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## SKEPTICAL THEISM, MORAL SKEPTICISM, AND DIVINE DECEPTION

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**Abstract.** Skeptical theism – a strategy for dealing with so-called ‘evidential arguments from evil’ – is often held to lead to moral skepticism. In this paper I look at some of the responses open to the skeptical theist to the contention that her position leads to moral skepticism, and argue that they are ultimately unsuccessful, since they leave the skeptical theist with no grounds for ruling out the possibility of maximal divine deception. I then go on to argue that the situation is particularly bleak for the skeptical theist, since the most prominent ways of dealing with this pervasive type of skepticism are not available to her. Furthermore, since this pervasive type of skepticism *entails* moral skepticism, it follows that moral skepticism will after all have found a way in ‘through the back door’. In order to solidify my case, I go on to outline and deal with three potential objections.

Skeptical theists attempt to defuse the threat posed to theistic belief by the presence in the world of apparently pointless evil by exploiting the claim that, when it comes to good and evil, the ways of God are mysterious. A familiar problem with this move is that, when it comes to good and evil, the ways of God cannot be *too* mysterious, lest the skeptical theist become engulfed in an all-encompassing moral skepticism.

Now, the skeptical theist has a number of replies at her disposal. In this paper I examine some of these replies, and argue that moral skepticism has a way of ‘slipping in through the back door’. The new challenge for the skeptical theist, then, lies in blocking the back as well as the front entrance. I argue that there are good reasons for thinking that the skeptical theist will not be able to do this. Finally, I go on to outline and deal with three potential objections.

## I.

The core claim of theism can be expressed thus:

- (T) God exists, and is the unique, omnipotent, omniscient, morally perfect creator of the universe.

Let us understand by ‘skeptical theism’ (ST) the conjunction of theism with the following claim:

- (S) For all we can tell, there are lots of facts about goods, evils, and the connections between goods and evils, of which human beings are unaware.<sup>1</sup>

(ST) may seem an attractive conjunction of theses. When (T) is combined with relevant facts about human cognitive capacities – i.e. with the fact that we, as opposed to God, are very far from being omniscient – (S) seems naturally to follow. Given the epistemic gulf between humans and God, why should we expect to be aware of very much of what God knows about goods, evils and the connections between them (and *a fortiori* very many of the facts about goods, evils and the connections between them)? As Alvin Plantinga notes, “On the theistic conception, our cognitive abilities, as opposed to God’s, are a bit slim for that” (Plantinga 1996, p. 73).

What’s more, we can note scriptural reasons for viewing (S) as a natural concomitant for many people subscribing to (T). We have, for example, God asking of Job the following question, which presumably is to be answered in the negative: “Do you know the ordinances of the heavens?” (Job 38: 33).<sup>2</sup> Likewise, Isaiah 55: 9: “For [as] the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts”, and Corinthians 1: 20-21: “Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” Certainly God’s decreeing that Adam may eat the fruits of any tree, except that of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2: 17), seems to imply that at least a degree of ignorance concerning matters of good and evil is our proper condition.

Indeed, without (S) much of God’s activity in scripture would seem not to make sense. Take, for example, God’s command in Genesis 22: 1-2

<sup>1</sup> For variations on this general theme, see Alston 1991, Alston 1996, Howard-Snyder 1996, and Bergmann 2001.

<sup>2</sup> All references to Bible are from the English Standard Version.

that Abraham prepare to kill Isaac, and His prohibitions in Leviticus 19: 19 against wearing garments containing both linen and wool. In the absence of (S) it should strike theists as surprising that a morally perfect God should respectively enjoin and prohibit such things. Given (S), however, we should not be surprised to find God commanding things whose goodness *we* are unable to fathom, or prohibiting things which to *us* seem morally innocuous, which is what we do in fact find. Furthermore, awareness of (S), an entailment of which is that there may well be unthought-of goods that would justify God's commanding killing, and unthought-of evils that would justify God's prohibitions in Leviticus 19: 19, can plausibly be seen as at least part of what compelled the people of the Book to endeavour to obey God's commands, and indeed to refrain from doubting that they are *God's* commands.

These considerations show that, for many with a prior commitment to (T), (ST) seems a natural position to adopt. Now, adopting (ST) provides the theist with a buffer against so-called 'evidential arguments from evil'. The following is representative of the general form of some of these arguments, where an instance of evil is 'pointless' just in case it could have been "prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse" (Rowe 2003, p. 369):<sup>3</sup>

- (1) Pointless evils exist.
- (2) Pointless evils would not exist if God exists.
- (3) Therefore God does not exist.

This argument is clearly valid; the aim of what I shall call the 'evidentialist' is to lend rational weight to each of its premises. Both theists and atheists typically hold that no possible world contains both God and pointless evil – that is, they typically hold that (2) is true.<sup>4</sup> Let us look, then, at how (1) is commonly supported by the evidentialist.

Consider William Rowe's famous example of a fawn, horribly burned in a forest fire and left to die a slow, lingering death. Rowe claims that "[s]o far as we can see, the fawn's suffering is pointless" (Rowe 2003, p.370) – there are no greater goods we can conceive of such that sparing the fawn's

<sup>3</sup> The following argument represents a stripped-down version of Rowe's argument in Rowe 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Hasker 1992 points out some reasons to view (2) as controversial. (2) gives rise to issues similar to those contained in discussion of the so-called 'logical' argument from evil, from which the evidential argument is commonly distinguished. For an explication of the logical argument, see Mackie 1955.

suffering diminishes these goods, and there are no other evils we can conceive of such that sparing the fawn's suffering would cause these evils to occur. Call an instance of evil 'inscrutable' just in case we are unable to conceive of the goods or evils by dint of which it would have a point. The fawn's suffering is an example of an inscrutable evil.

In order for this to lend rational weight to premise (1), we need some inference to the effect that if E is an instance of inscrutable evil, then we are rationally justified in viewing it as an instance of pointless evil. With this inference in place, we will be rationally justified in accepting (1), and thus, given (2), in denying God's existence.<sup>5</sup> What (ST) does is deny that any such inference from inscrutable to pointless evils will work. In order to see in more detail how (ST) does this, it will be useful to focus on a particular, famous example of (ST).

Stephen Wykstra<sup>6</sup> denies that the inference from inscrutable to pointless evils is a good one on the basis of an epistemic principle he terms 'CORNEA' ('Condition Of Reasonable Epistemic Access'). This principle holds that a person P is entitled to move from the claim that 'I see no *x*' to the claim that 'it is reasonable to believe that there is no *x*' only if *x* is the sort of thing that, *were* it to exist, would likely be discernible to P. To illustrate: I am not aware of any Buddhists living in my area – I have never met one, or heard from anyone in the area that any Buddhists live there. But, according to CORNEA, I would *not* be entitled to conclude, on the basis of this, that it is reasonable for me to believe that there are no Buddhists living in my area: *were* there Buddhists living in the area, it is not reasonable that I should expect things to seem any different to how they in fact seem. Buddhists generally don't go out of their way to make themselves conspicuous to others, and besides, the area in which I live is very large, and I have only met a very small percentage of its population. Thus, my epistemic position is such that I lack access to the data that would make the presence of Buddhists discernible.

The CORNEA principle, in conjunction with (S), blocks the inference from inscrutable evils to premise (1) above.<sup>7</sup> By CORNEA, such an inference would be reasonable only if there is good reason to think that were the instances of inscrutable evil *not* pointless, they would not be inscrutable –

<sup>5</sup> Examples of arguments that rely on this kind of inference can be found in Schellenberg 2000, Stone 2003, Tooley 1991, Tooley 2010 and Howard-Snyder 2010.

<sup>6</sup> See also Alston 1991, Alston 1996 and Bergmann 2001.

<sup>7</sup> CORNEA is a particular example of a general skeptical theistic strategy for blocking the path from inscrutable to pointless evils. For the purposes of this paper, nothing much will turn on the intricacies of its formulation.

i.e. were there to be some overriding justification for God's allowing such evils, we would be cognizant of it. But, given (S), it is unreasonable to think that such a condition is met: given what we know of our cognitive limitations, and the fact that God's knowledge so vastly transcends our own, it is reasonable to think that were inscrutable evils *not* pointless, they would *still* be inscrutable (Wykstra 1984, pp. 92-3). Our epistemic limitations are such that we simply may not be privy to the relevant data regarding goods, evils, and the connections between them, that would enable us to make the inference from inscrutable evils to premise (1).

We have already seen that, for the theist, (ST) is a natural position to adopt. When this natural position is combined with the apparently plausible CORNEA principle, it seems that we have an attractive way of blocking the evidential argument adumbrated above.

## II.

However, there are familiar problems with (ST). Let us understand by 'moral skepticism' the following:

(MS) No human is ever rationally justified in believing any moral proposition.<sup>8</sup>

If (ST) is indeed successful in blocking the inference from inscrutable to pointless evils, then it is hard to see why it should not lead to (MS). We can apply a CORNEA-like condition to *any* moral proposition we believe. According to the skeptical theist, one would only be rationally justified in believing such a proposition if it meets such a condition – i.e. if the proposition were false, it would not seem to us to be true, or we would have some reason to doubt its truth. But given (S), why should we suppose that it *does* meet this condition? Given the limitations of our cognitive abilities, as opposed to God's, why should we suppose that even the most powerful intuitions, or the most forceful arguments we can muster in favour of the most apparently obvious moral propositions, license us in rationally believing these propositions? After all, they are merely *our* intuitions, and the most powerful arguments *we* can muster, and we are cognitively limited beings. Thus, if (S) blocks the inference from inscrutable to pointless evils, then it seems also to block *any* inference from the way things seem to us (whether

<sup>8</sup> This formulation comes from Jordan 2006, p. 408.

on the basis of intuition or argument) to the way it is rational to believe that they are. So in blocking the inference from inscrutable evils to (1), (S) seems to lead to (MS). Since (S) is a component of (ST), it seems to follow that (ST) likewise leads to (MS).

But this would surely be an unacceptable consequence of (ST). The upshot of (MS) is that we are not smart enough or well-equipped enough to rationally determine which actions or states of affairs are good or bad (or indifferent), so it seems that we can have no moral basis for deciding to do one thing rather than another. In other words, (MS) leads to moral paralysis<sup>9</sup>: the inability to determine the moral status of any action leaves me with no idea which action I morally ought to perform in any given situation. Should I rescue the drowning child, if doing so would come at no obvious cost to me or to anyone else? Given (MS), I simply cannot say.<sup>10</sup> But this, obviously, is ridiculous. Thus, it seems important that the skeptical theist should be able to defend herself against the allegation that her position leads to (MS). In the following sections I argue that some of the most apparently attractive options open to (ST) in this regard nonetheless allow (MS) to seep in.

### III.

How might the skeptical theist go about shielding her position from (MS)? Well, the crucial thing to note is that (ST) is a *conjunction* of theses. As Michaels Bergmann and Rea highlight, “skeptical theists, after all, are *theists*” (Bergmann and Rea 2005, p.244), and thus it may well be that the *theistic* element of (ST) serves to constrain its skeptical element.

One initial point to note is that once one accepts (T), the scope of (MS) is thereby *immediately* attenuated. Since (T) refers to God’s *moral perfection*, it might plausibly be maintained that (T) *itself* is a moral proposition. So anyone with a prior commitment to (T) will see themselves as justified in holding at least *this* moral proposition to be true. But it clearly wouldn’t

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<sup>9</sup> I borrow this phrase from Sehon 2010. See also Almeida and Oppy 2003, Jordan 2006, and Maitzen 2009 for related criticisms. Note that moral paralysis need not amount to paralysis *simpliciter*. we may well still have *some* basis on which to decide to perform actions. The crucial problems arise when the decisions at issue are distinctly *moral* ones; the point is that, when this occurs, our beliefs about morality will not justify us in deciding to perform one action rather than another, because these beliefs are not themselves justified.

<sup>10</sup> Howard-Snyder 2010 points out that some versions of consequentialism also apparently lead to this implausible view.



be good enough if this were the *only* moral proposition that the skeptical theist is justified in believing – were this the case, the unacceptable consequence of (MS), that *we* have no moral basis on which to make decisions, would still obtain. We shall therefore have to see what else her antecedent commitment to theism will enable the skeptical theist to salvage.

Now, given the “standard theistic background assumptions” (Bergmann and Rea 2005, p. 245) against which (ST) is usually adopted, it seems that the contention that (ST) leads to a kind of paralysis when it comes to making moral decisions *can* indeed be undercut. Recall the discussion of Genesis 22: 1-2 and Leviticus 19: 19 in section 1. Bergmann and Rea note that “theists very typically believe that God has commanded his creatures to behave in certain ways; and they also very typically believe that God’s commands provide all-things-considered reasons to act” (Bergmann and Rea 2005, p. 245). Thus, the proponent of (ST) can argue that her position needn’t commit her to the kind of moral paralysis seemingly entailed by (MS).

The skeptical theist can also use these standard theistic background assumptions in order to attack (MS) directly. How is this to be done? Firstly, just as it can be argued on the basis of certain scriptural passages that a degree of ignorance concerning matters of good and evil is our proper condition, it can also be argued on a similar basis that, *contra* (MS), we are not in a state of *total* myopia on this issue. After all, Adam *did* consume the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3: 6), implying that mankind thus ingested a certain amount of knowledge in matters to do with good and evil. Furthermore, Romans 2: 14 seems to hold that persons can be led by *reason* to do what morality demands, and Genesis 1: 27 depicts mankind as being created ‘in the image of God’, implying that, rather like the relationship between Plato’s particulars and the Forms, we may very well ‘fall short’ of God’s infinite wisdom, but we nonetheless participate in it. Thus, one could argue that inasmuch as certain scriptural passages license an acceptance of (ST), others license a rejection of full-blown (MS).

Secondly, given that scripture licenses the view that our cognitive capacities are weak in comparison with God’s, but that they are not so weak as to imply that we are totally ignorant about everything, the proponent of (ST) could formulate a notion of justified belief *relative to epistemic position*. Given everything that we *as humans* have discovered about our world and about the consequences of our actions, and given that humans at least to some extent have morality “written on their hearts” (Romans 2: 15), we could be rationally justified in believing, for example, that the drowning of an innocent child *is* a pointless evil (that is, that there are no

goods/evils that *we* are aware of such that preventing it from occurring would diminish/increase them). This itself would seem to give us reason for preventing such a thing, thus further obviating the allegation of moral paralysis<sup>11</sup>. But it would also enable the skeptical theist to retain a degree of skepticism sufficient to undermine the view that it is rational to believe that certain evils are pointless relative to *God's* epistemic position. Thus, Nick Trakakis and Yujin Nagasawa argue that there are “differences . . . between a perfect being and a human being in virtue of their disparate roles” (Trakakis and Nagasawa 2004, p.35), and thus that “the skeptical theist need only hold that it is *God's* purposes or intentions that often elude us” (Trakakis and Nagasawa 2004, p.23).<sup>12</sup> Peter Van Inwagen likewise makes this point, arguing that “for all we know our inclinations to make value-judgements are not veridical when they are applied to cosmic matters *unrelated to the concerns of everyday life*” (Van Inwagen 2003, p. 398 – italics added).

Crucially, the evidentialist's inference from inscrutable evils to pointless evils conflates the ‘cosmic matters’ and the ‘concerns of everyday life’: the evidentialist wants to argue that the inscrutability of certain evils makes it reasonable to believe that such evils are *cosmically* pointless (i.e. pointless relative to God's epistemic position), whereas all she would in fact be entitled to is the claim that they are pointless with respect to the everyday concerns of human beings. She wants to argue that *God* should have prevented such evils, whereas all she would in fact be entitled to is that (in the absence perhaps of divine commands to the contrary) *she* should endeavour to prevent them.

#### IV.

These are the sorts of responses that so-called skeptical theists have given to the sorts of allegations I've discussed, so I hope I will not be going too far astray in using them as the basis for what follows. What I argue is this: regardless of the success of such responses up to this point, they are powerless against the allegation that (ST) leads to a more pervasive type of skepticism. Since this extreme skepticism *entails* (MS), it follows that the responses discussed above will nonetheless allow (MS) to slip in through the back door.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Howard-Snyder 2010, p.48.

<sup>12</sup> For a reply to Trakakis and Nagasawa, see Almeida and Oppy 2005.

What we need to focus on is the issue of *deception*. In particular, let us consider the kind of widespread deception discussed by Descartes in the *First Meditation*. Descartes briefly considers the possibility that God is deceiving him:

“[F]irmly rooted in my mind is the long-standing belief that there is an omnipotent God who made me the kind of creature I am. How do I know that he has not brought it about that there is no earth, no sky, no extended thing, no shape, no size, no place, while at the same time ensuring that all these things appear to me to exist just as they do now?” (Descartes 2007, pp. 78-79)

Of course, Descartes goes on to conclude that his notion of God is such that “God is supremely good and the source of all truth”, and thus that, whilst it may initially seem that he could be being deceived in this way, such deception cannot originate from *God*.

But the crucial question now is this: given (S), how can we justifiably believe that the kind of widespread deception described by Descartes is not a good thing? Granted that there may be many goods and evils of which we are unaware, what would justify us in believing that widespread deception is not one of these goods, or that refraining from such deception is not one of these evils?<sup>13</sup> Adopting (S) seems to deprive us of any basis on which to make this claim; it seems to deprive Descartes of his license to make the confident assertion that God’s goodness precludes deception. The new problem then is this: (S) seems to imply that we cannot justifiably believe that we are not being radically deceived. Since (S) is a component of (ST), it seems to follow that (ST) implies that we cannot justifiably believe that we are not being radically deceived.

Above I adumbrated some of the responses available to the skeptical theist in safeguarding her position from (MS). We can now ask: are such responses also helpful in defending (ST) against the allegation that it leads to the view that we cannot justifiably believe that we are not being radically deceived? What we find is that they are unhelpful. We saw above that the skeptical element of (ST) is “not deployed in a vacuum” (Bergmann and Rea 2005, p. 244). Other theistic commitments, in particular the typical commitment to the truth of certain scriptural passages, serve to attenuate the scope of (ST)’s skepticism so as to filter out full-blown (MS). But if the skeptical theist *is* to take this line, she shall have to contend with the fact that, at various points, God is presented in scripture as a deceiver. For example, 2 Thessalonians 2: 11 describes God as sending certain people

<sup>13</sup> The point about refraining will be left implicit in what follows.

a “strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false”. Interestingly, Genesis 22: 1-2, the passage involving Abraham and Isaac appealed to in section 1 to lend support to (S), and in section 3 to obviate the allegation of moral paralysis, may *itself* be an example of divine deception.<sup>14</sup> In the passage, God seems to have created in Abraham the false impression that Isaac is to be killed, by ultimately withdrawing that command.

Indeed, the bible is replete with examples of apparent divine deception – see for example John 7: 8-10; Jeremiah 4: 10; Jeremiah 20: 7 and Ezekiel 14. In order to consolidate my case, I want to mention two more apparent instances. The first occurs in Exodus 3:8, with God commanding Moses to ask the Pharaoh for a three day trip into the wilderness. This request is significantly less than the complete freedom promised to Moses by God, suggesting that Moses has been instructed deliberately to deceive the Pharaoh. A second further example of God apparently being implicated in deception occurs in 1 Samuel 16: 2, with God commanding that Samuel claim to the people of Bethlehem that he has come to sacrifice to God, so as to disguise his true purpose – to anoint a new king. These two examples lead to a further potential line of argument. It might seem that they are not examples of *divine* deception, but of God commanding that *humans* do the deceiving. But it also seems plausible that God issues the commands He does based on the *goodness* of that which He commands<sup>15</sup> – that there should be some goods that would justify God in issuing what seem to us to be morally dubious commands was part of what lent support to (S) in section 1. So it follows from God’s commanding that humans deceive that deception can sometimes be a good thing. It could be objected that this applies *merely* to human deception, but we can now use the view that humans are created *in imago dei* to argue that it likewise speaks in favour of the possibility of *divine* deception.

Given all this, if an appeal to scripture is to be successful in shielding (ST) from (MS), then by parity of reasoning it should also be successful in establishing that deception is the sort of thing within God’s remit. If scripture is to be taken at face-value – and, as we saw above, many defenders of (ST) will feel the attraction of taking it this way – then Van Inwagen seems incorrect when he claims that “it is plausible to suppose that deception

<sup>14</sup> See Wielenberg 2010 for this interpretation of the Genesis 22: 1-2. Wielenberg also discusses the aforementioned passage from 2 Thessalonians.

<sup>15</sup> Alternatively, it could be held that an action’s being good *depends* on God’s having issued a command with regard to that action. This view, however, is implausible. See Shaw 2002.

. . . is inconsistent with the nature of a perfect being” (Van Inwagen 2003, p. 397)

Having softened the case against the possibility of divine deception, we can turn to the second consideration in favour of limiting (ST) so as to exclude (MS). This was the view that we can justifiably believe moral propositions relative to our epistemic position. The key question now is this: what does our epistemic position tell us about deception? Are there ever any goods *that we are aware of* such that deception would be justified? Well, going back for a moment to ‘the concerns of everyday life’, it seems clearly to be the case that deception *is* sometimes a good thing; echoing Romans 2: 14-15, in everyday contexts we are often led “by nature” to view deception as such. Consider Robert Nozick’s example of the grandmother deceived about the health of her grandson so as to spare her from unnecessary anguish (Nozick 1981, p. 179), or consider the famous (if hackneyed) objection to Kant’s strictures against deception: it would surely be good to deceive a potential murderer as regards the whereabouts of her intended victim. So whilst there may be no greater goods we can think of that would justify our failing to save a drowning child at no obvious cost to ourselves or to anyone else, there *are* frequently greater goods we can think of that would justify instances of deception.

Note that even if this *weren’t* the case – even if there was *never* anything we could think of that would justify any instance of deception – this would not mean that the proponent of (ST) would be entitled to claim that *God* could not be justified in deceiving us; her commitment to (S), and the aforementioned observations that God sometimes *does* both deceive and command that humans deceive, precludes her from claiming this. The fact that we *can* often think of such justification means that, *even relative to our epistemic position*, deception cannot necessarily be thought of as a bad thing. This will be shown to be important in section 5.

Once all this has been allowed – that both scripture and ordinary moral practice seem frequently to show that deception can be a good thing – we can see that the replies adumbrated in section 3 on behalf of (ST) will not rule out the possibility of divine deception; they encourage the view that divine deception is consistent with God’s goodness. Furthermore, since “skeptical theists, after all, are *theists*”, they are committed to (T), and hence to God’s *omnipotence*. Since God is omnipotent, and deception is consistent with His goodness, we could indeed all be the victims (or benefactors?) of massive and wholesale deception – indeed, we could be deceived about *everything*. Call this ‘maximal deception’. (S) ensures that we cannot tell whether or not such maximal deception is a good thing, and thus

(given that God is morally perfect and hence always does what is good) that we cannot judge whether God *is* maximally deceptive.

But if this is the case, then the responses discussed in section 3 won't rule out (MS) after all. The argument is this:

- (4) God is maximally deceptive.
- (5) If God is maximally deceptive, then no human is ever justified in believing any proposition.
- (6) Therefore no human is ever justified in believing any proposition.  
(from 4 and 5)
- (7) Therefore no human is ever justified in believing any moral proposition. (from 6)

Note how this argument mirrors the evidentialist's argument from (1)-(3): in each case, we have a logically valid argument, and in each case the job of the argument's proponents is to lend rational weight to its first premise. What I've in effect argued is that the skeptical theist's attempts to shield (ST) from (MS) lend rational weight to (4), inasmuch as they lend weight to the view that divine deception is consistent with God's goodness, which in turn allows (S), coupled with the view that God is omnipotent, to show that for all we justifiably believe (4) is true.

(5) is licensed by CORNEA, the very principle that initially seemed so useful to (ST). If God were maximally deceptive, then no proposition we believe would meet this condition: CORNEA holds that belief in proposition *x* is rationally justified for person P only if it is reasonable to think that the falsity of *x* would be discernible to P. But in the case of divine deception such falsity is obviously not discernible. So if God is maximally deceptive it follows that none of the propositions we believe meet CORNEA.

But if the aforementioned responses on behalf of (ST) encourage the view that, for all we justifiably believe (4) is true, and the skeptical theist's CORNEA principle implies that (5) is true, then it follows that, for all we justifiably believe (6) and hence (7) are true. Thus, it follows that, for all we justifiably believe, (MS) is true. This isn't (yet!) to say that (MS) *is* true (only that, *for all we justifiably believe*, it is) but we can note at this stage that (MS) seems to be creeping in through the back door. This seems to undermine the skeptical theist's attempts, adumbrated in section 3, to safeguard (ST) from (MS).

## V.

How should a skeptical theist deal with this predicament? It follows from the inability justifiably to rule out (4) above that Bergmann and Rea's appeal to divine commands, and Ira Schnall's contention that "revealed theistic religions . . . have a . . . satisfactory solution to the moral problem for skeptical theism" (Schnall 2007, p. 60) will not be enough, since they leave us with no basis for justifiably believing that we are not being deceived as to God's commands and revelations. Furthermore, commenting on an earlier draft of this paper, an anonymous reviewer wrote that "theists typically believe that God has a discernible history with humans, in terms of the revelation of God's character and related matters." What we have seen is that "God's character" is revealed to be such that God is sometimes presented as a deceiver; and, as the passages from Job 38: 33, Isaiah 55: 9 and Corinthians 1: 20-21 referred to at the beginning of this paper indicate, "God's character" is also revealed to be such that His purposes often elude us. I thus argue that the resultant inability on the part of the skeptical theist to rule out (4) renders her unable to appeal directly to the "history with humans" she supposes herself to be able to "discern." So the skeptical theist cannot deal with the predicament *merely* by invoking divine commands,<sup>16</sup> the dictates of scripture, or the supposed 'discernible history' God has with humans.

Perhaps the skeptical theist could deal with the predicament in a similar way to various attempts to deal with contemporary brain-in-a-vat type skepticism. I want in this section to gesture at some reasons for pessimism in this regard.

The 'brain-in-a-vat' (henceforth BIV) is a contemporary variant on Descartes's skeptical hypothesis.<sup>17</sup> The basic idea is this: given all the experiences I am having, I cannot be rationally justified in believing that I am not a mere BIV, being stimulated by super-scientists so as to have exactly these experiences – all my current experiences are consistent with this possibility. But if I cannot be rationally justified in believing *this*, then it seems to follow that I cannot be rationally justified in believing many ordinary propositions, for example that I have a hand, since the falsity of such propositions follows from the BIV hypothesis.

Two popular lines of response are the following:

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<sup>16</sup> See Maitzen 2007 and Piper 2008 for some further objections to the appeal to divine commands.

<sup>17</sup> For a thorough discussion of skepticism in its contemporary guise, see DeRose and Warfield (1999).

- (A) I can be justified in believing many ordinary propositions, so it follows that I can be justified in believing that I am not a mere BIV.
- (B) I cannot be justified in believing that I am not a mere BIV, but this does not imply that I cannot be justified in believing many ordinary propositions.

What I want to do is to argue that it will be difficult for the skeptical theist to apply these types of responses to the argument adumbrated in section 4 above. Obviously I do not have space to discuss *all* the possible strategies that may be open to (ST); what I want to do is to provide examples of (A)-type and (B)-type responses to BIV-type skepticism, and to show how these responses will *not* help (ST).

Let's take (A) first. An example of this type of response comes from James Pryor (2000), building on previous work by G.E. Moore (1939). Pryor argues for *dogmatism*, which is a theory of perceptual justification according to which the mere fact that something seems to be the case – i.e. is represented in perceptual experience as being the case – provides (*prima facie*, defeasible) justification for the belief that it *is* the case. So the fact that I seem to see a hand attached to (what seems to be) my arm provides *prima facie* justification for the belief that I have a hand. Since it follows from my having a hand that I am not a (handless) BIV, my experience as of a hand provides *prima facie* justification for my belief that I am not a BIV. Perhaps the skeptical theist could adopt this strategy, and argue that the fact that many propositions seem to be true justifies me in believing them, and thus in believing that God is not maximally deceptive.

It is obvious that this will not be satisfactory for the proponent of (ST), whose response to the evidential argument from evil involves precisely the *opposite* claim – that the fact that something seems to be the case does *not* in itself provide justification, even *prima facie*, weak, justification (Wykstra 1990, p. 139) for the belief that it is the case. Adopting Pryor's strategy would seemingly license the inference from inscrutable to pointless evils, and since it is the purpose of (ST) to deny such an inference, the skeptical theist cannot adopt Pryor's strategy.

The skeptical theist has a possible line of response here. In section 3 I talked about the notion of justification relative to epistemic position, and claimed that this notion may be open to the skeptical theist in her attempt to shield (ST) from (MS). Given this, perhaps the skeptical theist could after all argue along the lines of (A) – that, relative to her epistemic position, she is justified in believing many propositions (i.e. that (6) is false) and thus,



given (5), that she is justified (relative to her epistemic position) in believing that (4) is false.

There are several problems with this response. Firstly, we saw above that an appeal to certain scriptural passages – for example Genesis 3: 6, Genesis 1: 27 and Romans 2: 14-15 – was what licensed the claim that we can justifiably believe things relative to our epistemic position. In order for these passages to be taken seriously, it must be the case that (4) is false. But then the notion of justification relative to epistemic position will not enable the skeptical theist to use the strategy suggested in (A); she won't be able to argue that her epistemic position licenses her in believing that (4) is false, since (4) must *already* be assumed to be false in order for her to have the scriptural grounds for invoking the notion of justification relative to epistemic position in the first place.

Secondly, even assuming that the notion of justified belief relative to epistemic position *can* be appealed to, the epistemic position of humans is part of what lent rational weight *to* (4), since it is such that deception sometimes seems to be a good thing. It surely seems strange to hold that the very same epistemic position that reveals deception to be a potentially good thing can allow us justifiably to believe that (4) is *false*, since this would allow us justifiably to believe that there is a potentially good action that is not open to a *wholly*-good (and omnipotent) God.

Thirdly, to infer that we can justifiably believe – relative to our epistemic position – that (4) is false, on the grounds that, relative to such a position, (6) is false, would be to undertake the same type of move as the evidentialist, who claims that relative to *her* epistemic position (“in the light of *our* experience” [Rowe 2003, p. 371 – italics added]) (1) is true, and hence, given (2), that she is justified in believing that God doesn't exist. The problem for this was that the evidentialist is conflating the ‘cosmic’ and the ‘concerns of everyday life’; she is arriving at a conclusion about God from premises concerning her own understanding of the world. If the skeptical theist wants to claim that such a move is impermissible, then appeal to the notion of justification relative to epistemic position cannot enable her to use the line of response suggested in (A), since this would likewise be to arrive at a conclusion about God from premises concerning her own understanding of the world. The point was that the epistemic distance between us and God is such that we simply cannot justifiably believe things like (1).<sup>18</sup> By parity of reasoning, I argue, it is such that we cannot justifiably believe not-(4).

<sup>18</sup> Where (1) is given the relevant ‘cosmic’ gloss; i.e. where (1) is read as ‘there exist evils that are pointless relative to *God's* epistemic position’.

What about option (B)? (B) involves some complicated issues to do with closure,<sup>19</sup> issues I will not be able to discuss fully here. As with (A), we can instead briefly explicate one prominent example of a response to BIV skepticism along the lines of (B), and show why this response is problematic for (ST).

Consider the well-known ‘sensitivity’ requirement for knowledge, according to which P knows that  $x$  only if, were  $x$  false, P wouldn’t believe that  $x$ .<sup>20</sup> Since I have been focusing thus far on *justification* rather than *knowledge*, let us view the sensitivity requirement as a necessary condition for justification. With such a condition in place, it seems that (B) is a viable option as a response to BIV skepticism: my belief that I am not a BIV is not justified because it is not sensitive – were I a BIV, I would still believe that I was not one (the BIV hypothesis is deliberately designed to make its truth indistinguishable from its falsity). But my belief, say, that I have a hand can nonetheless be justified because *this* belief *is* sensitive – were I not to have a hand I wouldn’t believe that I have one. Crucial to this response is that the ‘closest possible worlds’ in which I don’t have a hand are *not* worlds in which I am a BIV; they are worlds in which, for example, I lost my hand in an accident, or was born without it. Since my belief that I have a hand is sensitive throughout the relevant, closest worlds, my belief that I have a hand can be justified, even though I cannot justifiably believe that I am not a BIV.

Is this type of response open to (ST)? Well, it *does* seem like it would be an attractive option, since the sensitivity requirement already seems implicit in the CORNEA principle, which states that the falsity of  $x$  must be discernible to P in order for P to have a rationally justified belief that  $x$ .<sup>21</sup> So it seems that if the skeptical theist is willing to embrace CORNEA then she should see (B) as a viable response to the problems adduced in section 4.

But there is a crucial *asymmetry* between BIV skepticism and the ‘maximally deceptive God’ hypothesis discussed above. This asymmetry is such that the ‘sensitivity’ version of (B) – the version that, given her acceptance of CORNEA, is likely to seem most attractive to the skeptical theist – is *unlikely* to be of much use in defending the skeptical theist from the skepti-

<sup>19</sup> Roughly, the principle that if S knows (or is justified in believing)  $p$ , and S knows (or is justified in believing) that  $p$  entails  $q$ , then S is thereby in a position to know (or justifiably believe)  $q$ . See Luper (2010) for a full discussion of the issues surrounding this principle.

<sup>20</sup> See Nozick 1981, Dretske 2003 and Dretske 2005.

<sup>21</sup> Indeed, Graham and Maitzen 2007, p. 83 argue that CORNEA and (B) fail for the same reason: both entail “intolerable violations of closure.”

cism engendered by the maximally deceptive God hypothesis. In order for the ‘sensitivity’ version of (B) to work, it must be the case that the closest possible worlds in which the ordinary propositions I believe are false are *not* worlds in which the skeptical scenario obtains – this is essential if such beliefs are to be sensitive. Now, in the BIV case, it is relatively uncontroversial that such a requirement is met: had I not had a hand, it would not have thereby been the case that I am a BIV. A world in which BIVs *exist*, let alone a world in which *I* am a BIV, seems a very strange one indeed. No sane person believes in the existence of such things; they are not relevant to the assessment of the relevant counterfactuals.

But consider (B) as applied to the argument in section 4. Crucially, the skeptical theist *does* believe in an omnipotent, omniscient and morally perfect God, and *does* believe that there may well be many facts about good and evil that are beyond our ken, and (as I argued above) *should* believe that deception is within God’s remit. Thus, for the skeptical theist, the possible worlds in which a maximally deceptive God exists should not seem so ‘far out’. Given this, it is much harder to see in the case of the maximally deceptive God hypothesis that our beliefs meet the sensitivity requirement than it would be in the case of the BIV hypothesis. The fact that the skeptical theist *believes* in God, whilst no sane person believes in BIVs, means that (B) will be a problematic option for the skeptical theist.

Now, I argued above that, given the skeptical theist’s ways of dealing with (MS) discussed in section 3, it will follow that for all we justifiably believe (4) is true, and thus that we are not justified in believing not-(4). Since (B) is a problematic option for the skeptical theist, it seems that the fact that we are not rationally justified in believing that God is not maximally deceptive *will* imply that we are not rationally justified in believing any proposition, since the most prominent and initially promising way of disarming this implication – the ‘sensitivity’ version of (B) – runs into problems when applied to (ST). Given this, it is not merely the case that *for all we justifiably believe* (6) and hence (7) are true; given the failure of (B), (6) and hence (7) *are* true! (MS) has well and truly gained entrance through the back door.

## VI.

In order to solidify my argument, I want now to outline and deal with three potential objections. The first is as follows. It could be argued that it does not make sense to say that God could be deceptive. Descartes, as we

observed, claimed that “God is supremely good, and the source of all truth”. It could be argued that it is not God’s *goodness* that precludes His being deceptive – (S) at least seems to render *this* claim unavailable – but His role as the *source of all truth*.

Let me elaborate, this time with reference to George Berkeley. Berkeley claims that “[t]he ideas imprinted on the senses by the Author of nature are called ‘real things’” (Berkeley 2008, p. 95). If this is read as claiming that God’s imprinting ideas on the senses is a necessary and sufficient condition for those ideas constituting reality, then this would seem to imply that divine deception is a logical impossibility. But if divine deception *is* a logical impossibility, then of course (4) will be false, and my argument can’t proceed.

This objection would require that passages such as 2 Thessalonians 2: 11 be reinterpreted, since taking such passages at face value entails that divine deception *is* a logical possibility. Since taking scripture at face value was part of what lent support to (ST) in the first place, this objection might not be particularly attractive to the skeptical theist.

But since scripture *also* seems to hold in places that divine deception *is* impossible (for example, Hebrews 6: 18) at least *some* scriptural claims will inevitably need to be abandoned or reinterpreted. So I don’t want to place too much weight on 2 Thessalonians 2: 11 in dealing with the objection. Suffice it to say that the objection will not enable the skeptical theist to avoid my conclusion. Even if God’s *Himself* being deceptive were impossible, what is surely possible is for God to *allow* deception. So even if *all* deception were to originate with “deceitful spirits and teachings of demons” (1 Timothy 4: 1-2), (S) seems to imply that for all we can tell there could be some greater good that would justify God’s allowing the demons to do their dirty work.

Indeed, the scriptural support in favour of God’s allowing deception to occur is even stronger than that in favour of the view that God could Himself be deceptive, since *any* passage in which humans are deceived, even if God Himself is not explicitly implicated in such deception, would count in its favour. Furthermore, passages such as 1 Kings 22 *do* explicitly show God allowing other spirits to deceive. Thus, viewing divine deception as impossible will not aid the skeptical theist’s cause, since she will not be able to rule out the possibility of God’s allowing deception to occur. I argue, therefore, that the first objection fails to dislodge my argument. I am thus content to maintain that divine deception *is* possible, since assuming otherwise goes no way towards aiding the skeptical theist.

But my argument concerned not *mere* deception, but *maximal* deception. The second and third objections take umbrage with this notion. The second objection is along similar lines to the first: is maximal deception even a *coherent* notion? Could even an omnipotent God deceive one about *everything*? Perhaps not: perhaps there are propositions – Descartes’s *cogito* comes to mind – such that it is *impossible* that my belief that they obtain be false.

However, even if instead of *maximal deception* we have merely *the most deception that is logically possible*, I do not think this will substantially affect my argument.<sup>22</sup> My ultimate concern was with *moral* skepticism, and I do not think that any substantive moral propositions are, or follow from, the kind of propositions regarding which it is logically impossible that I be deceived.<sup>23</sup> I say ‘substantive’ moral propositions because there could perhaps be *some* moral propositions, e.g. ‘bad things are bad’, or even ‘God is morally perfect’, regarding which it *is* logically impossible that I be deceived. But the problem is this: “skeptical theists, after all, are *theists*”; given this, the contention that (ST) leads to (MS) is a problem specifically for *theists*, and surely no theist would find it acceptable to hold that the only moral propositions one is justified in believing are *these* types of moral propositions! If moral propositions such as these were the only ones we are justified in believing, then the unacceptable consequence of (MS) – that we are left with no moral basis on which to make decisions – would still obtain. ‘Bad things are bad’, for example, doesn’t tell us specifically *which* actions are bad, and thus it doesn’t tell us which actions to refrain from performing. ‘God is morally perfect’ might well *seem* action-guiding for us inasmuch as it gives us reason to obey God’s commands, but this will only help us if it is assumed that we are not being deceived as to what God’s commands are, and it is this very assumption which, as I claimed at the beginning of section 5, we are not entitled to.

