

**The Deconstruction of Contrast in the Sociological  
Analysis of Religion**

**by**

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**A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of  
The University of Manitoba  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of**

**Master of Arts**

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## **Abstract**

This analysis deconstructs and destabilizes the use of polarization in the sociological analysis of religion. The sociology of religion operates on the assumption that fundamental differences exist between religion and non-religion. Beginning with Feuerbach, this approach is elaborated by Durkheim, Berger, Barnes, and Caplan. These authors differentiate religion and non-religion along multiple axes. The religious is characterized by irrationality, mystification, and masochism, while the non-religious is depicted as rational, empirical, and empowering.

The deconstruction of this polarization may proceed along two different lines. First, the characterizations of religious thought and activity may be discredited. Second, these characterizations of religious thought may be shown to apply equally to the non-religious through a reflexive or symmetrical examination. If these contrasts are destabilized, the religious and non-religious become qualitative equivalents, engaged in a similar project, using similar tactics, and driven by similar objectives.

## **Acknowledgements**

Thesis Committee:

Prof. Charles Axelrod (advisor)

Prof. Daniel Albas

Prof. Kenneth MacKendrick

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## I. Introduction

The sociological analysis of religion is based upon the establishment of difference between religion and non-religion. Feuerbach provides the most detailed explanation of these differences, becoming foundational to the discipline. According to Peter Berger, the *Essence of Christianity* deploys methods and techniques that have informed the development of the sociological and psychological analysis of religion (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 45-46). Feuerbach's analysis makes the assertion that religious thought begins as an involuntary and unconscious contemplation of human nature as an external being. The infinite and perfect nature of the human species applies pressure to the mind and stimulates the imagination, resulting in the projection of a deified image (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 176-178). As this description implies, religious thought also represents something childlike and innocent at its conception, or an early self-consciousness that is confused about reality (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 5, 97, 177). In this way, the perfect and infinite elements of humanity are alienated, becoming predicates of the divine and, in turn, impoverishing humanity. As our naturally infinite nature is understood and the world is perceived as the "sum of all reality", humanity begins to reclaim the attributes originally given to God, achieving qualitative equivalence with the deity (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 26, 162, 177-178). The impoverishment of humanity under the divine is then reversed, leaving God without qualities, a negation or non-entity (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 12, 22). "Existence without qualities, is an insipidity, an absurdity...what he is to me is to me all that he is" (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 13). This initial projection and subsequent reclaiming of humanity's power of will, thought, and affection, becomes the recipe for human empowerment. "The history of mankind consists of nothing else than a continuous and progressive conquest of limits" (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 127). However, when this projection is indulged and reflected upon in theological thought, this becomes a source of falsehood, pathology, and an anti-cultural force (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 75,

176, 208). As such, his analysis engages in a systematic debunking of religious thought and Christian doctrines. Religion is critiqued as something inferior, irrational, foolish, lazy, intolerant, contradictory, and harmful toward nature and humanity (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 202-207).

Feuerbach's critique and systematic negation of religion is supported through a process of naturalization. The predicates used to describe God are not inventions, but are rooted in the inherent and universal qualities of nature and our existence. Religion expresses this truth, but only indirectly (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 57). The predicates attributed to God are really universalities, the absolute truths of our nature (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 4-5). Therefore, religious feeling is organically rooted in our genuine need and capacity for social bonds, morality, unity, love, creativity, perfection, and rationality. These needs are not discarded through an unqualified optimism in humanity, but they are only satisfied through the exercise of these infinite qualities in relation to this world (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 225-227). Once this capacity is realized, nature will "surrender itself" for our enjoyment (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 228). The human will, thought, and affection remain inherent and sacred, but only fulfilled when naturally rooted in human activity (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 219, 223).

Through Feuerbach, a recipe emerges for the analysis of religion. The individual is confronted by limitation but is also penetrated by an obscured truth that stimulates the mind, causing speculation. This reality appears infinite and external to the individual and is projected in the form of a deity. This projection is rational in that it adequately answers primitive questions and takes on the characteristics of the underlying reality. This projection is primitive and childlike, but this early rationality gives way to an irrationality and even self destruction, preventing a greater realization of human potential. The assumption of this analysis is that

religion does something fundamentally different from non-religion. Religion is characterized as irrational, mystifying, and inherently masochistic or self destructive. In contrast, non-religion is rational, rooted in reality, and empowering. The progress of the rational or natural mind is contrasted with religious stagnancy and decline, which pulls human activity away from the world. This recipe and these basic differences are retained and elaborated by Durkheim, Berger, Barnes, and others.

As these authors explore contrasts, the analysis of religion appears to suffer from definitional confusion. The separation of religion as a distinct subject matter appears to falter once targeted by scientific analysis, because “transcendence must be translated as immanence” (Berger P. L., 1974, p. 126). Once this translation is made, religion becomes difficult to separate from other phenomena. This blurring is evident from within the writings of these authors, and is present in the debate about substantive versus functional definitions of religion (Berger P. L., 1974, p. 126; Weigert, 1974, p. 483; Lauwers & Dobbelaere, 1973, pp. 540-544; Martin, 1966, pp. 354-355). Moreover, history has shown the fluidity between the religious and non-religious, predicting these definitional challenges (Gay, 1968, pp. 20-21; Lambert, 1999, p. 312). As the descriptions of religion change, so will the contrasts used to distinguish religion from non-religion. More importantly, these definitional challenges suggest the possibility of reversing or nullifying the contrasts that support the definition. If the definitions are malleable, so are the supporting contrasts.

It is possible to deconstruct these differences and the operative definition at work in the sociological analysis of religion. Religion is depicted as an irrational and self-destructive belief in mystified entities. It stands in contrast to a rational and empowered existence that ought to be rooted in this world or immediate culture. However, rationality and irrationality may be features



of both the religious and non-religious mind. Mystification and masochism may be secular and religious phenomena. If arguments from rationality, mystification, and masochism are destabilized and emptied, then the differences between religion and non-religion become a fabrication and may be seen as part of an ideological project. The religious and non-religious may be seen as qualitative equivalents, engaged in a similar project, using similar tactics, and driven by similar objectives.

## II. Methodology

The methodology employed in this analysis draws from the work of several authors. Mary Midgley examines the parallel between religious and non-religious thought. These connections are drawn through the identification of myths, visions, metaphors, and dramas that are used by non-religious authors, particularly in the area of science. While these images are not explicitly acknowledged as ‘religious’ by these authors, Midgley demonstrates their imaginative and speculative properties. Through physical eschatology, mechanization, chaos, and other concepts, these authors use faith to attribute purpose and order to the universe. She concludes that the attempts to desacralize and discard the purpose and hope that accompanied religion simply results in new manifestations of this religious project. Therefore, the irrationality and other-worldliness that is traditionally attributed to religion is fully integrated into non-religious thought, resulting in “remarkable” similarities (Midgley, 1992, p. 218).

Jerome Levi engages in a similar project through his comparison of Lévi-Strauss’ *The Structural Study of Myth* and Jewish mysticism in the form of Kabbalah. Lévi-Strauss attempted to identify a common structure to myth, showing a level of meaning that is not immediately apparent. Through this analysis, Levi demonstrates how both scientific and mystical techniques will incorporate empiricism and rational intuition to construct imbricated ontologies. The

concept of layered realities becomes a persistent feature in many disciplines and posits an overarching and non-empirical model that overrides sense perception. The deeper level of observation is mystical and imaginative in nature yet reveals truths that pure empiricism cannot reach. Therefore, rational intuition is privileged over simple observation, in that it sees what empiricism cannot see (Levi, 2009, p. 974). This method supports the identification of common structures, such as mystification, within religion and non-religion.

Michel Foucault, in his book *Discipline and Punish*, suggests that power is an independent and self-sustaining strategy that is detachable from a particular place or person. Power relations are a permanent feature of society, but they are never permanently located or univocal, and exist as part of an ongoing discourse (Foucault, 1977, pp. 26, 201). His analysis focuses on the juxtaposition between the humanitarian concerns of the modern era and the application of discipline to the body, which has greatly multiplied. His conclusions and methodology are helpful in assessing the characterization of religion as a uniquely masochistic and damaging force.

Jonathan Culler provides a methodology of deconstruction. This is based on the traditional use of opposing terms and the hierarchy that this opposition often contains. A deconstruction will breach a system of thought and deconstruct its binary oppositions toward reversing the hierarchy. In addition, it will undermine a system using its own oppositional terms and principles, acting as a type of theoretical insurgency. In doing this, the deconstruction produces instability and a possible reversal of properties, where the assumed privilege of a position is displaced (Culler, 1982, pp. 86-88). Like Foucault, Culler stresses the malleability of these oppositions and their vulnerability to redefinition, where the “present instant is not something given but a product of the relations between past and future” (Culler, 1982, p. 94).

For the purpose of this analysis, the sociological analysis of religion will be limited to the work of several authors, including Ludwig Feuerbach, Emile Durkheim, Peter Berger, Bryan Caplan, and Michael Barnes. Although the specific contrasts under examination are used by these authors, they are likely transferrable to other works in the sociology of religion. Nevertheless, other authors will be referenced who engage in a sociological analysis or critique of the problem, including Bronislaw Malinowski, Guy Robinson, and David Martin. This analysis will also be limited to religion in the west and the Judeo-Christian tradition, as most of these authors focus their attention here as well. Although some document their analysis of other traditions, such as Buddhism or Islam, this analysis will not engage these directly.

### **III. The Essence of Christianity**

Feuerbach argues for a distinct human nature, which possesses inherent characteristics and tendencies. This essence is comprised of three distinct powers, including *thought* (intellect), *will* (energy), and *affection* (love). This ‘trinity’ forms the purpose of our existence and exerts force on the individual consciousness, appearing infinite (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 4-5). “It is therefore impossible to be conscious of a perfection as an imperfection, impossible to feel feeling limited, to think thought limited” (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 5). The source of these infinite powers lies in the cumulative capabilities of the human species and the compensatory principle. In other words, an individual who possesses one attribute in abundance compensates for the person who lacks this attribute. “In the moral as well as the physical and intellectual elements, men compensate for each other, so that, taken as a whole, they are as they should be, they present the perfect man...each new man is new predicate, a new phasis of humanity” (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 129, 19). The perfection of the species exerts pressure on the mind, but it also appears detached from the realities of the natural world and individual shortcomings. The infinite characteristic of

these powers rests in their detachment from the individual and the world, which confronts the person with limitations and finiteness. The laws of nature and limited attributes of the individual exist in disjunction with his infinite essence. Faced with this disunity, individual contemplation works toward the discovery and establishment of unity. “Finiteness rests on the distinction of the existence from the essence, of the individual from the species; infinitude, on the unity of existence and essence” (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 36). Feeling impoverished and driven by feelings of want and loneliness, contemplation begins by setting these limits aside while focusing on the infinite essence of human nature, which the individual projects as a deified image, or God. “Only the poor man has a rich God. God springs out of the feeling of a want, what man is in need of, that is God” (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 62). In God, human nature and the perfection of the species becomes an object to the individual, personifying the absolute and universal characteristics that properly belong to another. This is the psychological mechanism at work and the essence of religious thought and feeling, that human nature is contemplated as *another* or distinct nature (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 176).

According to Feuerbach, this projection rests on a fundamental confusion about reality. A genuine and universal power is perceived, but its origins are misunderstood and wrongfully attributed to a false god. This tendency is not malicious or even intentional, but childlike in the sense of possessing an innocent misunderstanding of origins and connections. “Worship is on the childish, the religious form of contemplation, that which I contemplate, I humble myself before” (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 97). Because this misconception contains involuntary and unconscious elements, ignorance is fundamental to the nature of religious speculation (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 11). Nevertheless, what is hidden from the religious mind “is evident to the thinker, by whom religion is viewed objectively, which it cannot be by its votaries” (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 11). This

description implies a potential transition, or an educational requirement in the movement away from the ignorance of religion to a more enlightened and rational form. This is a double movement. First, contemplation begins by attributing infinite qualities to another from a local standpoint, as compensation for personal limitations and the poverty of life (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 162). All limitations are discarded through the imaginative positing of the deity, allowing for the ‘free play’ of feeling for the individual. However, central to this projection is not a qualitative difference between the projector and the projected, but a quantitative one. “Imagination does away with the limits of quantity, not of quality” (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 178). The first stage of this movement is fundamentally religious because it withdraws qualities from the individual and invests them in God. Therefore, the individual first impoverishes himself to enrich God, who predictably possesses the same qualities, likes, and interests. “That which is the highest in the estimation of man is naturally the highest in the estimation of his God, what pleases man, pleases God also” (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 22). Love, will, and thought are displaced in their infinite form to escape limits, leaving the individual wicked, corrupt, incapable, and in need of redemption (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 23). The impoverishment of humanity is only reversed through a change in the form of contemplation, from imaginative to rational. This is the second movement. The content of this rationality consists of a practical assessment of God’s qualities and activity in relation to the world. If the world possesses the same thoughts, inclinations, and interventions as God, then God is emptied and the world is enriched. Although an individual maintains a theoretical belief in the existence of God, he becomes practically void, an empty being without personality (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 12-13). “The denial of determinate, positive predicates concerning the divine nature is nothing else than the denial of religion” (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 13). Any remaining theoretical insistence in a divine presence becomes little more than “disguised atheism” (e.g. Deism), making it possible to banish God from the mind as an absurdity

(Feuerbach, 1881, p. 13). This results in the recognition of the truth that the world, including all species within it, is self sufficient and the “sum of all reality” (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 162). What was once projected is now reclaimed through rational contemplation of God and his predicates, as qualitatively present in human nature and the world. It is only in this movement away from religion that humanity discovers its powers and freedom (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 127).

God only is its compensation for the poverty of life, for the want of a substantial import, which the true life of rational contemplation presents in unending fullness. On the contrary, the theoretic view is joyful, self-sufficing, happy; for here the object calls forth love and admiration; in the light of the free intelligence it is radiant as a diamond, transparent as a rock-crystal. Religion therefore finds in God a compensation for the want of an aesthetic view. (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 162)

The most powerful of the projected qualities is reason and thought, and it is in the rediscovery of these as inherently existent within the human species that God is rendered useless. Religious contemplation initially posits the divine, but reason establishes the divine as qualitatively equivalent and sees God as a reflection of its own nature. Even God obeys the predicates that the individual attributes to God. Reason and the eternal character of the divine are really based in absolute human reason. “The existence of the world is only then clear and comprehensible when it sees the explanation of that existence in the source of all clear and intelligible ideas” (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 33). The world exists and is governed for the joy of reason as the higher power, the ultimate criterion, and the source of the “continuous and progressive conquest of limits” (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 127).

Religion progressively vanishes in the presence of progressive reason and “what to-day is atheism, tomorrow will be religion” (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 27). As the reversal of humanity’s impoverishment continues, the future will reveal that all apparent limits were only the limits of individuals and their childlike conceptions. Rational contemplation will reveal that the painful limitations that resulted in this impoverishment are really overcome in the recognition of the true

source of this infinitude, or the species. “God is nothing else than the immediate unity of species and individuality, of the universal and the individual being” (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 127). The quality of the species, the totality of all perfections, is the universal being that sparked the imagination in the religious mind, and whose inherent rationality brings about its rediscovery. God is finally recognized not as a person, but as personality itself, the species (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 127). Here, existence and essence are unified as an infinitude through the species, which works in relation to this world and overcomes all limitations (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 70, 127).

This conception of religious thought and its journey to rationality informs Feuerbach’s critique of religion, particularly in its theological form. In theology, the religious inclination is contemplated and elaborated to develop the Godhead into an actual person, with independent and fleshly characteristics. This elaboration becomes the source of many falsehoods and contradictions, becoming an obstacle for humanity (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 75, 176). Although the attributes of God are really projections of the infinite human nature, the theologian will conceal this through doctrinal development, thereby widening the gap between existence and essence. For example, although truth and morality are found in the agreement of the species, moral perfection will be attributed to God. The deity then imposes laws and standards of conduct, which become impossible to satisfy. The gulf between expectations and conduct generates bondage and implies a qualitative difference between the deity and humanity. Yet, the concept of love is also elaborated as the overriding principle toward the mending of this disunity (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 38-41, 131). Although love is the true unity of God and man, it is placed within a context of disunity that only the projected image can repair. This is expanded in the invention of a saviour, or God made flesh, where God will even renounce his divine (disunifying) nature under the truly supreme principle of love (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 45, 64). The trinity itself

becomes objectivated self-consciousness in a God who is involved in partnership with others, a “participated life” characterized by love, completeness, and friendship (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 58). Scriptures are generated and hailed as eternal, when language itself is the real abstract image of enlightened thought. Language is a rationalized miracle, because it remains and transcends the individual in time and space (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 67-68). God is developed as an independent and omnipotent being, yet he is governed by prayer. “Supplication is the means, under the guise of humility and submission, of exercising one’s power and superiority over another being” (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 63). Similarly, humanity is powerless and in need of providence to manipulate our physical conditions, yet humanity occupies a position of privilege in the religious schema (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 88). Sin is the result of a contrast between individual limitation and a perfect or complete entity (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 130). In these various ways, the theologian elaborates the deity by integrating the underlying truth of the matter with a fictitious representation. God is love, justice, truth, and perfection, and yet he is separate, qualitatively different, and unattainable. Humanity is in need and deficient, yet is the sole object of God and the target of grace. These differences and contradictions are immortalized and made part of our eternal condition through theological development.

The destructive characteristics of religion are rooted in this separation, where “the separation of God from man is therefore the separation of man from man, the unloosening of the social bond” (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 203). Faith in God is particularized to such an extent that those who elaborate on this relationship claim a position of privilege and exclusivity. The faithful become partial and narrow, incapable of experiencing or appreciating variety. “Believers are aristocrats, unbelievers plebeians. God is this distinction and pre-eminence of believers above unbelievers, personified” (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 205). As this arrogance permeates the



religious mind and becomes enshrined in dogma, non-believers become enemies and targets of coercion and violence. “In faith there lies a malignant principle”, where the disunity already manifest in the projection of divinity becomes the ground of deeper divisiveness within humanity (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 207). Therefore, religion embodies a self-destructive nature in that the very source of religious imagination, the natural connectedness of humanity, is targeted for destruction (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 208, 211). Furthermore, because the religious mind is invested in another and future immortality, it is inherently separated from the world and world-building. Feuerbach argues that culture declines within a religious context, because there is an inherent passivity in the religious mindset (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 117, 179, 211). “Why had the Hebrews no art, no science, as the Greeks had? Because they felt no need of it.” (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 178). Nature and things of this world are despised and escape becomes the only relief (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 149). Unhappy in the world, the religious mind rests on future assurance, miracles, and the acceptance of the divine, as if in a dream (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 117). All of a person’s wants and needs are met in God who provided individualized salvation, appropriate to perceived individual limitations. This personal salvation breeds laziness, “that which thou seekest to do has already been done...thou needest only believe, only enjoy” (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 118).

Only true activity in common has the potential for cultural development and real attachment, “the idea of activity, of making, of creation, is in itself a divine idea” that can build an “earthly heaven” (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 179). This combined human power is infinite and stands in contrast to the oppressive and limited relationship to the deity. Culture, reason, and science take on unlimited dimension and building capacity only because they are the “common acts of mankind” (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 70). Similarly, it is only in the species that love becomes possible, because love is dependent on diversity and reciprocal expression, where the virtues and

compassion of one atone for the failings of another (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 129-130). Feelings of shame and morality are only truly achieved in the context of species where each person functions as an objectified conscience to another, correcting and establishing a point of reference. Truth and morality are founded on the agreement established within the species, “the agreement of others is therefore my criterion of the normalness, the universality, the truth of my thoughts” (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 132). The species, not God, is the source of redemption and reconciliation, the effective cure against sin and individual deficiencies. Humanity functions as the supreme mediator, replacing the imaginary personification of God (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 132). In these ways, Feuerbach naturalizes religious sentiment by rooting human needs and their satisfaction in the context of nature and the species. “Man can do nothing without nature, nature needs man, as man needs nature” (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 227). As such, the qualities of our species are inherent and naturally founded, a “foundation in itself” that is directly opposed to the “groundless arbitrariness of religion” (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 225). Within this conception, the natural world and its provisions become sacred (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 225-227).

Throughout his analysis, Feuerbach attempts to establish the difference between the supernatural and the natural, religion and non-religion. The religious mind projects what is misunderstood, while the rational mind perceives this projection for what it truly is, the alienation of human nature to another being through predicates. Religious thought is the projection of our own being into objectivity, to which we then make ourselves an object, converting the projected objectivity into a subject. God is made and then worshipped as something independent and wholly other. “Man places the aim of his action in God, but God has no other aim of action than the moral and eternal salvation of man: thus man has in fact no other aim than himself” (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 25). Only rational contemplation reveals this fallacy and directs the thinker

to the immediate and material context of the world as the source of human qualities. The non-religious and rational standpoint projects nothing, but accepts the world and its images for what they are. “The natural man remains at home because he finds it agreeable, because he is perfectly satisfied, God...is...compensation for the poverty of life, which the true life of rational contemplation presents in unending fullness” (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 150, 162). The projected and non-projected stand in contrast, the non-thinker and the thinker, the dreamer and the investigator (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 162, 170). The progress of humanity is also contrasted to the stagnancy and passivity of religious life. The person focused and active in this world “feels himself free, unlimited, happy; in passivity, limited, oppressed, unhappy” (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 179). The rational and natural person seeks to establish an “earthly heaven” through cultural development (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 178-179). Moreover, the rationality that initially exposes the projection is inherently given in nature and guides the progressive enrichment of humanity. Finally, the inherent needs of humanity and their satisfaction are rooted in a natural versus super-natural context, in the material versus the mystical realm. The satisfaction of inherent human needs is not found in the imagination or doctrinal constructions, but in our relationship to species. Religion alienates the universal qualities of humanity, while non-religion retains and fosters these.

#### **IV. The Elaboration of Feuerbach**

##### **A. Emile Durkheim**

These contrasts are adopted and developed by others in the sociological analysis of religion. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* and elsewhere, Durkheim provides a very similar analysis. Like Feuerbach, he argues that the individual is confronted with limitations. The individual may believe that change and modification are possible, yet sees institutions and

forces that appear as facts, inaccessible through simple introspection, internal representations, or ideas. In this sense, individual consciousness is shallow and essentially confused regarding the nature of social reality (Durkheim, 1982, p. 37). The external reality of social facts is evidenced by the fact that they pre-exist individual consciousness. Individuals are presented with institutions that have been handed down to them and that they did not create or maintain. Aside from their pre-existence, phenomena conceived through association, or a collective consciousness, result in something new. This association of elements exceeds the sum of its parts and results in a new entity that may or may not resemble individual thought, inclination, or effort.

If, as is granted to us, this synthesis *sui generis*, which constitutes every society, gives rise to new phenomena, different from those which occur in consciousnesses in isolation, one is forced to admit that these specific facts reside in society itself that produces them and not in its parts. (Durkheim, 1982, p. 39)

In addition, the existence of social facts is demonstrated through the coercion they exert over the individual, and this is felt at the moment someone attempts to oppose them. Social facts are ways of acting, thinking or feeling that are obligatory and imposed from the outside through informal and crystallized forms, namely institutions (Durkheim, 1982, p. 51). Finally, a society, as a reality *sui generis*, contains rich accumulations of intelligence and experience that extend beyond individual perceptions and temporal limitations (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 15, 266). From birth, this superior force confronts a person, exercising moral and material influence over personal inclinations.

The earliest collectives engaged in religious speculation concerning the external world, about the divine and the cosmos. This contemplation can be understood in the context of two distinct epistemologies in the study of religion, *empiricism* and *apriorism*. The former relies on pure observation and the ability of the observer to construct categories “made out of bits and pieces” (Durkheim, 1995, p. 12). In contrast, apriorism acknowledges rational categories in

advance of observation. Apriorism is formed naturally in the collective by representing amassed intellectual capital, or the multiple concurrent observations that transcend individual experience (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 16-18). To identify and expand on these categories, the individual must transcend his own intellect. This duality manifests itself in the social realm and specifically through the religious, which is the obscure representation of our ascendancy in the collective. While many have attributed this unique ability to the divine, Durkheim argues that this ascendancy rests on collective forces that penetrate the individual. "It owes this power not to some mysterious virtue but simply to the fact that, as the well-known formulae has it, man is double" (Durkheim, 1995, p. 15). Religious representations, rather than the collective realities themselves, were adopted as a result of speculation and the primitive understanding of these realities (Durkheim, 1995, p. 25). "Religion is first and foremost a system of ideas by means of which individuals imagine the society of which they are members and the obscure yet intimate relations they have with it. Such is its paramount role" (Durkheim, 1995, p. 227). Confronted by the collective ascendancy and the natural state of dependence on these facts, religious expression represents this inferiority to the individual (Durkheim, 1982, p. 143). Therefore, all religious representations are in fact, "collective representations that express collective realities" (Durkheim, 1995, p. 9). Religion is an eminently social thing, or fact, in that "wherever we observe religious life, it has a definite group as its basis" (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 9, 43).

