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## The Consequences for Thought

### ( 1 )

THE CONSEQUENCES that we considered in the preceding chapter were mainly, if not exclusively, practical—in the sphere of action. We were concerned there with the effects upon conduct, and on the principles governing conduct, of one or another answer to the question about how man differs. According as we answer that question in one way or another, we sustain or abrogate the distinction between person and thing with all its moral and political consequences; we can adhere to or must abandon traditional views of human equality and freedom, and our whole approach to the problem of human rights, moral responsibility, and the pursuit of happiness is basically altered. These consequences affect the lives of everyone, the ordinary man as well as the man of specialized learning. In contrast, the theoretical consequences to which we now turn our attention—consequences in the sphere of thought, in the domain of scientific theory, philosophical doctrine, or religious belief—primarily affect the man in the academy, not the man in the street.

The thinking of ordinary men may, of course, be ultimately affected by basic changes in the thinking of the learned; and when that occurs, practical consequences—changes in the general tenor of human attitudes and action—may ensue. Let us, however, confine our attention to the theoretical consequences for the sophisticated; that is, to the effects of one alternative or the other on the thinking of the learned. We will first consider the consequences that would flow from an experimental falsification of the

immaterialist hypothesis—the hypothesis that the brain is only a necessary, but not the sufficient condition, of conceptual thought, together with its corollary that man differs radically in kind from other animals. We will then consider the consequences that would follow from the failure, after many repeated efforts, to falsify this hypothesis, such failure being interpreted as infirming or casting in doubt the materialist hypothesis and confirming or favoring the relative truth of the immaterialist position.

One further point should be noted. In the preceding chapter, we dealt with the consequences of what we at present know about man's difference, though we did take some account of the future possibility of discovering the very opposite to be the case. In this chapter, we will deal with the consequences not of what we now know, but rather of what we are certain to find out in the future about how man differs.

( 2 )

*The effect of confirming the truth of the materialist hypothesis; or, what is the same, the effect of falsifying the immaterialist hypothesis.* There are two questions to consider here, not one. It is not enough to ask what theoretical consequences would follow from experimental success with a Turing machine—a robot that could pass the conversational test and satisfactorily meet the Cartesian challenge. We must also ask in what sphere of learning the theoretical consequences would occur—in science, philosophy, or religion—and, in each case, we must specify the doctrinal commitment of those who would be seriously affected.

To answer the second question first: the most important effects, as I see them, would be in the field of religion. There would also be, I think, one serious consequence in the realm of philosophy. I will come to that later; let us concentrate for the moment on the religious consequences, and ask: *Consequences for whom? For which religious group? What doctrinal commitments define the religious group that would be affected?*

If I cite first the representatives of the “new theology” and those who call themselves “Christian radicals,” I must at once call attention to the fact that the views being promulgated by this group of contemporary writers would be affected as seriously

by the falsification of the materialist hypothesis as they would be by the falsification of its opposite. The writers I have in mind include not only such eminent Protestant theologians as Bultmann and Bonhoeffer, but also such self-styled Christian radicals as Professors Van Buren, Hamilton, Altizer, and Vahanian—to mention only those who have recently published proclamations of their views. And I would extend the list to include all those Christian thinkers who, in one way or another, approve and promote the secularization of Christianity, or who are engaged in fomenting what Bishop Robinson calls “the new reformation.” [1] While all members of this group may not be Christians without religion, as Bonhoeffer describes himself, all are atheists in the sense that their slogan “God is dead” expresses their disbelief in the existence of God as traditionally conceived by orthodox Christianity. The God in whose existence they find it impossible to believe is the God of traditional theism—the supreme being, an infinite and eternal spiritual being, a transcendent as well as an immanent God who is creator, provider, and governor of the cosmos. [2]

