



Charles Horton Cooley: *Nulla linea sine Deo*

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ABSTRACT

Charles H. Cooley, a pioneer in the study of Communication, had been credited regarding the notions of *the looking-glass self* and the *primary group*, but his seminal ideas related to *communication* – inspired by the German economist and sociologist Albert Schäffle – remained almost ignored for decades. But, after many years of obscurity, the most recent literature is outlining Cooley's contribution to symbolic interactionism and other concepts in the study of Communication. This paper focuses more specifically on how Cooley understood the relationship between communication and God. The original and surprising phrase *nulla linea sine Deo* (no one single line without God) that appears in his *Journal*, manifests his religious engagement during a time of intellectual and spiritual change in American universities. At twenty five years old he had written in his *Journal* on May 11, 1890: 'I want to be a scholar in righteousness, to be taught all the ways of strength and truth. I pray that may be led in hard ways so that I may know in my own life that "man shall not live by bread alone".'

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1. Introduction

In his text on 'The development of sociology at Michigan', published posthumously, Charles Horton Cooley (1864–1929) wrote: 'Communication was thus my first real conquest, and the [doctoral] thesis a forecast of the organic view of society I have been working out ever since' (Cooley 1930a, 8). Cooley was known intellectually, for many years, for his notions of the *looking-glass self* and *the primary group*, but his overall work – and particularly his reflections on communication – was fundamentally obscured by an article written after his death by George Herbert Mead (Mead 1930).

Several authors think that Cooley and Mead, who coincided during some academic years at the University of Michigan, maintained a lasting friendship. But one has to accept, at least partially, Wiley's assertion that, after Mead left Michigan for Chicago, 'he was distant from Cooley throughout his life'; and that, although 'they shared many ideas, particularly concerning the theory of child development and the social 'self',

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Mead did not refer to Cooley except to criticize him sharply. And [that] Cooley did not refer to Mead at all' (Wiley 2011, 169). Wiley is correct in the last statement; but he omits, on the other hand, that Mead did allude to Cooley on several occasions, in admiring and highly favorable terms, notably in his 1909 article 'Social Psychology as Counterpart to Physiological Psychology' (Mead 1909), in which he wrote: 'If we except Professor Cooley, in his *Human nature and the social order* and in his *Social organization*, sociologists have no adequate social psychology with which to interpret their own science'.

Already in the preface to his doctoral dissertation 'The Theory of Transportation' (1894), published by the American Economic Association, Cooley explained how he had planned to write a theory of transportation, and that, by that time, he had already begun to familiarize himself with the more recent school of sociologists, and thought he had found in Albert Schäffle's analysis of society (Schäffle 1896) a basis on which to build his plan. Schäffle's organic view of the relationship between individual and society gave Cooley the inspiration to overcome Spencer's influence (Cooley 1930b), and to offer a reflection that is fundamental to the development of a communicative theory of the social (López-Escobar 2019). Let us not forget that Cooley had studied engineering at the University of Michigan, and had worked on the Interstate Commerce Commission, chaired by his father, which was established to solve the problems posed by the railroads. Of the fourteen chapters that make up Cooley's thesis, particularly important is Chapter V, which examines in a general way the relationship between transportation and the organized community. In it Cooley asks 'what, in general terms, is the social function of transportation'; and, in answering this question, he introduces the *mechanism of communication*, and relates it to the unity of society:

Sociologically considered it [transportation] is a means to the physical organization of society. Development or evolution, the organization of social forces, implies unification of aim, specialization of activities in view of a common purpose, a growing interdependence among the parts of society. Such organization, such extension of relations, involves a mechanism through which the relations can exist and make themselves felt. This mechanism is *Communication* in the widest sense of that word; communication of ideas and of physical commodities, between one time and another and one place and another. These are the threads that hold society together; upon them all unity depends. And transportation, the means of material communication between one place and another, is one of the strongest and most conspicuous of these threads. (Cooley 1894, 264, italics mine)

Accepting Henry Carter Adams' proposal, Cooley had returned to the state University of Michigan from which he had graduated. At that time, it had over two thousand four hundred students, and was – as it remained for several years – the largest university in the country in numerical terms. Cooley had begun his teaching career in 1892 by offering an elementary course in economic theory and the courses *Theory of Statistics* (the last course he taught in this subject was in the academic year 1900–1901) and *History of Political Economy*. In 1895, after receiving his doctorate, he became an instructor in sociology.

