of Schleiermacher’s original insights for its own future in the following way. Familiarity of American liberal theologians with affective neuroscience and its related fields can give American

⁵⁹ Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience*, 310.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 309.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 178. Panksepp also cites here the work of S. Gallagher and J Shear, *Models of the Self* (Exeter, UK: Imprint Academic, 1999.)

⁶² Panksepp, “On the Embodied Neural Nature of Core Emotional Affects,” 178.

⁶³ Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (San Diego: A Harvest Book Harcourt, Inc., 1999), 156.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 231.

⁶⁵ Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience*, 310, 320.

⁶⁶ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion. Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (1799), ed. Günter Meckenstock (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001), p. 90. English translation by Richard Crouter, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 113.

liberal theology access to insights needed to distinguish shifting primal affective states from the ways in which they are being culturally determined as religious states of faith. This promise is a design program, a methodology, with structural integrity for doing American liberal theology in the twenty-first century.

This design program for American liberal theology enables three basic steps: (1) paying attention to affective shifts in human experience, (2) noting the ways in which these shifts are handled emotionally as pious⁶⁷ states of self-consciousness, and (3) studying these pious states and the faith pronouncements linked to them as emotional and rational expressions of a particular religious community's faith tradition (e.g., historical traditions and contemporary modifications of them, symbol systems, sacred texts, cultic practices, particular individual and communal variants within particular communities based on race, gender, class and other identity factors, etc.). Such a threefold methodology, which can be called *affect theology*, can give American liberal theology a viable future in two basic ways.

First, emotional relevance. America needs a liberal theological system conversant with primal emotions and how they get culturally determined as states of faith, i.e., pious feelings. This is the case because more and more Protestant and post-Protestant Americans, as noted earlier, now “pick and choose” their religious affiliations.⁶⁸ These choices are based on immediate personal needs rather than on long-term product loyalty to particular doctrines, creeds, and institutional affiliation. This seems an obvious conclusion of the survey of 35,000 Americans about their religious life conducted and published by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life in February 2008. The Report, titled “U.S. Religious Landscape Survey,” found that

- More than one-quarter of American adults have left the faith in which they were raised in favor of another religion or no religion at all.
- 44% of adults have switched their religious affiliation.
- A third of all Protestants do not define their religion by a denomination—an administrative structure characterized by particular doctrines and practices (e.g., the Southern Baptist Convention or the United Church of Christ).
- 16% of American adults define themselves as religiously unaffiliated.

In this “winners” and “losers” religious marketplace, all groups, the survey concludes, are both gaining and losing individual adherents. But the emotional turmoil linked to these structural changes in America's “religious marketplace” is not disclosed in this Report.

American liberal theology as a *liberal* theology is designed not only to adjudicate shifting human emotions that get defined by faith, but also to do this without eliding the doctrinal and liturgical differences linked to them. But presently, the legacy of the foundation problem within liberal religion has prevented American liberals informed by this liberal tradition and its Enlightenment context from seeing the affective foundation of religious beliefs. Rather, affective states, religious feelings, and creedal beliefs have been conflated and discussed as if all three can be assessed similarly as scientifically sound or unsound ideas.

A case in point: Garry Wills' 2004 post-election essay, “The Day the Enlightenment Went Out.”⁶⁹ Bemoaning Senator John Kerry's loss of the presidential election to George W. Bush, Wills asked rhetorically: “Can a people that believes more fervently in the Virgin Birth than in evolution still be called an Enlightened nation?” His answer was a resounding “No.”⁷⁰

⁶⁷ The use of the term *pious* in this paragraph is intended to denote, strictly speaking, the emotional content of a faith state, i.e., the way in which an affective state has been emotionally tempered by religious feeling.

⁶⁸ Luis Lugo, et. al., “U.S. Religious Landscape Survey,” 22.

⁶⁹ Garry Wills, “The Day the Enlightenment Went Out,” *New York Times* (November 4, 2004), A25. This example is taken from the article “Ministering to Anxiety: Take Abortion, for Example,” written by the present author for *Tikkun Magazine: A Bimonthly Jewish and Interfaith Critique of Politics, Culture & Society* (May/June 2005), 20.