Thus, given that the relevant conclusion – that (ST) leads to a more pervasive moral skepticism than will be acceptable to any theist – can be reached either way, I do not think it behooves the skeptical theist to press the second objection. Therefore I think it safe to stick with the notion of ‘maximal deception’ discussed above.

<sup>22</sup> Note that one could also argue, as Descartes apparently did, that God is able to do what is logically impossible (Descartes 1970, pp. 236-237). If one allows for this, then both the first and second objections are obviated.

<sup>23</sup> At any rate, the skeptical theist seems unable to deny this, since it seems simply to be a consequence of (S), whose essence is to maintain that humans are fallible when it comes to making moral judgements.

The third objection is as follows: even *allowing* for the view that maximal deception is coherent, one could argue that, since my considerations in favour of the possibility of divine deception were limited to *localized*, isolated instances of deception, they say nothing in support of *maximal* deception. “Skeptical theists, after all, are *theists*”, and (in the words of an anonymous reviewer) “theists typically embrace an understanding of God wherein . . . God deceives *at most in rare and special circumstances*.” It could, in other words, be argued that I was wrong to claim that the types of moves available to the skeptical theist in ensuring that (ST) doesn’t lead to (MS) can also be used in lending weight to the case that, for all we justifiably believe, (4) is true.<sup>24</sup>

This objection would be especially pressing were the first objection to force me to shift from God’s Himself being deceptive to God’s merely allowing deception to occur. I argued above that the first objection leaves room for God allowing that some other being deceive us. But it was God’s *omnipotence* that lent weight to the possibility of maximal deception. According to (T) God *uniquely* instantiates His attributes, and thus no other being could be omnipotent.

But I think that even considering merely localized instances of deception (and not maximal deception), we can still reach the conclusion that no human can ever be justified in believing any moral proposition. In order to bypass the third objection, (4) can be replaced with the following:

- (8) For any proposition *x*, no human is ever justified in believing that God is not deceiving him with regard to *x*.

Alternatively, if the first objection were likewise seen as requiring the relevant shift, (4) could be replaced with:

- (9) For any proposition *x*, no human is ever justified in believing that God is not allowing him to be deceived with regard to *x*.

These are both considerably weaker than (4); they hold merely that *any* proposition I believe is such that I could be being deceived with regard to that proposition, they do not say that I could be being deceived with regard to *every* proposition I believe. According to both (8) and (9), each possible instance of deception would be an isolated, localized instance.

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<sup>24</sup> I am grateful also to Dave Leal for pressing this objection.

We can now investigate whether the same considerations that supported the view that, for all we justifiably believe, (4) is true likewise support (8) and (9). I believe that they do. In support of (8) one could urge the following: “Skeptical theists, after all, are *theists*”, so they will believe that God is omnipotent. Thus, for any proposition I believe, it would be within God’s power to deceive me with regard to that proposition. (Note further that, as was highlighted in my response to the second objection, it will not behoove the skeptical theist to argue that (8) or (9) are false on the grounds that some propositions are such that it is logically impossible that I be deceived with regard to them.)

Appeal to divine omnipotence will *not* count in favour of (9). In favour of *this* principle, we need merely note that scripture presents deceptive influences as extremely powerful. For example, whether or not it originated from God, the ‘delusion’ referred to in 2 Thessalonians 2: 11 is described as “strong”. Furthermore, Matthew 24: 24 talks of “great signs and wonders” by which people are deceived, and Revelations 12: 9 goes so far as to talk of an evil spirit deceiving “the whole world”.

What ultimately lends weight to both (8) *and* (9), however, is this: skeptical theists endorse (S), and (S) ensures that, for any proposition I believe, for all I can tell there is some good that justifies God in either deceiving me or allowing me to be deceived with regard to it. Thus, (S) ensures that any proposition is such that, when I entertain it, for all I can tell I am in a “rare and special circumstance” in which God is deceiving me. From this it seems to follow that (8) or (9) is true. But if either (8) or (9) is true, and we accept the following:

- (10) If, for any proposition  $x$ , no human is ever justified in believing either that God is not deceiving him with regard to  $x$ , or that God is not allowing him to be deceived with regard to  $x$ , then, for any proposition  $x$ , no human is justified in believing  $x$ .

then we can derive (6), and hence (7).

Now, one reason for dealing with the objections at the *end* of this paper was to enable my primary argument to proceed unhindered. Another important reason is that only at this stage do I have the resources to defend (10). The considerations in section 5 against (B) count in favour of this principle; the strategy of (B) is simply to deny principles like (10), and I argued above that the most common and initially promising instance of a (B)-type strategy is highly problematic for the skeptical theist. So, since (8) and (9) bypass the third objection raised in this section, and since (10)

seems sanctioned by the argument against (B) at the end of the previous section, we can see that, even *given* the third objection, we can arrive at (6) and hence (7). Thus, the third objection will not prevent (MS) from gaining entrance to the skeptical theist's building.

### CONCLUSION

I have argued in this paper that some of the most common, and initially attractive, options in protecting (ST) from (MS) nonetheless allow (MS) to slip in, since they are powerless against a more pervasive type of skepticism that entails (MS). This more powerful type of skepticism seems similar to the type of BIV skepticism discussed in contemporary literature, and thus it might seem that the kind of responses adduced in such literature may be available to (ST). But the nature of (ST), and its role as a buffer against evidential arguments from evil, is such that these familiar kinds of responses will be problematic. I thus argue that a more severe skepticism than is desirable seems an unavoidable concomitant of (ST). I argue furthermore that three of the most powerful objections will not prevent me from reaching this conclusion.

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## FINDING A SYSTEMATIC BASE FOR DERRIDA'S WORK

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**Abstract.** Derrida became increasingly overt in later years in suggesting that his work displays a rigour, and even a 'logic'. Further, it is becoming accepted that deconstruction arose in dialogue with Husserl. In support of these views, this article points out that in 1990 Derrida told us that his first work of 1954 reveals a 'law' which guides his career, and that some responses had already arisen there. The work of 1954 is examined, and an interrelated 'system' developed by which the responses relate to the law, to help find a common, early and systematic base to apply to Derrida's oeuvre as it develops. Brief examples will be pointed to in closing to show that this basis subsists, at least in part, in later work.

There has been increasing agreement in recent years that Derrida's work contains one overarching system, buoyed by Derrida's own insistence on the issue. In 1993, for example, he pointed across sixteen of his works and noted that 'a plural logic' (Derrida 1993, pp. 13-16) takes shape.<sup>1</sup> Suggestions for such a system have been set out (cf. Hurst 2004, 2008), although none go as far back as Derrida's first work of 1954. Separate approaches have also been undertaken to track Derrida's 'logic' as it emerged from his engagement with Husserl, between 1954 and 1967 (cf. Lawlor 2002, Kamei 2005). As far as I am aware, no framework to extend from 1954 to the later work has been provided. To further these aims, this article points out that Derrida tells us in 1990 that there is one 'law' which impelled his career since his first work of 1954, and that some of his mature responses had already arisen there. Re-introducing that student essay, *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl's Philosophy* (Derrida 2003), he tells us that it "refers to

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<sup>1</sup> Bennington, for example, suggests Derrida's thinking on politics is "a rigorous consequence of [...] difference" (Bennington 2001, p.202).

a sort of law [and] *since then, even in its literal formulation*, this law will not have stopped commanding everything I have tried to prove” (Derrida 2003, p. xiv, Derrida’s emphasis).

Assuming that Derrida is not leading us astray, this becomes important. He then relates this to his term ‘contamination’<sup>2</sup> (employed once in 1954 at p. xl), and insists it is already entwined with this issue, asking: “why the very word ‘contamination’ has not stopped imposing itself on me from thence forward” (Derrida 2003, p. XV).

It follows that working out some relations of contamination, in regard to this ‘law’, could provide one base to apply to Derrida’s oeuvre. I hope the potential benefit is apparent – a common ground which could develop into Derrida’s many later interests, without privileging any school, simply as this work came first, and Derrida *tells us* there is a pole around which his development gravitates. Moreover (here is my difference from Lawlor, whom I will address in closing), one could track this by its ‘internal’ reasoning. Indeed, this student Derrida displays none of the later guardedness, revealing his own interests and criteria clearly, even mechanically.<sup>3</sup> I have thus suggested an interconnected, systematic and predictable basis.

As one might expect, this imposes some methodical requirements. Principally I aim to avoid *anachronism*, and only draw what is nascent forward, where required. For example, Derrida has not yet developed his own ‘logic’, but employs only a simple inside-outside reasoning,<sup>4</sup> nor has he problematised hermeneutics. Hence this article sets out conventional bases: what ‘Derrida’ wishes answered, without critique of the language which might limit this. The aim is to allow a simple basis which can develop as Derrida does. I have also laid out only a minimum of Husserl’s work – with respect – where necessary. This is intended as a protection, for as we will see, this young Derrida is no friend of descriptive phenomenology. He relentlessly demands exactly what Husserl excluded since 1907 (Husserl 1964, p. 7): absolute justification of the object despite the reduction. This article, then, will be *very* simple. As it sets forward mechanics, it is also reductionist; but this does not necessarily mean individual examples are treated unfairly, but rather that they are treated for their commonality.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Derrida 1976, pp. 30, 34; 1973, pp. 20, 22; 1978, p. 128; 2002, p. 274; 1993, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Derrida uses the term ‘machine’ to describe a ‘logic’ in ‘The Double Session’, and ‘The Typewriter Ribbon’ (cf. Hobson 2004, p.53). The ‘machine’ reappears later as a means of entertaining consistency in a ‘logic’ (Derrida 2000, pp. 72-3).

<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere, I have suggested some issues which a propositional logic might face in systematising Derrida (Galetti 2010) but here I feel this is premature.

## I. THE INITIAL PLATFORM

Husserl's *oeuvre* had several aims – not exhaustively: tabulating the elements of consciousness, situating the regions of different sciences (as they are constituted in consciousness) upon a rigorous systematic basis, and accounting for the problems of classical epistemology. All of these occur in a process of constitution via the flux of the mind's intentionality, in synthesis. Derrida explains his 'law' above thus: “. . . the question that governs the whole trajectory [of his *oeuvre*] is already: 'How can the originarity of a foundation be an a priori synthesis? How can everything start with a *complication*?'” (Derrida 2003, p. xv, quoting p. xxv, my emphasis)

While in Husserl, as in Kant, the constituted object is intuited in consciousness in an a priori synthesis, for Derrida, *synthesis does not succeed*. The key is the criterion he sets. In re-introducing this work, Derrida tells us that what seemed 'most curious' in it is his 'concern for knowledge' (Derrida 2003, p. xiv). Put differently, Derrida's *oeuvre* begins with the demand to determine the object absolutely. One might demarcate this from the 'presence-seeking' which Derrida later attributes to the history of metaphysics, and also his later approach: a more typical epistemology (cf. Condillac, the 'inheritor of Locke' (Derrida 1987, p. 29)), seeks to determine the object, upon the understanding that it could be found. This early Derrida seeks absolute knowledge on the understanding that determination is *not* found. The Derrida of 1967 recognises that even 'it is not found' is undecidable.

### The basic elements

This section thus sets out his interrelated parameters, the first instances being italicised. First, Derrida has a *demand* for *absolute* solution. As a result, he sets '*either/or limits*': 'yes or no', 'true or false' outcomes. This is bivalent, thus the limits apply to an object reasoned about: either it is absolutely *present* or not. The limits will no longer be accepted by 1964, but for now the '*problem*' is that the *origin* of the object is unaccounted for, leaving the demand for absolute solution unmet.

The primary impediment to solving the problem – as Lawlor agrees – is that any intended object was '*always already*' (henceforth '*already*') there to be found (cf. Derrida 1976, p. 73).

Thus the problem has a mechanical relation to presence. Amazingly, Derrida began with this issue in 1954. For a thought of an object “will always have to be *already there*, in front of a passive consciousness whose

*presence* remains accessory or accidental” (Derrida 2003, p. 21, my emphases).

Hence, “in order to give a ‘unity of sense’ to this [original] genesis and to its objective product, it has to be *supposed present*, and autonomous, before the multiplicity of acts of consciousness” (Derrida 2003, p. 21, my emphasis).

If one is to unify (identify, in *a priori* synthesis) the given object, the ‘already’ means one must ‘suppose’ – affirm – its presence. Given a demand for absolute solution, this is not acceptable.

### Shortfall and the inside-outside

However, I add a second and related mechanism, not yet included by other readers. A systematic interaction is deemed to fail absolutely if it does not interact with origin. But the ‘already’ means each interaction cannot find origin. Thus: *intra-systematic interactions fail to absolutely solve the problem*.

Derrida often uses this kind of reasoning. When the system interacts only with itself “we remain on *this side* [*en deçà*] of *absolute originarity*” (Derrida 2003, p. 137, my emphasis). This will be called ‘shortfall’, drawn from ‘Speech and Phenomena’ (Derrida 1967), where “presence had *already* from the start [from its origin] *fallen short* of itself” (Derrida 1973, p. 87, my emphases; cf. also 1976, pp. 47, 55).<sup>5</sup>

I will set out the relations via Derrida’s own terms – nearly universal in systematic readings of his work<sup>6</sup> – of the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ (Derrida 2003, p. 93; cf. 1976, pp. 35, 41; 1973, pp. 30-1). The ‘already’ means that “pregiven [objects] have only external relations” (Derrida 2003, p. 112).

Their relations do not relate ‘inside’. Oppositely, objects already here remain ‘on this side’ of the external origin (Derrida 2003, p. 137). These can be united so: shortfall is a judicative consequence of the inside-outside criterion. If the origin remains outside, it is judged that the system does not meet the demand for absolute solution.

Hence it is the *demand* to solve the problem that is not met; the problem is not that the object is not there, but that its origin is not accounted for. This will lead to the failure of affirmation and denial in closing. A me-

<sup>5</sup> ‘[L]a présence avait déjà commence à se manquer à elle-même.’ (Derrida, 1967, p. 97). A lack (*manque*) is also a falling short.

<sup>6</sup> Caputo (1987, p. 247) pointed out that the major structural readings of Derrida of 1986 (Gasché, Harvey, Llewellyn) had all been based upon Derrida’s work as ‘neither inside nor outside’.

chanical relation with presence is thus set out: the demand to affirm origin finds, on its 'inside', the presence of an object which must be absolutely accounted for, but shortfall means this is a problem. As can be seen, any term here can be related to any other.

## II. THE SPATIAL AND ITS JOINTS

It must be noted that these are Derrida's own concerns. From the start, Derrida never believes that Husserl's reductions provide exemption from the 'problem'. For example: "once the transcendental reduction has been carried out [. . .] Husserl seems, implicitly [. . .] to put passive synthesis, pure and as such, in its turn into brackets" (Derrida 2003, p. 142).

Husserl takes a reduction as sufficient to avoid the need to account for what has been passively constituted. Indeed, phenomenology is supposed to begin when a reduction allows the appearing of this object (cf. Husserl 1964, p. 7). But for Derrida the passive content still requires a justification, as it falls short of its origin. He demands that phenomenology answer his own problem. Hence, *none* of what follows is actually about Husserl's phenomenology. *In this sense, Derrida never was Husserlian*. He admits this in 1959:

[the reduction] brings eidetic forms once again to light, that is the 'structural a prioris'. . . in Husserl's mind, at least, there never was a 'structure-genesis' problem. Phenomenology, in the clarity of its intention, would be offended, then, by my preliminary question (Derrida 1978, p. 156).

This is unacknowledged in 1954. But in 1959 he goes on: "having taken these precautions as concerns Husserl's aim, I must now confess my own" (Derrida 1978, p. 156). This aim is

to reconcile the *structuralist* demand (which leads to the comprehensive description of a totality, of a form or function organised according to *an internal* legality [. . .] with the *genetic demand* (that is, the search for the *origin* and foundation of the structure) [which is outside] (Derrida 1978, p. 157, my emphasis last).

Integrating systematic *shortfall* with origin remains Derrida's central concern. To do so, he tracks through Husserl's work chronologically; I will begin with the *Ideas I* of 1913.<sup>7</sup> There, within a reduction, Husserl divides

<sup>7</sup> It is notable that Derrida only glosses Husserl's *Logical Investigations* (first of 1901) here. He omits *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (1929), suggesting his argument against

intentional being into the material (hyletic) and noetic phases (Husserl 1952, §85). The latter are the intentional processes which constitute essence without material input from the *hylē*. The *noema* is the ‘intentional content’ which corresponds to such a noetic process: “corresponding to all points to the manifold data of the real noetic content, there is a variety of data displayable in really pure intuition, and in a correlative ‘noematic content’, or briefly ‘noema’” (Husserl 1952, §88).

But the ‘noema’ is not a real object (Husserl 1952, §88), for which latter Husserl reserves his own term ‘*reell*’. One can understand this via Husserl’s early example: the *imagination* of a centaur is not real, while the imagined centaur is a real (*reell*) part of thought, but the centaur need not exist in reality (*Realität*). But the noema is intentional, as it is constituted in consciousness. On the other axis, the *hylē*, which is supposed to supply ‘sensible’ material, is real (*reell*), yet *not* intentional (Husserl 1952, §85). But then how could a noematic intention interact with it? Derrida applies the ‘already’. For it is “because [hyletic material] appears as *already constituted* in its very being, *prior to* any noematic synthesis, that consciousness can experience *originary* constitution” (Derrida 2003, p. 63, my emphases).

The noema cannot interact with the outside. Indeed, Derrida takes the *Ideas* back to the *natural* inside-outside sense. For, Derrida feels, by containing sensible matter, the *hylē* also claims to convey what is *outside* itself: “does [Husserl] not reintroduce, in the form of a ‘hyletic datum’, passively received, the transcendent object that he claimed to exclude [. . .]?” (Derrida 2003, p. 63).

Again, the reduction is rejected. The outside remains problematic. The *hylē*, as the ‘already constituted’ is also aligned with what is ‘passively’ constituted (outside), and Derrida applies this across Husserl’s works: “as soon as the pure content of sensation is admitted [then is] not the theme of passive genesis, taken up fifteen years later by Husserl, already announced?” (Derrida 2003, p. 63; also cf. p. 143).

Derrida is quite happy to simplify Husserl’s work across four decades to his own system. One recognises his commitment to his own demand.

### Pure logical grammar as conventional basis

Now a basic Husserlian distinction is required. Husserl aims to provide a systematic basis for thinking, thus his analysis sets out some of its ba-

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*Experience and Judgment* (begun from 1918-9) applies. I will not address Derrida’s address to Husserl’s years from 1891 to 1900, or after 1931.



sis components. His 'pure logical grammar' (Husserl LI 4, §14) sets out a *formal* interaction amongst judgment, logic and 'ontology'. The latter are, simply, constituted relations of essences which arise from an intention directed at an 'object'. Setting aside 'form' until below: 'apophansis' is 'judgment in the logical sense' (Husserl 1969, p.70; 1952, p.371). A correspondence between apophansis and ontology is made as thought (intentionality) has a universal logical underpinning (Husserl 1952, p. 409). To show their basic interlinking: Husserl employs a fundamental proposition of the form '*S is P*' (cf. Husserl 2000, Vol. 1, p. 18). In brief, one predicates<sup>8</sup> *P* of the subject *S*. The latter, in turn, is the object of ontology. Judgment then follows from the logical predication about this 'object'. One might think of apophansis simply as 'judgment', logic as 'what one uses to judge with', and ontology as 'what is judged of'. While Husserl thought these overlapped, Derrida is interested in their shortfall.

First, he addresses ontology. In brief, after a reduction, intentionality no longer addresses a natural object, and the general essence (*eidōs*) is constituted instead of the natural world. From this, eidetic ontologies arise, which do correlate to a 'world'. Derrida summarises: "the existence of the world is the correlate of certain experience-patterns marked out by certain essential formations" (Derrida 2003, p. 79).

For Derrida this supposes what is *already given* even as an essence: "*always* and essentially, eidetic reflection will presuppose an *already* constituted *ontology*" (Derrida 2003, p. 140, my emphases).

The groupings of essences which demarcate how the world appears find that their existence depends upon a problematic outside. For Derrida, eidetic phenomenology itself fails because of his simple criterion.

### The shortfall of judgment

This is apparent in Derrida's analysis of apophansis in *Experience and Judgment* (Husserl 1973(b), §1-16). There, Husserl deems that the 'world' is a horizon of possible judgments, which appear as believed evidence. Apophansis needs no reduction for judgment does not, ostensibly, deal with external objects. However, active judgment still judges of passive 'substrates' of judgments. These, Husserl says, are antepredicative: *already there*. Derrida suspects that Husserl re-creates an inside-outside, thus a problem of origin. Second, this work inaugurates Husserl's turn to

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<sup>8</sup> I use 'predicates' instead of 'asserts', to avoid confusion with the 'affirmation' of a judgment.

‘genetic phenomenology’. The object, Husserl says, contains a sedimented history of past judgments. These are ‘evident’ to active judgment. Phenomenological analysis, from within the horizon of possible judgments, can then strip off prior judgments *in regressus* to explicate the object *in progressus*. This project, were it completed, would reveal the original judgment in its life-world.

Derrida now turns to arguing that Husserl’s own address to the problem of origin does not succeed. The problem is that Husserl deems the origin is pre-given (Husserl 1973(b), §10). First, Derrida counters that predication of a ‘history’ falls short, as any regression through sedimentations finds the object was already given, thus there *may* always be a further term and “it is not known whether the regression that has to be effected to return to antepredicative existence has to end in a sensuous reality or in an absolute indetermination” (Derrida 2003, p. 114).

Note, a fortiori, that this is *indeterminate*, and *not* false. For Derrida, judgment can neither *affirm nor deny* the outcome of a predication. This will be furthered below. Here, it undermines the entire genetic project. The ‘passive’ substrate of judgments – what one actively judges ‘of’, just as one judges of ontological objects – simply reproduces the most basic problem. It is “a genesis that itself took evidence for granted, and which *could easily be assimilated to a simple empirical genesis*” (Derrida 2003, p. 109, my emphasis).

Again, Derrida is willing to devolve Husserl’s work over two decades to the simplest inside-outside criterion. As a measure of their divergence, Husserl deems that the precedence of the passive is the *solution* for phenomenological appearance: “anything built by activity necessarily presupposes, as the lowest level, a passivity that gives something beforehand” (Husserl 1960, §38; in Derrida 2003, p. 141).

For Derrida, who does not accept the reductions, this is the ‘problem’.

### The ‘joint’ – a mechanical model to understand Derrida

Thus at this divergence, Derrida’s system will be clarified. As he does not problematise metaphor until 1964 (cf. Derrida 1978, p. 84), I will import a term from *Of Grammatology* – the ‘joint’ (*brisure*: also ‘break’, ‘hinge’ etc.),<sup>9</sup> which, we are told, underpins the way all metaphysics – bound to inside-outside criteria – can be thought. The joint “marks the impossibility

<sup>9</sup> Or in other metaphors in 1967, as a ‘fissure’, and ‘interval’ in thought (Derrida 1976, p. 200). Derrida returns to it as a hinge (*charnière*) later (cf. 1994, p.78).

that a sign [can] be produced within the plenitude of a present" (Derrida 1976, p. 69).

The concept 'joint' indicates *both* a separation and a connection. For now it is seen for its separation. Every object or structure has an inside and an outside, between which lies a 'joint'. Thus, in a mechanical model, there are at least five directions to query: outside to its outside, outside to inside, inside to outside, inside to its own inside, and overall shortfall (everything to its outside). When one pole on any joint is taken as a locus from which to question (that is, as a hypothetical starting-point), then the other side is unjustifiable because of shortfall, thus *problematic*.

*Every one* of Derrida's arguments above, and below, can be treated as a direction upon a joint.

I will show this in Derrida's analysis of active and passive synthesis, which becomes the 'final stage' (Derrida 2003, p. 153) in his research.

### **First, the outside cannot certify its outside**

The passive constitution outside cannot justify its presence from outside. That is, the *already* constituted is outside its own constitution. Thus (a problem of simple idealism) the passive cannot justify its presence: "the supposed transcendental passivity is thus not absolutely originary here and refers me to a preceding moment of constitution" (Derrida 2003, p. 118).

'Preceding' here does not necessarily mean 'temporal' (for one cannot determine that an outside will be temporal (Derrida 2003, p. 86)), rather 'outside', as 'already' there.

### **Second, the inside cannot interact with the outside**

Moving further 'inward', the active inside cannot connect with a passive outside for "the active synthesis that inaugurates the possibility of a piece of eidetic research is *always preceded by* a passive synthesis" (Derrida 2003, p. 144, my emphasis).

The passive synthesis is already there.

### **Third, the outside cannot interact with the inside**

Nor can the passive synthesis interact with the active inside. For example, Husserl says that the passively constituted is 'not intentional'. The active itself constitutes the passive. But "is that not precisely to include formally

in the activity what is really and ‘in itself’ foreign to the constituting intentionality?” (Derrida 2003, p. 142)

The passive is ‘foreign’ because – for Derrida – it is outside constitution.

#### **Fourth, the system cannot reach its outside**

Next, there is overall shortfall. Husserl *also* says there is something of the active in the passive (Derrida 2003, p. 118, cf. 1973(b) §23a). But, assuming the active is intentional and the passive is not, then the active could not be truly met with in passivity: “to say, as Husserl does [. . .] that passivity is a moment of activity is to make use of an abstract concept of activity” (Derrida 2003, p. 142 cons.).

Thus the activity in passivity remains outside genuine contact with the active. However, even if there *were* a real moment of the active in the passive (which Derrida would not accept), then the passive would no longer be passive: “the passive synthesis [. . .] is thus a constituting [active] moment of the unity of intuition” (Derrida 2003, p. 143).

Even if the active does interact with the passive – as an entire systematic unity – the system still falls short. Derrida summarises: “Why does any constitution start with a synthesis of passivity and activity? [. . .] These questions, which were being posed from the very first moments of phenomenology, are still without an answer” (Derrida 2003, p. 118).

As a result Derrida determines that, overall, ‘genesis is never met’ (Derrida 2003, p. 118).

#### **Fifth, the inside cannot justify the inside – form**

Given this shortfall, the ‘outside’ is constituted inside only as *formal*. In an insistence on active and intentional constitution phenomenology itself creates a formal idealism. But in this phenomenology, even form is a problem as it *cannot appear*. It could only do so as an essence, but then the form which allows that essence to appear remains outside. For, given the ‘already’, “if passivity [as form] is placed *inside* a constituting sphere of activity, the problem is only pushed one stage further back [outside]” (Derrida 2003, p. 64, my emphasis).

Not even form can account for its origin, it is the innermost problem. *Form in any judgment, logic, or ontology is problematised*. Thus formal idealism is created from the *Ideas* to the *Cartesian Meditations* (Derrida 2003, pp. 107, 138, 142, 236). Alternatively, if form *were* somehow given

from outside, then “genesis does not start off [. . .] from an essence, from a *predicate*, but from [a passively constituted] antepredicative reality [and] one would have to admit that knowledge has *made a jump*, from the evidence of the given to the [. . .] judgment” (Derrida 2003, p. 107, my emphases).

To allow judgment of a predicate (outside), the latter needs to ‘jump’ inward (across a joint). Neither solves the problem.

### Parenthesis: the method

This approach to directions upon joints creates a method. An either-or choice sets the limits, in accord with a demand for absolute solution. This is applied to the outcome: it must be *affirmed* as absolutely true or false that objects which are predicated of are present or absent. Then Derrida poses a *conditional*; for example, ‘Suppose there were a completed passive synthesis’ is the antecedent, followed by ‘then the outside would not be able to interact with it’. But the ontological element in the antecedent would not be acceptable in the first place. Moreover, neither would its ‘opposite’, ‘Suppose there were a completed active synthesis’. Thirdly, even were the interactions to unify an object, the system would still fall short.

*Neither side in itself, or in interaction, solves the problem of origin, and each is precluded in advance by the same problem, thus each side is posed hypothetically.*

Even in this first work (cf. Derrida 2003, p. 68), Derrida calls some of the problems he finds ‘aporias’ (I will touch on his later use below). As he came to reflect upon his early use of the term, he drew it from Aristotle’s ‘*diaporeō*’, as a situation where “‘I’m stuck, I cannot get out, I’m helpless’” (Derrida 1993, p. 13).

Derrida has brought himself close to this point in 1954. At every turn, he has posed an either-or choice requiring absolute *distinction* of an object in active and passive constitution, when Husserl clearly means an interweaving constitution within the reduction. Derrida notes: “Husserl [. . .] merely indicates the impossibility of a ‘language’ that would distinguish strictly between passivity and activity” (Derrida 2003, p. 118).

Derrida’s method arises from his own demand.

### III. TEMPORISING AND THE JOINTS

The spatial elements now set out, we come to time, the seat of Husserl's constitution (cf. Husserl 1964(b), §§16-17; Derrida 2003, p. 92). Here Derrida applies *shortfall*. In Husserl, the 'presentification' represents a memory, which is no longer immediately within sense-perception, thus cannot be indubitable. However, the retention, for Husserl, is a part of primary perception, *indubitable* as it restores immediate evidence (Husserl, 1964(b) §16, 17; I §78). But for Derrida, retention is shielded by the reductions from needing to answer origin. He begins: "it is an *a priori* necessity of the perception of time and the time of perception that an originary impression have some temporal density" (Derrida 2003, p. 62).

Derrida insists on some natural time. He does not accept Husserl's temporal reduction. Thus he rapidly simmers protention and retention down to his joints.

#### **Retentions and protentions cannot justify the outside**

To answer the problem, retention would need to present a real impression. Husserl does *not* require this: "Husserl does not present the *a priori* necessity of this synthesis [retention and originary impression] as ontological – and especially not real – but as phenomenological" (Derrida 2003, p. 62, Husserl 1964(b), §12).

For Husserl, pure phenomenological processes have a special status as intentional but not real (cf. the noema, above). But Derrida especially needs them to be real. He goes on: "but so that this originary impression may be intentional [. . .] must it not as such 'announce' a real object that is constituted in the same way since it is aimed at it originarily?" (Derrida 2003, p. 62)

Even *assuming* that a process were a real object, retentions fall short of the outside as "retention [. . .] implies a synthesis or a passive genesis of a new 'now', [but if] the constitution and retention of the past were active, they would, like any pure activity, *shut themselves up* in the actuality of an originary now" (Derrida 2003, p. 93, my emphasis).

That is, shut themselves up 'inside'.

#### **Time account for its outside**

The joint is applied to temporal predication too. Given that pure logical grammar fuses logic and ontology (above), as absolute time is 'outside'

the ontological, this holds also of what can be predicated of it. The objective time is thus *antepredicative*. By Husserl's insistence, this is 'passively received by consciousness' (Derrida 2003, p. 119). But this passivity – as ontological substrate or received prior judgments – does not allow for predication of its outside: "antepredicative time [. . .] is still the foundation of absolute temporality, but this latter involving the coupling activity/passivity, it is not known what is the first condition of its constitution" (Derrida 2003, p. 119).

Predication falls short of original time.

### Space cannot account for time inside

Now – to unite the sections on space and time above – nor can space/time *interaction* account for origin (a systematic shortfall). If time is indeed fundamental, then spatial elements should devolve to original time inside themselves. Husserl 'does not ask himself' (Derrida 2003, p. 92) this, and for Derrida, "at *the interior* [the inside] of the spatial *hylē* [. . .], the problem of the constituting becoming is still being posed" (Derrida 2003, p. 92, my emphasis).

Note, for now, the word 'becoming'. Time as becoming is *not denied*, but is a *problem*. For similarly, fixing upon an object in time precludes its realisation, as one has only a "suite of [moments of] objective time, whose genesis is already completed" (Derrida 2003, p. 120).

That is, has already become. This is a problem because, to be seen, an object or essence needs to be *fixed*, atemporal. It halts the sequence of time it should fit into: "the temporality described is fixed; it interrupts the whole movement of constitution at a certain moment" (Derrida 2003, pp. 120-121).

In effect, space in constitution – as a cessation of time – is *outside* temporal movement. As Derrida explains in 1967: "space is 'in' time [yet it] opens up as pure 'outside' 'within' the movement of temporalisation" (Derrida 1973, p. 86).

Secondly, time as become can only be found outside its own movement, hence is not itself. Similarly, time cannot be objectified (spatialised) *into* itself (what Derrida calls 'irreducibility' below). It is always outside its origin. As, for Husserl, space and time allow *a priori* synthesis, then synthesis is jointed in three directions: space is outside time, time is outside space, and the living now is outside time. *Synthesis is not simple*. This is arrived at mechanically: becoming is outside the temporal (living) intention which would fix its origin, and the having-become is outside its temporal origin.

Thus Derrida says in *Of Grammatology*, spacing sets out “the *becoming-space* of time and the *becoming-time* of space” (Derrida 1978, p. 68, my emphases).

The problem of ‘becoming’ also arises from the earliest bases.

#### IV. FORWARD AND BACKWARD

This leads to a model which this article will explain via the terms ‘forward’ and ‘backward’. For as time cannot justify its outside, it cannot account for its temporal progress:

[h]ow can it be affirmed of a reality [...] that it is lived *before* being intentional if absolute evidence is made into an intentional act? One has the right to determine the *hylē* as lived *only from* that moment when an intentional morphe has come to animate it (Derrida 2003, p. 86).

The outside is beyond determination of either space or time. The origin of what comes from the ‘back’ (earlier in time) is a problem. As will be seen, it cannot even be distinguished from what came from the ‘front’ (a *telos* which appears).

#### **The *telos* as problem forward**

Derrida sets this out in three areas – science, history, and explication of the object. In the *Cartesian Meditations* of 1931, Husserl introduces the notion that there is a ‘teleological ideal’ of an ultimate science, explicated in phenomenology. Thus the *telos* is something that would need to be achieved by an intentional object moving ‘forward’ in time. But if an object

managed to [achieve its *telos*], on the one hand, the sense that it would thus produce would not have its foundation in any existence, on the other, it would mark the end of its own becoming: two mythical or metaphysical consequences that would suspend the originary intentionality and temporality of lived experience (Derrida 2003, pp. 142-143).

If the object *had* become, it would be divorced from its origin (foundation) in time. Time – posed hypothetically – remains outside the joint, thus ‘metaphysical’. But if the object were determined, it would no longer be becoming, and its undeniable temporality would be outside, thus again metaphysical. The joint ‘forward’ to the *telos* could be crossed only if time is set aside.



### Explicating the object as problem forward

Just so for the structure of adumbrating an object (a 'thing', for Husserl, is a kind of essence (cf. Husserl 1952, §15). For Husserl, a phenomenological object is given 'in itself', even if only partially, and then adumbrated forward in the service of knowing it completely (cf. Husserl LI 6, §14(b); I §142). But determination always remains outside. As Derrida notes of *Experience and Judgment*: "intentional referrals are in principle infinite and, to that degree, never take on the absolute of their sense" (Derrida 2003, p. 144).

There is always shortfall. *These arguments thus apply to any intentional object, iterated toward its completion.* Explication will never reach the outside.<sup>10</sup>

### History as problem forward

The problem of 'history' – in theory, 'backward' – is then set on this base. Regression toward the life-world should unpack a history, but the latter ends up being inside, as intentional alone: "history will thus be only the intentional chain of meanings" (Derrida 2003, p. 144).

As intentions are explicated forward, in the living present, then regression and explication, *in progressus* and *in regressus*, become indistinguishable. For, "this infinite totality of sedimentations is an idea: the idea of an absolute and completed history or of a teleology constituting all the moments of history" (Derrida 2003, p. 108).

History is also a *telos*. Seeking for genesis in history and *telos* in ideal science become one structure in that they are teleologised moments, explicating in inner time, with an undecidable object always outside. The teleological ideal already 'precedes' the historical object: "teleology could not be given to a concrete subject in an originary clear evidence. To be faithful to its mission, *it had to precede any active constitution*" (Derrida 2003, p. 153, my emphasis).

There is undecidability at front and back, 'indefinite in its past and in its future' (Derrida 2003, p. 143). What would come from outside – in the genetic, scientific or epistemological projects – cannot even be affirmed as 'in front' or 'behind'. That a temporised consciousness cannot distinguish

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<sup>10</sup> Derrida later points out that Husserl insists on this inevitable shortfall himself (cf. Derrida 1973, p. 101). In 1954, this is Derrida's own demand.

between origin at front and back is still emphasised in *Specters of Marx* (Derrida 1995): “what stands in front of it must always precede it, like its origin: before it” (Derrida 1994, p. xix).

At least one part of the model of spectrality is already set out in the 1950’s.

### **Ego and object differ from identity**

This loss of the object applies just as much to the ego as object. In the *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl wishes the ‘transcendental ego’ to provide a basis for synthesis, by positing only what it already knows in ‘self-constitution’. But to do so, “the transcendental ego [. . .] is what it is solely in relation to intentional objectivities” (Husserl 1960, p. 31).

However (from inside to outside) Husserl makes the transcendental ego an *eidos* (Husserl 1960, p. 34). How then can it have intentionality to relate to existence? For “in *separating* the transcendental from pure existence, a constituted ‘*eidos*’ is made out of the first” (Derrida 2003, p. 137, my emphasis).

The transcendental ego falls short of the outside. Secondly (from inside to its inside), the actively constituting ego could only be constituted by an ego which is already there (Derrida 2003, p. 141). The active, Derrida decides, has an ‘irreducible passivity’ inside it (Derrida 2003, p. 141). All the problems of active-passive interactions return, and Derrida concludes that “we remain *on this side of* absolute originarity” (Derrida 2003, p. 137, my emphasis).

The ego cannot *affirm* itself as it *falls short* of its *object*. This is a base for 1967, where an Ego posits its own absence (death) by asserting its presence: “my death is structurally necessary to the pronouncing of the I” (Derrida 1973, p. 96). For, “what can look at itself is not one” (Derrida 1976, p. 36).

As noted, Derrida arrives at this reasoning by pointing to a ‘joint’ in pure logical grammar, between what is intended and what can be judged as found: “we draw this conclusion, then, from the idea of a pure logical grammar, from the *sharp distinction* [joint] between the meaning-intention [permitting apophansis] and its ‘eventual’ fulfilment by the intuition of the object” (Derrida 2003, p. 97, cf. 1973, p. 57).

At this point – in both ordinary object (ontologically outside) and ego as object – there is a structure of a *differing in identity, in synthesis, which resists affirmation of identity*. This mechanic becomes fundamental for Der-

rida in later years,<sup>11</sup> as it is the ultimate source where both a problematised subjectivism and objectivism become indistinguishable. All of this follows from the bases above.

## V. SYNTHESIS AND CONTAMINATION

We can now draw the above toward the basic 'law' with which we began. The divorce from original certainty is a problem of identification. But the latter is the basic form of *synthesis*: "the fundamental form of synthesis [is] identification" (Derrida 2003, p.135).

Were an intentional object identified, it would be determined, in a priori synthesis in an intuition. From the above – inside-outside and forward-backward joints – it is now clear that this synthesis will not occur. *The 'already' prevents basic identification*. Positing identity misses 'authentic genesis' (Derrida 2003, p. 143). Synthesis and identity – intuition – thus becomes the locus of a *problem*.

But at this seeming death of all identity, I come to the next, crucial aspect.

*In no instance is a joint (a hinge) a pure scission.*

It would also be a connection. Indeed, Derrida does *not deny that there is a basis upon the given in synthesis*. When Husserl's phenomenology, in 1931, becomes the ego explicating itself, Derrida says "there is the risk of transforming the passive synthesis, *the only foundation of objectivity so far, the only access to being as being*, into a pure activity of the subject" (Derrida 2003, p. 144, my emphasis).