Now, one the clearest indications of Cooley's role as a pioneer in the field of communication is to be found, in my judgment, in the report of the committee of ten, which was formed at the 1909 annual conference of the American Sociological Society:

a committee of which Cooley, Ellwood, Fairchild, Giddings, Hayes, Ross, Small, Weatherly, Dealey, and Dowd, who had proposed it, were members. The purpose was to establish a basic course in sociology. When the committee delivered its report on the teaching of social science in 1911, it stated that, since the orientations were divergent, the most appropriate thing to do at that time was to present the individual reports of each member, to serve as a basis for further reflection in order to launch such a basic course, which was considered impossible at the time. The report fortunately allows us to appreciate the scarce attention paid to communication in each of the universities represented on the committee. The first individual report in alphabetical order, which is Cooley's, allows us to see how he explicitly highlights communication in his proposal, in contrast with other proposals.

2. Cooley rediscovered

The first two relevant works on Cooley were those of Edward Jandy and Marshall Cohen. A few years after his death Jandy published *Charles Horton Cooley: his life and his social theory* (Jandy 1942). He wrote it based on Cooley's publications, his *Journal* and other manuscript documents, and also with the invaluable help of Cooley's widow, Elsie. Jandy had been influenced by Mead, and it is evident when reading Willard Waller's introduction to the book, in which Waller says: 'Considering the nature of the book, it was only natural that the editor and the author should sometimes fall into friendly disagreement. I do not believe that Cooley was solipsistic, and I hereby register my disagreement' (Waller 1942). For his part, Cohen completed his doctoral dissertation *Self and Society: Charles Horton Cooley and the idea of Social Self in American Thought* in 1967.

But only at the end of the last century, and especially in the first years of the 21st century, has there been a renewed attention to the former professor at the University of Michigan: the works of Simonson (1996, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2013), Jacobs (1976, 1979a, 1979b, 2004, 2006, 2009, 2012, 2019), and Schubert (1995, 1998, 2005, 2006), fundamentally, are a manifestation of Cooley's discovery. López-Escobar and Breeze have also investigated Cooley's thought, analyzing in a comparative way the influence of Schäffle, especially in his organic approach and in his notions about public opinion (López-Escobar and Breeze 2012, 2015). I think that the rediscovery of Cooley is manifested in the fact that the anthology *Mass communication and American social thought: key texts 1919–1968* by John D. Peters and Peter Simonson (2004), nevertheless begins with a text by Cooley that had been published in 1897 (Cooley 1897).

Schubert has tried to reconcile Cooley's approaches with those of Mead, in order to overcome possible controversies. In one of his most recent works he recalls that Mead called Cooley an 'idealist' or 'mentalist' for whom 'imagination' and not 'symbolic interactions' were 'the solid facts of society'. Against that criticism, Schubert argues that Cooley broke 'with Cartesian mind-body dualism, at odds with idealism and with behaviorism. His aim was to develop a theory of 'communication' and 'understanding' (*Verständnis*¹) as the foundation of pragmatic sociology' (Schubert 2006, 51).

Having said that, what I am about to show in this paper is largely the result of surprise and perplexity. The surprise was to note that the name most often cited in the

indexes of the four books published by Cooley (1902, 1909, 1918, 1927) was that of God, which Cooley also mentions overwhelmingly in his manuscript *Journal*. In the *Introductory Sociology* of which Charles Cooley, Robert Cooley Angell and Lowell Julliard Carr are the authors (Cooley, Angell, and Carr 1933), and whose original edition was published a few years after Charles' death, God, Christianity, and religion also appear in the index of the work.

The perplexity, as a reaction to this evidence, was that this fact has attracted little attention from those who have written about Cooley's life and thought. Neither God, Christ, nor religion appear in the index of Jandy's biography, the first to have access to his *Journal*, although there is a mention of Christianity and four references to Kempis (Jandy 1942, 37, 48, 59 and 67); nor do they appear in Charles Horton Cooley's thematic index, or in Jacobs' *Imagining social reality* (Jacobs 2006), which is based on his doctoral work on Cooley's *Journal* (Jacobs 1976).

3. Search for truth and religious dimension

It is very important to note that Cooley was powerfully interested from his youth in autobiographies and biographies, as he wrote in his *Journal*: in fact one of his first texts, published in 1893 in *The Inlander*, was 'On autobiographies' (Cooley 1893). He conceived of sociology as 'systematic autobiography', and proposed 'sympathetic introspection' as the appropriate method for social scientists. In his own words 'a true sociology is systematic autobiography. The whole organization and process of society exists in my mind, and I and others like me can understand it only as we learn what it means to us'.² In coherence with his way of thinking, it is convenient to consider particularly important aspects of his biography.