This development was initially rational in nature. Religious institutions are rational in that they represent something real and display the "form in which knowledge is elaborated" (Durkheim, 1995, p. 8). The elaboration of religious symbols and thinking are rooted in objective social reality, but they also obscure this reality. "Sacredness...is not implicated in the intrinsic properties of the thing; it is added to them...it is superimposed upon nature" (Durkheim,

1995, p. 230). Similarly, the emblem becomes a tangible representation of the clan and represents its transcendence and externality, while the soul represents an enduring fragment of the totality (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 231, 233, 262, 271). These religious speculations are the means through which a person expresses an understanding, albeit obscured, of his duality and participation with the infinite. This is the rationality of apriorism as knowledge that extends beyond empirical observation, allowing “the mind to rise above” and to “think in universal terms” (Durkheim, 1995, p. 273). This underlying rationality explains the presence and persistence of religion. “It is a fundamental postulate of sociology that a human institution cannot rest upon error and falsehood. If it did, it could not endure” (Durkheim, 1995, p. 2). In the case of religious representations, “the error is in the literal character of the symbol used, not in the reality of the fact symbolized” (Durkheim, 1995, p. 267). In spite of the misleading characteristics of religious representations, their persistence is rooted in the natural development of collective realities, thus fulfilling a social purpose. Durkheim concludes, “no religions...are false” in that they express a need to understand the reality of the social and individual condition (Durkheim, 1995, p. 2).

Therefore, religion provides a mechanism through which individuals connect with an externality in common, ultimately fostering solidarity and allowing the collective to endure. Religious activity unites participants through the formation of cohesive beliefs and rites that differentiate between the sacred and profane (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 41-42). The moral conscience is the social conscience, and sacred things are really consecrated by society (Durkheim, 1995, p. 215). Within Durkheim's analysis, the deity and moral requirements become expressions of collective realities and God becomes “only a figurative representation” of that reality (Durkheim, 1995, p. 227). However, although religious expressions are functional and reflect a ‘primitive’

rationality, Durkheim also considers religion to be an institution that stubbornly rests on irrational conclusions and is destined for extinction. As opposed to scientific thought and controlled observation, religion indulges in a world of mystery and escapes clear thinking (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 22, 431).

As regards social things, we still have the mind-set of primitives...this old fashioned idea...they cling to these illusions that are repeatedly contradicted by experience... They have not yet grasped the real obscurity...not yet grasped the painstaking methods of the natural sciences in order to sweep away the darkness. (Durkheim, 1995, p. 25)

Scientific exploration provides a more rigorous and objective response to fundamental questions, just as religious thought satisfied the primitive mind (Durkheim, 1995, p. 240). Scientific and religious thought pursue the same goals, but science is a perfected form that sets aside all passions and mystery, eventually eclipsing religious speculation (Durkheim, 1995, p. 431). This new way of “explaining man” correctly roots and preserves the “distinctive attributes” of humanity within society and concrete experience (Durkheim, 1995, p. 448).

It is within this transition from religious speculation to a new form of contemplation that we see a replication of Feuerbach’s ‘double movement’. This new form of rationality and inquiry will reveal the underlying reality that truly forms the basis of religious thought. While this movement is not thoroughly elaborated within the *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim does outline the content of a more rigorous form of contemplation within *The Rules of Sociological Method*. As noted, although religious notions and ideas may be formed through experience, they are not necessarily an accurate representation of the actual thing that spurred contemplation. The idea or notion of a thing, developed in the individual consciousness, is likely confused with reality and this forms a barrier to real knowledge (Durkheim, 1982, pp. 37, 61). For example, ideological thinking exists in the realm of pre-notion, where the investigator

imposes an idea of reality on the object of study, which then directs the investigation from the outset. However, because social facts exist externally, they cannot be perceived accurately, or in their truth, through self-reflection. According to Durkheim, ideology needs to follow scientific inquiry, allowing the investigator to establish what *is* before what *ought* to be (Durkheim 1982: 68). Although it is possible that internal conceptions may in fact concur with the results of objective examination, the latter must precede the former.

To establish this order and to proceed with any objective study, Durkheim describes the necessary disciplines for its completion. The argument that facts are outside of the individual, misconceivable, even completely hidden, implies the need for some rigor in the investigatory process. To begin, “one must systematically discard all preconceptions” in order to resist the fallacies that overcome the majority of people (Durkheim, 1982, p. 72). Emotional sentiment must be discarded and a ‘cold, dry’ analysis must be embraced (Durkheim, 1982, p. 73). This approach appears to mirror Descartes’ *method of doubt*.

Accept nothing as true which I did not clearly recognize to be so: that is to say, to avoid carefully precipitation and prejudice, and to accept nothing in my judgements beyond what presented itself so clearly and distinctly to my mind, that I should have no occasion to doubt it. (Williams, 1978, p. 32)

In adopting this posture, the examiner can identify the true nature of a phenomenon by observing its inherent properties. This is the *absolute conception of reality*, or the ability to see reality through the suppression of projected personal bias. The goal is to attain an *absolute standpoint*, or a position whereby the scientist can perceive reality accurately and without error. “This motivation makes *pure enquiry* into a way of gaining the absolute conception, the pure search for truth seeks certainty against any conceivable doubt” (Williams, 1978, p. 66). For Durkheim, one way to maintain a pure mode of inquiry is to replace interpretive and subjective schemes for the



description of phenomena with classification systems that are based solely on empirical observation (versus self-reflection) of the object under study. In these ways, the investigator can identify and study social facts as they present themselves and describe them apart from subjective manifestations (Durkheim, 1982, p. 83).

The objective of this method is to establish the means by which information should be gathered in order to arrive at factual conclusions (Durkheim, 1982, p. 85). However, this approach, while indispensable for uncovering the truth, is inherently “disagreeable” to most. The deepest desires and tendencies of humanity are to indulge in subjective speculation concerning the external world. This type of speculative thought allows the actor to experience “unlimited power” over the social order, in that almost anything may be posited as an explanation or cause of that order (Durkheim, 1982, p. 46). While this type of speculation provides satisfaction and wish-fulfillment, it is destructive as a barrier to the discovery of social reality.

The illusion of which he so willingly entertains, has always been for him a cause of weakness; that his dominion over things only really began when he recognised that they have a nature of their own, and when he resigned himself to learning from them what they are. (Durkheim, 1982, p. 46)

These subjective pressures are so internalized that habit supplants constraint when observing and contemplating the external world (Durkheim, 1982, pp. 52-54, 128). This habitual thought (of which religious speculation would be only one example) represents a method of contemplation that inhibits the truth and prevents the discovery of the underlying reality. Moreover, the apparent goal of both the subjective and scientific standpoint is to achieve some measure of dominion over this social reality, which is only possible through knowledge of the truth. The control achieved through subjective speculation is illusory. It is only the scientific method of pure enquiry that reveals this hidden truth that is undiscoverable through other methods, which tend to contaminate the process with sentiment and pre-notions.

The individual finds himself in the presence of a force which dominates him...it is sufficient to make him aware of his natural state of dependence and inferiority. Through religion he represents this state to himself by the senses or symbolically; through science he arrives at an adequate and precise notion of it. (Durkheim, 1982, p. 143)

The contrast between a scientific and non-scientific mode of thought is clear. While the former incorporates “the painstaking methods” that accompanies precision and truth, the latter brings “illusions” and “darkness” (Durkheim, 1995, p. 25). One is rigorous and unbiased, while the other is emotional and subjective. One facilitates truth and power, while the other offers a mere perception of these.

Through Feuerbach and Durkheim, a recipe begins to emerge for the analysis of religion. For both, the individual is confronted by limitations but is also penetrated by an underlying yet obscured truth, a stimulus, causing speculation or contemplation. This reality appears infinite and external to the individual, a reality *sui generis*, an infinitude. In an attempt to understand this reality and to transcend individual limitations, something infinite is projected in the form of a deity. This projection of a deified image is rational in that it adequately answers primitive questions and even takes on the characteristics of the underlying reality. For Feuerbach, this reality is the infinite and perfect characteristics of the human species, while Durkheim posits the collective’s accumulated intelligence and experience that extends beyond temporal limitations. Both characterize this projection as something primitive, or an early form of contemplation. This early rationality gives way to absurdity and even self destructiveness by preventing a greater realization of human potential, or the light of the rational or scientific life. Here, contrasts are developed within the analysis between religion and non-religion. The religious mind is ultimately irrational and engaged in a mystified illusion, or deity, while the rational mind is focused on the real or material world. The religious mind fails to see what spurred the

imagination and therefore impoverishes itself of the truth, versus the empowered non-religious existence.

### **B. Peter L. Berger**

Peter Berger, writing more than a century later, retains and develops similar techniques. Human beings occupy a unique or special place as a species in that they have no species-specific environment in which to live. Unlike an animal that is born into a particular environment with specialized instincts, a human has unspecialized instincts and is 'unfinished' at birth. (Berger P. L., 1972, p. 156). "Man's relationship to his environment is characterized by world-openness (that) permits man to engage in different activities" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 47). Humanity's biological properties place few, if any, limits on their location or activity. More importantly, because humanity does not exist in a fixed relationship with the environment, they must construct an environment that is suitable. The nature of humanity is to produce itself (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 49). This production is due in part to humanity's unspecified condition, but it is also imperative for survival because the external world is anomic in nature and a source of terror. The unmanipulated and natural world is a "vast mass of meaninglessness... dark, always ominous jungle" (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 23). The natural world also confronts the human with many marginal or destabilizing experiences, such as dreams, fantasies, and ultimately death (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 23). Alone, a human being is unable to stabilize the environment. "Solitary human being is being on the animal level" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 51). Human existence without a stabilizing order would be instinct driven, reliant on individual resources, and characterized by chaos. For instance, it is impossible for an infant to survive without a sustaining environment that is characterized by distinctly human interdependencies that act as a guardian of order, or a shield against the terror in nature (Berger

P. L., 1969, pp. 21, 23). “Human existence takes place in the context of order, direction, stability” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 51). Therefore, human production or *externalization*, driven by an anthropological necessity, must create this order in common with others (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 51; Berger P. L., 1969, p. 4). This sociality, to be sustaining and nurturing, must possess some measure of stability, which takes the form of culture. The totality of humanity’s production of order is culture, the material and non-material externalizations that structure a person’s relationships with others and whose patterns are not given in nature or biologically given (Berger P. L., 1972, p. 157; Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 51). In these ways, there is an inherent link between the human organism, survival, sociality, and order. Through our social existence, the external world is transformed in a “relative world-closedness”, similar to the ‘closedness’ of animal existence (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 51). Because there is no naturally sustaining order, the production of a world suitable for the human species is a human activity and a social construction (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 52).

Within this production a paradox arises, “that man is capable of producing a world that he then experiences as something other than a human product” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 61). Institutions crystallize and embody the reciprocal typification of historical activity, or shared universes of meaning (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, pp. 54,65). The institutional world hardens these typifications and formulas for action, taking on a coercive and apparently immutable form. As such, the external world may appear to be foreign and “he may experience large sectors of the social world as incomprehensible, perhaps oppressive in their opaqueness, but real nonetheless... (he) cannot understand them by introspection” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, pp. 59-60). As people contemplate the institutions and the stability around them, they are endowed with ontological status, or perceived as objectified facticities (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 3-4, 24; Berger

& Luckmann, 1967, pp. 67, 69-70). Through this perception of a comprehensive order, there is a tendency in human history to project meaning into these objectivated human constructions. Taken for granted, this *nomos*, or meaningful order, is explained through cosmization. “In archaic societies, *nomos* appears as microcosmic reflection, the world of men as expressing meanings inherent in the universe as such” (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 25). Religion is a human project that establishes meaning through an all-embracing and sacred cosmos (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 25, 50-51). Therefore, religious activity seeks to explain, face, and contextualize anomic terror through a comprehensive theodicy. All order and the anomic events that threaten it are explained and understood in religious terms, connecting human life with a sacred order that exists beyond contingency (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 53). Unlike human structures that are precarious, religion provides ultimate security and permanence, transcending even death (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 36-37).

This grounding of the social reality in an ultimate reality is expressed through *mimetic reiterations*, or the specific linkages between microcosmic and macrocosmic forces (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 37-38). The immortality of gods and their qualities become analogous to institutions and even roles. Institutions are granted durability and inevitability when rooted in the ultimate reality of the universe. Paternal authority, motherhood, marriage, sex and the family, even occupations become rooted in a sacred order and purpose. “For now it is not only human others who recognize him in the manner appropriate to the role, but those superhuman others with which the cosmic legitimations populate the universe” (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 39; Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 73). Sacred roles and institutions become detached from those who perform the roles and their personalities, like actors in a sacred drama. The individual life is located by cosmic coordinates and the self is lost. In this way, crystallized religious sentiment becomes autonomous and acts back upon its producer (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 41, 55). This is the

fundamental irrationality that underlies all theodicies, that the individual engages in self-surrender to a deity through the transcendence of individuality. “It expresses a very basic psychological constellation...this is the attitude of masochism...It transforms the self into nothingness, the other into absolute reality” (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 55-56). Ironically, this surrender to the ultimate and eternal reality serves to protect the individual from contingency, “I am nothing – and therefore nothing can hurt me, I have died – and therefore I shall not die” (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 56). Berger describes this masochistic attitude as the most persistent factor in the irrationality of theodicy. Toward establishing a humanly meaningful universe, the religious mind produces a massive projection that haunts the producer through self-annihilation and abasement (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 73-74, 101).

Within this irrational tendency there is a fundamental error at work in the religious mind. Although the religious person is confronted by a humanly constructed order, or *nomos*, this production is mistakenly attributed to another. This is an alienated and false consciousness of the socio-cultural world, where the individual “forgets that this world was and continues to be produced by him. The alienated consciousness is undialectical consciousness”, the result of an overextension of the objectivated world (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 85, 90). The recipe for religious legitimation through alienated projections is the “transformation of human products into supra- or non-human facticities...the human *nomos* becomes a divine cosmos” (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 89). This mystification may provide shelter from chaos and terror, but it also prevents comprehension of the world as producible, thereby negating externalization. The result is a form of “bad faith” or fictitious inexorability, where choice is replaced by fate and destiny, pacifying the actor (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 86, 93, 95). Religion has been the most powerful vehicle of this false consciousness, but this tendency is also primitive and infantile. Comprehension of the human world as a product of external forces (*opus alienum*) precedes comprehension of the world as a

social construction (*opus proprium*) (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 86). Historically, the movement has been from alienated toward de-alienated entities. It is the de-alienation of consciousness that becomes central to the secularization of consciousness and the manifestation of contemporary anthropodicy, such as science and psychology. Salvation and grace (passivity) is increasingly replaced by a revolutionary (active) and justice oriented mindset (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 79, 92, 100). This progressive rationalization of consciousness eliminates the intermediaries that were previously erected between humanity and the order of the universe (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 68).

As with Feuerbach and Durkheim, Berger retains many of the same techniques in this analysis of religion. Limitation, stimulus, projection (primitive rationality), the alienation of self (masochism), and the realization of human potency in relation to this world are all present in Berger's analysis. Although developed within Feuerbach and Durkheim, the concepts of rationality, mystification, and masochism are explicitly used by Berger to explicate the difference between religion and non-religion.

### **C. Michael Barnes and Bryan Caplan**

Michael Barnes examines the historical pattern in the definition and analysis of religious phenomena, specifically examining the work of Stewart Guthrie and Donald Wiebe. He describes the criterion used to distinguish religion from non-religion as the pre-rational belief in supernatural agents, or *invisible anthropomorphisms* (Barnes, 1997, p. 375). The analysis is structured using the familiar pattern. Humans experience limitation and confront inexplicable events the world, causing a search for meaningful structures to meet these challenges. Through this process of contemplation, there is a distinctly religious positing of anthropomorphizing supernaturalism to overcome the limits of the world (Barnes, 1997, pp. 376-377). This anthropomorphizing tendency to "make sense of things" and provide explanations is inherent to the human species and is biologically rooted. Furthermore, there is a biological tendency among

humans to seek out “face like” images, expressed through the belief in spirits and gods (Barnes, 1997, pp. 379-380). This model also fits within a teleological framework, where this pre-rational belief system eventually surrenders to rational thought. Citing Levy-Bruhl and others, Barnes describes various stages of belief, beginning with the most primitive pre-religious mystical participation, pre-animism or the belief in souls and spirits, and finally toward the rational thought of Western Europe (Barnes, 1997, pp. 377-378). Each stage is characterized by a different “thought style”, with the mythopoeic thought beginning in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century BCE toward a modern philosophical-scientific style. Mythopoeic thought attributes events and develops solutions through invisible anthropomorphisms, while philosophical-scientific thought attributes causes to the impersonal forces of nature (Barnes, 1997, p. 380).

Barnes supports the argument that ancient or primitive religious contemplation was driven by a form of rationality. He notes that even the earliest religious belief followed patterns of rational thought and examination. On a primitive level, the religious mind engaged in naming, organizing, and categorizing information. Regardless of the conclusions reached, humans attempted to discover the causes and effects of events in their world. However, this rationality was relative to the information available. The primitive mind was confronted by a wide variety of inexplicable and irregular events, including disasters, birth deformities, accidents, and dreams. Because the world was unintelligible and unpredictable, the use of invisible agents to explain these phenomena was natural and ‘rational’ (Barnes, 1997, p. 381). This leads him to conclude that the lack of knowledge about the workings of the universe leads to the belief in invisible forces. “Belief in spirit beings, magic...a divinely planned and purposeful universe have all been respectable ideas, at least according to the overall evidence then available” (Barnes, 1997, p. 382). Barnes cautions that the assessment of religious beliefs from a standpoint of modern day



rationalism and scientific information results in an unfair assessment. However, when Barnes examines contemporary religious belief, this assessment changes.

Only quite recently have the rational conditions been met to support a thoroughly non-personalist and fully naturalistic model of the universe, one both sufficiently detailed in its grasp of various aspects of the universe, and also supported in detail by enough evidence to become the sole plausible model. (Barnes, 1997, p. 382)

As scientific methodology, tools, and findings have progressed since the Middle Ages, explanations for the events in our universe have grown increasingly comprehensive. Thought has grown increasingly detailed, empirically based, logically coherent, and authoritative to the extent where “there is no good evidence for the existence and activity of anthropomorphic invisible beings” (Barnes, 1997, p. 384). Religious beliefs are essentially superstitious in that they are no longer rationally defensible. Barnes appears to agree with Wiebe and Guthrie “in support of a flat claim that there is a simple choice: be irrationally superstitious or abandon all religion” (Barnes, 1997, p. 386). Despite the efforts of many religious denominations to demythologize and gain respectability, Barnes concludes that they have fallen short of what the modern mind would accept as rational. Barnes also suggests that overcoming religious irrationalism is important, though this remains a challenge. Direct attempts to ‘convert’ the religious believer have caused some to reject rationality altogether and may even result in a resurgence in mythopoeic thought (e.g. New Age Movement). Instead, efforts should be made to encourage rationality in religion to moderate its “anti-rational impulses” (Barnes, 1997, p. 386). The greatest challenge to religion and the hope for rational belief will likely come from future generations, who will challenge these beliefs from within. “Established religion has also had generations of discovering that at least some of its children grow up to cherish rationality...they will find it to be intellectually inadequate” (Barnes, 1997, p. 387).

Writing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Bryan Caplan also focuses on the irrational and rational elements of religious thought. Religion and religious beliefs are held to be equivalent to the pseudo-sciences (e.g. astrology) and other superstitious forms. These beliefs are nothing more than forms of wish fulfillment, or expressions of what people want to be true. “It is easier to tell a good story when unconstrained by the facts...trying to make people feel better...they feed clients’ emotional needs without appreciable side effects on their wealth” (Caplan, 2001, pp. 17-18). The irrationality of religious belief is explained through two distinct concepts in Caplan’s analysis, *rational ignorance* and *rational irrationality*. As noted, religious belief, like astrology, meets an emotional need in the client. However, these beliefs are irrational in that they are without basis in fact or even contrary to known scientific evidence. To adhere to these beliefs, the client must assess the personal cost and compartmentalize these beliefs as needed. Rational ignorance argues that when private costs associated with a belief are zero or very low, clients will gather very little information about those beliefs, retaining only the emotional benefits. The rational component of this belief lies in the estimation of the personal consequences associated with self deception. *Rational irrationality* occurs when the client assesses low personal cost, yet draws definite conclusions that are contrary to known facts or scientific evidence (Caplan, 2001, pp. 8-17). As the private cost of a belief rises, the belief is often deemed superfluous and is discarded. Caplan argues that within Western culture, this assessment of the private cost and benefit of beliefs is strongly connected with tolerance. When irrational beliefs spill into the public sphere, the consequences are severe. “Before the advent of religious toleration, religiously-inspired irrational opinions had large social costs from the suppression of scientific progress, inquisitions, and religious wars” (Caplan, 2001, p. 21). As long as irrational beliefs are assessed and maintained in a cost free and private sphere, this belief remains ‘efficient’ and does not interfere with rational development. Unlike religious beliefs, scientific norms reinforce

incentive structures for producing unbiased and accurate information. “The implicit tax the scientific community imposes on irrationality is, crucially, a private cost, prompting scientists to suppress their systematic biases” (Caplan, 2001, p. 18). It is the risk to one’s scientific *and* personal reputation that ensures the reliable production of information. In contrast, religion and pseudo-sciences will propagate false information as long the beliefs do not exact a personal cost (Caplan, 2001, p. 18).

Although Durkheim, Berger, and other theorists differ from one another in terms of the concepts used, Feuerbach’s pattern of analysis is largely maintained. Generally, religion is treated as a fundamentally mistaken perspective on an obscured truth at best, and a pure self-serving illusion at worst. Religion mystifies the truth in the world, locating it with invisible cosmic entities. Religion may have been based on a genuine human need and may have followed a primitive rationality at its inception, but it is also fundamentally irrational and contains masochistic tendencies. “Religion became a sort of human monologue...the entire historical-psychological-sociological analysis of religious phenomena since Feuerbach has been primarily a vast elaboration of the same conception and procedure” (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 46).

## V. Defining Religion

### A. Functional and Substantive Definitions

An examination of the contrasts used to differentiate religion from non-religion may begin with the struggle within the discipline to define the subject matter. Efforts to study religion scientifically involves what Berger describes as the ‘bracketing of ultimate truth claims’ and a limited focus on what is empirically available (Berger P. L., 1974, p. 126). As a result, while religious participants may interpret events as supernatural in origin or testify to a transcendent

experience, the scientific reading of these events will be immanence and projection. “The question is whether this ‘translation’ takes into account the intentions of those who adhere to these meanings, or whether it distorts them in the process of transposition” (Berger P. L., 1974, p. 126). This procedure involves the observation of religion from a non-religious standpoint, which assumes that an illusory mechanism is at work in the religious mind. More importantly, this analysis appears to know something about the subject matter that religious adherents do not perceive or understand.

The sociology of religion claims to speak differently about the same object, and in so doing it claims to possess privileged (and even the only true) rights of access to this object – independent of religion’s own self-descriptions. (Thomas G. , 2006, p. 99)

A scientific approach to religion will tend to reinterpret and even disregard the meanings within a community of faith, focusing primarily on what religious ‘does’ or how it behaves in a socio-cultural context. This is consistent with what authors describe as the functional definition of religion. Predictably, the tendency of the functional approach will be to broaden or flatten religion such that it becomes difficult to separate it from other phenomena that function in a similar way. In contrast, those methods which focus on the meanings and content of religious phenomena are described as substantive definitions of religion (Berger P. L., 1974, pp. 126-127). The tendency of the substantive approach will be to focus on meanings, but these must be defined apriori as distinctly ‘religious’.