It is undeniable, for Derrida, that there is being. As a result, the inside-outside is not simply a judicative criterion which insists upon failure of the given, but upon failure of the *perfectly* given, thus one cannot deny *dependency*. For example, it is only "because [hyletic material] appears as already constituted in its very being [. . .] that consciousness *can experience* originary constitution" (Derrida 2003, p. 63, my emphasis).

Derrida never denies the experience. Just so, the sedimented history of an object, depends upon what must already have been given. Thus Derrida goes on that "phenomenological history presupposes real history" (Derrida 2003, p. 143).

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. in *Aporias*, '[a]s soon as these totalities are overdetermined, or rather contaminated [...] they are no longer identical to themselves, hence no longer simply identifiable and to that extent no longer determinable' (Derrida, 1993, p. 7).

History itself is *never independent of* what was already given from the ‘outside’. Just so for time – Derrida insisted, above, that inner temporality does not escape natural (or psychologistic) time, for after a reduction “the autonomy it seems to have acquired is only a modality of *its dependence*” (Derrida 2003, p. 108, my emphasis).

Insofar as phenomenology is based on time, then the problem of origin is one of unsolved dependence. Hence this applies to every major relation. *Shortfall is just as much a dependence as a failure of relation.*

This points to the methodical aspect of the problem: it is not *givenness* that fails. Rather, *explanation* of givenness fails. Instead of Derrida the anomist, one finds the most frustrated idealist, demanding an absolute solution without success, thus bound within his system.

### ‘Logic’ as pointing to the problem

This system, thus, cannot determine (affirm) solution either way. Indeed although Derrida only aligns his work with the word ‘logic’ later,<sup>12</sup> and does not assess alternatives, his basis does lead to one criterion: “in all good logic, the absolute antepredicative must not receive *any determination*” (Derrida 2003, p. 112, my emphasis).

Husserl – who allows the antepredicative (*outside*) to be a substrate of judgment – does not use a ‘good’ logic. The word ‘determination’ already appears, as a caveat against careless affirmation of the outside, for the “determinations, [. . .] referring to a pregiven *with which they have only external [outside] relations*, are then perforce *conventional*” (Derrida 2003, p. 112, my emphases).

*Logic should not determine what is outside, on pain of being ‘conventional’.* Derrida already takes an ‘unconventional’ stance toward judgment. First, his either/or limit allows only affirmation or denial. But when he seeks to affirm an identity, an outside prevents determination. Further, when he attempts to *deny* the outcome, he is reminded of the dependency. Apophantically, one cannot affirm or deny that an ontological object is present or absent. For whenever one wishes to ‘respect originarity’, thus ‘refuse’ to determine the sense of an object, one finds that ‘it is not so easy’: “by trying to strip it out absolutely, one even more nearly runs the risk of contamination” (Derrida 2003, p. xxxiii).

*This is Derrida’s use of the term contamination in 1954* (he reminds us of this in 1990 (Derrida 2003, p. xv). The *joint*, which arose from either-

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Derrida 1981, pp. 196-7, in Hobson, 2004.

or limits, does not permit denial either. This is reflected in 'Différance' in 1967, when Derrida says

[i]n this way we question the authority of presence or its simple symmetrical contrary, absence or lack. We thus interrogate the [either-or] limit that has always constrained us [. . .] to form the sense of being in general as [ontological] presence or absence (Derrida 1973, p. 139).

This applies from 1954, to every aspect of the problem of origin.

### **Return to the basic 'law': synthesis and contamination**

We can now see, in a basic fashion, why Derrida names the question which imposes itself on his oeuvre: 'How can everything begin with a complication?' (Derrida 2003, pp. xv, xxv, above). When there is no 'pointlike' synthesis, then there is a scission preventing its affirmation. The problem of the 'already' is unsolved. But this does not mean that one can insist on (affirm) even the non-pointlike, for synthesis is not a separation. Thus it is a 'complication'.

This allows us to go back to the beginning to see how contamination impacts on synthesis:

[a]ll the [either-or] limits on which phenomenological discourse is constructed are examined from the standpoint of the fatal necessity of a 'contamination' ('unperceived entailment or dissimulated contamination') between the two edges of the opposition: transcendental/'worldly', eidetic/empirical, intentional /nonintentional, active/passive, present/non-present, pointlike/nonpointlike, originary/derived, pure/impure etc.)... (Derrida 2003, p. xv).

Every element can be explained by the process above. First, the transcendental is not real, thus predication 'falls short' of a real world. Second, Husserl's eidetic explication is 'outside' the empirical basis, to which it is nevertheless connected. Third, the nonintentional *hylē* remains outside the intentional noema, preventing material data from entering pure phenomenology. Fourth, the passive, made nonintentional, severs affirmation across the 'joint' to the active, without allowing denial. Fifth, the essence ends up being a formal constitution without passive empirical givenness; hence the indeterminacy which prevents pointlike synthesis of reality (sixth). Thus, non-presence can neither be affirmed nor denied, and so on.

Second, any major term in this system can also be reached from any other. For example, the 'eidetic' – second, above – ends up being an active constitution without affirmable link across the joint to a passive outside, the

indeterminacy which arises thereby prevents pointlike synthesis of reality – sixth – and so on. In every case, *there is a complication of synthesis*.

*This sets out the basic interaction by which contamination interacts with Derrida's 'law'*, which has guided this article. For Derrida continues: “the quaking of each border com[es] to propagate itself onto all the others.” (Derrida 2003, p. xv, cons.)

Thus contamination is not merely a simple opposition of two limits which fails because they interpenetrate one another. Contamination is systematic. This can be understood by distinguishing outset from outcome. The problem is first *posed* within absolute – thus oppositional – either-or limits. Only then does the simple opposition fail.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, when there is contamination this would be because *all* of the options – logical, ontological, apophantic, eidetic, intentional etc. – have a mutual inability either to be separated from or to solve the problem of origin. Contamination is a shared ‘relation’ of every term via the problem of origin, as an ‘unperceived entailment’ (Derrida 2003, p. xv). The unperceived would be separation, the entailment would be inseparable relation.

### Contamination as prison

It now becomes clearer how difficult, even claustrophobic, the ‘problem’ is for one who demands solution. It is plangent that the young Derrida thus finds only a ‘prison’ (Derrida 2003, p. 107, cf. 142). For Derrida had “tried to define in this way the [either-or] *limits* of the *inescapable* idealism of *any philosophy*” (Derrida 2003, p. 138, my emphases)

However, the “race toward the originary is permanently and essentially condemned to failure” (Derrida 2003, p. 122).

Derrida has revealed his own critical system clearly.

### Derrida's early affirmation

However, note that Derrida *affirms* the conclusion of idealism (thus *determining* the problem). His early work has not yet applied its reasoning consistently. Hence this early Derrida does allow a further ‘answer’ – ‘dialectic’. It is applied to all of philosophy: “any reflection must begin by assuming this idealism [which ignores the ‘already’]. It is this which autho-

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<sup>13</sup> It is often noted that the later Derrida seeks to avoid either-or oppositional logic (cf. Hobson 2004, pp. 57-59). But here, Derrida first *imposes* it in order to refuse its determination.

risers us to speak of a dialectic philosophy as the only possible philosophy of genesis” (Derrida 2003, p. 138).

Lawlor has already pointed out well how the ontological side of this outcome arises from Cavallès and Tran-Duc-Thao (Lawlor 2002, pp. 47-66). My point is that Derrida arrives at this via reasoning upon the joints: when there is a concern for knowledge, leading to either-or choice, an (undeniable) base upon time, and inability to affirm or deny of a joint, then dialectic follows.

That said, Derrida has not yet recognised that the system which traps him in iterated inability to affirm or deny could offer some relief by refusing the affirmation in the first place. Thus he comments of the passage from 1954 to 1967 that “through these moments, configurations, effects of *this law* [the] ‘contamination’ of the origin receives a philosophical name we have had to give up: ‘dialectic’” (Derrida 2003, p. xv, my emphasis).

Dialectic is ‘given up’ – at least – because the absolute either/or choice which impels it (in apophasis, ontology, logic and method) will no longer be accepted.

### Summary

I pointed out the relations in regard to particular content (eidetic/empirical etc.), above, but the system is more general, allowing application elsewhere. Derrida begins with a demand for absolute solution to the origin of the object. But the object is already there, thus never originally affirmable. Hence relations fall short, which gives rise to the ‘problem’. The absolute either-or framework then sets the ‘limits’, requiring affirmation or denial from apophasis, and full presence or absence from ontology. This interaction creates an ‘inside-outside’ distinction with an absolute criterion: only if the outside is solved is there knowledge. But as the ‘already’ prevents such determined presence, this leads to a method: ‘either’ one element ‘or’ the other are options, but neither may be determined in the first place (each is predicated *hypothetically*), nor an overall outcome determined anyway. Now, as constitution is the ground of the problem, this leads to (at least) three interdependent models: spatial elements fail to answer the problem of origin, as each element is beset by an inside-outside problem (a joint), the temporal model replicates the problems, and ‘becoming’ keeps the inside across the joint from its outside. Front and back (*telos* or origin) become indistinguishable, as modification forward or backward (of history, genetic project, object) does not attain the outside. Ego and object become indistinguishable as problems by the same mechanism. These results, as

egoic and apophantic inability to affirm (cross the joint), lead to the opposite side of the problem – presence cannot be excluded. Each joint is a dependency as much as a scission. Apophansis thus *cannot affirm, nor deny* of the logical predicate, hence ontological presence/absence cannot be dismissed. Method thus can find no either-or outcome of an identity or presence. This creates the ‘law’ that drives Derrida’s system: constitution never leads to ‘simple’ synthesis (in any either-or limit). Rather, each element has a shared locus through the problem of origin, allowing each to depend upon the others but be separated from them. This interweaving is the system of *contamination*.

Again, any term in the above can be reached from any other. One can understand Derrida when he says later that, when *différance* becomes a term substituted for the problem of origin, it “can refer to the whole complex of its meanings at once” (Derrida 1973, p. 137).

### Contextualisation

I can now briefly contextualise this. No thinkers, as far as I am aware, have mentioned the law, thus they could not relate it to contamination, systematically, nor suggest it could extend into Derrida’s later work. As to the early years, Leonard Lawlor (2002) has provided the first thorough reading of Derrida’s path from 1954 to 1967. I point out only elements which my approach adds, without impugning Lawlor’s study, or suggesting I cover all of his ground. In choosing not to mention the ‘law’, Lawlor does not seek an intra-systematic approach. This arises from a difference in emphasis – Lawlor tracks Derrida’s growth into awareness of a system. Thus he suggests Derrida only developed a ‘logic’ in 1962, and even then, Derrida had not understood contamination (Lawlor, 2002, pp. 138, 141). I track Derrida’s system before – as he tells us in 1990 – he knew he had one. Lawlor thus relays a series of cogent points as a ‘narrative’ (Lawlor 2002, p. 7), while pointing to Derrida’s external influences. I follow how the work revolves around its ‘internal’ imperatives. Hence while Lawlor wishes to show Derrida’s work is ‘continuous’ (Lawlor 2002, p. 11) with phenomenology, I focus on Derrida’s having internal aims from the first. I thus include his *demand*, as driving all, and the interactions of judgment with the system. Hence shortfall, the directions, joints, their predictable interactions, method, inability to affirm or deny, the system itself, are, I believe, new.

Of course, contextual readings remain crucial: Derrida is neither robot nor island. This article simply follows Derrida’s internal law, as the ‘road-map’ (Derrida 2003, p. xiv) which he pointed us to.



In regard to readers of Derrida's subsequent work, that he does not choose from the inside-outside division has always been accepted.<sup>14</sup> Relating this to contamination and 'logic' is becoming frequent.<sup>15</sup> Many still connect this to Kant, and a developmental account could help to situate this.<sup>16</sup> As to his 'method', Hurst suggests Derrida arrives at his 'aporias' as two propositions leading to insoluble either-or dilemma (Hurst 2004; 2008b, p. 9). While I caution that Derrida's method may develop after 1954 (cf. Galetti 2010), I have suggested a basis arises in 1954, where each proposition is posed hypothetically, in ongoing directions via joints.

### CONCLUSION

In support of these projects, I point first to an early application. In *Of Grammatology*, turning to question language, Derrida investigates whether speech can avoid 'contamination' by writing (Derrida 1976, p. 30, 34, 41), that is, whether the latter can be kept outside, as Saussure (1983, p. 46) wishes. Here, Derrida no longer 'make[s] a choice' (apophantically), as a 'Yes' or a 'No' (bivalent) outcome, of a presence or absence (Derrida 1976, p. 62, cf. 1978, p. 64). The either-or *outcome* has been let go. But Derrida still *poses* either-or choices on consecutive *joints*. For example, Saussure wishes to keep language outside the phonic – but then “‘the thing that constitutes language’ is [. . .] unrelated to [outside] the phonic character of the linguistic sign” (Derrida 1976, p. 43).

Again, Saussure wishes to keep the written word 'outside' the natural relation to speech (Derrida 1976, p. 35), but the *grammē* and *phonē* (essential units of possible writing and speech) become inseparable. Derrida interweaves hypothetical problems upon the joint. He makes this interweaving clear, as “the outside bears with the inside a relationship that is, as usual, anything but simple exteriority. The meaning of the outside was always [already] present within the inside, imprisoned outside the outside, and vice versa.” (Derrida 1976, p. 35)

Thus 'there is no longer a simple origin' (Derrida 1976, p. 37). I will take the 'trace' to be a name for the undeniable but unaffirmable origin; and even now, this “*thought of the trace can no more break with a transcendental phenomenology than be reduced to it*” (Derrida 1976, p. 62, author's emphasis).

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<sup>14</sup> See footnote vi.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Leavey (in Derrida 1978b, pp. 5); Hurst (2004, 2008), Hobson (2004).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Hart (2007).

But the *demand* for solution remains: “the grammatologist least of all can avoid questioning himself about the *essence* of his object in the form of the *question of origin*: ‘What is writing?’ means ‘where and when does writing begin?’” (Derrida 1976, p. 28, my emphasis, cf. 142, 143).<sup>17</sup>

The basis still applies in the transition to Derrida’s linguistic work. As to what will change by 1967 (and still needs to be shown): Derrida, I suggest, will recognise that the ‘problem’ implies that external relation – *even that there is* an inside-outside – cannot be affirmed (cf. Derrida 1973, pp. 107-128). Thus he will reassess *even whether one can affirm* an either-or binary. As he says in *Of Grammatology*: “the outside is the inside” (Derrida 1976, p. 44).

Erasure is well-known. My point is that its impetus could arise from a ‘law’ in 1954. Finally, I look ahead once, to Derrida’s first justice-law aporia of 1990, where “to be just, the decision of a judge, for example, must not only follow a rule of law or a general law, but must also assume it [. . .] by a reinstating act of interpretation (Derrida 2001, p. 251).

A judge – or better, a *judgment* must be made of an object, the general law. But from inside to outside: if the judgment is made ‘after’ the law, the origin of the law outside (before) is unaccounted for. Alternatively, if the judgment is made inside, the origin of the law inside its ‘re-instituting’ act is unaccounted for. The judgment can be neither affirmed nor denied as just. Again, Derrida requires absolute solution, while each either-or term is posed hypothetically. I point this out *not* to reduce the complexity of the later work, but to indicate the hard path that leads there – through the years rather than by generalisation, given that bases in the past remain. Hence the above is *only* introductory, but perhaps it can help to find an early platform for approach to Derrida.

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<sup>17</sup> As Derrida later says in the work: ‘[o]ne cannot help wishing to master absence and yet we must always let it go.’ (Derrida 1976, p. 142). He also calls this the ‘desire of presence’ of *différance* (Derrida 1976, p. 143).

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**THE HERMENEUTICAL KEYS TO WILLIAM JAMES'S  
PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION:  
PROTESTANT IMPULSES, VITAL BELIEF**

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**Abstract.** This essay argues that the American psychologist and philosopher William James should be viewed in the Lutheran Reformation's tradition because this viewpoint offers the hermeneutical key to his philosophy of religion. Though James obviously didn't ascribe to biblical authority, he expressed the following religious sensibilities made possible by Martin Luther and his contemporaries: 1) challenge of prevailing systems, 2) anti-rationalism, 3) being pro-religious experience and dynamic belief, 4) need for a personal, caring God, and also 5) a gospel of religious comfort. This essay asks, in one specific form, how religious concerns can hold steady over time but cause very different expressions of faith.

In his famous *Varieties of Religious Experience*, the American philosopher and psychologist William James offers a rather secularized version of the Protestant Reformation's central insight: a person is justified by faith apart from moral achievement. James writes of the tormented individual: „under these circumstances the way to success, as vouched for by innumerable authentic personal narrations, is by an anti-moralistic method, by the ‘surrender’ of which I spoke . . . This is salvation through self-despair, the dying to be truly born, of Lutheran theology, the passage into nothing of which Jacob Behmen writes” (1997a, p. 101; Shaw 1986, pp. 5–16). This salvation cannot be earned; it must somehow be experienced as a gift, a consequence of giving up. Possibly James found this „Gospel of Relaxation” (James 1958) from his research without recourse to a predisposing tradition, but this study argues the opposite—that sensibilities rooted in the Lutheran Reformation and its experiential concept of salvation drive his philosophy of religion.

James is famous for his contributions to psychology and philosophy, but he is rarely viewed in terms of a theological tradition. As this essay's title implies, this perspective is significant for unlocking the door to his entire religious philosophy. The claim is not obvious, given that he was not a practicing Lutheran, and whatever Reformed roots his family inherited had dried up and rotted before he was even born (Myers 1986, p. 386). However, he has inherent Protestant impulses from those who struggled with Enlightenment challenges to faith (be they pressures from empirical science or rationalism) much like Luther faced theological hardships in medieval Christianity. This struggle to blaze a new path for faith binds them in intellectual history because, in different ways, they both defended the individual's belief in a personal God. James's defense against the reductive materialism and Hegelian Idealism<sup>1</sup> of his day (as he perceived them) was a battle similar to Luther's attack against Catholic scholasticism and accrued tradition.

The similarities between James and the 16<sup>th</sup> century reformers appear in several tendencies, broadening the analogy. Reformers challenge (*protest*) a prevailing system directly impacting faith, just as Luther challenged Catholicism's authority or Kant limited reason and skepticism (Kant 1996, preface). Reformers challenge the idea of God built substantially out of logic, like the scholastic God, whose attributes are derived from the biblical symbols or the idea of infinity and filtered through syllogisms. Thus, the reformers are anti-speculative about God's nature, rejecting the scholasticism as they perceive it and its later manifestations from Descartes through Hegel. If sweeping speculation about God and proofs of his existence are detrimental to reformers, then they find their faith rooted elsewhere; rationally non-verifiable faith and experience are the true guides to reality. Because faith is much in vain if its object is a wrathful or indifferent God, the reformer seeks a personal God who cares for individuals' destinies within the world's whole fate. Finally, the compassionate God corresponds to a gospel of comfort or assurance of salvation that the reformer embraces (Wengert 2009). The success of this essay's thesis depends on the possibility of finding these theological sensibilities philosophically transformed in James's writings.

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<sup>1</sup> Materialism is a greater category under which Darwinism falls and any metaphysic that denies supernatural dimensions of the universe. Hegelian Idealism is a highly speculative kind of theism that exalts its own brand of intellectualist (rationalist) logic as the key to reality. Both can be considered 'Baconian' in that they both try to conquer reality through reason and science.

Though a reformer, William James cannot be identified with evangelical Christianity except as its philosophical product. Although he referred to himself as a Christian, it was a „rather hopelessly non-evangelical” one (Hardwick 1993, p. 166), and the continuity between his own confession of faith and the 16<sup>th</sup> century Lutherans is quite limited despite his excessive praise for Luther.<sup>2</sup> But for the above reasons, he belongs with the Reformers, in spirit if not content, while struggling with diverse enemies.<sup>3</sup> My task is to show how James was able to uphold a non-rational faith even as a Harvard professor with no sectarian wagons to hide behind, how he first criticized the authority of hard science, and, once science’s grip loosened, argued for the significance of religion. For James, faith’s life significance de-prioritized the need for universally defensible religion and opened up religion’s self-authentication for the individual. If religion helps, its universal validation is of secondary concern. Much of James’s writing on the subject approaches this basic thesis, bringing consistency to this thought. He saw false alternatives in materialism and Idealism’s absolute claims that force either a rationally based religion or none at all. James felt that both movements reveal people’s personalities more than timeless truths, and he devoted great energy to expound their general misunderstanding of faith. It is best, then, to start with his effort to contain these movements.

#### THE LIMITS OF SCIENCE

Throughout his career, James demanded humility in scientific inquiry. This call to modesty stemmed in part from his mammoth understanding of the universe’s complexity and the extreme limitation of human minds to conquer nature through reason and science. He portrays dogs’ and cats’ understanding of humans as analogous to humans’ understanding of the universe (James 1995, p. 116). Animals in a library can see books and listen to conversations, but they have only the thinnest understanding of a library. This

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<sup>2</sup> E.g. see James 1927. He said: “Luther broke through the crust of all this naturalistic self-sufficiency. He thought (and possibly he was right) that Saint Paul had done it already. Religious experience of the Lutheran type brings all our naturalistic standards to bankruptcy. You are strong only by being weak, it shows. You can not live on pride or self-sufficiency. There is a light in which all the naturally founded and correctly accepted distinctions, excellences, and safeguards of our characters appear as absolute childishness. To give up one’s conceit of being good is the only door to the Universe’s deeper reaches.”

<sup>3</sup> Other possible Protestant reformers in this line are Friedrich Schleiermacher, Søren Kierkegaard, and Karl Barth.

is how James felt about humans in a pluralistic universe, and he repudiated any attempts to deny the mysteries of existence through science.

Although a professional psychologist (or perhaps because of it), James had a sober sense of inductive inquiry's limitation. He identified himself as an *empiricist*—one who seeks knowledge through observation and experimentation—but unlike materialists such as William Clifford and Thomas Huxley, he believed science's objectivity to be tenuous. Objectivity, or 'objective truth' is a confusing term to postmoderns; here it simply denotes claims of supposed universal relevance, propositions that any reasonable individual should acknowledge. This was a time, similar to our 21<sup>st</sup> century contemporary one when one could say that: „one runs a better chance of being listened to to-day if one can quote Darwin and Helmholtz than if one can only quote Schleiermacher or Coleridge” (1956, p. 112). James was concerned that the West's passion for science, begun already in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century with Francis Bacon and Galileo, had gained too much unfavorable momentum. Darwin's fall from faith into a cold naturalism was symbolic of Christianity lapsing into secularism with increasing velocity, a turn striking James as depressing—if human life can be reduced to the causality of dead matter. Early in his career, he discovered a way to use science against itself, so to speak, by uncovering the psychological motivations behind claims to rationality. The essay „The Sentiment of Rationality” (published 1879) was an attempt to ask an unprecedented question of science: What does rationality feel like? (1956, pp. 63–66). Of course basic facts such as '7+7=14' or 'all known walruses have whiskers' have little affective import, but the way facts are built into great, moral-determining systems never lacks a non-rational impetus. James contended that rationality is „unimpeded mental function”, unmasking the affective energy behind all philosophies (1956, p. 75). Rationality is what satisfies our minds. For instance, Arthur Schopenhauer, because of his pessimistic mood, discovered a gloomy philosophy; and Walt Whitman the optimist found a viewpoint of great enthusiasm for life. This same analysis applies to the rise of materialism. At root, materialists desire to conjure their own comfort by vanquishing all unpredictability from nature. Given the limitation of our knowledge, James had no problem acknowledging the possibility of *miracles*, but the materialists he faced had dismissed this anomaly a priori because it conflicted with their emotional need for control (1956, p. 80). As reformer, James hollowed out a place where faith in a personal God could thrive. He accomplished the task by exposing faith as *basic* to all human endeavors and especially to those pretending to have transcended the need for it. This strong conviction that „our science is a drop,



our ignorance a sea" is one that never left him (1956, p. 64). It set up his entire philosophy of 'Radical Empiricism', encouraging the idea of the dynamic nature of truth, which must always answer to experience (i.e. its significance for human life). Although James thought materialism could never become a satisfying worldview, he felt that it had already plagued England and France by 1880 and was gaining enough traction in America to warrant positive counteraction.

If atheistic materialism was James's first enemy, Hegelian Idealism was close behind. His attitude toward Idealism was somewhat complicated by his friendship with Idealist colleague Josiah Royce, but despite Royce's influence, James generally condemned the system and method. In a letter to French philosopher Charles Renouvier he expressed his view intriguingly: „My principal amusement this winter [December, 1880] has been resisting the inroads of Hegelism in our University [Harvard] . . . as a reaction against materialistic evolutionism it has its use, only this evolutionism is fertile while Hegelism is absolutely sterile”.<sup>4</sup> Hegelianism is a good decoy to distract the atheists, but it is not a lasting power. An empiricist by temperament, James distrusted the ability of the mind's internal workings to grasp the nature of divine reality, because „God's being is sacred from ours”, and our task is to cooperate with him through our belief rather than any „speculative conquest of him” (1956, p. 141).

James viewed Hegelianism as a new rendition of the medieval Catholic scholasticism that Luther had so fully polemicized against (Kolb 2009, pp. 30–34). While James eventually relaxed his diatribe against materialism, his denunciation of Idealism only grew hotter from the early 1880's to his death in 1910. He found several problems with Hegel, and the need to emphasize them increased as he developed his own competing metaphysic in *A Pluralistic Universe*. As Reinhold Niebuhr wrote, he „inveighed against a 'Bloc Universe' and against any philosophy which identified the real with the actual” (James 1997a, introduction). James's distaste for scientific arrogance continued in similar form with Idealism with its reality conquering impulse, and his „aversion to metaphysical systems” as Niebuhr depicted it shows, again, his Protestant reformer impulse. Hegelian arrogance might have been forgivable had the philosophy produced positive results, but indeed it did not! The Bloc Universe had inspired thinkers to abstract upon

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<sup>4</sup> Hardwick 1993, p. 113. Additionally: „It is a strange thing, this resurrection of Hegel in England and here, after his burial in Germany. I think his philosophy will probably have an important influence on the development of our liberal form of Christianity. It gives a quasi-metaphysic backbone which this theology has always been in need of, but it is too fundamentally rotten and charlatanish to last long”.

abstractions to the point of unintelligibility (1997b)—anyone who has tried to read *The Phenomenology of Spirit* from start to finish might agree. James found its approach not only hermeneutically turbid but also disconnected from empirical honesty, sacrificing the gains of inductive research to castles in the sky. The problem, then, is not just that the ‘Bloc Universe’ proved itself contrary to concrete experience; its true deficiency was in excising God’s personality, immanence, and care. In calculating God’s identity like a lofty mathematical equation, Hegel had only resuscitated a more respectable *Zeus-Pantokrator* and killed any hope for religious belief having a meaning in individual lives. Instead of a pluralistic universe, where spontaneity and wonder remain, Hegelism was attempting to conquer individuality, freedom, and significance of religion in life (James 1909, lectures 2–3). With these objections unleashed, censuring materialism and Idealism, James was free to propose an alternative philosophy.

While his metaphysical alternative to materialism and Idealism is not the primary focus here, a short description will link these critiques to his positive view of religion. In 1896 James called his position “Radical Empiricism”, (1956, p. vi–vii) *empirical* in continually adjusting to new experiences and results, *radical* in denying monism (either Hegelian or material) dogmatic privilege. In sum, experience must be the measure of any philosophical system. If Radical Empiricism is the hardware of James’s thought, then surely *Pragmatism* (published 1907) is the software running it. The Pragmatism movement is infamous for creating confusion, both because of the term’s multifarious application and a general lack of clarity in its proponents (viz. John Dewey, F.S.C. Schiller, C.S. Peirce). Generally, Pragmatism is a method of finding practical consequences in ideas, but it can be broken down into about three functions. 1) As a theory of truth or cognition it evinces truth as a property of human thoughts, not something *in* things or independent of a mind. 2) As a theory of interpretation, it helps to discern between philosophical systems by determining which is most practically feasible. And, 3) when coupled with Radical Empiricism, it is a metaphysic that affirms the mind’s ability not only to discover truths about reality but to take an active role in shaping reality. This function follows Kant („Thoughts without content are void; intuitions without conceptions, blind”, 1999, p. 45) but it radicalizes thought’s ability to alter reality through time as experience changes. This aspect of Pragmatism is the most relevant to James’s defense of religion because it grants faith the power to establish its own truth ahead of any verifiable evidence.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> As a philosopher, James didn’t distinguish strictly between religious and non-religious

## BELIEF AND TRUTH

One occasion in James's young life set the key for his later confidence in the power of belief and optimistic thinking in general. He was 28, living hermitically in Berlin, and had sunk into despondency about moral values. If the universe really were a cold mechanism, he considered, and humans were determined by impersonal causes, then moral responsibility and an ultimate difference between good and evil are unfounded. That is, if free choice is an illusion, then so is everything else we hold dear, he reasoned. But the despairing young James found an answer in French philosopher Charles Renouvier's defense of free will based on the human ability to control thoughts.<sup>6</sup> Renouvier's insight gave James the confidence to affirm moral reality and the significance of human choice. This altered way of thinking offered an exit from the depression he was suffering. The importance of this event lies in the nature of this conversion to free will. If Kant is right, both freedom and determinism are at bottom faith statements. Neither one can be proved conclusively (Kant 1999, p. 264ff.). Thus, Renouvier served to clear away the persuasion of determinism and allow James to embrace freedom without verification. Once he did, he discovered a wealth of benefits philosophically and existentially, making a lapse back to determinism, for him, irrational. Much of James's later work shows him trying to serve his audience as Renouvier served him.

This philosophy of belief was actually part of James's mindset even before he read Renouvier, making that experience more of a confirmation than an epiphany of faith's power. Already in 1868, he wrote to his friend Thomas Ward: „I am sure that one can, by merely thinking of these matters of fact [beauties of nature], limit the power of one's evil moods over one's way of looking at the Kosmos” (Hardwick 1993, p. 51). As the statement shows, this philosophy first appears as a call for optimism over pessimism. From his earliest publications, James was convinced that thinking can influence reality in these issues. Belief can authenticate itself. In Christian

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gious faith. The practical weight of his thought (as he would have it) is a defense of *both*. Interestingly, here James proves himself, more than any other place, a prophet of postmodernism, which is acutely sensitized to the contextual nature of all truth claims and the lack of philosophical foundations for knowledge.

<sup>6</sup> See Renouvier 1859, ch. 9, 11, also pp. 324–371. The quote from James: „I think that yesterday was a crisis in my life. I finished the first part of Renouvier's *Essais* and see no reason why his definition of free will—'the sustaining of a thought *because I choose to* when I might have other thoughts'—need be the definition of an illusion. At any rate, I will assume for the present—until next year—that it is no illusion. My first act of free will shall be to believe in free will” (Myers 1986, p. 46).

terms, only faith in Christ's reality finds salvation as an eschatological event: the reality of salvation is not a fact to be found objectively, but belief is a pre-condition of finding its truth (Bultmann 1965, pp. 128–137). As a philosopher, James never defended doctrinal particulars but rather offered an apology for the healthiness of faith in human life. While he later defended God's existence, his early work functioned largely in the context of optimism and its importance for a non-illusory morality (Myers 1986, p. 446).

Theism was slow to develop in his system, especially as the *Principles of Psychology* occupied the first ten years of his career with concerns pertaining to behavioral science. Even so, his essay „Reflex Action and Theism” (published 1881) appeared, showing the early link between psychology and theistic faith. Reflex action is a nineteenth century way of explaining human behavior in a triadic structure. It states that humans first receive *impressions* by sensing the external environment. Then they carry out a *reflective stage* by which these impressions are ordered within their sensibilities and oriented toward understanding. The consequence, then, is *reaction*, or fitting action based on the reflection of sense data (James 1956, p. 115). The essential statement of this behavioral analysis is that humans act with ends in mind; and without invoking a wide, teleological structure such as Darwinian evolution, it locates the significance of actions in their functions, responding to and mastering their environment.

While any 19<sup>th</sup> century psychologist might have affirmed a version of this structure, James offers a novel interpretation. The reflexive stage, he argues, functions most adequately if it presupposes the idea of God, defined as the deepest power in the universe and as a mental personality.<sup>7</sup> In this early writing the implications of this claim are vague but firmly stated nonetheless. In order for healthy thought and action, people have to consider themselves in relation to a personal governor of the universe; only then will they live as rationally as possible. Any object of concern greater than God, James avers, would be impossible if God is the limit, and anything less than God would be irrational.<sup>8</sup> This charge of irrationality for anyone neglecting the divine is important as a direct attack on eliminative materialism and logical positivisms with their anti-theistic bias. The argument is quite minimal. Being approached from a psychological standpoint, the most real estate it purchases for theism is a ‘theistic attitude of mind’

<sup>7</sup> We should notice here the reformer's need for a personal, related God (James 1956, p. 122).

<sup>8</sup> There might be a vestige of James's Calvinist roots here, where he implies that God is known through his power and universality (James 1956, p. 134).

as an essential characteristic of human life (without implying God's actual existence). It serves much less as a direct attack on materialism but a subtle way of undermining it and clearing ground for theism, showing James's lasting theistic commitment. The importance of the matter continually increased for him because he felt that any materialism or agnosticism would finally alienate humans from their own world, something that philosophy must continually eschew to be true and adequate. Whether or not we can justify theism according to general canons of logic, theism has an irreducible importance for human life, and its benefits far outweigh those of living solely on positive evidence (something James thought impossible anyway).

James sharpened these insights drastically over the years, finally publishing his most treasured essay about the subject 15 years later in „The Will to Believe”, which he delivered to the philosophical clubs of Yale and Brown Universities (June, 1896), as „something like a sermon on justification by faith” (1956, p. 1). He intended it really as a justification *of* faith, simple belief in God, to a crowd that had difficulty seeing past the anti-theism of his day. The address works with Pragmatism's claim that truth is not always a fixed set of propositions to be discovered but a dynamic reality to be revised continually and acted on even if sure-fire evidence is forthcoming. Sometimes, he argued, there are conditions where sober scientific inquiry demands that we believe ahead of the evidence.

James argued that if a certain faith statement such as ‘God exists for us’ is what he called *forced*, *live*, and *momentous*, then it is more rational to take it on faith than not. Theism is *forced* because we must decide whether or not we believe in God; there is not a middle ground where we can agnostically refuse to decide. If we do not actively believe in God and make that belief constitutive for our existence, then we have chosen unbelief. It is forced because not acting is essentially acting in the negative. Theism also can be *live* or *dead*. For most people raised in America, James says that the phrase ‘be a Christian’ is a live possibility because it is familiar enough to be inside the bounds of credulity. For many Arabs, he says, that wouldn't be true; to them Christianity would be too foreign, making the option dead. The phrase ‘be a Muslim’ would probably be live for them. The underlying assumption is that all people, being created for theism as we earlier witnessed in „Reflex Action and Theism” are able to believe in God, but the particulars are constrained by their psychology. Finally, theism is *momentous*, rather than *trivial*. This qualification intensifies rather than modifies the argument, showing that the stakes are high for believing in God or not. It adds urgency to the question of where our belief will rest.

The argument proper is an updated version of Pascal's wager, stating that reason cannot decide the question whether or not God exists; if we wager to believe, then we stand to gain eternal life if God exists. If he does not, then we have nothing to lose for having believed. James notes a fatal flaw in the wager in that for many people the decision to become Catholic or not wasn't a live option as it was for Pascal; additionally, he notes that it neglects religion's *immediate* significance for human life. But he acknowledges a basic truth in Pascal's argument and proposes a more pragmatic wager to his contemporaries. Science had operated on two basic principles: 'believe truth', and 'avoid error'. However, they are not mutual imperatives but rather separate commands. All scientists refusing to work by faith had made error avoidance supreme to a point where they refused to look outside of established evidence, a methodological problem for James. If science is really to believe truth, it can't always suspend judgment. If error avoidance is the guiding principle, science will inevitably suppress some truths that are important for human life now. The creed 'avoid error' will suffocate 'believe truth' unless we are willing to work ahead of the evidence and let the future eventually demonstrate which truths are lasting and which must be transcended as antiquated hypotheses. Thus: "*a rule of thinking which would absolutely prevent me from acknowledging certain kinds of truth if those kinds of truth were really there, would be an irrational rule*" (1956, p. 28).

The wager, so interpreted, concerns concrete human life. There are great benefits to be gained from believing in a personal *Thou* in the universe if faith is not excised by science's presuppositions. Given the limitation of human knowledge, the sentiment of rationality, and the nature of truth as an active product of the human mind, James carves out a place where faith in a personal God can thrive without the pressures of Idealism's logic or materialism's eliminations. In this effort, he appears as a Protestant reformer, and more so with his concern for the religious significance of living faith as opposed to the world of facts and intellectual assent to them. This faith is decidedly vague, but it entails the negations that abstract reason can never get to God, and science cannot impede religious belief.

#### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FAITH . . .

In „The Will to Believe” talk about faith's benefits is quite limited. James states that belief in God has a self-authenticating element, making God's existence true for everyone whose life is enriched and deepened through

this belief. James depicts the whole moral constitution of the universe as being at stake and therefore human comfort, but he didn't there elaborate on the fruits of religious belief. That same year, however, he appropriated his own work in a more focused essay: „Is Life Worth Living?“, an address to Harvard's YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association). Using the argument from „The Will to Believe“, he attempts to inspire comfort directly in young students whom he thought susceptible to depression and even suicide because of their prolonged studies in abstract ideas (1956, p. 38). The essay's argument need not be rehearsed in full because it follows much previous argumentation. It is noteworthy, though, for its therapeutic tone and James's effort to encourage religion as an active faith, something to live by, and a demand of human existence in general. Surely James's own experience of depression, with belief as an alleviator, is in the background. In „Is Life Worth Living?“ he simply encourages optimism as it coheres with faith in God, ultimately to show that life really is worth living, and the key to seeing it as worthwhile is to believe in a personal God, in its own way, the Reformation's very theme (James 1956, pp. 61–62).

By 1896, when these essays appeared, James wasn't optimally equipped to see all of religion's benefits. We could say that he took the proposition 'faith is significant for human life' on faith before he had researched all of the possibilities it had, and then confirmed it in practice. Such is the pragmatic method. The most thorough research he did on this topic was for Edinburgh's Gifford Lectures in 1902, eventually published as *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. This work covers religious experience via a very biographical method, taking diverse individuals from many time periods and listening to their accounts of ecstasy, soul sickness, conversion, optimism, etc. For my purposes, it shows religion's significance for life and hence confirms James's defense of faith. In summing up the results of his study, he offers a list of benefits: zest for life, optimism, heroism, comfort, earnestness, loving affections, hope, peaceful temperament, and even miraculous healings (James 1997a, p. 337). As he argued long before, human nature is religious, making it obvious that life is healthier, saner, and more ethical when lived in faith (Myers 1986, pp. 451–56). *The Varieties* is really James's mature apology for the significance of religious belief, working on psychological grounds. He reaffirms much of his previous work, repudiating the classically abstract doctrine of God directly, limiting science's materialism, and thrashing Idealism as firmly as ever. As reformer, he exalted Luther's criticism of the righteousness of works:

Any God who, on the one hand, can care to keep a pedantically minute account of individual shortcomings, and on the other can feel such partialities, and

load particular creatures with such insipid marks of favor, is too small-minded a God for our credence. When Luther, in his immense manly way, swept off by a stroke of his hand the very notion of a debit and credit account kept with individuals by the Almighty, he stretched the soul's imagination and saved theology from puerility (1997a, p. 277).