I think that the main feature that defines Cooley is contained in the question that he himself underlines and repeats three times in the annotation of March 29, 1902 in his *Journal*: 'Is it true? Is it true? Is it true?'; this question is particularly revealing of the radical approach with which he faced his life and with which he went about shaping and expounding his ideas. With repetition, and also with slight variations, he left a record that the search for truth was for him a decisive question. The interest in truth, the search for it, and its communication, seem to have filled his life completely. On July 9, 1890, two weeks before his marriage to Elsie Jones, he wrote in his *Journal*:

I am one whose part it is to be a patient separator of grams of truth. In each matter that offers itself to my thought there is a little gram of truth which persisting sifting will disclose. I have the power of painstaking thought. To set free the little truth-kernel needs integrity, attention and time; the last not least than the others. We must give our brains time to slowly adjust themselves to new things. No intensity of immediate thought is enough.

I am to be a truth-finder and truth-keeper and I want to for myself better for my work. I wish more intellectual integrity, a more systematic and thorough habit of thinking.

Throughout his life, he was accompanied by this obstinate passion for the truth, the conviction that he needed it. It is very likely that he was influenced by Chapter III (On the teaching of the truth) of the first part of *The imitation of Christ (De imitatione Christi)* of Thomas à Kempis (Kempis 1989), which we find in his *Journal*; but he was also influenced by the work of Darwin, to whom he alludes, at an early date, in one of

the longest entries in his *Journal*, that of July 21, 1895, and to whom he returns later, to mark his difference with him: 'I wish to be as eager for truth as Darwin was, but I would not fill my mind with structure ideas to the extent he did. The facts for me are facts of sympathetic insight that must be obtained mainly by an open and watchful imagination'.³ Throughout his life, as he reflected in his *Journal*, Cooley felt an intense passion to know the truth: 'A great man has a personal need for truth', he wrote on July 25, 1895.

But Cooley's spiritual and religious attitude is extremely interesting in order to understand his personality in greater depth, and I think it is necessary to pay more attention to it than he has received so far. Two years before his death he wrote: 'I think that what drowns me most might be described as the search of God and the contemplation of him in his works'.⁴

Jandy briefly addressed this issue in the section 'Ethico-religionism, passion for democracy', where he writes:

The philosophic Zeitgeist of Cooley's day was predominantly idealistic. Transcendental idealism of the nineteenth century aimed to see nature as an integrated, organic whole, or unity, with man as a phase of it. (Jandy 1942, 46–53)

Jandy adds that the thinkers that Cooley appreciated most belonged to that school: Goethe, Emerson, and Thoreau. In the field of science, he points out that the organic vision is implicit in the works of Darwin, Schäßle, and others. But, for the reasons I will immediately point out, I think that simply considering Cooley as a theist – as Jandy does – might be accurate, but that it is insufficient. In reflecting on this matter, I could not get out of my mind the words of Paul of Tarsus in the Areopagus of Athens, when he speaks to the Athenians of an unknown God in whom 'we live, we move, and we exist'. I think Cooley was ultimately a Christian theist. At the end of the 20th volume of his *Journal*, which ends on November 1, 1913, he wrote these three lines:

The common life is the only human life
Ritornero poeta (I will become a poet)
Nulla linea sine Deo (No one single line without God).

And on the next page, he added, *Expect God*.

We are used to the cliché expression *nulla dies sine linea* (no one day without a single line), attributed to Pliny the Elder (23–79 aC.), so recurrent in the academic world; but I would like to emphasize the originality of Cooley's phrase, which is a very appropriate manifestation of his personality. The religious dimension appears to be extraordinarily relevant – although complex – in his life; and so a study of him requires that it be considered specifically. This annotation by Cooley is particularly significant: 'When a man sits down to write he should pray "not my will but Thine be done"'.⁵ As in the following statement: 'It is the religious bearing of my work that arouses me. It helps me to see life an onward, growing, upreaching whole. I might call my book God in Human Life. To understand and expound the social manifestation of God is my religious function'.⁶

At a time when initiatives to rehabilitate him have emerged, because, as Wiley writes, Mead wrote after Cooley's death an article containing 'some modest

compliments with some devastating criticism' (Wiley 2011, 169), it seems appropriate to investigate this aspect in more detail. The issue does not appear, understandably, in Cohen's 1967 doctoral research, since it focuses on the study of the social self in Cooley's thinking. But Cooley mentions God in his works more frequently than Emerson, Goethe, Darwin, Shakespeare, Dante, à Kempis, Montaigne, or Marcus Aurelius, who are at the top of the list of the most cited authors. Cooley's rehabilitation cannot marginalize this decisive aspect of his life, because a religious and theological nerve is present – not as an underground stream, but as an overflowing current– in all his life and work. In another very early fragment of his undated *Journal*⁷ he wrote:

It is the instinct of man to long for a definite ideal to command him what to do. But every definite ideal he embraces grows misshapen and insufficient before his eyes. And so I suppose he goes on over the fragments of broken idols toward the true and infinite God.

