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There has been considerable discussion of the impact of religious change upon social thought. The entire debate about the Weber-thesis, that is the significance of the rise of Protestantism for the emergence of not only capitalism but also for sociology, is an example.

Our present paper will invert the discussion, as it were, and ask a different question. What bearing does the change in the content of social thought have on religious understanding? We will argue that it has had a profound impact both on the scientific study of religion and on the believer's appropriation of the faith. It is not surprising that theory development would impact upon the scientific study of religion, since this can be understood as an instance of social theorizing. It is perhaps more interesting to consider the impact of theory development upon religious behaviors and conceptions themselves.

I.

First, we will briefly consider Conceptualizations of the Divinity. In many conceptualizations, the divinity is the creator, and the world and humans are the creatures. Thus a perfection, a self-sufficiency, is accorded to the divinity which is denied to humanity. There are also contradictions between these conceptualizations. Recall that the Hebrew creation myth held that "God created humans in his own image." Meanwhile, the Mesopotamian creation myth held that "God created humans to toil, to set the gods free." Both accounts highlight the creator/creature moment, so the contradictory moment may be secondary. But the contradiction remains. How are different conceptualizations of the divinity to be reconciled? Is there some pragmatic test?

Returning to the primary moment, there is moreover a contradiction within the conceptualizations. The religious stress on the divine presence, or we might say "presence in the absence" (God the creator, etc.), contradicts the stress which most theology places on the divine absence, or "absence in the presence" (God the ineffible, etc.). Recall Matthew, 5:8 which recounts that Jesus of Nazareth said "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Seeing implies presence. By the seventh century, theology was prevailing. Recall Surah 35:40 of the Quran, which denies that any divinities can be "seen." By the fourteenth century, Dominicans like Eckhart were proclaiming that the Bible is to be understood "parabolically" (cf. his Defense, vii).

Furthermore, theology tends to repeat its stress on divine absence even when it discusses the so-called positive attributes of the divinity -- perfection, omniscience, etc. -- because it discusses these attributes by way of analogy. When it discusses the so-called negative
attributes of the divinity -- uncreated, infinite, etc. -- it discusses these attributes directly, literally.

By the seventeenth century, the time of the "Cartesian revolution" in philosophy, the crucial question had become: How do humans know the divinity, its nature, its image, etc. The young Descartes appears to have accepted the perfection and primacy of the divinity, as we see in his Correspondence as late as 1630. By 1637, however, Descartes' Discours proclaimed the philosophical fruit of his celebrated Method. For Descartes in the Fourth Part of his Discours, the human initially knows only himself as a thinking being. Subsequently the human knows that his imperfection necessitates a more perfect being. This more perfect being is the divinity.

Descartes' revolution -- the "epistemological turn" -- was preceded by the dramatic trial and execution for witchcraft of Father Urbain Grandier in 1634. Just as Descartes pondered the possibilities of knowledge in general, given the presence of a great deceiver (cf. his Meditationes II, of 1641), so had Grandier's trial raised the question of the possibility of truth in the face of such a devil. This problem -- the significance of a great deceiver -- had been resolved by the Church fathers centuries earlier. As Thomas Aquinas had put it, "the devil is not to be believed." Why should this question have re-emerged in the seventeenth century?

Throughout the Middle Ages, exchange was governed by a weakly articulated economic ethic. Caveat emptor was indeed the norm. But the obligation to be suspicious of the motives of the Other -- suspicion bordering on social paranoia -- was tempered by the limited extension of commerce. By the early modern period, exchange began to permeate every aspect of social life. The commoditization of the world proceeded more rapidly than did an appropriate economic ethic. Hence there was the outbreak of social paranoia known as the "Witch Hunts." No less than James Stuart of Scotland, soon to become James I of England (1603), published his infamous book Demonologie in 1597. The plague of witch hunting boiled throughout the seventeenth century in England, France, Germany, New England, Scotland, Switzerland, etc.

