

Healing Nothingness:
A Rhetorical Analysis of Christian Scientists' Understanding of Illness as Belief

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Although "faith healing" is an accepted concept and practice within many faith communities, many contemporary Christians assume, or even assert, that the healing events recounted in the New Testament are to be understood as a phenomenon of that time and place, rather than as contemporary possibilities for believers in the power of God to heal. That assertion is in keeping with modern sensibilities concerning science, in contrast to faith, that are traceable to the Enlightenment's success in curtailing faith and spiritual authority in order to make room for experimentation and physical science.

Christian Science rejects that Enlightenment project. It is a spiritual or metaphysical (rather than natural or physical) science, which bases its claims on practice, rather than authority. In other words, Christian Scientists appeal to evidence that is amenable to a pragmatic test of truth, in contrast to modern science's representational orientation. It's on the basis of that evidence (therefore: scientifically) that Christian Scientists affirm that healing through prayer constitutes ongoing evidence for--even, proof of--God's presence in the world. Organizationally, Christian Science may well exist as a distinct denomination because of that affirmation, since there is historical evidence that its discoverer and founder, Mary Baker Eddy, intended to emphasize healing through prayer within the Protestant churches of her time and place, rather than to found a new church.

Analysis of Christian Scientists' talk and their founder's writings about healing reveals rhetorical artifacts that are quite different from those in accounts of Jesus' healings. In this essay I identify those differences as indicative of Christian Scientists' understanding of illness as (false) belief, amenable to healing, rather than as (physical) affliction requiring cure. The initial difference is the very nature of the reports of healing in early Christianity (i.e., Jesus' acts of healing) in contrast to contemporary accounts by Christian Scientists: the former are reports by other authors, whose veracity cannot be affirmed independently of Scripture. The latter are first-person accounts, many of which are amenable to both rhetorical and empirical testing; that is, inquiry into the speaker's ethos, and examination of speakers' actions as well as medical-scientific evidence (respectively). The earliest, and in a sense most basic, of those first-person accounts is Mrs. Eddy's own report of the healing in which she discovered Christian Science. In what follows, I briefly recount the salient events of Mrs. Eddy's life, with particular focus on that discovery, and without attention to either the institutionalization of that discovery (the founding of the Christian Science Church) or the many controversies that surround both aspects of her title ("Discoverer and Founder"). I focus instead on the Principle that she discovered, as she articulated it. In Part II, I consider several patterns of speaking and turns of phrase that are characteristic of contemporary testimonies of healing by Christian Scientists. In the concluding section, I use concepts developed in phenomenological sociology and ethnomethodology (specifically, the work of Alfred Schutz and Harold Garfinkel) to continue the rhetorical analysis of these testimonies. I find that Christian Scientists' way of speaking is efficacious in constituting the alternative metaphysic that is basic to that faith community.

I. The Discovery

Mary Baker was born in Bow, New Hampshire, in 1821. She became a member of the Congregational Church, married George Washington Glover in 1843, and returned to her parents' home, pregnant with their child, after his death in 1844. She married Daniel Patterson in 1853; the marriage ended in divorce in 1873. In 1877 she married Asa Gilbert Eddy, who died in 1882. Mrs. Eddy died in 1910 (Powell, 1930/1950: 85, 112). The more important dates of her life, however, are 1866, 1875, and 1895. It was in February 1866 that she fell on the ice while walking and her persistently frail health took a severe turn for the worse. A physician attended her and she remained in bed until--as she recalled these events in her autobiography, *Retrospection and Introspection*--she asked to be left alone and opened her Bible. The book fell open to the ninth chapter of Matthew, which begins with Jesus' healing of a paralytic. She reports reading this passage as "a revelation of Truth. . . The miracles recorded in the Bible which had before seemed to me supernatural, grew divinely natural. . ." (1892: 26). The phrase, "divinely natural," seems strange in the ears of those of us accustomed to the separation of faith and science; i.e., the divine and the natural. However, Christian Science recommends itself as an additional science: not physical, or social, or formal; but, precisely, "Divine Science." In another account, she reports the aftermath of that reading and revelation: "I rose, dressed myself, and ever after was in better health than I had before enjoyed" (1896: 24.13-14). This conclusion to what we might consider the first Christian Science testimony is often echoed in contemporary testimonies, which typically conclude with the speaker's expression of thanks not only for a particular healing, but also for a life that is in all respects "better" than before they became Students of Christian Science.