The danger of each approach is the potential loss of the subject matter and definitional confusion. Using a functional approach, Durkheim acknowledges that scientific rationality and religious thought share common ground. “Both attempt to connect things to one another, establish internal relations between those things, classify them, and systematize them. We have seen that the essential notions of scientific logic are of religious origin” (Durkheim, 1995, p. 431). Science merely distills religious thought and filters out those features which lead to

inaccurate results. Although science represents a perfected form of thought, he concludes that this is not enough to “differentiate science from religion”, therefore “it seems natural that religion should lose ground as science becomes better at performing its task” (Durkheim, 1995, p. 431). Science and religion ask similar questions and provide answers that meet similar needs, though the former is more effective in doing this by providing better (more accurate) responses. Science correctly cuts through the appearance of things and identifies the supporting reality, or the *real* source of ascendancy in the collective. The implied motive behind the religious or scientific response appears to be the gaps in our understanding of social forces. The assumption is that humanity seeks more and better information about the external world, which may be obtained through a variety of functional equivalents. The religious mind is more obscure, a mere representation of our ascendancy in the collective and so connects us to this truth indirectly, “such is its paramount role” (Durkheim, 1995, p. 227). As a representation, religion functions like other representations, though it is one of the earliest and most primitive forms. As such, it forms the foundation of more complex representations. “It is from it that have emerged, through successive transformations, all the other manifestations of collective activity – law, morality, art, science, political forms, etc. In principle everything is religious” (Durkheim, 1982, p. 173). This tendency within Durkheim’s analysis becomes the focus of Bronislaw Malinowski’s critique. The massive imagery of the collective force as the source of all sacredness becomes all encompassing, losing any explanatory power (Malinowski, 1948, p. 56). This exemplifies the flattening of the religious as a concept within a functional framework.

In *The Sacred Canopy*, Berger also appears to frame his analysis within a functional approach, but then, to differentiate religion as a subject, injects substantive elements. He describes the anthropological necessity to create order as a shield against terror, or marginal situations, as taking on a cosmic form. Yet this tendency to engage in cosmization is not

restricted to religion and may be utilized by other non-religious forces. “In contemporary society, this archaic cosmization of the social world is likely to take the form of ‘scientific’ propositions about the nature of men” (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 25). Similarly, he notes that psychology has effectively replaced religion as the primary legitimating or integrative force in society (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 43). Berger acknowledges that cosmization may take on numerous historical variations, and “need not necessarily be sacred” (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 27). Theodicy is described as the explanation and integration of anomic phenomena in religious terms, locating the individual on cosmic coordinates. Yet there is an “implicit theodicy of all social order, religious or otherwise” (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 55). This integration of anomic phenomena and achievement of de-alienation will be accomplished through a new anthropodicy, or a new age of revolution, rebellion, and justice to address evil. Yet religious movements may engage in de-alienation and relativize social institutions as well, thereby sanctioning rebellion and anarchy (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 79, 97-98). He acknowledges that religion creates order and stabilizes, but it may reverse itself and become a de-stabilizing force (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 99-100). The masochistic tendencies of religion are also present in political and other spheres, where the self is reduced to nothing (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 55-56). Religion stands apart, yet he describes religion as being in constant competition with, and giving way to, other movements in economics, art, literature, politics, science, philosophy and other “secularizing soteriologies” which also “define the world” (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 107, 124, 137). Within Berger’s analysis, the functional treatment of religion gives rise to “many competitors” within a larger discussion about pluralism (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 151). Religion is flattened and equated with other phenomena. “People who suppose that science can and should put religion out of business need to notice that their picture implies direct competition between them, a place where their functions overlap” (Midgley, 1995, p. 23). Paul Vitz, in his analysis of the ‘religious tendencies’ within

psychology, quotes a functionalist definition of religion posited by Erich Fromm, where religion is “any system of thought and action shared by a group which gives the individual a frame of orientation and an object of devotion” (Vitz, 1977, p. 32). This definition, and functionalist approaches generally, allow for many reversals, where religious phenomena may be seen to contain secular features, just as secular phenomena may be seen to contain religious features, whatever those may be at a given time.

To establish a field of study, Berger must move away from a functional analysis and establish religion as something that stands apart. Several years after writing *The Sacred Canopy*, he acknowledges that the functional approach equates religion with other phenomena by translating transcendence as something psychological (Berger P. L., 1974, p. 128). But even in *The Sacred Canopy*, his definition of religion reveals the attempt to establish difference along other axes, “religion is the establishment, through human activity, of an all embracing sacred order, cosmos, that can maintain itself in the presence of chaos” (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 50-51). The *sacred* is intrinsic and unique to religion, but initially appears to be functionally defined by Berger as something that exists as the culmination of nomic structures and the “opposite of chaos” (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 26). In his description of mimetic reiterations, he also appears to connect the sacred to whatever functions as an ultimate reality, or an externalized point of reference (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 37-39). However, he later adds a distinctly substantive element by focusing on the religious experience of believers as the source of the differentiation of religion. “One of the essential qualities of the sacred...is otherness...awe...numinous dread, of the adoration of what totally transcends all dimensions” (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 87). Here, Berger establishes the difference between religion and non-religion as an experience of the numinous, “other worlds”, or transcendent entities (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 88; Berger P. L., 1974, p. 128). Borrowing from Rudolf Otto and Alfred Schutz, he argues that religion dwells in another *enclave*

*of meaning*, and references the ‘uncanny’ in such a way that it threatens the paramount (or mundane) reality. “Religious experience takes place in the night outside, the outer court” (Berger P. L., 1974, p. 130). For Berger, this type of experience identifies the essence of what is distinctly ‘religious’ about a particular phenomenon.

In the *Rumor of Angels*, Berger expands upon Otto’s emphasis on the aesthetic and non-rational that accompanies the religious experience. Otto described this experience as “non-rational”, because rational explanations and descriptions for the divine only *approach* the subject matter. These explanations may include anthropomorphisms and ideograms, but they do not capture the emotion, quality, and attitude of an individual’s response to the numinous (Otto, 1923, pp. 3, 107). These emotional experiences are non-rational, because they do not arise from our natural senses or the physical world, constituting a *sui generis* experience.

It issues from the deepest foundation of cognitive apprehension that the soul possesses, and, through it of course comes into being in and amid the sensory data and empirical material of the natural world and cannot anticipate or dispense with those, yet it does not arise out of them, but only by their means. They are the incitement, the stimulus, and the occasion for the numinous experience. (Otto, 1923, p. 113)

In this way, the natural world functions as a platform for a peculiar type of cognition that posits entities and objects that no longer belong to the perceptual world (Otto, 1923, p. 113). The results of this perception of transcendence are fairies, the soul, magic, demonic dread, beliefs in ‘clean’ and ‘unclean’ objects, aesthetic judgements, ordinate affections, and so on (Otto, 1923, pp. 120-122,134). These things stand against the natural world as something ‘wholly other’ and apart, existing in the ‘outer court’ in Berger’s terminology. Using Otto’s conclusions, Berger employs the non-rational elements of the religious experience to explore their peculiar social manifestations, or signals of transcendence. “By signals of transcendence I mean phenomena that are to be found within the domain of our natural reality but that appear to point beyond that



reality...as the transcending of the normal, everyday world” (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 53). Citing phenomena such as social ordering, play, humour, hope, and damnation, Berger attempts to identify the “prototypical human gestures that appear timeless...necessarily recurrent expressions of humanitas” (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 73). The display of these behaviours and attitudes demonstrate an inherent uneasiness with the natural world and communicate a breach with that reality (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 72). Moreover, these behaviours are not logical expressions of a physical necessity, but represent unique emotive responses that ‘signal’ and reflect another reality. These signals, or ‘rumors’, act as empirical coordinates which, if they are explored, will reveal a transcendent source as the only reasonable explanation (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 96). Through a substantive examination of these uncanny and inexplicable phenomena, in their personal and social manifestations, Berger and Otto attempt to define what constitutes the uniquely religious.

### **B. Relativization and the Fluidity of Religious Definitions**

Others completely relativize religious experience. Andrew Weigert argues that in attributing a “universal essence” to religion, Berger assumes an authoritative position (Weigert, 1974, p. 483). This essence may not resonate with an “actor’s own definitions within the world of everyday life”, which ought to become the definitional standard (Weigert, 1974, p. 483). He describes Berger’s use of a particular kind of religious experience as problematic because this experience may be transitory or not comparable across cultures and eras. Similarly, this substantive use of religious experience may resemble other “shudder experiences”, ecstatic states, and even mental illness (Weigert, 1974, p. 484). As a result, Weigert attempts to relativize religious content as a purely context driven phenomena. Dobbelaere and Lauwers also agree that substantive or universal definitions of religion focus on particular psychological states that are not specific to religion. More importantly, these definitions exceed the socio-cultural context in

which the religious activity occurs in favor of a “general evolutionary scheme” (Lauwers & Dobbelaere, 1973, p. 542). For these reasons, the mysterious characteristics of substantive definitions have been discarded in favor of a new definition for the sacred, that being the belief in the supernatural. However, they argue that this distinction is Western in origin and culturally loaded, meaning that the substantive definition also needs to be limited to a particular context. “The substantive definition of religion then becomes in our western societies of today, a system of beliefs and rituals relative to supernatural things which unite into moral collectivity those who adhere to them” (Lauwers & Dobbelaere, 1973, p. 544). However, even if this definition is limited to the west, religious expressions in the west challenge this definition. Religious movements have developed without a supernatural referent, just as communities deny religious qualities yet maintain a supernatural referent. Regarding the former, Dobbelaere and Lauwers point to the death-of-God movement that completely de-mythologized Christian beliefs, yet its adherents would still consider themselves religious and Christian. Regarding the latter, they cite the American Way of Life as “cultural religion, or a ritualized belief system that incorporates a supernatural referent (e.g. American values) without religious labels, “best understood as a kind of secularized Puritanism” (Lauwers & Dobbelaere, 1973, p. 545). This leads to an amended definition for sociologists, which states that “the essential aspect of religion is that it is differently defined by different categories of actors according their position and their situational context” (Lauwers & Dobbelaere, 1973, p. 546). Therefore, they conclude that the adherence to any definition of religion, whether substantive or functional, immediately becomes an ideological standpoint and project, because it imposes parameters and does not allow the object of study to define this for itself. “The definition of religion is not a starting point for the sociological research but it is part of the object to be examined” (Lauwers & Dobbelaere, 1973, p. 549). Weigert agrees that religion is a socially constructed object and the distinction between religion

and non-religion is part of a larger struggle to control the classification of phenomena (Weigert, 1974, p. 486).

The distortion of a clear distinction between religion and non-religion is supported historically. In the western world, Christianity in particular has been involved in a constant process of decomposition and re-composition (Lambert, 1999, p. 311). This process is described by Peter Berger as the ongoing reformation of religious forms to accommodate or resist secularizing forces within a pluralistic environment (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 156). Yves Lambert identifies features of contemporary society and their possible effects on religious movements. These include a) decline, b) adaptation/reinterpretation, c) conservation, and d) innovation (Lambert, 1999, p. 313). Therefore, the religious response to social forces is highly varied and may result in new religious forms and syncretism. This variability was particularly evident between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in response to unprecedented scientific and industrial advance.

European culture during this time underwent significant cultural decentralization. The belief among most Europeans that other cultures were pagan, barbaric, and inferior was challenged through geographical expansion.

After 1770, Europe must have learned more emphatically than ever before that there were unknown cultures completely independent of the Old World, some of which even predated it...the Jewish-Christian Bible and Greek and Roman antiquity, thus acquired competition. (Kippenberg, 2002, p. 25)

Archaeological discoveries and evolutionary theories directly challenged biblical chronologies and models for world history (Kippenberg, 2002, pp. 29-35). Translations of Indian religious texts and the study of languages stimulated curiosity but also an awareness that Western culture could not lay absolute claim to religious values. However, this expansion of horizons was also used to reassert religion in its pure form. For example, Friedrich Max Muller (19<sup>th</sup> Century)

attempted to develop a linguistic classification system for religions with the hope of tracing religious development back to a single source.

It implies not only that our own ancestors and the ancestors of Homer and Cicero spoke the same language as the people of India...but it also implies and proves that they all had the same faith, and worshipped for a time the same supreme deity” (Kippenberg, 2002, p. 43).

The apparent discovery of this ‘original religion’ intended to reveal the pure revelation of God, apart from the religious distortions that came with industrialization. Matthew Arnold, a social critic living in England at the time, commented that “Puritanism had unilaterally motivated economic success, but this was perverted, because work, which Puritanism itself initially regarded as a curse ... had become a goal in itself. Religion had become a soulless engine” (Kippenberg, 2002, p. 47). Muller’s description attempted to highlight an early religious form that developed independently of industrial production, thereby showing religious devotion apart from superficial economic interests. Yet, the discovery of pre-historic faith carried a double meaning. Although it was intended to refocus a religious outlook, its conclusions strained the sense of English (and European) superiority and independent development, resulting in its “stark rejection” (Kippenberg, 2002, p. 46).

The incompatibility between scientific advance and religious thought was also not given. In fact, scientific discovery was in the minds of religious leaders during the Enlightenment. Richard Bentley, a 17<sup>th</sup> century religious scholar, was among the first who seized Newtonian philosophy in an effort to refute atheism. Arguments from the uniformity of design in creation became a preoccupation of many religious leaders in England. “Attracted by the same lure as Bentley, so many clergymen followed suit that by 1720 it was common to hear them from the pulpit dilating on matter and motion...atoms, of theories, and phenomena” (Odom, 1966, p. 536). Similarly, scientific language was adopted by some clerics for describing religious

phenomena, “in the hope of capitalizing on the prestige of that vocabulary” (Brooke, 1989, p. 14). By using scientific vocabulary, clerics could show the compatibility of truths, both scientific and religious. Scientific philosophies also assisted the development of liberal Protestantism. If uniformity was true and the universe was self-sustaining, revelation was no longer plausible, or even necessary. Salvation could be the natural destiny of man who possesses God-given reason and common sense. This *reasonable piety* was widely preached by the English Latitudinarians who dominated the Church of England in the latter half of the 17<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (Gay, 1968, pp. 20-21). What these divines offered was a scientific and secular reading of salvation. These led to more extreme forms of liberal Protestantism and Deism, first within England, then continental Europe and North America. Polemicists like John Toland, Anthony Collins and Matthew Tindal became fervent popularizers of *natural religion*. Borrowing from scientific descriptions of nature, their intent was to interrogate revealed and historical religion by depending wholly on natural reason. Rationality, as nature’s greatest gift, would become the foundation of all religion and represents the highest state of man (Richter, 2006, pp. 27, 31). In contrast, some scientists would argue in defense of traditional religious doctrines. Among these was Isaac Newton, who published the *General Scholium to the Principia* in an effort to forestall the growth of Deism, atheism and free thinking within England. Based on the “appearance of things”, he wanted to apply his potent scientific method as a confirmation of religious beliefs (Odom, 1966, p. 535). For Newton, natural knowledge gained through observation was inseparable from the knowledge of God; this was the real purpose of his science (Odom, 1966, p. 537). The presence of God was not merely wishful thinking on his part, but it was built into his scientific philosophy. The argument was that if gravitational attraction is true, then mutual attractions among sun-centered bodies will result in deviations in their motion. These irregularities will increase and will eventually require “reformation” that only God could

provide (Odom, 1966, p. 537). Newton's philosophy could demonstrate the need for God's involvement in the physical universe, but it also demonstrated *how* it was needed. This was the introduction of *natural theology*, or a proof of God from nature, something quite distinct from the natural religion of the Deists. Newton would use the natural sciences to validate his sacred reading of nature, while the Deist would use elements of Newton's scientific philosophy to support a secular reading of the sacred. Nevertheless, Newton hoped that his science would be a quantitative proof for God and his providence (Odom, 1966, p. 536). Similarly, the French Cartesians based their arguments on God's perfection. Although they disagreed with Newton concerning the necessity of reformation in universe, they nonetheless believed that God was behind it all. Because God is perfect and does "nothing without reason", the universe must be an extension of that perfection and that God given reason would lead man back to God (Lambert, 1999, p. 312; Odom, 1966, p. 539). By characterizing the universe in this way, Cartesians provided a useful argument to the Deists who sought to exclude the requirement for divine interference (Odom 1966: 540). Ironically, the Cartesian argument from God's perfection allowed for his exclusion as a providential figure in the hands of the Deists. Although Newtonianism and Cartesianism both originated from a theistic perspective, their arguments concerning the uniformity and mechanism of the universe was seized by the Deists toward the development of a new religious form.

Giordano Bruno, a former priest, was considered a religious rebel in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. Based on the infinite nature of God, he argued that the universe must be infinite, containing many worlds. He also advocated for pantheistic monism or the doctrine that all things are forms of one ultimate reality. In doing so, matter was attributed with unique abilities, including the ability to move and organize itself (Catholic Encyclopedia). His argument for a plurality of worlds and pantheism threatened the sense of cosmic identity and he was burned at the stake as a heretic in

1600 by the church in Rome (Brooke, 1989, p. 6). A century later, Newton would establish the laws of gravitation, which suggested that matter could move without divine intervention, although God was the organizer. The self-sustaining nature of the universe was adopted by Deists to argue for the impossibility of miracles and the irrelevance of providence. Similarly, quantum mechanics has shown how creation can occur without a creator in that matter can organize itself into self-reproducing systems. Arthur Peacocke, a 20<sup>th</sup> century theologian and scientist provided a reinterpretation. He argued that this characteristic of matter provides strong support for the *continuous* creation of God (Brooke, 1989, pp. 6-7). Here, an argument that contributed to Bruno's death at the hands of the church is used as a Christian apologetic.

These examples illustrate the fluidity between sacred and secular readings of nature and the subsequent religious adaptations. These collisions and modifications were largely driven by an over optimism in the industrial and scientific advance, which, at the time, appeared infinite (Midgley, 1992, p. 192). A general belief prevailed that the accumulation of knowledge was of supreme value. With each new discovery, old notions and ideas would be challenged or swept away.

But there really was a crucial shift of emphasis in the early Enlightenment towards making this destructive cutting and slashing central...a scientist is typically a destroyer, one who sweeps away existing superstitions...and among these superstitions, the former idea of Nature seemed an obvious target. (Midgley, 1992, p. 79)

Initial advances in knowledge and the introduction of the 'machinery metaphor', led many scientists to conclude that it was possible to posit a single and simple explanatory system for nature and the universe (Midgley, 1992, pp. 76, 84). The appearance of certainty and comprehensive explanations challenged notions of mystery and invisible forces. It seemed possible that everything could be brought under observation, leading to singular explanations

(Midgley, 1992, p. 61). This was certainly the perspective of Auguste Comte, who envisioned Sociology as the platform for these types of explanations.

Positive philosophy...alone has been advancing during a course of centuries, through which the others have been declining. This general revolution of the mind is nearly accomplished...bringing social phenomena within its comprehension...into one body of homogeneous doctrine. (Comte, 1975, p. 84)

More important than these early discoveries was a change in temperament that accompanied this knowledge. The apparent simplicity and accumulation of facts led to an exaltation of human intellect, or the “orgiastic dramatization” of the human mind as the centre of value and rationality (Midgley, 1992, pp. 73, 118, 223). In this way, it was not merely the quantity of information that posed a challenge to religious thought, but the posture through which one could gather accurate and truthful information. Suspicion and disbelief were held as morally respectable and led to truth, while faith and the imagination led to error and needed to be purged (Midgley, 1992, pp. 118, 126, 133).

The religious response to these forces was to find a new place for God, or to identify a role for the deity that could be accommodated within this body of knowledge, and this way of knowing. One of the primary strategies was to proclaim a ‘God of the gaps’, or an explanation for the inexplicable (Midgley, 1992, p. 200). The need for adaptation and reinterpretation are inherent to any approach that wants to explain theological realities through observations of phenomena, because these phenomena exist in the middle of a sequence of events (Odom, 1966, p. 546). The peril of Natural Theology and this type of engagement generally, is rooted in the attempt to exploit the gaps in scientific understanding (Brooke, 1989, p. 5). As scientific understanding grows or undergoes modification, the proof for the existence or absence of God requires revision to accommodate the latest discovery (Odom, 1966, p. 547). For example, Newton’s theological argument from the design of nature was an attempt at adaptation whose



success was entirely dependent on the exhaustive nature of his observations. Colin Maclaurin, one of Newton's followers, also made the argument that the observation of nature would lead to religious piety. However, he acknowledged that phenomena in the physical universe were significantly more complex than Newton had imagined. "The processes of nature lie so deep, that, after all the pains we can take, much, perhaps, will remain undiscovered beyond the reach of human art or skill" (Odom, 1966, p. 542). Decades later, Pierre Laplace would show how the universe was self-correcting, negating the need for reformation (Brooke, 1989, p. 18; Odom, 1966, p. 546). Similarly, the Cartesians, arguing from the perfection of God, would overemphasize mechanization and the 'closed' nature of the universe on which the Deists relied. Facing the potential loss of human free will and dignity, Cartesians would engage in "some astonishing contortions" concerning the true nature of man (Gay, 1968, p. 18). For Descartes, this takes the form of the *real distinction*, or the principle by which the material world is separated from a spiritual one. "It is certain that this I, that is to say my soul, which makes me what I am, is entirely and truly distinct from my body, and can be or exist without it" (Williams, 1978, p. 105). Through science, the Cartesians would revert to a religious ontology by proclaiming that the human being is a spiritual substance and inherently different from his material surroundings (Stoker, 2006, p. 13). Finally, although the Cartesians believed that they could identify 'first causes', the complexity of nature would pose an obstacle. As Maclaurin stated, "such a philosophy far surpasses the reach of man", as methodologically it would be impossible to identify the singular or first causes of phenomena (Odom, 1966, p. 543). Mary Midgley makes a similar argument that the machinery metaphor within science has lost most of its force in light of recent advances in physics.

'Chance' cannot be defined except as a measure of the observer's ignorance of the future. The laws leave a place for mind in the description of every molecule...the

mechanistic model of matter as inert, standard, homogeneous stuff...no longer works...it was never a literal description of the world. (Midgley, 1992, p. 173)

The universe is no longer perceived as a “single secret” or a fixed set of objects that may be observed, classified, and defined. Moreover, scientific theory is in a constant state of flux, always contingent on the ‘next discovery’ (Midgley, 1992, pp. 174, 180, 190). Within science, the unknown may be expanding faster than the known (Odom, 1966, p. 542). Therefore, while religious thought made adaptations in response to this new epistemology, these changes were made uncertain through their alignment with an unfinished and transient body of knowledge.

Yet these types of adaptations are not specific to the Enlightenment. The loss of religious monopoly has also resulted in innovative changes in contemporary western religious thought. According to Lambert, what is critical to the survival of any contemporary religious movement is its endorsement of personal freedom and its compatibility with other features of modernity (Lambert, 1999, p. 317). While science and rationality remain important features and potential secularizing forces, western culture has also fragmented and become more diverse since the Enlightenment. This includes the emergence of new masses, globalized epistemologies, and the growth of capitalism. “World religious ferment of contesting epistemologies...is in fact going on without limit around the globe” (Swatos, 1999, p. 221). Although pluralism presents challenges to western religion, only those movements that maintain rigid structures or remain closed to external influence tend to decline. Religion may face a greater plurality of challenges to its authority, but its survival is largely dependent on its ability to evolve with cultural change (Lambert, 1999, p. 311). For example, Canada and the US are among the most developed nations of the world yet continue to be among the most ‘religious’ according to World Value Surveys, contradicting those who have argued that western religion is largely incompatible with highly rationalized societies (Lambert, 1999, p. 312). Several Christian denominations have developed

partnerships with feminist, counter cultural, and ecological groups. Technological advance has been incorporated by many religious groups with the purpose of propagating their message (Lambert, 1999, p. 313). Religious innovations continue to involve mergers with scientific ideas. The Christian Science movement, Scientology, and the New Age have blended scientific and religious elements to create new religious forms. Parascientificity has also emerged, incorporating astrology and Near Death Experiences (NDE's). Western culture's emphasis on personal freedom has prompted religious denominations to eliminate requirements of membership, resulting in a 'consumer friendly' religious culture. This has also placed a greater emphasis on self-spirituality, "individual consciousness and freedom may favor a rejection of religion or a more personal religion... a more personalized faith" (Lambert, 1999, p. 315). Many Christian movements have also become more egalitarian in their leadership structures by reducing the distance between the laity and clergy. Protestant denominations have been active in promoting human rights within the US while advocating for a friendship based and democratic (congregational) governance structure (Lambert, 1999, p. 322). In the last 50 years, there has also been resurgence in Christian apologetics. Authors and orators like Josh McDowell, John Warwick Montgomery, Lee Strobel, and Gary Habermas have been the forerunners of a movement that is conservationist in nature. This has been a response, in part, to perceptions of Christian passivity in the face of aggressive literary and historical criticism directed toward Christian scriptures. To reaffirm the historicity of Christianity, they draw support from current literary, natural scientific, historical, and archaeological research. More importantly, this has been a social movement. Josh MacDowell, writing in 1972, stated that he had lectured or debated on more than 400 college campuses in more than 42 countries (McDowell, 1972, p. i). This religious movement represents a new alliance with science and other disciplines toward establishing support or 'proofs' for Christian doctrine and theology.