Like his father, Cooley was a member of the Congregationalist Church, one of the various branches of British and American Protestantism. Jandy wrote that Cooley's family could not be described as essentially religious (Jandy 1942, 18); and also that the religious teaching the children received was not so sectarian as to 'color' and prejudice their views on religion. But it must be stressed precisely that Charles Cooley was born, raised, and educated in a Christian environment in a Congregationalist family; and that his father, Thomas McIntyre Cooley, as the University of Michigan's President Angell observed in his funeral address, was a good Christian.⁸ But at the same time, it is necessary to account for the religious circumstances of the time, especially in American universities.

Most of Cooley's university life was spent within the period 1880–1920, in which, according to Julie Reuben (1996, 4) the 'university leaders tried to create several different forms of modern moral education'. And he entered the university at a time when many cases of *de-conversion* were taking place, which Harrold has studied focusing specifically on Henry Carter Adams and Calvin Thomas, two distinguished members of the University of Michigan (Harrold 2006). On January 14, 1883,⁹ after a Sunday meeting on 'What Does It Mean to Be a Christian', which was well attended by young people, Cooley, at age 18, took a walk around *campus* reflecting on religious issues; and these reflections, which reveal his religious attitude at the time, were recorded in one of the unnumbered volumes of his *Journal*:¹⁰

The cause of my not openly joining the church seems to be, as nearly as I can tell by thinking conscientiously about the matter, not doubt upon any matters that affect practical life but merely an intellectual dislike to subscribe to certain propositions about the nature of Christ. That he was a good man who taught the truth and thereby made the world better I think is true, but what he meant by saying that he was the son of God, whether his divine nature was different from that of other good men, what was the significance of his death in the cross if it had any, whether he really claimed for himself as much as the church claims for him; are questions of a different nature. Indeed they seem to be questions of small moment but in joining the church an affirmation of certain beliefs regarding them is required. The most unpleasant and unreasonable thing about the matter is that I who am trying to follow my conscience, should, because of doubts upon unimportant questions about which most people, Christians included, never bother their heads, be considered a recreant, a subject for prayer, hope, and

Christian labor but not for sympathy and confidence. One thing is certain; a man does right and is a good man in proportion as he follows his conscience.

Cooley was intellectually influenced in his youth by Emerson, who had created with some colleagues the Transcendental Club, from which the transcendentalist movement spread. The transcendentalists rejected an authority above themselves, and affirmed that each human being should make his own decisions about God, about human beings and about the world. Emerson declared that the transcendentalist ‘believes in miracles, in the perpetual opening of the human mind to the new influx of light and power; he believes in inspiration and ecstasy’ (Hudson and Corrigan 1999, chap. 7, note 37). But in 1838, in his July 15 lecture to future graduates of Harvard’s Divinity School, he rejected biblical miracles and claimed that although Jesus had been a great man, he was not God.¹¹ According to Emerson, God was not the stern judge of the Calvinists or the distant clockmaker of the deists; he thought that God revealed himself through nature. And like his romantic contemporaries, particularly the British, he saw a direct connection between man, nature, and God. Historian Grant Wacker (Wacker 2008) said that, in Emerson’s view, ‘God was best understood as a spirit, an ideal, a breath of life, always and everywhere filling the world with the inexhaustible power of the divine presence. God was as close as the atmosphere, as intimate as the sprouting clover or the falling rain’. These ideas influenced, especially during his youth, Charles Cooley.

4. Cooley’s attitude

References to God, to Christ and to Christianity, and to Thomas à Kempis are very frequent in books, articles, and in the *Journal* of Cooley, and it would be foolish to try to account for all of them; but it seems convenient to select some even if one risks being arbitrary in one’s choice.

