Beyond Realism

Seeking the Divine Other

A Study in Applied Metaphysics

Simon Smith

For my parents, Mary and Eric Smith

and

Charlie Reilly (1938-2014)

To live in hearts we leave behind

Is not to die.

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Preface

The meaning of "talk about God" remains the first and most fundamental issue facing philosophers and theologians in the modern age. This study concerns the analogies needed to make sense of that talk: images, ripe with poetic intensity, borrowed from the language and practice of faith; from the splicing together of lives, human and divine. It concerns, moreover, the reinvestment of those images in the structures of human personality, their role in the development of a renewed metaphysic of the human spirit, aspirationally divine or 'upwardly' oriented.

Such concerns have, in recent years, gained still greater urgency as a popular and aggressive 'evangelical atheism' has come to dominate religious discourse, threatening to obscure the human truth of religious language. The challenge is a familiar one; its polemic deeply indebted to British Empiricism and, perhaps, especially the Logical Positivism of the last century. It seems that those who put their faith in post-modern theories of language to silence the likes of Ayer and Russell spoke too soon.

In response, theism has retreated from empiricist attack into a new-found realism. Championed by the likes of Peter Byrne, William Alston, and of course, Richard Swinburne, neo-realist metaphysics has, ostensibly, steeped itself in classical philosophy. Amid the search for reason and necessity, the God of grace and providence, of ordinary belief, has been forced to yield to 'Perfect Being' thinking, Absolute Being ontology, and other forms of untenable metaphysics, with few alternatives on the margins of relevance. The God of the philosophers may have the virtue of necessity, but this Being's temperament remains essentially anti-social. With God successfully held in logical quarantine, we may well wonder whether "God-talk" means anything at all.

To close the breach and realign finite with Infinite, philosophical faith with practical piety, has become the most pressing problem in contemporary philosophical theology. Undoubtedly, Whitehead and his neo-classical followers have been quick to learn the lessons of British Empiricism. If anything, however, they learned them *too* well, placing the religious emphasis almost exclusively on natural, physical forces. So

seamless an alignment of God with Creation can be of little comfort to the ordinary believer.

Caught between inflationary transcendence and reductive empiricism, the 'gap' between theological speculation and religious belief has widened until neither side seems very concerned with the other. Cleaving to 'first principles' and other metaphysical abstractions, both classical and neo-classical theologians have disenfranchised the faithful, putting faith on a trajectory for atheism.

To steer a course between such extremes, I want to return to an earlier tradition; to a metaphysic of persons exemplified in the practice of faith. Doing so draws upon the logic of personal identity: what it means to be, or rather, to *become*, a person.

This is the practical application of a cutting-edge theology, the progeny of one of the twentieth century's last great metaphysical minds. Almost fifty years after his death, Austin Farrer remains in the vanguard of modern theology, his vital grasp of faith *and* philosophy unequalled and unrivalled. Farrer first defended theology against the excesses of positivist and then process reduction but he used them to drive his own retreat from the scholastic tradition. This was analysed at great length by Charles Conti in *Metaphysical Personalism*.

Locating the means and motive for revision in the experience and expressions of lived faith, Farrer supplied the vital corrective; there is nothing more one can say about an overweening impersonalism which describes God as *Ens per se*, so cuts its own throat by depersonalising the cosmological connection.

It is my supposition, on Farrer's behalf, that person-concepts meet the pragmatic demands of both metaphysical theism and realistic belief. So doing, they open up a more fertile route between orthodox and 'process' mythologies. Following that route, I begin with the incoherence of philosophical realism and its ruinous application to theism. From there, we journey backwards into neo-classical and neo-Thomist thinkers who themselves attempted to overcome realist abstractions. Our destination lies in a Feuerbachian anthropology of theology or 'anthropotheism'. Like Farrer, Ludwig Feuerbach used the language of the believer to relocate theology and philosophy *within* a framework which makes fertile use of anthropomorphic personifications to 'think' God.

