



## Perspectives on the Self: Substantial and Dialogical Aspects

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*To the individualistic and rationalistic notions which have characterized Western thought in modern times, currents in the psychology of the self have added globalized and dialogical accounts. Several metaphors have been utilized to convey structural and functional aspects of the self, such as the computer (information processing) and the narrative (regarding the self as multivoiced and engaging in intrapsychic and intersubjective dialogue). The latter paradigms tend to render the self as constructive, but unbound to any referential anchor and elaborating its own reality. This paper deals with a redefined substantial/dialogical personhood, which integrates aspects from psychological theory and theological reflection. The self is defined as being grounded in God, in others, and in the cosmos, with a sense of ontological, epistemological, and teleological basis derived from biblical anthropology. Several propositions and implications are provided as derivatives of the notions presented, with implications drawn from such attempts at psychological-theological integration.*

The self construct has been an object of concern for philosophers, theologians, and psychologists. Metaphors have been utilized in all these fields to convey notions about the self's structure and function. Hermans, Kempen, and van Loon have alluded to the fact that two metaphors which play a major role in the field of psychological research are the computer and the narrative.<sup>1</sup> The computer metaphor allows for the investigation of the self as an information processing machine, and the narrative renders versions of a multivoiced self which engages in stories, fiction, metaphors, and dialogues of intrapsychic as well as intersubjective natures. These two currents may be compared in view of theological notions of ontological (substantial, essential, or sub-structural) and relational aspects of the self.

In this article, the self is rendered in terms of an interplay between substantial notions and dialogical capacities, with "personhood" defined as the capacity for and the condition of being human, embodied and differentiated from its ecosystem, and relationally grounded. Being human implies the presence of an essential characteristic- a minimum biological criterion manifesting the presence of human DNA- to which psychological criteria are juxtaposed (expressing cognitive, affective, and volitional processes proper to humans). A distinctive element in such a definition is the postulation of a transcendent criterion: a self made in the *imago Dei* and capable of a personal relationship and fellowship with God.<sup>2</sup> In essence, the self is an aspect of a more comprehensive definition of being human, involving the concepts of body, soul, and spirit. To such essential characteristics, the aspects of dialogical personhood are added. When coupled to the self, the adjective "dialogical" is not necessarily restricted to the meaning conveyed in narrative psychology, but goes beyond such connotations. It is redefined to denote not only the expression of internal

dialogues between the different positions of "I" (multivoiced self) and the introjected collective voices of a contextual community, but also the transactions with a transcendent interlocutor (God). The expression "one another" occurs 52 times in the New Testament, and seems to convey relational aspects of a self grounded in a community, which may be considered the anchoring collective voice interacting along the spiritual "resocialization" of the self upon entering into fellowship with such a "family of faith."

### **The Self as an Evolved Construct**

Present concepts of the self have evolved from philosophical, theological, and psychological notions of pre-modern times, influenced by a bipolar ontology in which Platonic and Aristotelian versions of human nature were postulated. In Plato's terms, every person had a "packaged nature" which contained potentially everything that such a being could be or ever become. On the other hand, the Aristotelian version considered the person as a tabula rasa receiving impressions of reality, but without the capacity to transcend itself, except in the sense of being a "social" animal. The nature of the self was regarded as an objectified substance, with *entelecheia* (inherent capacities to grow into an intellectual entity), or a being endowed with a certain rational potency embedded in its substance.

The Enlightenment added to such notions. It presented the human as a self-determined entity of an autonomous nature. The self was understood as being logical, perceived in terms of cognitive supremacy over the rest of the cosmic order. Descriptions along substantial, structural, topographic, and dynamic notions emerged from this enthroned self, all of which have demonstrated an individualistic, rationalistic, and tribalistic (intersubjective agreement among selves of a particular kind) legacy. In stressing constructs of an individualistic nature, modernism has severed the self from meaningful dialogue with community as well as transcending reality. The loss of an overarching meaningful purpose has deeply affected the considerations of philosophers, scientists, and academicians. The self-critical consciousness and private experience of an autonomous entity became the hallmarks of a solipsistic system.

Anderson alluded to early American thinkers as fostering individualism, citing Emerson's notions of the "internalized god in us" as "the imperial self," talking with itself, about self, to others.<sup>3</sup> Lasch observed that modern culture is inherently narcissistic, dissolving the links by which people have been rooted in time and space, drawing them into impersonal centers of modern tribalism, only to make them prisoners of loneliness in the midst of a crowd, with self-centeredness and drives to enhance self-esteem.<sup>4</sup> Bellah et al. state that our culture has embarked on a "nervous search for the true self," issuing idiosyncratic, extravagant conclusions drawn from such endeavors.<sup>5</sup> They promote a more balanced view between individualism and communalism. Cushman described the ethnocentric claims of the Western world which have advocated "self-contained individualism" that resulted in emptiness.<sup>6</sup> The self in his view should be studied from a broader perspective, beyond ethnocentrism and across times, drawing from social diversity as a vessel that must be continuously filled to be fulfilled. The self of modern times has also been described as a "distinctive whole set" contrasted against other such wholes, "egocentric," "selfish," and "self-reliant and independent."<sup>7</sup> Emerging from its embeddedness in various collectivities, the modern self became the unit of social concern, regarded as a free-standing central unit or "self-contained."<sup>8</sup> Hermans, Kempen, and van Loon summarized these accounts and rendered them as a background for their promotion of a different paradigm: that of a globalized, dialogical, and multivoiced self relating to a social context.<sup>9</sup>