James confessed that variety is important for a living faith because religion must speak to diverse peoples and circumstances, but the reformer impulse in him often won out over the pluralist in him. Any perceived childishness, superstition, sententiousness, or undue abstraction in religion felt the sharp edge of his critical appraisal. Religions must be judged by their adequacy for life—their ability to produce the above benefits—and James did not feel that all expressions of faith were equally suited for this task.

As Pragmatist, he judges all religion by its experiential value, implying that personal fulfillment and happiness are the ultimate criteria but also that religion must still answer to confirmed scientific evidence. If belief in leprechauns, Santa Claus, or the Loch Ness Monster makes us happy it still must pass the scrutiny of what can be known. This method of analysis shows that James never lost interest in religion's evidential *factuality*, and why, I think, his caring but inscrutable God resists the constraints of dogmatic particulars. Notwithstanding his childhood aversion to church authority, theological particulars are hard to defend in the ring of philosophical combat. If he were a postmodernist he might have compromised the truth question by opting for many religious narratives, none universally superior to the others; but the modernist James felt that even in religion there is one essential answer that experience could reveal in time.

The truth question also distances him from psychologist J.H. Leuba, who taught (similarly to Ludwig Feuerbach) that God need not exist to have religious value and that God's entire value lies in the usefulness of the concept of God (James 1997a, p. 392). Because James emphasizes the practical function of faith, he appears very close to Leuba at points; both would agree that religion's significance arises out of its experiential effects. But James's account finally demands God as an independent other, a wise governor. He shows affinities to theologian Rudolf Bultmann, whose existential New Testament interpretation demanded that language about God is always language about self. In contrast, Leuba required only a religion of projection, cutting off any honest 'language about God'. Such an outlook was too limiting for James's vision of religious truth.



## . . . AND THE REALITY OF GOD

The truth question sets up our final theme: the reality of God. As the section headings show, the *significance of faith and the reality of God* are synthetically connected. Unlike the Idealist, who begins with logic or Kant's transcendental ego of apperception (viz. James Caird) and deduces God's existence, James begins with belief and leaves the question of God open and pragmatically true so long as future praxis confirms its validity. As a Protestant reformer, he started in *faith*, not the *sight* (or supposed certainty) of what he considered to be scholastic brands of logic.

James was not an absolute fideist, however, whose faith increases proportionally to absurdity (Tertullian). He thought religion reasonable (in his own sense of rationality) based on its moral function for humans. Because he also felt the fact question to be (secondarily) important, he offered his own minimal apology for God's existence, not to prove it for all time as, for instance, an ontological proof could be intended to do, but to show to a reasonable probability that God really is an independent other.

Because of his previous work to limit materialism's momentum, James was open to a universe of possibilities outside of matter, and he refused to let religion be reduced to biochemistry or neurology. The wide varieties of religion he felt were experiential markers of a deeper reality visible to psychology (James 1995, p. 115). Not all would find the argument (that *religion proves God*) convincing, but to a person in James's position who had experimented widely in psychical research, God's reality seemed the best interpretation of the data, his own string of pseudo-mystical experiences concurring (James 1969, pp. 504–12). In *The Varieties*, James even expresses the possibility that philosophical analysis of experience could one day assert religion's positive foundation by straining out its particulars to find the experiential core and thereafter gain religious studies equal respectability with physical science (1997a, p. 355). Because God actually inspires religion through humanity's sub-consciousness, and all creeds have a common experiential nucleus, all religions, then, have real objects of faith and address problems with solutions of essentially the same kind. Taken together, James postulates a meta-theory to explain these phenomena, but it is speculation that he doesn't accent as more than a future possibility. He contented himself, in contrast, with a basic kind of belief and never demanded a rational foundation for it even though God's existence seemed empirically probable based on his own sentiment of rationality.

The only other place where James's gives positive evidence of God's reality is an essay defending conscious immortality: „Human Immortality”

(published originally in 1893). Being a defense of the afterlife, the argument for God's existence is more an implication of the argument proper. The essay takes a characteristic tone in overturning popular materialistic assumptions. As many psychologists believed, the brain is the power of consciousness, meaning that the death of the brain is the death of personal existence. Obviously, then, no hope for an afterlife would remain, and whatever immortality existed could not transcend books and memories. Conversely, James argues that, based on his psychical research of conversions, providential leadings from prayer, instantaneous healings, premonitions, apparitions, and others, a new model might better explain consciousness (James 1956, p. 25.). In his view, the brain is only a transmitter (a radio rather than a CD player, analogously stated) of a deeper source or stream of consciousness ultimately related to God. When children are born they don't generate their own field of consciousness anew but rather pick up the stream of consciousness we all share. All the brains that transmit this natural stream stamp it and color it with their subjectivity so that personhood is not lost even after the brain dies. Because consciousness is so much larger than an individual brain, its power is not necessarily contingent on brain function.

It is telling of James's personality that he could use an argument so highly speculative and intend it for nothing more sublime than psychological comfort. At the outset he admits that the topic of immortality is ruled by personal feeling, and he made no attempt to claim transcendent objectivity. James, like all of us, had to deal with the horror of death in his life, and the hope for conscious immortality gave him comfort and helped him to comfort others. When his sister was on the verge of her premature death, he spoke to her with calm words about immortality, the wonder of her transition from this life to the next (Hardwick 1993, p. 134).

Thus, we see the Protestant reformer wavering from his predecessor's trail and somehow still remaining within shouting distance. James propounded a doctrine of comfort for a threatened existence—no longer for a troubled conscience. He affirmed life after death, but treated salvation as though it had no conditions! Ultimately he believed in a personal God, present in faith but did not escape the speculative nature of theism as inferred from experience, and though he repudiated rational foundations for faith, he still upheld a *pragmatic* foundation based in the mental health benefits of religion.

## CONCLUSION

When I argue this thesis (that James is a Protestant reformer) before more traditionally-minded theologians, their knee-jerk reaction is to say 'ridiculous!', because to them doctrinal subscription alone distinguishes a theology or philosophy. But we've seen quite concretely that religious motives producing one doctrinal statement might serve a completely different expression of belief in new time periods under different pressures such as the rise of science. It is these motives that help us to understand where a philosophy of religion comes from and why it is important for the ever-changing forms of religious discourse that daily struggle for significance.

Though the traditionally-minded reformers would undoubtedly reject James as one of their own, I've tried to make room for him as something of a black sheep—still part of the family, but following a different course. This interpretation helps to explain James's entire religious philosophy,<sup>9</sup> taking seriously his self-identification as a Protestant and a New England liberal Christian. Devoted to studying the sciences, he was unable to escape their rigid criteria for knowledge despite his best efforts to limit rationalism and materialism. It is evident because he never opened up to a transcendent word of revelation, having elevated religious experience (critically considered) as the highest knowledge of God. Saying with Luther 'faith alone', and maybe even 'grace alone', he couldn't confess 'scripture alone'. He never really took Pascal's wager without hedging the bet with his own safeguards.

James is a prime example of a Protestant philosophy that takes the virtues of Christianity and handles them in terms of pure experience. His contribution, given the opponents of his day, was to clear room for faith in a remarkably non-sectarian fashion by showing how the practical significance of religion eclipses the need for rational foundations. While many Protestants will recognize the limitations of this program and reject it as a whole, I think they can at least smile on James's apology as an expression of true Protestant spirit.

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<sup>9</sup> To repeat these affinities, they are: 1) challenge of prevailing systems, 2) anti-rationalism, 3) pro-religious experience and dynamic faith, 4) need for a personal, caring God, and also 5) a gospel of religious comfort.

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***THESE ULTIMATE SPRINGS AND PRINCIPLES:  
SCIENCE, RELIGION AND THE LIMITS OF REASON***

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**Abstract.** The question of the limits of reason, not just within philosophy but also in the modern sciences, is arguably more important than ever given numerous recent commentaries on “life”, “reality”, meaning, purpose, pointlessness and so on, emanating not from philosophers or metaphysicians, but rather from physicists and biologists such as Steven Weinberg and Richard Dawkins. It will be argued that such commentaries concerning the “pointlessness” of the universe, or the purpose of ‘life’, and other such things, are flawed and unconvincing, not least because they seem to overlook or forget a number of well known and significant philosophical contributions on the question of limits, particularly by Kant, but also by Hume, Russell and Sir A J Ayer.

A certain confusion, however, arose in science, which cannot determine how far reason is to be trusted, and why only so far and no farther; and this confusion can only be cleared up and all future relapses obviated by a formal determination, on principle, of the boundary of the use of our reason. . . .

We cannot indeed, beyond all possible experience, form a definite concept of what things in themselves may be. Yet we are not at liberty to abstain entirely from inquiring into them; for experience never satisfies reason fully but, in answering questions, refers us further and further back and leaves us dissatisfied with regard to their complete solution. . . .

Who can satisfy himself with mere empirical knowledge in all the cosmological questions of the duration and of the magnitude of the world, of freedom or of natural necessity, since every answer given on principles of experience begets a fresh question, which likewise requires its answer and thereby clearly shows the insufficiency of all physical modes of explanation to satisfy reason? Finally, who does not see in the thoroughgoing contingency and dependence of all his thoughts and assumptions on mere

principles of experience the impossibility of stopping there? (Kant, *Prolegomena*, pp. 99-101)

Many thinkers, from Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and the ancient skeptics to Kant, Hume, Russell and Ayer, have reflected memorably on the limits of reason. It is certainly not a new topic, though there remains much to consider. The ancient Pyrrhonists warned of the equipollence of competing claims or arguments and of the suspension of judgment in relation to such things; Socrates spoke of perplexity (see Mathews, 1999) and the nature of philosophy and Aristotle warned of *aporiai* in his *Metaphysics*. In modern philosophy, a rich vein of significant material, Hume and Kant, Russell and Ayer, provided profound reflections on the question of the limits of reason (and by extension, of empirical knowledge).

The question is arguably more important than ever given the recent upsurge in quite grandiose and sweeping claims about “reality”, “life”, meaning, purpose and so on, made not by enlightened metaphysicians, but by prominent scientists such as Steven Weinberg and Richard Dawkins, among others. It will be argued that these scientists’ positions concerning the “pointlessness” or purpose of the universe, or “life”, are flawed and unconvincing, not least because they seem to overlook or forget some significant philosophical contributions of the kind mentioned above, and particularly by Kant.

## I.

Kant’s contributions to debates on the limits of reason, and by extension, of our knowledge of things, are well known. There is a considerable and significant body of literature too: for example, Forster discusses varieties of skepticism (2008); Hanna discusses human nature and freedom (2006); Waxman explores Kant and the empirical tradition (2005); Watkins (2005) and Ewing (1924) are concerned fundamentally with the problems of causality; Dickerson explores representation and its limits (2003); Campbell focuses on constructivism, epistemology and ethics (2002); Rescher explores the limits of philosophy (2000); Grier (2001) and Gardner (1999) examine Kant’s understanding of transcendental illusions; Llewelyn compares and contrasts Kant and Levinas with respect to ethics and the limits of freedom and duty (2000); Langton reflects on ignorance (1998); Strawson focuses on reason, limits and the task of philosophy (1989); Velkley (1989) stresses the limits of cognition; Peacocke (1989) and Gram (1984) focus on the transcendental aspect of Kant’s philosophy; Shell (1996) emphasizes the collapse of reason and the limits of autonomy (2009); Beiser focuses on

reason's questions about its authority (1987), and on the challenge to subjectivism (2002); Buchdahl explores reason and the structure of Kantian thinking (1992); Guyer (1987) and Prichard (1909) focus on epistemology; Beets discusses the Kantian analogies (1986); Friedman discusses reason and faith in Kant and Kierkegaard (1986); Bennett focuses on dialectical reasoning (1974); Vesey (1972) and Green (1997) discuss the Copernican Revolution in Kant's thought; Jalal discusses the antinomies of pure reason (1972); McFarland explores teleology (1970); Ewing (1967) discusses the impossibility of knowledge of the transcendent; Heidegger (1962) and Sellars (1968) discuss in very different ways the relation between Kant's thought and metaphysics;

This listing is not exhaustive either. It is, however, possible to go further, notwithstanding the value and significance of these studies. Kant himself in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (his other works are outside the scope of this paper) understood "limits" in several respects; a point that has not been noted with sufficient force or clarity. It might be useful to outline several of these respects at the outset.

First, he argued that reason "is called upon to consider questions which it cannot decline" but also "cannot answer" because these questions "transcend every faculty of the mind". What he meant is that reason employs principles, "the truth and sufficiency of which . . . are insured by experience"; these principles are then applied to "ever higher and more remote conditions", which lie beyond the limits of experience. (One might think here of the attempt through reason and these principles to discover the true nature of a transcendent being such as "God" or of a sphere of being which is genuinely or truly not subject to the conditions of space and time – if, of course, one grants for the purposes of argument that such things are ontologically possible).

There are in fact four aspects here in relation to limits, not one, though Kant does not make this point clearly. First, he wrote of a limit that applies to *reason generally* inasmuch as seeks to discover, so to speak, things that lie outside of the "sphere of its cognition"; second, he wrote of a limit that applies to *principles specifically*, which reason seeks to apply, so to speak, principles which are anchored in experience, in the sense that they are useful in the field of experience and in the sense that they are "insured" by experience, to things which we have no experience of, such as the universe as a whole, or genuinely and truly *transcendent* things (in Kant's understanding of that term); third, he wrote of the *manifestations* of overstepping such limits, so to speak, namely confusion, contradiction and error; and fourth,

he wrote, repeatedly, of the limit that applies to the attempted application of reason to *objects in general* that lie outside of the sphere of experience.

So, according to Kant, there are *objects* which lie beyond our reason, our cognition, our faculties *and* our experience, particularly in relation to what he called “the sphere of the supersensible” (1952, p. 8). This is, of course, one of the major reasons why he sought in the *Critique* to confine speculative reason “within its proper bounds” (1952, p. 9); to limit its bounds and therefore, remove the problems that “arise out of her own bosom” (1952, p.20). But elsewhere, he wrote also of the limits that apply to *conceptions* and of the principles that derive from them (1952, p. 10). He argued that our *theoretical cognition* is limited to “mere phenomena”, by which he meant, presumably, that we are unable through reason and the conceptions that it forms in its speculative functions, to attain “transcendent insight” – insight into the true nature of things in themselves which lie outside the sphere of our possible experience (that is, things in relation to which *experience* cannot offer sure guidance or comprehensive, true knowledge, according to Kant).

Intriguingly, he also linked the question of limits to the importance in the *Critique* of thoroughly investigating *dogmatism and its limits*. He understood dogmatism in terms of a *presumption*: that it is “possible to make . . . progress with a pure cognition, derived from (philosophical) conceptions, according to the principles which reason has long been in the habit of employing” (1952, p. 11). However, he pointed out that there is a preliminary task: inquiring “in what way and by what right reason has come into possession of these principles”. So, *dogmatism* is limited because it employs pure reason without a critique of the very “powers” that are employed in its procedures. This kind of searching, reflexive criticism is a necessary preparation, according to Kant, and it involves such things as clearly defined conceptions, demonstrations that withstand the “most severe scrutiny” and which avoid rashness or precipitousness (in the Pyrrhonist sense of that term) – in short, the “spirit of profound and thorough investigation” (a phrase that Kant repeats, significantly; 1952, pp. 11, 13)

He wrote of limits in other memorable and significant ways: first, he wrote of an inability to render complete our “edifice of cognitions” (1952, p. 148). This is the “architectonic limit”, one might say. He argued, as is well known, that human reason is by its very nature “architectonic”, which means that every cognition is regarded as part of an overall system. But the limit is introduced here by our discovery of antitheses or antinomies or *aporiai* (puzzles, enigmas or impassés, as Aristotle would have it) when we try and employ reason to give a comprehensive and true account of



whether or not the world had a beginning in time or whether or not all things are conditioned, and so on. In this context, our attempt to form an *a priori* unity (in terms of our cognitions as a whole), becomes difficult if not impossible (Kant's position here is unforgettably clear, if not compelling: it is "utterly impossible", 1952, p.149).

Crucially, he distinguished between "bounds" and "limits": "in all bounds there is something positive (for example, a surface is the boundary of corporeal space . . .) . . . but limits contain mere negations" (1950, p. 103). He added:

Human reason admits of limits but not of bounds, namely, it admits that something indeed lies without it, at which it can never arrive, but not that it will at any point find completion in its internal progress . . . Natural science will never reveal to us the internal constitution of things, . . . Reason through all its concepts and laws of the understanding which are sufficient to it for empirical use, that is within the sensible world, finds in it no satisfaction, because ever recurring questions deprive us of all hope of their complete solution . . . (1950, pp. 100-101)

If Kant is correct and reason, for example, as a faculty, has limits but not bounds, that is, reason allows us to provide *some explanations* but not *complete* ones or a "complete solution", for instance, to the problems of cosmology and cosmogony, then it would follow that natural science, inasmuch as it draws upon or is based on reason, would not be able to furnish complete explanations

Finally he linked the question of limits to the question of comprehensive, true knowledge. His position again is fairly clear: our perceptions are subject to conditions; if this is true, we cannot arrive at a comprehensive (and true) understanding of things (*through perception*) – assuming for the purposes of argument that such as these exist – that are *unconditioned*. He realized that this argument has important implications in relation to explanations or more broadly to the explanatory function of our knowledge, especially in the theoretical sphere. His position suggests that if there are in fact things or objects which we cannot perceive, or which are not subject to those conditions which make our perception possible, then a comprehensive and true explanation of the whole is not an object of experience but rather the object of a transcendental problematic (wherein the limits of reason and of dogmatism would need to be set out systematically, wherever possible). This aspect of Kant's work has important implications of course, but is outside the scope of this paper; in what follows it will be argued that several other aspects of Kant's work on the limits of reason, augmented by

the work of Hume, Russell and Ayer on the *limits of empirical knowledge*, need to be recalled again, in relation to a number of arguments that have emerged in recent times in the physical and human sciences concerning purpose and “life”.

## II.

Hume, as Kant was well aware, provided one of the most memorable accounts of such “limits” in his *Treatise of Human Nature*:

We speak not strictly and philosophically when we talk of the combat of passion and reason. Reason is, and ought only to be *the slave* of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than *to serve and obey* them... (II.iii.3, pp. 414-15)

It is significant that Hume, strictly speaking, found talk of the conflict between reason and passion problematic. He found it problematic because he believed that passion is more powerful, by which is intended, in the words of Ayer, a “rhetorical [one might say “passionate”!] way of making the point that the ends of our actions are determined by our desires” (1972, p. 123), or put in an amplified way, our “passions”.

This is not the place to critically assess the literature surrounding Hume’s argument but it is important to note that it does harmonize with Kant’s work in one very important respect, at least: it emphasizes another limit of reason, inasmuch as it conflicts with “passion”, and inasmuch as desire determines the ends that we choose. In this sense, rhetorically de-amplified, reason is a “slave” and its two functions are to “serve” and “obey”; this presumably would strike Hume as more strictly and *philosophically* accurate. In another sense, Hume seems to be sounding a warning about not *understanding properly* the nature, function and scope of “reason” as a faculty or capacity; about *employing it correctly*, another point of emphasis that anticipates and in fact, harmonizes with, Kant’s conception of the *Critique* as a corrective in relation to the extent to which reason oversteps its limits.

In short, and Kant may have known this, Hume’s work highlights no less than five “limits” to “reason”: an inability *to explain* the *ultimate cause* of the impressions that we get through the senses; an inability *to know* (that is, with certainty) whether *impressions* arise from external things (“objects”), the “creative power of the mind” or the “author of our being”; an inability *to give* a “reason for our most general and most refined principles, *beside our experience* of their reality” (*Treatise*, Introduction, #9); an inability *to*

*discover* the causes of general laws (derived from observation or from our experience of numerous effects, or from reasoning by analogy) –

But as to the *causes of these general laws*, we should in vain attempt their *discovery*; nor shall we ever be able to satisfy ourselves, by any particular explication of them. These *ultimate springs and principles* are totally shut up from human curiosity and enquiry . . .” (Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, section 4, part 1, parag. 12, p. 45)

The fifth “limit” concerns an impasse: the “ultimate springs and principles”, according to Hume, remain inaccessible to reason (and more broadly, “enquiry”), presumably because “ultimate” things are, as Kant would say, beyond the sphere of possible experience (at the very least, as far as *we* can tell). The question of whether or not these *springs and principles* (note the connection here, in passing, between Hume’s work on *principles* that are not accessible and Kant’s work on *principles* that cannot be extended to the sphere of the unconditioned) are *totally* shut up, *strictly and philosophically*, it must be said, is debatable, for Hume, *strictly and philosophically*, does not and arguably cannot show that they are and will remain *totally shut up* in this kind of way. However, this objection does not invalidate Hume’s general argument concerning the limits of the “particular explications” that we attempt or the limits of human enquiry into “ultimate” things, or for that matter the limits of our experience of reality, in the broadest sense.

### III.

Russell and Ayer, both of whom were, of course, profoundly influenced by Hume, also made important contributions in this field and in these contexts, though these contributions are somewhat under-researched. Three further examples of limits, at least, are found in their work: Russell wrote of the absence of “positive knowledge” and of what we know in relation to, or in association with, observers; Ayer argued that there is a circularity in our rational methods, or at least, that our procedures are question begging.

Russell reminds us that there is a great deal that we do not know about the world or nature as a whole (even though he was writing in 1948 and 1961):

Physics is mathematical not because we know so much about the physical world but because we know so little: it is only its mathematical properties that we can discover. For the rest our knowledge is negative . . . *We cannot find out what the world looks like from a place where there is nobody*, because if we

go to look there will be somebody there; the attempt is as hopeless as trying to jump on one's own shadow . . ." (1961, pp. 163-164)

This is an important point. What is implied is that we make connections between parts of the physical world, which we do know, and parts, which we do not know, and quite conceivably cannot, know completely (to return to Kant and Hume for a moment). Analogy or inductive inference helps us to bridge such gaps; complete certainty cannot be attained. (It is debatable whether or not non-mathematical knowledge is "negative" but this debate is outside of the scope of this paper.) Russell suggests, quite sensibly, that our observations are also limited and therefore that those parts of the physical world that we cannot observe cannot be spoken of with complete certainty so long as analogy and induction are the bridging devices in our explanatory systems or rational procedures. It is interesting to note that modern physics with its current emphasis on dark energy and dark matter, in particular, largely harmonizes with Russell's striking claim concerning how little we know. It is debatable, again strictly and philosophically speaking, whether or not we can *only discover* the physical world's *mathematical properties*, but this debate is outside the scope of this paper. At any rate, even if Russell turned out to be wrong about this, his point about the limits of some, if not all, of the rational methods that we employ in our quest for true knowledge and understanding of the physical world, would not be invalidated.

Ayer extends this kind of analysis further. Not only are our models, in one sense at least, and our observations limited, but our use of induction is also limited.

In calling such inferences reasonable, we do not mean to claim that they are demonstrative. What we mean, when we say that we have good reason to believe a proposition, which is not formally demonstrable, is . . . simply that it is supported by strong inductive evidence, or, in other words, that it accords with our past experience. And if this is so there is no sense in asking whether the accepted general procedure of arguing from observed to unobserved cases is itself reasonable; for in the application of the criteria by which we determine what is reasonable the validity of this procedure is already presupposed (1971, pp. 190-191)

The *accepted general procedure*, which allows us to proceed from what has been observed to what has not been observed, is useful, perhaps even necessary, but clearly limited, inasmuch as it requires those things that have been observed; this much is nothing new.

But it is limited in another significant way, as Ayer pointed out: if we wish to establish that something is reasonable, for example, a proposition, we apply an *accepted general procedure*; if someone asks if this procedure is reasonable, we can point out that the application of the criteria, which allow us to determine whether or not something is reasonable, presupposes the validity of the procedure itself. In this context, Ayer's sense of the limit of inductive inferences becomes clearer: we can say that something accords with our past experience or that there is good inductive evidence for it; and that our inferences on that basis are reasonable; but we cannot argue validly or truly at the same time that our inferences are *demonstrative*.

Ayer developed this theme in a number of works, though, once again, it remains under-researched (and a further, critical exploration of its central thrust will have to wait for another time). It is clearly of some importance in debates not only about inference and induction, but also about the formation or articulation of theories and explanations, and by extension, in debates about the comprehensive, true knowledge, if any, that natural science provides in relation to the physical world as a whole. For example, in a later work, Ayer argues:

admittedly there is *a circularity in our procedure*. The special theories which we hold about the behavior of physical objects presuppose the validity of the general principles which enter into our conception of those objects, such principles as that they are accessible to different senses and to different observers, and that they are capable of existing unperceived; but equally these principles are themselves consolidated by the success of the theories which presuppose them . . . We cannot stand in the void, and there is nothing exterior to our system by which it could be justified . . . (1990, p. 137)

#### IV.

What then of the significance of such work, by Kant in particular, but also by Hume, Russell and Ayer, in relation to some fairly grandiose claims about the universe and "life" in recent times in the physical and human sciences, and more particularly by Steven Weinberg, who argues that the discoveries of modern physics reinforce the sense that the universe seems "pointless", and Richard Dawkins, who argues that evolution *explains* "life" and *as a whole*?

Weinberg has famously argued that the "more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless" (1988 quoted in Glanz, 2000 and Koupelis and Kuhn, 2007, p. 551) He also argued:

[though] aware that there is nothing in the universe that suggests any purpose for humanity, one way that we can find a purpose is to study the universe *by the methods of science*, without consoling ourselves with fairy tales about its future, or about our own . . .” (Overbye, 2002)

If Weinberg is aware of those limits to reason and enquiry set out by Kant, in particular, but also by Hume, Ayer and Russell, he does not say so. Weinberg’s argument deserves careful scrutiny, for though it sounds memorable and persuasive, it is flawed.

First of all, if one grants that there is, in fact, *nothing in the universe that suggests any purpose for humanity*, it would not follow that there is, *in fact, no purpose for humanity*. Weinberg’s argument is fallacious. Even if there is *no evidence in the universe to suggest that there is a “purpose for humanity”* (the phrase is ambiguous and vague, but this is a problem that shall be put to one side for the time being), he cannot logically infer the non-existence of any kind of purpose for humanity. This latter objection would be strengthened further if Russell is right and we do in fact know very little about the universe as a whole. Weinberg then, seems to be arguing from ignorance.

So, there are at least four problems that would need to be overcome before Weinberg’s argument can be salvaged: first, the claim that *there is nothing in the universe that suggests any purpose for humanity* is ambiguous: it might mean “nothing in fact”, or it might mean “nothing that we have discovered” or “nothing that we can discover”; and it is neither clear what would count as *purpose for humanity* nor is it clear what would count as *evidence* for such a thing in the universe itself. A Kantian critique would emphasise, validly, that “purpose” of this (overarching?) kind is not an object of experience and is certainly not an object of perception or observation.

Second, the claim that *there is nothing in the universe that suggests any purpose for humanity* is itself unconvincing, precisely because much of what we know about the universe at the subatomic level is probabilistic, not certain, and precisely because, as Russell reminds us, we know so little about the universe as a whole (on one conservative estimate, about 97% of the universe remains unobserved! If this is so, the sample that Weinberg is extending the range of evidence to would seem to be very small indeed!). Strictly and philosophically, to invoke Hume again, Weinberg’s claim should be modified to make clear how much we do not know about the universe; how much we grasp about it in terms of statistical probabilities; how much room for uncertainty therefore remains; how much remains to

be discovered about it; how much is subject to *a priori* principles and the extension of the principles of pure reason beyond their proper sphere; and how Kant's work had already prepared us for some of these objections over 120 years ago.

Third, even if one grants for the purpose of argument that the evidence in the universe does not *suggest any purpose for humanity*, it would not follow that there is, in fact, no *purpose for humanity*. The connection between the "evidence" and "purpose" remains obscure: it is not clear what sort of evidence would suffice to establish whether or not *purpose for humanity* exists, especially since Kant and Hume, among others, would take *purpose for humanity*, particularly in the sense of "purpose" which is *genuinely and literally universal*, as something that belongs to the order of the *transcendent* (in the Kantian sense) or to the order of *ultimate springs and principles* (in the Humean sense) – and neither order would in any evident or clear way escape the limits already elaborated upon by these philosophers.

Weinberg seems to believe that what we have learned about the universe to this point allied with the *expectation* that we will learn *more in this vein*, justify confident conclusions about the *pointlessness* or otherwise of *the whole*. It is important to note that Weinberg presents what looks like negative knowledge: "there is nothing in the universe that suggests any purpose for humanity". He not only concludes that there *is no purpose* for humanity (in the grand teleological or ontological sense, presumably) in the universe, but also suggests that *religious accounts of purpose* in the universe, though they offer possible sources of consolation, are not defensible – at least not more so than "fairy tales".

It would seem that Weinberg is arguing that "science" (this term is also a little ambiguous, but presumably Weinberg understands "science" in terms of some analogy with physics *as a science*, though it is not easy to tell just what the clear sense is) is sufficient to refute religious accounts of purpose (which, in turn, are bound by analogy, by implication, to "fairy tales". Such an analogy raises numerous problems though they remain outside the immediate scope of this paper.) But this kind of argument too, is problematic and for at least 3 reasons: first, it implicitly overlooks or ignores (again) the Kantian and Humean emphases on the limits of human enquiry *and* reason. Both Kant and Hume would argue that the universe (as a whole) is either not something that we can observe or not something that can be an object of our experience. It is important for Weinberg to address these arguments carefully and thoroughly if his own broader argument concerning science – presumably *empirical* science is what he has in mind

– and the knowledge that it has produced about the universe as a whole, is to be convincing or compelling.

Moreover, Weinberg would need to show how such sweeping claims about non-evidence and *purpose for humanity* are *not* subject to the dialectic of pure reason, as Kant understood it in *Critique of Pure Reason*, with its emphasis on *inferred concepts* (for example, of the *universe* or of *nature* as a purposeful or purposeless *whole*), *the object of which cannot be given empirically*.

Richard Dawkins argues in *The God Delusion* that the theory of natural selection furnishes a theory of “life” (presumably in its broad sense, though the vagueness is part of the initial problem here, but more of this in a moment). Dawkins seems to be arguing that we begin with a “theory” which allows us to explain how some living things (which we have observed) evolve through adaptation, mutation and “selection”, and then we arrive (somehow!) at an explanation of how *all* living things, including those that we have not, and cannot possibly, observe (for example in the distant future), evolve. Dawkins does not address Hume’s argument that it is a *presumption* that allows us to affirm that the events of the past will continue to resemble the events of the future, just as Dawkins does not address Hume’s important work on the limits of some of our rational procedures.

And one can go further: Dawkins seems to suggest that this “theory” will also allow us to explain, accurately and comprehensively, *all* “life” – which means, presumably again, where it came from, what it is, how it develops and where it is heading (if this kind of talk makes any logical or empirical sense at all, and if it does not lead to parallogisms, antinomies or contradiction, in the Kantian senses of these terms). Such a position cannot deliver certainty – it is inductive though it does not escape Hume’s and Ayer’s well-made points about this kind of procedure. Moreover, the available evidence is not sufficient, strictly speaking, to justify such sweeping generalizations about *life* as a whole or nature in its totality, for such things, as Kant and Hume remind us, are outside the range of our experience. As an *explanation, strictly and philosophically*, Dawkins’ “theory” of “life”, taken literally, would be neither verifiable nor refutable *as such*, in empirical terms. On this basis, one would wonder with some logical *and* empirical justification, just how much factual content it has at all, just how many presumptions and how much speculation gives it shape or form.

It is questionable, to say the least, to affirm – without clear justification one might add and with questionable presumptions – some empirical con-



nection between *some living things* and “life” as a whole or between some living things and *nature as a whole* – or for that matter between actually existing things, as we know them, and some ambiguous, overarching concept such as “life” now *and* in the future. This point is reinforced by the failure of Dawkins to explain clearly and convincingly how a category that can be applied to some things now can be applied to all things (that were alive, that are alive or that will be alive, in some sense, in the future). How many observations will it take for the position to be established? Well, those who are familiar with the logic of induction and its limits will answer decisively: it will only take one counter-observation to challenge the whole edifice and conceivably, generate antinomies, paralogsms or contradiction – all, as Kant pointed out long ago, manifestations of reason over-stepping its limits.

Kant, in his attempt to provide a solution to the “transcendental problems” of pure reason, argues that phenomena “require and admit of explanation, only in so far as the conditions of their explanation are given in perception” (1952, p. 151), and that wholes, in the “empirical signification of the term” (p. 151), are always “comparative”; that is to say, they lie beyond the range of our possible experience and our experience cannot provide a demonstrative guide. It is not at all clear that *all of the conditions, or the conditions generally, that govern “life”* as a whole are “given” to human perception (in the sense of being accessible to, or being common to, human perception), nor is it clear that the conditions that govern the *explanation* of wholes (such as “life”) are “given” to human perception. Dawkins’s position seems to presuppose that the conditions of the explanation of “life” (as a whole) are “given” to human perception – inasmuch as human perception informs observation and inasmuch as human perception and observation inform the evolutionary theory of “life” as a whole. If this is correct, then Dawkins would need to explain in what sense these connections evade or overcome Kantian objections based on his analysis of the limits of reason.

## V.

It would seem that Kant was correct to a significant degree. There is some evidence to support this claim, quoted in the epigraph:

We cannot indeed, beyond all possible experience, form a definite concept of what things in themselves may be. Yet we are not at liberty to abstain entirely from inquiring into them; for experience never satisfies reason fully but, in an-

swering questions, refers us further and further back and leaves us dissatisfied with regard to their complete solution...

It is evident that the arguments of Weinberg and Dawkins cannot give us a *definite and clear concept* of what the universe or “reality” in itself, as Kant might say, *is*, that is to say, as a whole that exists independently of our observations, theories, experience, cognitions and sensibility. Kant may very well be right about our not being “at liberty to abstain entirely” from inquiring into the nature of such things too, if Weinberg and Dawkins can serve as representative examples. The explanations given by Weinberg and Dawkins, inasmuch as they derive from experience, do not satisfy reason fully, in the sense that they do not furnish comprehensive or convincing answers to the sorts of questions that have been asked in the course of this essay. In answering questions about the “reality” of the world or about the “pointlessness”, or otherwise, of the universe, it would seem also that Kant is correct about the claim that these accounts (since they generate further questions and objections) refer us “further back”; they certainly seem to be less than satisfactory with regard to a “complete solution”, in Kant’s words, in the sense that it is difficult to see, as things stand now, how such accounts can overcome many if not all of the objections, and problems, that have arisen.

Kant also seems to be correct on two other points:

every answer given on principles of experience begets a fresh question, which likewise requires its answer and thereby clearly shows the insufficiency of all physical modes of explanation to satisfy reason. Finally, who does not see in the thoroughgoing contingency and dependence of all his thoughts and assumptions on mere principles of experience the impossibility of stopping there?

The claims of Weinberg and Dawkins, for example, concerning “life” or “pointlessness”, *in truth*, inasmuch as they exemplify “physical modes of explanation”, also serve to highlight the extent to which reason fails to be satisfied, in the sense of a lack of a “complete solution” to the questions that arise *as a consequence of the content of such modes of explanation*. It is not difficult to see signs of contingency and dependence either in their thoughts and assumptions – for example, in the context of “theories” (which are incomplete, inconclusive or subject to statistical probabilities) or questionable assumptions about the links between some parts and the whole – with regard to “mere principles of experience”.

It would seem that Hume is also correct, to a significant degree. It is difficult to see how one might speak *truly* and *conclusively* of “pointlessness” in the universe without in some sense commanding an understanding of

the “causes of [those] . . . general laws” or of their absence – causes which, according to Hume, we vainly attempt to discover. Of course, it is difficult to show that all such attempts are vain, without using the kind of reasoning that one finds problematic in some ways in the arguments put by Weinberg and Dawkins (that is, forms of inductive reasoning), but Hume’s point is an important one inasmuch as it highlights the extent to which the arguments go well beyond the *available* evidence.

Hume also seems to be correct on this point: we cannot find (empirical or rational) satisfaction *by any particular explication* of the causes of those general laws, for example, in the arguments mounted by Weinberg and Dawkins, for Weinberg gives no convincing, unified account of the causes of the general laws that pertain in the physical universe at the macro and quantum levels, and Dawkins does not give a convincing “explication” of the *ultimate springs and principles* from which evolution by natural selection derives (if there are such things, Hume might have added), if it is a process that is caused.

Finally, it would seem that Russell and Ayer are also correct, in an important sense: the arguments mounted by Weinberg and Dawkins entail, in part, it would seem, a view of what “reality” or “life” or the universe *look like from a place where there is nobody* to observe them or to appeal to experience, or from *the void*, that is to say, where no human observation or cognition, presumably, is possible. These kinds of limits do raise important questions, as Russell and Ayer realized, for how can one *know* conclusively or demonstrably that such a view is true if there are no observers or participants to confirm or verify the claims that are made and the arguments that are preferred, or to go further, if Hume and Kant are correct, if there is no possibility of such observation, participation or experience? There is indeed much scope here for further research, reflection and debate.

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## GOD AND TOLERATION

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**Abstract.** The enduring debate on the question of whether an omnipotent, omniscient God exists amid the existence of evils in the world is crucial to understanding religions. Much recent discussion has taken an approach in which the focal question is whether we can cognitively—for example, logically, evidentially, and the like—and rationally justify that God's full power and full goodness cannot be doubted amid the existence of evils. In this paper I argue that we can reasonably assume that God exists in an evil-afflicted world if he chooses to do so and if he tolerates evils. We can reasonably argue that he does exist in an evil-afflicted world because he chooses to tolerate evils for whatever reasons. I would like to make a stronger claim: he tolerates evils in order to give humankind a chance to grow in knowledge of good and evils by combating evils, which implies that his toleration of evils imposes a task on humankind to combat evils.

The enduring debate on the question of whether an omnipotent, omniscient God exists amid the existence of evils in the world is crucial to understanding religions. Much recent discussion has taken an approach in which the focal question is whether we can cognitively—for example, logically, evidentially, and the like—and rationally justify that God's full power and full goodness cannot be doubted amid the existence of evils. Let us characterize this approach as the cognitive approach. I wonder if we may do better by taking an existential approach that focuses on God's toleration and free will. In an existential approach, the existential contradiction of the co-existence of an omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly good God and evils is understood to reveal God's tolerant nature and free-will. In an existential approach, the existence of evils is not understood as a cognitive statement that God's power is limited or that God's goodness is not perfect, but as an existential statement, akin to one Hegel might make, that existence consists of contradiction.

In recommending an existential approach, my purpose is also to address the Habermasian question of “how one can assimilate the semantic legacy of religious traditions without effacing the boundary between the universes of faith and knowledge.”<sup>1</sup> An existential approach allows a faith in God to remain a reasonable faith that can exist without justifying its epistemic validity first. It defends the faith in God by affirming something, not by denying something. It turns the table around to challenge others to demonstrate that God cannot be tolerant or cannot have free will. It also rekindles what we learn from the *Bible*: historically, God tolerated humankind’s downfall through Adam and Eve; God tolerated Cain’s murder of his own brother Abel; God pledged not to use violence, such as a flood, against humankind—God’s own creation—again, no matter how humankind is corrupted by sins and evils; God tolerated Joshua’s genocide; God tolerated Abram’s lies in a particular circumstance; God tolerated Satan’s testing Job by visiting him with sufferings and evils; Christ Jesus tolerated sinners; and so on.

I must clarify at the outset that I do not argue or imply here that God accepts or endorses evils and that God is indifferent to evils. Instead, I simply demonstrate that we are better off by focusing on God’s tolerant nature and free will, seeing that God’s full and perfect goodness does not exclude the possibility that God may tolerate evils. In addition, when we recognize the difference between toleration and endorsement, we appreciate that even if God tolerates evil, He will still encourage us to combat evils. When we recognize that tolerance is not indifference, we appreciate that the toleration argument actually inspires us to engage evils in order to defeat them. By this token, God’s toleration of evils can involve giving humankind a test and imposing a task and responsibility on humankind. In other words, God’s toleration of evils can be a statement to us that humankind must grow on its own, and that humankind bears the responsibility for this growth.