The preceding discussion does not exclude the possibility of definitions, nor does it suggest that something essential to religion was not left intact through these permutations. Rather, to demonstrate that the manifestations of religion, and the contrasts that separate it from other phenomena, are in flux and exist in the context of historical forces. The description of religion as mystifying, irrational, or masochistic, may not be generally descriptive or accurate in light of these variations. Furthermore, in light of this variability, these descriptions of religion do not appear to be objectively given, but constructed and used. Günter Thomas has described the post-Enlightenment sociological project as a process of *constructing*, rather than *finding* religious phenomena. He describes this as the source of a ‘conceptual crisis’ within the sociological analysis of religion, where the observer approaches the subject matter with assumptions that yield new realities and errors that do not exist in the participant’s consciousness.

How (can) sociology guarantee that it is not actually speaking about something other than religion, while simultaneously retaining the freedom to speak about this same object in quite a different way from religious self-descriptions? (Thomas G. , 2006, p. 100)

In other words, how can sociology establish religion as a distinct subject matter when the content of this subject, within the religious mind, is defined as something else? Despite the sturdy appearance of these descriptions at times, “we must attend seriously to myths, metaphors, images and the other... apparatus of thought surrounding the official doctrines” (Midgley, 1992, p. 15). The users of these definitions will deploy contrasts to distinguish the subject matter, religion from non-religion. If religion is distinct because of its sacredness, then desacralization will be the antithesis and a signal of secular influence. If religion is defined in terms of great religious traditions, then the loss of orthodoxy will be interpreted as religious decline. If religion is defined by its functions, “then one should not be surprised to find it functional” (Lauwers & Dobbelaere, 1973, p. 542). More importantly, these definitional challenges suggest the

possibility of reversing or nullifying the contrasts used to support the definition. If definitions are malleable, so are the contrasts that support them.

## **VI. Deconstructing Contrast**

As noted, Feuerbach's pattern of analysis has been largely maintained within the work of the theorists under examination. These theorists approach religion as a fundamentally mistaken perspective on an obscured truth, or even a self-serving illusion. Religion is seen as a mystifying force in that it locates truth and realities with invisible cosmic entities. Religion may have been based on a genuine human need and may have followed a primitive rationality at its inception, but it also fundamentally irrational and contains masochistic tendencies. There appears to be a distinct definition at work in their sociological analysis. Religion is depicted as an irrational and self-destructive belief in mystified entities that stands in contrast to a rational and empowered existence, which is rooted in this world or immediate culture. Although this definition represents the contribution of several theorists, there is evidence to show that this approach has been widely replicated, across multiple disciplines. Mary Midgley has examined these trends within philosophical and scientific writings and finds similar definitions and contrasts at work. She describes the approach toward religious phenomena as 'intellectual puritanism', or the belief that truth and reliable knowledge derives from a particular type of rationality that stands opposed to religious thought. This way of thinking must be disbelieving, critical, skeptical, sanitary, and without feeling to yield the truth. In contrast, religious 'belief' or faith is wrought with error because it is founded on the constructive imagination and an emotional disposition toward the universe (Midgley, 1992, pp. 126-136). A rational perspective is also assumed to be empirical, revealing facts directly from the universe and formulating descriptions, while the imaginative impulse will mythologize (Midgley, 1992, pp. 50, 60-61). In her description, these many authors

have constructed various clefs and generated polarization, manufacturing the isolation of disciplines (Midgley, 1992, p. 136).

Although an operative definition is identifiable among the theorists under examination, they are also tenuous because they are constructed in the context of highly varied manifestations of religion and non-religion. This variability poses a challenge to this operative definition and its supporting contrasts. It is possible to deconstruct these contrasts through a symmetrical treatment of rationality, masochism, and mystification. Rationality and irrationality may be features of both the religious and non-religious mind, just as a masochistic principle may be at work in both spheres. Similarly, mystification may be a secular and religious phenomenon.

#### **A. Rationality**

The most significant area of differentiation appears to be rationality, in that the religious mind engages in something fundamentally irrational, while the non-religious does not (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 225; Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 64-65; Barnes, 1997, p. 379; Caplan, 2001, p. 16). However, the meaning and application of rationality is difficult to pinpoint in Feuerbach and in the writings of other investigators. Cornelia Richter, in her examination of rationality within the Enlightenment, concludes that it is “almost impossible to find a general definition of this term” (Richter, 2006, p. 24). Rational thought was attributed to philosophers, scientists, and theologians alike. Similarly, it was not typically viewed as the only legitimate form of thought or source of knowledge. Only the narrowest use of the term excluded experience, emotion, and belief. She identifies numerous debates during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century that centered on the role of rationality in life and in the religious mind, but offers only caution when attempting to reduce the concept to a single formula (Richter, 2006, pp. 24-35). In analyzing the debates about the role of ‘original’ or primitive religions in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Hans Kippenberg describes the prevailing dispute as focused not on rationality or its affiliation with a theological or scientific

perspective, but on the different expectations of science and the limits of rational thought. While some believed that science could “explain everything” through natural laws and made “total scientific claims”, others sought to protect the mind from causal explanations (Kippenberg, 2002, pp. 60-62). The use of rationality, like the definition of religion, appears to be fluid and contingent on other factors. As the battlegrounds and objectives change, so does the application of the term. Some have indicated that rationality is not necessarily descriptive of particular methods and techniques, but of a resistance to error or a critical posture of unbelief (Midgley, 1992, pp. 133-134; Richter, 2006, p. 27).

These variable descriptions of rationality may be categorized into two general approaches, where rationality is viewed as historically progressive or universally present. For Berger, Feuerbach, and Durkheim, a progressive model is employed that sees historical forces moving toward greater rationality. Berger describes the tendency of civilizations to move from an alienated to a de-alienated consciousness, or from an irrational to a rational standpoint. Over time, people come to reclaim their externalizing ability or their role as co-producers in the world (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 85, 92). This movement includes the progressive growth of other rational elements, such as complex thought, emotional detachment, and goal orientation (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 67-68). Durkheim provides a similar description where religious contemplation is described as a primitive form of rationality, existing in response to a genuine reality. However, this rationality is flawed because it is based on subjective reflection, meaning it is unable to produce the factual conclusions that a scientific method produces (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 25, 273; Durkheim, 1982, p. 143). David Martin traces the persistence of progressive rationalization in classical sociological theory, primarily in Weber, Comte, and Marx. He concludes that within this discipline, religion has become displaced as a “fundamental unreality” when confronted by a growing rationality.

An increasing emphasis over time on strictly mundane objectives, and the universal triumph of the positive method, not merely as a means for achieving these mundane objectives but as a universal state of mind – a new social ethos. (Martin, 1966, p. 355)

Midgley identifies the same within contemporary scientific journals, primarily through the metaphors of *infancy* and *gravitation*. Religious belief, and especially primitive animism, is depicted as a childish mode of existence, while the scientific and modern age represents adulthood, particularly in its western form (Midgley, 1992, pp. 157-170). The beginning of thought is associated with the imagination and non-rational forces, wishful, ungoverned, and senseless. As the mind matures, thought becomes intellectual, serious, and noble (Midgley, 1992, pp. 133, 164, 182). However, while this progression is underway a new drama is perceived as only beginning. This gravitational metaphor views scientific rationality as the ‘new beginning’, or the ground *to* which all of history has been drawn and the basis *from* which all future thought will grow (Midgley, 1992, p. 142). This has given rise to new physical eschatologies, often based on physics and the computer sciences that communicate new and fantastical visions of the future (Midgley, 1992, p. 184). The assumption of this perspective is that rationality is a recent manifestation and is not a constant feature of human civilization. The presence of religious thought in contemporary western society constitutes an irrational remnant of the past.

Others have described particular behaviours or thought as rational dependent on the knowledge the actor possesses and believes to be true, or real. Therefore, rationality is determined not on the basis of a historical epoch or a generalized mode of thought, but on a subject’s particular response to the environment. Rudolf Otto identifies this connection in discussing the problem of ontology when labelling the belief in miracles as irrational:

It is not that which is commonly asserted, that rationalism is the denial, and its opposite the affirmation, of the miraculous. That is... a very superficial distinction.



For the traditional theory of the miraculous as the occasional breach of the causal nexus in nature by a Being who himself instituted and must therefore be master of it – this theory is itself as massively rational as it is possible to be. (Otto, 1923, p. 3)

Rationality is here depicted as present in the religious mind but contingent on the facts assumed by the actor. Thomas argues that ontological conclusions within Durkheim's theory directly results in his use of blindness toward one reality, and the sight of another. For Durkheim, the failure to 'see' the collective force as the source of divine projection constitutes an irrationality (Thomas G. , 2006, p. 104). On this basis, he suggests an approach that does not impose an ontological judgement or a continuum of rationality, but an *operative realism*, where the examiner assumes the reality of the object under study (Thomas G. , 2006, p. 100). Therefore, rationality is assessed on the basis of what the actor sees, versus an assessment of rationality based on what the examiner sees. Barnes applies a similar principle within his theory, where he describes mythopoeic traditions that acted rationally in relation to the information available. Unpredictable and unintelligible events required interpretation, and in the absence of a scientific one, the observer posited invisible anthropomorphisms (Barnes, 1997, p. 381). In this way, religious phenomena became irrational only in the presence of more plausible explanatory schemes. Claude Lévi-Strauss and Bronislaw Malinowski both conclude that the primitive mind possessed both logic and reason, and that the difference between primitive and modern thought lies not in mental powers, but in the environment and the tools available (Lévi-Strauss, 1955, p. 444; Malinowski, 1948, p. 21). It is also noted that even the most primitive forms of thought will seek causes of events in an effort to manipulate the environment (Barnes, 1997, pp. 380-381; Malinowski, 1948, p. 21). Within these perspectives, rationality is assumed to be universally present and that rational behaviour may be assessed in relation to the immediate conditions. In this way, rationality becomes a universality.

Each of these perspectives on rationality describes a general approach to the problem of rationality, but few define it with any precision. The timeline that frames the discussion about irrationality ranges from pre-Enlightenment to pre-historic, including descriptions such as archaic, primitive, pre-scientific, pre-rational, mythopoeic, savage, and barbaric. The descriptions for rationality range from strict scientific methodology to a general approach toward the external world that incorporates observation and the rudimentary application of rules to predict outcomes. Included in these are the conventional or ‘everyday’ uses of the term, simply describing that which is sensible or consistent with established goals. To analyze this concept, it must be drawn from the authors under examination and reduced to several manageable categories. Although some of these authors do not provide any explicit definitions of the term, it is possible to extract and isolate its meaning through its particular association with behaviours and ideals within their writings. Through this process, rationality emerges as a specific cosmology, productive force, and posture.

**i. Cosmology of Rationality**

Evident within the works of these authors is the close association between rational thought and a particular view of the universe. Feuerbach describes reason as a fundamental understanding and an absolute reality of the universe. Rationality imbues the universe and the mind, and it is treated as a self-evident and an absolute principle that requires no justification or explanation (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 33-35, 220). The rational mind perceives the world as rational and sees that it is governed by principles of cause and effect. Feuerbach describes this as the perspective of the scientific or natural man, who both accepts the laws of necessity in nature and uses these principles to achieve objectives (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 102,114). Durkheim also asserts that the principle of determinism “is firmly established” through the sciences and that this constitutes the power of reason, which “only a few minds” have grasped (Durkheim, 1995, p. 25).

For this reason, Durkheim outlines a similar program that applies these principles to social phenomena. “Our main objective is to extend the scope of scientific rationalism to cover human behaviour by demonstrating that...it is capable of being reduced to relationships of cause and effect” (Durkheim, 1982, p. 33). Similarly, Barnes argues that the intelligibility of the world is contingent on predictability, mechanization, and principles of causation. Through these, Barnes asserts that it is possible to place every event in the universe within a “network of natural causes”. This forms the cornerstone of rational inquiry that seeks to understand the world (Barnes, 1997, pp. 380, 384). Berger is more modest in his assertion of this principle, but he clearly links rational thought with the ability to perceive and apply causal chains (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 65-67).<sup>1</sup> However, while the use of a cause-effect framework is certainly required as an assumption to do scientific work, even in its rudimentary forms, it is often posited as a conclusion of science (Midgley, 1992, p. 97). This is best summarized in Feuerbach’s conclusion that that the “world is the sum of all reality” (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 162). This overextension of the cause-effect schema, or the mechanization of the universe, prompts opposition to notions of providence or any form of external interference (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 160-163; Barnes, 1997, p. 380). “If the invisible being is a God who by definition is superior to all the laws of the universe, then the entire enterprise of rationality might be in vain” (Barnes, 1997, p. 380). Nevertheless, Feuerbach and Durkheim acknowledge that the confrontation with this type of reality is oppressive, even horrifying, and may only be interrupted by chance (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 155; Durkheim, 1995, p. 25).

The cosmology of rationality is inherently tied to the historically progressive scheme of rationality. Mechanization, used to describe the functioning of the universe, only becomes

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<sup>1</sup> Berger’s use of causality is less cosmological than rudimentary. The recognition of causation is a central feature of his rationality, but he does not deploy it as necessity or mechanization. This would stand as a contradiction to the principle of externalization.

possible within a particular methodology and level of confidence in the conclusions of scientific rationalism. In other words, mechanization is the conclusion of a type of rationality that emerges only within recent history. Therefore, to suggest that rationality involves the recognition of cause-effect relationships, and that this mode of thought is unique to the scientific method, implies that all pre-scientific generations operated irrationally. This dilemma is acknowledged by Durkheim in his conclusion to *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, but is moderated by his assertion that all representations are based on something more than an illusion. Beliefs still rest on a definite experience of an underlying reality and therefore constitute a rudimentary form of rational thought. However, the conceptions of this reality were and are, if they are maintained, in error (Durkheim, 1995, p. 420). This paradox within Durkheim is what Günter Thomas describes as the “rightly wrong” conception of religious thought (Thomas G. , 2006, p. 103). It is the careful observation of scientific methodology that reveals truths in a way that stands apart from subjective contemplation. The cause-effect relationships that govern the social world only become fully apparent through this method. Therefore, the cosmology of rationality within Durkheim is specific to the scientific age, and appears to be inseparable from it (Durkheim, 1995, p. 26). Barnes and Caplan also rest their arguments on the link between rationality and the *recent* discoveries of science (Barnes, 1997, p. 384; Caplan, 2001, p. 16). This becomes a tautology, where rationality equals science, and science equals rationality. Within this framework, the assertion that religion or any pre-scientific thought is irrational becomes supportable, because religion and pre-science are not science.

Yet the cause-effect schema encounters other problems when it fails to distinguish between its usefulness as an assumption versus a conclusion of science. The notion of mechanization has been a persistent metaphor. Isaac Newton, prominent in England in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, introduced celestial mechanics. His philosophy would explain the movement of

matter and the forces that held the universe together in *general* harmony. Similarly, Cartesians in France (e.g. Leibniz), emphasized the intricate causes and effects that govern the universe within a pre-established harmony, albeit a harmony established by God (Odom, 1966, pp. 536, 540). These “innumerable circular motions or whirlpools in the continuous fluid of the universe are the vortices for which Cartesian physics is famous” (Williams, 1978, p. 254). This mechanization was also extended to living things. Animals are a “walking plant...a machine which winds its own springs. It is the living image of perpetual movement” (La Mettrie, 1912, pp. 93, 97). It was the perfect, or nearly perfect, mechanization of nature that captured the imagination of these early scientists, clerics, and the public. This uniformity and necessity of nature has become the first premise of all scientific and rational projections (Robinson, 2007, p. 615). More importantly, the conclusion is “that without such a premise, our inductions and projections would be uncertain and even valueless” (Robinson, 2007, p. 616). The difficulty with this conception of the universe is that it becomes difficult to manage accidents and the unexpected, as these imply capriciousness. As a consequence, any unexpected results must be folded into the schema and new results must be interpreted in light of this premise (Robinson, 2007, pp. 613-614; Midgley, 1995, p. 95). If the notion of mechanization is taken seriously, then all is determined or nothing may be expected as the course of nature may be interrupted at any moment. Adherence to this principle as the ‘truth’ of nature leads to categorical conclusions, where only two alternatives are considered. “There is, or there is not, a unicorn in the garden - if there is not, then there is nothing there at all” (Midgley, 1992, p. 95). Therefore, the deployment of this metaphor to express the regularity of nature led to incoherence and required practical moderation. For example, Durkheim asserts determinism and the application of causal necessity to the social world, yet believes that it is possible to be insubordinate to the principle (Durkheim, 1995, p. 274). In reality, the concepts of necessity and uniformity do not constitute “real worries” for

those that use them (Robinson, 2007, pp. 611-612). Despite conclusions that the universe is governed by these principles, most still hold to the belief that they can interact meaningfully with their surroundings and effect change. This is evident in the scientific orientation toward nature, where the goal of discovery is often the manipulation of or liberation from the physical environment (Robinson, 2007, p. 609; Sire, 1988, p. 97; Durkheim, 1995, p. 274).

Moreover, mechanization may not be supportable through observation. It was already noted that science was an unpredictable ally for religion due to unforeseen results and theoretical revisions. It was Colin Maclaurin, one of Newton's followers, who acknowledged that the physical universe was significantly more complex than Newton had imagined and that the pursuit of causes would only yield partial results (Odom, 1966, p. 542). Theories, and the discoveries that support them, are in a constant state of change, contingent, and often wrought with error (Midgley, 1995, pp. 180, 190). Even Durkheim acknowledges that the process of discovery and the explanation of causes is "fragmentary and incomplete; it advances slowly and is never finished" (Durkheim, 1995, p. 432). The universe has presented us with too many untestable facts to substantiate an all encompassing adherence to universal order. "Only in patches is the order and beauty of the world directly visible. To believe in it as a whole requires faith" (Midgley, 1995, p. 116). Moreover, recent scientific discoveries have resulted in a "loss of hardness" in the belief in determinism (Midgley, 1995, p. 173). Derek Lovejoy, in his examination of causality as a historical macroscopic concept, agrees that causality has become a "slippery concept". Examinations of the microscopic world have not yielded strictly causal explanations, raising speculation that "quantum mechanics only predicts sets of probabilities" at best (Lovejoy, 1999-2000, p. 447). This leads to a rejection of "fatalistic determinism...since it denies dialectics and the emergence of novelty" (Lovejoy, 1999-2000, p. 436).

A special irony in all this, is that naturalistic and nonpersonalist modern physics itself has stumbled across limits to the intelligibility of things. Early mechanistic forms of atomism gave way to quantum wave-mechanics and the deterministic universe has fallen into subatomic indeterminacy. These limits to the intelligibility of the universe have been accepted. (Barnes, 1997, p. 384)

Therefore, while observation and scientific inquiry may support conclusions that the universe contains regularity, the use of mechanization extends beyond observation. In addition, the unfinished nature of inquiry and the limits of scientific findings have bred a sense of tentativeness concerning knowledge and rationality (Barnes, 1997, p. 385; Lovejoy, 1999-2000, pp. 433, 441).<sup>2</sup> For some, descriptions of a mechanistic cosmology and the inconclusive results of scientific rationalism have generated a threatening or ambiguous universe. This has resulted in a resurgence of non-rational contemplation of the universe, whether in the form of post-modern malaise, new mythologies, secular soteriologies, nihilism, or physical eschatologies (Barnes, 1997, p. 385; Berger P. L., 1969, p. 124; Sire, 1988, p. 85; Midgley, 1992, p. 184)

A strict cause-effect schema, or mechanistic metaphor, appears to be inadequate in providing a complete explanation of the universe. This image of a completely ordered and causal world extends beyond the observation of causes and poses other challenges, leading to its abandonment or moderation. This may be the irrationality of the 'rational cosmology'. If the cosmology of rationality is discarded, what features of this schema remain? A moderate view of causal schemes may provide a more suitable ground of comparison when assessing whether religious phenomena are non-rational. The cosmology of rationality, left incoherent, may leave only rudimentary rationality as the basis of comparison. When this is done, the contrast between the rationality of non-religion and the non-rationality of religion begins to blur. In Durkheim, a rudimentary rationality will seek an understanding of collective forces and their causes, establish

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<sup>2</sup> For Barnes, the latest scientific discoveries have introduced ambiguity and uncertainty concerning the nature of the universe, which is full of "black holes". Yet, he maintains that enough information has been gathered to support the denial of invisible beings.

their internal relations, engage in classification, systemization, and apply the principles of logic. On this basis, he also concludes that religion “does not differ in nature from...science” (Durkheim, 1995, p. 431). Barnes identifies rationality with the basic recognition of causes and effects in the world toward identifying regular and reliable patterns. Here to, he acknowledges that religious thought, even in its most ancient forms, sought to identify, name, and organize causes to make the world intelligible (Barnes, 1997, p. 380). For Berger as well, he associates rationality with complexity, elaboration, coherence, and goal orientation. Yet in describing his typological continuum of rationality, he acknowledges that “intermediate theodicies” incorporate and foster these features of rational thought (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 60-70, 112). Here, rudimentary rationality loses its force as a distinguishing variable. These conceptions of rationality, falling short of a cosmological principle, also become incompatible with progressive models of rationality. As the content of rationality is reduced to classification, complexity, coherence and so on, it becomes increasingly challenging to establish that these behaviours are absent at a particular time or from a body of knowledge. This leads to a universal application of rationality.<sup>3</sup>

Bronislaw Malinowski asserts that no peoples, no matter how primitive, lacked a “scientific attitude”, though scholars frequently associate the absence of reason with these groups (Malinowski, 1948, pp. 21, 35-36). Citing his knowledge of the Melanesians, he identifies expertise and detailed knowledge in the areas of fishing, agriculture, manufacturing, and trade (Malinowski, 1948, p. 29). “They have, in fact, a whole system of principles of sailing, embodied in a complex and rich terminology, traditionally handed on and obeyed as rationally and consistently as is modern science by modern sailors” (Malinowski, 1948, p. 32). In this

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<sup>3</sup> Incidentally, this functions as a contradiction within Feuerbach. Rationality, embodied within the essential power of thought and constituting the absolute truth of the universe, engages in religious contemplation, which is inherently irrational. In this way, religious thought constitutes an exception to the rule and something alien to this universal truth.



way, Malinowski disassociates rationality from a particular period in history, connecting it rather to the human condition. Rationality becomes a universality, though it may be applied differently and with varying effect in relation to the environment. Lévi-Strauss applies the same principle in his structural analysis of myth, where he dismisses the scientific characterization of mythology as “idle play or...a course kind of speculation” (Lévi-Strauss, 1955, p. 428). By establishing structural similarities between mythologies, he attempts to show that myth contains logical coherence and complex properties. This leads to his rejection of the qualitative difference between the scientific and the so called ‘primitive’ mind. “The kind of logic which is used by mythical thought is as rigorous as that of modern science...the difference lies not in the quality of the intellectual process, but in the nature of the things to which it is applied” (Lévi-Strauss, 1955, p. 444).

In sum, the cosmology of rationality asserts causality as an absolute principle or truth of the universe. However, this conclusion is not verifiable by or consistent with observation, nor is strict adherence to mechanization sustainable. One could argue that this cosmology forms the basis of the division between the irrationality of religion and the rationality of non-religion. However, if this cosmology is non-sensical in the manner described above, then what is the substance of this contrast? If this principle is not strictly adhered to in practice or ‘taken seriously’, then this contrast is based on a poor metaphor, a fiction (Robinson, 2007, p. 612). If the cosmology of rationality is incoherent, then rudimentary rationality becomes the only legitimate point of contrast between religion and non-religion. As such, it also loses its force as a differentiating variable, because it becomes a universality, or a concept divorced from a progressive scheme. Untied from recent and scientific modes of inquiry, rationality becomes omnipresent. On this basis, it is improbable that rudimentary rationality inhabits non-religious

thought only. Or, that the scientific mind avoids non-rational trappings. This should manifest itself historically, and we shall examine this shortly.