Almost two years before his death, Cooley writes: ‘Such religion as I have is quite simple. I have a natural need for faith and loyalty. They afford an inner basis for activity and hope. At the same time I am curious, critical, penetrative, and cannot accept the irrational. So I go back of everything that seems transient or partial to life itself and fix faith and loyalty on that. All this fuss about God or no God is rather silly. We are religious as far as we are rational and need to believe on something; whether we call it God or not is unimportant’.¹²

And shortly afterwards he offers a thought that has to do with *the common*, that is to say something that goes beyond the mechanism of communication, which synthesizes his first conquest, and manifests communication in a teleological way:

The largest human thought is ‘we’, a ‘we’ embracing humanity growing and striving through the ages. This becomes a part of us through the outstanding men with whom we sympathize, Jesus, Dante, ... No doubt ‘we’ are part of something larger, but into that we cannot enter, we know it only from the outside, in its acts, wonderful but not human.¹³

For Cooley, the evangelical teaching that one must become like a child is very dear to him, and he thinks that this precept was taken more seriously in the United States than in other areas.¹⁴ ‘Here in America we tend to take more seriously the precept ‘unless you become as little children’. It should not be forgotten that in his last book,

Life and the student, he concludes by associating democracy with Christ's proposal to become like children (Cooley 1927, 269). And, by contrast, in *Social Organization*, he meditates on how 'our life is full of confusion which often leaves the individual conscious only of this separateness, engaged in a struggle which, so far as he sees, has no more relation to justice and to common good than a dog-fight' (Cooley 1909, 193).

5. Climate of spiritual revision

Certainly, the young Cooley's college life was spent in the climate of spiritual review studied by Harrold (Harrold 2006). But, if we can speak of a process of *de-conversion* in the case of Cooley, this process led him to the conviction that he had to fulfil a mission of a religious nature, which was influenced by the family environment, in the first place, and also by his initial readings. The favorite book of his childhood, which he read and reread,¹⁵ was *The Swiss family Robinson*, the novel by J. D. Wyss, originally published in 1812, which contains references to God at decisive moments, and in the last pages a declaration of Christian submission to the divine will: it cannot be excluded that this reading confirmed the essential Christian ideas received in his family. The work, written by a Protestant pastor, with the formation of his own children in mind, includes this text in one of the first pages, after the shipwreck (Wyss 1994, 11):

God can save us, for nothing is impossible for him [...] We must however hold ourselves resigned, and, instead of murmuring at His decree, rely that what He sees fit to do is the best, and that should He call us from this earthly scene, we shall be near Him in heaven, and united through eternity: Death may be well supported when it does not separate those who love.

Without paying special attention now to other situations in which the members of the family have God in mind or have recourse to him, it is worth noting that the novel ends with the words of the father, at the moment in which the family, rescued from the shipwreck, is divided, and a part of it heads for America in the ship that has discovered them:

I finish these few lines whilst the ship's boat is waiting. My sons will thus receive my last blessing. May God ever be with you. Adieu, Europe! Adieu, dear Switzerland! Never shall I see you again! May your inhabitants be always happy, pious, and free!

Apart from Wyss' novel, Cooley read and pondered Thomas à Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ* (Cooley 1927, 106–107), and later works by Emerson, Goethe, Dante and many others, including of course the Old and New Testaments; all these texts shaped his spiritual attitude, perhaps summarised in a kind of poem at the end of volume 18 of his *Journal*, which seems to have been composed by Cooley himself:¹⁶

I acquiesce, I serve, I trust
Now is enough
His hour is mine: I have no other
God give me peace in this hour
I am safe if I am faithful
Whatever comes is good
I am at rest
Do not get ahead of God
To *seek* the best is my life

Take me, use me, destroy me
 This is a world of order and growth
 I serve the spirit in trust and peace
 I let the spirit work
 Not I but the spirit
 The relaxed mind does the work
 Lifelong and heroic literary labor
 I relax and let God enter
 God in us
 I own the past nothing; the future owes me nothing;
 I am here with God in the present.

Marty has proposed that Cooley, Mead, Jane Addams, Veblen, and Dewey, whatever their personal religion, intended to offer ‘syntheses and programs that are ready for a democratic and pluralistic America. Therefore, he argued, their philosophy had to be non-Jewish and non-Christian. They were moderns who had to find new ways of dealing with the modernity that they were all, in some way, ready to face’ (Marty 1986, 76). And in a note he includes Giddings, Ross and Ward, but excludes Small, ‘because of his more positive relations with the institutional church’. He proposes that Cooley ‘served the hunger for wholeness that modernity had fed with its differentiation of orders of life’, and says:

[Cooley] represents the easiest case for religion. In conventional terms he was least modern, most ready to transport inherited religious ideals and forms into actions and agencies designed to minister to the needs of contemporaries. However much he must transform these he had the least difficulty wedding them to social thought. He was personally most at home in the vestigial religious institution. Cooley was the diagnostician of individualism and its limits along with the alienation he thought it was causing. So strong was this tradition, he wrote during War World I, that Americans and the British seemed hardly permitted to aspire toward an ideal society. Attempts to build such a society on the competitive market of business must fail. He would work to see society itself stand behind or shape authority. For Cooley and his colleagues, the self, which the previous Darwinists had celebrated, dared never pose against society. The two evolved in relation to each other.

