



Doctoral School

THESES FROM THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

IDENTITY IN THE MORAL SPACE

SELF-IDENTITY AS THE MOTIVATIONAL SOURCE OF
ECONOMIC AND MORAL ACTION
IN THE CONTEXT OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP –
AN ATTEMPT TO APPLY EXPLORATORY THEOLOGICAL ETHICS
IN THE DISCOURSE OF ECONOMIC ETHICS

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CONTENTS

RESEARCH ANTECEDENTS AND OBJECTIVES	3
METHODOLOGY.....	4
THESES.....	5
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	9
LIST OF PUBLICATIONS BY THE AUTHOR RELATED TO THE DISSERTATION.....	11

RESEARCH ANTECEDENTS AND OBJECTIVES

Far from being an unprecedented exercise, the theological investigation of the central tenets of economic ethics has by now developed into a significant tradition. At least since the 2008 global financial and economic crisis, the voice of theologians has increasingly been heard in the interdisciplinary discourses on capitalism.

Wolfgang NETHÖFEL nevertheless writes about the severe impotence of protestant theology concerning the questions of economic ethics (Nethöfel, 2001). While it may seem that the world has gone off its track and has become its own inverse – evil having been taken for the good, what should be avoided being heralded as an example to follow – protestant theology has to wage its own battle against the burden of the intellectual heritage going back to Max WEBER's groundbreaking analysis arguing that the capitalist spirit had grown out of the protestant ethic (Weber, 1982). At the same time, Georg WÜNSCH established a tradition describing economy as a religion (Wünsch, 1927), essentially avoiding the fundamental question I wish to answer in my dissertation: accepting the economy to be what it is, how can the unity of economic and moral action be created?

Concerning entrepreneurial action (entrepreneurship) chosen as the specific context of my research, only a limited amount of theological reflection has been available. Giving an overview of the protestant theological and ecclesiastical sources on entrepreneurship in her doctoral thesis published in 2013, Sabine BEHRENDT only found a single piece of text actually dealing with theological reflection of entrepreneurship, i.e. the 2008 Memorandum of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, EKD) (Behrendt, 2013).

Starting out from here, the objective of the present doctoral dissertation is formulated thus: to look for a theologically inspired solution for the question of economic ethics in a way that is not a *critique of the economic system* ("Systemkritik"). Naturally, without denying the potential and responsibility of theology to carry out a normative criticism of capitalism through describing the economy as a religion or in any other way, I

wish to demonstrate in my doctoral dissertation that through a rediscovery and exploration of the foundations of protestant, and more specifically, Lutheran theology, it is possible to work out an answer to economic ethics in a way that stays “within the system”, and as such, attempts to answer the problem raised inherently by the system of capitalism, accepting its self-definition.

METHODOLOGY

Throughout my thesis, I rely on the method of exploratory theological ethics as expounded by the Erlangen-based theologian, Hans G. ULRICH in his work *Wie geschöpfe leben* (Ulrich, H. G., 2005). Hans G. ULRICH worked out an innovative solution to a methodological and theoretical conundrum as old as the protestant theological tradition itself, i.e. the definition of the relationship of teaching (dogma) and life (ethics) we can refer to as **the exploratory ethics of life as a created being**.

According to his conception based on the biblical tradition, we can declare that in the Bible we do not find the construct of man’s morality, but the ethos of listening to and responding to the Other, with the aim of getting to know **created existence**. Ethics is part of the exploratory ethos of life as created being, and thus, ethics is the praxis of life as of a created being, investigating man as a creation of God. Within the model of exploratory theological ethics, exploration differs from learning about metaphysics that the former is imbued by *passio*, which on the basis of *Rom 12:2.*, is a parallel application of sorts of discerning and judging. According to the author, this is the Adventist logic of theological ethics, that always tries to discern given reality from the point of view of future reality. For the biblical ethos, from which the exploratory theological ethics draws force, is the ethos of hope.

From a methodological point of view, this means that considering the fundamental logical steps of ethical investigation – discerning, judging, communication – will influence

their directedness throughout. In my paper, **the exploratory method guides along a path (way)**. I start out from economic thinking, and eventually return there – to the specific context of entrepreneurship as a test environment. On this path – or to use another metaphor, in this cycle – the place of theology is *the centre*. The problem originating from economic thinking leads to a theological transformation, from where not only can we understand the problem, but also an answer can be worked out so as to be voiced in a conceptual construct that will be meaningful for the participants in the interdisciplinary dialogue.

THESES

The Great Transformation

- 1) For the conceptual definition of the capitalist economy in my dissertation, I follow the description provided by classical economics. Besides emphasizing the importance of the principle of utility, I attach great significance to the impact of the industrial revolution as well as the role of the markets in organizing society. I think it is worth highlighting that **the modern economy is fundamentally different from pre-modern economic forms**. Following POLÁNYI, the change leading to the creation of a modern capitalist market economy is referred to as the *great transformation*. As a consequence of this great transformation, the economic activities of man have undergone radical change.