Constructivists dedicated their efforts to render a version of the self as a dynamic, evolving entity which optimizes contingencies. Kelly presented the self as a scientist, a living organism dynamically apprehending data and constructing meaning, with the capacity to be dialogical and proactive.<sup>10</sup> As an active processor, the self builds its own reality in a constant flux of hypothesis testing, rearranging, and reformulating the meaning of constructed reality. In doing that, the self remains autonomous, individualistic, solipsistic, and scientifically aimed at providing sense to an ever changing, relative context for its being. Critical constructivists, such as Guidano, Lakatos, and Mahoney, have argued for a moment-to-moment process that constitutes personal experience, inseparable from and influenced by an active personal knowing process of a tacit nature.<sup>11</sup> Maturana, postulating radical constructivism based on natural epistemology, presents a self-created, self-produced, self-organized constructor, seen as a unity of mind and nature and propelled with autopoiesis (the self-organization of living systems).<sup>12</sup>

## Cognitive Metaphors and Rational Dialogue

Scientists who approach the human from a biological (physiological, neurological, biochemical) perspective are working toward a better understanding of the working brain and its individual cells, where most of life's choices seem to be made. Computer models (information processing) are taken as metaphors to convey the knowledge about psychological processes. The main question (and a very old one) in such endeavors is: How can a physical entity produce, emanate, or give rise to conscious experience? Attempts to elucidate aspects of sentience, cognition, and emotion as being present in the experiencing human being, have proven to be quite elusive. Those engaged in such pursuit have been divided into "mysterians," who have given up such a search, and those who "naturalize" the mind.<sup>13</sup> The "mind" is considered as the emergent property of organismic evolution which took place in the brain, culminating in a field of events and transactional processes. These are thought to respond to principles of complex cybernetics, developing in a trans-personal context without necessarily having a central administrator. Aspects of the self are translated in terms of transactional capacities between the differentiated organism and its ecosystemic surrounding transduced through multiple channels. Such transactions combine sensory, cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes which follow parallel, convoluted patterns and emerge as chunked, tacit expressions. The optimization of such contingencies takes place due to the organismic capacity to self-regulate and transact with its environment in an adaptive fashion, resulting in "mindful" outcomes.

Discoveries in the natural domain (i.e., gathered from physics) tend to translate rapidly into the social sciences. For example, psychologists may adopt some discoveries and musings, such as Prigogine's revision of the second law of thermodynamics<sup>14</sup> and Waldrop's complexity notions,<sup>15</sup> to draw analogies applicable to human aspects and processes. In open systems, the spontaneous emergence of structures that are self-perpetuating and relatively stable over time is a possibility, thanks to the dissipative structures that scatter their internally generated entropy into their ecosystem, and drain it of its assimilable order (negentropy). Such a notion allows for transformation and renewal in relational systems (i.e., dyadic, family, or intrapsychic voices) which otherwise may be doomed to decay or dysfunction. Also, instead of looking at cognitive-affective or behavioral processes as unraveling along linear causality, open systems may adopt the notion that order may emerge from chaos through nonlinear dynamic processes, raising themselves to higher levels of self-organization. The emerging science "at the edge of order and chaos" is provoking social scientists into construing new paradigms to understand human complexity and renewal. Along such endeavors, the self is reframed in new terms: an entity is endowed with a natural teleological aim, becoming organized as an expected outcome from bottom-up processes starting at the individual living cells. Yet, the field is not unified, as thinkers differ about the possibility of understanding the human as a processor of information.