Ultimately, revisiting the personalist presuppositions of metaphysics in this way throws light on questions of personal identity, which is to

describe the nature of an 'overview' existence *directly* related to or experienced in ourselves. This is to 'draw' reality on a grand-scale and, most importantly, locate our place within that image. Doing theology dynamically, or psychologically informed – as both Farrer and Feuerbach insisted we must – means recognising the *constitutive* role projections play in self-construction. Without conscious, active, or intentional participation in our projects, we cannot become persons at all. This returns us to the practice of faith wherein Feuerbach's anthropology is reconstructed as *applied* theology, thus completing the personalist metaphysics perpetuated by Farrer as initially developed by the Biblical faith in a Godly person. And what greater challenge can religious philosophy respond to today?

Abbreviations Used
in this Work

Works by Farrer:

GV   *The Glass of Vision*. Westminster: Dacre Press, 1948.

FI   *Finite and Infinite*. Westminster: Dacre Press, 1959.

FW   *The Freedom of the Will*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960.

SB   *Saving Belief*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1964.

SG   *A Science of God?* London: Geoffrey Bles Ltd, 1966.

LAIU   *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*. London & Glasgow: The Fontana Library, 1966.

FS   *Faith and Speculation*. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1967.

Works by others:

MP   Conti, Charles. *Metaphysical Personalism*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1995.

EC   Feuerbach, Ludwig. *The Essence of Christianity*, translated by George Eliot. New York: Harper & Row, 1957.

PPF   Feuerbach, Ludwig. *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, translated by M. H. Vogel. Cambridge: Hackett. 1986.

DP   Henderson, Edward. 'The Divine Playwright' in *The Personalist Forum* 12, no. 1 (1996), 35-80.

SFA   Henderson, Edward. 'The Supremely Free Agent' in *Human and Divine Agency: Anglican, Catholic, and Lutheran Perspectives*, edited by F. Michael McLain and W. Mark Richardson, 97-120. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1999.

PR   Whitehead, Alfred North. *Process and Reality*, Corrected Edition, edited by David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne. New York: Free Press, 1978.

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Introductions are never quite what they seem. Appearances notwithstanding, they rarely begin at the beginning.[1] Contrariwise, and disdaining the King of Hearts naïve linearity, they begin at the end, go on to the beginning, *then* stop. (Alice would, no doubt, have guessed as much anyway.) This is because introductions are the last links in a chain of thought. (Although the length of this particular chain may not be immediately obvious, it will, I hope, soon become so.) Coming at the end – and before the beginning, in proper Wonderland fashion – introductions look backwards and forwards at the same time. They are a summation and a prediction: project and projection in one.

That makes this much more than my first and last chance to catch your attention before we disappear down a rabbit-hole of philosophical reflection. It is an opportunity to plant a few signposts, to offer *my* view of what is to follow.

In fact, the displaced nature of introductions is, at once, a most important signpost and illustration of some of the key themes of this book. For, on one level, this is a study in the development of consciousness, of personal identity. It concerns our projects – religious, theological, and philosophical – and the ways in which our participation in them shapes who we are and what we become. Philosophers call this the dialectics of consciousness, the logic of what it means to be or, more importantly, to *become* a person. Introductions make that logic explicit by closing the circle of enquiry and, yes, opening it simultaneously. They bring the enquirer face-to-face with himself, a former self; another incarnation. (Best to start with incarnational images: end as we mean to go on, in resurrection-mode.) The beginning and end of a kind of hermeneutic, introductions mark the place where first impressions coincide with final reflections, yours and mine, ushering us both into the self-critical and so transformative dialectic that is to come. As Ludwig Feuerbach might have said, such reflections tell us to our face what we are and how we came to be.[2] They tell of aspirations, of constructive complementarities, of debts owed and the measure to which they have been repaid. They reveal, in other words, the creative involvement of one consciousness, one person,

in the becoming of another. This, in Martin Buber's poignant phrase, is the 'cradle of real life'.[3]

There is a pragmatic psychology in this natal place; one which is essential to both philosophy and theology in their healthier, inclusivist modes. Essential, too, to both the form and content of this book. Philosophically speaking, this is because that psychology is the antidote to the debilitating dualisms from which much western thought has derived itself. Antiquated oppositions – mind and body, transcendence and immanence, and doubtless most damaging of all, them and us – are realigned within a framework in which we are intimately reconnected to one another.