Finally, an economic ethic reflecting the longer-term interests of the newly emerging capitalists came to prevail. This ethic established the norm of interpersonal reliability (trust) among strangers, where prices tended to reflect embodied labor, where contracts made tended to be contracts honored, etc. Thereupon, the social paranoia subsided, the witch hunts came to an end. Descartes' revolution in philosophy, however, where the human situation comes to be understood as presupposing the knowing situation, remained as part of the heritage of the modern world.

II.

Next, we will briefly review Conceptions of Dialogue. On the one hand, dialogue as communicative practice has existed since time immemorial. Dialogue is arguably coterminous with the recognizably human. On the other hand, there have been varied
conceptions of dialogue. We are interested in the latter, in the conceptualizations of dialogue rather than the practice itself.

Dialogue might provisionally be characterized in terms of form and content. Formally, it is the interaction of several persons such that they are peers; the process is terminated only by mutual consent. In terms of content, it is interaction through (dia-) verbalizations (-logos), so as to bring out the attitudes and behavior in one person which are appropriate to the attitudes and behavior of another. Thus dialogue represents the exchange of personae between the interlocutors. It is important to stress that dialogue is not to be equated with the externality of duologue; a dialogue can have any number of interlocutors.

There are several ancient candidates for the label "dialogue:" these include most notably dramatic discourse and philosophical discourse. Let us briefly consider each of these. The dramatic discourse (logon protagonisten, "protagonistic speech") of Greek tragedy was a literary representation (mimesis) of dialogical practice. Before Aeschylus there was but a solitary actor which had emerged from the chorus (Poetica, 1449 a 15-18). The chorus can be considered to be the primordial community; the emergence of an actor can be taken to represent the beginnings of individuation. Even if we accept, as Aristotle suggests, that a chorus is itself an actor (1456 a 25-26), the introduction of the notion of collective persons may raise more questions than it resolves. Furthermore, it is not clear that "dialogue" is the best characterization of the interlocution of one actor and the chorus (cf Coleridge, 5:I, 225). Perhaps "call and response" would be more appropriate. Still more questionable is the dialogical status of the parts of the classical drama: prologue, chorus, episode, epilogue (1450, XII); of these, all but the episode are clearly undialogical in form.

Next, each persona within the drama has a character (ethos) which is, in part, the cause of dramatic action (1450 a 1). But only in part. According to Aristotle, the level of dramatic unity, at least for tragedy, is the drama itself, not any particular persona within the drama (1450 a 15-17; 1451 a 15-19). Hence dramatic discourse was not intended as a literal representation of dialogue. Dramatic discourse was intended to move a plot, not to develop a character. Indeed, the act of recognition (anagnorisis) is an event on which the plot turns, not an immanent process of disclosure of the character of personae (1452 a 36-37).

Thus we conclude that the classical conception of dramatic discourse differs in profound ways from what we call "dialogue." It refers to story line and is in fact a variant of a serial monologue. This is understandable. The classical conceptualization of social interaction was the monologue, that is to say the superior's verbal imposition of a persona, a status, on the subordinate. It is useful to recall in this respect that a number of ancient literary efforts were given a "dialogical" form, including Thucydides' "Melian Dialogue," the Biblical "Book of Job," and Plato's "Dialogues." We recall Job 13:2 "What you know, I also know; I am not inferior to you." On the one side, we can see that there is no dialogue here, only set pieces, monologues, cast in serial form. On the other side, we see the concern for hierarchy; who is superior and who is inferior. The
monologue underlies the conception of interaction between the divinity and the human. This form of interaction is a reflection of despotic (monarchial) rule.

Let us make a few remarks about the development of the philosophical argument in dialogical form. For Plato's Socrates, the dialogical form is represented as the mimesis of intellectual debate. Under the most charitable reading, however, this philosophical discourse was not intended as a representation of learning, philosophical or otherwise; rather, it is the entire dialogical form which moves toward the Truth, regardless of whether the protagonists did so. Indeed, were philosophic discourse to address the character of the protagonists, this would constitute an ad personem fallacy. Plato himself used the Dialogue as a literary form which gives the appearance, as Thomas De Quincey observes, of being a "collusive dialogue" (cf. his "Style" *Blackwoods Magazine*, Sept. 1840).

