Title	Cultivating a Critical Attitude in Pastoral Theology
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Background	Dr. Blevins was invited to be the respondent to the plenary presentation of the Society for Pastoral Theology. In his response, he lays out the opportunities and the dangers in interdisciplinary work between religion and the health sciences and underscores the importance of critical analysis to help assess potential dangers.

I appreciate the opportunity to serve as the respondent to this paper—primarily because it compelled me to read David Hogue's outstanding and intriguing paper more closely in prepation. I often receive papers such as these for a conference or seminar with the best of intentions of reading and reflecting on them and rarely find that I manage to carve out the time to do so. Given the added incentive of having to speak with some coherence as a respondent, I did dive into David's paper. To my delight, the originality and intellectual rigor of the paper "hooked" me quickly. As someone with little knowledge of neuroscience (I am quite certain that this paper serves as the most significant source of information on this topic I have encountered up to this point), I found the information David introduced and summarized fascinating and appreciate his integration of neurobiology, psychology, and theology. And yet, I have been asked to serve as a respondent and I feel some pressure to perform that role according to the expectations of the genre by presenting some broad critical questions in the hopes that they contribute to the unfolding ideas rattling around in David's head and—thanks to his sharing of those ideas—rattling around in ours.

And so, with that self-imposed expectation, I do want to raise a critical point in response to David's paper. It is not so much his ideas in the paper that I take issue with but more what I would argue remains "unfinished" about the paper—namely a kind of critical attitude that I believe is important for the kind of interdisciplinary reflection that David's paper represents. I want, first, to try to articulate what I mean by this attitude fby framing the issue around questions of methodology and second, to demonstrate why I believe this attitude is important for pastoral theology by applying it to the theological perspectives that David articulated.

A Question of Method

Though David does not explicitly name the methodological approach he employs in this interdisciplinary paper as a critical (or revised) correlational methodology akin to that articulated by David Tracy (1975) and, more centrally for our field, by Don Browning (1996), I assume this is the approach he is employing in that this method, like David's paper, argues that theologians can be in fruitful dialogue with scholars from other disciplines, recognizing that each discipline can offer opportunities for insight and correction that would not be possible if the theologian cloistered herself in theology alone. The critical correlational method also acknowledges that discourses bring their own "truth claims" along with them and that, on occasion and to varying degrees of frequency, theological discourse and scientific discourse (as two examples employed in this paper) may actually have very little to say to one another not because they are necessarily adversarial but because they are asking different kinds of questions and interpreting the world in different kinds of ways.

The methodological approach—particularly as it is developed by Browning—assumes these two dynamics: either an experience of mutually enlightening dialogue among scholarly disciplines or of a kind of respectful "talking past one another" because of the widely divergent worldviews and truth claims that ground those disciplines. But I think this description fails to describe another possibility of interdisciplinary scholarship: namely that a scholar in one of the disciplines will employ the discourse of the other discipline(s) to re-enforce or re-inscribe the assumptions central to her or his own field. Such re-enforcement need not necessarily be problematic but it can be problematic when such re-enforcement underwrites a kind of worldview that has the potential (or the actual intent) to do violence.[i] There are many examples in which such re-enforcement has been part of theological reflection; in our own field, one need only explore how some (certainly not all) have used psychodynamic psychology to support a theological position which sees lesbians, gay men, and other queer people as falling outside of God's intent for human beings.

Now, let me be clear: I do not see David's paper as an example of such violent re-enforcement. In fact, I think he attends to the possibility of this violence in places. But I wonder if David attends it sufficiently and I raise such a question about his paper not because David is particularly vulnerable to it but because we all are. I must admit to some uneasiness as I read the paper and began to think about the implications of the neuroscientific discourse that he was surveying. Such unease is similar to that I feel what I think about the potential harmful consequences of the human genome project (Rose, 2007, pp. 155-186)[ii] or about the over-reliance (in my opinion) on psychotropics in the counseling field since we cannot even say with certainty why the medicines achieve the effects they do.

I say this not because I am a Luddite who expresses a supreme unease with all technological advances or because I align myself with the radical orthodoxy camp of theologians who believe that every aspect of modernity is a profound detour from the truth of God and that our only hope is to return to a premodern Christianity. No, my unease comes as someone who loves my iPhone, who recognizes that anti-depressants have helped many clients with whom I work, and as someone who has been grateful for those anti-depressants in my own life at a time when things threatened to overwhelm me. My

point is not that this kind of technology is bad, but that it is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad.