The Christian radicals and promoters of the “death of God” movement all agree with the implied negative answer to Robinson’s rhetorical question—“Can a truly contemporary person *not* be an atheist?” Why do they think that a truly contemporary person must be an atheist—a disbeliever in the God of traditional theism? The answer lies, in part at least, in their commitment to the naturalism and materialism that is regnant in contemporary thought, and in their rejection of views that they think are incompatible with the main tenets of contemporary science. As a consequence, they are led to deny that anything *immaterial* or *supernatural* exists. The God affirmed to exist by traditional Judaism and by orthodox Christianity (in its Protestant as well as in its Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox forms) is both a spiritual being and also a supernatural being whose existence transcends the whole natural order. If nothing exists or can exist that is not physical and somehow subject to natural laws, if whatever exists, exists in the cosmos and not apart from it, the supernatural does not exist. Considered in this context, the possible future falsification of the immaterialist hypothesis about man would be welcomed by the new theologians: it would tend to confirm them in their present disbeliefs. Only those among them who are aware

that their present commitment to the tenets of scientific naturalism is an "act of faith" on their part would realize that scientific knowledge might be substituted for faith as a result of success by a Turing machine in the conversational test.

In another context, however, the new theologians would—or should—welcome the failure of repeated efforts by Turing machines in the conversational test, and, with it, the weakening of the materialist hypothesis and the strengthening of its contrary. Rejecting traditional theism, the Christian radicals and secularists affirm their belief in a divinity that is somehow manifested in man as a person and in the sphere of interpersonal relationships. This belief leads them to speak of the "transcendence" of the human person, and to conceive man as a being that, though a part of nature, is not wholly natural. If they understood the presuppositions of this view of man, they would realize that it requires them to affirm man's radical difference in kind; for man is wholly natural only if he differs in degree from other animals, or if, while differing in kind, his difference in kind is only superficial. As we have seen, man is not a person in the full sense of that term unless he differs radically in kind from other animals and machines; nor can he be "transcendent," in the sense attached to that word by the new theology, unless his make-up involves the presence and operation of a non-physical or immaterial factor. Hence, if the immaterialist hypothesis were to be decisively falsified in the future, the Christian radicals and secularists might have to abandon not only traditional theism, but also their present notions about the divinity in man.

Conversely, strict logic would lead to a conclusion that might discomfort them—if they ever paid attention to strict logic. For if their belief in the transcendence and divinity of man presupposes man's radical difference in kind from everything else, and if that radical difference in kind carries with it the affirmation of an immaterial or non-physical element in man, then their disbelief in a transcendent and wholly supernatural being that is spiritual should be weakened by the same future findings that would strengthen their belief in the transcendence and divinity of man. Clear recognition of this should lead them to suspect profound inconsistency or incoherence in their various beliefs and disbeliefs. As I will point out presently, the truth of the immaterialist hypothesis renders intelligible and credible belief in

a divine person—a wholly spiritual, transcendent, supernatural being—and at the same time it explains the analogical sense in which there is something divine and transcendent about man, i.e., the sense in which man, by virtue of an immaterial element in his make-up, is a *natural person*—the image of God who is a *supernatural person*.

Let us consider another and quite different religious group. It consists of those traditional and orthodox Christians, both Catholic and Protestant, who are fideists. The falsification of the immaterialist hypothesis would have little effect on them.

Fideism involves two things: on the one hand, commitment to a body of religious dogmas; on the other hand, commitment by faith alone and without any regard for the relation between what is affirmed by faith and what is affirmed or denied by the rest of human knowledge. The fideist does not care whether prevailing scientific or philosophical opinions support or oppose the dogmas of his religion. In his eyes, they do not need support from that quarter. And if certain religious dogmas appear to be absurd or unreasonable in the light of secular knowledge, the fideist redoubles his commitment to them, not merely in spite of their being absurd, but precisely because they are absurd. Hence, for the fideist, no change in the state of secular knowledge can affect the dogmas in which he believes or the manner in which he is committed to them. [3]