A lengthy article printed shortly before the dedication of the First Church of Christ, Scientist in Boston in 1895 and included in the "Clippings from Newspapers" section of *Pulpit and Press* (included in *Christian Healing and Other Writings*) reports on an interview with Mrs. Eddy "in the early '80's," which confirms her self-diagnosis. The unnamed reporter speaks of her as "singularly graceful and winning in bearing and manner. . . she must have been some sixty years of age, yet she had the coloring and the elastic bearing of a woman of thirty, and this, she told me, was due to the principles of Christian Science" (1895: 32). In the years between 1866 and 1875, she studied and wrote. In 1875 the first edition of her major work, *Science and Health*, was published. It presented those principles in a form that was expanded, but not substantially revised, throughout the many editions that followed.

Several articles written at the time of the First Church's dedication in 1895 and included in the "Clippings from Newspapers" section of Mrs. Eddy's *Pulpit and Press* suggest some of the rhetorical strategies that may have contributed to the new church's growth. An article in the *Boston Herald* noted that Mary Baker Eddy prepared a sermon for that momentous occasion, which was attended by about six thousand persons at four identical services throughout the day. The unnamed reporter noted that it was "read by Mrs. Bemis" since "Mrs. Eddy remained at her home in Concord, N.H. during the day because. . . it is her custom to discourage among her followers that sort of personal worship which religious teachers so often receive" (1895: 43). Another article, from the *Jackson [Michigan] Patriot*, referred to Mrs. Eddy as "the reviver of the ancient faith," and went on to say: "The name Christian Science alone is new"; the faith itself "was taught and practiced by Jesus and his disciples. . . But the wave of materialism and bigotry that swept over the world for fifteen centuries. . . nearly obliterated all vital belief in his teachings" (1895: 52). The unnamed reporter went on to quote John Greenleaf Whittier, the "grandest of mystic poets": "'That healing gift he lends to them/ Who use it in his name;/ The power that filled his garment's hem/ Is evermore the same'" (1895: 53). The same writer went on to connect the revival of the faith to "our remarkable nineteenth century": that the "advent of Christian Science. . . should be the work of a woman is the natural outcome of a period notable for her emancipation from many of the thralldoms, prejudices, and oppressions of the past"

(1895: 55). All of the articles included in the "Clippings from Newspapers" section extol the size and beauty of the church building and note that its substantial cost--reports ranged from "over \$200,000" to "\$250,000. . .paid for before it was begun" (1895: 63)--was entirely subscribed before the dedication. Both the emphasis on Mrs. Eddy as the reviver of ancient truth, rather than the creator of a new way of thinking, and her choice to not appear at a public occasion in which attention was to be given to the remarkable church building that was being dedicated, contributed to a strategy of minimizing the importance of Mrs. Eddy's personality at a time when women were not yet accepted as public speakers, much less creative founders of institutions. Attention was directed away from the sex of the church's founder, to its accomplishments.

The 1886 discovery that instigated these events in 1875 and 1895 (and the growth of Christian Science between those dates) is what enabled Mrs. Eddy to call her church both Christian and Scientific--despite the everyday assumption by many in her day (and this) that the two terms were incompatible. She often stressed her church's reliance on Jesus' healings as the model for Christian Science practice; e.g.,

Our Master said, 'The works that I do shall ye do also;' and, 'The kingdom of God is within you.' This makes practical all his words and works. As the ages advance in spirituality, Christian Science will be seen to depart from the trend of other Christian denominations in no wise except by increase in spirituality" (1896: 21.9-14).