The Roman philosopher Cicero (Jan. 106 - Dec. 43 B.C.) also used the dialogical form extensively. His use can be distinguished into form and content. In terms of form, the dialogical form was a literary device to help structure an argument, facilitating the reader's following its twists and turns. In terms of content, the dialogical form was also the academicist arguing of all sides of an issue. For Augustine of Hippo (Nov. 354 - August 430 A.D.), the dialogical form was extended to include internalized conversation, the so-called "Soliloque" (cf. that dialogue II, vii, 14). This can be understood as a retreat into oneself in the face of declining civilization. Finally, for Boethius (died 524 A.D.), in the midst of the ruins of civilization, the dialogical form had become a literary device to exclude the unworthy (albeit real) audience. Thus the course of the dialogical form in philosophy tended to accentuate the fragmentation of the disciplines as well as the increasingly esoteric nature of their content.

Let us summarize the development of the dialogical form in both dramatic discourse and philosophical representation. These forms tend initially to become increasingly mimetic of the exchange of personae, while never fully attaining that status. Then these forms tend to decline from that status, becoming less and less mimetic until they are reduced to the maintenance of the identity of the persona, not exchange at all. This rise and fall corresponds to the introduction, development, and virtual disappearance of commercial activity in the ancient world.

III.

Now we shall discuss the Reconceptualization of Dialogue. By the late sixteenth century, Shakespeare was writing genuine dialogue, where the interlocution of the personae causes the audience quickly to grasp the dramatic situation. His dramatic discourse is genuine dialogue which brings out attitudes and behaviors in the audience which are appropriate to a participant in the dramatic situation. The development of character, as well as the movement of the plot, can be said to "grip" the audience of the Elizabethan drama.
During the eighteenth century, the novel emerged, going well beyond the earlier romances. Originally the novel's author was omnipresent in the work. We recall how Henry Fielding introduces Joseph Andrews' affection for Fanny: "we have not hitherto hinted a matter which now seems necessary to be explained." Fielding continues "having explained these matters to our reader, and, as far as possible, satisfied all his doubts, we return to honest Joseph, etc." (Joseph Andrews, 1742, Bk. I, Chap. 11). A century later, the omniscient author had disappeared from the novel; as Gustave Flaubert put it in 1852, "The author in his work must be like God in the universe, always present but never visible" (letter to Louise Colet, Dec. 1852). Presence does not imply being seen.

Between the time of Fielding and that of Flaubert, at the same time as the omniscient author was disappearing from the novel, the theoretical conception of interaction which incorporated the true dialogue had emerged. The monologue then came to be viewed as a limiting case of dialogue.

In Book II of his Treatise of Human Nature (1739), David Hume had discussed the significance of sympathy. This concept was to become central to Adam Smith's analysis. For Hume, this sentiment permits us "to receive by communication [others'] inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even contrary from our own" those sentiments may be. Indeed, it is sympathetic social relations -- in particular interlocutory relations --- and not climatic or other material conditions, which were decisive for Hume. These relations of reciprocity are sufficient for the "great uniformity we may observe in the humors and turn of thinking of those of the same nation" (1888: 316-317). Thus Hume had a rudimentary conception of a general social equilibrium based on peer interlocution and interaction. But Hume's analysis did not prove fruitful because he understood these interactions in qualitative terms of primary, secondary (reflected), tertiary (doubly reflected), etc. sentiments, passions, and opinions. These sentiments "decay away by insensible degrees" as we move through successive reflections (1888: 365). While Hume understood interlocution as a process which tended to equilibrium through "decay," it would take Smith's reconceptualization of dialogue in terms of the extensive amplitude of the sentiments expressed, rather than their intensive 'echo,' to provide the decisive theoretical breakthrough. As schematic as they may seem to us, Hume's insights into these topics of social interaction would find a resonance as well as substantial refinement in subsequent thinkers.