The one religious group that would be seriously affected by the confirmation of the materialist position, and by the falsification of the immaterialist hypothesis concerning man's nature and radical difference, consists of those traditional Christians (mainly Roman Catholics) who not only are orthodox in their dogmatic commitments but who also try to be philosophical in their understanding of dogmas that they hold by religious faith. The dogmatic theologians in this group conceive the theological enterprise as *faith seeking understanding*. They look to that part of philosophy which they call "natural theology" to provide rational support for some of the articles of their faith, and to make other articles of faith as reasonable, as intelligible, and as credible as possible. Affirming the unity of truth, they deny that religious truth can exist in a logic-tight compartment unaffected by scientific or philosophical knowledge having a contrary tenor. Unlike the fideists, they regard the slightest apparent conflict between

science and religion, or between philosophy and religion, as a matter of the most serious concern—as a challenge to be met or a problem to be resolved. [4]

For this last group, what would be the consequences of the future possibility that we have been considering? The most effective way to answer this question quickly is to turn back to earlier centuries—any period of Christendom prior to the last 100 or 150 years. The dogmatic theology of this earlier period, in most of the Protestant sects as well as in Roman Catholicism, includes four dogmas that we must now consider.

- (1) *The dogma of man's personality*: that man and man alone is made in the image of God, and has this special character among all terrestrial creatures by virtue of his having a spiritual aspect, or a non-material component in his nature. [5]
- (2) *The dogma of man's special creation*: that the origin of the human race as a whole, and the coming to be of each human individual, cannot be adequately accounted for by the operation of the purely natural causes that are operative in the biological processes of reproduction or procreation, but requires the intervention of divine causality. [6]
- (3) *The dogma of individual immortality or of a life hereafter for the individual human person*: that the human soul, unlike the souls of other living things, is capable of subsisting apart from the body, even though for the perfection of human life, it needs to be re-united with the body that God resurrects from the ashes of this earthly life. [7]
- (4) *The dogma of free will and moral responsibility*: that man is morally responsible for his compliance with or transgression of God's will by virtue of his having the power of free choice between good and evil, between loving God or turning away from him. [8]

These four dogmas have in common the fact that they all sharply separate man from other terrestrial creatures. No other creature, inert body, plant, or animal is made in the image of God, for none is a person as God is a person. The operation of physical causes in the natural processes of reproduction suffices for the origin of other species of living things, and for the generation of individual members of these species. Only man requires

God's special creative action. No other living thing on earth is vouchsafed individual immortality by God. No other terrestrial creature carries the burden of moral responsibility that is inseparable from freedom of choice.

If now we ask what philosophical conception of man is required to render these four dogmas concerning man's uniqueness reasonable, intelligible, and credible, the answer, *stated in minimal terms*, is as follows. Man must be conceived as different in kind from all other terrestrial things. That difference in kind must be conceived as a radical difference in kind, involving a break in the continuity of nature. That radical difference in kind must be conceived in terms of man's unique possession of an intellectual power that transcends the properties of matter and the operation of physical causes. In other words, man's intellect (i.e., his power of conceptual thought) is the immaterial component in his constitution that makes him a person, requires his special creation, gives him the hope of immortality, and endows him with freedom of choice.

I do not wish to be understood as saying that the truth of the four dogmas can be demonstrated philosophically to constitute a body of natural theology that has the character of *épistēmē*. Far from it. The only point I am trying to make here is much less extravagant. It amounts to no more than this: the truth of the immaterialist hypothesis concerning man's power of conceptual thought, and the truth of its corollary concerning man's radical difference in kind, is the minimal support that philosophy can offer for the four dogmas mentioned above. If the immaterialist hypothesis is true, that at least renders the dogmas somewhat credible, intelligible, and reasonable. What the dogmas assert is at least possible within the framework of all the rest of our philosophical and scientific knowledge.