⁷⁰ Quoting Wills: “America, the first real democracy in history, was a product of Enlightenment values—critical intelligence, tolerance, respect for evidence, a regard for the secular sciences. Though the founders differed on many things, they shared these values of what was then modernity. They addressed ‘a candid world,’ as they wrote in the

Wills's own list of "Enlightenment values" left out one of them: religious emotions. Daniel E. Ritchie, director of the humanities program at Bethel University, pointed out this oversight in his letter-to-the-editor.⁷¹ The actual American Enlightenment, Ritchie argued, "was neither antireligious nor anticlerical." Nor was it "a triumph of conservative religious belief over reason and facts." Political liberty and religious practice were inseparable, Ritchie insisted.

After correcting Wills's record of Enlightenment values, Ritchie then offered liberals advice from the heart—"the heart of an evangelical university with a strongly pro-Bush student body." Liberals, Ritchie said, need to take religion to heart. In Ritchie's words: "America's elites must . . . come to understand American religion, past and present, more deeply. Until they do, they will continue to create the polarization they lament."

Conservative historian Gertrude Himmelfarb also makes a similar point when calling attention to the lost (to liberals) emotions that form the foundation of the liberal Enlightenment faith in reason. In her book, *The Roads to Modernity: The British, French, and American Enlightenment*,⁷² Himmelfarb not only shows fellow conservatives the feelings liberals lost sight of, but also stakes out this lost emotional terrain as conservative turf. Do not turn away from the "driving force of the eighteenth-century British Enlightenment" because it is a foundation of American liberalism, Himmelfarb pleads to her colleagues. Just add what the liberals usually leave out: the social emotions, which she calls the "social virtues" and the "social affections." This traditional emotional ground of liberal faith is now conservative terrain.⁷³

American liberal theology, with insights from affective neuroscience and its related fields, can now reclaim and update knowledge of its own lost affective terrain. By so doing, it will have an affective vocabulary, one that can speak to affective states such as anxiety, rage, fear, and terror common to Americans who come from distinct and often conflicting religious traditions, without dismissing or demeaning the religious creeds and beliefs linked to them.⁷⁴ By affirming this common affective ground, persons from disparate religious traditions might have a place to stand together because their foundational affective worries, wishes, desires, and fears have been acknowledged rather than demeaned or set aside.

Second, collective power. American liberal theology will gain the ability to gather its diversity together for coordinated, collective projects. This will happen as religious studies scholars, theologians, ethicists, and theorists from disparate fields of study along with clergy and other ecclesiastical and organizational leaders note what they already have in common: shared interests in affective experiences. This kind of "affect theology," as constructive theologian Jennifer Jesse rightly notes, "could effectively help bridge the gap between the academy and the church—a gap that poses a significant roadblock to any future designs in the liberal traditions."⁷⁵ Insights from affective neuroscience and its related fields enhance the ability to see this shared affective ground.

Declaration of Independence, out of a decent respect for the opinions of mankind. Respect for evidence seems not to pertain any more, when a poll taken just before the elections showed that 75 percent of Mr. Bush's supporters believe Iraq either worked closely with Al Qaeda or was directly involved in the attacks of 9/11."

⁷¹ Daniel E. Ritchie, "Did Belief Win Out Over Reason?", *New York Times*, Letter to the Editor, (November 9, 2004), <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9506EFDB133CF93BA35752C1A9629C8B63&n=Top/Reference/Times%20Topics/Subjects/E/Election%20Issues>

⁷² Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Roads to Modernity: The British, French, and American Enlightenment* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁷⁴ The present author's analysis of the way President George W. Bush, in the 2004 presidential election campaign, mined religious emotions for his own vested political purposes, is an example of the new role American liberal theology can play in the analysis of Christian politics in America. See Thandeka, "The Confidence Man," *Tikkun Magazine* (May/June 2004), 14-15.

⁷⁵ Jennifer Jesse, personal correspondence, May 13, 2008.

Consider the possibilities when scholars as diverse as the three listed below are brought together to talk about that which already links their diverse interests: studies on affective experiences.