Looking for answers beyond utilitarianism

- 2) In my dissertation I demonstrate how it was necessary for this change to appear in the ethical reflection on the economic activities of man. **Thus I claim that the modern market economy raised a new question of ethics, while the classic, and according to many commentators, still valid and true answer to this question had been elaborated by economic utilitarianism**, associated with Adam SMITH (Smith, 1992). With

reference to the earliest stages of the history the discipline, I argue that **economic ethics is a scientific approach created as an empirical refutation of utilitarianism, looking for answers to its fundamental questions over and beyond utilitarianism.**

The problem of integration

- 3) Providing an overview of the most important economic and theological approaches to economic ethics, I investigate how the search for answers beyond the one given by utilitarianism has rendered the original question more precise. As a result of my investigations, I formulate the thesis that the critical analysis of the most significant approaches to economic ethics sheds light on a question lying behind the problem raised by the discipline: **how can the *unity of morals and action* be created in a world the most important characteristic of which happens to be the separation of the two?** Referring to the social philosophical analyses of WEBER (Weber, 1920) and Karl-Otto APEL (Apel, 1980), who claimed that the development of the complementary systems of the public and private spheres in the modern era lead to the loss of the normative foundations of action, I argue, in agreement with the catholic theologian Christof BREITSAMETER investigating moral identity, that the question of social unity becomes a moral question (Breitsameter, 2003). This **problem of integration** appears in the question of economic ethics of how one can act morally within the limits set by the economy.

Sources of the identity question in Luther

- 4) The theological exploratory analysis of the integration issue led us to the historical moment of the birth of the problem of unity: the dawn of the modern era. When unity ceases, it gives birth to *the search for an identity by the reflexive self*, thus bringing to life a *new form of subjectivity*. With the disintegration of the normative unity of social reality, the unity of the individual becomes more and more important.

Subjectivity looking at itself as a single, unique and unrepeatable existence, i.e. *identity*, does not appear in a single moment in the history of Western ideas, but has a tradition accessible primarily for theological reflection. Following Hans-Georg SOEFFNER's interpretation of Luther, I argue that **the new subjectivity, which is one of the most important sources of self-identity can be associated with the figure and the teachings of Luther** (Soeffner, 1988). Besides such fundamental protestant teachings as saying yes to everyday life and inwardness, it laid the foundations on which moral action can be turned into an individual project.

Self-identity as a moral conception

- 5) **Starting** out from theological analysis, but based on the relevant investigations in the fields of psychology, social psychology as well as philosophy – especially in the work of Jürgen HABERMAS (Habermas, 1974a, 1974b), Charles TAYLOR (Taylor, 1989), Paul RICOEUR (Ricoeur 1990) and Alasdair MACINTYRE (1981) – I argue that **self-identity is morally construed, thus is a concept forming a unity with morality**. In the wake of research by Augusto BLASI on moral motivation (Blasi, 1983) and Peter J. BURKE's theory of identity control (Burke, a) and using a metaphor of space I formulate the hypothesis that the solution to the fundamental question of economic ethics lies one level *deeper* than the intersection of economics and morality, and it needs to be verified whether it is possible to find a motivational base, i.e. a source, from which both moral and economic action can develop at the level of the individual. **According to my hypothesis, modernity's new subjectivity as grasped in the form of self-identity can provide the point of integration which could also solve the fundamental question of economic ethics.**

Entrepreneurship and self-identity

- 6) Starting out from theological analysis, but based on the relevant investigations in the fields of psychology, social psychology as well as philosophy – especially in the work

of Jürgen HABERMAS (Habermas, 1974a, 1974b), Charles TAYLOR (Taylor, 1989), Paul RICOEUR (Ricoeur 1990) and Alasdair MACINTYRE (1981) – I argue that **self-identity is morally construed, thus is a concept forming a unity with morality**. In the wake of research by Augusto BLASI on moral motivation (Blasi, 1983) and Peter J. BURKE's theory of identity control (Burke, a) and using a metaphor of space I formulate the hypothesis that the solution to the fundamental question of economic ethics lies one level *deeper* than the intersection of economics and morality, and it needs to be verified whether it is possible to find a motivational base, i.e. a source, from which both moral and economic action can develop at the level of the individual. **According to my hypothesis, modernity's new subjectivity as grasped in the form of self-identity can provide the point of integration which could also solve the fundamental question of economic ethics.**

Sanctification and the healthy identity

- 7) The ultimate question of my research explored whether there is a difference in quality among the different kinds of self-identities. From the perspective of theology, the question led to the universal symbol of salvation, which we described following the interpretation developed by TILLICH through the fundamental principles of sanctification (Tillich, 2000). Self-determination theory (SDT), associated with RYAN and DECI (Ryan & Deci, 1985), helped reach the psychological model of a healthy identity starting out from self-identity. We saw that autonomy, relatedness and competence are the needs that we have in order for a healthy identity to be formed. These psychological needs have lead us back again to the principles of sanctification.

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