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Promising and challenging theories have been proposed by Dennett, who claims to have "consciousness explained."<sup>16</sup> His views are rational but counterintuitive. They demand a revision of the strongly held notion of a Cartesian theater (unified view of consciousness) in favor of an array of metaphors with the emergence of multiple drafts and enactments. On the other hand, Penrose argues for a new physics which would approach the study of human consciousness from a yet unknown angle. He believes that human consciousness at the present time transcends computation.<sup>17</sup>

If a science of consciousness proves to be difficult to tackle, the elucidation of the old notion of the "unconscious" is even more so. Freud challenged the rationality of the self early in this century, alluding to the unconscious processes which indicated more primitive, irrational, or unrefined propensities.<sup>18</sup> Ego

psychologists who reframed his concepts revised the ego's ingredients with their emphasis on conflict-free spheres and added "ego strength" and rational-social dealings. In his own idiosyncratic fashion, Lacan took aim at such logicalization of Freudian doctrine and returned to a neo-orthodox emphasis on the irrational nature of personhood. He argued in favor of an unconscious, structured as a language which escapes the control of the individual, a discourse censored from consciousness. His version of the ego was non-empirical, seen as a fundamentally illusory identity, inherently weak, alienating and alienated, a clear hindrance to analysis. The "word" was essential for Lacan, who saw the dialectical grasp for meaning as the main task of analysis. Subjectivity, for him, had an inherently bipolar dialogical structure, as speech always implies a reply: there is no speaking subject without an auditor who replies.<sup>19</sup>

Cognitive scientists have "liberated" such a construct from the exclusive psychoanalytical domain. It is now acknowledged that tacit ordering processes are involved in all aspects of our lives, and in all points of our brain and body.<sup>20</sup> The distinction between higher cortical functions and lower centers in the brain is the legacy of neurosciences that now begin to give credit to the operational structure of the nervous system as a whole. The convergence of cognitive science, evolutionary epistemology, and developmental and relational trends has allowed for a renewed emphasis on the inseparable aspects of the self, with knowing, feeling, and doing as emergent properties of the holistic nature. Scientists are making dedicated efforts to elucidate metacognitive and intuitional processes, focusing on personal, tacit ways of knowing, with "superconscious" emphasis replacing irrational, unconscious labels.<sup>21</sup>

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One interesting aspect of investigation in neural networks is the thrust to elucidate how emergent properties work. Through a natural epistemology, derived, chunked, and emerging properties are introduced with concepts such as "Darwin machines" at work, shaping thoughts in milliseconds rather than millennia.<sup>22</sup> Besides reactive processing, anticipatory capacities and distinguishing properties between self and nonself, born out of biological theories of consciousness, are ascertained.<sup>23</sup> The self, in such terms "is not the self of narrative awareness, constitutive of personal or social identity, but the subject of interoceptive signals that alert the organism to its own homeostatic state: to its automatic, neuroendocrinological and hedonic condition."<sup>24</sup> Therefore, in this camp, computer metaphors and their related robots provide for basic explanations of personhood in ever-increasing refinements along natural, evolutionary lines. Such considerations do not necessarily get stuck on debates about whether the self is individualistic or relational, but rather focus on processes of serial and parallel nature, with analogic and digital "voices." Integration between the individual set and the whole array is desirable, as even "Darwin machines" may profit from being connected to networks instead of being considered isolated units devoid of the benefits of systems at work.

### **The Self as Multivoiced and Dialogical**

As it has already been noted, in terms of metaphoric appeals to describe or understand the self, computer-based models have been countered with narrative analogies. The individualistic and rationalistic notions which have characterized Western thought for centuries are now compared and contrasted with dialogical notions which include personal myths, stories, and intrasubjective, polyphonic voices as valid avenues to investigate.

Current trends among dialogical thinkers go beyond rational, substantial, and propositional notions. Several authors have emphasized the narrative nature of the self.<sup>25</sup> Such notions propose a multifaceted self, a set of contrasting characters (*imagoes*—Ä) relating as personified voices of diverse nature, affect laden, and

engaging in mutual dialogues, often opposite to each other and yet, cohesively held together in intrapsychic fashion. Beyond rationalism, those who adopt a postmodern view tend to attribute voices to the self which allow for personal myths, stories, and storytelling as guiding principles for the self. Hermans has provided a comprehensive review of such trends.<sup>26</sup>

The notion of an intersubjective dialogue has been credited to William James, the father of American psychology. He emphasized the distinction between "I" and "Me" in which the self was both the knower and the known. James demonstrated continuity in time, distinctness from others, and a will to choose between the aspects of reality being processed.<sup>27</sup> Mead also pointed to this distinction.<sup>28</sup> The ideas of neoanalytical theorists may be recast into updated versions of intrapsychic dialogue. For example, Sullivan regarded the self as part of a social system, always transacting with others, who represent the most critical factor in shaping the self. In his system, the "good me" and the "bad me" as well as the personified good/bad objects (mother, father, etc.) become "personifications."<sup>29</sup> These are organized patterns of interactions of subjective nature: images, concepts, representations of others, things, or abstracted principles which are introjected and symbolized by the self. Once these personifications are formed, they guide all social endeavors.

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The self in psychoanalytic "object relations" theory has been considered as developing the internalization of significant love objects from birth on.<sup>30</sup> From an autistic phase in which the newborn is one with the socializing object, the incipient self develops into a symbiotic phase in which shared/overlapping selves dialogue in continuous transactions. The love object who nurtures is considered the ground of being for the tentative wanderings of the emerging self. Finally, a third phase (differentiation) allows for a more separate engagement between dialogical selves in relationship. The formation of structures, boundaries, and defenses of the self are embedded in relational terms. The internalized objects may represent the personalized or multivoiced aspects of the self, as they engage in organizing and guiding aspects of relationships of an intrapsychic and an interpersonal nature.