Cooley came to see society as ‘an interweaving and interworking of mental selves’. For that development there must be small interpersonal groups and encounters. This meant also that he had to relativize the authoritarianism he found in Christianity just as he used cherished Christian themes to endow small social clusters with validity. (Marty 1986, 76–77)

This is, in my view, a global vision, which needs to be qualified. References to God are in the hundreds in Cooley’s unpublished or published work as a whole, with nuances that reflect a faith that is sometimes paradoxical and often based on texts from the Bible. He proclaims that he wants to see God,¹⁷ that God is a lord to be obeyed,¹⁸ that he is love;¹⁹ he is considered ‘father’;²⁰ and Cooley submits to him.²¹ He thinks that God speaks through him; and he often considers his presence. In 1908, he wrote: ‘God is, and God is *here*; there is nothing so near and sure; but it is only by a constant intention that we see and feel him’.²² And in 1928: ‘Any continuous current of life that is dear to us belongs to the nature of God. We imagine God because we need such a life, our own, but living in it. We find him in our family, country, church, community, cause. (...) Power, beauty, love, continence, hope: we need these things, we dedicate

ourselves to them where we find them, or we project them into God and into another life'.²³

Someone who lives and works in the spirit of God or for God is, according to Cooley, on the right path. His readings and rereadings of *The Divine Comedy* made him exclaim in 1914: 'Who can think of Dante and not believe in God?'.²⁴

6. Human brotherhood and communication

On the other hand, Cooley always admired the greatness of Jesus Christ, even if he did not believe in his divinity; and he referred to him in all his works, in some cases with clear implications in terms of human brotherhood, commonness, and communication. In August 1902 he made a long reflection on Jesus Christ and fraternity, alluding to communication.²⁵

Did not Jesus speak of Christ or the Son of Man, as something transcending himself, which he only partially incarnated? He often uses the third person, as in Matt. 24, 30 et seq. Again, he distinctly refuses to be called good, Matt. 19, 17. He does not speak as if he had a monopoly of incarnate divinity. His life would be meaningless to us unless we regarded him as a real man, sharing our limitations.

Christ lived the life of the common people, sharing and glorifying their struggles and hardships, thus he is *their* ideal and example, full of the spirit of brotherhood and mutual service which their life teaches them to value. [...] 'What is to treat a man like a brother?' To have that kindness toward him and understanding of his better nature that comes from cooperative intercourse; and to express this kindness and sympathy in sociable and helpful acts? This implies, first, an original compatibility of nature, second familiar intercourse, third, the absence of fundamentally diverse aims. As a rule persons brought into intercourse with one another and not separated by opposition in cherished ideas, become friendly. So in a society where communication is uninterrupted by placing obstacles or by invidious class distinctions, and were the same fundamental ideals of justice are cherished, there should be a general fraternity.

Where this exists and is defined and organized we have something in the way of a 'kingdom of God', apparently. To formulate the ideals of right would be a great help toward this.

Cooley affirms that 'all modern history may be regarded as chiefly the expansion or organization of ideas that were understood locally at the beginning of the Christian Era';²⁶ although he says in other circumstances that a universal religion could be superior to the Christian one, a thought that had some acceptance in his time. Nevertheless he alludes to Christ, whose life and death were altogether a work of art,²⁷ and whom he qualifies as *the great socius*.²⁸ His admiration for Christ is paralleled by his rejection of the church as an institution; and in *Life and the student* he reflects the thought that 'With disgusting grossness the fine appeal of the young man of Nazareth has, through the ages, been exploited by men of a wholly alien sort. Nothing breeds cynicism like the church. And yet through it the fine appeal does get dissemination' (Cooley 1927, 268).

In the epigraph 'Evolution', he refers to the existence of a 'common life', and asks himself how it is possible to see in others nothing but brothers; and he rounds off his reflection with these words: 'If I do a good work it is the central power working through me. This, says Thomas à Kempis, is the truth, by which one scapes vain glory' (Cooley 1927, 240).