In regard to the scientific character of this denomination, she wrote: "What I have given the world on the subject of metaphysical healing or Christian Science is the result of my own observations, experience, and final discovery, quite independent of all other authors except the Bible" (1901: 26-27). As is generally the case in scientific discoveries, a process of observation (often, based in a singular experience that contravened expectations), is interpreted as an instance of a general principle that can be articulated and tested in other circumstances. In this case, the singular experience was her healing in 1866; the interpretation developed through years of observation and was articulated in the 1875 publication of *Science and Health*, as well as many other writings that followed. That principle--the Principle at the core of Christian Scientists' understanding of the world--can be stated in a single sentence: "Divine Mind is the only cause or principle of existence" (1875/1906: 262.30-31).

An expanded version of the Principle (that typically is memorized by Christian Scientists as a summary of their understanding) summarizes the alternative metaphysic that underlies this interpretation:

There is no life, truth, intelligence, nor substance in matter. All is infinite Mind and its infinite manifestation, for God is All-in-all. Spirit is immortal Truth; matter is mortal error. Spirit is the real and eternal; matter is the unreal and temporal. Spirit is God, and man is His image and likeness. Therefore man is not material; he is spiritual. (1875/1906: 468:9-15).

I will return to the statement (which is referred to as the Scientific Statement of Being) in the last part of this paper, in order to analyze it as articulating a "province of reality" that reverses the assumptions of everyday metaphysics.

Christian Science is a deductive system that is based on this Principle. Members learn, both through formal classroom instruction and through listening to testimony by other members, to interpret their negative experiences (occurrences of "error") as instances of failing to think in accord with this Principle, and that these experiences can be altered (the error can be "healed") by correcting that erroneous thinking. In other words, the Principle is adopted as a basic truth, from which other truths can be deduced. Members of the community thus speak of themselves as "students" who accomplish "demonstrations" (of the Principle) after doing appropriate "work," i.e., recollecting (through individual or communal prayer focused on reading or recalling passages in the Bible and Mrs. Eddy's writings) that the Principle applies to all events in their experience. In keeping with her emphasis on science, Mrs. Eddy emphasized that this Principle

is to be accepted on the basis of reason, rather than authority: the student knows, rather than believes. She recognized that the Principle must be (in effect) re-discovered by students through induction: "Christian Science must be accepted at this period by induction. We admit the whole, because a part is proved and that part illustrates and proves the entire Principle" (1875/1906: 461.4-7).

The rhetorical strategy here is very much in keeping with everyday learning of (secular) scientific principles, which are more often called laws. A friend illustrated the procedure in telling me of how, after moving into a new home on a busy street, she taught her children to not run into the street. She sat them on the curb and rolled a grapefruit into the road just as a car was approaching. The fruit was crushed; the children understood that their heads could suffer a similar fate if they were to ignore her instruction to stay out of the road.

II. Testimony

Each Wednesday evening in Christian Sciences churches, a testimony meeting is held. After readings that set a theme for the evening, the floor is opened to contributions from the congregation. Typically, these are brief, follow one another immediately or after short pauses, and connect to the theme in a more or less direct way. These contributions are not commentary, but (judging from frequent remarks adverting to specifics of the readings or the general theme) are offered as recollections of an experience that relates to the theme set by the Reader for that evening. (Christian Scientist churches elect Readers to lead their services, following Mrs. Eddy's directive that the Bible (in the King James version) and *Science and Health* were to be the church's only pastors.) In this section, I report on the patterns that I've discerned in these testimonies, in order to focus on the rhetorical efficacy of the communicative practices used by Students (the testifiers).

Both the events reported in testimonies and the process they document display distinctive patterns that, I suggest, both intensify communal experience (the Students' sense of membership in a faith community) and teach how to interpret experience correctly (through examples which function as repetitions, with variation, of the Principle). There is an overall structure that incorporates these patterns: beginning with an impetus--an event in the Student's experience (often introduced by reference to the evening's readings)--the testimony goes on to describe the student's observations, provide an interpretation, recount a resolution of the instigating event, and express gratitude for spiritual growth through application of the Principle (or more generally, of Mrs. Eddy's teachings) to the event. We can now look more closely at the patterns displayed in both the content of these testimonies and the process that they document.