Postmodern thinkers tend to do away with the distinctions between the knower, the knowing, and the known. The emphasis upon verification (confirmed by experience) as the divider between scientific and nonscientific propositions is coupled with justification (quest for authorized knowledge). Yet, the quest for justification with ultimate certainty experienced an erosion, a giving way to more personal, tacit trends. Challenging the notions of "true" objectivity, rationality, or absoluteness in the apprehension of reality, all knowledge is considered to be "personal" and biased in such paradigms.<sup>31</sup> The self in this framework is seen as spatially organized and embodied, social with "the other" not outside but in the self-structure, resulting in a multiphonic array of selves in dialogue. The emphasis is placed not upon a unified center of consciousness (such as the Cartesian theater), but rather upon a multiplicity of "I" positions in an imaginal-affective landscape engaging in dialogue, with emotive voices within the system functioning like interactive characters in a polyphonic narrative.

Social constructivism presents a dialogical self, transacting not only with the particularities of a context, but also with a larger system, a "multiverse," drifting along in the currents of this age with no oars, no anchors, and no particular sense of direction. The voices of this self seem to bounce autistically from the inner walls of a solipsistic container, or to diffuse and get lost among a multitude of other voices that are construing alternative meanings and dialogue without any possible referential anchor point due to the plausibility of a multiuniverse filled with noise.<sup>32</sup>



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A biblical anthropology, derived from scriptural Hebrew views, presents the nature of the person with descriptive and narrative concepts conveying a dynamic relationship.<sup>39</sup> The term "flesh" is used to denote creatureliness and also employed to label all living creatures. Biological urges and limitations are presented in solidarity with a created order. Such weakness is constantly presented in contrast with God's creating and sustaining power. Thus, the term "flesh" points not so much to the nature or essence of personhood, but to the lack of personal power. Such a notion is a derivative of an emphasis upon God's activity, not just God's essence. Thus, God's activity in creation, redemptive and sustaining movement in history, and relatedness in love and justice are seen as "ingredients" in the interpretations of the *imago Dei*.<sup>40</sup>

The word translated "spirit" may show breath, air, wind, and properties coming from God to the human, as a relational principle of life, a vital force, the unseen spiritual element in humans. It also refers to a dispositional stance, a mode of thinking, the empowering from God which allows the self to act. Will and counsel are also implied by the concept, as to speak of "self-assertion," the capacity for intellectual endeavors, insight, and self-understanding. All in all, regardless of whether it refers to the breath of life, to the principle of life itself, to the spirit of humans, or to the intellect, personhood is a gift from God. To be created in the *imago Dei* indicates a reflection of God's own spiritual nature and power, with a capacity for creativity, spirituality, and transcendence all embodied within a skin, and yet, activated through empowered dialogue. As a contained, interacted with, mutually engaged reflection, such a definition may be regarded in expressive, descriptive, ontological, and substantial fashion without denying the relational capacity for dialogue and fellowship in love.

The self is not a "given" or a static entity, but is endowed with a dynamic movement of a hypostatic-ecstatic nature.<sup>40</sup> The term *hypo-stasis* refers to an ontological, essential, or sub-structural construct, which serves as a "substantial" base which upholds the characteristics of being human. It serves as a defining construct for the unique and emerging self, differentiated from its engendering entities (parents) and socializing systems. This self is endowed with energy to be, and to enact a process of growth without necessarily ending in an isolated state, devoid of grounding. The term *ek-stasis* conveys movement, as if the self is transpersonally "coming out" and targeting ("moving toward") love objects.

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From such considerations, an integrated emphasis is placed upon substantial self-understanding as well as upon relational capacity. Rather than presenting a self which "possesses" an essence (*natura*) as the substance of its existence, the self may be postulated as standing out (*ex-sisto*) as a person toward others.<sup>41</sup> Thus, personhood constructs include not only properties defined with "self-" prefixes (e.g., self-consciousness, self-reflection, self-determination), but also the capacity for relationship, fellowship, and dialogue. Such dialogue may be enacted with past, future, and present objects, both external and internal to the self. Multivoiced events/ processes are perceived to be enacted within, in-between, or beyond the boundaries which comprise the life space of the self. From a multilevel, multivoiced perspective, the self may be considered as being both receptive and expressive along its capacities to engage at biological

(natural), psychological (soulical), and spiritual levels. The spiritual level may encompass the capacity for intuition, faith, illumination-inspiration, and related states/processes of a "higher" nature.