Since humankind’s downfall through its ancestors Adam and Eve, humankind has no longer lived in God’s heavenly garden, but on the Earth. The difference between God’s heavenly garden and the Earth is, perhaps, that in God’s garden, one is totally free of all kinds of evils while the Earth is evil-filled. As we learn from the New Testament, Jesus has not come to the world because the world is perfect and free of sins and evils. Instead, he comes to the world because the world is full of sins and evils. Humankind

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<sup>1</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2009), 211.



needs renewal not because humankind is perfect, but because humankind is still sinful and the human world is still corrupted by sin and evil. Thus, theologically, as well as existentially, God exists at all times amid evils.

Now, without further introduction, I shall start my present enquiry.

### I.

The enduring image of the Buddha is of a smiling person with a huge belly—an image that reminds us of a couplet that is engraved in many Buddhist temples in Eastern Asia, especially in central and western China: The huge belly can tolerate anything in the world, including things that are difficult, even impossible, to be tolerated by the world; the smiling mouth always smiles at those in the world who are laughable and things in the world that are laughable. The Buddha image and the corresponding couplet say that the Buddha is Buddha because he or she is tolerant and what he or she tolerates may be that which cannot be, and will not be, tolerated by the world, which in turn makes the world limited while the Buddha is limitless; it says that the Buddha is enlightened and therefore tolerant; the fact that Buddha is tolerant says that Buddha is enlightened.

The image and couplet further suggest that the Buddha and evils, as well as laughable persons and things in the world, co-exist, even though the Buddha is all compassionate and all powerful. This image of the Buddha and the acclaimed relationship between the Buddha and things in the world, including evils, gives us a clue towards an existential approach to the relationship between God and evils. Of course, the Buddha is not identical to God. Nonetheless, the image of the Buddha should remind us of God's toleration and free will, something that we seem to forget in the present discourse on God and evils. In particular, the image of Buddha in the minds of millions and millions of people has great affinity to that of God. The Buddha is "the greatly Compassionate One, the Savior of the world, omnipotent, omniscient, of most excellent deeds in all the ten directions."<sup>2</sup>

For our present study, the Buddha image and the corresponding couplet above suggest something illustrative. That is, the Buddha is wholly and perfectly good; yet the Buddha's full, perfect goodness is partially exhibited in the Buddha's toleration, not in the Buddha's intolerance of what is

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<sup>2</sup> *The Awakening of Faith: Attributed to Ashvagoshosha*, translated by Yoshito S.Hakeda, in Forrest E. Baird and Raeburne S.Heimbeck (eds.), *Asian Philosophy* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2006): 444—473, at 444.

considered to be evils for us. In other words, the concept of the Buddha's perfect, full goodness does not imply that the Buddha cannot possibly tolerate evils. Instead, it indicates the opposite: the Buddha's full, perfectly good nature is exhibited also in his tolerance and toleration of evils; the Buddha's perfection in deed, in all directions, implies that he tolerates evils and is tolerant of evils. Admittedly, in our daily understanding today, the concept of perfect, full goodness indicates a rejection of evil or intolerance of evil. However, historically or hermeneutically, this is not the case in some major world religions including Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism. God in *the Bible* is perfectly good, yet God in *the Bible* tolerates evil. Christ Jesus is perfectly good, yet Christ Jesus in *the New Testament* tolerates evil. Buddha is perfectly good, yet Buddha tolerates evil. In Buddhist classics such as *The Awakening of Faith*, the Buddha is omnipotent and omniscient; yet the Buddha tolerates evils.

With what is said, let me here make three dogmatic but non-controversial claims:

- (1) God has free will; God does not necessarily operate by the law of causality and is not constrained by necessity; for example, suppose God is hungry, with free will, he may choose not to eat; by the same token, with free will, God may choose to tolerate evils (NC1).
- (2) God's nature is eternal and unchangeable; whatever he does or chooses not to do does not affect what he is (NC2);
- (3) existentially, the compatibility problem exists only in a relation between or among limited beings, not in a relation between a limitless and infinite being and limited and finite beings; to raise a question of whether the existence of evil is compatible to the existence of God is to assume that God is limited and finite (NC3).

NC1 and NC2 should strike us as self-evident, at least from the concept of God that we learn from the Bible. Though, NC1 differs from such claims as that God has this or that reason not to eliminate evil, for example, NC1 does not claim what Nelson Pike claims—that is, God has some morally sufficient reasons not to eliminate evils.<sup>3</sup> NC1 states simply that God may tolerate evil because he chooses to tolerate evil. Of course, the claim is also that God may eliminate evils if he chooses to do so.

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<sup>3</sup> Nelson Pike, "Hume on Evil", *Philosophical Reviews*, 72:2 (1963).

NC2 indicates the problem of the concept that if God is omniscient and fully and perfectly good, he can only, and must only choose, good; toleration of evil will be out of question from the concept of perfect goodness. For example, one argument has it that if God is omniscient and fully and perfectly good, he can only, and must only choose, what is good. This comes from the principle, as William L. Rowe, well puts it: "If an omniscient being creates a world when there is a better world that it could have created, then it is possible that there exists a being morally better than it."<sup>4</sup> "Rowe claims that since God is a perfect being, God has to create the best of all possible worlds because of his nature."<sup>5</sup>

In response to the above, in addition to the question of whether the best possible world is one totally free of all evils, NC2 indicates that Rowe's principle may apply to a non-eternal being whose nature is defined by what he does, but not to an eternal being whose being is not defined by what it does. Therefore, it is at least fair to argue that even if one accepts Rowe's principle, it is not necessarily the case that if God is omniscient and fully and perfectly good, he can only, and must only choose, what is good; that even if one accepts Rowe's principle, it is not unreasonable for one to assume that God allows evils to exist, even though he or she or it is omniscient and fully and perfectly good. God creates and governs the world "by a volition free from all necessity," in this context toleration itself may be a virtue.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, NC2 does not suggest that God has no distinction between good and evil or that God is impartial toward good and evil. It simply says that God's full goodness remains regardless as it does not matter what he chooses and does so far as toleration or elimination of evil is concerned. To say that God tolerates evil is one thing. To say that God endorses evil is quite another. To say that God does evil is quite another yet. NC2 claims that God may tolerate evil. It does not claim that God endorses evil or does evil, in the context of its insistence that God's nature is eternal. It claims that God's perfect goodness does not exclude God from possible toleration of evils.

NC3 is conceptually plausible. Existentially, if incompatibility exists between X and Y, then X and Y must both be limited and finite beings. If X is infinite and limitless, then Y cannot be incompatible with X because as a limitless and infinite being, X will include and accommodate all beings.

<sup>4</sup> William L. Rowe, *Can God Be Free?* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 91.

<sup>5</sup> Frank B. Dilley, "William L. Rowe. Can God Be Free?" *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 58:3, December (2005), 201.

<sup>6</sup> Rowe, *Can God Be Free?*, 128.

If Y is infinite and limitless, then X cannot be incompatible with Y because as a limitless and infinite being, Y will include and accommodate all beings. NC3 does not reject the possibility that evils violate the principle of good that God intends for humankind. It simply states that the state of affairs that X and Y are morally in conflict (S1) and the state of affairs that X and Y cannot existentially co-exist (S2) are not necessarily connected; the latter (S2) does not supervene on the former (S1); the former (S1) does not necessarily lead to the latter (S2).

If NC1, NC2, and NC3 above are justified, which I think they are, then we are better off by approaching God's existence amid evils existentially. We should change our question into: if God tolerates evils, will it be existentially possible that both God and evils exist? In my opinion, the answer to the question here should be affirmative. And the answer does not terminate discussion, but only develops new ones.

The new approach affords us with a new response to the logical problem argument. It also enables us to resist atheism without either denying that evil is a reality or denying that God is omnipotent or wholly good. Thus, for example, we do not need to follow William Alston and Peter van Inwagen to try to prove that we are in no epistemic position to justify atheist claims of the existence of evils as evidence against the existence of God. Nor do we need a counter-strategy to argue that we are in an epistemic position to prove that the existence of evil is not cognitively—either logically or evidentially—evidence against the existence of God.

Instead, we need to recognize the difference between cognitive co-existence and existential co-existence. Two mutually opposite, contradictory, and excluding claims cannot both be true—that is, they cannot both exist as true claims simultaneously. However, two opposite and contradictory beings can simultaneously exist as real beings. Thus, for example, a good being and an evil being can co-exist, although one is good and one is evil. We need to recognize further that being limitless and being omnipotent enables God to tolerate evil if he chooses to.

The new approach will look at how toleration and free will can change the landscape of discourse here. In my opinion, this new approach is more effective in defending a theist position; it enables us to reflect the controversies in the present debate over God and evils in a new light. It enables us to see that cognitive incompatibility does not exclude the possibility of co-existence. Admittedly, the argument indicates that at some points, we should accept certain states of affairs in faith, even if we cannot rationalize them or have full knowledge of them. However, this should not terminate discussion, but invites us to draw a distinction between a reasonable con-

cept of God and a rational concept of God. A reasonable concept of God does not impose the burden of rational knowledge and justification of everything pertaining to God while a rational concept of God imposes such a burden. What we need here is simply a reasonable concept of God.

A concept of God is reasonable in terms of the following properties. First, what is said of God can be reasonably accepted, even if we cannot totally and rationally demonstrate and prove it in terms of knowledge. Second, what is said of God can be reasonably explained, although some controversies may still exist. Third, belief in such a concept of God can improve humanity and human existence significantly and, conversely, disbelief in it will make humankind worse off. Fourth, it is hermeneutically justifiable. Fifth, it can stand up to critical scrutiny. Sixth, it serves the interests of human liberation, and enriches, not bankrupts, fundamental human sentiments and feelings.

With this said, I do not pretend to speak a new language here. What I argue here in effect amounts to a defense of a continuous use of the language of faith, instead of replacing it with a scientific language—a language that is more fashionable today. Admittedly, what I suggest here is intended to recommend an existential language to counter-balance a too heavily cognitive language in the discourse on God and evils.

## II.

Now let us see if we can read the logical problem argument in a new light. The logical problem argument is that the three theist claims concerning God are logically incompatible; they cannot all be true; instead, if any two are true, the third is necessarily false. J.L. Mackie succinctly indicates the problem as follows: “In its simplest form the problem is this: God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; and yet evil exists. There seems to be some contradiction between these three propositions, so that if any two of them were true the third would be false.”<sup>7</sup> For the purpose of our discussion here, let us number as LC1 the claim that “God is omnipotent”, as LC2 the claim that “God is wholly good”, and as LC3 the claim that evils exist.

For Mackie, as well as for some other atheists, there can be three solutions of the problem that LC1, LC2, and LC3 are all true. Solution One goes something like this: rejecting as false the claim that God is omnipotent (LC1), and accepting as true only the claim that God is wholly good

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<sup>7</sup> J. L. Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence,” in *Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 263—264.

(C2) and the claim that evil exists (LC3); this solution allows one to say that the wholly good God wants to prevent evils, but he is not able to. Solution Two goes as follows: accepting LC1 and LC3 as true, and rejecting LC2 as false; the solution allows one to say that God is omnipotent, but not wholly good, and therefore he allows evils to exist. Solution Three is as follows: accepting LC1 and LC2 as true and rejecting LC3 as false; with this solution, one affirms the existence of God but denies the existence of evils.

The first thing that should be said here is that we must draw a distinction between two kinds of logic: existential logic and cognitive logic; cognitive contradiction and existential contradiction are two different states of affairs. The most obvious difference is that in cognitive logic two contradictory claims cannot be both true; however, in existential logic, two contradictory states of affairs can co-exist, which is to say, can truly or really co-exist. For example, to say that God is fully good and to say that God is not fully good constitute a cognitive contradiction and, by cognitive logic, the two statements cannot both be true. However, to say that God is all powerful and fully good amid the existence of evil may indicate the presence of existential contradiction, but is not cognitively self-contradictory, at least not necessarily so. In other words, to say that the world under God's eye is filled with evils is not to say that God is not fully and perfectly good.

The logical problem argument as described above has not drawn this distinction. In the logical problem argument, LC3 is read as a cognitive contradiction to LC1 and LC 2, while LC3 can, and should, be read merely as a statement of an existential contradiction. That is, LC3 should be read as merely saying that evils exist, and the state of affairs that evils exist contradicts both the states of affairs that God is all powerful and that God is fully good. LC3 is not a statement that God is not all powerful or that God is not fully good. To say that evils exist and are contradictory to God's perfect nature and could have been disallowed by God is one thing. To say both that God is all powerful (or perfectly good) and that God is not all powerful (not perfectly good) is quite another.

While cognitively, we cannot claim both that God is all powerful and fully good and simultaneously that God is not all powerful or fully good, existentially, LC1, LC2 and LC3 can all be true, if we read the matter in the language of toleration and free will. Suppose God chooses to tolerate evils by acting on free will, he can be all-powerful, and wholly good, while allowing evils to exist under his nose. All we need here is to recognize two truths: (1) God has free will (NC1 above); and (2) whatever God does will not affect his eternal nature (NC2). All the same, there can be a reasonable

argument or explanation that LC3 is not a cognitive statement that God is all powerful and fully good and simultaneously God is not all powerful or not fully good.

The traditional logical problem argument is that God, who is both omnipotent and wholly good, cannot possibly permit evils. This amounts to claiming that an omnipotent and a wholly good God *necessarily rejects* evil. This claim is also at the heart of Rowe's principle, "If an omniscient being creates a world when there is a better world that it could have created, then it is possible that there exists a being morally better than it," as mentioned above. However, this claim might not be valid. William Wainwright criticizes the fact that Rowe illegitimately faults God for what is logically impossible—that is, it is logically impossible for God to avoid not doing what he could have done.<sup>8</sup> In my opinion, Rowe does not fault God for what is logically impossible. Instead, Rowe could have recognized that there is no natural transition from the statement that God could have done what he has not done to the statement that God is either not capable of what he could have done or God is not perfectly good, which is the reason why he has not done what he could have done.

On a careful analysis, to claim that an omnipotent and a wholly good God *necessarily rejects* evil, is to claim that an omnipotent and wholly good God necessarily operates within the law of causality and is constrained by necessity. To claim that an omnipotent and a wholly good God *necessarily rejects* evil is also to claim that disallowing or prohibiting evils is a necessary condition for God to be wholly good. As indicated in the discussions of NC1 and NC2 above, the claim that an omnipotent and a wholly good God *necessarily rejects* evil is not necessarily true.

If God is not confined to the law of causality and the constraint of necessity, God's choice of good is not an act of necessity, but one of probability and of free will. If prohibiting evils is not a necessary condition for God to be wholly good, then God can still be a wholly good God even if he does not prohibit evils. Now, are we justified to claim that (1) God always acts from necessity and causality—that is, God is confined to act within the law of causality and to be constrained by necessity as we are (A1), and (2) disallowing or prohibiting evils is a necessary condition for God to be wholly good (A2)?

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<sup>8</sup> William Wainwright, "Jonathan Edwards, William Rowe, and the Necessity of Creation," in Jeff Jordan and Daniel Howard-Snyder (eds.), *Faith, Freedom, and Rationality* (Boston: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996); Wainwright, *Philosophy of Religion* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn., Wadsworth, 1999); Rowe, *Can God Be Free?*, 113–127;

We are not justified to claim either A1 or A2. The concept that God is constrained by necessity here should strike us as something implausible. God has free will, and is not confined to act within the law of causality and thus is not constrained by necessity, as Vatican I recognizes.<sup>9</sup> His omnipotence only enhances his freedom of choice and action outside the law of causality and necessity. If we know anything about God, we know that he can, and often, act with free will. It is not out of any necessity that he creates light. It is not out of any necessity that he creates humankind in his own image. Being omnipotent and omniscient only makes God's freedom a perfect and absolute one.

If God creates the world and humankind at will, he can also allow evils at will. Even if being wholly good produces some reasons for him to prevent evil, nothing is ontologically and existentially impossible about him acting otherwise. Existentially, God's toleration of evils and Christ's turning some water—but not all water—into wine uncover the same divine nature: freedom and free will beyond the law of causality.

The concept that God's disallowance of evils is a necessary condition for God to be wholly good should strike us as implausible. As indicated in the discussion of NC2 above, this concept first contradicts the idea that God is *a priori* wholly good and also the idea that God's nature is eternal and permanent: nothing God does and chooses to do changes his nature. Hermeneutically, this concept is also inconsistent with what we read from the Bible, and other religious texts. In *the Bible*, God tolerates evils. Indeed, in *Job* (in *the Bible*), God even allows Satan to visit Job and his family with sufferings and evils in order to demonstrate Job's integrity and persistency in faith to Satan. In classical Buddhist texts, we also read that the Buddha is all powerful and perfectly good and compassionate, and yet Buddha can tolerate things that the world cannot tolerate.

The content of the act of allowing is relevant here. God's allowance of evils can mean that God does not act to stop or eliminate evils. It does not mean either that God does evils or that God endorses evils. In addition, to allow evils may mean simply that God is yet to eliminate evils. It does not mean either that God cannot eliminate evils or that God does not want to eliminate evils. If I allow my office to be presently disordered, it does not mean that I like disorder or that I cannot put my office in order or that I do not want to put my office in order. It can well be the case that I will put my office in order later on.

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<sup>9</sup> Rowe, *Can God Be Free?*, 128.



Admittedly, God's allowance of evils lets evils continue to exist in the God-filled human world, e.g., God's allowance of Satan is the reason that Satan still exists. However, this fact does not alter the other fact that God can allow evils and his allowance of evils does not make him less good. It also does not imply that since God tolerates evils, we are obliged to, and should, tolerate evils. Instead, it might well be that God tolerates evils to leave humankind some homework to do: to grow in knowledge of good and evil by engaging and combating evils.

One may argue that the concept of being wholly good implies the idea of doing only good, as Rowes's argument that "since God is a perfect being, God has to create the best of all possible worlds because of his nature" suggests; doing only good implies disallowing evils. This argument might not stand.

The concept of doing only good implies only that one does not do evil; it does not imply that one acts to prevent others from doing evils. More crucial, were it that being perfectly and fully good implies disallowing evils, it would mean one of the following two principles or both are true: (1) If a being X allows evils and a being Y disallow evils, Y is necessarily a better being than X; and (2) if a being X allows evils, his or her or its act of allowing evils necessarily changes his or her or its being or nature to make it less perfect and less good. But neither principle (1) nor principle (2) are necessarily true here. For example, Buddha allows evils, and some of us do not. Does this fact make some of us better than Buddha? Few of us would claim so. In the Bible, God allows evils. Christ Jesus allows evils. Does this biblical view indicate that some of us are better than God or Christ Jesus if some of us have zero tolerance of evils?

In connection with this, the concept that being wholly good implies prohibiting evils may beg the question. If we argue that prohibiting evils is a property of being wholly good, then we presuppose what we are to argue for and demonstrate. If we argue that prohibiting evils is a necessary condition of being wholly good, we also presuppose what we are to argue for and demonstrate. If we do not evoke either argument, we have no argument anymore.

In addition to the above, to claim that an omnipotent and a wholly good God *necessarily rejects* evil is to claim that God necessarily rejects what is contrary to his own nature. But this claim is not necessarily true. To claim that God necessarily does X in given circumstance is to claim that God is also constrained by the law of causality. If God is not constrained by the law of causality, he does not necessarily do anything. God is not

constrained by the law of causality, and therefore God does not necessarily do anything, including eliminating evils.

God does not necessarily disallow what is contrary to his own nature. Suppose God is omnipotent and wholly great, is there any thing logically and existentially inconsistent in the fact that he permits what is small, even pointlessly small? Can we not reasonably assume that God can be both wholly great and tolerant toward what is small, even pointlessly small?

Suppose God is omnipotent and sweet, is there anything logically and existentially inconsistent that he allows what is bitter to exist? Can we not reasonably say that God can be both wholly sweet and tolerant toward what is bitter?

Suppose God is omnipotent and wholly happy, is there anything logically inconsistent that he permits unhappiness to exist? Can we not reasonably think that God is wholly happy and tolerant toward what is unhappy or causes unhappiness?

Therefore, by analogy, suppose God is omnipotent and wholly good, is there anything logically and existentially inconsistent or impossible in him allowing evils to exist in the God-filled human world, granted that evil is the antithesis of good? The answer should be negative. God does not always reject what is contrary to his nature.

At the end of the day, once we abandon both the assumption that God always acts on necessity (or is confined to the law of necessity) or is constrained by the law of causality, and the assumption that prohibiting evils is a necessary condition for God to be wholly good, we resolve the logical problem. While being wholly good still allows the possibility that God permits evils, being omnipotent allows God total freedom to allow evils.

In other words, the fact that the human world is evil-afflicted may indicate that God can disallow evils but he chooses not to do so; evils exist because God allows them to exist; allowing evils is not an indication of the limit of God's power and knowledge or the limit of God's goodness, but an indication of his freedom, tolerance, and toleration. Perhaps, God might have also other good reasons. Nonetheless, his tolerant nature can be a sufficient reason for him to be tolerant toward evils.

### III.

From the existential perspective, we should now examine the evidential argument. The argument is succinctly put forth by Rowe. The standard evidential argument runs as followings: (1) There exist instances of intense sufferings which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented

without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse (SEA1); (2) An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse (SEA2); (3) There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being (SEA3).<sup>10</sup>

The core of the standard evidential argument is the belief that an omnipotent, omniscient God necessarily disallows pointless evils. In other words, in the argument, it is claimed that even if God may permit some evils for greater good or in order to avoid greater evils or equally bad evils, a fully powerful and perfectly good God still will not possibly permit any pointless evils.

The first thing to be noted is that morally, the argument is perfectly sound. However, existentially, this argument presupposes what the logical problem argument also presupposes: a fully powerful and perfectly good God is constrained by the necessity to promote good and prevent evils. By this token, the reasons that we evoke to reject the logical problem argument above can also be evoked here to reject the evidential argument: existentially, God is not constrained by necessity but can act from free will; eliminating evils is not a necessary condition for an eternal God to be fully good and fully powerful. Again, the flaw in Rowe's argument is not that it faults God for what is logically impossible, but that it inserts the logical impossibility of the co-existence of two mutually contradictory states of affairs; that it has not drawn a distinction between cognitive logic and existential logic.

In addition, as noted by Eric Reitan and others, Rowe's argument entails utilitarianism.<sup>11</sup> Rowe's premise (1), SEA1 above, makes a utilitarian claim: God ought to prevent a given evil provided that no greater evils or equally bad or worse evils will be produced by God's action. In other words, the "ought" that God should subscribe to is a result of a utilitarian reasoning. But God is not utilitarian. Rowe's premise (2), SEA2 above, also makes a utilitarian claim: God necessarily will prevent a given evil provided that no greater evils or equally bad or worse evils will be produced by God's action. In other words, the necessity of God's act of prevention of evils is a conclusion of a utilitarian calculation of the balance-sheet of the consequence of preventing evils. But God neither needs to act from

<sup>10</sup> William Rowe, "Evil and Theodicy", in *Philosophy of Religion*, 317.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Eric Reitan, "Does the Argument from Evil Assume a Consequentialist Morality?" in *Faith and Philosophy*, 17:3 (2000): 304—317.

necessity nor to be a utilitarian when he considers acting or abstaining from action.

In short, the standard evidential argument, as summarized by Rowe, can stand if and only if we grant what we do not grant to the logical problem argument—that is, God is subject to the law of causality and necessity and that God is a utilitarian. But we cannot, and should not, grant either of these claims.

Today, a new form of evidential argument is that the actual magnitude and distribution of evils in the human world that we live in constitutes evidence against the theist claim concerning God's existence. That is, God cannot possibly allow evils of present magnitude and global distribution. By this token, God's allowance of Satan's visiting Job with unbearable suffering and evils is possible because of the small scale of the evil. The genocides in Auschwitz, Nanjing, Rwanda, Kosovo, Bosnia, East Timor, Darfur and similar indicate the absence of God. They raise not only the question, "Why are times so dark, men know each other not at all?", as asked by the French poet Eustache Deschamps in the fourteenth century, but also the question, "Where was God in Auschwitz?", as asked by Jürgen Habermas.<sup>12</sup>

Does the actual magnitude and distribution of evils in our world add new weight to the evidential argument against theism? It does not. How evils exist in the world does alter the fact that the claims NC1, NC2, and NC3 that I make earlier remain valid: (1) God has three will and is not confined to the law of causality and not constrained by necessity; (2) prohibiting evils is not a necessary condition for God to be wholly good; (3) the compatibility problem does not exist in a relation between a limitless, infinite being and limited, finite beings. In my opinion, the new evidential argument would have some force if God were not omnipotent. That is, if God were not omnipotent, there would be a limit to what God could tolerate or endure, and the actual magnitude and distribution of evils in the human world could be something beyond God's capacity to tolerate. However, the limit of the capacity of humankind is not the limit of God's capacity.

By this token, perhaps, we can ask if the existence of evils—either pointless ones or those with horrible magnitude and distribution—is something beyond what God's moral sensibility will possibly allow. Again, this question presupposes that God is not omnipotent and omniscient—that

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<sup>12</sup> Deschamps' question is quoted in Eric and Mary Josephson, (eds.), *Man Alone* (New York: Dell, 1962), 17; for Habermas's question, see Jürgen Habermas, *Religion and Rationality*, ed. & trans. Eudardo Mendieta (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2002), 154,

is, there is still something beyond God's capacity, viz. moral sensibility. While this question might not be unreasonable in itself, to use this question to argue that God is either not omnipotent or not omniscient will amount to begging the question.

All the same, to the evidential argument, a reasonable counter-argument stands: the existence of evils is not evidence against the existence of God if we believe (1) that God has free will and (2) God is capable of tolerating evils. And we can believe in both.

#### IV.

In light of the above, one path opened but not taken is the toleration argument that evils exist because God tolerates them; God can tolerate evils because God has free will and is tolerant. And I suspect that God tolerates evils in order to give humankind a quiz or mid-term examination. Since the Fall, humankind has manifested the propensity to make judgments on good and evil. God knows that humankind has not yet gained sufficient knowledge of good and evil and intends humankind to grow by combat evils—that is, he tolerates evils in order for humankind to learn something about good and evil more comprehensively and systematically.

If God tolerates evils because he is tolerant, then the existence of evils will not be evidence against God's existence, or logically incompatible with the fact that God exists. This is nothing unreasonable or mysterious. What we need to see here is the difference between existential incompatibility and cognitive incompatibility. Cognitively, two contradictory claims to the same truth cannot be both true. Thus, here, we do not claim both that God necessarily excludes evils and that God tolerates evils. However, existentially, two opposing states of affairs can co-exist. Thus, here, it is possible that God considers evils to be evils and thinks that humankind should reject evils and simultaneously, that God himself does not prevent or eliminate evils for humankind, but tolerates their existence in the human world. And as far as God is concerned, tolerance can be a good and comprehensible reason.

God may have extrinsic reasons to tolerate evils. For example, he may tolerate evils for the greater good or to avoid greater evils. Or, according to my most favored guess, in tolerating evils God is giving humankind a quiz or mid-term. Job's case is an example at hand. God tolerated Satan's visiting Job with suffering and evils because God wanted to give the test to demonstrate to Satan that Satan is wrong. The Chinese Confucian master Mencius offered a view akin to that concerning Job in *the*

*Bible*, though with some minor differences. According to Mencius, before Heaven entrusts a great responsibility to a person, it will first test the person in body, mind, and spirit.<sup>13</sup> The French writer Victor Hugo also said, “Life, misfortunes, isolation, abandonment, poverty, are battlefields which have their heroes; obscure heroes, sometimes greater than the illustrious heroes. Strong and rare natures are thus created; misery, almost a step-mother, is sometimes a mother; privation gives birth to power of soul and mind; distress is the nurse of self-respect; misfortune is a good breast for great souls.”<sup>14</sup> The question, “Where was God in Auschwitz?”, can find a Menciusian answer: God was testing humankind; God was where he was when Job was tested.

All the same, suffice it to say that God has free will and is capable of tolerating and therefore may tolerate evils. The case that God may have other reasons to tolerate evils is not incompatible with the view that God tolerates evils out of his tolerant nature. With reference to contemporary philosophical debates, it is better for us to recognize that God has free will and is capable of tolerating what is impossible to the world and finite human beings than to entertain the belief that something is logically impossible to God.

A few clarifications are in order. First, God’s toleration of evils will not damage his full goodness or undermine his omnipotence, but is consistent with his eternal nature. That God is *a priori* eternal should be a non-negotiable truth. In other words, given God’s eternal nature, we cannot be justified in the claim that if God tolerated evils God would be less good than a being that would not tolerate evils.

Second, God’s toleration of evils is not indifference to evils. “Tolerance is not indifference.”<sup>15</sup> God’s toleration of evils is also not an indication that God has not drawn a distinction between good and evils. Thus, for example, God has a distinction between good and evils when he allows Satan to test Job by visiting Jobs with sufferings and evils. Buddha has a distinction between good and evil although Buddha tolerates evils. Toleration means to bear intellectually, ethically-morally, and politically with what is worthy of rejection, in an engaging manner.

Third, God’s toleration of evils would involve allowing evils to exist, not participating in doing evils or approving evils or endorsing evils. The

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<sup>13</sup> Mencius, *The Essence and Substance of Mencius (Mengzi Zheng Yi)*, ed. Jiao Shun, in *Completed Works of Teachers (Zhu Zi Ji Cheng)*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Unity Publishing House, 1996), 6B15.

<sup>14</sup> Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables* (New York: The Modern Library, 1992), 588.

<sup>15</sup> Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 258.

act of toleration of evils is an intermediate act between outright prohibition and endorsement of evils. Thomas Scanlon points out: “Tolerance requires us to accept people and permit their practices even when we strongly disapprove of them. Tolerance thus involves an attitude that is intermediate between wholehearted acceptance and unrestrained opposition.”<sup>16</sup> By this token, God’s toleration of evils is an intermediate act between outright prohibition of evils and endorsement of evils. For the purpose of the present study, God’s toleration of evils does not indicate that God conceives evils in humankind and in the human world.

Fourth, the fact that evils are what God would reject qualifies, instead of disqualifying, them as the objects of God’s toleration. X is an object of toleration if and only if X is always something that the tolerator would reject or wants to reject. Jürgen Habermas thus says, “Rejection is a condition necessary for all kinds of tolerant behavior.”<sup>17</sup> Bernard Williams also says, “Toleration, we may say, is required only for the intolerable.”<sup>18</sup> Of course, this is not to say that evils are intolerable to God in terms of his capacity or perfect goodness. Instead, it is to say that evils can be the objects of his toleration precisely because he would have rejected them.

Fifth, being tolerant is a sufficient reason for God to tolerate evils. In other words, given his free will, God may tolerate evils simply because he is tolerant. This is true even of toleration of what Rowe calls pointless evils or evils of such horrible magnitude and distribution as we have today. Given that what can be the object of one’s toleration must be that which one would like to reject, the fact that evil is something which God would like to reject qualifies evil as a possible object of God’s toleration.

Sixth, the toleration argument does not introduce any myths here. Nothing is mysterious and incomprehensible in God tolerating evils simply because he is tolerant. Is there any thing mysterious if a person tolerates a bad smell because he is tolerant? Is there anything mysterious if one bears with a bad neighborhood simply because one is tolerant? Is there anything mysterious if being tolerant, one tolerates another person who advocates at the top of his lungs what one opposes at the top of one’s lungs for one’s entire life?

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas Scanlon, *The Difficulty of Tolerance* (Cambridge, UK: The University of Cambridge Press, 2003), 187.

<sup>17</sup> Jürgen Habermas, “Religious Tolerance—the Pacemaker for Cultural Rights,” in *Philosophy*, 79, no.1 (spring 2004), 10; Cf. Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 258—259.

<sup>18</sup> Bernard Williams, “Toleration: An Impossible Virtue?” in David Heyd (ed.), *Toleration: An Elusive Virtue* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1996), 18.

Seventh, even if God tolerates evils, it does not follow that he wants us to tolerate evils. Instead, it might well be that he tolerates evils in order to give humankind some homework to do—that is, to grow in knowledge of good and evils by engaging and combating evils. In other words, the toleration argument here does not undermine or damage the distinction between good and evil, or undermine the fact that for God humankind ought to aspire for what good and ought to reject what is evil.

The toleration argument here is consistent with our daily experience. In comparison, cognitive arguments that attempt to discredit the fact that evils exist should strike us as something too dry. Meanwhile, the toleration argument is not an extrinsic-reason argument, but focuses on God's nature itself. In addition, as demonstrated above, the toleration argument can explain away both the logical problem argument and the evidential argument. Furthermore, the toleration argument can account for those traditional defenses of theism, without inheriting their problems. For example, the argument that God allows evils for the sake of greater good can be explained by the toleration argument.

## V.

I would like to conclude this paper as follows. We should draw a distinction between a reasonable concept of God and a rational concept of God. A reasonable concept of God claims only existential plausibility. A rational concept of God includes a stronger claim: the claim that such a concept is, and can be, cognitively justified to be true. A reasonable concept of God allows one to subscribe to the concept of God in faith. A rational concept of God, which makes a knowledge claim, demands that one should and can subscribe to a concept of God if and only if one can recognize and prove its truth.

By this token, the concept that an omnipotent, omniscient God may tolerate evils is a reasonable one. What the concept claims or demonstrates has strong existential plausibility. It is acceptable, particularly when we recognize that existence consists of contradictions. Subscription to this concept supports us to continue to have faith in God amid evils, as Job did, and improves our faith and life. And such a concept can respond to the contemporary debate over whether God exists amid evils. More crucial, it is my contention that if God tolerates what humankind cannot and should not tolerate, our view on the logical problem argument and evidential argument should be adjusted. The logical problem argument should take into account the difference between the unacceptability of logical contradiction



in cognition and the acceptability of existential contradiction. The evidential argument should take into account the difference between the undesirability of the co-existence of an omnipotent, omniscient God and evils and the impossibility of such co-existence.

By this token, we can, and should, question three concepts: (1) that an omnipotent, wholly good God *necessarily* allows only good, but not evil at any time; (2) that prohibition of evils is a necessary act which God must perform in order to be wholly good; and (3) that there can be a compatibility-incompatibility problem in a relation between an infinite, limitless being and finite, limited beings. Although these concepts are morally appealing, in my opinion, none of them is free of dubious assumptions. In other words, none of these three concepts can be taken for granted to have truth.

Meanwhile, we should recover and restore three concepts: (1) that God's activities and choices are totally free from the law of causality and not constrained by necessity, or in the phrase of Vatican I, are "by a volition free from all necessity"; (2) that God is tolerant and can tolerate anything; and (3) that toleration is not identical to endorsement.

Doing so, we can reasonably assume that God exists in an evil-afflicted world if he chooses to do so and if he tolerates evils. We can reasonably argue that he does exist in an evil-afflicted world because he chooses to tolerate evils for whatever reasons. I would like to make a stronger claim: he tolerates evils in order to give humankind a chance to grow in knowledge of good and evils by combating evils, which implies that his toleration of evils imposes a task on humankind to combat evils.



## PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF NATURALIZING RELIGION

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**Abstract.** This paper deals with Daniel Dennett's argument regarding the nature of belief in contrast to belief in belief. The idea that the value of the first order belief in the existence of a precept is entirely irrelevant because it is indistinguishable from the second-order belief; that the belief in something is a good thing. That is to say it doesn't matter if I believe something inasmuch as if I believe that the belief is a good thing (i.e.: beneficial to the individual, etc). Dennett's approach particularly regards an analysis of religion from this point, and suggests that it is entirely impossible to determine if an individual believes in God, or simply believes that the belief in God is a good thing. More importantly, Dennett argues that the individual themselves cannot make this distinction.

### THE CLAIM

The nature of belief has been an area of study that has historically had great influence in the philosophical field. However, in *Breaking the Spell*, Daniel Dennett proposes a new, interesting way of looking at religious belief. Dennett's proposition is that while the first-order belief of most monotheistic religions is that God exists, a second-order belief is necessary for religions develop and to propagate successfully. The second-order belief is that the belief that God exists is a good thing (i.e.: that the belief that God exists is beneficial to individuals who believe it). Dennett refers to this second-order claim as *belief in belief*, and he claims that the truth is independent of the validity or truthfulness of the first-order claim. Almost all individuals who practice in monotheistic religions fervently claim, that as devout and pious people, they truly believe in God. That is to say again, that they hold to the first order belief that God exists. Dennett challenges this claim, arguing that it is impossible from an external (or third-person)

perspective to determine whether an individual actually believes in God or instead believe only that the belief in God is a good thing. More importantly, Dennett also claims that it is impossible for an individual to evaluate from a reflective (or first-person) perspective whether or not she herself/he himself actually believes that God exists. The claim that an individual cannot make this first-personal judgment is important not only because the foundation of these religions rests upon the existence of God, but also because, if an individual cannot determine himself/herself if he/she truly holds to a belief, it calls into question at least some of what is known about epistemology. While I will intermittently address the broad implications of this point in what follows, this paper will focus on the philosophical and religious implications of belief in belief.

It can be assumed, by inference, that Dennett is sympathetic with a pragmatist view of belief which suggests that beliefs necessitate a behavioral consequence. For the pragmatist, the truth value of a belief is secondary to the degree to which the belief is useful. Given this, even false beliefs can be valuable (evolutionarily speaking) provided that they result in a behavioral change that benefits the organism. The evolutionary aspect is important to the pragmatist, because the pragmatist is concerned with the genetic implications of a belief, and provided that a belief serves an evolutionary function (allows organisms to survive to reproduce), it is considered to be *truthful*. From this perspective, the usefulness of a belief is contingent upon a behavioral consequence which then benefits the individual who holds the belief. These displays of behavior actively demonstrate the individual's commitment to the belief, and the absence of any such demonstration could indicate that the individual does not really believe what they claim. To be succinct, if an individual holds to a belief, there will be a behavioral change resultant from (or constituent of) the belief, and if that behavioral change provides an evolutionarily beneficial change in behavior (causes the individual to procreate, keeps the individual alive, etc.) the belief is useful and therefore pragmatically valuable/truthful. Ultimately, the omission of a behavioral change could stand to indicate that an individual does not really believe their belief, or even believe that belief is a good thing. What this means is that while an individual might not believe belief *x*, because the belief *x* is a good thing (useful to the organism who believes it), the omission of a behavioral consequence could indicate (from a pragmatic perspective) that the individual believes that their belief *x* is, in fact, not useful.

Dennett remarks that often the type of behavioral display that is prominent in religion is actually paying "lip service" to the religious claims in

hope both of convincing other individuals that they themselves truly hold to their beliefs, and in propagating the religion (or at least the tenets of the religion) to other individuals (Dennett, 2006). Paying lip service, as it were, does not directly indicate that an individual truly believes the beliefs they are espousing, but instead, indicates only that the individual may only believe that the espoused belief is good to hold.