1. William A. Graham, who is Dean of Harvard Divinity School, Murray A. Albertson Professor of Middle Eastern Studies, and John Lord O'Brian Professor of Divinity, lifts up what he calls “the affective realm of religious life” and the “‘sensual’ aspects of religious life” in his work. To this end, Graham explains his intended use of the term “sensual.” The importance of his insight is worth quoting at length:

I use the word not so much to refer in a technical way to the five senses, but rather to suggest that seeing, hearing, and touching in particular are essential elements in religious life as we can observe it. . . . A sacred text can be read laboriously in silent study, chanted or sung in unthinking repetition, copied or illuminated in loving devotion, imaginatively depicted in art or drama, solemnly processed in ritual pageantry, or devoutly touched in hope of luck and blessing. In each instance, in very diverse and not always predictable but still very real ways, such contact with scripture can elicit in reader, hearer, onlooker, or worshiper diverse responses: a surge of joy or sorrow; a feeling of belonging or even of alienation; a sense of guidance or consolation (or the want of either); or a feeling of intimacy with the awesome distance from the divine. These kinds of religious responses are important to an adequate understanding of what it means to encounter a text as scripture. Such aspects are difficult, perhaps finally impossible, for the scholar to get at in any systematic way, but to ignore them entirely is to omit a substantial portion of their reality. Ideally, our knowledge of the textual history, doctrinal interpretation, ritual and devotional use, and political and social roles of a scriptural book should be joined to an awareness of these sensual elements in the response of the faithful to their sacred text. Only in this way can our understanding of scripture as a relational phenomenon begin to be adequate.⁷⁶

Graham is talking about affect—that *surge* of joy or sorrow; that *feeling* of belonging or even of alienation; that *sense* of guidance or consolation (or the want of either); that *feeling* of intimacy. Graham calls these affective states experiences beyond words. They are the affective foundation for faith. And because, as Graham puts it, “every historical tradition is unique,” these affective displays prompted by “multisensory, and sometimes synaesthetic experience of communal worship . . . will present different problems and require different formulation of common questions.”⁷⁷ These different formulations delineate diverse perspectives on the same affective phenomena: the affective foundation of the religious claims.

2. Emilie M. Townes, who is President of the American Academy of Religion, Andrew W. Mellon Professor of African American Religion and Theology at Yale Divinity School, focuses on affective care.⁷⁸ Townes uses the term “an ethic of care” to describe the kinds of liberative feelings that produce the *work of care* and she shows her readers how to link the practices and principles theologically through praxis. Attention to these feelings entails affective study. Townes affirms the importance of social context for this work in her book *Breaking the*

⁷⁶ William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 6-7.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁷⁸ For more details, see Thandeka, “Feminist, Inc.: North American Feminist Theologies and Globalization,” *The Oxford Handbook on Feminist Theology and Globalization*, Eds. Sheila Briggs and Mary McClintock Fulkerson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

*Fine Rain of Death: African American Health Issues and a Womanist Ethic of Care.*⁷⁹ She does this within the affective context of care.

The centrality of emotion in her work on ethics is made dramatically evident in the opening paragraphs of her Introduction to *Embracing the Spirit: Womanist Perspectives on Hope, Salvation and Transformation*. The power of her story requires direct quote rather than summary. And so she begins,

As I sit writing the introduction to this anthology, I do so in my mother's hospital room waiting for her to return from surgery. There is a myriad of emotions welling up, but the one that I find returning again and again is hope. . . .

I am hopeful that Mom's surgery will go well and that the test results will come back negative. This will be good news for our family. Yet this hope that I have is indescribably ultimate. I can point to it, I can even walk around in it and be comforted by it, but I cannot convey to you the reader how it is holding me in a place of calm, of peace.

Such is the hope that the contributors to this anthology try to describe. It is often yoked, as we have done, with notions of salvation and transformation.⁸⁰

Townes's recognition of the way in which emotions get linked to religious notions of salvation and transformation lies at the heart and soul of the liberal theological project. This tradition begins with shifting affective states (emotions) and reflects upon them through the theological lens of the doctrinal claims and pious feelings linked to them.