In 1759, Adam Smith published his Theory of Moral Sentiments which analysed the dialectics of human interaction. Smith was influenced in this project by his teacher, Francis Hutcheson, by his friend, Hume, and by his acquaintance, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. This is particularly true of the latter's Second Discourse (cf. Smith, 1976, III: 250 ff), but not even Rousseau's dialectic of the self is any more than an adumbration of Smith's analysis. Smith indicates how person-perception is constituted of a series of reflexive social relationships. One person's perception of any other is always reflexively mediated by the perceptual stance of another. Smith begins by arguing that if one person is to assess the sentiments and conduct of another, he must "endeavor as much as he can to put himself in the situation of the latter." Thus sympathy between two persons is not direct, does not imply a "sympathetic faculty," but is reflexively based upon an
"imaginary change of situation." Meanwhile the other person presumably seeks a favorable assessment of his sentiments and actions, and he too strives to facilitate sympathy. Smith continues that "he can only hope to obtain this by lowering his passion to that pitch in which the [more disinterested] spectators are capable of going along with him."

Thus a "concord" tends to develop between one's own sentiments and those of the other, since one tends to sympathize with the other while the other tends to moderate his sentiments and thereby render them more generally accessible. Smith concludes that "in order to produce this concord, as nature teaches the spectators [i.e. the first person] to assume the circumstances of the person principally concerned [i.e. the other], so she teaches this last in some measure to assume those of the spectators" (1976, I:22). This process, which occurs through interlocution, results in the exchange of personae; it is precisely dialogue in the fullest sense.

Smith's analysis of the dialectics of human interaction is profoundly significant, since on his argument person-perception based on reflexive social relationships is the source of both self-satisfaction in the case of self-assessment, as well as "the harmony of society" in the case of the assessment of others. Human interaction -- especially interlocution -- is enough to generate values, norms, culture, history. This analysis is also profoundly influential, with filiations to Karl Marx, and to the Americans Charles H. Cooley and George Herbert Mead, to mention just a few thinkers.

The rich sense of dialogue was incorporated into subsequent social thought. Thus we find Wilhelm von Humboldt asserting in 1827 that "all speaking is founded on dialogue," because "an unalterable duality grounds the primordial nature of language; the very possibility of speech is based on address and response." He continues "the archetype of all languages is expressed by the pronoun with its differentiation of the second and the third person." His point is that the grammatical first and third persons represent different objects -- what von Humboldt calls the "I and the not-I." But thou is in "another sphere, that dependent on mutual interaction" with the Ego. Von Humboldt concludes this discussion by saying "only by the union, effected by language, of the `other' to the Ego can all the noble and profound feelings, which bring out the fully human, emerge. In friendship, love, and all the communications of mind this makes the connection between two beings the most intimate of all relations" (G.S., 1903, VI, 25-27). Of course, this "union effected by language" is the dialogue, which realizes the "most intimate of all relations," namely the exchange of personae. The shift to dialogue in literary practice, as well as the theorizing of dialogue in social thought, were reflections of the rise of what Adam Smith called "commercial society."

IV.

All these elements come together in the Reconceptualizations of the Divinity. Taking together Descartes' "epistemological turn" and the notion of the true dialogue, the divinity could be understood as the partner in a dialogue. Insofar as the divinity was not a partner in dialogue (Martin Buber), there was no divinity at all (Ludwig Feuerbach). The
German theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher, initiated this reconceptualization by 1821, in the celebrated "Introduction" to his *Christian Faith*. In keeping with the "epistemological turn," the traditional Scriptural bases of religious faith had become unacceptable. Schleiermacher sought to found religious faith immanently, in the consciousness of the believer.

Self-consciousness, he begins, is always two-fold. It is consciousness of the self-identical on the one hand, and consciousness of the variable state of being on the other. The first of these is the self-caused, the moment of Activity; the second, the non-self-caused element, the moment of Receptivity. The latter implicates the Other, the non-self. Activity gives rise to the "feeling of Freedom;" Receptivity, to the "feeling of Dependence."

Schleiermacher then argues that Activity also implicates the Other, namely the object of the act. Hence self-consciousness of the Self -- whether in its Active or its Receptive moment -- always implicates an Other. The totality of self-consciousness, including Self and Other, is one of Reciprocity.