This insight was the particular contribution of Austin Marsden Farrer, Oxford philosopher and theologian, Anglican priest, and primary subject matter of the present work. As any theology student knows, the roots of it strike deeper into both scripture and speculation. On the one hand, parallels may be found in Aquinas as well as the writings of St. Francis and Bonaventure.[4] On the other, there is a clear, if unexpected, connection with Ludwig Feuerbach's anthropology of theology, his 'anthropotheism'. It is, however, the flowering of this idea in Farrer and those who followed him with which this study is concerned. (Feuerbach is the exception and for good reason, as we shall see.)

For readers unfamiliar with Farrer's extraordinary corpus, a brief introduction may be in order.[5]

Austin Marsden Farrer was one of the last great metaphysical thinkers of the twentieth century. In the words of the late Basil Mitchell – philosopher, friend, and colleague – Farrer was 'one of the most remarkable men of his generation'.[6] '[O]riginality, independence, imagination and intellectual force to a degree amounting to genius' were (Mitchell assures us) the hallmarks of Farrer's thought and character. Genius, then; 'and the word was sometimes used of him'. John Hick agreed. The reader who tarries in such elevated company, he avowed, is bound 'to lose any taste for the lower levels of theological writing': those drier depths of modernist and post-modernist thought alike, which have come lately to dominate.[7] To Charles Conti, our foremost Farrerian scholar, this was 'a mind as philosophically gifted as it was theologically rare'.[8]

Farrer is, without doubt, the most important Anglican theologian since John Henry Newman, another Anglo-Catholic but of a somewhat different

persuasion. Newman, as everyone knows, entered fully into Catholic theology and there he would remain. Farrer, on the other hand, concluded his neo-Catholic or "high" Anglican interlude by returning to his pragmatic roots, and there *he* would remain. In so doing, he kept faith to the fullest with the communitarian interests celebrated by his former tutor at Balliol, John Macmurray.[9] Those interests, he would further cultivate in his own philosophical theology, endowing them with greater metaphysical extensions.

Those extensions reveal a remarkable and captivating insight into the perennial, and indeed, *primordial*, questions of philosophy and theology. Farrer showed himself to be uniquely alive to the demands of both disciplines, 'keeping heart and head in dynamic balance';[10] alive, too, to the fullest implications of doing so: a clue to their vital role in the becoming of persons. Guided by a profound grasp of human nature, he brought 'passion to bear on philosophy…aligning integrity with religion.' His challenge to the standard articles of Christian tradition was never less than penetrating. It was also timely. Against the grain of contemporary Positivism, Farrer refused to surrender the most difficult aspects of the faith out of which he philosophised. Rich in philosophical wisdom and psychological insight, faith (he firmly believed) is central to the deepest understanding of a humanity love-oriented unto a God of love. He himself may not have used the language of 'feeling tone', *Gefuhl*, or passion, but it was there for those with eyes to see and ears to hear.

Acutely sensitive to this, the meaning of human being, Farrer resisted the temptations of cultural relativism and the worst excesses of the post-modern turn; he 'did his theology metaphysically, approaching his task in the manner of *philosophia perennis*'.[11] Anthropologically astute, his attention to the most vital topics of philosophical concern gives his work an enduring importance to modern thinkers who philosophise out of the human condition; the more so to those who enquire after matters of lasting significance and transcendental import.