Testifier A tells of arriving at his office anxious about all that had to be done that day, only to find that needed paperwork was not in the expected place. He started to cast blame--on himself and co-workers--but then remembered Mrs. Eddy's statement: "Divine Love always meets, and always has met, every human need" (1875/1906: 494.10-11). Without any evident reason to do so, he turned to a file cabinet that normally did not contain files of the sort that were missing; the needed paperwork was there. Despite the fact that the same busy day still lay before him, his anxiety vanished and he was able to go about his work and bring it to a satisfactory conclusion. The testifier concludes by giving thanks for the specific teaching ("Divine Love. . .") that "brought about this Demonstration" as well as for his continuing spiritual growth.

Testifier B tells of pouring water from a kettle that lost its lid, so that steam escaped onto her hand. She began to feel pain, but refused the temptation to look at the affected hand while reminding herself that she was "the perfect child of God." In the course of donning gloves, later

in the morning, she noticed that her hand moved and looked as it always did, and she realized that refusing the false beliefs that might have come into her thinking had enabled her to forget the incident, since there were no further temptations after those initial moments. She concludes with expressing "gratitude for all of the many blessings that Science has brought" to her life.

Testifier C tells of rising on the morning of a business trip with "a belief of a cold" and going on with preparations for the trip while "working to know the Truth." Since she was feeling even less well upon arrival at the airport, she called a Practitioner. (Practitioners are learned Christian Scientists who are registered as such with the First Church, Boston as appropriately prepared to aid students with prayer.) As the airplane gained altitude, there was a "claim of pain" in her ears, and she continued to work while in flight. Upon arrival at her destination, she realized that she had worked--now, in preparation for the business meeting to come, rather than in the prayerful work that marked the beginning of the flight--without any recurrence of the "claim" during the loss of altitude preceding landing, and she reports going on with her day without any reoccurrence of the "belief" that was present at its start. She ends her testimony by emphasizing her thankfulness for "living in the manifestation of Divine Reality."

The content of these testimonies exhibits a consistent pattern: observed events give rise to beliefs that the testifier now characterizes as erroneous--although often immediately experienced as reality. "Error" is the name given to any appearance that is out of harmony with the Principle, and so constitutes (to borrow an analogy used by another testifier) an error just as adding two plus two and getting five would be out of harmony with arithmetical principles and so would be labeled, by a teacher who knew the truth, as an error in applying the rules of addition. Although observation provides the content that is the impetus for the telling, interpretation yields an alternative content, which is affirmed as Reality; as the Truth, rather than the error provided by what immediately appears in observation. (I will return to this contrast between appearance and reality in the final section of the paper.)

The processual pattern illustrated in these testimonies (and discernible in all of the testimonies that I have heard) can be analyzed into three moments:

1. There is an initial removal of the self as agent, as false beliefs take over a situation. In other words, mental anxiety or physical causes (both of which are referred to as "sin," "sickness," or "error") take on the agency that the testifier normally exercises. In effect, error comes to replace the testifier's usual sense of him or herself as agent, as so renders the testifier a passive tool of its (error's) purposes.

2. This usurping of proper agency is rejected though Work (prayerful study that rediscovers the Principle) which succeeds (sometimes quickly; other times, only after great perseverance) in rejecting that (false) agent--often called "mortal mind"--in favor of the Truth of "divine Mind," which is understood to be resident within each person. (This rejection of one source of agency in favor of another is reminiscent of the last phrase in the circle of words that surrounds the cross and crown in Christian Science's emblem: "Cast out demons.") The testifier, in the course of this Work, is enabled to "receive the Truth," i.e., acknowledge the Principle as applying in this case as in all cases, just as the rules of arithmetic and law of gravity apply to all experienced instances of adding sums and falling bodies.

3. The received Truth vanquishes error, and so enables recovery of the testifier's usual sense of agency--now strengthened with recognition as the true self that manifests Divine (rather than "mortal") Mind. Here too, there is a certain passivity in human agency. However, this is understood as an openness to the Divine, as expressed in Christian Science teaching; i.e., a correct state of growth in spirituality and happiness that is summarized as health, rather than an erroneous state of sickness or sin.