Within the world of reciprocity, according to Schleiermacher, the feeling of freedom is always limited; there can never be a feeling of absolute freedom. Action on an Other implicates the self’s receptivity. This presupposes a coordinate feeling of dependence which limits the feeling of freedom. Schleiermacher next argues that the Finitude which is felt in the world of reciprocity implicates a higher plane from whence the finitude. This plane from whence is that of "God," so-called, and the self-consciousness of the dependence of the world of reciprocity upon this higher plane is the "consciousness of God," again so-called. I stress that these terms are "so-called" because Schleiermacher is never able to move beyond the sphere of feelings. Since the world of reciprocity -- the world of the feelings of limited freedom and limited dependence -- depends upon this higher plane, the feeling is characterized as one of absolute dependence.

On the one hand, this is truly an existential phenomenon. As Schleiermacher acknowledges later, the feeling of absolute dependence is not a consciousness of the self as a particular person but is a consciousness of what he calls "finite existence in general." Human finitude is felt to depend upon some infinitude, and this feeling is one of absolute dependence. I read this as an extensive gloss on Descartes' "Cogito ergo sum." On the other hand, this is totally a social phenomenon. Schleiermacher holds that any content of self-consciousness, including religious consciousness, requires expression, and that is usually verbal expression, interlocution. The consciousness of absolute dependence is quite simple, continues Schleiermacher, always remaining self-identical. As he amplifies this argument, we find that this self-identical moment of consciousness differs from the initial moment which becomes an element of Reciprocity, only insofar as it is accompanied by the existential "aura."

Now we face a dilemma. On the one hand, if the consciousness of the self-identical lacks that existential aura, it is simply a self-consciousness of the world of reciprocity -- it is "sensible" self-consciousness -- an important aspect of which is the reciprocity of interlocutors, i.e. human dialogue. No divinity here. On the other hand, if that self-identical consciousness is also aware of the existential aura, then Schleiermacher defines
it as "religious consciousness." Where is the divinity in all of this? It is the Other of the feeling of absolute dependency. There would seem to be no possibility of dialogue in the face of such mystery.

But there is an out. The existential aura will always accompany the self-consciousness of the world of reciprocity. The variable relationship between the two -- the religious consciousness and the sensible consciousness -- is a measure of religiosity. But the variable relationship is also a necessary relationship: no existential aura without the sensible consciousness. As Schleiermacher acknowledges, "this is the source of all the anthropomorphic elements which are inevitable in this realm in utterances about God."

V.

Ludwig Feuerbach was a student of Schleiermacher's at Berlin. He continued his teacher's argument to its logical conclusion. His early *Thoughts on Death and Immortality* (anonymously published in 1830), provides an intriguing summary of Feuerbach's conception of interaction. He begins with the anthropological thesis that "All human actions can be derived from love." Feuerbach qualifies this thesis by holding that the "value of love" is established by the "extent of the beloved object," i.e. "the more you sacrifice yourself, the greater and more genuine is your love. For one cannot love without self-sacrifice." This self-sacrifice manifests human self-reflexivity.

Feuerbach explains that "in loving, I love myself in another" and moreover that "I locate myself, my essence, not in myself but in the object that I love." The essence of the human transcends the self-contained being of the animal; it is putting oneself in the place of the other, exchanging personae. This "self-surrender" is, in Feuerbach's words, "the humanity of the human essence." It consists precisely "in sacrificing one's purely natural self-being, in letting the ground of one's being exist through another, in having the ground of one's being in the being of another." The alienated condition of the human is distinguished from the unalienated condition for Feuerbach in terms of the "confining" versus the "unrestraining space" of the love object. Says Feuerbach "Self-surrender is more or less true, greater or lesser according to the extent of the object."