To those thinkers, he offers the essential connection of thought and action embodied by the life of faith. Sermons resonate beautifully with philosophical writings, reminding us that *praxis* supplies the conditions by which *theoria* must be judged. Philosophers tend to reverse this, making inappropriate logical demands on more basic social interactions. But Farrer held fast to the fundamental conditions of active belief and, crucially, to the epistemic requirements of the simple believer.[12] Make no mistake, he said, '[i]f we are not tough enough to assert that the act of

religious obedience is our privileged access to the knowledge of God, we shall be beaten out of the field'.[13] Hick aptly termed this 'rationality illuminatingly at work within the life of faith'.[14] It means Farrer understood that any faith worth living must be capable of being thought and any philosophy worth thinking must be capable of being lived. This gives his work an unusual metaphysical edge, overcoming traditional philosophical polarities: rationalism-cum-realism versus empiricism, idealism, and pragmatism.

That is why, on finding that 'the ancient rift between the God of the philosophers and the God of religion remained as wide as ever,' the process theologian John Cobb was ready to add, 'if anyone came close to closing it, it was Austin Farrer.'[15] Like Cobb, I am inclined to think Farrer succeeded, not least because he 'kept faith with reason, in both senses.'

So go the pragmatic interpenetrations of *praxis* and *theoria*. More profitable than anything else on the philosophical market, this offers a way of doing philosophy and theology that is far more original and more fertile than the thinking that currently dominates the field. Both subtly anthropological and traditionally analogical, it contrasts sharply with the neo-realist revival of modern theology. Theology as construal is, of course, the vital factor, just as it was for Hegel and the entire Continental tradition; though it remains starkly, and sadly, absent from analytic philosophy and realist ontology.

Such is the vision I want to reflect here.

Heart *and* head; thought *and* action; *praxis and theoria*; faith *and* reason: it should be obvious by now that Farrer's stock-in-trade was not the *things* or *substances* commonly beloved of metaphysical minds. Nor was it the "first principles" that bind them. He dealt, instead, in dynamic interplay. Indeed, one might say that he washed his philosophy in the waters of life at Bethesda, baptising his constructs with living imagery: *A Rebirth of Images*, in the title-words of one of his works. Applied to that most ancient and honourable question of philosophical debate, "the nature of mind", this puts Farrer at the cutting-edge of philosophy *and* theology.

His conception of mind as physically embodied, socially extended was radical at the time of its formulation; quite as revolutionary as Ryle's *The Concept of Mind*.[16] And yet if that conception has not hitherto received the attention or recognition it deserves, this is not, perhaps, entirely surprising. A prevailing climate of British empiricism, which produced

Logical Positivism in the formative years of the last century and computational theories of mind in its senescence, was unlikely to foster spiritual sensibilities or offer a sympathetic ear to the overtures of consciousness. Nevertheless, ideas which Farrer first began to forge in the central chapters of his *magnum opus, Finite and Infinite* – before his Gifford lectures put them firmly at the centre of philosophical theology – have, in recent years, begun to swim in the mainstream. They appear to have found a place in the latest discussions of "embodied cognition," a development of the cognitive sciences which may turn out to be crucial. Hints abound, moreover, that neuroscientists may also be about to catch up with Farrer.

Does it seem odd that a scientific and essentially reductive approach to mind should adopt a position close to Farrer's social and spiritually sensitised one? Perhaps it should not. This is not to suggest that there has been anything like a wholesale appropriation of his 'metaphysical personalism' (as Conti dubbed it).[17] Nevertheless, it seems somehow fitting that such ideas would re-emerge in another dynamic interplay of disciplines, this time philosophy, psychology, and neuroscience. How well these developments account for the subtle logic of intentionality and its place in the social and physical realisation of mind remains to be seen. However, leaving theology out may, as the poet suggests, ultimately mean they reckon ill.[18]