That being the case, falsification of the immaterialist hypothesis would clearly have serious consequences for the reasonableness of faith in the four dogmas concerning man. If there is nothing immaterial in the constitution of man, if man is continuous with the rest of physical nature, if everything that is distinctive of man can be explained by the magnitude of his brain, then all four of the dogmas are adversely affected, though not in the same way.

It is difficult to see how man can be made in the image of God as a person, if God's personality lies in His spiritual being, and man's personality consists solely in his having the power to engage

in meaningful discourse. It is difficult to see why the origin of the human race cannot be accounted for by the natural processes of evolution, or why the generation of the human individual cannot be accounted for by the ordinary processes of procreation. It is difficult to see why man should have any hope of individual immortality or look forward, after death, to a resurrected body and a life in the world to come. It is more than difficult, it is impossible to see how man can have freedom of choice, which involves a kind of causality that is not to be found in the material or physical world.

While it is true that, in the last hundred years or so, Christian theologians, especially those in the Roman Catholic community, have tried to accommodate some of their doctrines to the theory and facts of evolution, none of the accommodations that have been made involves the four dogmas about man. Hence, if the immaterialist hypothesis about man's nature and about his difference in kind should be falsified in the future, the theological consequences for Christians who wish their faith to be reasonable would either be those set forth above or would closely resemble them. [9]

Before we close this discussion of the consequences of the falsification of the immaterialist hypothesis, we must consider briefly the effect of such falsification outside the field of religion and in the realm of philosophy.

I have already touched on the one point that must be made when I said a moment ago that man's freedom of choice is rendered impossible to understand if man's intellectual power is wholly explicable in neurological terms. There is no problem here, of course, for those recent writers who confuse the unpredictability of freely chosen acts with the unpredictability of causally contingent events. For them free choice can occur in any causal sequence and is not found exclusively in human action. [10] But for all the rest, that is, for all the leading exponents of free will in the tradition of Western thought, freedom of choice involves a mode of causality that is not operative in the physical action of bodies or material forces. For those who understand free choice in terms of an immaterial mode of causality, the falsification of the immaterialist hypothesis about man must lead to the denial that man has the power of free choice. Free choice



would then become more than difficult to understand; it would become impossible to understand. [11]

This result would, in turn, have serious consequences for moral philosophy, at least for moral philosophers of a certain persuasion. There are many philosophers who hold, as I do, that moral responsibility rests on freedom of choice, and cannot be grounded merely on freedom from external constraint. [12] There are also many who agree with Kant, as I do, that the moral imperative to treat man as an end rests not simply on his being a person able to engage in meaningful discourse, but on his being a person who, through freedom of choice, directs his own life, and so is master of himself. [13]

( 3 )

*The effect of trying to falsify the immaterialist hypothesis, and, after many repeated efforts, failing to do so; thus tending to confirm its relative truth, and to infirm the materialist hypothesis.* Let us recall once more the logic of the alternatives. On the one hand, those who espouse the materialist hypothesis concerning man's nature and mode of difference predict a successful outcome of the conversational test. A robot that effectively played its part in the Turing game would show, as nothing else might, that neurological factors and processes suffice to explain propositional speech and conceptual thought. With that shown, the immaterialist hypothesis concerning man's nature and his radical difference in kind would be falsified. While the materialist hypothesis would not be correspondingly proved true beyond doubt, it would be confirmed to so high a degree that it would be, for all practical purposes, true.

On the other hand, those who espouse the immaterialist hypothesis predict that Turing machines will always fail to pass the conversational test. Here we must envisage an extensive number and variety of technological efforts to produce a robot that can effectively play its part in Turing's game. Given such efforts over an extended period of time, and given failure to achieve the desired result, the immaterialist hypothesis would be progressively confirmed by thus being repeatedly put to the test and

escaping falsification each time. While the materialist hypothesis would not thereby be falsified, its relative truth would be so far diminished that the scientist or philosopher who still continued to hold it without serious reservations or doubts would be exactly like the dogmatic theologian who is an extreme fideist.