## ii. Production of Rationality

Within a ‘closed’ understanding of the universe, it is logical to direct activity toward this world and manipulate its workings. This is only possible when the examiner begins with *things*, versus the ideas that come from internal reflection. “We are content to reflect upon our ideas...this method cannot yield objective results...they are as a veil interposed between the things and ourselves” (Durkheim, 1982, pp. 60-61). To arrive at a real picture of the world, work must be directed to the world in its concrete form. Feuerbach emphasizes this difference, where the religious mind seeks departure while the rational mind invests.

The man who does not exclude from his mind the idea of the world, the idea that everything here must be sought intermediately, that every effect has its natural cause, that a wish is only to be attained when it is made an end and the corresponding means are put into operation – such a man does not pray, he only works, he transforms. (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 102)

Although the true nature of things are not easily understood and muddled by our representations, Durkheim suggests that only the scientific method can naturally penetrate and understand their true nature (Durkheim, 1982, p. 36). This begins with systematic sense perception, observable data, and definitions (Durkheim, 1982, p. 81; Feuerbach, 1881, p. 165). This orientation to the world is the central feature of Berger’s theory as well. The concept of externalization is inherent to rational activity, while false consciousness, alienation, mystification, and masochism, are synonymous with irrationality, or the withdrawal from the socio-cultural world (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 85, 90, 95, 113). Rational activity is self-empowerment and an externalizing force (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 67-69). Similarly, Barnes associates the knowledge of causation with work that is directed to the immediate surroundings, where these principles are empirically tested and put to use (Barnes, 1997, pp. 380, 385). Caplan’s use of rational ignorance and rational

irrationality are based on the premise that the truthfulness of beliefs rest with “known scientific evidence”, which is marked by its “practical success” (Caplan, 2001, pp. 16-17). This orientation to the world speaks to the direction of human effort, suggesting that rationality will be productive in that sphere as well.

Berger uses rationality to describe a ‘results driven’ approach that continually elaborates, theoretically and bureaucratically (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 60, 69, 88, 139). As a result, the rationalization of ideas and structures results in greater complexity and technological development (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 60, 64-65, 112). Durkheim describes the process of systematic observation as producing an increasingly complicated and detailed explanation of the world, leading to more comprehensive explanatory systems (Durkheim, 1982, pp. 36, 67, 75). This understanding may grow to the extent that ultimate explanations of the objective world become possible and more desirable than religious speculation (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 84). Barnes draws a similar conclusion, that a sufficiently detailed and “fully naturalistic model of the universe” already exists as the most plausible model for the universe (Barnes, 1997, p. 382). In short, the application of empirical science has produced a body of knowledge that surpasses all others in its explanatory power. More importantly, this production extends beyond accumulations of knowledge to include new measures of truth and certainty (Caplan, 2001, pp. 4, 13, 16). Durkheim describes this path in some detail, but it is summarized in three essential doctrines of disciplined and objective observation: 1) Discard preconceptions, 2) define the subject matter through observation, and 3) discard data that is personal or has individual manifestations (Durkheim, 1982, pp. 72-81). For Barnes, improvements in mathematics, better tools, reliance on empirical observation, and the public scrutiny of results all contributed to a more reliable body of knowledge (Barnes, 1997, p. 383). Although difficult, if this particular methodology is adhered to, “one will not be tempted to go beyond the facts...if they are wholly

intelligible they suffice for both science and practice” (Durkheim, 1982, p. 384). Only rationality may posit the truth, while religious and subjective reflection results in sophism, falsehood, obscurity, ignorance, and the loss of clarity (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 22-25; Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 176, 193; Barnes, 1997, pp. 382, 384).

As soon as the authority of science is established, science must be reckoned with; under pressure of need, one can go beyond science, but it is from science that one must start out. One can affirm nothing that science denies, deny nothing that science affirms, and establish nothing that does not directly or indirectly rest on principles taken from science. (Durkheim, 1995, p. 433)

This knowledge and its truth, rooted in the reality of this world, also permits mastery and dominion over this world. The application of rationality to the world brings efficiency, cultural investment, transformation, and the “progressive conquest” of the external world (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 127; Caplan, 2001, p. 20; Durkheim, 1982, p. 46; Berger P. L., 1969, p. 68; Barnes, 1997, p. 386-387). Therefore, rationality is not only oriented to the world, but it produces in the world.

The production of rationality may be reduced to several propositions. First, this implies that an orientation away from the world is irrational. As we have seen, this disposition is often attributed to the religious mind, which ignores the truth and seeks escape from the world. This contrast leads Feuerbach to conclude that religious groups produce no culture, “because they felt no need of it.” (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 178). To deny that the Judeo-Christian tradition contains themes of deliverance and salvation would be futile. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, there are numerous examples of the desire to escape material circumstances. Whether this takes the form of deliverance from an immediate oppressor, redemption from hell, or the hope of meeting the Lord in the air, there is a persistent longing to flee limitations. However, does this escapism translate into cultural withdrawal or a disinterest in life on earth? Within Judeo-Christian scriptures, future hope appears alongside a large body of moral instruction, both for the

community and the individual. Beside future glory is the larger concern about how to live in relation to the world. Therefore, eschatology does not necessarily stand in contradiction to wisdom literature or the gospels. Rather, there appears to be a paradox or tension between the ‘now’ and the ‘not yet’, or two worlds. Note the following:

Now, O Lord God, Your promise to my father David is fulfilled, for you have made me king over a people as numerous as the dust of the earth. Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come before this people, for who can rule this great people of Yours. *2 Chronicles 1:9-10 (NASB)*

Your dead will live; Their corpses will rise. You who lie in the dust, awake and shout for joy, for your dew is as the dew of the dawn, and the earth will give birth to the departed spirits. *Isaiah 26:19 (NASB)*

At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. *Mark 13:26 (NASB)*

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves, do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. *Philippians 2:3-4 (NASB)*

These passages illustrate the dual focus on this world and another world as compatible orientations. This has manifested itself historically in numerous ways, taking both charitable and hostile forms. One could examine the founding work of Henry Dunant (19<sup>th</sup> Century) and the origins of the Red Cross, or John Howard (18<sup>th</sup> Century) as a leader in prison reform and founder of the John Howard Society. Both of these organizations trace their beginnings to religious fervour. More contemporary examples would include Millard and Linda Fuller and the beginnings of Habitat for Humanity, the Canadian Food Grains Bank, and Mediation Services. The orientation and activity in the world is also evident in religious wars and expansionism. The current significance of geographical locations such as Jerusalem, for Judaism, Islam, and Christianity alike, provides an illustration of the linkage between the supernatural and the concrete, embodied in the “holy city”. Berger readily acknowledges that religious forces may alienate people from their externalizing capacity, but it also engages institutions and legitimates

anarchy and rebellion (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 97-98). Likewise, Durkheim may describe religion as a “system of ideas” that exists in the imagination, symbols, and obscurity, yet he acknowledges that these are superimposed onto nature (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 227, 230). As such, religion is still capable of exerting power over the individual and the environment (Durkheim, 1995, p. 421).

The second proposition of this contrast is that the non-religious mind is rationally oriented to the physical world. This may be considered along two dimensions, the belief or hope in another world, and the simple withdrawal from the immediate world or culture. Both would equally and independently constitute an irrationality and a failure to build culture. The belief in another world or reality will be discussed in greater detail within the context of mystification, but some discussion is needed here. Guy Robinson discusses a tendency within scientific rationalism to explain unknown forces using quasi-theological imagery. “This ultimately became a conception of Nature as something transcendental and external, a Nature with ‘laws’ that govern and determine the events of the world” (Robinson, 2007, p. 608). This powerful externality, or essence, pulls thought away from the physical world and becomes a product of imaginative indulgence, or speculation (Robinson, 2007, p. 608). These departures from the world also take the explicit form of physical eschatologies, based on theoretical physics and the belief that humanity will and should flee the world. Mary Midgley traces these tendencies within ‘scientific’ writings, particularly in Theophysics. The following is one excerpt from Freeman J. Dyson:

Green technology pushes in the right direction, outward from the sun, to the asteroids and the giant planets and beyond, where space is limitless and the frontier forever open...We adapt our plants and animals and ourselves to live wild in the universe as we find it...if our grandchildren are born with an even tougher skin and an even narrower eye, they may walk bare-faced in the winds of mars. (Midgley, 1992, p. 187)

Or, consider the following quote from John D. Barrow and Frank Tipler citing the emergence of the “Omega Point”:

Life will have spread into all spatial regions in all universes which could logically exist, and will have stored an infinite amount of information, including all bits of knowledge which is logically possible to know. And this is the end. (Midgley, 1992, p. 66)

Other authors have suggested the transference of human essence to computer hardware in order to free ourselves from organic limitations, or a transformation away from flesh and blood (Midgley, 1992, pp. 153, 164, 184). Prophetic and superstitious statements in non-religious writings sometimes convey an “all-embracing upward surge of progress culminating in Homo Sapiens and destined to carry him up to indefinite vistas of future glory” (Midgley, 1995, p. 21). Assuming the future destruction of earth, physical limitations of humanity and the fragility of organic matter is ignored in favour of an imagined retreat. This represents a reversion to a magical style of thought where all physical limitations are eventually overcome (Midgley, 1992, pp. 183-190).

The belief in a physical eschatology may be the exception. However, the non-religious mind may still act irrationally if it denies another world yet withdraws from *this* world or culture. Feuerbach and other authors do not define the degree or type of withdrawal that is required before it qualifies as ‘irrational’. For example, it is reasonable to assert that some religious behaviour pulls the believer away from the world. Religious asceticism permeates various traditions and this may support the juxtaposition of productive non-religious and non-productive religious activity. However, it is arguable whether ascetic behaviours have absolutely no orientation toward the world. Only the most extreme forms of ascetic behaviour would qualify as a complete withdrawal, and this behaviour is often temporary and would not constitute the ‘normal’ life of the believer. Rather, asceticism may be described as a selective withdrawal,

where the believer forgoes certain comforts in different quantities and for different lengths of time. If understood in this way, is it possible to assert that non-religious behaviour does not indulge in selective asceticism? Utopian visions would qualify as a type of withdrawal in that they maintain an orientation to the physical world, but not in its current form. Anarchists like George Benello have communicated a utopian vision based on the loss of control that has accompanied industrial and centralized development.

Large organizations...are sterile...densely organized at the top...power ridden... discourage innovation. As the big organizations have drawn off life and energies from the communities where people live, a wasteland culture has emerged (Benello, 1992, pp. 17-18).

Although citizens were once able to take part in meaningful decision making within a local setting, centralism has dissociated the individual from space, economy, and neighbours. In addition, this way of life has negatively affected psychology and human nature. The solution to the problem is presented as a strategic withdrawal and the installation of a new and locally sustainable community that fully integrates its members (Benello, 1992, p. 70). This “is the project of constructing a society that encourages human growth” through personal, intellectual, and manual work (Benello, 1992, p. 72). Over time, the individual is rebuilt and psychologically restructured, where new instincts take hold and old limits are surpassed.

Genuine psychic transformation is possible, and as the instincts are formed and evolve, a new psychology arises....for one must start the process of transforming infantile reactions into those of an adult. With mastery, the instinctual nature disappears, having been fully transformed into human nature. This dialectical process then continues until human nature itself is transformed into a higher state. (Benello, 1992, pp. 72-73)

Others observe more mundane forms of withdrawal, or the more common trend to manufacture sub-cultures that stand apart from the world at large. For example, the expansion of gated



communities within the USA and Canada has become a symbol of homogeneous affiliation and the rejection of urbanization. Blakely and Snyder have tracked the development of these communities and report that over 3 million households in the United States are now gated.

Americans are electing to live behind walls to prevent intrusion...attempting to secure the value of their houses, reduce or escape from the impact of crime, and find neighbors who share their sense of the good life (Blakely & Snyder, 1997).

The adoption of Homeowner Associations (HOA's) replaces impersonal government and enforces a subculture that excludes and defines. The engagement with and investment in culture is selective, where some elements are retained and others are rejected. Whether in the belief in other worlds or the strategic withdrawal from the immediate culture, this form of irrationality persists in non-religious thought and behaviour. It is unlikely that the prevalence and extent of escapism differs between religious and non-religious forms.

Finally, this argument proposes that scientific rationalism produces and measures truth. This claim may be based, in part, on the historic tendency of religion to express supernatural conclusions about the world without taking into account other causes. "What science disputes in religion is not its right to exist but is right to dogmatize about the nature of things" (Durkheim, 1995, p. 432). Similarly, Midgley argues that religion has "overstepped" its ability to explain specific phenomena in the natural world. It has engaged in "heresy hunting" and has posited explanations for events in the universe without support or sensitivity to new information (Midgley, 1992, p. 95). Religious advocates "treated the idea of literal, factual truth as the only one available, and set it up as a prize to be fought for" (Midgley, 1992, pp. 54-55). However, the tendency to claim truth is not unique to the religious. As we read, claims that describe the workings of the universe extend beyond mere observation. The claim to truth in scientific rationality also ignores its "endless failures", theoretical modifications, and its position as a

“fragmentary and incomplete” exercise (Midgley, 1992, pp. 180, 190; Durkheim, 1995, p. 432). Barnes acknowledges that even the most recent scientific discoveries have challenged previous assumptions, leaving parts of the universe unintelligible. In addition, the difficulty in assessing truth as the sole terrain of scientific rationalism is that historic tracts of thinking are ignored, or displaced as secondary (Midgley, 1992, p. 180). Other ways of knowing the universe are deemed to be lesser forms. Although the religious or non-scientific mind may be confronted by the same “unified and orderly vision” of the universe, that mind is thought to function differently, rendering different types of conclusions (Midgley, 1992, p. 12). This is closely tied to the notion of progressive rationality and a “selective distrust of mind”, where one era may produce truth but another produces something less than truth, or even falsity (Midgley, 1992, p. 101). The claim to truth, like the mechanized universe, seems to be an over-extended conclusion, based on the partial observations made at particular point in history. This approach appears to be myopic and may reflect a moral temper more than the actual discoveries of early science (Midgley, 1992, p. 118).

### **iii. Posture of Rationality**

In addition, the production of rationality is accompanied by a particular emotional condition, or posture. Within Feuerbach, affection or feeling forms one of the three essential powers of humanity and yet, when expressed through the religious mind, becomes the impediment to rationality. Feuerbach describes the religious mind as unthinking, dreaming, simple, and emotional, based in feeling (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 11, 114, 170). The religious mind operates in irrational simplicity, a “wish of the heart” or unconditional trust (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 101). In addition, the religious mind rests in a false assurance and is unwilling to ask questions about its presuppositions or the world. “To place anything in God, or to derive anything from God, is nothing more than to withdraw it from the test of reason, to institute it as a indubitable,

unassailable, sacred, without rendering an account *why*” (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 225). In contrast the rational and understanding mind is “neutral, impassible, not to be bribed, not subject to illusions – the pure, passionless light of the intelligence” (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 30). Likewise, Caplan and Barnes describe the irrationality of religious belief as an emotionally satisfying position that is freed from the truth and immune to the principles of logic, causal formulae, and intelligible explanations (Caplan, 2001, pp. 9, 17-18; Barnes, 1997, pp. 378, 381). In contrast, rationality is intelligent, free of deception, and direct in its pursuit of the truth (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 30, 161, 175). Berger associates rationality with a certain kind of “coolness” or detachment that stands opposed to the religious attitude (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 68). The individual must “deny himself the use of those concepts formed outside science”, which are “fallacious” and possess an emotional quality that a “cold, dry” analysis would not tolerate (Durkheim, 1982, p. 73). This posture of discipline, disbelief, self-control, hard work, and detachment from the subjective perspective becomes central to the “great revolution” in sociology (Durkheim, 1982, p. 71). Therefore, emotional qualities are attributed to the rational and irrational life. Metaphors convey that the truth is found in the coldness of objective inquiry, light eliminating darkness, and the hope in new frontiers (Durkheim, 1995, p. 25; Durkheim, 1982, p. 85; Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 125, 160). Moreover, once the rational life is fully embraced, it forms the proper foundations for a perfectly fulfilling, joyful, and happy life (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 83, 162, 228).

This proposition appears to suggest that the rational mind does not operate with passion nor can the religious mind be without it. Although this emotive character or rationality exists within these writings, it is an unelaborated and ambiguous feature. As such, there is no explanation or historical evidence offered for this conclusion. Nor is there any discussion concerning the role that affections play in the formation of a body of knowledge, aside from the need to suppress them. This is what Midgley describes as the historical cleft between reason and

feeling, or the “hygienic view of truth” (Midgley, 1992, p. 135). If the imagination, feelings of mystery, and belief are purged, truth somehow emerges. Sound knowledge only occurs in a sanitary environment, without distraction or personal investment. However, does this type of separation exist in reality, or is it even possible? Even within Durkheim’s rules of observation, he encounters this tension. Although he begins with the assertion that “one must systematically discard all preconceptions”, he acknowledges that the scientists must begin with a classification system (Durkheim, 1982, p. 72).

The subject matter of research must only include a group of phenomena defined beforehand by certain common external characteristics and all phenomena which correspond to this definition must be so included. (Durkheim, 1982, p. 75)

In light of the need for classification and because social facts impose themselves over a given population as normality, it follows that the most basic classification should include a distinction between the normal and the abnormal. Normality can be objectively established and it is *natural* because it is directly grounded in the collective being, the conditions of existence in a given society, and/or the result of some adaptation. In this way, what is normal is also often the most advantageous or useful to a group based on the options available (Durkheim, 1982, p. 97).

Durkheim clearly renounces any value judgements in this analysis by avoiding good or evil designations or by adopting a teleological perspective (Durkheim, 1982, p. 85). However, the observation of normality also becomes the objective within his analysis.

There is no longer need to pursue desperately an end which recedes as we move forward; we need only to work steadily and persistently to maintain the normal state, to re-establish it if it is disturbed, and to rediscover the conditions of normality if they happen to change. (Durkheim, 1982, p. 104)

In these ways, Durkheim defines the subject matter before hand, identifies the norm, and advocates for its maintenance. In spite of his denial of the subjective perspective, this permeates his own analysis and becomes integral to it. Only a portion of this exercise is rooted in empirical

observation. This suggests that any scientific or objective endeavour will contain subjective elements. In fact, it is difficult to consider the development of scientific hypotheses or theory without the use of imagination or an emotional investment of expectations and intensity. “All our thinking involves emotional factors as well as rational ones” (Midgley, 1992, p. 129). If emotions and rational thinking are not separable or incompatible, then we would expect to find both features within religious thought as well.

#### **iv. Case Studies: Protestantism and DNA**

We have examined the contrast between rational non-religion and non-rational religion. First, the cosmology of rationality may be incoherent and the remaining rudiments of rationality appear to be universal. Second, the production of rationality appears to be present within the Judeo-Christian tradition just as escapism is present within non-religious thought. Finally, the posture of rationality as ‘cold, dry’ approach is unelaborated by our theorists and appears to contradict the subjective investment in science. These divisions may be tested further by examining two historical accounts, religious and non-religious.

It is possible to demonstrate that forms of rationalism are the legacy of religious thought that emerged through Protestantism and the Reformation (Estep, 1986, p. 190). William Estep has traced the foundations of the Protestant Reformation to the prolific work of Desiderius Erasmus. Although his initial interests led him to study the ancient classics, Erasmus eventually attended the University of Paris and began to harmonize his studies with theology. In 1499, through the influence of John Colet and other scholars, Erasmus departed from a traditional medieval treatment of biblical interpretation. “The new theologian returned to the text of the Scripture itself and its direct interpretation. The new emphasis...was upon the document and the writer, rather than upon the doctrine and the tradition” (Estep, 1986, p. 82). Guided by a new

grammatico-historical method of interpretation and other hermeneutical principles, Erasmus hoped to approach the scriptures with a new sense of integrity and credibility. To do this, he studied ancient Greek and gained access to source documents that were previously inaccessible and only interpreted by others. This accessibility and direct interaction with the source material excluded faith in tradition and scholasticism, becoming the cornerstone of *sola scriptura*, or the belief that faith should be based on scripture alone. The emphasis was on developing knowledge of this material, rather than the ignorance on which traditional instruction relied. Armed with this knowledge, the individual could not only test traditional teachings, but develop a personal faith.

Erasmus became highly critical of Catholicism as the embodiment of this tradition and scholasticism. The concern was that scholastics would interpret hidden mysteries and engage in trivial speculations, using flawed manuscripts no less, to suit their personal needs. His criticism was persistent and included a demythologization of transubstantiation and repeated denunciations of spurious apologetics. During this time, Erasmus also produced large volumes of writing and by 1513 he completed his collation of the Greek New Testament. This reached print in 1516 and coincided with the advent of the 'book culture' and radical transformations in intellectual life. This allowed for learning in areas that traditionally belonged to the elite. As print shops opened, there was an exponential growth in printed materials throughout the major cities in Europe (Estep, 1986, pp. 78-95). This "not only enabled the revival of learning...but disseminated its message and ideas in ways never thought possible before...The Reformation is also inconceivable apart from the new process of printing" (Estep, 1986, p. 96).

The climate in Europe at that time was unsettled on religious, political, and economic fronts. In several countries, corrupt alliances between the church and state led to distrust among the "restless and impoverished" masses (Estep, 1986, p. 102). "The charges of ignorance, immorality, avarice, drunkenness, concubinage, simony, nepotism brought against priests, friars,

and prelates...are quite well documented by ecclesiastical and legal records” (Estep, 1986, p. 108). Religious fervour often became the justification for rebellion against socioeconomic conditions and the financial exploitation of the clerics. In addition, as the Bible became increasingly accessible and literacy grew, it became possible for the laity to discern the divine right of kings and priests.

Martin Luther entered this environment and became part of this spirit of protest. An Augustinian monk and priest, Luther has been credited with igniting the Reformation. Through his direct access to the scriptures, Luther concluded that the salvation administered through the church was not in accordance with the Bible. This led to his conclusion that faith and grace are the true source of that salvation.<sup>4</sup> Luther began a protest through his *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology*, which was based on careful exegesis of the ancient Greek texts, historical analysis, and textual criticism. Through public speaking and multiple written materials, Luther questioned the pope’s authority and attacked the financial abuses of the church, which were often supported by fabricated mystifications.<sup>5</sup> Through this theological critique and an analysis of Aristotelian philosophy, Luther developed the foundation of his evangelical theology. This also resulted in his eventual condemnation by the pope and his excommunication, to which Luther responded that “seldom has the pope overcome anyone with Scripture and with reason” (Estep, 1986, p. 128). Labelled a heretic and under the threat of death, Luther was exiled and found himself in protective custody where he translated the Bible into German. “It is now recognized that through his work as translator he created the modern German language” (Estep, 1986, p. 137).

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<sup>4</sup> Sola Fida and Sola Gratia, salvation by faith alone and by grace alone. These, combined with Sola Scriptura, become the recurring themes during the Reformation and Anabaptist movements.

<sup>5</sup> The use of the indulgence system was a particular point of attack. This allowed people to view relics in exchange for a contribution, the outcome of which would reduce time in purgatory.

The Protestant Reformation included appeals to rigorous thought and rationality, meaning “an attitude of mind founded on independent thought and judgement, free of sovereign, church, or tradition” (Stoker, 2006, p. 2). Through a direct examination of source documents and the use of hermeneutical principles (or rules of observation), reformers attempted to separate truth from fiction and systematize their findings through theological elaboration. Filtered interpretations, personal interests, and mystifications were attacked as distortions of the faith. “Protestantism was the first widespread ... agent of demythologization” (Lambert, 1999, pp. 315, 312). The Reformation was also a productive force, through volumes of written material and its influence among the masses. The posture was critical toward tradition and scathing in its critique, yet this existed alongside controlled methods of examination.

James D. Watson documented his account of how the DNA structure was discovered between 1951 and 1953. The purpose of this account, aside from recording one of the most significant discoveries in the last century, is to describe “how science is done” and that “styles of scientific research vary almost as much as human personalities” (Watson, 1968, p. ix). Within his account, several observations are made that demonstrate how science is advanced and inhibited by peculiar motives and personalities. Relationships and conflicts played a significant role in controlling the pace of discovery. Watson explains that the scientific community in England at the time of the discovery was closed and territorial, meaning that scientists would not infringe on the work of another in the interests of “fair play” (Watson, 1968, p. 19). For example, Francis Crick, who would be one of the co-founders of the DNA structure, would not work on the DNA problem initially because DNA was “for all practical purposes, the personal property of Maurice Wilkins” (Watson, 1968, p. 19). Similarly, personality conflicts and accusations of intellectual theft between Crick and Sir Lawrence Bragg threatened Crick’s position in the lab and future research into the problem (Watson, 1968, pp. 44-45). He also describes the



personality of Rosalind Franklin, her subjective bias, and her conflicts with co-workers as contributing to her denial of evidence, suppression of challenges, and the withholding of results (Watson, 1968, pp. 52, 95, 105, 107). Personal connections also aided the advance by facilitating access to information and gaining the necessary financial support (Watson, 1968, pp. 28, 35).