**A twist in the paradigm: Sin and depravity of the self.**

Ä Theological reflection points to the notion that the original "edenic" (unimpeded, open, mutual) dialogue was impinged upon by the entrance of sin. The concept of sin indicates both the "missing of the target" and the trespassing of God's will. Misdirection in the movement and aim of the self, lack of true self-actualization of God's intended design, and defiance/overstepping the boundaries demarcated by God for the self, are all connotations of this concept.

Although the potential or capacity for a transactional dialogue exists, it has been affected by sin. "The Fall" is defined as the disobedient event-process which rendered the human under the penalty and consequences of trespassing God's boundaries and missing God's targets, with the consequential separation and movement away from God. The result of improper grounding is a condition known as "depravity," or the human incapacity to do what is right at all times (implying the presence of absolute voices "standardized" with moral tones). The separated, autonomous self cannot engage freely or perceive reality with accuracy. Thus, a deep reserve exists about the intrinsic capacities of the self (in terms of observation, perception, inductive or deductive reasoning, judgment, reliability, and validity) to ascertain "the things of God." The narrative of the divisive temptation points to the distortion of the intended meaning of God's dialogue, deviating the person away from the original design and purpose. Thus, left to its own will, constructive powers, and ungrounded faculties, the dialogical self experiences distortions and is incapable of addressing God in an unimpeded fashion.

Inherent in the self's endowment is the limitation imposed by entropic contingencies which ecosystemically filter spiritual reality. Although conscious of its own (self-awareness of) finitude, mortality, and precariousness, the self may be unaware of God's provisions: "The man without the Spirit... cannot understand *spiritual things*" Ä\_Ä(1 Cor. 2:14, NIV), which denote a need for acquiring and employing the capacity to ascertain transcending reality from a different basis and point of view. Without being grounded in God, who can provide redemption, meaning, and purpose, life under the sun does not make much ultimate sense. What has been intended for ecstatic movement, becomes apostatic (moving away from the object of love), solipsistic (self-contained), moving in two directions: in centrifugal fashion away from God as interlocutor, while introverting the thrust in a narcissistic, centripetal, or "selfish" fashion. Such an apostatic self, having rejected God as the interlocutor, seeks to find in the multitude of voices of the multiuniverse someone or something to feedforward (anticipate) and receive feedback for validation and meaning.

It is my opinion that the "multivoiced" aspect of the self emerged as a consequence of separation and departure from God as an interlocutor, leaving the human subject to intrapsychic complexity, disarray, and dialectic endeavors in attempts to make sense out of perceived reality. Dominance among such "voices" would denote the "main character" of the person at a given time, gaining a consolidated and customary way of expressing the self.

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It follows that "self-justification" (the posture of the apostatic, ungrounded self which declares "I am okay") may deprive a person from a real encounter with God's offer of grace and justification (to be declared as being in good standing before the standards and expectations of the postulator of the self's existence and

destiny). An example of this is narrated in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14). The biblical narrative presents a vivid picture, with body language as well as verbal voicing of both selves in dialogue with God. The Pharisee's dialogue was enacted as he "stood and prayed thus with himself" while the publican, "standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'" The publican's dialogue was markedly self-deprecatory and repentant. And yet, he found grace and mercy, being justified by God; while the Pharisee departed in self-righteousness and was invalidated by the source of justification.

It is due to the consequences of being inoperative and not in tune with God at the level of the spirit (in spite of acquiring intellectual, sensitive, or habitual skills along soulful avenues) that the self engages in self-justification of a solipsistic nature. The internal dialogues reveal the character of the individual engaged in intrapsychic expressions. For example, the account of an ambitious man who "thought to himself" and engaged in an internal dialogue of expansionistic, yet solipsistic nature, is coupled with the statement, "But God said to him, 'You fool'" (Luke 12:16-21). Another reference is made in Psalm 14:1 to a person who "says in his heart, 'There is no God'" In this account, the character is also described as being less than adequate.

A multivoiced self is capable not only of self-recrimination, as in the case of the tax collector, but of recognition of isolation, separateness from proper grounding, and the vacuum created by apostasy. One example is found in the narrative of the anticipatory, imaginable dialogues which the prodigal son engaged in while preparing for action. He, according to the parable, reflected upon his predicament and rehearsed his script in his mind before he returned to his father (Luke 15:17-19). The recognition of depravity which generates the internal dialogue and fosters a repentant stance, is coupled to the appeal of the memory of his benevolent father. The dialogue being voiced in feedforward fashion, fostered a relational stance "as if" the father were present. Orienting toward the source of his grounding allowed the dialogical self to move toward the eventual, "actual" encounter.

### **The need for regeneration**

Ignoring God as the ground of being as well as the defining, energizing, and justifying interlocutor who provides meaning, renders the self as an "apostatic" or "introverted hypostasis" animated with centripetal thrust and subject to entropic decay. Hence, the need exists to be reactivated and inaugurated in terms of re-establishing a dialogue with God (commonly alluded to as "to be born again" or "to be born of the Spirit" so as to experience the regeneration of the proper substructure, state, condition, and function).