Consider now this approach from a memetic perspective. The memetic perspective claims that there is a unit of cultural transmission similar to the gene which is replicated through imitation and transmits both linearly down a hereditary line and laterally across cultures. From this perspective, the individual who engages in the behavioral display is the vessel for the religious memeplex (a complex of memes) which has taken up residency in the individual's brain, and the display serves a memetic advantage. That is, the display or religiously supportive behavior serves to help the memes supportive of religion to get themselves copied in the brains of other individuals, who will then continue to propagate the same memes linearly (down a hereditary line, e.g. to children) and laterally (across cultures e.g. missionaries). Memes are important to incorporate in this argument, because they provide the behavior by which ideas or cultural replicates (in this case, replicates for religion) get transmitted. This perspective also allows the transmission to disregard the value to biological fitness, their truth value, or the degree to which an individual actually holds to a belief. Through a memetic exposition, one could argue that believing in religious tenets is a matter of the successful transmission of memes for religion, and that an individual need not necessarily really believe the religious replicates to transmit them into other meme-accepting brains. Dennett would also argue that if the replicates can be transmitted without true belief, then the individual is simply acting for the benefit of the memes being transmitted (as a slave to the memes). More importantly, the argument would include that the individual is simply seeking to convince other meme-accepting brains that these memes are beneficial and good to acquire as demonstrated by the individual transmitting the memes they do not truly believe in (Dennett, 2006).

At this point, Dennett's claims are as follows: a. an individual cannot determine if they believe a belief or if they believe that the belief is a good thing, b. the division of doxastic labor (the reliance upon designated "authorities" for the interpretation and understanding of dogma) eliminates the necessary understanding of a belief by conferring to experts, c. mimetically, beliefs need not be believed or understood to be transmitted, d. pragmatically, a belief can be value-laden by its usefulness regardless of

its truth value. In contrast to what Dennett argues about religion, Dennett claims that other sorts of belief have a definitive result. Take, for example, the case of mathematics... While we rely upon teachers to delineate the mathematical equations we are taught in school (a division of doxastic labor), we can demonstrate, reason, and replicate the results of equations such as  $2+2=4$ . We *can* know intrinsically and first-personally that the result of  $2+2$  will always equal 4 and if we are ever uncertain about such a prospect, we can test it and evaluate the result. The same can be said in the case of gravity. We can reason through formulas developed by Isaac Newton that an object released without suspension from a height will fall to the ground at a given rate of 3.8 m/s/s and while we rely upon physicists to routinely test, evaluate, and retest this information, the laws of gravity are time tested, and easily proven. One can also imagine that if there were some sort of counter-example or new evidence that could be presented against the case of gravity, it could reliably be evaluated and interpreted by experts by virtue of their track-record in providing support for the law. Also, one can imagine that since this doctrine has come directly from a human source whose existence could never be questioned, at one point, one could've conferred upon Newton himself to explain his reasoning.

Dennett argues that in religion there is a division of doxastic labor in which individuals, who are not holding positions of authority, rely on supposed "experts" to delineate and distribute the fundamentals of dogmatic belief and to provide accurate and truthful information. For Dennett, this division of doxastic labor (which is not exclusive to religion as he notes the same type of reliance on authorities in science) creates a social hierarchy in which the lay people who are seeking to believe a certain dogma (read belief) cannot truly believe the dogmas unless they are capable of understanding that which they desire to believe, and so dispatch the understanding of the dogma to the experts who then understand (read interpret) the dogma for the lay people so that they can go on believing the dogma without first-personally understanding it (Dennett, 2006). The problem becomes apparent in that there is an overreliance on authorities, and that in this case, if Dennett's claim about belief in belief is true, then these purported "authorities" cannot themselves determine if they actually hold the beliefs they claim (and are responsible to interpret), and are mistakenly propagating this information as authoritative and accurate. This claim is significant because it holds the "authorities" to the same rules as the lay person insofar as their responsibility to understand and convey dogma to establish accurate beliefs. What this means is that the authorities are limited only to an interpretation of dogma (as opposed to true understanding) and therefore

they cannot be said truly to understand the dogma they are responsible to understand and convey to the individual believers. For example, religious belief is reliant upon the understanding of doctrine and dogma from God in the Bible. The believers cannot adequately (so the authorities say) interpret and understand the Bible without authoritative assistance. The authorities are also believers, who just happen to be charged with providing that understanding. As they are believers, like the lay person, they too cannot adequately reflect upon the dogma to result in a truly held belief without assistance from superior authorities, and so on ad infinitum. The reason for this is that according to Dennett, the division of doxastic labor is an infinitesimal reliance upon authorities. If the lay person relies upon their appointed experts, the experts then have to confer to experts that they have appointed (perhaps elders, superior members of their order, experts with more longevity, the Pope) to interpret and delineate the dogma, who then in turn, have to confer to yet superior experts. The final authority over the dogma would be God himself and as the dogma states that God is infinitely unknowable, the final authority is removed from providing the actual interpretation and understanding of the dogma for the individual believers (lay-person or authority), and therefore even the purported authorities cannot dispatch adequate understanding to the lay-person believers. The ultimate result is that the interpretation of dogma from God, must be conferred to God. Due to this logical fallacy, there can be no real belief in God unless one can receive direct interpretation and understanding from the man himself, and as he is infinitely unknowable (as per his own doctrine) true belief in God can never be held.

An objector to Dennett's claim that even on a reflective personal level, an individual cannot determine if she/he believes in God or exclusively believes in belief in god, can pursue a couple of courses of action. First, the individual may propose a counter example to demonstrate that there is an act that an individual may engage that adequately can demonstrate that an individual in fact holds to the first order belief that they believe in God. The alternative to this option is to challenge the pragmatist assumption that true belief requires a behavioral manifestation. Due to the nature of this discussion, the scope of this treatment will handle only the first option, the proposition of a counter-example that demonstrates that an individual can, in fact, know that they believe in God.

## OBJECTION 1

An objector taking this approach would begin by first presenting a hypothetical scenario in which there was a monotheistic religion isolated to at least some degree from the external world. Take an example of a monastery of monks who practice monotheistic religion, and do so isolated largely from society either by geography or choice. The tenets of this religion include sacrifices to God to ensure a bountiful harvest season, and the ritual spilling of blood of the participants by lashing themselves. This type of behavior is seen in many indigenous tribes of South America and Indochina, and is also arguably practiced by the members of the Roman Catholic religious sect, Opus Dei. An individual monk who claims to believe in God and is particularly devout and pious, attends his monastic duties fervently and in the privacy of his domicile expends a great deal of time and energy on this particularly costly religion, in solitary reflective meditation. The tenets of this faith also require great personal sacrifice, and are particularly detrimental to this monk, yet he continues to lash himself dutifully on the back with a flail of leather straps until the skin is tender and blood is drawn. This monk additionally wears a cilice, a ritualistic device that resembles a small belt of intertwined chain links with barbed ends, which is then worn around the upper thigh or upper arm to distract the devout from any notions of pleasure. Traditionally, this practice (usually found in extremist sects of Roman Catholicism such as Opus Dei; again, arguably) serves the purpose of restraining an individual from any acts or moments of pleasure so as to better serve, perceive, and understand God.

The example as laid out, an objector might argue, demonstrates the monk's true belief in God from an individual and reflective perspective. The monk not only claims to believe in God, he knows he believes in God. To begin with, the monk would not engage in a religion which requires such a great cost in time and energy and personal deprivation if he did not truly believe their claim. Secondly, the monk would not engage in such physically debilitating practices such as lashings or the wearing of a cilice unless the individual was truly devout in their beliefs.

Dennett might respond that if a monk were so devout in believing that his beliefs are a good thing, regardless of the beliefs he is trying to demonstrate he truly holds, he would engage in whatever dogma (in this case, lashing and the cilice) that was composite of the belief. He might also argue that those behaviors are individual beliefs in themselves (the self-mutilation is a good and pious thing to do). In this case, the monk only believes that it is a good thing to be closer to, or better serve God and that



these behaviors are said to have that result. Additionally, it can be argued that because these behaviors are being engaged in a public forum, that the behavior is being used to convince other individuals of the monk's conviction in his beliefs, or to simply propagate the behaviors and coinciding beliefs. This is important, because it appears that a belief is truly held only if other individuals can objectively state that an individual engages in behavior which supports the belief. In this case, the behavior is normatively assessed to determine if the individual believes in the belief. In this case, the audience of third-personally objective spectators evaluates the behavior in which the individual is engaging in contrast to the behaviors normally (read typically) associated with that belief. If the behavior seems to coincide with most of the behaviors traditionally or typically associated with the belief, the individual is evaluated to truly hold to their belief to at least a moderate degree. Conversely if the behavior does not coincide with the behaviors typically associated with the belief, then there are two alternative results. First, if the behavior is more consistent (as objectively and normatively evaluated by the audience) with behaviors that show that the individual does not hold to the belief, the individual is branded a heretic, or much less punitively, said to either not believe or not understand the belief. This is relevant to the argument being presented because it supports the necessity to engage in behavioral practices that support a belief and to do so in a public forum. Secondly, the audience determines that the individual's behaviors are consistent with some of the behaviors associated with, or the basic principles of the belief, but the behaviors themselves are so extreme (and as in the case of the monk, self-detrimental) that the individual is either said to have an enlightened understanding of the belief, or that because of the severity of the behavior, the individual is said to hold to the belief to a high degree. The objector presents a solution by isolating the monastic order from society, and further isolating the individual believers into their own private domiciles in which they engage these practices. In this case, without an audience to evaluate the individual, the individual may believe that they are now engaging in these behaviors for the purpose of the belief itself. What this means is that because the behaviors are no longer being done for the purpose of convincing an audience that the monk is not a heretic and because the behavior is not being passed to any other individuals, the behaviors, despite their detrimental effects on the individual, are now being engaged in for the sake of the beliefs. This might suggest that the monk truly holds to his beliefs. Does the fact that the individual engages these practices in private, behind closed doors, without an audience, not demonstrate the individual's conviction in their belief in God?

## THE RESPONSE

Dennett's response would be that while the isolation of the monks from society and from each other does eliminate the audience from the argument, there is still one member of the audience left to convince. Dennett would likely argue that even with this degree of isolation, the believer engages in these activities to convince himself of his convictions, and that if an individual truly held to a belief they claim, they would not need to take such measures as self-conviction. Dennett would likely argue that even though the monk is now isolated from the larger objective audience of other people or contemporaries, the behavior is not being engaged in for the sake of the belief itself, but instead for the sake of convincing the monk engaging in this activity that he truly believes that God exists. Dennett would claim that, whereas in the larger audience, the more severe the behavior the monk engages in, the greater the individual's conviction to the belief, in actuality, the more severe the behavior reflects a greater need for self-conviction. Dennett might also argue that in regards to the arguments posited above, the more severe the behavior, the dumber the monk, seeking to believe an unbelievable belief.

This case presents a problem for the non-naturalist monotheist, in that all evidence for an individual's belief in God could be exclusively evaluated and determined to also provide evidence for the belief in belief. That is to say, all the behaviors engaged in by individuals that would reflect the true commitment to a belief, the behaviors also reflect the true commitment to the belief that the belief is a good thing. In this case, it is impossible to isolate the true belief that God exists from the belief that the belief that God exists is a good thing and there can be no support exclusively for the true belief. What an objector would need to do at this stage is present an example in which all of the evidence supports the belief in God exclusively, and so cannot be rationalized alternatively to be evidence for the second-order belief that the belief in God is a good thing.

## OBJECTION 2

At this point, it seems that the objector could assert that the only way to actively demonstrate a true belief in God is to not act. If Dennett's response to the monastic objection is true, then it would seem that any sort of action which is representative of an individual's beliefs would only serve to demonstrate the necessity for the individual to convince themselves of

their beliefs. To truly demonstrate that an individual holds to a belief, then the believer should not engage in any sort of behavior that could be rationalized as self-convincing, and, therefore, the only method by which to prove a conviction in a belief is to not act on that belief. An example can be proposed wherein an individual believer of a faith, such as Christianity, wherein the practitioner believes in the existence of God (the first-order belief) and believes that such a belief is a good thing (the second-order belief), therefore accepting the tenets of the faith. With the restriction to inaction as stipulated, the believer then embarks to live his/her life in a manner consistent with those tenets without any attempt or outwardly expressive demonstration of those beliefs. Ultimately, the argument here is that if a behavioral change makes it impossible to distinguish between true belief and belief in belief, the only solution is to eliminate the behavioral change. Doing so could in fact indicate that an individual truly holds to a belief simply because if the individual does in fact truly believe, he/she need to convince no one, not even himself/herself, that he/she believes.

#### THE RESPONSE

First, Dennett could challenge from the pragmatist perspective stating that the absence of action by the believer in fact *demonstrates* that the individual does not actually hold to their claims on the principle that a convicted belief requires a behavioral consequence or action. The objection could then be raised, that even inaction is a form of action as if it is a conscious choice, and therefore, is in fact a behavioral consequence. These two objections are important because, from a pragmatist approach, a behavioral change is necessary and that behavior must be beneficial to the organism in the long run in order for the precipitating belief to be considered true. If inaction is considered to be a form of action, then the behavior demanded by the belief is indistinguishable from the behavior of normal people and therefore provides no more evidence for the first order belief than for not holding it at all. To this point, it seems that Dennett would respond that the lack of objective evaluation resulting from the lack of an audience indicates that the individual does not hold to their belief, or that it may indicate that the individual does not wish to provide evidence that he/she believes the belief. The objector would argue that the lack of evidence being provided would indicate a lack of *need* to provide evidence, and therefore a truly held belief, however it seems clear that Dennett would argue that if a belief is truly held, the individual is *responsible* to provide evidence

that he/she does so. He may also challenge that even mental process (i.e.: prayer) in support of religious belief serve as a form of self-persuasion. If this is true, then it would seem that there is no final way to determine whether or not an individual truly believes in God. There is however, an important distinction between being unable to prove something and proving its non-existence. If it can be proven that there is no way to determine that an individual truly believes/does not believe in God (or any belief), it does not indicate that the belief is not/cannot held by the/any individual. What this means simply, is that being unable to prove that something exists does not prove its non-existence, and being unable to prove that something doesn't exist does not prove its existence. Because of the grand scope that belief in God engenders, this is a continuing problem on both sides of the argument, and neither one is willing to make concessions, rightfully so, because there are no proven necessary and sufficient conditions which prove or disprove the existence of God.

#### IMPLICATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, Dennett has raised a compelling argument against an individual's religious belief in god and perhaps it can/should be said that it will forever be impossible to determine if an individual can truly believe in God or if they are exclusively limited to believing that such a belief is a good thing. Under this case, it would seem that Dennett's argument is unsettling. One reason which could be offered to explain the unsettling nature of this claim is that the same approach of isolating a truly held belief from the belief that it is a good thing can be applied to other fields of study. As discussed, however, in trying to apply the same criticism to the sciences blatantly fails as science is based on empirical evidence that can be tested, improved upon, recalculated, and retested. So it would seem that the dis-ease in this is that if we cannot in fact truly believe in God, what is the purpose of that belief? Other questions arise from this type of exposition as well. Do beliefs serve a biologically adaptive function that aid in the continuation of the species? Are we just slaves to the memes or memeplexes that are constituent of beliefs? If we cannot truly believe anything, can anything truly be known?

These questions certainly deserve to be answered and the responsibility of these questions would sit with the epistemologists who combat and wrestle with the nature of knowledge. It would seem however, that Dennett would conclude (at least in regards to religion) that the nature of be-

belief in God is hinged upon one or many logical fallacies (overreliance on authorities, circular reasoning, etc.) and as such, there can be no truly held religious belief and that the belief in God is an indefensible position whose ambiguity arises from the fact that it can neither be proven or disproven. The only thing that can be said in regards to the attempt to disprove such claims as first-person conscious knowledge of belief is that Dennett raises many interesting claims and it seems that there is a greater probability in support of his argument than there is for the religious zealot.



## THE UNIVERSAL AND PARTICULAR DIMENSIONS OF THE HOLOCAUST STORY AND THE EMERGENCE OF GLOBAL ETHICS

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**Abstract.** In this paper I want to look at the Holocaust story as an example of a value-laden story which might become one of the foundation stones of the emergent global ethics, indispensable for bridging ideological divides that so often prevent a global society from living in peace and solidarity. My key suggestion will be that the stories that have the potential of becoming truly 'global stories', will in reality become carriers of global values only after undergoing interpretative transformation which will enable all citizens of the global village to identify with ethically positive aspects of the story, so that they will perceive this story as their own.

### INTRODUCTION

Every potentially global ethical story is at the point of departure particular, not universal, because it usually speaks about only one group of people (defined along ethnic, national, religious, racial, political, gender or other lines) among other groups. Every such story is at the point of departure used by some particular group as the story constitutive of its ethical identity, by showing this group in positive ethical light, in contrast with some other groups of people. Every such group has inalienable moral right to its ethical stories (each group has many such stories, more or less central to its ethical identity). However, the challenge of our age, the age of globalization, consists exactly of the need to provide the global society with global ethical stories, by way of the universalization of the stories that are always primarily particular, often supremely particular (as in the case of the Holocaust of European Jewry, but also in such cases as the story of the slavery of the black peoples, the story of the fate of the native peoples of North and

South America, the story of the Soviet gulags, the story of South African apartheid, the stories of the Red totalitarian regimes of South East Asia, the story of the suffering of the Tibetan people, and many more).

In this paper I want to look at the Holocaust story as an example of such value-laden story, unprecedented and incomparable as it is, which might become one of the foundation stones and points of reference of the emergent global ethics, indispensable for bridging ideological divides that so often prevent a global society to live in peace and solidarity. My key suggestion will be that the stories that have the potential of becoming truly 'global stories', will in reality become carriers of global values only after undergoing interpretative transformation which will enable (in principle) all citizens of the global village to identify with ethically positive aspects of the story, so that they would perceive this story as their own.

Unsurprisingly the particular aspect of the ethical stories provides the main reason for which particular groups are likely to resist universalization of *their* particular stories. They feel threatened by the prospect of the universalization of their stories, afraid that the reinterpretation of their ethical stories (a reinterpretation whose direction and nature is usually difficult to know in advance) will rob the stories of their particularity, and ultimately will rob the group in question of their stories.

There is no need to deny that such a danger exists. However, I want to suggest that the universalization of particular stories does not have to result in the weakening of the particular aspect of the story as a matter of necessity. The whole point of the efforts of global ethicists is to construe global ethics in such a way as to strike the right balance between its universal and particular dimensions. It is in fact the precondition of the global character of global ethics, that it will never be operative if it is not accepted by some parts of the global society freely as their own.

There is, however, a different point to be made, in favour of the universalization of particular ethical stories, such as the Holocaust story, namely that from a certain point of view the universalization of the story may actually result in the positive transformation of the particular aspect of the story, thus strengthening the power of the story as a carrier of ethical values. And the reverse may also be true (at the same time), namely that a certain excessive stress on the particularity of the story and refusal to 'share' the story with the global society may result in gradual de-valuation of the story, in a gradual corruption of its primarily ethical character.

It seems that the Holocaust story, controversial as it may sound, is a story which may and should become the supremely global ethical story, while at the same time being a particular story in danger of ethical de-valuation.



Nearly half a century after the Eichmann trial, which marked the beginning of the intense efforts to engage the global public in ethical reflection on the Holocaust as the ultimate moral failure of humanity, one question keeps coming to the fore: where do we go from here? This question is put forward by people with very different agendas, including those who report being ‘tired’ of listening to the Holocaust stories through all these years. Some advocates of the ‘let’s move on’ approach to the issue at hand are quite clearly motivated by anti-Semitic sentiments. However, the question about the future of the Holocaust story is taken seriously also by scholars of international ethics and Holocaust studies. There is a growing awareness that in the multicultural context of the multi-polar world that is emerging in the process of deepening globalization, new ways of formulating the moral lesson of the Holocaust need to be found, if the Holocaust is to remain (or to become) a stable point of reference for the global ethics that is slowly taking shape.

Whatever the specific characteristics and variety of these ‘new ways’ of communicating the moral message of the Holocaust to non-Jews, they all have to bring to the fore the ‘universal’ aspect of the Holocaust story with which non-Jews could easily connect. It seems that this can be done without diminishing the ‘particular’ (i.e. distinctly Jewish) dimension of the story. In fact – and this is the main point of this paper – without the reference to the universal core of the Holocaust story, the deeper meaning of its particularity cannot be appreciated by non-Jews and Jews alike.

### THE BATTLE OF THE IDENTITY STORIES

A turning point seems to be emerging on the horizon for the Holocaust storytellers. It is not necessarily marked by the fact that the generation of the last first person witnesses of the Holocaust is passing away, though the passage of time does not make it more likely that new generations – as a matter of course – will be inclined to shape their moral attitudes (towards Jews and non-Jews) by drawing inspiration from the horrors of the Holocaust. Neither is this turning point marked decisively by the successful establishment and flourishing of the State of Israel. It has rather to do with the profound changes in the much broader cultural and ethical context that mark the beginning of a truly global age.

Since the 1960s, the colonial era has come to an end, and the bipolar world of the Cold War has been superseded by a multi-polar one. In this new world it is not only the case that many regional powers have joined

the chess game of global politics, but also ethnic groups and local cultures affirm their right to dignity and respect for their own 'identity stories', ignored for so long or perceived as destined to be replaced by non-indigenous, supposedly superior and supposedly 'universal' stories.

This new cultural revolution, on a truly planetary scale, has been tacitly taking place in the last few decades, especially since the fall of Communism and the rise of the Internet. Today it challenges the old 'made in the West' world in which the global story telling was dominated by a few political and cultural superpowers. It gives birth to a far more pluralistic world in which local cultures while willing to participate in the global market of ideas and goods, and ready to use the technical tools of communication developed in the West, at the same time resist foreign cultural domination. They reject the role of a cultural satellite and want to constitute their own centre, prescribing for all other cultures the role of satellites shedding some additional light, but not being the primary source of the light in which they perceive themselves as valuable and at least on par with other cultures.

However controversial (and perhaps outdated) the 'clash of civilizations' talk might appear to us today, there can be no doubt that there is growing balance between various cultural voices on the world stage. Unsurprisingly this new multi-polar and multicultural reality is characterized by tensions and cultural competition of a new kind generated by the new media that are far freer from external control than were the traditional mass media which sometimes represented the cultural and political agendas of their owners. This competition can be helpfully compared to a battle, but it is not so much a battle between cultures, but rather a battle for the cultural soul of a person who is a product of this new global situation. This is a person who, though primarily immersed in her local culture, is open to and bombarded by images, ideas and stories conceived in different cultures, to such an extent that it is no longer a matter of course that her cultural identity will in time simply reflect her local origin. In this new and fascinating cultural context it is more and more obvious that one's cultural identity (or worldview) is a very complex and fragile aspect of one's personal identity and is by no means a given once and for all.

This battlefield for the cultural soul of a growing number of individuals that are on a day to day basis open to the flood of information coming from cultures different than their own, is delineated by the distinct 'identity stories' that are foundational for each culture. Identity stories have the power of shaping, among other things, one's moral perception of oneself and other people, which in turn informs one's moral decisions and actions.

It is crucially important to notice that identity stories don't have to be old to be foundational. It may be a story about the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, about the 2008 bombing of Gaza, or about President Obama being a descendent of Kenyan villagers. It may be a story that is shared by very many people (like the ones just mentioned), but may be a story that is foundational for a small minority (a cultural, religious, or social minority) functioning within a broader cultural entity (like the story of the Falashas – Ethiopian Jews, a story which was not shared for centuries even with the broader Jewish community; or a story 'codifying' the experiences of British miners losing their jobs in the Thatcher era, a story of which other members of the broader society would be aware but would not 'share' in the deeper sense of the word).

Whatever the criticism of postmodern theories of cultural and linguistic expressions of group identities, it is hard to deny that such stories can be used as a tool in a power-struggle. However, it is only at a certain level that a conscious affirmation of one's own 'local' or 'particular' identity stories gives rise to a fragmented and polarized picture of the global community. What postmodern theorists seem to ignore is the fact that 'particular' stories are not the only ones that decisively shape cultural identities. Simultaneously with the process of polarization along the lines defined by the particular identity stories, another process is taking place, namely the increasing absorption of 'universal' identity stories across the cultural, religious and ethnic lines, and indeed on a global scale.

Stories exemplifying certain 'universal' values, such as peaceful resistance against the violation of human equality ('the Gandhi story', 'the Martin Luther King story', 'the Mandela story'), or the value of charity and compassion transcending ethnic and religious boundaries ('the Mother Theresa story', 'the Dalai Lama story') become parts of the web of interwoven identity stories not forced upon local cultures but accepted by them voluntarily as a part of the universal story of humanity. It is important to note that in some cases the values that such stories codify were not at all universal as recently as 100 or even 50 years ago. The point is that some stories are being accepted as universal or global (or perhaps better put as 'trans-local' and 'trans-particular') because of their compatibility with the local or particular identity stories, while other stories are likely to be rejected as clashing with particular stories and undermining local identities.

THE HOLOCAUST STORY:  
PARTICULAR AND/OR UNIVERSAL?

Thus it appears that the most characteristic feature of this new global cultural context, in which the Holocaust story will also have to be transmitted and passed to new generations, is defined by a complex interplay between the particular and the universal, the global and the local aspects of individual and communal identities that are being formed and shaped in the circumstances of an unprecedented flood of information. This co-existence of two seemingly opposing tendencies is only to be expected when one takes into account the information revolution that marks the beginning of the Global Age. It is the easy access to the technical tools that allow for spreading the local identity stories, which by being shared become quickly rooted in the soil of the local societies. It is also the access to these new mass media (largely uncontrolled by anybody who might like to promote a specific cultural agenda) which allows for the trans-local stories being quickly transmitted and absorbed by very different local cultural communities.

It seems that in this new situation only those elements of one's cultural and ethical identity which will be authentically appropriated, will retain their transformative force. To put it differently, only those stories which will be accepted in an unforced way as an integral part of particular identity stories of various peoples and cultures will become *de facto* universal, that is to say, *de facto* shaping local identities in various places of the globe. Thus some stories have a chance of becoming trans-local and trans-particular identity stories, while some stories may be rejected and so *de facto* remaining particular and local, whatever the efforts towards presenting them as universal and valid across the cultures.

This is a context which can make it at the same time more difficult and easier to tell the story of the Holocaust to various people in various places in such a way as to be voluntarily absorbed and accepted as a moral guide. The power of identity stories consists, in the last resort, in the fact that they serve as guides for action and sources of orientation in the otherwise morally ambiguous world. However, not all stories that people remember and share serve as true identity stories, that is stories that possess motivational power, defining individuals and groups to such an extent that they constitute points of reference in their self-perception and moral decision making. The vast majority of stories that fill books and human memory are just old narratives which have lost the fundamental importance they once possessed (for some people), or are just more or less accurate accounts of past historical events which in time have lost their power of firing people's

moral imagination, on the basis of which people act. Some ancient wars, past international conflicts, lost religious beliefs, nearly forgotten national or religious heroes, works of art or literary narratives which conveyed ideas that have ceased to inspire, can serve as examples of 'stories' that in the past served as identity stories, but were replaced by new stories or have retained only secondary status in the complex web of identity stories.

Bearing in mind these subtle dynamics of stories gaining and losing prominence, which in the era when people are bombarded with an unprecedented quantity of stories can take place in a relatively short period of time, one needs to conclude that only a very limited number of stories can have a secure place in the pool of universal stories shared across the cultures. There is no reason to think that without intentional efforts to turn the Holocaust story into a universal story, it will become one. After all, few Holocaust scholars will deny that before the Eichmann trial the Holocaust story did not achieve the status of an identity story even for the Jewish People as a whole (even though it is hard to believe today that this was indeed the case). But achieving the status of an identity story for one particular group of people does not secure its place among the universal stories, and the Holocaust story is after all in the first place a particular story, its particularity being implied even in its name: the Shoah, or the Holocaust (of the Jewish People).

Now, against this background it is easier to notice that the aforementioned 'lets move on' approach, to the issue of the teaching of the moral lesson of the Holocaust, brings with it more dramatic consequences than one might initially expect. This approach is advocated with special urgency by those who think that the Holocaust story has been successfully transmitted on the global scale and brought about desirable affects, clarifying sufficiently the issues of moral responsibility, retributive justice, atonement, forgiveness and reconciliation with regard to the perpetrators and the victims. They argue that the post-Holocaust generations can look upon the Holocaust as a historical event from which a moral lesson ('never again') *has* been learnt. Moreover, they argue that a prolonged discussion of the moral responsibility for the Holocaust, when conducted in a manner that implies that the Holocaust guilt has been somehow inherited by the Europeans born after the Holocaust (and not just by the descendents of the German Nazi perpetrators, but by the entire 'Christian civilization'), may in fact make it more difficult for these new generations to form a compassionate approach towards people of different origin, culture, or religion.

This line of argument can not only be motivated by various agendas, but may be developed in different directions leading to strikingly different

conclusions. One possibility is to argue that the Holocaust was a horrific event which took place in very specific socio-political circumstances and took place as a result of exceptional deterioration of the moral standards of one specific nation (Germany), and as such it concerns clearly defined groups of people, namely certain group of Germans (plus perhaps certain non-German collaborators) on the one hand, and a certain group of Jews on the other. The Holocaust – advocates of this line of thought want to say – is an event in which in the strict sense only these two groups of people participated, and such considerations as moral responsibility for the Holocaust, or the rights and responsibilities dictated by the idea of retributive justice, cannot really concern the descendents of the perpetrators and the descendents of the victims. In short, they want to suggest, once the last perpetrator and the last Holocaust survivor will pass away, the way the Holocaust story is to be told has to change significantly. How should it change? What the proponents of the ‘move on’ model most probably have in mind is lowering the expectations as to the status of the Holocaust story as an identity story. They seem to presume that it is unrealistic (and perhaps even undesirable) to expect that in 50 or 100 years from now the Holocaust story will be a universal identity story that would be defining for the moral sensitivities of people of various ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds around the globe, and not just the sensitivities of the Jews. There are respected mainstream Jewish thinkers and politicians in Israel and elsewhere who also stress the need of shifting at least partly the focus of the Israeli identity from the Holocaust to other elements of Jewish history and Jewish values, but in this paper we are not at all concerned with the role of the Holocaust story as an identity story for the Jews, i.e. a particular story, but as a candidate for a universal or global story accepted as their own ethical identity story by non-Jews.

However, the above reasoning – in effect advocating playing down the importance of the Holocaust story – does not have to be the only version of the ‘move on’ approach. By stressing the need to ‘move on’ one can in fact have in mind making a move from the current way of speaking about the Holocaust to some new way of speaking which would be expected to result in making the Holocaust story even more central and more ‘effective’ (in the sense of effectively shaping people’s moral perceptions). Advocates of this line of thought are simply concerned that without ‘moving on’ from the exclusive focus on the *particularity* of the Holocaust understood as the Shoah of the Jewish People, and without framing the moral lesson of the Holocaust in more *universal* terms, appropriating the lesson of the Holocaust will in the future be more and more difficult for non-Jews. And

so the Holocaust story told in this particularist mode will simply be ‘un-effective’, which certainly is not the outcome that those who make efforts to transmit this story hope for.

#### MAKING PLACE FOR SOMEONE ELSE’S STORY IN ONE’S OWN IDENTITY STORY

These ‘let’s move on’ defenders of the universal importance of the Holocaust story call for shifting (somewhat) the focus from the particular aspect of the story (that is foundational only for the Jews) to the universal aspect of the story which would allow us to make the story foundational for Jews and non-Jews alike. Such a suggestion does not presuppose changing anything in the story itself, but rather – drawing on the multifaceted reality of such stories as the Holocaust story – encourages bringing to light the universal message that is implicit in the heart of that story.

In order to have the sort of profound moral impact on a person that only identity stories can have, the Holocaust story has simply to become her own story by becoming a part of the web of her identity stories. An absorption of stories which are to begin with someone else’s stories will always be of the nature of a selective and creative ‘re-reading’. This process is necessary if the story is to fit the already existing web of the identity stories, which play the role of conceptual glasses through which a person perceives the moral realm.

It might seem that the Holocaust story is in such an obvious way the ultimate universal human story that it is enough to ‘hear’ it, in order to accept it as one’s own identity story. Whatever the reasons, this does not seem to be the case. After a colossal effort of ‘telling’ the Holocaust story to as many people as possible, there are countless people in every corner of the globe, who close their ears to the voices preaching that the awareness of the moral responsibility of much of the human race for the Holocaust, should always remain as fresh as if they were themselves participating in the circle of evil that brought about the Holocaust of European Jewry. Very many people, even in the countries that were on ‘Hitler’s side’, find the ‘forever guilty’ narrative too depressing to pay serious attention to it, and prefer to embrace the desire of making the Holocaust story a ‘thing of the past’.

Be that as it may, making the Holocaust story an identity story for a non-Jew is not only desirable, but possible. This may not sound like a revelation, but what is worthy of attention is the subtle dynamic that allows for

such absorption of the Holocaust story by non-Jews. It is by studying this dynamic that one can draw some conclusions concerning the most helpful ways of promoting the Holocaust story as a possible universal story that could and should be the corner stone of a global ethics that would be free from moral relativism.

Let me present an example of a non-Jew who made the Holocaust story very much a part of his own identity story. It is worth noticing that he was exposed to the Holocaust story in a way that is practically not possible today and yet it appears that the absorption of the story by him was not an obvious thing.

This non-Jew, who turned the Holocaust story into a crucial part of the foundation of his moral vision, was a Catholic priest who became a Polish pioneer of the Christian-Jewish dialogue. In 1942, at the age of four, Stanisław Musiał, together with his family had narrowly escaped death, when they were to be executed by German soldiers for helping a Jewish neighbour. Sixty years later he described this event in the following words: "They aligned us in a row in front of our house. Then suddenly, led by some child's instinct, I threw myself down to the ground and nuzzled the knees of the German commander. He got emotional, sent the other soldiers away to look for other Jews in the houses of our neighbours and later said that he left a sonny like me in Germany. [ . . . ] And this Jew, whom we were trying to help, was tied by the soldiers behind a horse, brutally dragged through the village and killed." How surprising is his confession concerning the *memory* of this event: "I didn't think at all about this Jew, neither then, nor afterwards. Only many years later this image of the man dragged along the ground started to appear in front of my eyes, emerging from among the images of my early childhood. And it brings with it the sorrow and grief that I didn't save his life. This grief does not go away, even though I'm aware that I was only four years old then."

This is perhaps the most important message of Stanisław Musiał to all those involved in re-reading ethical stories in the new global context: his effort to recover and transform his memory, to discover in a stranger, in a person of different origin and different faith, a brother or sister, turning the fragment of someone else's memory into an important part of one's own memory.

What happened that after years of amnesia Stanisław Musiał regained the memory of the Jewish world that existed for centuries in the same space in which his own memory, the memory of a Polish Catholic, had been formed? This is how he spoke about it in 1998: "It was a mysterious



event. Conversion of heart. [. . .] One day I reached for a book about the suffering of the Jews during the war and I experienced a shock. I came across the story of the liquidation of a Jewish children's home in Ukraine. The Nazis bolted all the children in one room. The oldest children were only 7 years old. And someone had to kill them. The successive groups of soldiers had no heart to do it. And finally someone . . . [. . .] Reading about it I felt crushed. And I said to myself, that if I will be able to turn two or three people away from hatred and primitive anti-Semitism then my life will have sense."

Conversion of heart – the moral shock of a person whose own memory did not blind him to the point that he was not able to perceive, in the tragic history of a people of different faith, a call directed to himself to stand on their side. Here is the experience in which a man of dialogue is being born, a man with his heart and mind fully open to the 'other'. And a prophet who demands of his co-believers and compatriots that while cultivating their own memory – including the sacred memory of their own sufferings and their own martyrs – they voluntarily make space within their own story for the sacred memory of the sufferings and martyrs of 'other' fellow human beings.

The case of Stanisław Musiał presented above sheds light on one crucial element in the complex dynamics of the absorption of the Holocaust story by a non-Jew, which seems a *conditio sine qua non* for the promotion of the story to the role of the corner stone of a global ethics. It is his 'discovery' of the *universal* core of the story that allowed him in a spontaneous and voluntary way to 'accept' this story as foundational for his own moral orientation. He was clearly aware of the factual aspect of the Holocaust and yet for many years could not 'connect' to what constituted the heart of the story. There is no reason to think that his 'awakening' to the moral truth of the Holocaust story was preceded by some gradual moral development and that his 'conversion of heart' could not be reached earlier because he wasn't yet morally sensitive enough. There is a far simpler and more plausible explanation of why the hearts and minds of so many otherwise morally sensitive persons remain closed to the transformative force of the lesson of the Holocaust. We can read it between the lines of Stanisław Musiał's testimony. Before the Holocaust story became his identity story, it was not his story. It was a story of some people whose identity stories he did not – up to that point – share. He was immersed in his own identity stories and until he could see the natural and profound *connection* between his stories and the Holocaust story, he was not able to see why he should absorb it. To

be more precise, one should say that in such situations people don't really take notice of the story, they simply don't 'see' this story in a way that is necessary for discovering the inner truth of the story for oneself.

#### SAVING THE PARTICULAR BY SAVING THE UNIVERSAL

There can be no doubt that this decisive *connection* that people make between the stories that are already *their* stories and the stories that are to become their stories, is possible thanks to the existence of some common moral ground that people apparently share across the cultural and religious boundaries. The very fact that people sometimes do awaken to the truth inherent in the until then 'alien' stories, provides an argument for the existence of this common moral ground, which may be described as defined by universal or global values. The use of the term 'universal values' does not have to imply the necessity for some philosophical or doctrinal (religious) consensus (i.e. one does not have to bother about the absolute objectivity of such values being supported theoretically beyond reasonable doubt). It suffices that 'it works' in practice, that is to say, that the (moral) identity stories from one culture do not lose the power of motivating people to certain clearly desirable attitudes towards other people. If such a phenomenon is observable on a global scale, it justifies calling the values pointed to by the stories universal or global.

Here we can see that the process of the emergence of global ethics and the dynamics of this process are exactly the same as in the case of the aforementioned battle of the identity stories. In fact, the former is just a species of the latter. In both cases the decisive thing is the 'power of attraction' of a story, which seems to be rooted in the universality of the values that the story points to or expresses. The emergence of global ethics seems to be a spontaneous process, and as such it has far more to do with the spontaneously emerging consensus between representatives of otherwise distinct cultural and ethical traditions, than with books written by academic philosophers and having 'global ethics' in the title. Global ethics takes shape at these numerous cultural junctions created by the process of globalization, at which people discover without coercion that certain truths are expressed in alien cultures, perhaps expressed more powerfully than in their own. This realization generates a process of a voluntary and free exchange of insights into the realm of truth and value, and a spontaneous exchange of stories that serve as vehicles of these insights.

From this analysis some basic conclusions of practical value seem to follow. Firstly, it is clear that the more 'particularist' and 'local' the particular web of identity stories is, the more difficult it will be for people who do not participate in the same culture to connect to these alien stories and absorb them, allowing them to resonate in their own value system. Secondly, the process of globalization, when accompanied by an unprecedented loss of control over the stories that are being transmitted and made available virtually to everybody on the globe, makes it far less likely than it might have been in the past that the stories one 'believes' are *de facto* imposed on one, and not accepted freely (in any meaningful sense of the word). Thirdly, and somewhat paradoxically, it seems that there is a certain circularity in the dynamics of the process of accepting or rejecting stories because of their universality and/or particularity. On one hand, the more particularist the alien story appears on the surface, the more likely it is that it will be rejected as having nothing to do with one's own worldview as expressed in one's stories. On the other hand, universal values are almost always expressed in stories which are *also* particular (because there are no 'universal' identities, as there are no 'universal' cultures). As a result, when a particular story is accepted because of its universality, it is very likely that the discovery of the positive value of the particular aspect of the story will follow, as the history of Stanisław Musiał and so many other 'converts' to the Holocaust story testifies.