Although testimonies most often tell of experiences that follow this pattern of disturbance in the testifier's routine that call forth remedial or therapeutic Work, some testimonies attest to

the benefits of daily Work that enables living in the third moment--as embodying the agency of Divine Mind--and so being spared potential harm from potential forces of evil. This state of being is reminiscent of Amish women's practice of wearing a prayer cap at all times, so that they are always ready for prayer. Another analogy might be preventive medicine and dentistry, which stresses ongoing practices of nutrition, exercise, and hygiene that are proactive rather than reactive in relation to disease. In all three situations, good health (spiritual and/or physical) is not taken for granted, as tends to be the case for many people who are not troubled by illness of one or another variety. These who live in a state of preparedness, I want to suggest, equip themselves with multiple ways of understanding their circumstances. In a sense, they live within what William James characterized as multiple "sub-universes," or what the phenomenological tradition developed by Alfred Schutz calls "multiple realities," or preferably, "finite provinces of meaning" (1962: 207, 229).

III. Provinces of Meaning and Alternate Realities

The "remarkable nineteenth century" which the anonymous reporter for the *Jackson Patriot* (quoted in context above) cited as the context that enabled Mary Baker Eddy to be "the reviver of the ancient faith" for which the "name. . . alone is new" (1895: 52) was also the time in which pragmatism as a philosophical orientation began. Here too we find a tendency to abjure novelty in favor of revival: "The pragmatic movement, so-called," William James insisted, was merely "a new name for some old ways of thinking" that "seems to have rather suddenly precipitated itself out of air" around the term introduced by Charles Saunders Peirce in 1878 (1907: viii; subtitle; 46). There seem to me many parallels and overlaps between the pragmatism of Peirce, James, and John Dewey, and the understanding of being and doing taught by Christian Science--although developing a case for that claim would go far beyond the limits of this paper. What is relevant to continuing this rhetorical analysis of Christian Scientists' understanding of illness, however, is not simply the concurrence of pragmatism's and Christian Science's beginnings, and only tangentially relates to their mutual preference for self-identification as a revival of neglected, and worthy, ways of thinking. The crucial link is an understanding of being and meaning that begins in pragmatism as explicated by William James, was developed by Alfred Schutz as a way of conceptualizing the plurality of interpretations that we make of our experience, and then was investigated by Harold Garfinkel as the topic for ethnomethodological research.

"All our truths are beliefs about 'Reality,'" James says, "and in any particular belief the reality acts as something independent, as a thing found, not manufactured. . . . 'Reality' is. . . what truths have to take account of. . ." (1907: 243-244). He goes on to identify "sensations" as the "first part of reality," the "relations that obtain between our sensations or between their copies [i.e., ideas] in our minds" as "the second part of reality," and "the previous truths of which every new inquiry takes account" as the "third part of reality, additional to these perceptions (tho [sic] largely based upon them)" (1907: 244-245). When he considers how we respond or relate to those sensations, ideas, and their context ("previous truths"), however, James recognizes that "however fixed these elements of reality may be, we still have a certain freedom in our dealings with them," which freedom "depends on our own interests (1907: 245). He gives this example: "'Waterloo, with the same fixed details, spells a 'victory' for an Englishman; for a Frenchman it spells a 'defeat'" (1907: 246). Sensations occur, we relate them to our ideas, which are in turn the context for those ideas, and the multiplicity and variety of those ideas and the our interests result in a theory of being and meaning: "The world we live in exists diffused and distributed, in the form of an indefinitely numerous lot of eaches, coherent in all sorts of ways and degrees" (1907: 264; James' emphasis).