Watson also claims that deception and exaggeration are fairly common within the scientific community. For example, crystallographers could posit “wild” conclusions, knowing that few could challenge or disprove these theories (Watson, 1968, p. 27). Similarly, he describes the ability of Linus Pauling to present information with a degree of self-confidence and charisma that would convince his listeners, even if he spoke nonsense (Watson, 1968, p. 30). The highly aggressive and competitive pace of science after the World War II contributed to this tendency. Work was sometimes rushed to ensure first publication and experimental results were closely guarded (Watson, 1968, pp. 53, 94, 99, 109, 129). In addition, these pressures to find the solution may have contributed to some fundamental errors in the process of discovery. In describing the competition to discover the DNA structure, he recalls a proposed solution by Linus Pauling that proved inaccurate. “Linus’ chemistry was screwy. Markham predictably expressed pleasure that a giant had forgotten elementary college chemistry” (Watson, 1968, p. 103). Even if this error was not caused by pressures to produce, it demonstrates the trial and error approach inherent to scientific work (Watson, 1968, p. 120).

The process of discovery was also guided as much by imagination as technical knowledge and expertise. Watson himself acknowledges that his ambition and personal interests caused him to forego challenging subject matter and to manipulate his lab assignments (Watson, 1968, pp. 22, 30, 35). Ironically, his knowledge of the subject matter was not the decisive factor in the discovery of the DNA structure. “The fact that I was unable to interpret it (a DNA photograph) did not bother me. It was certainly better to imagine myself becoming famous than maturing into

a stifled academic who had never risked a thought” (Watson, 1968, p. 30). That ‘thought’ was imaginative, when Watson would spend time “vaguely dreaming that the answer would suddenly hit me” (Watson, 1968, p. 114). Developing ideas and drafting puzzles became integral to discovery and occurred before the hard evidence was available, “telling each other that a structure this pretty just had to exist” (Watson, 1968, p. 131). More importantly, this instinct led Crick to proclaim publically that they had “found the secret of life” before the theory had been verified (Watson, 1968, p. 126).

Although the structure of DNA was ultimately discovered and deemed accurate, this account demonstrates how scientific rationalism is complicated by other variables. “I do not believe that the way DNA came out constitutes an odd exception to a scientific world complicated by the contradictory pulls of ambition and the sense of fair play” (Watson, 1968, p. x). Personality, instinct, doubt, speculation, and emotion played a significant role in this process and effected outcomes. Trial and error permeates the account, where theories were posited, disproved, and posited again. Truth was tenuous and never complete, in spite of the periodic claims that “everything would be solved and we would have no recourse but to be engineers or doctors” (Watson, 1968, p. 108). This discovery, may have uncovered a portion of the secret, but was by no means complete. In the Foreword, Sir Lawrence Bragg stated that the double helix “caused an explosion in biochemistry and transformed the science” (Watson, 1968, p. vii). Therefore, the answer to one question spawned mystery and more questions.

## **B. Mystification**

To separate the religious, Barnes engages in a detailed analysis of what constitutes irrational thought in mythopoeic traditions. Irrationality is reduced to the belief in that which is ‘unintelligible’ in the form of ‘invisible anthropomorphisms’, or supernatural beings, because these things are not available to the senses or based on real evidence (Barnes, 1997, p. 380). This

irrational belief in the supernatural appears to be the remaining and definitive criteria when defining the religious response. Weigert and Dobbelaere have described this distinction as the typical and most persistent feature in the Western analysis of religion (Lauwers & Dobbelaere, 1973, p. 544; Weigert, 1974, pp. 484-485). This belief in ‘invisible anthropomorphisms’ may be examined as a type of mystification. The act of mystification is posited by Feuerbach as the projection of human perfection in a deity, while Berger uses this concept to refer to the tendency to falsely perceive human products as non-human facticities (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 176; Berger P. L., 1969, p. 89). For Durkheim, “ghost-like” creatures distort the true appearance of things, shrouding the world in mystery, making it unknowable and incomprehensible (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 22-25; Durkheim, 1982, p. 62). Supernatural thinking exists beyond nature and its laws, beyond reason and logic (Durkheim, 1995, p. 24).

David Bloor develops this concept further to describe mystification as the tendency to believe in or assert an authority that is external to human constructions or the physical world. As one of the founders of the Strong Programme in the sociology of knowledge, his theory rests on the assumption that *all* knowledge is a social construction. Knowledge does not form spontaneously, nor is it revelatory or produced by an external entity. Logically, the notion of truth or falsity is contextualized and reduced to mean “how the world stands” and the “schema with which we think” at a particular time (Bloor, 1991, pp. 5, 7, 41). Truth itself is conceived as a social construction. If all knowledge is socially constructed, the entire territory of knowledge is subject to a causal investigation. His *symmetrical* examination argues that “the same types of causes would explain...true and false beliefs” (Bloor, 1991, p. 7). Therefore, an asymmetrical examination is the differential application of causation, where some phenomena are treated as asocial even though all phenomena are deemed social constructions. For example, truth is often

treated as an asocial phenomenon, something inherently so, or self evident. In contrast, falsity is attributed to some error or oversight, a concrete cause that may be identified and rooted out. For Bloor, asymmetry extends beyond theoretical accident, involving an active resistance to the sociology of knowledge through *mystification*. This resistance takes the forms of unqualified adherence to virtually any position or principle, including logic, reason, and empiricism. Using a Durkheimian model, Bloor describes this resistance as a form of religious duality, where the sacred and profane must be kept apart.

The threat posed by the sociology of knowledge is precisely this: it appears to reverse or interfere with the outward flow of energy and inspiration which derives from contact with the basic truths and principles of science and methodology. Science is sacred, so it must be kept apart. (Bloor, 1991, p. 49)

A symmetrical sociology of knowledge threatens notions of an asocial source of stability and truth by exposing the social origins of sacred imagery. These mystified elements will become inaccessible and hidden from causal examination. Their validity is beyond convention, time, and place, implying a point of origin outside of society and existing as a standing exception (Bloor, 1991, pp. 46-47). Mystified knowledge will also apply differential causation, where some elements of knowledge are constructed and others originate outside of social construction (Bloor, 1991, pp. 46-47). While Berger argues that mystification characterizes religious thought, Bloor suggests that mystification itself is a universal phenomenon.

Bloor's objective is to naturalize all knowledge, including science and mathematics, by showing their social origins. Although this is not the objective here, the concept of mystification and its symmetrical application is useful when examining the sociological analysis of religion. His development of the concept is entirely consistent with Berger, though he extends it logically to include non-religious phenomena that may reject invisible anthropomorphisms. Berger describes mystification as a falsified or alienated consciousness, or the loss of externalization in

the over-objectivated world. Believing that the social world or elements within it are facticities, the actor ceases to be an actor. Instead, the actor is acted upon, pacified, fated, and destined by external forces (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 85-86). For Berger, religion is the most powerful and persistent instrument of mystification, because it imposes “fictitious inexorability” on the constructed world through the imposition of super-empirical forces (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 95-96). Bloor merely takes these principles and applies them symmetrically, by identifying mystifications within non-religious spheres. Mystification will be deployed by any body of knowledge or ideology that seeks to make elements of its knowledge inaccessible and inexorable. These elements will appear as inherently true, or assumed, and their origins will be hidden and mysterious. Mystification will also involve asymmetry, where some phenomena are treated as social productions and others as originating outside of the social arena. Therefore, Bloor separates mystification from its religious affiliation, transforming the supernatural into a secular concept.

#### **i. Divine Nature**

Guy Robinson argues that secular and particularly scientific thought has mystified nature, making it impenetrable and incomprehensible (Robinson, 2007, p. 606). Nature has come to be perceived as operating independently, as a natural force. It is granted intrinsic properties, possessing a will that can shape and move materials in nature, yet existing outside of nature (Robinson, 2007, pp. 606-607; Midgley, 1992, p. 76). For some, this is nothing more than attributing the ultimate cause and purpose of the universe to an impersonal versus personal force (Barnes, 1997, p. 380). Feuerbach is not discreet in his assertion that nature and humanity are infinitudes, or perfections, that supply all of our needs.

If God is really a different being from myself, why should his perfection trouble me? Disunion exists between beings who are at variance, but who ought to be one,

who can be one, and who consequently in nature, in truth, are one. (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 29)

He overtly engages in a project of substitution, simply attributed the predicates of God to the intrinsic properties of nature and humanity. There is a similar tendency within scientific thought to attribute divine attributes to nature, as “the external power that keeps everything in being and keeps things running smoothly” (Robinson, 2007, p. 613). Terms like ‘communication’ and ‘information’ are used to describe the non-conscious interactions between things (Midgley, 1992, p. 13). Likewise, Durkheim suggests that “society...is part of nature and nature’s highest expression. The social realm is a natural realm that differs from others only in its greater complexity” (Durkheim, 1995, p. 17). Nature’s mode of operation or purpose is necessity, or a type of secularized providence that governs our existence (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 87). This conception is imbedded in the metaphor of mechanization, which envisions a self-sustaining clockwork that can only be imagined (Robinson, 2007, p. 611). Similarly, if not completely ordered and intentional, the ‘casino’ metaphor is used to describe the injection of chance. For Feuerbach, the power of chance is mystified in the grace of God, or an independent and sovereign decision in the universe (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 155). Durkheim argues that the element of chance in nature fits within its overall functioning and cannot be attributed to the supernatural (Durkheim, 1995, p. 26). However, metaphors of machinery and chance reference a reality beneath appearances where ordered or chaotic relations form the context of life (Midgley, 1992, p. 40). These images constitute the externalization of nature, as a highly ordered and deterministic force, or an arbitrary and capricious one, or both (Robinson, 2007, p. 613). As an asocial and super-empirical reality to which we are subject, this conception of nature, inherent within the cosmology of rationality, constitutes a mystification.

These metaphors are inaccessible and external to social construction. As such, adherence to these metaphors requires belief, or faith. However, this faith is not limited to the metaphors themselves, but extends to a belief in the capacity and harmony of mind.

If we think of the world as ordered, we are expressing confidence in our own faculties as in tune with it and suited to find that order...If, by contrast, we think of it as illusory, we may be thinking of our own faculties with despair as hopelessly deceived. Or again, we may be trusting that we have certain faculties which can pierce through that screen, though others are misled by it. (Midgley, 1992, p. 101)

This is what Midgley describes as the principle of ‘naive realism’, or the unqualified belief in our faculties to perceive the universe accurately (Midgley, 1992, p. 121). Durkheim argues that the “natural is also rational”, granting rationality a particular authority that resonates with the mind (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 16, 24). However, within the work of the authors under examination, this naive realism is selective. The non-religious mind perceives the world for what it is, but the religious mind is deceived and projects an image to represent that reality. This selective distrust mystifies one mind and falsifies the other. Along these lines, David Martin has critiqued Durkheim and the sociology of religion generally for the re-introduction of epiphenomenalism. This view, originally put forward by Thomas Huxley and others, held that the mind functioned like a steam whistle, where mental states exist as a by product of other physical realities or stimuli (Martin, 1966, p. 354). Within the sociology of religion, the religious mind constitutes an epiphenomenal event, where something real beneath the surface is expressed through religious projection. Projection is rationalized as an archaic or primitive response to a poorly understood stimulus, yet projection as a modern phenomenon affecting secular thought is seldom considered as a possibility. If the religious mind is epiphenomenal in its production of religion, how does the non-religious mind escape this folly? If this principle is applied symmetrically, it would suggest that a physical or psychological state should not be specific to a particular epoch or system of beliefs. Yet, its application is selective. “The unilateralist and epiphenomalist

arguments oscillate in bewildering and even brilliant fashion, to determine what shall count as evidence and what not” (Martin, 1966, p. 357). In an examination of Charles Darwin’s view of religion, Midgley quotes a text in which Darwin communicates his distrust in his faculties to discern the truth in religion, choosing rather to trust in his rationality and disbelief. Yet, “all our beliefs – including those that make us doubt God’s existence, as well as those that support it – come to us through the faculties...all our thought equally is then subject to undetectable corruption” (Midgley, 1992, p. 102). Therefore, the selective application of the stimuli-projection schema to religious phenomena mystifies the non-religious mind. The non-religious mind somehow possesses the distinct capacity to see and to dispel, like a prophet. This tendency within the sociological analysis of religion is what draws critique from multiple sources and the call to end ‘privileged perspectives’ (Thomas G. , 2006, p. 100). “To study religion is like studying a residual penumbra. Of all the different enclaves of contemporary specialization the sociology of religion most resembles the republic of Venice just before Napoleon snuffed it out for ever” (Martin, 1966, p. 355)

The objection may be made at this point that religion has always assumed a privileged perspective, and this would be valid. One could find many examples within the Judeo-Christian tradition (and others) of the selective distrust of mind, expressed in the metaphors of light and darkness. But this is not in dispute here. Rather, the exposure of mystifying tendencies within the works of these authors destabilizes their use of contrast between mystifying religion and the reality of non-religion. As Bloor suggests, mystification may be a universal phenomena. The use of mental pictures generally precedes observation and will function as filters to what must be true and what must be false (Midgley, 1992, p. 15). “People must operate with a mental map or picture of the world. Stories that fall far away from these lines won’t be perceived at all...The whole point is that what is hidden might in principle be anything” (Midgley, 1992, p. 59). This is



why claims to impartiality and objectivity in scientific rationalism become suspect, because these images define the frontier in advance and exclude possibilities, defining one's line of sight. The result is selective engagement, or an asymmetry. This is what led Rosalind Franklin to deny the helical structure of DNA, in spite of evidence or discussion (Watson, 1968, p. 105). Similarly, this is what leads Durkheim to identify the "ghost like creatures that distort the true appearance of things" but ignore the "gigantic ghost of the Collective Soul" (Durkheim, 1982, p. 62; Malinowski, 1948, p. 27).

## ii. Imbricated Ontologies

Claude Lévi-Strauss, in his structural study of myth, attempts to identify common structural threads within mythological accounts. At the outset of his analysis, he observes that there is "astounding similarity between myths collected in widely different regions" (Lévi-Strauss, 1955, p. 429). Moreover, myth tends to combine specific elements in a particular way and contains properties that exist beyond the use of language. Using diachronic and synchronic time referents, his analysis deconstructs myth along these two axes, horizontal (melody) and vertical (harmony). In doing this, he accounts for the individual variations between different myths while simultaneously identifying their universal features, which are then reduced to a mathematical formula (Lévi-Strauss, 1955, pp. 433-435, 442). The advent of myth is spurred by a common intellectual impulse in response to common problems and questions, hence its repetition and repeating structure (Lévi-Strauss, 1955, p. 443). Therefore, mythology is historical and ahistorical, discontinuous and continuous (Lévi-Strauss, 1955, pp. 430-431). His analysis stands in contrast with previous scientific analyses of myth, which found nothing more than chaotic themes that reflected a type of "idle play" or "coarse speculation" (Lévi-Strauss, 1955, p. 428). Rather, Lévi-Strauss attempts to demonstrate a universal grammar of myth that transcends

the particular use of language or the images used. He concludes that mythological mind is highly sophisticated and does not differ qualitatively from the scientific mind.

The validity of Lévi-Strauss' mathematical formula or his particular structure of myth is not of primary importance here. Rather, it is the assumption that realities are layered within mythology and that one of these realities exists beneath what is immediately perceived by those who hear the myth. Jerome Levi examines the work of Lévi-Strauss and draws connections between the principles of structuralism and Jewish mysticism. Within both, there is a surface structure that is highly differentiated, empirical, and full of polarity (Levi, 2009, pp. 933, 937). However, these surface structures are mere refractions of the non-empirical, undifferentiated, opaque, and deeper structure. As refractions, these surface elements are inherently connected to this deeper structure and are derived from it (Levi, 2009, p. 942). Levi attempts to explain this relationship using the Lurianic creation account. God, as an infinite source of energy, needed to contain this energy in the context of a finite creation. To do this, God needed to withdraw portions of himself to fit into limited space, or vessels. However, God's energy was still too great, resulting in the 'breaking of the vessels', causing it to shatter into shards that became the substance of the universe.

Like beads of olive oil that adhere to the sides of jar after the vessel has been broken, tumbling through the void into the lower worlds, these spread throughout matter in the universe. Consequently, not only is all of reality in a state of existential separation, it also is all composed of the same cosmic fragments. (Levi, 2009, p. 943)

The goal of the universe is to reassemble the fragments and uncover the undifferentiated and underlying source that birthed the empirical world (Levi, 2009, pp. 935, 943). The presence of empirical structures, in their multiplicity and diversity, conceal the underlying unity and its symmetry with the empirical world, making it elusive and difficult to penetrate. These diverse

manifestations may mislead the observer to believe that only polarities exist or that there are multiple sources of physical realities. This requires a deeper level of observation to reveal properties that are not apparent to the empirical observer. Therefore, rational intuition and abstract theory is privileged over empirical data (Levi, 2009, pp. 974-975, 977). Levi suggests that structuralism and Jewish mysticism are engaged in the same project that seeks the inclusion of all opposites, the perception of the hidden symmetry, and the identification of the underlying object (Levi, 2009, pp. 935-939). “The mind thus passes from empirical diversity to conceptual simplicity...the ultimate deep structure Lévi-Strauss is after is nothing less than the unitary structure of the human mind” (Levi, 2009, p. 934).

This pattern of analysis contains scientific and mystical elements. The scientific component involves the deconstruction of elementary elements in search for hidden likenesses. This is evident in Francis Crick’s proclamation that they “found the secret of life” after postulating the DNA structure and the particular combinations of four acids (Watson, 1968, p. 126). Science also speaks to singular or unitary origins of the empirical, such as the Big Bang or forms of the Anthropic Principle. Yet this beginning is also concealed and obscure (Midgley, 1992, pp. 26, 97, 120). Based on fragmentary evidence, science, structuralism, and Jewish mysticism will use empiricism and rational intuition to draw conclusions about the nature and purpose of the universe (Levi, 2009, p. 977). The realities beneath our experiences are mental constructions, the outcome of a hermeneutical project, or the imaginative extensions of our sense perceptions (Midgley, 1992, p. 96). The universe is pieced back together based on the pieces we perceive, finding the singular truth within.

A layered model of reality... that space, time, and matter are characterized by entropy and fragmentation as revealed by similarities among modern physicists’ cosmology of the big bang, Isaak Luria’s theory of creation, and Lévi-Strauss’ structural analysis of myth. (Levi, 2009, p. 979)

The use of intuition to discuss the origin or purpose of things constitutes the mystical element. Superstructures and substructures, latent and manifest behaviours, the conscious and unconscious, the real and the projected, all point to an imbricated ontology. Therefore, science and myth will use scientific methods, but they will also interpret and generate myth (Levi, 2009, p. 942).

The infinite species, the collective soul, and the externalizing capability are concealed from the religious mind and lay beneath appearances. These comprise the reality, the source from which religious projection is born but which remains unseen. This hidden reality is a mythology of origins and hidden forces. The unique perception of this layered reality is evident in the visions of the first person(s) who encountered the world. For Feuerbach, history begins with a childlike human who, in possession of an infinite nature (thought, will, affection), innocently engages in contemplation (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 2, 97). Durkheim identifies the “first systems of representations” that were of religious origin, when the “primitive” and “old fashioned” mindset held sway. (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 8, 25). Berger describes a similar scenario through his concept of *organism*, or the original biological conditions that shaped our reality. Unlike other animals, humans did not enter the world as a *species specific* environment. Because our instincts are unspecialized and undirected, the world presented itself as open and unfixed, a mere possibility (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, pp. 47-48, 156). “There is no man-world in the sense that one may speak of a dog-world or a horse-world” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 47). Born biologically unfinished and immediately vulnerable to the natural environment, humans would be dependent on others for survival (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 48). This primitive mind then encountered external facticities that arose through interdependencies and speculated concerning their origin, alienating its externalizing capability and producing the first mythologies

(Berger P. L., 1969, p. 86; Berger & Luckmann, 1967, pp. 111-112). This understanding of earliest humanity is, perhaps, rationalized based on the study of “lower societies” that carry the “imprint of its origins”, yet these origins are invisible and far removed from this observation (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 5, 7). Based on a theory that is currently held by these authors, the distant past is manufactured and mystified. A pre-history is envisioned and populated by particular motivations, activities, and biological predispositions.

Finally, this layered ontology is evident within the sociological analysis of religion just as it is evident within the Judeo-Christian tradition. Both appear to posit a limited consciousness, where the mind immediately perceives one reality, diverse and fragmentary, but not the deeper layer, or the undifferentiated unity. The visible ontology, perceived through the senses, conceals the truth, or the supporting layers, that only mental activity can reveal (Levi, 2009, pp. 937, 941).

Note the following parallels:

The “infinite spirit”, in distinction from the finite, is therefore nothing else than the intelligence disengaged from the limits of individuality and corporeality – for individuality and corporeality are inseparable – intelligence posited in and by itself. (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 31)

Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, that the Lord, He is God, in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other. *Deuteronomy 4:39 (NASB)*

Behind these forms, be they cruder or more refined, there is a concrete and living reality... religion is first and foremost a system of ideas by means of which individuals imagine the society of which they are members and the obscure yet intimate relations they have with it. (Durkheim, 1995, p. 227)

For now we see in a mirror dimly; but then face to face; now I know in part; but then I will know fully, just as I also have been fully known. *1 Corinthians 13:12 (NASB)*

Long-established religion can be obtusely stubborn in adapting to changes in culture, including improved methods for reasoning and determining what is true. (Barnes, 1997, p. 387)

They want to find out the truth, but they also have pet theories that they want to be true. It is easier to tell a good story when unconstrained by the facts. (Caplan, 2001, p. 17)

Reason has gained the power to go beyond the range of empirical cognition. (Durkheim, 1995, p. 15)

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. *Matthew 7:7-8 (NASB)*

All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, but the Lord weighs the motives. *Proverbs 16:2 (NASB)*

All human productions are, at least potentially, comprehensible in human terms. The veil of mystification thrown over them by religion prevents such comprehension. (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 90)

And it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will take my hand away and you shall see my back, but My face shall not be seen. *Exodus 33:22-23 (NASB)*

Each of these texts points to a reality and an unreality, unity and disunity, truth and untruth, the perceived and the hidden. The apparent reality is false or partly true, while the underlying truth is only perceived through a particular effort or the application of special techniques. As Durkheim asks in the introduction to his *Elementary Forms*, “how can one find the fundamental states characteristic of the religious mentality in general through the clash of theologies, the variations of ritual, the multiplicity of groupings, and the diversity individuals” (Durkheim, 1995, p. 5)? This leads to the rules of the sociological method, or the disciplines needed to penetrate the deeper layers. “The classical disciplines of the spiritual life call us to move beyond surface living into the depths” (Foster, 1978, p. 1). Therefore, the sociological analysis of religion and religion maintain a qualitative equivalence through mystification, or the positing of a deeper and unseen reality.

### C. Masochism

Berger describes the masochistic tendencies within religious thought as a contradiction, when the quest for a humanly significant universe results in the masochistic tendency to deny the self in favour of a sacred cosmos (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 101). “In other words, he may ‘lose himself’ in the meaning-giving nomos of his society” (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 55). Feuerbach argued that the seemingly perfect and infinite human nature generates a divine objectivity and converts it into a subject, leading to human impoverishment and the loss of culture (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 5, 178). He also notes a counter tendency in religion as well that promotes aggression and intolerance, where unbelievers may become targets of violence (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 205-208). Human freedom is associated with the emancipation from religion (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 127). Religion, though based on reality, keeps the human mind in darkness of the truth and permits whimsy, allowing the individual to indulge in an imagined world of dependence (Durkheim, 1982, pp. 62, 143; Durkheim, 1995, p. 25). Particularly in Christianity, Durkheim identifies the tendency toward self-deprivation, which is “ever practiced...the idea of Christ ever present...daily sacrificed” (Durkheim, 1995, p. 30). Dominion of the world cannot be achieved until subservience to the higher authority is set aside (Durkheim, 1982, pp. 46, 143). The mentality of escape may make the believer “impervious to the unpleasant realities of the world”, but it also creates a sub-culture that rewards blindness and prevents progress (Caplan, 2001, pp. 16, 21; Barnes, 1997, p. 386). We have already noted the productive activity within the western religious tradition, which challenges the notion that religion withdraws from the world. This addresses the inward or escapist dimension of masochism, which argues that religion pacifies the believer and reduces the investment in culture. Yet this concept includes other dimensions. The masochistic tendency in religion is described as a type of disempowerment or impoverishment that results from a self induced enslavement to an external force. However, if religious activity is

productive in the world while maintaining an eschatology, then self empowerment may not be incompatible with masochism. In addition, religion is described as a harmful and oppressive phenomenon. Most prevalent is the description of religion as preventing advance or acting as a veil that hides the truth. This type of masochism is used in a universal sense in that humanity, through religion, is diminishing itself. In contrast, non-religion is depicted as non-masochistic. However, evidence of oppressive human activity within a secular framework challenges the argument for the emancipation from religion, which some of these authors present as the antithesis of freedom.