3. John Cobb Jr., who is professor emeritus at the Claremont School of Theology and the Claremont Graduate University, and who is also one of the preeminent theologians of our era, a founder to process studies and a foremost scholar in transdisciplinary process thought,⁸¹ suggests that Alfred North Whitehead's system could be thought of as a "philosophy of emotion."⁸² As Cobb notes, based on more than 50 years of evaluating, using, and emending the work of Whitehead, both he and Whitehead affirm that the major events they analyze as constituent processes within human experience have locus points within the human brain.⁸³ Moreover, as Cobb suggests, all of the various types of feelings from both the mental and physical poles of experience are accompanied by an "emotional tone," which Whitehead called the "subjective forms" of the "prehensions that are the experiences of the entities in question."⁸⁴ Nevertheless, as Cobb notes, there is a chasm between the human brain and conscious human perception, which must be explored. Can insights from affective neuroscience help fill this gap? As Cobb noted in response to this query, the use of affective neuroscience

is a whole new field that goes a long way to bridge the gap between the objective and the subjective and to provide the kind of information that can give life to

⁷⁹ Emilie M. Townes, *Breaking the Fine Rain of Death: African American Health Issues and a Womanist Ethic of Care*. (New York, NY: Continuum, 2001), 154.

⁸⁰ Emilie M. Townes, "Introduction: Creating Ruminations of the Spirit," in *Embracing the Spirit: Womanist Perspectives on Hope, Salvation and Transformation*, ed. Emilie M. Townes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), xi.

⁸¹ As the program brochure, *John B. Cobb, Jr.: Celebrating the Legacy*, rightly noted for the February 15, 2008, fundraiser to create an endowed chair in Process Studies at the Claremont School of Theology: "Process theology is the most influential school of liberal progressive theology on the American scene, and its international influence is growing."

⁸² Personal e-mail correspondence to the present author from John B. Cobb Jr., March 10, 2008.

⁸³ John B., Cobb, Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology: Based on the Thought of Alfred North Whitehead*, Second Edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 6 – 9.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

general ideas. I like the idea of using “affect” to designate the most elemental “emotions,” since the latter word connotes something that is hard to generalize to purely bodily events. I think “affect” comes close to what Whitehead means by “subjective form.”⁸⁵

Much more work, Cobb concludes, is needed to test how well the translations from Whitehead to affective neuroscience will work. “But there can be here a genuinely helpful conversation partner.” This work goes on now.⁸⁶

Thanks to affective neuroscience and its related fields, American liberal theology now has a place to stand in order to discern and affirm the common ground of fields as distinct as the three examples presented above.⁸⁷ As made evident by these three examples, the respective interests in affective studies link the history of religions, womanist ethics, and process studies to a common ground, which is the affective foundation of liberal theology. This universal foundation *within* human experience can now finally function as it was designed to function in liberal theology from its inception: as the “historical and theoretical touchstone for all progressive theologies” and their future.⁸⁸

Such collective work can create multidisciplinary links to the disciplinary divisions within the American liberal theological tradition and within its divinity schools and religious studies departments. This collective work can give American liberal theology its designs as a multidimensional field of study rather than a field defined increasingly by individual interests.⁸⁹

The future designs of American liberal theology begin here. Indeed, they have already begun.

⁸⁵ John B. Cobb Jr. Personal correspondence, January 29, 2008.

⁸⁶ The November 2008 panel, entitled “Affect: A Link Between Religious Studies and Affective Neuroscience,” with panelists John B. Cobb Jr., Philip Clayton, William R. Graham, affective and social neuroscientist Michael L. Spezio, and Thandeka, was presented at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Chicago. The panel was co-sponsored by the Cognitive Science of Religion consultation and the Science, Technology, and Religion Group. Moderator was Nina P. Azari.

⁸⁷ The possibilities are vast. Consider the claim by postmodern feminist scholar Amy Hollywood, who is Elizabeth H. Monard Professor of Christian Studies at Harvard Divinity School. According to Hollywood, “bodily affect” is being studied anew as “a potent site for philosophical reflection and for its disruption,” and with it “the recognition that transcendence occurs only through the body.” *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 19, 278.

⁸⁸ Dorrien, 6.

⁸⁹ Dorrien, 529ff.