Alfred Schutz, in his essay "On Multiple Realities," praises James' analysis of "our sense of reality" as "simply relation to our emotional and active life" as an insight that is a mark of his "genius" (1962: 207). He understands that insight as a refocusing from what things are to how they are related to experience: "To call a thing real means that this thing stands in a certain relation to ourselves" (1962: 207). However, he notes, James's psychological orientation led to a "restricting [of] his inquiry to the psychological aspect of the problem" of reality. In contrast (and in keeping with the emphasis in phenomenology as developed by Edmund Husserl) Schutz uses this insight as the basis for epistemological, rather than ontological or psychological, inquiry: "In order to free this important insight from its psychologistic setting, we prefer to speak instead of many sub-universes of reality or finite provinces of meaning upon each of which we may bestow the accent of reality" (1962: 229-230). When Schutz returns to this point in the context of his essay on "Symbol, Reality, and Society," he marks this change in terminology more strongly as signifying a shift from being to meaning; ontology to epistemology: "By this change of terminology we emphasize that it is the meaning of our experiences, and not the ontological structure of the objects, which constitutes reality" (1962: 341). I will return to this remark as indicative of a shift from James' conception of reality that makes Schutz's theory amenable to typical misunderstandings of Christian Science, but less relevant for understanding the efficacy of Christian Scientists' way of speaking, than an analysis that begins from James' metaphysics.

In Schutz's account, transition from one to another province of meaning occurs when some "specific shock. . .compels us to break through the limits of this 'finite' province of meaning and to shift the accent of reality to another one" (1962: 231). He identifies a number of these provinces (e.g., "dreams. . .art. . .religious experience. . .scientific contemplation") and emphasizes that we cannot transform the content of one province into that of another, for each has a specific "constitutive principle" and language "obstinately resists serving as a vehicle for meanings which transcend its own presuppositions" (1962: 232-233). That is, our words carry with them the meanings that are rooted in everyday relations and interests. Yet, we do communicate about these alternative (not everyday) provinces of meaning. Schutz responds to that "paradox of communication" by reminding us that finite provinces of meaning are not to be understood as "ontological static entities," or as "separated states of mental life in the sense that passing from one to another would require a transmigration of the soul," but as "merely names for different tensions of one and the same consciousness. . .attended to in different modifications" (1962: 257-258). In other words: communication is possible because we are flexible in our ways of speaking and so can think differently, without a correlative need to think about (give credence to) the possibility of different ontological structures embedded in an alternative metaphysics.

The difficulty with this response is that it places all responsibility for alternative ways of being--that is, for interaction with different objects and relations in the environment--on unilateral changes in the mind (consciousness) that experiences that environment, and so backs down from the radical ontological implications of the pragmatic theory of reality from which Schutz began. This happens as Schutz turns his attention from the subject-matter that's attended to--the experienced object that is related to with particular interests--and directs exclusive attention to the meanings given to that subject-matter, by the one who experiences it. Thus James' recognition that, in any particular belief system, "reality acts as something independent, as a thing found, not manufactured" (1907: 243; quoted above in context) is lost: the character of an experienced object now rests solely on the predications and associated beliefs of the human subject who proposes particular meanings, rather than others, on the basis of his or her interests.

An alternative to this consciousness-centered (subject-based) response is suggested by Christian Scientists' testimonies, in which the very "ontological structure of the objects" rather

than "the meaning of our experiences" is portrayed as changed (1962: 341; quoted above in context). That difference relies on an alternative and profoundly pluralistic ontology that is more congruent with James than Schutz, and can be discerned by close attention to the role of mind (consciousness) in testifier's accounts. The Work done in prayer accomplishes a response to the "shock" of experiences typically named as "illness" or "sin" by rejecting governance by "mortal mind" (understood as an erroneous conception of themselves) in favor of direction by "Divine Mind" (understood as appropriate to humans' true being as made in the image of God). This rejection of the former source of agency and recovery (or, for new Students, discovery) of the latter places testifiers into relation with ontologically fluid entities--including both themselves and their subject-matter. In other words, the removal-rejection-recovery processual pattern that I identified in testimonies as retaining a certain passivity accounts for healing as living in the presence of an alternate ontological structure--a different form of being--rather than as an accomplishment of "one and the same consciousness" that adopts alternative meanings. In effect, the words used in the prayer Work that encompasses healing (as recounted in testimonies) constitute alternative subject-matter. They articulate the discovery (revelation) of a different reality, rather than express different meanings about the same environment.