An immediate tension is present in this contrast, where religion is identified as unproductive and yet harmful, disempowered yet destructive. Feuerbach states that the religious mind does not labour because it is focused on another world, choosing to pray rather than invest. Yet, he also alleges that religion has been the cause of war and oppression (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 102, 205-208). Barnes also alleges that religion is harmful to society as an irrational force that needs to be moderated, although it remains focused on invisible anthropomorphisms and has little credibility as a body of knowledge.

Religion has also had generations of discovering that at least some of its children grow up to cherish rationality. Of those children many will reject religion because they will find it intellectually inadequate. But others will remain within the religious family and add some extra rational wisdom. It may be better for society as a whole to have lovers of reason inside the tent of religion as a moderating influence. (Barnes, 1997, p. 387)

In Durkheim's conclusion to the *Elementary Forms*, he resigns himself to the ongoing existence of religion in society as a benign entity that "has a right to exist" but "does not know itself...it knows neither what it is made of nor what it needs to respond to", resulting in its decline (Durkheim, 1982, p. 432). Yet this weak representation is also a "darkness" that needs eradication (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 25, 432). In these ways, religion is portrayed



as a destructive force that is also declining or impotent. The sociological analysis of religion has been critiqued for this oscillation.

If forces unite people they may 'seem' to be religious but are in fact social, but if they divide people as in India and Pakistan then they are really religious. The religious Samson has clearly lost his hair but somehow he is capable of bringing the house down. (Martin, 1966, p. 357)

Therefore, religious masochism, and the disempowerment it entails, becomes tenuous and uncertain within this contrast. Nevertheless, the contrast warrants further examination.

**i. Enslavement and Empowerment**

A particular psychological mechanism appears to be at work in the religious mind. The religious gives abilities and attributes away to a personified being, only to find that they are now in service to this objectivated reality. This is deemed masochistic because power is surrendered to another and the self is debased or lowered to a servile role. Regardless of the validity of this mechanism or whether it exists in reality, it rests on the juxtaposition between surrender and power. Setting aside this juxtaposition for the moment, if the masochistic tendencies of religion are discussed in terms of this servitude alone, this observation may be valid. Extreme expressions of self-deprivation are present within the Judeo-Christian tradition. However, within mainstream practice one could identify acts of self-deprivation in the form of tithing, fasting, charity, or voluntary simplicity. Subsistence is vividly expressed in the Judeo-Christian tradition and includes acts of self-sacrifice, strict obedience to the law, and service to a community.

But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. *Luke 6:34-36 (NASB)*

Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine. *Exodus 19:5 (NASB)*

Surely I will not enter my house, or lie on my bed; I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob. *Psalms 132:4-5 (NASB)*

He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. *John 12:25 (NASB)*

The principle of humility is a persistent and central theme, where self sufficiency and pride become the greatest impediment to relationship with the Godhead and service toward others. However, this tendency toward self denial is not present in isolation, but becomes an integral component of harmonious living. This principle is communicated through the Golden Rule and the Ten Commandments, where sacrificial obedience precedes positive community. Therefore, it is unlikely that believers within this tradition perceive their position as disempowered. In contrast, the individual and the community are more likely to believe that they achieve an optimal existence only within prescribed boundaries or limitation.

Keep His statutes and His commandments which I am giving you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may live long on the land. *Deuteronomy 4:40 (NASB)*

For whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved. *Romans 10:13 (NASB)*

There is a distinct connection between selflessness and empowerment, sacrifice and deliverance, death and life (Martens, 1981, p. 23).

For the authors under examination, adherence to scientific rationalism also calls forth self sacrifice and suppression. The freedom within this framework is not absolute but exists within a particular structure. The posture of this mode of thought asks the adherent to suppress emotional satisfaction, blind trust, passion, and personal attachment to locate the truth and engage in objective observation (Durkheim, 1982, pp. 72-81; Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 30, 101; Caplan, 2001,

pp. 17-18; Barnes, 1997, pp. 378-381). In short, discipline and self control are needed to observe the world as it is and to set aside the indulgences of the religious mind. This self sacrifice becomes necessary to see the underlying reality or the truth of the matter. For Durkheim, the “painstaking methods of the natural sciences” lead to truth and dominion over the natural world (Durkheim, 1995, p. 25; Durkheim, 1982, p. 46). Similar to the religious pattern, subservience to specific principles and limitations, although difficult, is associated with a type of empowerment. The light of the truth only becomes evident in the context of subservience and sacrifice. “In framing our world pictures, it is essential that we should be able to feel small, to recognize our own unimportance. The immemorial human situation in the world has not been one of supremacy” (Midgley, 1992, p. 72). The value of self-inflicted pain is common to both the religious and non-religious, though each may adhere to this principle to varying degrees and may have different rewards in mind. Therefore, this is no longer a question of servitude, but the principle or object to which one renders the service.

## **ii. Dominion and Oppression**

In contrast to masochistic powerlessness, religion is also seen as masochistic in the universal sense of turning humanity against itself. It is possible to support the allegation that religion has been hostile toward social order and a source of intolerance. William Estep and others have observed the indistinguishable boundaries between nationalism and the church during the pre-Reformation period in Europe. This, together with religious inquisitions, Crusades, and a new found zeal for exploration and conquest, reflected a cultural and religious ferment (Estep, 1986, pp. 97-104). “Religion was so much a part of all aspects of life in Medieval Europe that it is difficult to view it as a separate element in itself” (Estep, 1986, p. 105). Aside from the public power that the church held in medieval Europe, this influence penetrated the daily life of the

commoner as well. Richard Hunne, a tailor in London in 1514, was sued by his priest, accused of heresy, jailed, and eventually murdered for refusing to provide the shroud of his deceased infant as a mortuary tax. During this incident, it was recorded that Hunne's business was ruined as a result of his defiance (Estep, 1986, p. 108). However, when contemporary religious movements in the west are examined, the scope of influence has changed dramatically (see *Relativization and Fluidity of Religious Definitions*). Adaptation and syncretism have replaced the religious monopoly of the Late Middle Ages.

It is possible that the sociology of religion has the medieval church in mind when it speaks of religious power and influence. However, it may no longer be viable to argue that contemporary western religious movements govern the truth or prevent progress. As Berger observes, contemporary religious commitment has been effectively privatized and has lost its plausibility in light "disconfirming others" and "multiple competitors" (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 151-152). If this is true, then perhaps these authors are correct in their assertion that rationality has become the new producer of truth, constituting the "sole plausible model" (Barnes, 1997, p. 382). If so, a re-examination is needed regarding the nature and origin of contemporary influence, even oppression. Durkheim clarified the objective of this new rationality, which is to establish "dominion over things" and to liberate "ourselves from physical forces...with collective forces" (Durkheim, 1982, p. 46; Durkheim, 1995, p. 274). Guy Robinson has described the accumulation of knowledge since the scientific revolution as the progressive attempt to "manipulate and control" the environment, or what Feuerbach has described as the "continuous and progressive conquest of limits" (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 127; Robinson, 2007, p. 609). Numerous authors have traced the transformation of these objectives into a social ethos.

Ernest Becker has suggested that in European medieval times, people lived within a relatively stable moral context and were generally sensitive to absolute moral concepts (Becker, 1968, p. 16). This moral compass was tied to the concepts of inherency, the inevitability of sin, and the general psychological assumption that man occupied a central place in the universe and was sustained by God (Becker, 1968, pp. 16-17, 26). The physical world was also seen in light of decay, but nevertheless subject to God's will and purpose. This solidified a hope for a supernatural solution and helped to maintain theological principles, like providence (Becker, 1968, p. 18). "The idea of the decay of nature, which held sway from the late medieval times through the sixteenth and seventeen centuries, was itself a moral force, and had moral significance" (Becker, 1968, p. 17). However, this view of nature would change to become something inert and self-sustaining. Where matter was once imbued with spiritual forces and direction, it was transformed into something alien and mindless (Midgley, 1992, pp. 15, 32). With the decline of a religious outlook, a new "secular theodicy" would be needed to ensure a human centered approach to morality. This is what Becker describes as the "reasoned moral groping" that followed the Enlightenment (Becker, 1968, p. 33). One expression of this search for purpose and direction was the advent of Deism. Thomas Paine, a North American Deist writing in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, advocated for a new religion based on reason and nature. "Revelation, therefore, cannot be applied to anything done upon the earth, of which man himself is the actor" (Gay, 1968, p. 175). This new religious movement would not be based on unreliable historical accounts, ceremony or mystery, but on the truths in nature, accessible to and discernable by everyone.

The Deists were convinced of the uniformity and changelessness of reason. The natural order of things is valid always and everywhere as the norm for all actions. Living in accordance with nature means obeying an unchanging and universal norm...nature teaches always and everywhere. (Stoker, 2006, p. 5)

Deists would still argue for the existence of God as the first cause, but the universe was considered self-sufficient and elevated to a perfectly designed giant “clockwork” (Sire, 1988, p. 50). Although Deism was short lived as a movement, it signalled a change in direction toward an anthropodicy. “For most of his recorded history man has been a religious animal. After Deism, and partly because of it, he was so no longer” (Gay, 1968, p. 10).

Science and rationality aggressively advanced and they took their place in the symbolic field, but this advance was undirected. Progress would need to be controlled by a socially rooted or human centered rationalism (Becker, 1968, p. 32). Yet the natural world did not provide the moral direction that some had hoped for, containing many non-prescriptive and conflicting elements.

Nature is a word of varying meanings - Nature seems to be the spatial and temporal, as distinct from what is less fully so or not so at all. She seems to be the world of quantity, as against the world of quality...of efficient causes (or, in some modern systems, of no causality at all) as against final causes. (Lewis, 1944, pp. 68-69)

If nature conveyed a moral message, this message was uncertain and even contradictory.

Nevertheless, this new rationality, adopted as a competing worldview, needed to go beyond pure discovery to include prescriptive elements. Just as there were gaps in scientific explanations that religion attempted to fill, there was a moral and existential void in rationality that secularists would need to fill. Nevertheless, critics like Rousseau and Hume were resistant to this passive acceptance of reason and scientific discovery. “Rousseau...believed in reason, yet he lashed out against the pathetic trust in the blind following of science that still mesmerizes us today” (Becker, 1968, p. 15).

Within this new age of reason, some have identified the emergence of an unlikely parallel between material dominion and human oppression. As nature becomes the only remaining

source of purpose and understanding, it becomes the object of our focus. This process of examination will produce the information needed and so “nature will be forced to speak the whole truth” (Midgley, 1992, p. 85). There is a vision of supremacy over nature and a disdain for that which is not understood and therefore uncontrolled (Midgley, 1992, p. 154). In addition, if the earth is desacralized and matter is reduced to mere matter, the ability to separate humanity from this schema becomes increasingly difficult. Humanity becomes another permutation of matter, subject to study and understanding. This curiosity, in the absence of reverence, becomes predatory (Midgley, 1992, p. 73).

But as soon as we take the final step of reducing our own species to the level of mere Nature, the whole process is stultified, for this time the being who stood to gain and the being who has been sacrificed are one and the same. (Lewis, 1944, p. 71).

Therefore, humanity, which provides the strongest “evidence of the existence of beings whose choices seem to be unpredictable”, falls under examination and become a target of “progressive conquest” (Barnes, 1997, p. 382; Feuerbach, 1881, p. 127). This process has led to reversals and contradictory outcomes in that humanity does not always have humanity’s interests at heart, just as nature contains conflicted meanings. As an example, Midgley points to the aggressive pursuit of weapons development in contrast to the search for providing the necessities of life (Midgley, 1992, p. 191). “Our Age of Terror, when instant annihilation is a constant possibility, we can see what we have lost with the loss of the medieval cosmology” (Becker, 1968, p. 17). In addition, the techniques of rational exploration and discovery are not universally held. Only certain individuals have the skills and training to uncover these truths, hence the advent of the “engineers” and “conditioners” who will seek to understand and mold humanity in accordance with the purpose at hand (Lewis, 1944, p. 73; Midgley, 1992, p. 151).

Again, the intent here is not to suggest that oppression belongs solely to post-Enlightenment rationality or scientific pursuits, or that religion has not functioned as a masochistic force in history. Rather, it suggests the potential for locating the masochistic tendency within a non-religious arena. Michel Foucault has documented the anonymous and polyvalent nature of power and how this has manifested itself through secular and ‘modern’ institutions. Here, humanity is shown to turn against itself through examination and manipulation in the post-Enlightenment period.

### **iii. Foucault: Non-religious Oppression**

Power is traditionally conceived as something that is possessed locally, as a given property of an office or position. Accordingly, a possessor of power exerts force to suppress and annihilate opposition toward retaining absolute control. Through historical analysis, Foucault suggests that power, when conceived as an independent and self-sustaining strategy, is detachable from a particular place or person (Foucault, 1977, pp. 26, 201). Power relations are a permanent feature of society, but they are never permanently located or univocal, granting them anonymity and polyvalent features (Foucault, 1977, p. 26). In this way, there is a discourse that makes the exercise of power uncertain.

Power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who ‘do not have it’, it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them, it exerts pressure upon them, just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them. (Foucault, 1977, p. 27)

Foucault also demonstrates that the techniques of power are fundamentally productive in nature. Although power does exert pressure and seeks to master, it only maintains this capability through the production of knowledge and reality (Foucault, 1977, p. 194). This production of knowledge is so entrenched in the techniques of power that these concepts become synonymous, “power and knowledge directly imply one another” (Foucault, 1977, p. 27). Conceived as an independent



and polyvalent strategy, the use of power and the deployment of its techniques should be evident in every age, across various institutions and movements, and regardless of claims that the exercise of power has been disavowed (Foucault, 1977, pp. 205-207).

Foucault develops this conception through the analysis of two historical phenomena that appear to represent very different, even opposite, images. The public torture and execution of an offender under the authority of a sovereign is presented as the most graphic and spectacular public demonstration of the dissymmetry of power (Foucault, 1977, pp. 48-49). Yet even in this demonstration of absolute suppression, Foucault shows how the scaffolds produced knowledge, particularly in the *moments of truth* that preceded death (Foucault, 1977, p. 43). Even in the face of power that appears absolute and completely one sided, the public execution was an ambiguous and dangerous event through the participation of the condemned and the crowd (Foucault, 1977, pp. 59-60). In contrast, the Enlightenment introduced an approach that opposed the exclusive and arbitrary power of the sovereign. Rather, reformers sought an approach that would respect human dignity. Through reason and religious sentiment, the barbarity of the public execution would recede and be replaced by kindness and leniency (Foucault, 1977, p. 10). New liberties were introduced and punishment would become non-corporal and painless (Foucault, 1977, pp. 11,16). These humanistic and moral claims would leave the offender's body intact and introduce civility to the business of punishment. However, despite the apparent shift in thought and practice, techniques of power are applied to different objects, such as the offender's thought, will, and intent (Foucault, 1977, p. 16). The goal of punishment would no longer be the destruction of the body, but the restoration of the offender through meticulous examination and diagnosis, secretly carried out by therapeutic specialists (Foucault, 1977, p. 10). This constitutes the most intrusive control and judgement of the soul, standing in contrast to the 'humane' goals set out by reformers (Foucault, 1977, pp. 20, 252). This juxtaposition exhibits the discreet, hidden, and

naturalized form of disciplinary techniques in their modern form (Foucault, 1977, p. 177).

“Humanity is the respectable name given to this economy and to its meticulous calculations”

(Foucault, 1977, p. 92). Moreover, consistent with Foucault’s conception of power as a polyvalent force, these disciplinary techniques are integrated into other institutions and culminate in a panoptic regime (Foucault, 1977, pp. 211-212, 308). Validated by a corpus of knowledge, these techniques support the advent and longevity of the prison as another observatory and part of a “whole series of ‘carceral’ mechanisms” (Foucault, 1977, pp. 307-308).

Although torture has been considered to be an “inexplicable phenomena” that is both barbarous and cruel, torture is a technique of power that obeys specific criteria (Foucault, 1977, p. 33). The application of torture must produce pain, but in a calculated and graduated way so that life is maintained in a state of pain, a prolonged agony. This calculation relates directly to the crime itself, so that the punishment ‘fits’ the crime in a precise way (Foucault, 1977, pp. 33-34). “When it involves torture, punishment does not fall upon the body indiscriminately...the number of lashes...the positioning of the branding iron...the duration of death agony on the stake”, are all measured before being applied to the body of the accused (Foucault, 1977, p. 34). As a ritual, this practice must also mark the accused in a permanent, public, and spectacular way so that it is remembered by all who observe it. The triumph and victory over the accused must be decisive and plain to see. The application of force is so dissymmetrical that it claims rights over the body even after death, “corpses burn, ashes thrown to the winds, bodies dragged...justice pursues the body beyond all possible pain” (Foucault, 1977, p. 34). It is in the excess of torture and the spectacular display that an “economy of power is invested” (Foucault, 1977, p. 35).

Although there was an apparent barbarity in this act of justice, there was no embarrassment or shame associated with the agony of the accused (Foucault, 1977, pp. 34, 57). This suggests a validating or justifying body of knowledge that rendered this act of power an

acceptable, even appropriate, response to an offence. In most European countries from the 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> century, criminal procedures were carried out in secret and the establishment of truth was the exclusive right of the sovereign and judges. “They met the accused only once in order to question him before passing sentence” (Foucault, 1977, p. 35). However, this determination was not casual, but governed by specific rules of evidence and measures of legal proof, requiring specialized personnel to manage this complexity (Foucault, 1977, p. 37). The procedures that accompanied the prosecution of the accused and the establishment of truth lent credibility to the verdict, but the ultimate validation is achieved only through the participation of the accused in the form of a confession. “It transcended all other evidence...through the confession, the accused himself took part in the ritual of producing penal truth” (Foucault, 1977, p. 38). Moreover, this confession must be made publically, so that witnesses may recognize the power of the sovereign to establish the truth in the body of the accused. Because this confession is made just before death, the accused has nothing to lose and is essentially testifying before God as his eternal witness. Through this confession, the accused becomes a partner of the sovereign in supporting the entire operation of justice, including the rights of the sovereign, the production of truth, and its secrecy (Foucault, 1977, pp. 42-47).

The appropriateness of the sovereign’s response to the offence also lies in his role as sovereign, making the public execution a political ritual. The crime is certainly an offence against those who abide by the law, demanding reparation for the immediate victim. But the crime is also an offence against the sovereign, who bears the responsibility of defending the state against all enemies, internal and external (Foucault, 1977, pp. 47-48). Punishment of the crime is a direct reply of the sovereign to a direct challenge of his authority, which must invoke awe.

The ceremony of punishment, then, is an exercise of terror...to make everyone aware, through the body of the criminal, of the unrestrained presence of the

sovereign. The public execution did not re-establish justice; it reactivated power. (Foucault, 1977, p. 49)

The execution scene itself became a display of military might, including the presence of cavalry, archers, and soldiers. This show of force clearly demonstrated the offender's status as an enemy of the prince and the state. While the torture itself conveyed a sense of struggle with this challenging force, the imbalance of power also conveyed the absolute victory of the sovereign over his enemies through the broken body of the accused. (Foucault, 1977, p. 50).

The necessity of the sovereign's response is supported through the convergence of truth and power in the event of the public execution. There is a corpus of knowledge developed around the investigation and judgement of the act, leading to this event. The confession of the accused validated this process and judgement before the crowd and God himself, confirming the sovereign's ability to know and declare the truth. The execution itself became a demonstration of military might and affirmed the sovereign's responsibility to defend the state against all her enemies. In these ways, "the truth-power connection remains at the heart of all mechanisms of judgement" (Foucault, 1977, p. 55). This connection also serves as a naturalizing force. The actions of the sovereign, regardless of the barbarity and excess, were entirely natural because they were rooted in truth and appropriate to the sovereign's role. However, Foucault's conception of power also allows for these power relations to shift or become unstable. The sovereign's exercise of power is not absolute, despite its appearance to the contrary.

As a spectacle of truth and power, the execution required the participation of both the accused and the populace. "Not only must people know, they must see with their own eyes. Because they must be made to be afraid" (Foucault, 1977, p. 58). Although their presence was required and the people had the right to observe, the nature of their participation was uncertain. In support of the sovereign, the people may exact their own vengeance on the accused as a sign of

allegiance. In some cases, the accused would require protection of the crowd. “In calling on the crowd to manifest its power, the sovereign tolerated for a moment acts of violence, which he accepted...but which were strictly limited by the sovereign’s own privileges” (Foucault, 1977, p. 59). However, the rules of the execution could be inverted, and the crowd could mock the present authority or rise in rebellion to physically prevent it. The accused could also intervene through the ‘gallows speech’ to invalidate or reverse the verification of truth. “Under the protection of imminent death, the criminal could say everything” to curse, deny, and challenge the accusers and those around the scaffold, turning the criminal into a hero (Foucault, 1977, pp. 60-61). The broadsheet also surfaced as a re-writing of crime, which would glorify the criminal act and the criminal (Foucault, 1977, p. 67). These partnerships between the sovereign, the accused, and the populace, introduce the potential for instability in the exercise of power. Overall, the events in and around the execution became part of an “uncertain festival”, where “work stopped, authorities were abused, (and) fights broke out” (Foucault, 1977, p. 63). This discourse around the public execution made this exercise of power tenuous and led to protests in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was the convergence of these rebellions and the voices of reformers that would lead to the introduction of a new political technology for the mastery of the body. This would not represent a fundamental movement away from the truth-power relation, only “a different form with very different effects” (Foucault, 1977, p. 55). Using ‘humanity’ as the new measure and strategy, this movement would employ its own “dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, (and) functionings” in the exercise of power (Foucault, 1977, pp. 26, 55).

The excess of armed justice together with the unpredictability of the crowd made public executions intolerable (Foucault, 1977, p. 73). The new focus would be on respectful intervention to correct and transform the offender. However, this challenge to violent justice

would require a convergence of pressures to bring about this change. Among these were changes in the types of crimes being committed in a new economy.

The first of these...was a change in the operation of economic pressures, a general rise in the standard of living, a large demographic expansion, an increase in wealth and property and consequent need for security. (Foucault, 1977, p. 76)

The higher value placed on property relations placed greater pressures on the poor, but it also required changes to the law and greater vigilance in detecting criminal acts against possessions. Excessive punishment was also bound with irregularities in the application of justice, which was plagued with corruption and had numerous loopholes (Foucault, 1977, pp. 78-79, 83). Due to the fact that the sovereign was able to exercise absolute control over the administration of justice, penalties were inconsistently applied and sometimes arbitrary. The king could “suspend courts of justice, alter their decisions, remove magistrates from office, or exile them, and replace them by judges acting under royal commission” (Foucault, 1977, p. 79). These factors represented a poor economy of power and became important allies to the argument for more ‘humane’ punishment. “This explains why the reform did not have a single origin...many different interests came together” (Foucault, 1977, p. 81). The new strategy arose from a larger discourse around the power to punish, and would argue for a more regular, universalized, and efficient administration of punishment in response to new illegalities.