That last sentence is a paraphrase of a quote by the French cultural historian, Michel Foucault (1997, p. 256). Foucault's "critical attitude" toward the ways in which certain discourses gain a power to effect unintended outcomes is precisely the kind of critical attitude I believe is important for us as pastoral theologians. For Foucault, this kind of power is dangerous (which, remember, is not exactly the same as bad) not because of the way it denies or limits or punishes but because of the way it allows or creates or encourages (Foucault, 1980, 1995). The kind of power that Foucault found most dangerous is the kind of power that hooks us with its promise of a solution to an intractable problem or that bestows a benefit to us if we simply agree to adhere to its demands. The temptation of this kind of power becomes violent when we receive benefit from it at the expense of others who cannot meet (or choose not to meet) the demands of the norm such power requires. In the last few years of his life, in the early 1980s, Foucault traced the contours of the shape he believed this power was taking. He called it "bio-power", the capacity of technologies to inscribe themselves on our bodies and thereby to tell us "the truth" about ourselves.

Foucault was wary of such bio-power because it was a field of knowledge not only of scientific experts such as biologists, natural scientists, or social scientists (or pastoral theologians?); politicians or free market capitalists could also employ this bio-power in ways that Foucault found quite sobering. I believe his prescient description of thirty years ago has particular resonance for the topic of David's paper. It supports a "critical attitude" toward the potential dangers of this kind of power—this bio-power—and such a critical attitude is important for pastoral theology. Indeed, in examining the applications of Foucault's bio-power in the decades since his death, the medical sociologist Nikolas Rose describes bioscientfic researchers and the clinicians who work with patients based on that research as "new pastors of the soma," (Rose, 2007, p. 74) arguing that they provide a secular kind of pastoral function in their conversations with patients regarding, for example, genetic abnormalities.

Rose does not reject this function (it is not necessarily bad) as much as point to the unintended consequences that arise from it (it is dangerous). For Rose, biomedical advances create categories of "risk groups" who live their lives under the shadow of risk management programs in medical insurance, or of behavioral screenings and services which justify preventive interventions (often aimed at lower income, urban adolescents) that may actually set the conditions for those young people to take on the identity of (to borrow a Bowenian term) the identified patient the intervention intended to forestall (Rose, 2007). With these kinds of attendant dangers, pastoral theologians and practitioners can in fact offer some important critical perspectives—but only if we are keenly aware of those dangers in the first place. The critical attitude I have briefly tried to trace is, I believe, a tool for such awareness. To close, I want, very briefly, to demonstrate the effects of such an attitude on the theological points that David developed in his paper and to argue that he employed such an attitude (perhaps unintentionally) in some of those points.

The centrality of the body. David claims that neuroscience can support important theological positions that exhort us to pay attention to the material reality of our lives as human bodies and to refuse to continue the bifurcation of mind/soul from body: "The

doctrine of the resurrection of the body captures this holistic image of humanity much more fully than notions of the immortality of a disembodied soul, for we do not have bodies – we are our bodies. " I agree with David that any theology that continues this bifurcation needs to be critiqued. But is there not a possible pitfall when thinking about this emphasis on human bodies from the perspective of Foucault's bio-power, namely that embodied humans become a commodity to trade and market by economic forces or a population to manage by governmental forces? Let me be clear: David's theology is not an example of such commodification but I believe it needs to specifically speak against such a danger, recognizing the potential of this newly emerging neuroscientific research to be employed in ways far different from a theology that takes the centrality of the body seriously.