This interpretation of Christian Science healing as affecting the ontological structure encompassing the testifier, rather than (merely) instituting alternative meanings, accounts for Mrs. Eddy's insistence upon the absence of will in healing, which may be one of the least understood of her doctrines. Insofar as healing is dependent upon thinking differently about the world, it would seem that a substantial effort of the will is needed to counteract everyday ways of thinking. Yet Mrs. Eddy insists that "every conscientious teacher of the Science of Mind-healing knows that human will is not Christian Science" (1875/1906: 451.19-21). Bluntly stated, wishing does not make things accord with how we would like them to be. Rather: "Christian Science silences human will, quiets fear with Truth and Love, and illustrates the unlabored motion of divine energy in healing the sick" (1875/1906: 445: 19-21). Change without labor is a difficult notion to comprehend, unless a possibility is entertained that is quite congruent with James' notion that "reality acts as something independent of, as a thing found, not manufactured" (1907: 243-244; quoted above in context). The silencing of human will and quieting of fear may then be seen as a way of engaging an alternative mode of being that is affirmed by Mrs. Eddy at the very beginning of *Science and Health*: "The prayer that reforms the sinner and heals the sick is an absolute faith that all things are possible to God. . . . Regardless of what another may say or think. . . I speak from experience" (1875/1906: 1.1-5). The words that seems to me crucial here are "possible" and "experience": Mrs. Eddy offers her own life experience as proof (Demonstration) that the Work of prayer enables recognizing, and so living in accord with, a possible ontological structure that cannot be discerned from our everyday way of thinking. What is brought about in a healing is not simply a matter of introducing new meanings in order to bring about change in beliefs about what appears to be the sole reality. Rather, the Student comes to adopt an alternative metaphysics; to dwell in an alternate domain of reality.

For the articulation of this alternative reality to be rhetorically efficacious--that is, to affect beliefs, feeling, and values in ways that motivate action--Christian Scientists must engage an understanding of meaningful discourse that is as radical as its metaphysics. It is only suggested by Mrs. Eddy's use of the phrase "higher meaning" (e.g., 1875/1906: 313.14; 349.27), her reminders that words are used differently "out of Science" than within Scientific metaphysics (e.g., 1875/1906: 482.9-12), and her observation that Jesus "had constantly to employ words of material significance in order to unfold spiritual thoughts" (1875/1906: 598.8-10). Harold Garfinkel's rejection of the predominant theory of how description in everyday communicative experience works suggests a way of understanding how that efficacy occurs in this out-of-the-ordinary mode of experience. We can now look briefly at that discussion, and then apply it to understanding how description functions rhetorically in testimonies.

In the course of a classroom exercise directed at the relation between what is "actually said" in conversation and what conversation partners "understood they were talking about," Garfinkel interprets his students' complaint that they could never write enough to describe the latter as due to their attempt to "set the two contents ["what was said" and "what was talked about"] into a correspondence of sign and referent" (1967/1984: 27). Even after extensive additions to their descriptions, that correspondence could not be achieved: "the students somehow saw that the task was, in principle, unaccomplishable" (1967/1984: 28). Garfinkel then suggests "an alternative conception of the task" which requires us to "drop the assumption that. . .we must at the outset know what the substantive common understandings consist of" and also, "drop the assumption's accompanying theory of signs, according to which a 'sign' and 'referent' are respectively properties of something said and something talked about" (1967/1984: 28). In other words, we are advised to surrender our everyday understanding of words, in which what is said (the sign) designates a particular content that is what is talked about (the referent). In place of this referential or representational conception of word use, Garfinkel recommends understanding all words as "indexical," which is to say, as having their meaning determined by their context. In other words, and borrowing Karl Mannheim's "documentary method of interpretation," the words "document" their context: the more we understand that context, the more meaning we have for the words; and, the more we develop those meanings, the more fully we constitute the context (1967/1984: 78).