Such a transforming event is coupled to the self's need to learn to dialogue and "grow up again" (be resocialized by God so as to speak in God's terms, developing spiritual wisdom, and understanding God's definitions of reality). The Bible is a redemptive account of God's transactions with the derived personhood-in-relation. As the New Covenant unravels, more expressed aspects of God's will and design for the human appear. Due to the self's incapacity to be and to do what has been designed and expected, God took the initiative to re-establish the dialogue and fellowship. God acted in an unilateral, unconditional, and proactive fashion, to address the human in propitiatory, redemptive, and transforming fashion. Having eliminated the negative consequences of disobedience, separation, and brokenness in dialogue, God invites the self to relate in Spirit and truth, to know him, and to receive his laws within the heart and mind (Heb. 10:16-18).

Theologically speaking, the redeemed-transformed self is not aimless, adrift, or purposeless. Rather, it is teleologically summoned to fulfill a destiny in fellowship with its postulator who has invited the *imago Dei* to participate in an ultimate state, condition, and function yet to be actualized.

### **Hypothetical Constructs of Grounded Selfhood**

Structural constructs. This author entertains the notion (and appeals to metaphors) proposed by thinkers who regard the self as standing out as an existing person, yet grounded in God and in others.<sup>42</sup> To represent

the multivoiced, intrapsychic, and interpersonal aspects of the dialogical aspects, spatial metaphors are appealed to, somewhat similar to the ones postulated by Lakatos.<sup>43</sup> Such rendering presents the self as endowed with an "inner core" of metaphysically held beliefs and values, surrounded with a "protective belt." The construct is expanded here to include dialogic processes of anticipatory, reactive, and proactive nature, with feedback and feedforward capacities for transaction with inner voices, collective voices, and the voice of God.

This inner core is self-organizing and transactive, and may be open to the coparticipation with the Postulator of its being, at the level of the Spirit after being activated by the will, action, and summoning call of God. The inner core may be conceptualized as being transacted by a zonal boundary which has an "inline" encompassing the tacit, personal knowledge of reality, the intrinsic/ontological endowments, and emergent properties derived from a relationship to God and others. This is the realm of faith, spiritual intuition, and deep awareness of God's Spirit. It is activated, inaugurated, and empowered by God to function in relationship to him and spiritual reality. The "outline" of this zonal boundary experiences accessibility to the "soulical" attributes, the emergent properties derived psychologically from intrinsic motivations, proactive endeavors, and introjected voices and images. Thus, deep-seated tacit knowledge, faith, and capacity for love may be surrounded, amalgamated, or transacted with reason, logic, entrenched attitudes, self-confirmatory bias, stereotypes, and self-pronouncements which comprise the cognitive, affective, and behavioral structures, processes, and events which belong to this zonal construct. Volitional aspects are imbedded as well, representing the motivational, proactive, and purposive dimensions of the self-organizing capacity of the inner core which transacts with its "zonal boundary." The hypothetical protective belt serves as a "semi-permeable membrane" filtering incoming information and allowing the trans-duction of intuitional, faith-based expressions and spiritual dimensions "from within." It also functions as a "consolidating mechanism" which buttresses and affirms the contents of the inner core.

The core-belt system is a dynamic construct which experiences degrees of strength and functionality to serve the purpose of "holding oneself together." For example, the scriptural expression "gird up the loins of your understanding" (or "gird up your minds" in 1 Peter 1:13 which conveys the act of gathering a loose garment and tucking it under the belt for freedom of movement), in my opinion, represents a metaphorical way of expressing the need to "gather oneself together" or "tighten the belt" to prepare for spiritual or emotional struggles, service, or tasks. In doing so, the self is not just guarding an inner core of metaphysically held beliefs of guiding nature, but is proactive and purposive in action.

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The outline boundary bordering the cosmos "outside the skin" of the embodied self deals with the transactions between the unique features of the amalgamated "inner core/surrounding belt" and the "external reality" (the ecosystemic environment). The self may engage in transpersonal dialogue with the cosmos and its stressors, demands, and contingencies present in the surrounding context, as well as with stressors, activators, or motivators which emerge from the biological sensations and needs of the organism, translated into voiced subceptive, apperceptive, or even perceptive promptings.

Between the inner core and its surrounding zonal-psychological outline, the multivoiced self may engage in intrapsychic-polyphonic dialogue. Whatever sensations, stimuli of varied nature (including "the other"), enter the phenomenal field of the self and in superconscious, conscious, or subceptive fashion, are apprehended, such may be acted upon, processed, and responded to with feedback and feedforward processes. Examples of an intrapsychic struggle are gathered from Paul's letter to the Romans (7:14-26), where he recognizes the internal pull between two positions of the "I": "It is no longer I (an inner core) who do it, but I (surrounding entropic zonal aspects

intruding and controlling core aspects). "So then, I myself in my mind (an inner core) am slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature (unregenerated aspect, natural self juxtaposed to regenerated self) a slave to the law of sin."