The uniqueness of human beings in regard to symbolic and linguistic representation and the implications of this for our theological anthropology. Arguing that human beings are unique in our capacity to communicate and understand by employing symbolism and language, David's employs theology as a resource to articulate a social theological vision (a theological ethics?) of what grounds us in our commitments—for example, in a commitment to welcome the stranger into our midst. David holds us as human beings to a higher standard than that of other primates such a rhesus monkeys in this regard because of our unique capacity of symbolic and linguistic representation. He reveals that in controlled experiments, a rhesus monkey will go without food if that food is secured by pressing a lever that delivers a shock to another rhesus monkey. Having offered that example, David then says: "It is undeniable that the higher-order functions of language and symbolic representation provide human beings with a level of empathic capacity that is unmatched in other species. Nonetheless, our drives to provide nurture and care identify us unmistakably as mammals, and root us deeply in evolutionary history." I would argue that a critical attitude that takes seriously the danger of bio-power would also lead us to confess the possibility that our unique capacity for symbolic and linguistic representation can lead not only to greater empathy but also to greater, more efficient forms of xenophobia, hatred, isolation, and alienation because it provides us with a capacity to signify otherness. After all, if rhesus monkeys refuse to shock another rhesus monkey, the famous social psychological experiments by Stanley Milgram (1965) demonstrate sadly that we can overcome such reluctance when instructed by an authority figure to follow the rules. This realization is particularly salient for us as theologians since theology is a discourse that deigns to articulate such instructions by an authority figure *par exceleance* (that figure being God)*.* In short, bio-power can be misused not only by economic or political interests, but by theological ones as well.

To be fair, David does address this danger at another point when he describes the *essential relatedness of human beings.* In fact, I would argue that this section represents a point in which David explicitly employs a theological perspective to argue that we as human beings are obligated to follow the theological imperatives of love of neighbor and of hospitality even if such imperatives demand more of us in regard to empathy than might be mustered by the motor neurons of the neuroscientist. Such claims are important so that theology might have its own voice in interdisciplinary conversation, particularly in conversations in which the playing field of contemporary intellectual discourse is so tilted in favor of the scientific over and against the theological.

In this way, then, David's important insight in regard to neuroscience that "the 'natural' is not always the 'good'" is an example of resisting or refusing bio-power. I would

only connect that insight to an existing body of theological writing that reminds us that the sin of "othering" the other—of making the other strange and dangerous—is deeply imbedded not only in the neurobiology of motor neurons but in the social structure. This theologically robust writing includes (but is certainly not limited to) contemporary systematic theologians as diverse as Alasdair MacFadyen (2000) and Mary McClintock Fulkerson (1994), feminist and womanist theological ethicists such as Emilie Townes (1995), queer/LGBT theologians such as Marcella Althaus-Reid (2000, 2003) and pastoral theologians such as Emmanuel Lartey (2006). I would also add that such a critical attitude is also important for theology itself.   We have to be willing to acknowledge the dangers of theological discourse even as we develop and employ such a discourse. After all, every form of discourse, including (especially?) theology, is self-interested.

Finally, like any pastoral or practical theologian worth her or his salt, David does not stay only in the theoretical but moves to practice. He alludes to practice at various points but in his theological reflection he moves to liturgical practice, speaking of *"technologies" of spiritual formation* in light of the neuroscientific research he has studied. This section is, to me, an example of a critical attitude toward bio-power that actually begins to think about ways to guard against its dangers not only in thought but in individual and communal practices. I find this powerful for two reasons: 1) it explicitly articulates an alternative kind of "technology" to the kind employed by bio-power; and 2) because of this alternative articulation, these kinds of technologies have the potential to resist the siren call of bio-power by creating a different social space—a different community—one that is still influenced by neuroscientific processes (the members of that community would still have motor neurons, after all) but that understands their implications differently than would a marketing executive, pharmaceutical researcher, or policymaker.

To summarize, then: I was intrigued by David's paper. I learned a lot and I appreciated not only the facts contained in it but also its wisdom and theological depth. I only wonder if there might be some need to develop what I have tried to articulate as a critical attitude toward this work in order to be more attuned to the potential dangers and pitfalls of neuroscientific discourse. As I said before, such an attitude is not something that David's work uniquely demands; rather, I believe that it is necessary for all of our work.

Endnotes

[i] In all fairness to David Tracy, he does explore the potential danger of religious traditions to enact violence as he calls for practical theology to employ two simultaneous hermeneutics: one of retrieval and one of critique-suspicion (Tracy, 1983, p. 70). Even in such a call, however, Tracy does not attend to the possibility that one of the most tempting misuses of theological reflection is to use a "secular" discourse to re-enforce or re-inscribe an abusive theological perspective.

[ii] Rose presents a lively survey of the complicated relationship between genomics and race, demonstrating the danger of genetics to be used to support racist viewpoints—a danger that exists despite efforts by geneticists to attend to that danger because of an existing cultural history in which science has been used to justify racism.

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