Garfinkel's reciprocal (rather than referential) theory of words and things (text and context; thinking/speaking and being/reality) proposes "that the significance of any speaker's communicative action is doubly contextual in being both *context-shaped* and *context-renewing*" (Heritage, 1984: 242; author's emphasis). Context, then--and in its widest sense, the domain of reality in which any particular communicative action occurs--is not "exogenous to interaction," but is "endogenously generated within the talk of the participants" (Heritage, 1984: 283). Following the general principle that whatever is actual is always already possible: any particular context (mode of reality), can be understood as a possibility that is actualized in its articulation. The task for ethnomethodological research, then, is investigating how participants in particular situations go about articulative actualization of possible contexts (i.e., domains of reality). An example from a rather mundane province of meaning is provided by Lawrence Wieder's study of the "convict code" in a residence for narcotics offenders. In conversation with the residents, Wieder found that certain phrases were used to both explain particular actions (such as refusing to give information about other residents to staff members) and to persuade him of the existence of the code that governed those actions. Those ways of speaking, Wieder discovered, were "multi-formulative and multi-consequential": "Since 'telling the code' was taken seriously (by me and by staff) as an active part of the environment, it did not simply describe, analyze, and explain the environment, but was as well a way in which residents (and staff, when they 'told the code') guided conduct through effective persuasion" (1974/1988: 168, 175).

Christian Science testifiers actualize another such context as they articulate a reality quite different from the everyday by treating everyday appearances (such as "the belief of a cold" or "missing files") as the "documents" of a pattern of reality that is described in Mrs. Eddy's writings as an erroneous one based in false belief. The very hearing of a testimony provides a sketchy description of reality shaped otherwise; i.e., a true reality correlative to "Divine Mind," rather than that false reality, which is correlative to "mortal mind." Study and the experience of healing itself renews that alternative as the true reality, which can be used as the context for interpreting other everyday appearances. In the course of healing narratives, the meaning attributed to particular appearances (events) and the alternative pattern (the underlying reality) reciprocally reinforce one another. In Garfinkel's terms: "Each is used to elaborate the other" (1967: 78). What is accomplished is not simply description of a "province of meaning" dependent upon non-Scientific reality. Rather, testifiers apply the Principle of Science to

particular events so as to interpret them as documents of an alternative reality in which, as the Scientific Statement of Being (quoted earlier) affirms: "There is no life, truth, intelligence, nor substance in matter." The described events do not accord with everyday interpretations, but do accord with that alternative reality--which is to say that the words do not refer to what the congregation knows about material reality, but are used to both shape and renew an alternative reality.

Christian Scientists do accomplish an alternative "province of meaning," in which they are able to talk about a reality that is the inverse of non-Scientific understanding. In so doing, they affirm Schutz's insight: "Meaning. . .is not a quality inherent in certain experiences emerging within our stream of consciousness but the result of an interpretation of a past experience looked at from the present Now with a reflective attitude" (1962: 210). However, they go beyond knowing (describing, analyzing, explaining) to being (living in particular ways), and so affirm James' ontological insight: we "have a certain freedom in our dealings" with the "elements of reality" (1907: 245; quoted earlier in context). Mrs. Eddy demonstrated a way of dealing with those elements as articulated within a reality that manifests a radical freedom and provides an encompassing "Now" from which to reflect upon everyday reality (marked by physical and spiritual illness) and describe it as only one possibility, rather than as the only and necessary mode of being. By their adoption of Mrs. Eddy's alternative description as sufficient guide for their living, testifiers renew the context that has been shaped in their prayerful Work. Their telling of the reality revealed in Science is rhetorically efficacious not simply because it provides new words for everyday reality--and so encourages different ways of thinking--but because it shapes a new reality which is then renewed and continuously elaborated by their affirmations of freedom from spiritual and physical illness.

A last testimony, from the very end of a volume prepared by the Christian Science Board of Directors and entitled *A Century of Christian Science Healing*, suggests the appeal of living in reciprocal relationship with this alternative reality. The anonymous writer reports it as coming from an African-American student

who told of his healing of tuberculosis, and then went on to express his joy and gratitude for the unlimited spiritual freedom he was discovering. His testimony ended with the words of a song which he described as 'about the same age as Christian Science.' . . .the words of this old freedom song might stand for the larger and deeper rejoicing of all who have found their citizenship in the Kingdom of God: 'Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, we're free at last' (1966: 256).

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