Now let us suppose that this possibility is realized in the future. It should be clear at once that its consequences would take an opposite direction to the ones that flow from the future realization of the alternative possibility. But we must ask as we did before: *For whom would these opposite consequences be serious?* What groups would be adversely affected by confirmation of the relative truth of (a) the proposition that man differs radically in kind from all other animals; (b) the proposition that the brain is only a necessary and not a sufficient condition of man's power of conceptual thought; (c) the proposition that an immaterial power must be posited to explain conceptual thought?

So far as I can see, three groups would be affected: (1) the philosophical proponents of the identity hypothesis, the moderate materialists, for their doctrine excludes the possibility of the existence or operation of an immaterial factor; (2) the scientists, and especially the evolutionists, who in their commitment to naturalism exclude the possibility of any break in the continuity of nature, and therefore exclude all radical differences in kind that would introduce discontinuity into nature; (3) the Christian radicals, the religionless or atheistic Christians, the exponents of the new theology or the new reformation.

I will now comment briefly on the consequences for each of these three groups, dealing with them in the order named.

(1) *The philosophers who are moderate materialists.* It must not be thought that failure to falsify the immaterialist hypothesis after repeated efforts to produce Turing machines able to pass the conversational test would afford the first or only argument against the truth of materialism. In the long history of the controversy about materialism, other arguments have been advanced, and one of these, drawn from common experience, claims to falsify the materialist position. That one is still a matter of grave concern to the most thoughtful of contemporary materialists, such as Wilfrid Sellars and J. J. C. Smart. [14] Nevertheless, it can be

said that the failure of repeated efforts to falsify the immaterialist hypothesis by putting machines to the conversational test would bring a different sort of empirical evidence into the picture; and, if the strict logic of empirical procedures is adhered to, the result could not fail to be regarded as extremely damaging.

(2) *The naturalists and especially the evolutionists.* What is at stake here is not only the unbroken continuity of nature but also the principle of phylogenetic continuity as applied to the origin of man. That principle would be violated if man's nature involves an immaterial component that could not possibly be transmitted by the material factors operative in the genetic process. As a result, a question that most evolutionists now think is solved, at least in principle, would become an open question and, what is more, an embarrassment; for the problem of the origin of man on earth might not be capable of scientific solution.

I mentioned earlier, as one of four articles of orthodox Christian faith about man, the dogma of man's special creation—the dogma that, because of an immaterial factor in man's constitution, neither the human race as a whole nor the individual human person can be generated by the operation of purely natural causes, the kind of causes that operate in the genetic process. If the relative truth of the immaterialist hypothesis is confirmed, the problem of man's origin—both the origin of the race and the origin of the individual—may call for a reconciliation of evolutionary theory with orthodox Christian theology. It is hardly an overstatement to say that most scientists today are unprepared for this eventuality.

In addition, the discontinuity of man with the rest of nature would place an insuperable obstacle in the path of the behavioral sciences, at least insofar as they proceed on the assumption that the laws governing and the theories explaining the behavior of subhuman animals apply without qualification or modification to human behavior. The presence and operation of an immaterial factor in the constitution of man would introduce an element of freedom and unpredictability into human behavior. As we observed in Chapter 17, even though man shares with other animals certain basic instinctual drives, these drives would not operate in the same way in human and subhuman animals if the power of conceptual thought is an immaterial power that endows man with efficacious freedom of choice and permits him to have goals and

aspirations beyond his animal needs. Hence, if the immaterialist hypothesis were to be confirmed by the outcome of the Turing test, the discontinuity that would result from man's being radically different in kind would make it impossible any longer to suppose, as natural scientists and especially behavioral scientists now do suppose, that the same laws and the same explanations that apply to the behavior of everything else would not only apply to, but also adequately account for, the behavior of man.