What, in particular, they will 'reckon without', one suspects, is what philosophers always reckon without: the very interplay that configures, indeed makes possible, their own enquiries. (For a profession that seeks to penetrate the deepest truths of existence, philosophy has, of late, produced remarkably few practitioners of the Delphic art, *gnothi seauton.*)

The old Russellian school of philosophy was forced to throw a rickety analogical bridge between the self and other minds.[19] Not everyone was willing to cross over. For some, the opportunity to deny that there is anything on the other side has been far too tempting: an all too human reflection of the scepticism which theists know all too well. The difficulty was and always has been obvious. The evidence offered for the reality of another (or an Other) is judged by external criteria. Supposedly, I know that you *are* a person, a consciousness, like me precisely because you appear to *be* like me. You behave *like me*: you walk and talk, read books, watch television, sing and dance, wine and dine, and generally do all the things that consciousnesses do. (Although not, one assumes, all at the same time.) But this is all wrong: both the reasoning and the evidence

reasoned from. For, as everyone knows (or almost everyone, as we shall discover) there is a world of difference between appearance and reality. So goes the antediluvian argument between realism and idealism.

The sceptics may have a point as far as they go, but their demand for ontological security and the reassurances of what they purport to be "proper philosophic method" is no less flawed. Their analogical bridge-breaking can issue only in a self-stultifying denial of the other because, by simply refusing the analogy any purchase, they too failed to ask the *right* question. The *right* question is "How did we come by the analogy in the first place?"

How do I know *what* consciousness looks or behaves like? From my own case, rebounds the echo of ego-certainty. Perhaps; but in such truisms, lurk the dangers of pernicious circularity. How did I come to be a consciousness capable of recognising its reflection in others? Where, in fact, did "my own case" come from? Where else, P. F. Strawson observed, if not those others? A "case" is not a single integer. Arguments "from" are really arguments "back to"; they return us, by another full turn of the circle, to the simple ontological facts of human existence. So we plumb *de facto* logic to see how we become a talking mind in the first place.

Indeed, logical philosophers will doubtless aver that we have known as much since Strawson and Wittgenstein located the primary conditions for any thought at all, not in the individual, but in those who taught us how to think. The form of argument, the very language in which the sceptic frames his or her doubts, cannot, in all conscience, be claimed as a new invention. In making use of it, one is entirely, if unconsciously (worse, perhaps even thoughtlessly), reliant on 'the other' whose existence one may claim to doubt. Just here, pernicious circularity unfurls as self-contradiction.[20]

There is a lesson in honesty here which, if I may say so, is urgently needed in philosophy, not to mention the physical sciences. I cannot help but wonder who made you the remarkable thinker you undoubtedly have become. If asked, would you, in the manner of the old joke, choose to take the blame yourself? Be warned, however, self-made minds indict their origins no less than those who recognise their debts and seek to honour them.

Farrer clearly recognised the constitutive role others play in our development. The idea appears in all his major works, most notably *Finite and Infinite* and *The Freedom of the Will*. The former was first published in

1943, a good furlong ahead of both Strawson and Wittgenstein. Unfortunately, that book saw the theological application of this idea overwhelmed by the ontological demands of a more traditional Thomism. The result was a classical deployment of action-concepts: God as *Actus Purus* casting before it the shadow of Real Being. Working out that concept of mind, or rather of persons, in *The Freedom of the Will*, Farrer would use a full-blooded interactionism to purge the residue of classical absolutism from his theology. By privileging anthropology over *usiology*, he realigned metaphysics with the demands of religious belief. This led to the "pragmatic theology" of *Faith and Speculation*.