An example of the dialogical nature of the self is found in Psalm 42, where David sings to God in worship: "my soul pants for you, O God" (v. 1). Next, he turns to his introjected images of the past, remembering his enemies: "while men say to me all day long, 'Where is your God?'" (v. 10). He also remembers his friends: "how I used to go with the multitude, leading them to the house of God" (v. 4). Then, he addresses his soul, as if from the top: "Why are you so downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?" (v. 11). The many voices of despair were superseded by a metacognitive expression, which appears to be an empowered and dominant voice which reminds him of his grounding in God. Such internal dialogue is intended to serve as a buttressing self-talk aimed at facing the realities of his existence under the sun.

Intrapsychic dialogue is established with the capacity to target or focus and intentionally process reality as perceived (reality-based, distorted, imaginable, or fictional), accommodated through idiosyncratic, mediational processes (attributional, value based) in a proactive, dynamic, and transactive fashion. Thus, a parallel, multi-level/multi-zonal, convoluted, and cybernetic version of the dialogical self emerges, who encounters the cosmos at the boundary of the "me! Not me" with the skin acting as a barrier along the physical dimension, and the level of differentiation-individuation along the psychological lines.

### **Implications of These Views**

The views presented in this article allow for some considerations with regard to the substantial-dialogical personhood.

### **The need for a differential psychology of the self**

Difficulties are inherent in any attempts to render a general psychology of the self, as the ontology, epistemology, and teleology which depart from secular propositions allow for an undifferentiated or unqualified definition of personhood, without resorting to "redeemed self" as over "natural self." At "redemptive levels" of explanation, the personhood of a "believer" is regarded to be qualitatively differentiated from the nonbeliever on the basis of grounding, belonging to God's fellowship, empowering and validation of its capacities, and dialogue at the level of the Spirit. The finite "I am" is postulated as being grounded in the ultimate I Am, deriving a qualified personhood from such basis.

The dialogue of redeemed nature is not a given, nor automatically ascribed by culture, tradition, inheritance, or self-prompting, but is presented as an event-process in which the self, summoned by God the postulator, accepts the invitation to reconnect (re-ligare in Latin) and have fellowship/rootedness on the graciously provided basis of a vicarious, mediational, and redemptive act of God in history. God, having dialogued in various manners in ancient days, finally did so through the incarnated logos: "in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son" (Heb. 1:3). So, "as the Holy Spirit says: Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts" (Heb. 2:7).

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## Capacity for transcendence

The dialogical self embodied in space and time can transcend both. Beyond spatial limitations, the self may "come out" (metaphorically speaking) and be ecstatic through relationships with God and others, or "bring in" others into voiced, subjective considerations. Beyond temporal boundaries, the self may engage with history: its own introjected and stored past, that of others who may be voiced as memories, or gathered accounts through stories. Reflecting on God's capacity to "call things as if they are when they are not yet," the grounded self may in anticipatory fashion engage in eschatology by rehearsing prognostic notions, expectations, and affirmations made in hope and faith in future events.

## Transactions with God's dominant voice

Dialogical personhood expresses itself as well as treasures up the expressions of love objects. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" was the counsel of St. Paul (Col. 3:16, NIV). Thus, dialogue with the postulations of God (introjected, amalgamated, chunked, and forming part of a superconscious repertoire of voices) is possible, in a constant "renewal of the mind" (Rom. 12:1, 2) to allow for creativity without detouring into apostatic or solipsistic processes. The coparticipation among propositional truth, existential knowledge, and psychological processes (the awareness of phenomena of subceptive, apperceptive, subconscious, or superconscious nature as well as that derived from the rational processes engaged in cognitive processing of information at "obvious" levels) allows for meaningful internal dialogues in constant flux. The "chunking" of such becomes the substructure for personal, tacit knowledge, which appears as "being there," proceeding from data gathering to abstractions with insight, understanding, and wisdom.

A Christian may regard Scriptures as the multivoiced account of God's instrumental authors (prophets, apostles, psalmists, etc.). Together, such diverse renderings convey an admirable unity of purpose, claiming to be inspired ("God-breathed"). All the writers may be regarded as being in dialogue with the same dominant voice- the eternal, constant, and guiding Logos, the Verb who finally became "incarnated" ("And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us" [John 1:14]) so he could address humankind as a relational person. Establishing a dialogue with the Scriptures allows for a fellowship with a living Word, not with a dead letter (Heb. 4:12), taking "to heart" the words of Jesus, "The words which I have spoken to you, they are spirit and life" (John 7:64). And, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). Thus, being grounded in the voice of God through Scriptures, and also being grounded in God at the level of the Spirit through redemption and transformation, allows the self to redefine and reattribute meaning to reality with faith and hope, not as a drifting array of multivoices, but as a cohesive and purposive dialogical self.