(3) *The Christian radicals for whom God is dead.* If the failure of Turing machines to pass the conversational test greatly strengthens the hypothesis that an immaterial power exists in man and operates in human thought and life, that would—or should—have an effect on the negative faith of those who say that God is dead, at least insofar as their reason for disbelieving in a transcendent God is their disbelief in the reality of immaterial entities—spiritual beings. The confirmation of the relative truth of the immaterialist hypothesis concerning man might even lead to a new proof of the existence of God. For if man's origin cannot be explained by purely natural causes, then the existence of man can be used as a premise in an *a posteriori* argument for the existence of the cause that must be added to all natural causes in order to account for man's genesis on earth. That additional cause would have to be supernatural. [15]

Hence, unless the exponents of the new theology and the new reformation in the Christian community are as much dogmatic fideists as some of their orthodox forebears were, their faith in the proposition that God is dead will be seriously challenged; and the question about the existence of a deity that is a transcendent supernatural being will confront them as an open and embarrassing problem. Confused as the new theologians are, they can only be the worse confounded by whichever alternative comes to pass—by the failure as well as by the success of Turing machines to meet the Cartesian challenge.

#### ( 4 )

A mixed question is one that requires for its solution a combination of the findings of scientific investigation and the con-

tributions of philosophical analysis and criticism. In such questions, an apparent conflict between scientific opinion and common-sense opinion serves to test the truth of competing philosophical theories by challenging them to resolve the conflict without giving up either the truth of common sense or the truth of science. [16] But the question about man with which this book has been concerned is a very special type of mixed question. Here the solution of the problem of how man differs requires us to consult all relevant scientific data and theories as well as bring philosophical analyses and arguments to bear on the question. But what is most extraordinary here is the fact that we can, with reasonable certainty, predict that future scientific efforts will have the effect either of falsifying a traditional philosophical theory or of confirming its relative truth and infirming the relative truth of its contrary. [17]

The point just made has significance for the difficult question about progress in philosophy. Those who think, as I do, that progress has been and can be made in philosophy are often taxed to offer good and clear examples of advances in philosophical truth. If the future contains the alternative possibilities, one of which must be realized, then the advance that will be made toward a solution of the mixed question about man provides us with a dramatic instance of philosophical progress. Since this advance will be occasioned not simply by the efforts of philosophical inquiry, but by the work of scientists and technologists, it may be atypical. The problem of showing progress in philosophy apart from, or independent, of advances in scientific research may, therefore, remain as perplexing as ever. [18]

There is a certain irony in the shift that will take place from the state of the learned world a hundred years ago to the state it will be in a hundred years hence—when one of these alternative possibilities is realized and generates the theoretical consequences that I have indicated.

A century ago and throughout the last hundred years, the portion of the learned world that was most affected by the changing view of man that came to prevail with scientific advances, especially those in the field of evolution, consisted of adherents to traditional orthodox Christian theology. The thrust of the challenge was mainly, if not exclusively, felt by learned men—philosophers and scientists as well as theologians—who subscribed

to certain religious beliefs, among which the four dogmas about man were central. In the last hundred years, the altered view of man has come so generally to pervade the learned world that if now or in the future the immaterialist hypothesis were to be falsified, few would be surprised, and fewer would suffer any serious embarrassment.

A century hence and in the intervening years, if present trends continue and accelerate, the portion of the learned world that would be most shocked by an altered view of man that might come to prevail through the failure of Turing machines to pass the conversational test would be all those who are united in a common disbelief—disbelief in the dogmas of traditional orthodox Christianity. Ideas now thought by them to be dead would come to life again, and questions now thought to be closed would have to be re-opened and faced again. [19]

The beliefs or disbeliefs of the learned eventually filter down and exert an influence upon the lives and conduct of their fellow men. But quite apart from the doctrines that prevail among the learned, the ultimate resolution of the question about how man differs from other things will make a difference—a serious difference—to the future course of human affairs; for the image that we hold of man cannot fail to affect attitudes that influence our behavior in the world of action, and beliefs that determine our commitments in the world of thought.