In this, his last major work, theological application returned explicitly to its anthropological and psychological roots (somewhat as I am attempting to do here). Unearthing those roots, it becomes clear that, as vital as their corrective contribution was, logical philosophers had still somehow missed the point. After all, Farrer observed, '[i]t is not as though we believed in our neighbour's personality *because* logical philosophers are able to exhibit the self-contradiction involved in denying it'.[21] Such intellectual conceit surely adds the insult of unnecessary demonstration to the injury of inexcusable doubt: bad faith atop faulty inference. "The other" is no philosophical puzzle for rational minds to solve but a matter of real practical urgency. 'From first infancy our elders loved us, played us, served us and talked us into knowing them'. Had they failed us, we simply would not be.

No need, then, for arguments or analogies *to* the other (inside). Those who had and held us have already and inexorably bound themselves into our *every* experience of consciousness. We are who we are by their grace and gift; wherein, St. Paul reminds us, works the grace of God.[22] Others give us the tools with which to make or 'mend' ourselves (as Eugene O'Neill suggests) using that same grace as 'glue'.[23] They give us the language, the symbols, in which we think our thoughts and through which we live our lives. The hand of any great teacher may, indeed *must*, be perfectly hidden (just like, Farrer said, the hand of God), the 'causal joint' between teacher and student, utterly indiscernible.[24] So much so that it is easy to forget; or worse, we ignore it, whitewashing others from our biographical reminiscences.[25] We do so to our own shame, however; for all we do we owe to them, in recognition of them. Such connections are not merely logical. 'Otherness' is a feature of philosophical schematics *and* social semantics. First and foremost, the relation is lived *in* so known *by* its social demonstrations.

Philosophically and theologically pregnant, Farrer's social semantics provide most of us with all the evidence we ever need to discern the reality of others. As conditions of knowledge, they are quite sufficient: in philosophical parlance, adequate but not necessary so not absolutely and unambiguously certain. Demand more, however, and the risks are clear; for we are the selves we are by living our belief in others.[26] Deny the transactions embodied by that belief and we are not persons at all, only 'mindless imbeciles…innocent of all communication.'

This alone might be enough to put Farrer in the vanguard of a new philosophy. Forty-five years after his death, his "counter-episteme" still offers a vital corrective to those who pursue their enquiries without due regard to their role in the psycho-dynamics of personal identity. Rather than press into service an untenable epistemology *and* an unfathomable ontology,[27] as rationalists are wont to do, he distilled an empirical mandate from this basic description of persons seeking connections and explanations. That mandate overcomes traditional realist ontologising (as we shall see in Chapter One) by reconnecting us in dynamic interplay, one with another (and perhaps ultimately an Other).

Conceiving consciousness as actively extended or "agency-personified" is of fundamental importance to any intelligible theology. It is a vital clue to the meaning of "talk about God" and the cosmological relation, reminding us that both of these are human truths. At its simplest, it works like this. Real "being" is primitively experienced *in* action; the self – *any* self – is *publicly* enacted. No ontological deficiency, as traditional thinkers fear; sociality is the quiddity of consciousness: substance, essence, existence, all in one. Mentality is first transacted *between* persons. An essential expression of "soulful" social conjunctions, '[m]ind does everywhere flow into mind.'[28] In practice this means that, just as ordinary believers find their own thoughts spelled out in scripture, so Farrer himself would philosophise out of the Living Word.

That, in quite a sizeable nutshell, provides the means for conceiving a real confluence between natural and spiritual. A more creative way of reintegrating finite and infinite, it splices together the very threads by which our 'plaints' once reached an Other's ear, but lately snapped (as Thomas Hardy avers) by our own hands.[29] In so doing, it lays the foundation for a new personalist metaphysic.