7. The influence of Thomas à Kempis

Let us make a reference to the classic work of Thomas à Kempis to complete these ideas. Without, of course, being exhaustive, I think it would be dishonest to talk about him without including a small cast of his references to à Kempis. For example, in April 1907 he wrote: ‘And there is no peace until I am driven into humility and Thomas à Kempis’.²⁹ And in early 1916 he highlights, as so often, the qualities of à Kempis’ work in comparison with other authors: ‘Some lasting books are limited in range of thought. The charm of Thomas à Kempis is that of a few high and familiar ideas represented in a hundred forms and carrying the sincere character of the author with them. You live with very little effort in an atmosphere of true religion’.³⁰

Jandy states that ‘seeking a defense for his unsociability and an antidote for his over- concern for worldly approval, Cooley found both in *The Imitation of Christ* of Thomas à Kempis’ (Jandy 1942, 37). This is a somewhat lightweight judgment – perhaps understandable because we are dealing with a biography of Cooley that was published in 1942, and which was drawn from from Jandy’s doctoral thesis discussed in 1938. Jandy says that Cooley copied *verbatim* long sections of *De imitatione Christi*, and offers seven examples. In fact, Cooley translated or copied, almost in its entirety, the first of the four treatises, or parts, of à Kempis’ book, which is composed of 25 chapters. Allusions to the work of the German Augustinian are very frequent and significant; in October 1902 he described himself: ‘There is much of the “religious” in me. I have always loved to think of that life’;³¹ and he closes his note with some words of à Kempis: ‘dolce cosa e servire al signore’.

Jandy adds that Cooley appreciated à Kempis as a twenty-year-old, and that he found comfort and stability in his book in old age. Certainly Cooley wrote in 1918 that chapter 9 of the second treatise on *De Imitatione Christi* – ‘De carentia omnis solacii’ – ‘is one of the best and has often supported me’.³² But it is clear that an early reading of that book left a wider and more lasting impression on the spirit of Cooley, who dedicated one of his early texts to à Kempis (Cooley 1985). Cooley read and reread this influential work of the Augustinian monk, which inspired in him – among other things – a peculiar sense of poverty, which Cooley chose.³³

In *Life and the student*, Cooley collects, sometimes reworking, ideas he anticipated in his *Journal*. And although he devotes a section of the book to à Kempis – three paragraphs of considerable interest (Cooley 1927, 106–107) – he refers to him in other passages. For example, he compares him to Pascal, and writes: ‘Although his teaching is one of extreme abnegation, he is not to be counted among the humble spirits like Thomas à Kempis’ (Cooley 1927, 32). In another section entitled ‘Quiet in books’, he includes à Kempis, alluding to ‘the feeling of silence that some books give [...] They seem to be without a human audience, written, so to speak, for God’; and he concludes that he finds ‘an inner passion for truth, not requiring immediate appreciation, [that] gives the author assurance and universality. I find this’ – he says – ‘in Marcus, in some of the Psalms, in Thoreau, in Thomas à Kempis, in George Herbert, in a few of Shakespeare’s sonnets, in the best of Emerson and much of Thoreau’ (Cooley 1927, 102). And he somehow repeats himself when he writes later: ‘I soon tire of any mechanism, and find that the great books of the inner life – as Marcus Aurelius, Thomas à

Kempis, Pascal, Thoreau and Emerson – last better than manuals. Being persons not schemes, they are not easily exhausted’ (Cooley 1927, 222–223).

Finally, in a section entitled ‘Can Christianity survive’, he asks: ‘In what sense, if any, can Christianity become a general principle of conduct? Certainly not as non-resistance and the foregoing of ambition; Thomas à Kempis and St. Francis are hardly the men to make the world move; theirs is only a kind of goodness’.³⁴

Cooley valued à Kempis when he was in his early twenties, and it is true that he found ‘comfort and stability in his old age’;³⁵ but it should not be thought that he was looking for a lenitive; on the contrary, à Kempis offered him a vital model that inspired him throughout his life. In 1916, he prepared a text about Kempis to be read in the congregational church:³⁶ ‘for three Sundays I have worked an hour or two in the morning on a paper on Thomas à Kempis to be read Nov. 5 before a class at the congregational church’. In short, he regarded *The Imitation of Christ* as one of his favourite readings:³⁷ ‘Kempis – he wrote – stands to me for purity, withdrawal, compunction ...’.³⁸ It is not surprising that he considered this book, which he continued reading until the end of his life, to be a work of art.³⁹

8. A concluding remark

Communication, Cooley’s ‘first conquest’, became an object of study that gave rise to a fertile and complex field of research and teaching, particularly due to the development of propaganda and early public relations at the beginning of the twentieth century. In the middle of the century Kenneth Harwood and Francis Cartier (Harwood and Cartier 1953a, 1953b) suggested that progress in certain areas of knowledge tended ‘to underscore the need for a general theory of communication’. And George Gerbner (1956, 171) asserted that ‘the field of communication study [is] having communication troubles. It has no clear idea of its subject matter. It has no framework for the discussion or its technical concerns. And it has no value orientation for making much sense of its findings in terms of urgently needed judgements’.