## AGAINST INEFFABILITY

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**Abstract.** It is a commonplace assumption that there are realities and types of experience words are just not able to handle. I find the recourse to ineffability to be an evasive tactic and argue that there is inherently nothing beyond words and that this fact has ethical implications. I offer three theoretical considerations in support of my claim. The first two deal with the infinite nature of language itself, as understood first in Chomsky and then Derrida. The third deals with the linguistically structured nature of human experience. Expanding on Heidegger, I then draw some ethical implications from language's inexhaustibility.

It is a commonplace assumption that language has its limits, that there are realities and types of experience words are just not able to handle. I want to take issue with this assumption and argue that there is inherently nothing that is beyond words and that this fact about language has ethical implications.

It is in the area of religion that words have most often been found wanting. William James argues that "personal religious experience has its root and center in mystical states of consciousness" and that the clearest mark of mystical consciousness is its ineffability.

The handiest of the marks by which I classify a state of mind as mystical is negative. The subject of it immediately says that it defies expression, that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words. (James 1961, pp. 299-300)

The religious person normally claims god to be a reality beyond anything that words can capture and faith a kind of experience deeper than language can describe.

But it is not just in the area of religion that people make claims of ineffability. It is frequently the recourse of anyone trying to describe realities

outside the norm, outside the ordinary scope of human experience. “Words fail to describe” for example “the natural thrill and sheer spectacle of the 450-foot bridge high above Capilano River.” (Privilege 2009, p. 1) Likewise, “there are no words that can describe what is going on in Darfur every day – the killings, the rapes, the burning of villages.” (Cox 2007, p. B15) And finally, a lover in the throes of separation croons: “I need you now, more than words can say.” (Curci & DeMarchi 1990) These few examples give some indication of just how widespread the belief in ineffability is, and how many things are believed to fit under its umbrella.

I owe my first doubts about ineffability to my freshman composition teacher. Whenever a student would innocently proclaim some experience or emotion to be beyond words, Fr. Christopher would be on that cliché like a heat seeking missile. “Don’t blame language,” he would mock, “for defects which are entirely your own.” As my own red-faced embarrassment attested, he was right, at least in my case. Certainly the words I found to express my sorrow at the funeral of a friend were clumsy and far from what I felt, but Roethke’s “Elegy for Jane” had never seemed inadequate to me, nor Auden’s “Funeral Blues,” nor Thomas’s “Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London.” I had struggled with my own poetry enough to realize that “There are no words” was most often a way of avoiding the work of finding them, or evading the truth that I did not have the talent to create them.

## I. THE NATURE OF LANGUAGE

When the inadequacy of words is bemoaned, it is usually some form of a representational theory of language that is being assumed. When, for example, parents confront a tragedy like the death of a child, and tearfully claim that words cannot express how they feel, they are assuming that language does a pretty good job of conveying their normal, day-to-day feelings, but cannot adequately perform that function in their present sorrow because it is too complex, nuanced and deep. In other words, language can represent most ordinary things quite well, but fails with certain extraordinary things.

In arguing against ineffability I am going to share in the common assumption that language is representational. However, I will not be assuming that representation is the only function of language, or even its primary one, but only that it is an important, meaningful and distinctive one.

There are, of course, many ways in which one thing can be said to represent another. A map outlining an earthen land mass can be said to “represent” the USA. The Stars and Stripes unfurled atop a flag pole “represents” the USA in quite another sense. And, in yet one more sense, the Secretary of State “represents” the USA at a treaty negotiation. In what sense am I assuming language to be representational?

I do not believe there is any kind of immediate, one-to-one relationship between words and things. Language is not a picture of reality, even in the logically abstract manner Wittgenstein tried to argue it was in the *Tractatus*. Words are much trickier than pictures in the way they connect to the world and therein lies their representational power.

Wittgenstein’s mistake is worth dwelling on here because the *Tractatus* is one of philosophy’s most famous advocates for ineffability, for there being realities beyond language. For Wittgenstein, the most important things in life, things like beauty and goodness, are the very things language cannot touch. Therefore, he concludes the *Tractatus* with a Zen like endorsement of wordless contemplation: “Of what we cannot speak we must be silent.” (Wittgenstein 1998, p. 49) The rest of the *Tractatus*, everything that leads up to that famous final sentence, is summarized by a corresponding sentence in the Preface: “What can be said at all can be said clearly.” (Wittgenstein 1998, p. xxxi) The problem with this is that, in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein restricts what can be said to derivatives of simple signs which denotatively “mean” objects in the world. So, he believes that if we have spoken logically and carefully, “there is one and only one complete analysis of a sentence.” (Wittgenstein 1998, p. 7) But, as the later Wittgenstein came to see, “simple sentences” end up being constructed not out of words in their living concrete usage, but out of words as abstract logical symbols. No living, breathing sentence, including the final one in the *Tractatus* itself, can be correlated with the world in the way the *Tractatus* envisioned it should be, at least not without draining it of meaning.

But refusing to tether words to a one-to-one picturing of reality is not to set them totally adrift from it either. The model I want to use for the way in which language represents reality is the way in which dance “represents” music. George Balanchine famously described his choreography as an attempt to get the audience to “see the music.” (Croce 2009, p. 37) Obviously, he did not mean to imply any simplistic, one-to-one correspondence between bodily movements and musical sounds. Nonetheless, something about the rhythmic interweaving of sounds can be matched (represented) by the interweaving patterns that moving bodies make for sight. I think language represents reality in a similar way.

Does it make sense to say that there are musics beyond dance? Beyond being illuminated by dance or even perfectly satisfied by it? I doubt it. But is that not exactly what people are saying when they claim to have experiences beyond words? In what follows, I want to argue that the powers we readily concede to language in representing ordinary life, apply equally well to life's rare and dramatic moments. Just as there is no music that cannot be perfectly satisfied by a dance, so too, there are words perfect for every moment.

This can be affirmed, I think, without implying that any sentence, or collection of them, exhausts the moment's possibilities, or is its moment's definitive truth. There is obviously no one "true" way to dance a given piece of music. The number of ways is limited only by a choreographer's creativity. In 1941, Balanchine choreographed Stravinsky's "Violin Concerto" in a dance he called "Balustrade." Stravinsky described it as "perfectly complementary to and coordinated with the dialogues of the music." (Stravinsky 1963, p. 80) In 1972, Balanchine choreographed the exact same music quite differently as "Stravinsky's Violin Concerto." Two very different dances can give sight to the same music. Yet, this does not imply that any haphazard way of moving the body would count as dancing to the music. There are clearly dances that obscure the music or miss its mark entirely. The same holds for a wording's representation of reality.

I now want to offer three theoretical considerations in support of my claim that everything can be verbally represented, that nothing is inherently ineffable. The first two have to do with the infinite nature of language itself, the third with the nature of human experience. I then want to draw some ethical implications from the fact of language's inexhaustibility.

## II. THE INFINITY OF LANGUAGE

Language is infinite in at least two ways. The first is that advocated by the linguist Noam Chomsky. He has argued that "discrete infinity" is one of the most fundamental characteristics of human language and, indeed, the one that clearly distinguishes it from the forms of communication used by other animals.

[T]he most elementary property of the language faculty is the property of discrete infinity; you have six-word sentences, seven-word sentences, but you don't have six-and-a-half-word sentences. Furthermore, there is no limit; you can have ten-word sentences, twenty-word sentences and so on indefinitely. That is the property of discrete infinity. This property is virtually unknown in



the biological world. There are plenty of continuous systems, plenty of finite systems but try to find a system of discrete infinity. The only other one that anybody knows is the arithmetic capacity, which could well be some offshoot of the language faculty. (Chomsky 2001, pp. 51-52)

To Chomsky, language is a system comprised of a finite number of elements (i.e., words) along with grammatical rules for combining them in an infinite number of meaningful ways. Chomsky argues that essential to the syntactical rules of human language is the element of recursion, that is, the ability to embed similar combinations within each other in a hierarchical order. For example, consider the following verse from a traditional childhood song: “I know an old lady who swallowed a dog, to catch the cat, to catch the bird, to catch the spider – that wiggled and jiggled and tickled inside her.” Certainly, part of the song’s delight is the way in which even children get caught up in the playful infinity of its recursive possibilities. The only way to stop the song is to have one of the old lady’s larger meals (usually a horse, of course) arbitrarily kill her off. Because of recursion, human language is a completely open-ended system. Its syntactical rules are such that they can generate from a finite number of word units an infinite number of meanings. This ability of language clearly gives it, as Chomsky *et al* insist, a “limitless expressive power, captured by the notion of discrete infinity.” (Hauser 2002, p. 1576)

I simply want to take Chomsky’s point about the nature of language and apply it to the question of its scope. If language has “discrete infinity,” then it has “limitless expressive power,” which means that, in theory, nothing can be outside its purview. If our words are not matching the experience we want to express, the problem must be ours and not that of words themselves.

In this regard, it is interesting to compare the discrete infinity of language with that of numbers. We do not normally speak of there being quantities beyond numbers, beyond what numbers can handle. Although we do use the term “innumerable” in relation to quantities, it is not really comparable to the meaning of “ineffable” in relation to language. When we say, for example, that the stars in the heavens are innumerable, we do not mean that numbers are inapplicable to the quantity of stars, or that numbers are not the kinds of things appropriate to quantities of stars, or even that there are not numbers big enough for that quantity. Rather, we mean that the task of determining what the number actually is, is outside the abilities of the one doing the counting. In other words, with the discrete infinity of numbers, there is no limitation inherent in the system itself, but only in the resources of its users. Should not the same be said of the infinity of language?

Of course, language is not itself a machine that automatically generates satisfactory representations. The tool may be infinite, but the user usually is not. The criterion for determining the right number is pretty straightforward, but not so the right language. Determining the right number is a matter of rote, whereas the right language usually involves some measure of creativity. When are our words the right ones? What exactly is it that we can expect of a verbal representation? Obviously, we do not expect words to be identical with what they represent. We do not expect the word "salt" to flavor our meat, for example, or appear in crystalline form. But if someone says the meat is too salty, and their words are worth their salt, we expect to know what the meat will taste like. There is, however, no easy formula for what rightness looks like in language. Proust can be said to have needed the entirety of *In Search of Lost Time* to catch the precise taste of that tea in which he had dipped a morsel of Madeline cake! Yet, Basho needed only seventeen syllables to catch his monk's quiet morning sip of that same beverage.

When we come face-to-face with the unsettling powers of nature or a searing personal tragedy, our own deficiencies as language users can be painfully evident. But in assessing the capabilities of language itself, it seems important to look at the best creative practices of humanity as a whole and not our own personal resources. How often has some poet taken an agony we thought to be beyond words and put it in all its nuanced form before us? How often have we said of some story: "Yes, that's it; that's exactly what I was feeling." In a similar vein, those who once thought their personal catastrophe inexpressible sometimes find in trauma support groups the right words to make healing possible. To be fair to the possibilities of words, it is important to acknowledge not just those psychological moments when we felt frustrated by them, but also those moments in art or life when they seemed right on the money. Such psychological moments are not, in and of themselves, arguments for the infinity of language's power, but they can provide an emotional balance to our experience of its limitations.

A second way in which language is infinite is presented by the philosopher, Jacques Derrida. While he would not deny Chomsky's claim that language can generate an infinity of possible sentences, he finds infinity in a different aspect of language.

For Derrida, meaning is not a fixed property of individual words (signifiers). Instead, it is a relational property that depends upon the context in which a signifier functions and its interplay with other signifiers in the

system. Since the number of contexts is infinite, the number of meanings is too.

Every sign, linguistic or non linguistic, spoken or written (in the usual sense of this opposition), as a small or large unity, can be *cited*, put between quotation marks; thereby it can break with every given context, and engender infinitely new contexts in an absolutely nonsaturable fashion. This does not suppose that the mark is valid outside its context, but on the contrary that there are only contexts without any center of absolute anchoring. (Derrida 1982, p. 320)

Derrida's point can be exemplified by both the simplest elements of a language and the vastness of its literature. The letters in any word, for example, have meaning only in the context of other letters. Thus, if one starts with the letter "o", its meanings change as its relationships to other letters change: "to," "of," "ton," "off," "tone" and so on. The meaning is not determined until the relations are. (Derrida 1981, pp. 129-130) This is equally true, of course, with the relations between words in a sentence. What the word "break" means in a sentence like "John went to Florida for his break" is made clear only in the context of the other words. So, a different collection of words, for example, "John's break will take months to heal," yields a different meaning for the same word. But, of course, this contextual coloring is also true of sentences in a paragraph, paragraphs in a novel, novels in an *oeuvre*, *oeuvres* in an era and so on. "Traces" (Derrida 1974, p. 65) of every word's past (and future) contexts are hovering around any given usage. Like Heraclitus' river, you cannot step into the same word twice. Each word is a portal on an infinity of traces.

Let me use another example: the word "duck." We tend to think that a word's meaning is anchored in the word itself and that a dictionary can provide us with this basic information. Even if the word has more than one meaning, if it is a noun or a verb, this can be handled by the dictionary as well. Derrida argues, however, that any actual meaning, any meaning actually communicated, will depend on the context (time, place and audience) in which it occurs. Where the word is physically placed, for example, whether it is on a stairway or a cage or a menu, obviously affects its meaning. Imagine the word placed under a feather in a museum or on a taxidermist's price list. Even a minimal amount of creativity or concrete everyday usage can generate contexts that would endlessly stretch the meanings beyond those suggested by the dictionary.

If the nuances of a simple word like "duck" stretch out endlessly, imagine the rich scope of an historically complex word like "Jesus." What started as the name of an historical figure has become a rich mythological sym-

bol surrounded by hundreds of flavoring stories. What was once a prayer can now be a cry of sexual ecstasy or petty anger. The reach of words is as inexhaustible as the contexts in which they can be placed.

Unlike Chomsky, Derrida does not view the infinity of language as a mere potency, but as something already present in any actual use of language. Classical theory tended to see language as a kind of mirror held up to reality. But the mirror always seemed to fail because there were nuances of the reality that the words did not capture. In Derrida's hands, however, this failure becomes a strength. It is precisely because language cannot "totalize" anything, that its meanings become infinite.

Totalization can be judged impossible in the classical style: one then refers to the empirical endeavor of a subject or of a finite discourse in a vain and breathless quest of an infinite richness which it can never master. There is too much, more than one can say. But nontotalization can also be determined in another way: not from the standpoint of the concept of finitude as assigning us to an empirical view, but from the standpoint of the concept of *freeplay*. If totalization no longer has any meaning, it is not because the infinity of a field cannot be covered by a finite glance or a finite discourse, but because the nature of the field – that is, language and a finite language – excludes totalization. This field is in fact that of *freeplay*, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions in the closure of a finite ensemble. (Derrida 1993, p. 236)

In other words, there is no way to close off, to stop or be satisfied with, (to "totalize") the meaning of a word. This inability leaves some language users frustrated because there are always experiences that they can not precisely nail down with words, experiences that seem "more than words can say." Yet, Derrida argues, if we can just renounce such fixating attempts at totalization and instead let words play freely with their contexts, we will find an infinity in the midst of every finite sentence. In other words, if we avoid a single restrictive meaning to the words before us, they might very well include the "more" that we want them to say.

Let me use a metaphor from Yeats to illustrate the kind of infinity Derrida is talking about. In his poem, "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," Yeats focuses on the chaos caused by the Anglo-Irish War. Since the horrors of war are often claimed to be beyond words, his efforts are revealing.

Now days are dragon-ridden, the nightmare  
Rides upon sleep: a drunken soldiery  
Can leave the mother, murdered at her door,  
To crawl in her own blood, and go scot-free;  
The night can sweat with terror as before  
We pieced our thoughts into philosophy,

And planned to bring the world under a rule,  
 Who are but weasels fighting in a hole.  
 (Yeats 1962, p. 109)

The brutal events that Yeats recounts (a drunken soldiery, an innocent victim, the failure of a legal system) are not unique to 1919; they would be present in any war and multiplied many times over. Numerous as well would be the intellectual efforts to make sense of human history (“piece our thoughts into philosophy”) and to establish a universally fair legal system (“bring the world under a rule”). Because we humans see our violence as perpetrated in the service of ideals and values, we imagine it to have a nobility far beyond anything that animals could muster. Yet, for all our aspirations and sophisticated weaponry, Yeats finds our violence to rise no higher than that of “weasels fighting in a hole.” This judgment by metaphor is delivered with a contempt that is especially chilling. It is also, I want to argue, especially “right” for the way war banalizes brutality, “right” for what war reveals about human nature, “right” for the ultimately venal character of military ambition. But this rightness holds only as long as we avoid locking the image into one specific meaning, only as long as we do not “totalize” it, but let it hang loose and play with its traces and contexts. Notice how richly the single sneaky word “weasel” resonates in this regard. Metaphors are not like mirrors fixating reality, but like dances performed to its music

By using as my example a metaphor from a master wordsmith like Yeats, I do not mean to imply that the right words are found only in the mouths of great poets. Slang and popular culture can be equally “right.” A metaphor like “pissed off,” for example, seems a perfect image for a particular kind of frustrated anger. Nor do I want to imply that creative metaphor is the only way to speak a deep emotion rightly. Sometimes a simple account in a poignant context can be achingly adequate to the hurt of a tragic situation. Words can be right in many ways.

As has been noted, there is a longstanding tradition that finds in the infinity of god the paradigm instance of a reality beyond words. In arguing for the infinity of language, Chomsky and Derrida seem to turn this tradition on its head by giving language itself a property usually reserved for divinity. Perhaps, however, their strategy is not as revolutionary as it at first seems. At the beginning of his gospel, John clearly and forcefully identifies god with language: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1) Such an identity, taken seriously, should make even a religious person wary about any quick conclusions regarding the limitations of language.

### III. THE LINGUISTIC NATURE OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE

When people claim that there are experiences beyond words, they are usually utilizing a receptive model of perception and experience. They imagine that the person without language sees the same world, the same tree in a field, for example, that the person with language sees. They imagine that the only difference is that the person with language has the value-added ability to give names to the tree and the field. Names enable her to convey information about the tree and the field to others without actually having them in front of her. It is on the basis of this model of language that they then go on to claim that humans sometimes receive experiences which have no words adequate to them.

Michel Foucault is one of several thinkers who argue against this purely receptive model of experience. In "The Discourse on Language," he cautions that

we should not imagine that the world presents us with a legible face, leaving us merely to decipher it; it does not work hand in glove with what we already know; there is no prediscursive fate disposing the world in our favor. We must conceive discourse as a violence that we do to things, or, at all events, as a practice we impose upon them. (Foucault 1972, p. 229)

We might think, for example, that racial diversity would be present in any neutral observation of the human species, that the world "presents us with" a certain number of clearly discernable ("legible") racial types and that these types pre-exist any verbal schema for their organization. But Foucauldian histories ("genealogies") of the concept of race demonstrate that the opposite is true. (McWhorter 2004, pp. 38-62) The experience of race seems to be more a result of the schema than a cause of it. In other words, we see humanity as black and white only if we are wearing racial glasses, only if we are embedded in a language that utilizes racial categories. Furthermore, these categories evolve not from some neutral reception of the world, but as an exercise of power which one social group uses to validate its dominance over others. Thus, Enlightenment Europeans "invent" the concept of race as a way of justifying their enslavement of other humans at the very time they are proclaiming the dignity of every human being in their own political systems. Humans do not first have experiences and then find appropriate words to describe them; rather, they only have experiences insofar as they are already given shape by words. For Foucault, the very concept of a nonlinguistic or "prediscursive" experience is deeply problematic.

Foucault is willing to agree with Chomsky and Derrida that, in the abstract, there are “infinite resources available for the creation of discourse.” (Foucault 1972, p. 224) However, in practice, these resources “are nonetheless principles of constraint and it is probably impossible to appreciate their positive, multiplicatory role without first taking into consideration their restrictive, constraining role.” (Foucault 1972, p. 224) Yes, language is a “positive, multiplicatory” revelation of the world, but it is first of all “a violence” that we do to it.

Much of Foucault’s work is an analysis of the concrete and pervasive ways that a given historical discourse creates an experiencing subject who, in turn, proceeds to do violence to reality by constructing experience according to the dictates of that discourse.

For Foucault, the Enlightenment vision of the individual subject as a free and transcendent user of the instrument of language is no longer tenable. Rather, the human subject is constituted and controlled by language (discourse) and the matrices of power inherent in it.

I think Foucault’s work on the constitutive nature of discourse highlights another difficulty with claiming that there are experiences beyond words: human experience itself is inherently linguistic. Once this is understood, it becomes problematic, even contradictory, to talk about experiences to which words do not apply. Words are what make human experience possible. Human experiences come to us linguistically packaged. Since they are made out of words, they can hardly be said to be beyond them.

Some have taken Foucault’s position on the constitutive power of discourse to imply a linguistic determinism which leaves the speaker without any real sense of agency. This begets a despair about the use of language quite opposite to my own ethical intentions and, I think, Foucault’s as well. Insisting on the discursive construction of all experience need not exclude the possibility of creative expression regarding it.

Michel de Certeau’s work is a helpful demonstration of this. While he acknowledges the disciplinary grip that the forms of discourse have on society, he is adept at demonstrating various modes of resistance to this grip, at demonstrating “the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong.” (Certeau 1984, p. xvii) This resistance is performed not just by heroic poets, but by ordinary people in the practice of everyday life. They resist not by overthrowing the disciplinary matrices of power altogether, but by utilizing them for their own ends. Language use is his primary model for such resistance.

In the technologically constructed, written, and functionalized space in which consumers move about, their trajectories form unforeseeable sentences, partly

unreadable paths across a space. Although they are composed with the vocabularies of established languages, . . . the trajectories trace out the ruses of other interests and desires that are neither determined nor captured by the systems in which they develop. (Certeau 1984, p. xviii)

Certeau's treatment of "Mystic Speech" is an intriguing analysis of such a resistance process. When mystics speak about their experience, Certeau finds a discursive structuring of their experience but also creative strategies for utilizing that structure for their own ends. His prime analysis focuses on a group of sixteenth and seventeenth century texts which were labeled "mystic" and proliferated at the dawn of modernity. Fortunately, many mystics, while proclaiming their experiences to be beyond words, also produced a great quantity of words about them. Certeau's reading of their texts is, I think, supportive of my own claims against ineffability.

He makes clear from the beginning that he is not interested in finding behind the mystic texts "an ineffability that could be twisted to any end, a 'night in which all cats are black.'" (Certeau 1986, p. 82) He notes that both the geographical locations where the texts were produced and the social status of their authors had been "marginalized by progress." (Certeau 1986, p. 84) At the very time when the new discourse of science was displacing longstanding religious structures, those displaced were at work creating an alternative discourse. He argues that the mystics, even while claiming the ineffability of their experience, were far from despairing of language's power regarding it. Quite the contrary: "Mysticism is the anti-Babel. It is the search for a common language after language has been shattered. It is an invention of a 'language of the angels' because that of man has been disseminated." (Certeau 1986, p. 88)

As one example of this invention, Certeau examines "the standard unit of mystic speech," a linguistic device he calls "the cleft unit." (Certeau 1992, p. 144) Examples of this device would be contradictory tropes like "cruel repose," "silent music," "dark light" and "blissful wound." (Ahearne 1995, p. 108) What such phrases do, Certeau claims, is jar the hearer from her naïve faith in the transparency of language, her faith that language directly pictures reality. When this faith is undermined, the reader is forced to look at the signs themselves rather than at what they represent. Since the two represented (signified) realities – cruelty and repose, for example – are incompatible, the reader's attention is directed away from the referents of those words and onto the words themselves. Now, instead of things in the world, the reader sees "wounded words" whose incompatibility creates a kind of "cleft" or emptiness between them. (Certeau 1992, p. 144)



These wounded words, however, do not depict the failure of all language, but only its rigidly designational form. It is in the very midst of exposing that failure that the mystic's meaning happens. "What must be said cannot be said except by a shattering of the word." (Certeau 1992, p. 144) In other words, what the mystic wants to say, gets said, but its meaning happens in the practice of the sentence rather than its designation. In the very act of shattering the old discourse, the speaker is generating an alternative kind of language usage. "An operation is substituted for the Name." (Certeau 1992, p. 150) This operational usage of language does not refer the reader to an object in the world, but envelopes her in a mode of experience. This experience turns out to be the very one the mystic is struggling to convey.

The mystic's meaning is, as it were, resurrected from the wounded words. In this manner, the central mystery at the heart of the Christian experience, the mystery of life pulled from the cleft of death, the mystery of absolute fullness inherent in the hole of absence, is figured and enacted in the linguistic practices of the mystics. As the popularity of their texts in the early modern period makes clear, even though the mystics explicitly denied that words were adequate to their experience of the divine, their "paradoxical games" demonstrated something different. "They did not 'express' an experience because they were themselves that experience." (Certeau 1992, p. 147) Thus, by "*playing* with the mother tongue" (Certeau 1992, p. 147), the wounded words of the mystics proved adequate even to divine experiences.

Foucault and Certeau are right to call attention to the thoroughly discursive nature of human experience. How could human experiences, even mystic ones, be beyond language, when they are made possible by it? In his poem, "Men Made Out of Words," Wallace Stevens artistically echoes this basic theoretical point. (Stephens 1967, pp. 281-282)

Stevens begins his poem by asking us to imagine where we humans would be, what our experience would be like, without words. Like the mystics, Stevens has to "play" with the mother tongue a bit to come up with his answer. Without words we would be, he claims, "Castratos of moon mash." "Castratos" would seem to be the plural of the word "castrato," which means a boy who has been castrated to preserve his singing voice. But Stevens surely knows that the correct plural of castrato is castrati, not castratos. Thus, he starts his answer by breaking the rules of language and using an illicit, "broken" word. Next is his use of the phrase, "moon mash." We understand the two individual words, but their union is odd. Is "moon mash," mash made out of moonlight? Or mash made in moonlight? Or by

moonlight? Perhaps it is some form of moonshine? The two words seem to form some kind of “cleft unit” in Certeau’s sense. Is “moon mash” the song that wordless castrati would sing? Are “castratos” what is left when moon mash, whatever it is, is castrated? The four words leave us with a tantalizing confusion of meanings that conveys rather well, I think, what the experience of wordlessness might be like, managing thereby to prove that even wordlessness itself is not ineffable.

#### IV. INEFFABILITY AND ETHICS

Of every idle word men speak, they shall give account on the day of judgment.  
(Matt. 12:36)

There is something encouraging about seeing poets and mystics “play” with language. Using familiar words in ways we do not expect, they provide concrete proof of language’s infinite range. But my interest in arguing for the inexhaustibility of language is not merely theoretical. Like my old composition teacher, I want to discourage any retreat into the excuse of ineffability. But while his reasons were pedagogical, mine are ethical. I want to argue that human beings not only can articulate any experience, they have a duty to do so, have, as Martin Heidegger puts it, a “call to the word.” (Heidegger 1971, p. 66)

For Heidegger, human experience is as thoroughly linguistic as it is for Foucault. Like Foucault, Heidegger believes there is no such thing as prediscursive human experience. “Only where the word has been found is the thing a thing. Only thus *is* it. Accordingly we must stress as follows: no thing *is* where the word, that is, the name is lacking. The word alone gives being to the thing.” (Heidegger 1971, p. 62) In other words, the realities of the world achieve presence, happen as pieces of a whole, as “things” separated from a whole, only amidst language. This does not mean that a word is some omnipotent *fiat* which “gives being” by making an entity spring into existence from pure nothingness; rather, words “give being” by providing form and meaning where there previously was none. “[L]anguage alone brings what is, as something that is, into the Open for the first time.” (Heidegger 2001, p. 71).

However, while both Heidegger and Foucault see language as constitutive of human experience and make the history of words a crucial part of their philosophical arguments, their attitude toward words could not be more different. Foucault focuses on the negative and emphasizes the “vio-

lence” with which discourse structures experience. Heidegger, on the other hand, chooses positive, gentler words like “disclosing” (Heidegger 1962, p. 205) and “unconcealing” (Heidegger 1949, p. 306) to describe the activity of language. He emphasizes that language is a revelatory power more than it is a dominating one. While he shares Foucault’s critique of any one-to-one transparency between word and thing, he finds, on a deeper poetic level, enough revelatory power in language to famously describe it as “the house of Being.” (Heidegger 1971, p. 135)

The Being that language “houses,” however, is not a Kantian “thing-in-itself,” nor some mysterious prediscursive entity, but instead “the meaningful presence of that entity within the range of human experience.” (Sheehan 1998, p. 307) The tree that the word “tree” discloses is not the one that falls in the forest when no one is there to hear it, but the one embedded in the history of human interaction with it. In other words, the tree that language discloses is that sturdy green giver of shade, fire, masks and medicine around and under which human life happens. To understand the kind of disclosive work that language does, Heidegger continuously uses poets and poetry as examples. To him, poetry merely intensifies what ordinary language does in the course of its everyday practice. “Language itself is poetry in the essential sense.” (Heidegger 2001, p. 72)

Certainly, one of the things that poetry does is take an obscure object inhabiting the periphery of our experience and give it significance in such a way that it becomes front and center to us for the first time. When we experience a new metaphor, when, for example, Homer describes the sea as “wine dark,” we become aware of a connection between those two liquids (sea and wine) that went unrecognized before. A new color – wine dark – comes to exist in and for our eyes. Even more than this, something about the sea’s intoxicating powers, pleasures and dangers comes to exist in our minds. The effective poet does not manufacture metaphors from thin air, but from the recesses of language and our linguistically constituted experience. Homer’s saying that the sea is wine dark does not, as Foucault would have it, violently make it so, but rather discloses its “so-ness” for our savoring. “For appropriating Saying brings to light all present beings in terms of their properties – it lauds, that is, allows them into their own, their nature.” (Heidegger 1971, p. 135)

Heidegger’s claim then is that all human language discloses reality in a manner similar to that of poetic metaphor. This ability of language makes ethical demands on us. While poetic metaphors are creative, they are not arbitrary. They can be as embarrassingly inept, as they can be gloriously apt. For this reason, Heidegger argues that a certain careful attention,

especially to language itself, is the necessary groundwork for all human speaking.

Mortals speak insofar as they listen. . . . This speaking that listens and accepts is responding. . . . Mortals speak by responding to language in a twofold way, receiving and replying. (Heidegger 1971, pp. 206-207)

In its essence, human language is neither a denotative tagging of pre-discursive experience, nor an *ex nihilo* construction of it. In language, word and thing, expression and intuition, are equiprimordial; they arise together and are intertwined like music and movement in an improvisational jazz dance. In such a performance, the musicians are as attuned to the dancer as she is to their music. It is precisely their attention to each other that creates, mutually, the work of art. So it is with word and thing. Human speech, if it is to avoid being “idle talk,” (Heidegger 1962, p. 211) must involve a level of fundamental attention and responsibility, a very active “letting be” of things. (Heidegger 1949, p. 306)

I want to extend Heidegger’s analysis of our ethical responsibilities to language to include a resistance to any and all ineffability claims.

No doubt, human language evolved, just as did the dance of the honey bee, to serve a very practical communicative purpose. No doubt too, the bulk of our daily word count serves pretty much the same purpose as the honey bee’s waggle. However, our distinctively human use of words is not as practical communication, but as fundamental poetry, as a creation of a world and its meanings. Stories seem at least as old as the campfires around which they were told. But as humans, we tell our day to those who care about it, not just to provide them with the practical details of our hunt, but the felt tone of its adventure. It is this telling, this saying, that is our distinction.

To become what one is, to be true to one’s distinction, is among the oldest of ethical mandates. If poetic words are our distinction, then at no point are we more ourselves than when we are immersed in them. “In order to be who we are, we human beings remain committed to and within the being of language.” (Heidegger 1971, p. 134) This means that it is not only our poets who are called to do words’ work, but all of us who share in the human distinction.

As humans, we are not self-contained units which could be plopped down in any venue. Rather, as Heidegger famously argued, we are “beings-in-the-world,” inextricable from our experiential engagement with it. (Heidegger 1962, pp. 78-90) But the world is as inextricable from us as we are from it. The world and its things depend on us for their presence and,

as we have seen, this can happen only in language. “The word alone gives being to the thing.” (Heidegger 1971, p. 62) This dependence should not be taken to mean that, in some Hegelian sense, things are destined for consciousness. Yet, their “appearance” does rise or fall with us; they can perform their existence only on our stage. To use a choreographic analogy one last time: it is not as if music (reality) *must* be danced to, or was made to be danced to; but it does seem to “shine” (Heidegger 1971, p. 47) when it is danced to, to be more translucent and more splendid in that union. Since the world is a correlate of human language, we all carry it on our shoulders (on our tongues) and should, like Atlas, feel its weight. Any responsibility to be ourselves implies a responsibility to the world. This dual obligation is best understood as an obligation to language.

Now, the most basic duty of those who have human language is to use it, and to use it not just to get by, but to let one’s experience be, to let it have its shine in the sun. The texture of the world depends on us speaking it. And if the world is to be sustained in all its fullness, it is precisely those experiences not already fixed in cliché, that most need saying. While this duty weighs heavier on those who have special talents or have honed their skills on the heights and history of literature, it remains the duty of all who gather communally around whatever campfires there are in today’s digital world. Heidegger himself would probably be suspicious of the avid blogger and find in her a tendency to idle talk, but there is something about her determination to leave nothing unsaid that he could not fail to cherish.

So, I argue, we have a duty to words, a call to language. Any recourse to ineffability is an evasion of that call, a ploy to escape our distinctive task of wording the experiences that move us. The world and its things, the language which brings them to presence, the community which both creates language and is nourished by it, are all owed more. Nothing is ineffable.

## CONCLUSION

I would like to bring this reflection to closure with the example of Dante. He was, arguably, the boldest of human wordsmiths. His *Divine Comedy* is, at its heart, a frontal attack on ineffability. Surely, if anything is beyond words, it is the hell of god’s justice and the heights of god’s heaven. Even Dante himself twice takes refuge in the word “*ineffabile*” as he attempts to describe what he is experiencing in *The Paradiso*. (X, 3; XXVII,7) Nevertheless, he persists in his task of speaking the very things he has called ineffable.

In the final canto of his *Comedy*, in the act of describing how much he has already forgotten of his vision of the universe translucent in the face of god, Dante creates – almost off-handedly – a rather remarkable metaphor:

My memory of that moment is more lost  
 Than five and twenty centuries make dim that enterprise  
 when, in wonder, Neptune at the *Argo's* shadow stared.  
 (Alighieri 2008, p. 915)

What this metaphor is intended to illuminate has long been the subject of debate, (Alighieri 2007, pp. 837-838) but I am going to avoid that issue entirely and, following the lead of Joan Acocella, (Acocella 2007, p. 130) focus only on the image itself, on Neptune's sight of the *Argo's* shadow.

Any understanding of this image must begin with Neptune (Poseidon) himself. He was Zeus' brother, the volatile god not only of the sea, but of earthquakes and horses as well. A rich history of poems, sculpture and temples has been created in efforts to give meaning to this name. Suffice it here to note that Neptune had hopes that his watery environment would one day be inhabited by those god-revering humans who seemed so tied to the solid ground under their feet. (Alighieri 2007, p. 837)

Next we must know something of the *Argo*. To the Greeks, it was a history creating vessel, the first warship capable of handling the high seas. The boat itself was built by Argus under the guidance of Athena. Since it was reputed to have had fifty oars, its sailing was a complex social achievement. It included in its prow, oak from the Oracle at Dordona. This meant that it was a ship with the ability both of speaking and prophesying.

Finally, in order to begin an understanding of Dante's image, some acquaintance with the ship's captain, Jason, is necessary. He was the early Greek hero who assembled the community of men (Argonauts) capable of handling this powerful ship. His journey to obtain the Golden Fleece and claim his rightful place on the throne of Thessaly was "the first important event in the Greek portion of universal history." (Alighieri 2008, p. 838) His accomplishment highlights not just bravery in the face of natural and political dangers, but organizational leadership and creativity as well.

Once some grasp of these three elements is in place, we can begin to imagine that shadowy shaft of shimmering darkness gliding through the liquid blue of Neptune's realm. The "Earth-Shaker" would not only be astonished by the bravery it entailed, but disturbed by its audacity and encouraged by its future. Truly, an epoch-making moment that is now only a dim human memory.

But notice that Dante, like Jason, is boldly encroaching on divine territory – and in that frailest of crafts: words. Granted, his explicit intent is to compare how little he remembers of his vision of god’s triunity with how little humanity remembers of its foundational sea voyage, yet – as Acocella suggests (Acocella 2007, p. 131) – there is another comparison obvious in this image and that is between Neptune’s amazement at Jason’s performance and the Trinity’s amazement at Dante’s performance. On the one hand, Dante is painfully aware of his own limitations, of the gap between god’s inexhaustibility and his own inflexible bones. But on the other hand, he has felt in his own pen the inexhaustibility of his craft and cannot help but wonder what awe Infinity itself feels staring into such a mirror.

Nothing is ineffable.

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**WHY THINKING IN FAITH?  
A REAPPRAISAL OF EDITH STEIN'S VIEW OF REASON**

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**Abstract.** This paper intends to question the conventional wisdom that philosophy should limit its endeavours to the horizon of modern transcendentalism, thus rejecting the presuppositions of faith. By reappraising Edith Stein's views of faith and reason, which are also shared by the magisterial document of John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, an argument for the possibility of "thinking in faith" is put forward. But why would it be important nowadays to engage in rational research in philosophy in a quest for truth which also draws its inspiration from faith? First of all, as I shall argue, because the two great modern transcendental projects, namely the Kantian and the Husserlian one, which were both in tune with Spinoza's project to liberate philosophical reason from theology, have failed. Secondly, because "faith" (*fides*) is not based on "irrational sentiments", but is "intellectual understanding", as Edith Stein argues. Third, because the natural light of the created intellect is, as was shown by St. Thomas Aquinas, a participated likeness of the supernatural light of the uncreated divine intellect. Therefore, even the natural philosopher gets their own light from the eternal Truth of faith. Finally, by following another Thomistic stance, one may argue that the end of human life is an intelligible one: the contemplation of God. In order to attain this end, the human being should endeavour to attain as much as is possible, in an intelligible way, the thing desired. Even if the philosophical inquiry has its own limits, it may however sustain such progress towards the end of human life.

**DISLOYAL REASON: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

What can be the significance of *thinking in faith* today, in an era in which all theoretical thinking that neglects immediate usefulness is seen as quasi-superfluous, and in which, on the other hand, Christian faith and religious faith in general are widely associated with irrationalism and mythology?

The current lack of prestige of both philosophy and faith seems to be caused by the fact that, unlike *liberty* and *justice*, values recognized by

contemporary society, the value of *truth* is seriously undermined by the legitimacy of many subjective creeds, belief-systems and ideologies. In the postmodern culture of today, pervaded by relativism as it is, rational thinking is hardly seen as “a quest for truth”. As for faith, it is usually perceived as a mere subjective phenomenon, a human relation with a comforting deity who, if at all existent, is fitted to the emotional and moral sensibility of each religious believer. This mentality is shaped by the pragmatist conception of truth and religion which emphasizes only the practical utility of an opportune “truth” and the utility of “religious experience” for satisfying human emotional needs.

However, in all historical times there were philosophers who believed that knowledge is an end in itself and that by theoretical contemplation the mind can approach the truth that is proper to *being* (*to on, esse*), that is, to the underlying reality which is beyond mere appearance. Thales, Parmenides, Anaxagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Boethius, St. Anselm of Canterbury, St. Thomas Aquinas, Edmund Husserl, Edith Stein – all of them shared, although in different ways, this belief in the cognitive capacity of human reason.