## Dialoguing with the cosmos

Fine tuning into God's voice may allow a person to dialogue with God's creation in contemplation. "Listening to cosmic dialogue" appears in metaphorical personifications, in narrative fashion: "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out throughout all the earth, and their words to the end of the world" (Ps. 19:1-4). Also, "Deep calls to deep, in the roar of your waterfalls, all your waves and breakers have swept over me" (Ps. 42:7).

Dialogue with the cosmos implies not only a reflective stance, but an administrative responsibility as well. Humans have been given the cultural mandate to "name" the rest of the creatures (Gen. 2:20). In ancient thought, the Semitic "naming" implied the capacity to define, discern, investigate, and learn the inner secrets of things, the ontological aspect or the essence of things. As related to inquiry, the human was not given the capacity to name God, but vice versa. Attempts to define, discern, and learn the inner secrets of an incomprehensible God in systematic renderings of logical nature ("to name" or define means to encompass in comprehensive categories) fall short of embracing its most ambitious subject. Yet "humble"

theological and psychological dialogue among those in academia is possible. Thus, scientific endeavors are encouraged, sanctioned, and validated to create or to "toil" (in a secondary sense, out of God's ex-nihilo\_Ä\_Ä created order).

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**As related to therapeutic work, the dialogical emphasis places communication at the center stage, with rapport building, empathic engagement, working through problems in the context of mutual dialogue.**

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Dialogue may also assume a unique tone when the self addresses situational constraints and difficulties encountered in the cosmos, abstracted into concepts which are somehow "personified." Observe the case of a person addressing a "mountain" with the faith that it will be removed (Zech. 4:7) or inanimate objects of unfruitful nature (Jesus scolding or cursing a fig tree for not having fruits). Dialogue becomes dialectic and paradoxical when the self encounters dissonant, oppositional, or conflicting voices in its investigation: Data from the cosmos may directly conflict with the metaphysically held beliefs at the core. Yet, without denying the sensical, empirical, or scientific endeavor, the self may hold on to the "girded loins of its understanding" due to the nature of the tacit protectiveness of the hypothesized "belt" holding the self's capacity to tolerate ambiguity. The resolution of cognitive dissonance is possible by the modes employed in bolstering some voices while giving a lesser value or softer tone to others.

#### **Practical considerations: Integrating therapeutic notions**

Ä In therapeutic work, the dialogical emphasis places communication at center stage, with rapport building, empathic engagement, and working through problems in the context of mutual dialogue. "Talking cures" may indeed recover their original intention and meaning, employing both rational as well as dialogical discourse in interaction. Diagnostic considerations may include the understanding of the person's self-dialogue (autistic, idiosyncratic, polyphonic-novel type, introverted- hypostatic, apostatic, etc.). Impressions about the person's troubles are aided by the discernment along introjects in which enmeshed voices appear (symbiotic, judgmental, ambivalent). Dominant voices, as in the case of repetitive obsessions and self-critical, intropunitive stances adopted by the multivoiced self, may be assessed in relation to irrational self-confirmatory beliefs which foster psychopathology.

#### **Conclusion**

The creative and sustaining Word of God is seen as postulating a substantial self with dialogical tones, who by virtue of the word can communicate. Such communication may assume logical discourse along symbolic (abstract, condensed meaning) and concrete (specific, literal) lines. Categorical propositions (axiomatic, dogmatic, revelational) as well as scientific (hypothetical, empiric) ones may be enunciated. Such capacity does not preclude nor exclude the capacity to engage in narrative accounts (story, fiction, metaphor), which may convey a deeper, affective and ecstatic emphasis not always available in the "cut and dry" propositional or analytic expressions.

Grounding in God, in history, in fellowship, and in the cosmos, provides a sense of constancy, permanency, and sameness in spite of variations due to fluctuations in mood, sensation, perception or awareness. Holistic growth is possible within the stability that allows for the flexibility of the multifaceted, multivoiced self. Thus, the postmodern dialogical self animated along a nonpurposeful drift, floating without direction or sense, is encountered by the Christian dialogical (yet ontologically-rationally grounded) self. Such a being is eschatologically aimed, with an epistemological basis on God's pronouncements and teleological destiny.

A return to the proper grounding represents an essential feature in considering the self in the cosmos: Inviting the transcending God, or, better said, accepting God's invitation to coparticipate dialogically in everyday life, brings meaning and purpose under the sun. In the words of Ecclesiastes, "Meaningless! Meaningless! Utterly meaningless!" All is vanity "under the sun" unless a point of reference is believed, accepted and adopted as the anchor point for all constructive endeavors in the here and now. Thus, the transformed self does not live by its own multivoiced feeding alone, but by digesting in dialogue every word that comes from the mouth of God.

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