At the end of the fifties of the last century, Schramm, Riesman, and Bauer (1959) responded to judgements such as these by appealing to the proliferation of research and centers dedicated to communication in the United States, although this approach did not satisfy John D. Peters (1986) years later. And just fifteen years ago, Wolfgang Donsbach (2006), in his presidential address to the International Communication Association, stressed how, despite the flourishing of the field of communication in academia and research, it still lacked its own identity, and had even lost the identity it originally had.

A return to Cooley is illuminating for the development of a communicative theory of the social. The ideas of Cooley, whom I would qualify as a *Christian theist*, in view of all the texts considered in this work, maintain their validity. It is obvious paying attention to this text that he wrote as the year 1909 drew to a close:⁴⁰ ‘I have perhaps done my most essential work as a thinker. I please myself with the thought of seeking more deliberately to become a better gentleman, scholar and Christian’. In that very year he published *Social organization*, in which he included this conviction (Cooley 1909, 52):

And Christianity, as a social system, is based upon the family, its ideals being traceable to the domestic circle of a Judean carpenter. God is a kind of father, men and women

are brothers and sisters; we are all members one of another, (...) In so far as the church has departed from these principles it has proved transient; these endure because they are human.

Notes

1. I personally include the word *Verständnis*, which is not included in this text by Schubert.
2. *Journal*, April 16, 1902.
3. *Journal*, April 27, 1915.
4. *Journal*, June 21, 1927
5. *Journal*, March 2, 1912.
6. *Journal*, December 7, 1913.
7. It is supposed to be from the early 1880s, and is titled as *Journal of judgements*.
8. The first Congregational church in Ann Arbor was created on March 23, 1847, twenty years after the founding of the city, when forty-eight members of the Presbyterian church left it because of disagreements on the issue of anti-slavery and on some doctrinal approaches, and created a self-governing church according to the basic principles of Congregationalism: that of *sola scriptura* and the priesthood of the faithful. More information on their site. <http://fccannarbor.org/about-fcc/our-story/>
9. I am referring to the volumen dated January 1882-March 1, 1882, which is a 54-page document and poses a clear dating problem. Indeed, the first date that appears in this document is Friday, January 5, 1882; but that day was a Thursday; on the other hand, January 5, 1883 was a Friday. I think this is an error attributable to Cooley himself, for, from that time on, all the dates and days of the week correspond to the year 1883, or to the year 1884 (from Sunday, January 20, to Tuesday, January 29, 1884); and, from Wednesday, January 31, inclusive, the dates and days of the week again correspond to those of 1883. This confusion is, by all accounts, quite old. This means that this *Journal* actually dates from 1883 to 1884. It contains reflections made by Cooley when he was 19 or 20 years old.
10. Please note my correction to the dates attributed to this document, in the previous footnote.
11. The address can be read online here: <https://emersoncentral.com/texts/nature-addresses-lectures/addresses/divinity-school-address/>
12. *Journal*, August 28, 1927.
13. *Journal*, November 6, 1927.
14. *Journal*, January 3, 1903.
15. *Journal*, July 21, 1895.
16. Cooley, *Journal* 18^a, February 6, 1908. I have not found on the Internet references to a text like this one, and for that reason I think it is Cooley's original. There are two volumes of Cooley's *Journal* numbered 18: *a* and *b*.
17. *Journal*, March 29, 1902.
18. *Journal*, September 12, 1912.
19. *Journal*, September 12, 1912.
20. *Journal*, August 7, 1907.
21. *Journal*, February 9, 1906.
22. *Journal*, November 21, 1908.
23. *Journal*, January 21, 1928.
24. *Journal*, January 8, 1914.
25. *Journal*, August 31, 1902.
26. *Journal*, June 25, 1903.
27. *Journal*, April 25, 1920.
28. *Journal*, March 20, 1910.

29. *Journal*, April 7, 1907.
30. *Journal*, January 5, 1916.
31. *Journal*, October 10, 1902.
32. *Journal*, April 21, 1918.
33. Cooley mentions à Kempis in *Human nature and the social order* (at least on pages 70, 161, 186, 244, 248, 250 and 256), and also in *Social order* (137–138). He does not cite him in *Social process*.
34. *Journal*, December 5, 1903.
35. Jandy, *ib*.
36. *Journal*, October 22, 1916.
37. *Journal*, July 21, 1895.
38. *Journal*, March 1, 1896.
39. *Journal*, November 19, 1919.
40. *Journal*, November 22, 1909.

Author's note

This text is mainly based on chapter V of the first part of my research 'Charles H. Cooley: an approach (Bases for a communicative theory of the social)', which I used to obtain a PhD in Communication, and which will be published soon.

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