The delimiting of the sovereign’s power results in new definitions, goals, and instruments of punishment. If the offence is not committed against the sovereign, it must be committed against another object, such as society. And if society must respond to the criminal, it cannot be a personal or vengeful response, but a measured and regulated one (Foucault, 1977, pp. 89-90). Punishment must be carried out in the defence of society and moderated to exclude its vengeful components. This transition “is not on account of some profound humanity that the criminal

conceals within him, but because of a necessary regulation of the effects of power” (Foucault, 1977, p. 92). In addition, a generalized and moderated response to the criminal would require a new goal, that being prevention. In this way, punishment becomes a temporal project in that the future conduct of the criminal is targeted. To cause a change in the future, the punishment must seek to uncover what led the accused to commit the crime, or his past. It must target “his nature...his way of life, and his attitude of mind, to his past, to the quality...of his will” (Foucault, 1977, p. 99). This emerging approach would come to include a variety of techniques toward the discovery of these ‘truths’ inside the criminal. In addition, to prevent crime, the punishment must not only change the offender and repair the damage done; it must also function as a sign to society at large. People must expect that punishment is certain, equal, and that its disadvantage outweighs the benefit of the criminal act (Foucault, 1977, pp. 94-101). Punishment must be universal and ideological. The exercise of power in punishing an accused must affect future conduct, not only of the criminal, but members of society, who internalize this punishment as an idea. “It is in the mind, or rather a play of representations and signs circulating discreetly but necessarily and evidently in the minds of all. It is no longer the body, but the soul” (Foucault, 1977, p. 101). It is this universal and ideological emphasis that exemplifies the insidious nature of this exercise of power, because it appears to originate from within. Through this, the new forms of punishment become naturalized because they appear to be the result of our own work. “A true politician binds them even more strongly by the chain of their own ideas; it is at the stable point of reason that he secures the end of the chain” (Foucault, 1977, pp. 102-103).

The prison would emerge from this newly conceived form of punishment but the control and modification of behaviour, as a social and ideological project, would originate primarily in the techniques of discipline. Like the changes in criminal activity, these techniques were applied

in the context of fluctuating populations and growing production (Foucault, 1977, pp. 219-220).

Disciplinary techniques were a means to order and make useful these unskilled masses. In addition, by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, there was a fundamental change in belief that the individual was not born, but made.

To begin with, the soldier was someone who could be recognized from afar; he bore certain signs: his body was the blazon of strength and valour...an erect head, taut stomach, broad shoulders...by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the soldier has become something that can be made; out of formless clay, an inapt body. (Foucault, 1977, p. 135)

To affect this kind of transformation, instruments and strategies must be applied to the body.

The classical age provided both the methodological and ideological supports for this type of activity. Humanity was conceived as a mechanized entity that could be understood and ‘known’,

but more importantly, manipulated. Methods and tools were also supplied to facilitate this understanding and to measure the smallest of movements (Foucault, 1977, pp. 136-139). Before people can be altered or formed, they must be observed in a controlled space and rendered docile.

The *principle of partitioning* becomes the technique whereby people are set apart for controlled analysis, or the acquisition of knowledge. Schools, monasteries, factories, and hospitals all employ this model to define movement, associations, and activity. “It was a procedure, therefore, aimed at knowing, mastering, and using. Discipline organizes an analytical space... disciplinary space is always, basically, cellular” (Foucault, 1977, p. 143). Each person may be analyzed, measured, linked, codified, and ranked in relation to others (Foucault, 1977, pp. 141-148).

Enclosures also maximized supervision, like an examination or experiment, yielding the ‘truth’ about the person under observation (Foucault, 1977, p. 184). It is here that the truth-power relation is established in the new political technology of the body.



Within this context, time and the detailed elaboration of each activity could be applied to the body. Each task could be understood, repeated, and applied to individuals working in concert. This *anatomo-chronological* schema enabled meticulous controls to be applied and coordinated, functioning as a coercive link to the production apparatus (Foucault, 1977, pp. 152-153). Consistently applied, the individual would be transformed in a progressive and cumulative manner. With the imposition of tasks that are repetitive and graduated in complexity, behaviour moves toward a perfected state under a skilled authority (Foucault, 1977, p. 161). The act of assessment and instruction was based on a determination of what constitutes optimal, normal, and deficient conduct. This “ordinal character of judging”, or “field of comparison”, supports the penal mechanism within disciplinary systems (Foucault, 1977, pp. 177, 181-182). The authority may withhold or grant membership, impose penalties of time or other deprivations to promote or suppress behaviour toward closing ‘gaps’. “It was a question both of making the slightest departures from correct behaviour subject to punishment...each subject finds himself caught in a punishable, punishing universality” (Foucault, 1977, p. 178). Through this corrective mechanism, a binary opposition is formed between the normal and the abnormal. This disciplinary power, not exercised in a spectacular fashion by a sovereign, places the subject under intense observation, rendering the disciplinary power invisible (Foucault, 1977, p. 187). It was this meticulous observation and normalization, employing knowledge and a new set of techniques, which accompanied the advent of modern humanism (Foucault, 1977, p. 141). It is in this modern form that the productive capacity of power is most visible.

As the machinery of production grew, so did the need for observatories and specialized personnel who were trained in surveillance. Society becomes a place of ceaseless inspection and recording, where individuals are coded and placed (Foucault, 1977, pp. 196-197). Discipline’s

power is analysis, and this assigns to each individual their “true name, his true place, his true body, his true disease” (Foucault, 1977, p. 198). The panopticon represents these techniques in architectural form, where the subject never knows who or if he is being observed. It is this model that induces “in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (Foucault, 1977, p. 201). The panoptic arrangement assures this consciousness and it operates regardless of the presence or the known identity of the observer. Therefore, it is a machine that assures the dissymmetry and anonymity of power, completely transferable to a variety of institutions (Foucault, 1977, pp. 201-202). The panopticon is polyvalent, centralized, and without the risks associated with the spectacle of power.

The polyvalent nature of the disciplinary techniques is particularly evident in the ‘epistemological thaw’ of the modern age, which has spawned multiple specialties and rationalizations. The Enlightenment, which introduced liberties, also developed these disciplines and the ruthlessly authoritarian search for truth. This intellectual growth and the establishment of centralized bodies of codified knowledge were realized through the refinement of power relations. “These sciences, which have so delighted our ‘humanity’ for over a century, have their technical matrix in the petty, malicious minutiae of the disciplines and their investigations” (Foucault, 1977, p. 226). Since power is invested, this accumulated knowledge or truth would be appropriated to support and multiply the exercise of power (Foucault, 1977, p. 224). The stability of the prison would be based on these disciplinary techniques of partitioned observation, codification, and normalization (Foucault, 1977, pp. 227, 233). Moreover, the prison would invest in a body of knowledge in the form of criminology and in the fabrication of the delinquent. Intense biographical investigations into the lives of offenders would result in characterization and their placement within a network of causality, whose truth is ‘scientific’ and self evident. “At

this point one enters the criminological labyrinth from which we have certainly not emerged” (Foucault, 1977, p. 252). Through this, the prison could withstand challenges and reforms, even incorporating these into its programme. The prison fails to repair or reintegrate the offender, but succeeds in producing and segregating a pathologized subject. “So successful has the prison been that, after a century and a half of failures, the prison still exists, producing the same results” (Foucault, 1977, p. 277). Based on a network of disciplinary techniques, the prison, school, barracks, and the hospital, multiplied the asymmetries of power that were apparently discarded with the sovereign (Foucault, 1977, p. 223).

Foucault’s analysis raises several paradoxical developments and conclusions. The disciplinary techniques arise out of the Enlightenment, which heralded egalitarianism, rights, and new liberties. The elevation of humanity is paralleled with its subjugation. “The carceral network constituted one of the armatures of this power-knowledge that has made the human sciences historically possible” (Foucault, 1977, p. 305). Humanity would be placed under observation and domination through institutions that are carceral and knowledge producing. Similarly, Foucault traces the origins of the transformable human body to the “materialist reduction of the soul” during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (Foucault, 1977, p. 136). Here, the mechanistic conception of humanity is translated into docility, an opportunity for training and transformation. Although mechanistic conceptions are incompatible with directed modification, the knowledge of the human allows for the meticulous control of humanity. This functions as a caution and critique of the development of the human power to observe and codify, which has morphed into a type of slavery.

Perhaps in defence of humanity, Foucault gives power providential autonomy, where “it is the economy of power that they exercise, and not that of their scruples or their humanism”

(Foucault, 1977, p. 304). This implies a deceiving and independent construct that causes the “intent to alleviate pain, to cure, to comfort” to function as a masquerade for the exercise of power (Foucault, 1977, p. 308). While this deception may be discreet and pervasive, it is not absolute. If power operates independently and according to its own laws, then it is not a question of whether knowledge becomes domination, but which knowledge and who is enslaved. The independence of power makes it a type of commodity to be held, shared, traded, or lost. The public execution became uncertain because of the discourse around the economy of power. If the sovereign could be dethroned through this discourse, then the ‘carceral city’, which has replaced the body of the king, may also be vulnerable. This appears to be the supporting argument for activism, in that “what presides over all these mechanisms is not the unitary functioning of an apparatus or an institution, but the necessity of combat and the rules of strategy” (Foucault, 1977, p. 308). The polyvalence of the techniques of power implies new localities and applications, making the panoptic society an ‘uncertain festival’.

## **VII. Ideological Considerations**

Through these authors, the sociological analysis of religion has defined religion as an irrational and masochistic belief in mystified entities. This has been set in contrast to the non-religious mind that operates as an empowered rationality centred on the physical world, or concrete existence. The rationality they describe manifests itself as a particular cosmology, production, and posture. This cosmology is best characterized as the belief in a mechanized universe, which has become an incoherent concept. The remaining elements of this rationality are rudimentary and universally present. The production of rationality and its orientation to the world appears to be present within the Judeo-Christian tradition where eschatology is compatible with investment in the world. Escapism is also present within non-religious thought in the form

of transcendental nature, physical eschatologies, and utopian visions. Both the religious and non-religious mind will claim to produce the truth and some of these claims appear as overextensions of the evidence available. The posture of rationality, or its emotive character, is depicted as a detached exercise, yet the role of the imagination in hypothesis and the presence of subjective goals belies the image of a ‘cold, dry’ analysis. A brief examination of the Protestant Reformation and the discovery of the DNA structure confirmed that the rudiments, production, and posture of rationality cross the divide between the religious and non-religious. The mystification contrast is destabilized through the non-religious projection of a ‘divine’ or providential nature and the belief in imbricated ontologies. Both religion and non-religion posit super-empirical realities and forces. Masochistic tendencies were universalized, in that subservience and empowerment are compatible concepts within the religious and non religious mind, just as the dominion over things may translate into a self destructive humanity.

The symmetrical analysis of these contrasts reveals their instability and may even support their negation. The use of these contrasts requires further explanation, as they may have been the result of historical circumstance, mistake, or even fabrication. Some authors point to the use of contrast as a technique that seeks to suppress and elevate bodies of knowledge in a competitive environment. In describing the construction of racial identity in America, Toni Morrison suggests that the use of difference denotes what should be celebrated and what should be deplored. “Difference provided a huge payout of sign, symbol, and agency in the process of organizing, separating, and consolidating identity along culturally valuable lines of interest” (Morrison, 1992, p. 39). Similarly, Jonathon Culler argues that the use of binary opposites and the resulting distinctions become “hierarchical oppositions, in which one term belongs to presence and the other denotes a fall from presence” (Culler, 1982, p. 107). Foucault also

describes the productive capacity of power through comparison and codification. The techniques of meticulous observation that have accompanied modern humanism deploy an “ordinal character of judging”, or “field of comparison”, that results in oppositions between the normal and abnormal, truth and falsity. It is this “truth-power connection” that “remains at the heart of all mechanisms of judgement” (Foucault, 1977, pp. 55, 141, 177, 181-182). In these ways, the use of contrast may be a strategic expression in a battle between competing epistemologies in the West (Swatos, 1999, p. 225).

Others associate this competitive environment with the particular conditions of the Enlightenment. Ernest Becker traces the origin of this project to the 18<sup>th</sup> century and describes its development as a blind following of progress, rapid change, and an exaggerated hope in scientific knowledge that could probe all mysteries and answer all questions (Becker, 1968, pp. 15, 16). The advent of scientism and naturalism marked the end of a medieval cosmology and presented a new metaphysical crisis. With this new outlook, the project turned to a new reading of nature for the discovery of natural law and moral guidance. “In the Enlightenment they likewise read nature, but to try to discern what man should do. They tried to find natural laws” (Becker, 1968, p. 19). This moral groping would be the search for a new anthropodicy, or the human explanation of good and evil apart from God’s intention. Like Becker, James Sire argues that naturalism has been a dominant worldview that has posed unique challenges for morality, meaning, and agency since the Enlightenment (Sire, 1988, pp. 60-83). The scientific revolution also brought high hopes for discovery and progress, and these ambitions continue to linger. Robinson describes the entire scientific project since the Enlightenment as pretentious and positing facts not in evidence (Robinson, 2007, pp. 619, 622). “The dominant world picture in our culture has been one of steady linear progress brought about by that will and intellect, an

improvement booked to continue indefinitely” (Midgley, 1992, p. 224). The centre of this progress was the human mind and the accumulation of knowledge, culminating in a “deified ...neo-MAN” who could eventually posit a “complete description of the universe we live in” (Midgley, 1992, pp. 7, 26). The new and accelerated accumulation of knowledge likely resulted in a privileged perspectives, where each person may be assigned his “true name, his true place, his true body, his true disease” (Foucault, 1977, p. 198). When this knowledge is applied to religion, the examiner “claims to speak differently about the same object, and in so doing it claims...the only true rights of access to this object” (Thomas G. , 2006, p. 99).

George Steinmetz has argued that methodological positivism embodied this certainty and would come to dominate the research field in North America. This meant that sociology would focus on quantitative analysis, experimentation, and surveys (Steinmetz, 2005, pp. 111,114). Methodological positivism carried scientific capital and was heavily funded after World War II. Harry Alpert, who founded the National Science Foundation (1950), defined the conditions under which researchers were able to obtain funding. These criteria included those projects “characterized by the application of the methods and logic of science (and the belief in) convergence of the natural sciences and the social sciences” (Steinmetz, 2005, p. 118). As the state came to draw on the social sciences to track economic and business trends, the National Science Foundation became the largest non-military source of funding for sociological research (Steinmetz, 2005, p. 125). In these ways, methodological positivism received unprecedented resources and came to dominate sociology text books, journals, and departmental mandates. This was seen as the natural progression “toward scientific maturity” (Steinmetz, 2005, p. 117).

Bloor has described this as an ideological contest, where competitors seek to solidify their own positions while destabilizing others. He describes the *Enlightenment Ideology* as a

particular strategy that will be deployed by any body of knowledge that seeks to expand and suppress. It will use universal principles to override localized knowledge, and place a greater emphasis on facts, reason, and innate human rights (Bloor, 1991, p. 68). He argues that this ideology will deploy massive social images, metaphors, styles, and content that will define and segregate all rival claims to truth (Bloor, 1991, p. 55). Within this context, the Enlightenment Ideology will often be confronted by a *Romantic Ideology*. These are summarized as follows:

**Table 1 - Romantic and Enlightenment Ideology**

Romantic Ideology	Enlightenment Ideology
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Human nature is benevolent</li> <li>- Emphasizes the social, family, culture</li> <li>- Concrete and real principles of everyday life</li> <li>- Particular, relative, and context bound</li> <li>- Values immanent and tied to facts</li> <li>- Descriptive, adherence to tradition</li> <li>- Complexity and contingency</li> <li>- Cautious</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- State of human nature in need of rescue</li> <li>- Atomized individual, cosmopolitan</li> <li>- Abstract deduction of principles</li> <li>- Universal and timeless</li> <li>- Values are separate from facts</li> <li>- Prescriptive laws and morality</li> <li>- Simplicity and consistency</li> <li>- Risk taking</li> </ul>

(Bloor, 1991, pp. 62-65,68,70)

The features of the romantic and enlightenment ideologies appear exclusive or dichotomous, yet there is no inherent loyalty to one over the other. Either may be adopted or rejected dependent on the strategy. The enlightenment perspective contains strong prescriptive and moralizing elements that are informed by simple and universal principles (Bloor, 1991, p. 63). As a result, this ideology will be deployed in favour of reformation, consolidation, expansion, and suppression. Romantic ideologies favour localities and stress the importance of complexity, context, and culture. As such, it is typically deployed to stress contingency and challenge universal principles (Bloor, 1991, pp. 63-64). These strategies are broadly deployed within economic, political, ethical, and epistemological debates as expressions of “deep ideological



concerns” (Bloor, 1991, p. 55). Therefore, the debate in one discipline will be structurally identical or very similar with the debate in another.

The structural similarity of these debates rests on the recurring arguments around divinity, humanity, and nature to explain our current position and to justify our ambitions (Bloor, 1991, p. 66). Given the repeating rhythms of social experience “and the mind’s search for structure and pattern, the two archetypes will settle down in each of us and form a foundation and resource for our thinking” (Bloor, 1991, p. 75). These ideological opposition particularly manifests itself during or following a divisive event, where one group stands to lose and another stands to gain (Bloor, 1991, p. 66). In competition, groups will mystify their knowledge, granting it universality or inevitability, and suppress the psycho-social origins of this knowledge (Bloor, 1991, pp. 75-77). This grants permanence to the held position, like a sacred nomic structure. Or, mystified knowledge will come under attack through a destabilizing strategy. Again, these ideologies are strategically deployed, and one ideology may be discarded in favour of another.

The law which is at work here appears to be this: those who are defending a society...from a perceived threat will tend to mystify its values and standards, including its knowledge. Those who are either unthreatened...or on the ascendancy and attacking established institutions will be happy...to treat values and standards as more accessible, as this worldly rather than transcendent. (Bloor, 1991, p. 78)

Although each ideology lends itself to a specific strategy, any ideology may be threatened and may utilize unfamiliar strategies. If so, Bloor’s argument thoroughly politicizes the deployment of these ideologies. Movements will mystify and demystify, universalize and relativize, dependent on their position relative to other movements and the perceptions of dominance or vulnerability.

It is possible to view the sociological analysis of religion that emerged in the Enlightenment as adopting a particular ideological strategy. The Protestant Reformation, in

rebellion against ecclesiastical oppression, would demythologize and relativize the dominant authorities and doctrines of the church. In doing this, the Reformation would represent a powerful destabilizing force by adopting elements of the Romantic Ideology, laying the ground work for a new freedom of thought (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 123). On this foundation, the scientific revolution would posit new universalities through rationality and specific methodologies that would reveal the ‘truth’, as opposed to the speculations of the religious mind. In the wake of religious wars and the loss of ecclesiastical dominance, this new movement would also mystify its knowledge and overstate its conclusions. This project would deploy imagery, metaphors, and oppositions to define the truth and segregate rival claims. This, together with its initial success as an explanatory power, would allow this perspective and methodology to expand and consolidate. As a project that seeks dominion over things, it will also become a new source of oppression, or the new panoptic regime. Berger describes this process as a great irony in history, where “Christianity became its own gravedigger” (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 129). Rationality and scientific advance becomes the new plausibility structure or legitimizing force, causing religiosity to fall from widespread consciousness and influence (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 112, 133).

In reality, it may not be possible to historically differentiate these ideological strategies or movements with any great precision. However, these discussions posit the universal adherence to ideological projects, or the prominence of specific goals and interests within these movements. The religious and non-religious are treated as equivalents, engaged in similar projects, using similar tactics, and driven by similar objectives. Differences are subsumed under the concepts of world pictures, worldviews, archetypes, and cosmologies, all attending to ‘deep ideological

concerns' and metaphysical crises. The presence of rivalry and competition, assumes commonality and a universality of experience.

### **VIII. Conclusion: Theoretical Implications**

As these authors use these concepts, both religion and non-religion appear to practice rationality and demonstrate a tendency toward mystification and masochism. The affinity between religion and non-religion is acknowledged by Durkheim, in that “everything is religious” or that everything is a manifestation of collective forces and the “power of the mind to...think in universal terms” (Durkheim, 1982, p. 173; Durkheim, 1995, p. 273). Many of the same metaphors, symbols, and images will be used, which is apparent in the *Essence of Christianity* and Feuerbach’s substitutions. Both appear to seek underlying forces, unifying patterns, and universal connections in an attempt to resolve timeless problems and find purpose (Midgley, 1995, p. 22; Midgley, 1992, pp. 15, 95, 180). They may share epistemological and ontological assumptions, where “truth is discoverable within a layered model of reality” and fragmented surface structures conceal a latent and non-empirical symmetry (Levi, 2009, pp. 978-978). Both may have grown out of an orderly and coherent vision for the universe. “The kinship between these two ways of thinking is far closer than has been recognized” (Midgley, 1992, p. 12; Levi, 2009, p. 980). If arguments from rationality, mystification, and masochism are destabilized and emptied, then the religious and non-religious may be seen as qualitative equivalents, possessing a hidden symmetry. It is the recognition of this commonality that leads to reversals, when religion may become “disguised atheism” just as the non-religious practice religion but “cover it with the façade of science” (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 13; Midgley, 1992, p. 30).

In deconstructing these contrasts, we observe the disappearance of religion as a subject matter in two ways. First, if the contrasts presented within the sociological analysis of religion

are accepted, religion is reduced to an irrationality, a representation or projection, a monologue, and an ever diminishing entity. “The subject matter is disappearing. To a...sociologist, it is largely of historical interest....If some of the subject matter seems still to exist then it is either a residue, or a false front for another more genuine reality” (Martin, 1966, p. 354). In addition to the unreality of religion, Günter Thomas describes an “awkward problem” in this analysis. The purely empirical model of observation forces the sociological observer to treat religious phenomena as “something else”, because it must maintain it as a distinct subject matter without itself becoming theology (Thomas G. , 2006, p. 98). Berger makes a similar observation that when religion is targeted by scientific analysis “transcendence must be translated as immanence” (Berger P. L., 1974, p. 126). This is the loss of religion as a subject matter through its negation. It is lost as a reality, but it is also lost in that the description used for religion contradicts the self-descriptions of the religious (Thomas G. , 2006, p. 99).

Second, if the contrasts presented within the sociological analysis of religion are negated, religion becomes a qualitative equivalent to non-religion. Through equivalence, religion may again “join the ranks of the status deprived” (Martin, 1966, p. 354). As the contrasts disappear, so does any distinction of religion. Religion may simply become another way of seeing the universe and humanity’s place within it. However, it is possible to view this potential loss as an elevation of religion, in that non-religious activity may be reinterpreted as possessing religious objectives or motivations. Therefore, all human activity may become a religious endeavour. For example, Berger describes religion as the human enterprise of creating a sacred cosmos, or the culmination of nomic structures (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 25-27). In other words, religious order is an extension of humanly constructed order, or religion becomes an overextension of non-religion. A religious reading of this phenomenon would state that nomic structures are an

inadequate extension of the sacred cosmos. This is precisely what Jacques Ellul did in *The Meaning of the City*, where he interprets urbanization as a failing soteriology. Berger suggests a similar strategy in *A Rumor of Angels*, where he posits the possible inversion of *projection* as a *reflection* of divine realities (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 46-47). This is the transformation of religion to the place of origin, moving from absence to presence.

Although this inversion becomes possible through the negation of contrast, it is an unlikely outcome. As David Martin observes, the historical contributions to the sociological analysis of religion “are sometimes assumed to have elucidated the topic in a way not easily capable of extension, and because of certain axioms written into their work which provide more basic inhibitions to further work” (Martin, 1966, p. 354). He argues that a recovery from this position involves a suspension of ontological judgements that have infested this sociology (Martin, 1966, p. 354). Günter Thomas suggests a method of inquiry that is guided by “operative realism”, or the position taken by the sociologist that “assumes ‘operatively’ the reality of the object of observation” (Thomas G. , 2006, p. 100). At least, the negation of these contrasts permits a dialogue and examination that grants the intellectual and emotional integrity of the religious mind.

Finally, this suggests a re-examination of these contrasts and perhaps a search for new axes of comparison. The historical adherence to these contrasts may have formed part of an ideological contest and an unwavering commitment to new ‘world pictures’ that brought a particular vision and characterization of religious phenomena (Thomas G. , 2006, p. 104; Midgley, 1992, p. 97). As a particular historical manifestation, these contrasts are neither absolute nor exhaustive. Rationality, mystification, and masochism may be an inadequate foundation upon which to separate the religious and the non-religious. Levi, Malinowski, and

Lévi-Strauss suggest that the analysis of religion and myth has often been shallow and may have missed integral elements of the religious experience. In offering a critique of the sociological perspective, Malinowski states that “everyone who has experienced religion... knows that the strongest religious moments come in solitude, in turning away from the world, in concentration and in mental detachment” (Malinowski, 1948, p. 54). Or, these concepts may be useful but were examined too thinly. Just as Durkheim and Feuerbach visualized an underlying reality that spurred religious speculation, this ontology may not penetrate the truth of the matter. The fragmentary and incomplete nature of analysis implies that more is available. This leads Levi and Lévi-Strauss to discover common rationalities and symmetries that were once invisible, demonstrating that a rigorous analysis of religion may “enlarge the realm of the real” (Lévi-Strauss, 1955, p. 444; Levi, 2009, p. 978).

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