It follows that the magnitude of love, its "value" cited above, is equivalent to the magnitude of the love object. Feuerbach continues "the truth of self-surrender depends on whether the object is of such an extent that it takes up and encloses in itself the total human self, or whether it is so confined that the self has no room in it, that the self is shut out, that (to divide the indivisible) one part of the self exists within the object, while one part remains outside and unsurrendered." The latter of these terms, where the self has "no room," has been "shut out", has been "divided," has in part remained "unsurrendered," defines the conditions of uncommunication of the self. Under these conditions, "the human does indeed surrender himself, but he does so to things that cannot include the human self."

Feuerbach contrasts this alienated self with "the genuine human," the one who "has placed his essence, not in objects that are beneath him, but in objects that are above the
self." And those "higher objects" make available the unrestraining spaces necessary for complete self-surrender and the concomittant total self-reflection.

There are two candidates for the status of "higher objects," the divinity and the human species. As the pantheistic Feuerbach argues, the divinity cannot be a love object since it is both subject and object. The species can, however, be that love object. The human's supposed love of a personal divinity is instead a confused love of humanity, the species. This discussion of the confusion of the human species with the conception of the divinity was resumed by Feuerbach in his later and more familiar writings to which we will now turn.

Feuerbach began his 1841 *Essence of Christianity* by distinguishing between humans and animals. In the most general terms, humans are self-conscious or reflexive while animals are not. While animals have an exterior life at one with whatever inner life they may have, the inner life of humans diverges from their exterior life. This divergence depends upon the human ability "to put oneself in the place of another;" it permits what David Hume and Adam Smith, as we have seen, had popularized as the 'looking glass self,' the fully dialogical self. The human can relate to the other as "thou," reflecting difference within unity, because the human species (the unity) is an object of one's thought. The human species embodies that which is essentially human or human nature.

Feuerbach turns to the topic of "limits" and "finitude." The individual is limited, a finite being. Recognition of one's limits, one's finitude, depends on consciousness of the species' infinitude. This infinitude cannot be denied from the limited stance of the individual. It is only due to vanity, for example, that the human confuses his limits with those of the species. The finitude of the human species could only be established from a higher, more comprehensive plane. Such a plane is humanly unattainable. Thus Feuerbach holds that every proposed limit of human nature rests on an error. The explanation of this error is found in the inverting of the subject and predicate, the inverting of the subject-object relationship.

Scientific knowledge is species knowledge. The individual (as subject) having knowledge of the human species (as object) exemplifies the human standing above one's scientific concepts. But, says Feuerbach, the human doesn't stand above religious concepts; instead, religious concepts come to stand above the human. I read this as a gloss on Schleiermacher's concept of "God," so-called. This subject-object inversion, this domination of the human by concepts, is what we call religious alienation. The subject (the human) and the predicate or object (the species) become inverted. Rather than the human thinking about the species and its infinitude, the human fantasizes that the species, deified and even personified, is thinking of humanity. The human objectifies species-being and imagines oneself to be its object, absolutely dependent upon this objectified being. Thereby the paradoxes of religion: to enrich God, the human becomes poor, humanity is depreciated. The human affirms in God what is denied in oneself. Feuerbach later summarized this point in his *Essence of Religion*: "Man is reduced to nothing before god [hence] only when the Earth abandons the gods ... will men have space and room for themselves." And, we might add, room for dialogue.
Conclusion

As social practice changes, as it did with the emergence of the commoditized societies of the seventeenth century, the theorizing of that practice changes as well. The emergence of Mercantilist economic thought, and then the fully developed classical economic thought of Smith and his followers manifest that theorizing. The philosophical reflection of these changes can be first seen in the "epistemological turn" of Descartes -- a turn which would have profound impact on both the scientific study of religion, and religious practices and conceptions themselves. The human relation to the divinity comes to presuppose the knowing relation, the subject.

As social practices change through commoditization, the significance of dialogue -- peers taking the roles of one another -- is foregrounded. Through the work of Hume and Smith, the dialogue comes to be theorized in a rich sense reflective of the subtleties of commoditized society. Finally, the Subject and the Dialogue are conjoined in a new conception of the Divinity. Schleiermacher and his student Feuerbach bring the several moments together as they conceptualize a divinity who is dependent upon human subjectivity and the actuality of dialogue.

References