The reality of an Other given in the shaping of a mind, a life, is as much a truth of pragmatic theology as of philosophical psychology. For the same dynamic interplay which constitutes personal becoming is at once our

best analogy for and most sublime expression of the realities of faith. Best and most sublime because the application-point of the analogy lies in the enactment of the spirit there expressed. So we may both *cognise* the hidden hand of God and *recognise* the signature of 'His' handiwork.[30] This, Farrer well knew, makes our return to the Other a matter of direct personal experience, embedding therein a cosmological connectedness which blossoms in the providential care of a nurturing other. It puts the will of God back in the hands of those who seek to put themselves in its way. The hidden-ness of the divine/human complementarity thereby blooms in the very acts that inspirit us. In so doing, those acts meet bodily the epistemological and psychological conditions of faith. Herein lies the solution to what has become known as the "problem of double-agency". Profitably rewriting Levinas, then, we might say that *faith* is first philosophy.[31]

But now consciousness of such connections and the debts they imply tempts me to go further, to run the risk of saying too much. Let us be bold and make the matter plain. Let us say, unequivocally, those connections supply *the* analogy for 'the God about whom we have something to do.'[32]

And there is always so much to do, not least because *this* analogy is not *merely* an analogy. It is not an arbitrary image or convenient cipher, side-by-side with the reality it symbolises. In fact, it is something we cannot do without because it is the form of our interpersonal relations, and so the form of consciousness itself.[33] It is, moreover, the form that divine/human complementarity takes: a direct encounter – the only one we are ever likely to have – with a Will working itself out in the development of consciousness. It is the very stuff of Creation.

It is also the stuff of faith, is it not? In the life of Christ, our theory of persons finds concrete expression. The Son is given to represent the Father in a fiercely demonstrative analogue for grace and providence.[34] Here, too, the analogue is no more a cipher than 'He' is a theoretical construct or psychic projection. In this manifestation of kenotic dynamism, we find the blood and bones of divine outreach, the enactment of love and sacrifice. Is that not, after all, what Christian faith demands of us: to redouble the analogy, recapitulate the symbolism, and imitate the Son as much as in our power lies? Not so much a symbol, then; but more, as C. S. Lewis might have said, a sacrament.[35]

To say it plainer still, we strive to put what we are pleased to call "our theory of persons" (human and divine) into practice and live the analogy of interpersonality. Even, or especially, here and now. We rely on it, you

and I, to unlock the content of this book, to articulate the development of consciousness, of friendship, of love; a transformation upon which the yearned-for response utterly depends. Properly understood, as Conti has put it to me, we set the matrix of social-cum-metaphysical connections trembling with spiritual anticipation, the Other syncopating with the fixing-points of a web that vibrates in every strand. *Circumincessio.*

In sober philosophical tones, this is the dialectic of a *religious* consciousness; that is, consciousness passing itself through hallowed images of infinite otherness, a sacramental self re-enacting the place of a holy Other in the name of that Other. By such anthropo-psychological insights would Farrer change the face of modern metaphysics, bearing 'in the hand of love' (the saints remind us) the mirror of its own highest ideals.[36]

Conti himself provides a prime example of those insights in action, putting theory into practice and vice versa. This is, perhaps, not surprising since he too has followed this path, in vigorous pursuit of personal transformations and social syncopations.

Having encountered *Finite and Infinite* while still at Princeton, Conti found his thoughts written in Farrer's hand, so devoted a lifetime's study to a mind that reflected his own. The reverberations of that encounter continued even into the hereafter. The teacher participated in this, his last doctoral student's development, far beyond the teacher's mortal span. In response, the student amplified the gifts of his teacher, blurring the line of creative complementarity still further. The end result was an exhaustive – and surely definitive – exegesis in the shape of *Metaphysical Personalism.*[37]

Focusing on the evolution of Farrer's thinking between *Finite and Infinite* and *Faith and Speculation, Metaphysical Personalism* sought (successfully, I believe) to rebut the common misconception of this as a shift from orthodox apologetics to Wittgensteinian fideism. In fact, Farrer took a far more subtle intellectual journey, so was able to offer a more robust and consistent philosophical engagement with questions of theology. That journey represents a progressive attempt to reconcile transcendental presuppositions with the realities of religious practice. Therein lie the social and spiritual connections which drove his own development.

Sociality implies moral agency and moral agency supplies theology with a concrete analogy for transcendence. The transactions of

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