On the other hand, the objectivity of faith and the value of the light of faith for human knowledge and for scientific research were recognized by great scientists such as Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, Newton, and others. For discovering *what really is* in nature and in the physical universe, the scientist might have not only an inquisitive mind, but also “a religious attitude” ennobled by the humility of faith. Even those scientists who believed in a pantheistic deity, like Einstein for example, reasserted at least “the God of philosophers” who besides Spinoza’s rationalist God, is also the Greek *logos* who created the mysterious harmony of the physical universe – the same *logos* taken by early Christian theology as conveying much of the Christian understanding of God, in the pagan world.

Yet, in early modernity it was precisely a rationalist believer in “the God of philosophers” like Spinoza who proposed, in his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670), a sharp separation of “faith from Philosophy” (Spinoza 1925, pp.173-174). In Spinoza’s challenging view, faith has to do only with a piety that is equated with irrationalism and superstition and with an obedience grounded on fear, whereas “reason is the domain of truth and wisdom” (Spinoza 1925, p. 184). In reducing faith to credulity and piety to bigotry, Spinoza adopted something of the critique of religion made by Epicurus, according to which the worship of gods originated in fear and ignorance, whereas only philosophy and reason may lead to wisdom (*sapientia*) and, thus, to a happy and perfect life, in harmony with nature. In

the 17th century, Hobbes shared this view of religious faith. Spinoza recognized, however, that religion can be useful to society, though not because it is truthful, but because it may cause people to behave well (Spinoza 1925, p. 176). Here Spinoza is rather close to Machiavelli's case for a politically established religion that can maintain civic virtue (see Machiavelli 1998, pp. 139-152).

So, according to Spinoza's influential view, the subjectivism and irrationalism of faith would be opposed to the wisdom acquired by a reason liberated from theology. Thus, only an autonomous reason may possess the truth, whereas theology has to do only with obedience and action, since many of its tenets have not "even a shadow of the truth" (Spinoza 1925, p. 176).

Over the last two centuries, the two great transcendental projects that aimed at founding the whole of knowledge only on the grounds of the immanent, created reason, that is the Kantian and the Husserlian transcendentalism, have failed. After following, in modernity, the path of the total autonomy of reason in relation to faith, as recommended by Spinoza, the subjective transcendental reason has proved its tragic deficiency. It has lost not only the view of its creator, who is the creator of the entire universe, but also the grounds of its own cognitive capacity. After Nietzsche and Heidegger, philosophical reason has led only to the confusion of relativism and to the hopelessness of nihilism. Since this process has seriously betrayed our inner demand to search for the truth, it now seems that only a philosophical thinking in faith may enlarge the dimensions of the limited philosophical rationality to which we have arrived in modernity.

The main question of this paper is, therefore, why would it be meaningful to resort nowadays to a philosophy which takes seriously the horizons of faith. To answer this query, I shall rely primarily on Edith Stein's understanding of knowledge, reason and faith and on Pope John Paul II's Catholic document, *Fides et ratio*.

#### FAITH, REASON AND TRUTH FOR EDITH STEIN

Edith Stein (St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross) (1891-1942) was a Jewish-German philosopher trained at Breslau and Göttingen. She was Husserl's student at Göttingen and became his assistant at Freiburg. In 1933, 12 years after her conversion to Christianity, she entered the Carmelite monastery in Köln. Later on, trying to protect her from the Holocaust, her superiors sent her to the Carmelite monastery in Echt (Holland), but in August 1942 she

was deported at Auschwitz-Birkenau and exterminated. She was canonized in 1998 and proclaimed co-patron saint of Europe in 1999, by Pope John Paul II.

Those who have tried to grasp the substance of her life agreed that this can be identified with her faithful *passion for truth*. For Edith Stein, the dignity of a human being consists in her being a *Wahrheitsucher* (one who is searching for the truth), which for her is synonymous with a *Gottsucher* (one who is searching for God) (see Paolinelli 2001, pp. 60-61; Palade 2008, pp. 89-91).

Edith Stein was converted to the Christian faith during the summer of 1921, while she was staying with her friends, the spouses Conrad-Martius, at their house in Bergzabern (Hedwig Conrad-Martius was also a philosopher and a disciple of Husserl's). The decisive moment of Edith Stein's conversion to Christianity apparently was her reading of the autobiography of St Teresa of Ávila, which she took „by chance” from the library of her friends. She suddenly discovered that the whole truth that she was seeking from her adolescence „was there”, in the relationship of faith of St. Teresa with Christ. ”The truth is here!”, she reportedly exclaimed after she finished reading the book.

After her conversion, although she honestly recognized the limits of the natural knowledge of philosophy and believed that the first and ultimate truth, i.e. the supernatural divine truth, is the object of faith rather than that of natural philosophy, she pursued her philosophical research. After entering the monastery, her superiors encouraged her to dedicate her spare time to work in order to continue her previous research. As an enclosed nun, Edith Stein wrote, *inter alia*, her large philosophical treatise on *being*, *Endliches und ewiges Sein (Finite and eternal being)* – a more elaborated version of her previous work *Akt und Potenz (Act and potentiality)* and *Kreuzeswissenschaft (Scientia Crucis)*, the phenomenology of the mystical theology of St. John of the Cross which was left unfinished when she was arrested, in August 1942.

Edith Stein believed that contemplation and prayer cannot deprive natural philosophy of its value. On the contrary, faith can throw a light – a supernatural one – on thinking. On the other hand, she believed that even the feeble light of the natural reason can prevent Christians from going astray and loosing themselves in darkness – in the darkness that is also present on the way of faith. Edith Stein thus found her additional Christian vocation, besides devoting herself to prayer and contemplation in the monastery, in cultivating a ”theocentric” philosophy, based on a ”supernatural reason” that is illuminated by faith.

Now, those who are familiar with Aquinas's views on faith and reason would not readily agree to this "mixture" between philosophy and theology. For St Thomas, "philosophical science" is "built up by human reason", whereas the "sacred doctrine [is] learned through revelation" (*The Summa Theologica* I, q. 1, a. 1.). So, there is no admixture between the knowledge of the truth by natural reason, which is natural philosophy, and the sacred doctrine based upon the Scriptures, which reveals truths that exceed human reason, and should be accepted by faith.

Nonetheless, Edith Stein, who had assimilated the writings of St. Thomas, does not question the legitimacy of the separate subjects of philosophy and theology and is not, on the other hand, interested in reconciling them. What she has in view is rather the original vocation of philosophy, as a desire for and a search for wisdom. Since after the Christian revelation wisdom has been identified with the person of Jesus of Nazareth, she believed that philosophical reflection should enlarge its horizons by regarding the truth communicated by revelation, though not in order to become a new theology, but to aim, with its own powers, at the sovereign and first truth that is God himself (*The Summa Theologica* I, q.16, a. 5). A "theocentric philosophy" is thus a rigorous rational quest for truth that has elevated its goal to the knowledge of God, that is to the final cause of reality and of human existence.

For Edith Stein, as for St. Thomas, faith is clearly distinguished from reason, and the light of faith is differentiated from the natural light of reason. But since both faith and reason aim at the knowledge of truth, they have, arguably, at least this common vocation for truth.

To understand better the closeness of faith and reason for Edith Stein, we should remember that she distinguished Christian faith (*fides*) from a "religion of sentiment". In 1925, she wrote in a letter to her friend, the philosopher Roman Ingarden (another former disciple of Husserl) that, far from being an irrational religion, Christianity deals with the question of truth (which also regards life and the heart) (Stein 1991, p. 168). In 1931, she pointed out in a conference that "faith is not an object of phantasy, or a pious sentiment, but is intellectual understanding (even if not rational penetration), adhesion of the will to the eternal truth" (Stein 1993, p. 196).<sup>1</sup>

Faith is thus seen by Edith Stein as directed to truth as to its object. She believes that faith has in common with knowledge (*Wissen*) and with

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<sup>1</sup> I am using here the German edition of *Edith Steins Werke* (Edith Stein's Works); the English translation of all relevant quotations is my own.

the intellectual vision (*Einsicht*) the certitude of a truth that is grasped by intellectual intuition. In this sense, faith is different from doubt or opinion, which lack such a certitude. But, in another sense, faith is different from a mere theoretical belief, because it involves a personal trust in one who is unchangeable and totally trustworthy. The truth of faith is, therefore, different from the truth of reason, because the former involves the whole being of the believer, and moves his will to the adhesion of faith, unlike the latter which is only partially convincing and may not move the will towards God. But, given this difference between faith and reason, and between the truth of faith and the truth of reason, how is it possible, again, to philosophize *in faith*?

#### THINKING IN FAITH

In her article "Der Intellekt und die Intellektuellen", originally published in 1931, Edith Stein points out the main characteristic of what could be understood by "thinking in faith". First, she describes the intellect as a divine gift that is necessary to us, in a way similar to St. Thomas, who sees the (active) intellect as a light that allows us to make intelligible the singular objects (Stein 1987, p. 116). For St. Thomas, as for Edith Stein, this light is "nothing else than a participated likeness of the uncreated light" (see *The Summa Theologica* I q. 84, a. 5). So, the natural light of the created intellect is a participated likeness of the supernatural light of the uncreated divine intellect.

But, as Edith Stein adds, the intellect should become aware of its own limits and gain, therefore, the virtue of humility. The prevailing tendency of intellectuals who rely only on the natural capacity of their intellect is to become self-assured and even presumptuous. But this attitude overshadows the real limits of the intellect. Nonetheless, it can be questioned and reversed when the natural intellect is confronted with the supreme and ultimate truths. Then, after seeing that our natural knowledge is usually only a fragmentary one (*Stückwerk*), the intellectual pride normally gets dissolved.

After gaining this awareness as to its own limits, there are, according to Edith Stein, two possibilities for the intellect: either it turns upside down in despair, or it recognizes with humility that the divine, inscrutable truth cannot be approached without the supplementary light that comes from faith, since faith can enhance the natural capacity of the intellect.

In Edith Stein's view, "the supreme and ultimate truths are not revealed by virtue of the human intellect alone" (Stein 1987, p. 116). On the other hand, the intellectual should not surrender, *qua* intellectual, since the sphere of the natural activity of the intellect has its own legitimacy. But he should perform his work "as the farmer cultivates his own land, which is good and useful, but is nevertheless confined within strict limits, like any other human work" (Stein 1987, pp. 117).

"Thinking in faith" is thus a human activity which may receive an inspiration from the light of faith, although it should not surpass the methodological boundaries of philosophy and turn into a theology. If the theses of the sacred doctrine are based on the theological principles, that is on the articles of faith, the arguments used by philosophy should be taken from the principles that are discovered by reason (*The Summa Theologica* I, q. 1, a. 8).

This autonomy of natural reason from theology has also been reasserted by the Encyclical *Fides et ratio* (1998). But John Paul II praises too the wise reason that stands before Revelation, by being opened towards the mystery of faith. This wise reason is the same as Edith Stein's humble reason, which receives an additional light from the truth of faith.

In 2008, when the tenth anniversary of the Encyclical *Fides et ratio* was celebrated, Pope Benedict XVI significantly encouraged a relaunching of philosophical studies in universities and schools. In his address to the participants at the Sixth European Symposium for university professors held in Rome in June 2008, he explicitly invited philosophers to assume a more courageous anthropological research that has in view the cultural context of modernity, and to conduct their reflection both on the real situation of the human being in our times and on ontology and metaphysics. He added that in order to *enlarge* the horizons of rationality, philosophical research should give up its rationalist self-sufficiency. Since in more recent philosophy some authors give credit to religion and, in particular, to Christianity, there are signs, as Pope Benedict stresses, that there is a sincere desire among contemporary philosophers to give up the old presumption of modern philosophy and move towards the mystery of religion (Benedict XVI 2008).

This new encounter of the horizon of philosophical research with that of theology was explicitly recommended ten years ago by *Fides et ratio* and was previously envisaged by Edith Stein. Without a humble recognition of its own limits and without a reverence for mystery, reason has proved its insufficiency, especially after the complete Kantian separation of philosophy from theology. From the Kantian epistemological modesty,

modern and contemporary philosophers (except for Hegel and the Hegelians, who took the train in the opposite direction by divinizing the human intelligence) have become increasingly sceptical, agnostic, pragmatist and relativist – with the ultimate result of adopting the postmodern official metaphysics of nihilism, since the answer given by Heidegger to the query *What is Metaphysics?* was an ontological agreement with the existence of a fundamental *nothingness*.

Furthermore, without a more widely shared belief in the objectivity of truth and without a quest for truth in natural philosophy even theology, the sacred doctrine based on divine revelation, may lose its human support. This philosophical indifference as regards the truth is quite harmful, since, without the support of natural reason, theology itself is often seen as sheer mythology.

But to tackle ultimate questions and embark on metaphysical research one needs a courage or a magnanimity that can be nourished only by faith. Such questions are usually left aside by contemporary analytic philosophy, on the one hand, as "too vague" to be grasped by our language and by continental philosophy, on the other hand, as contradicting the official metaphysical doctrine of *nothingness*. But, even if courage is required, a necessary precondition of such a metaphysical research is, as Edith Stein has emphasized, the virtue of humility.

#### THE VIRTUE OF HUMILITY

According to St. Thomas, the virtue of humility is part of modesty or temperance. Humility moderates the impetuosity of a passionate hope that is usually driven by pride: "Just as meekness suppresses the movement of anger, so does humility suppress the movement of hope, which is the movement of a spirit aiming at great things" (*The Summa Theologica* II-II, q. 161, a. 4).

As we have seen, without a magnanimous spirit that aims at great things, one cannot start metaphysical research. However, an immoderate spirit that "propels itself to find the supreme and ultimate truths" and relies only on its own powers conveys rather an inordinate desire for its own excellence, which is the very definition of pride (*The Summa Theologica* II-II, q. 162, a. 2). Pride has pushed modern philosophers to proclaim the self-sufficiency of reason, thus projecting on faith the suspicion of irrationality. And an immoderate courage of reason may lead not only to audacity, as Aristotle has shown in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, but also to the



myopia of human intelligence. The self-sufficient reason that ignores the mystery of faith could not safely approach the truths of metaphysics – it is rather tempted to confine itself to subjective truths, trying to pass them off for essential truths.

But if the human intellect is humble, it may receive in faith what could not be seized by the natural activity of the intellect. "The knowledge proper to faith does not destroy the mystery; it only reveals it more, showing how important it is for people's life" (John Paul II 1998, no. 13). The truth that the human intelligence may receive from faith is more than a simple "truth of reason". It is the truth that illuminates the entire human life, and, therefore, also the human intelligence, despite its "finiteness before the infinite mystery of God" (John Paul II 1998, no. 14).

That truth is in fact the ultimate and the universal truth – it is the fullness of the mystery of God that is concealed: "It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out" (*Proverbs* 25:2). The highest nobility of human beings thus consists in exploring the truth of God also with their reason, following the yearning desire for knowledge of the human heart (John Paul II 1998, no. 17).

The recognition of the fact that the ultimate truth searched for by reason is the mystery of God requires, again, humility and reverence. Otherwise, the search of reason may become immoderate and proud, yielding a discouragement which is but false humility, or a "grievous pride", as St. Augustine calls it. A reason that pretends to be humble by embracing absolute scepticism, agnosticism and relativism shows only a false self-abasement. True humility means, on the contrary, the correct attitude of reason before the mystery, described by Edith Stein as follows: "before the inscrutable truth it bows down in worship and humbly receives in faith what could not be seized by the natural activity of the intellect" (Stein 1987, p. 116), while not turning upside down in despair and surrender to scepticism.

"Thinking in faith" is thus possible, thanks to a true humility that is consistent with a magnanimous spirit. If faith is understood as a search for truth that is not simply *irrational*, but engages the whole human being, including her cognitive capacity, the desire for knowledge arising and fueled by faith may also stimulate the philosophical reason to approach eternal truths, as far as this is possible. Since the desire of the human heart for knowledge is universal, a philosophical reflection nourished by the mystery of faith would also be meaningful in our time, although it should not depart from the current real situation of men and women in our contemporary culture. A philosophical thinking in faith, and especially in the Christian faith, which is meant to be imparted to "all nations" (*Luke* 24:47), is, therefore,

worth engaging in nowadays for at least two reasons: because the human desire for knowledge is invariable and because the ultimate truth sought by the human heart is primarily the object of faith and religion.

### THE STRUGGLE WITH THE ANGEL AND THE FINALITY OF HUMAN THOUGHT

Two souls dwell, alas! in my breast.  
J. W. von Goethe

Faith may thus impel a Christian believer to try to answer by his natural reason the ultimate questions of human life and reality, that is, the most important metaphysical questions. Moreover, faith offers metaphysical intuitions and may inflame the desire to explore philosophical queries. In his treatise *Monologion*, the philosopher and theologian St. Anselm of Canterbury tries to *understand* by reason and natural theology not only how the existence of God can be argued for, but also which are the divine attributes, and even what is the divine essence (Anselm 1996). The same metaphysical questions about the essence of God and the divine attributes reappear in the meditations of St. Maria Faustina Kowalska, surprisingly enough, as she was a young Sister who only studied for a few years at an elementary school (Maria Faustina Kowalska 2005, 30). And perhaps St. Anselm himself, in spite of his philosophical learning, would not have formulated this query without his *Credo* and his Christian faith.

It seems that it is the human heart that is longing for God with a desire arising from faith that strongly wishes to know God in his very essence. Although the essence of God is unfathomable and incomprehensible by a created intellect, it is this mystery that provides the true finality of human thought.

This finality could only be reached, according to St. Thomas and to the doctrine of the Church, through the beatific vision of the blessed in heaven, who are made "deiform" (*The Summa Theologica* I, q. 12, a. 5). Nevertheless, in order to receive the "crown of justice" (2 *Timothy* 4:8) in heaven, human reason should have the courage to engage during the life on earth in a struggle with the angel (*Genesis*, 32:24-26). Since the end of human life is an intelligible one (*The Summa Theologica* II-I, q. 4, a.3), that is, the contemplation of the most desirable and supreme object of love, that is God Himself, the human being should endeavour even now to attain in an intelligible way the thing desired, as much as is possible. To receive the fi-

nal blessing that the angel gave to Jacob (*Genesis* 32, 29), the human mind should thus confront the ultimate questions related to God and to human existence, without losing sight of its finality and leaving the battlefield. The human intelligence should thus keep vivid those ultimate questions, unless it wants to fall prey to the pervasive pragmatism of our culture or to the ideologies and idolatries of our time.

Thinking in faith is thus the most important and perhaps the most difficult mission of philosophy today. It is the mission to preserve the finality of human thought, while engaging with true humility and courage in its own struggle with the angel, that is with the philosophical queries that start from the inner demands of our modern culture. Those questions should not be evaded, as often happens, but followed and raised to the light of an ontological and metaphysical reflection. If we consistently follow the way opened by the question "what is the finality of our modern human life?", even in an era of technology and global communication, we may ourselves arrive at metaphysical queries about the underlying principle of reality that unifies our goals and our complex experiences. While our answer might differ from St. Anselm's, we need to follow as well the ultimate intelligible end of our life. In addition, our own struggle with the angel requires us to discover some unexplored ways to approach the mystery of the eternal being and the mystery of human existence in the light of faith.

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**ALL-UNITY ACCORDING  
TO V. SOLOVIEV AND S. FRANK.  
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

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**Abstract.** In this article I will present and analyze the concept of all-unity of the two most famous Russian philosophers – Vladimir Soloviev (1853-1900) and Semyon Frank (1877-1958). As will be argued, the concept of all-unity is part of an old philosophical tradition. At the same time, it is an original idea of the Russian thought of the Silver Age (the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries).

SOLOVIEV'S CONCEPT: THE TWO-POLAR ABSOLUTE

Both Soloviev and Frank taught about the existence of a structure called all-unity which embraces all beings and guarantees their organic connection. Soloviev claimed to be the author of the Russian term *vseedinstvo* (“all-unity”)<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, in the history of philosophy we can find analogous expressions, i.e. in the thought of Nicholas of Cusa who defined God as *unus et omnia* and *omnia uniter*<sup>2</sup> or Schelling who used the term *Allheit und Einheit*.

We can find the roots of the concept of all-unity in Greek philosophy, in the pre-Socratics, and even deeper – in the old religious thought of China

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<sup>1</sup> Soloviev's Letter to S. A. Vengerov (1892.07.12) in: *Pis'ma Vladimira Sergejevicha Solovieva*, Brussels 1970, vol. II, p. 321. Frank also stressed that Soloviev enriched the Russian language with the word *vseedinstvo* (S. L. Frank, *Duchovnoe nasledije Vladimira Solovieva* in: D. K. Burlaka (ed.), *Vladimir Soloviev: pro et contra. Lichnost' i tvorcestvo Vladimira Solovieva v otsenke russkikh myslitelej i issledovatelej. Antologija*, Saint Petersburg 2002, vol. 2, p. 955).

<sup>2</sup> *De docta ignorantia*, I, XXIV in: Nicolai de Cusa, *Opera omnia*, Lipsiae 1932, vol. I, p. 48.

and India. Soloviev intentionally referred to the philosophical and religion tradition. In his first work entitled *The mythological process in the ancient paganism* (1873) he noticed that the ancient gods were understood as an expression of all-unity (το παν)<sup>3</sup>. In his later papers the Russian thinker used in this context Heraclitus' term *έν και παν* ("one and all")<sup>4</sup>. No doubt, Soloviev is not only an excellent metaphysician, but also a brilliant historian of philosophy.

Soloviev distinguishes all-unity (*vseedinstvo*) and all-one (*vseedinoe*) – properly the second and the first Absolute. The first Absolute is the Absolute *in se* which is "liberated" (according to the Latin word *absolutum*) from all beings and which is their fundament (*υποκειμενον*). It is so called the "positive potency". In Soloviev's opinion, the first Absolute is a *super-being*: *Superens* or *υπερόυσιος*<sup>5</sup>. He identifies the Absolute with God and in his „non-academic" works *La Sophia* and *The Philosophical Foundations of Integral Knowledge* denotes it by the Kabalistic notion *en-sof* ("non-something")<sup>6</sup>. Since the first Absolute is not "being", Soloviev called it "nothing". In the tractate *La Sophia* he introduced the term "non-being", which "had been used even by the orthodox theologians", also, in *Lectures on Godmanhood* he introduced the ancient notion *μη ον*<sup>7</sup>, but in *A Critique of Abstract Principles* he denied these definitions and replaced them by the term "nothing". This word does not express any "content" of the Absolute, but indicates its transcendental character. Hence we can find the elements of negative theology in Soloviev's works. For example, Plato,

<sup>3</sup> V. S. Soloviev, *Mifologicheskij protsess v drevnem yazychestve* in: *Polnoe sobranie sochinenij i pisem v dvadtsati tomakh* [PSS], Moscow 2000-2001, vol. 1, p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> V. S. Soloviev, *La Sophia* in: PSS, vol. 2, p. 90/91; *Filosofskie nachala tsel'nogo znaniya* in: PSS, vol. 2, p. 253; *Kritika otvlechennykh nachal* in: PSS, vol. III, p. 277. In the conclusion of *The Crisis of Western philosophy* Soloviev quoted the famous statement of Heraclitus: *συνάμειξ όλα και ουχ όλα, συμφερόμενον διαφερόμενον, συναδον διαδον, και εκ πάντων έν και εξ ένος πάντα* (*Krizis zapadnoj filosofiji (protiv pozitivistiv)*) in: PSS, vol. 1, p. 138). Cf. *Istoricheskije dela filosofiji* in: *Sobranie sochinenij Vladimira Sergejevicha Solovieva* [SS], Brussels 1966-1970, vol. II, p. 403: „All is one' is the first word of the [Indian] philosophy". Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads*, V, 8, 4; Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, 1. See S. Khoruzhij, *Idea vseedinstva ot Geraklita do Bakhtina* in: idem, *Posle pereryva. Puti russskoj filosofiji*, Saint Petersburg 1994, p. 32-66.

<sup>5</sup> V. S. Soloviev, *La Sophia*, p. 88/89.

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, p. 92/93; *Filosofskie nachala...*, p. 263. See K. Burmistrov, *Vladimir Soloviev i Kaballa. K postanovke problemy* in: M. A. Kolerov (ed.), *Issledovanija po istoriji russskoj mysli. Yezhegodnik za 1998 god*, Saint Petersburg 1998, p. 7-104.

<sup>7</sup> V. S. Soloviev, *La Sophia*, p. 88/89; *Chtenija o Bogochelovechestve* in: SS, vol. III, p. 135.

Plotinus, Proclus, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and Nicholas of Cusa<sup>8</sup> treated the Absolute as *ὑπερόν* and *ὑπερούσιος*, as a reality superior to essence (*ἐπέκεινα του οντος*).

At the same time, the transcendent God needs the world in order to express His nature. The first Absolute as a positive potency of being supposes the existence of the empirical world. Soloviev writes that “God is not satisfied with the eternal contemplation of ideal essences, (...) but by an act of His will He focuses on each of them (...) and establishes it as an independent being”<sup>9</sup>. “The absolute substance necessarily and eternally divides itself into two poles: one as the principle of absolute unity, affirmed as such, the principle of liberty towards any form, any manifestation and any being, and the other one as the principle or the productive form of the multiple beings and of the phenomenal forms”<sup>10</sup>.

In this way Soloviev describes the second Absolute which is the principle of all things. It is denoted – in contradistinction to “nothing” – by the term “all”, because besides the divine element it contains a material one (Plato’s *materia prima*). As a result, God is “nothing” and “all” – “nothing”, for the reason that He is not “something particular”, and “all”, because He cannot be deprived of anything<sup>11</sup>. This definition wasn’t new, on the contrary, it was well-known in the mystical tradition.

Soloviev describes the first Absolute as the Spirit, whereas he describes the second Absolute as Logos: it is the eternal foundation of the ideas that emerge in time in the shape of the empirical beings as the World Soul (*anima mundi*) or *κόσμος νοητός*. Referring to Plato’s dialogue *Timaeus*, Soloviev calls it “the second God”.

As we remember, all-unity (*materia prima*) is a “negative potency” or *potentia proxima essendi*. This means that all-unity has a tendency towards the actualization of the ideas. Consequently, the second Absolute is in permanent development, in the process of becoming (according to Soloviev the theory of evolution partially explains this process)<sup>12</sup>. “The idea of

<sup>8</sup> See i.e. Plato, *The Republic*, 509b: the Good is “beyond being”; Plotinus, *Enneads*, I, VII, 1: “The Good must, then, be the Good not by any Act, not even by virtue of its Intellection, but by its very rest within Itself” and V, V, 6: “the First cannot be thought of as having definition and limit”; Nicholas of Cusa, *On learned ignorance*, I, VI: “‘being’ (or any other name) is not a precise name for the Maximum”.

<sup>9</sup> V. S. Soloviev, *Chtenija o Bogochelovechestve*, p. 137-138.

<sup>10</sup> V. S. Soloviev, *La Sophia*, p. 92-94 (trans. by M. De Courten, *Sophia and the Longing for Unity*, „The Journal of Eastern Christian Studies” 3-4 (2007), p. 248.

<sup>11</sup> V. S. Soloviev, *Filosofskie nachala...*, p. 262; *Kritika otvlechennykh nachal*, p. 277.

<sup>12</sup> V. S. Soloviev, *Opravdanije dobra* in: *SS*, vol. VIII, p. 218-219. This motive of Soloviev’s philosophy anticipates Teilhard de Chardin’s thought. See K. V. Truhlar, *Teilhard und*

reality as a creative life, as manifesting its essence creatively, reminds us of German idealism, of Fichte, Hegel and Schelling”<sup>13</sup> and the various theories of emanation. As a result,

there is no essential difference between God and the world. In other words, the “essence” of God and world are the same. (...) God himself endows each point of being with the power of self-consciousness – apart from which the whole of manifold reality could not become external to God. (...) The world is *consubstantial* with God<sup>14</sup>.

The following scheme illustrates the metaphysical conception of Soloviev:

The first Absolute	The second Absolute
All-one	All-unity
Positive potency	Negative potency / <i>potentia proxima essendi</i>
“Nothing” (“ <i>En Sof</i> ”)	“All”
God	<i>Materia prima</i>

Soloviev claimed that the two-polar concept of the Absolute allows him to explain the changing of the world without falling into pantheism which identifies the first Absolute with the second one (God with the world)<sup>15</sup>. Nevertheless, in Frank’s opinion Soloviev’s philosophy of all-unity is clearly of a pantheistic character<sup>16</sup>, although most correctly it could be described as panentheism.

This position has significant epistemological consequences. Namely, Soloviev accepts the possibility of direct, intuitive cognition of things, because they are rooted in the second Absolute. At the same time he declares that we could not express the first Absolute (God) adequately, for the reason

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*Solowjew. Dichtung und religiöse Erfahrung*, Freiburg-München 1966.

<sup>13</sup> F. Ch. Copleston, *Philosophy in Russia. From Herzen to Lenin and Berdyaev*, Notre Dame 1986, p. 222.

<sup>14</sup> V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, vol. II, trans. by G. L. Kline, London 1953, p. 500-501.

<sup>15</sup> V. S. Soloviev, *Kritika otvlechennykh nachal*, p. 285-286.

<sup>16</sup> S. Frank, *Russkoje mirovozzrenije*, trans. by G. Franko in: idem, *Duchovnye osnovy obshchestva*, Moscow 1992, p. 497. Cf. L. J. Shein (eds.), *Reading in Philosophical Thought*, The Hague 1968, p. 26; J. Novotný, *Vladimir Sergejevič Solovyov (1853–1900)* in: P. Ambros (eds.), *Vladimir Soloviov and United Europe: International Conference on the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of V. Soloviov’s Death (1853–1900)*, Olomouc 2000, p. 45: “The metaphysics, a global unity is formed in the form of a neopantheism in the monistic line of Spinoza-Schelling”.



that He “cannot be the subject of any definition”<sup>17</sup>. According to Soloviev, the Absolute is both transcendent and immanent. This ambivalence is conditioned ontologically. No doubt, Soloviev’s metaphysics is not dualistic *sensu stricto*. Rather the thinker intended to construct a synthetic system and to connect “the ideal element with the material one, the principle of unity with the radical plurality of essences”<sup>18</sup>.

Frank also paid attention to the transcendent and immanent character of the Absolute, but justified his position in another way. I will present Frank’s concept in the next section.

#### FRANK’S POSITION: THE ABSOLUTE AS THE UNKNOWNABLE

In his *The Philosophical Foundations of Integral Knowledge* Soloviev maintained that the two-polar concept of the Absolute is only “the fruit of the discursive character of our thinking”<sup>19</sup>. Hence we can consider his position “rather as a heuristic trick which allows us to know the nature of the Absolute”<sup>20</sup>. However in other works of Soloviev we can read that the distinction between the first and the second Absolute has a cosmological basis as well: the Russian philosopher, like Schelling, stated that the empirical world had fallen away from God. The Universe (*unum versum* – “the opposite unity”<sup>21</sup>) is a disorder of all-union’s elements. On the one hand, Soloviev tried to reconcile the unchangeable nature of God (the first Absolute) with the development of nature (which is established in the second Absolute). On the other hand, he did not harmonize the static aspect of the Absolute with the dynamic one. It is one of the weakest points of Soloviev’s concept of all-unity.

<sup>17</sup> V. S. Soloviev, *Kritika otvlechennykh nachal*, p. 279.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. V. S. Soloviev, *Metafizika* in: *SS*, vol. X, p. 243.

<sup>19</sup> V. S. Soloviev, *Filosofskie nachala...*, p. 268.

<sup>20</sup> N. F. Utkina, *Tema Vseedinstva v filosofiji Vl. Solovieva*, “Voprosy filosofiji” 6 (1989), p. 63.

<sup>21</sup> V. S. Soloviev, <*Chernovik o Schellinge*> in: *PSS*, vol. 2, p. 180. Zob. *Rossija i Vselenskaja Tserkov’*, trans. by G. A. Rachinskij in: *SS*, vol. XI, p. 293: „what is non-divine [nature – T.O.] is transposed or reverse [*transposé ou renversé*] Divinity”; Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, prop. 31: “All that proceeds from any principle reverts in respect of its being upon that from which it proceeds”; prop. 33: “Thus all things proceed in a circuit, from their causes to their causes again”; prop. 34: “Everything whose nature it is to revert reverts upon that from which it derived the procession of its own substance”.

Frank radically transformed Soloviev's doctrine, believing that the Absolute has a totally simple (non-composite) nature. In *An object of knowledge* we can find the following theses:

The absolute being is not a being-for-other, but being-for-itself. It is the being-for-itself which precedes the difference of subject and object. It is total unity (...), life which experiences itself. Consequently it is immanent for itself and for us, because we directly participate in it<sup>22</sup>.

Where Soloviev makes a distinction between the first Absolute and the second Absolute, that allows us to show the difference between the divine and the natural element, and precisely characterizes them, Frank claims that "'true unity' (...) is *absolute unity* or *all-unity*"<sup>23</sup> (or else "all-one"). The particular qualities of empirical beings are not something ontologically different from the Absolute (substantially or – as Soloviev seems to say – "topologically", as a result of falling away from the primordial unity), but they are only the product of their cognitive identification. A concrete object exists just "for us", but as such it participates in the absolute unity, so it is not subject to any specification.

Nevertheless Frank like Soloviev pays attention to two aspects of the Absolute. Firstly, the Absolute itself is a total unity, an entirety (in Soloviev's thought the first Absolute, or all-one expresses this feature). Secondly, the Absolute in its relation to the world is a plurality and a foundation of the particular attributes, so it could be compared with the second Absolute of Soloviev. As a result, the Absolute is "free" from any things and at the same time embraces all of them.

Yet a comparative analysis points to an important difference between Soloviev's and Frank's positions. Namely, contrary to Soloviev's opinion, Frank's Absolute is a perfect unity. The author of *An object of knowledge* does not make any ontological (even conventional) distinctions in the Absolute, but he only demonstrates the variation in its cognition. Both all-unity *ad extra*, considered in its relation to the world, and all-unity *ad intra* – in its relation to the divine sphere – are not two separate polarities, but just the *modi* of the same absolute reality.

According to Frank, all-unity as such is not subject to the principle of identity which strictly defines an object as "this" and "not that". This is the reason that Frank describes all-unity as "a metalogical unity". The Absolute is the base of all predicates, but as such it is a "transdefinite" being (in

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<sup>22</sup> S. L. Frank, *Predmet znaniya. Ob osnovakh i predelakh otvlechnogo znaniya* in: idem, *Predmet znaniya. Dusha cheloveka*, Saint Petersburg 1995, p. 157.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, p. 219.

this context Frank adds that the same thought was expressed in the Upanishads which represented the transcendent reality as *neti-neti* – “neither this nor that”<sup>24</sup>. As Frank wrote,

The sphere of “the unity” in essence is *above* the sphere of categories of identity and difference. Its relation to the domain of knowledge, which is expressed by the system of the definitions, is not subject to these categories, but it should be understood in another fundamental way<sup>25</sup>.

The sphere of the Absolute is beyond the logical principle of identity and no definition or opposition (*A* and *non-A*) expresses it. Frank characterizes the Absolute as *coincidentia oppositorum* (the coincidence of opposites). The Russian thinker refers to an old philosophical tradition: The Upanishads, Heraclitus, Plato, Neo-Platonism, the medieval mystics, German idealism and especially Nicholas of Cusa<sup>26</sup>. Let us quote *De docta ignorantia*:

I give the name “Maximum” to that for which there cannot be anything greater. But fullness (*abundantia*) befits what is one. Thus, oneness – which is also being – coincides with Maximality. But if such oneness is altogether free from all relation and contraction (*respectu*), obviously nothing is opposed to it, since it is Absolute Maximality. Thus, the Maximum is Absolute One which is all things. And all things are in the Maximum (for it is the Maximum); and since nothing is opposed to it, the Minimum likewise concedes with it, and hence the Maximum is also in all things<sup>27</sup>.

The next name which Nicholas of Cusa applies to the Absolute (under the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and Eriugena) is *non-aliud* – “not-other”. In his commentary, the Russian philosopher explains that this notion means that the Absolute precedes the distinction between *idem* and *aliud* – “this” and “other”. In this way Frank, following Cusanus, tries to overcome the dualistic tendency which, for instance, we can find in Soloviev’s thought. Frank admits that the Absolute is a totally simple being or – in Nicholas of Cusa’s term – the precise Equality (*aequalitas praecisa*). Although Soloviev made an effort to show the unity and indivisibility of the Absolute, nevertheless his attempt concerned mainly the “first

<sup>24</sup> S. L. Frank, *Nepostizhimoe* in: idem, *Sochinenija*, Minsk – Moscow 2000, p. 459. Cf. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, III, 9, 26; IV, 2, 4.

<sup>25</sup> S. L. Frank, *Predmet znaniya*, p. 196. See P. Modesto, *Un filosofo russo contemporaneo. Semjon Ljudvigovič Frank*, „Rivista di Filosofia neo-scolastica”, vol. 50 (1958), p. 523-524.

<sup>26</sup> S. L. Frank, *Predmet znaniya*, p. 204.

<sup>27</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *On learned ignorance*, I, II.

Absolute”. A non-different *non-aliud* corresponds with Soloviev’s Absolute *in se*, but not with the “Absolute-for-us” which is expressed in the form of empirical beings. No doubt, “the Father of the Russian doctrine of all-unity” (Soloviev) was close to Cusanus’ concept according to which “all is in God” (*omnia in deo*)<sup>28</sup>, but judged his view as “very daring”<sup>29</sup>. Soloviev – as we have mentioned – tried to overcome the radical pantheism characteristic of Nicholas of Cusa, and distinguished all-one from all-unity.

At first Frank did not agree with Soloviev’s solution. In *An Object of knowledge* he motivated his concept of the absolute being from the epistemological perspective, basing it mainly on the analysis of cognition. In this work, he did not reflect on the origin and the nature of the world. Yet in the latest papers Frank also considered the problem of the existence of evil in the world, putting forward the hypothesis that it is a result of an enigmatic “fissure” in the all-unity<sup>30</sup>. In his philosophical notebook, which Frank wrote during the Second World War, we can find some remarks that resemble the two-polar concept of Soloviev:

The first principle as Absolute is beyond the category of “the one” and “the second”, “itself” and “its product”. The difference between “the first” and “the second” is involved for the first time in the act of creative embodiment. The first principle by its embodiment is differentiated into Creator and creation (...). This difference and origin of diversity from unity is, first of all, the self-manifestation of the One in the plurality of “the world of ideas”. (...) Besides the diversity, “dramatization” also becomes: the created activity spreads from the One to the plurality, on the “monads”. On the one hand, this activity creates the harmonic entirety, the organism. On the other hand, each element becomes free (creative), which involves the possibility and necessity of collision between them<sup>31</sup>.

The investigations pursued by Frank in the later period of his activity (like Soloviev) gradually proceeded in the direction of theodicy and theology. Frank leaves radical monism and makes a distinction between Creator and creation, although a bit weaker than the one Soloviev made. The concept of God as an Artist creating the world, and the idea of the strict connection between Creator and creation is deeply rooted in the German

<sup>28</sup> Cf. P. P. Gajdenko, *Nikolaj Kuzanskij i princip sovpadenija protivopoložnostej*, “Voprosy filosofiji” 7 (2002), p. 132.

<sup>29</sup> V. S. Soloviev, *Nikolaj Kuzanskij* in: *SS*, vol. X, p. 439.

<sup>30</sup> S. L. Frank, *Niepostizhimoe*, X, 3. See I. Krekshin, *Metafizika zla (Prolegomeny k teoditsei v filosofiji posdnego S. L. Franka)*, “Voprosy filosofiji” 12 (2001), p. 128-139.

<sup>31</sup> S. L. Frank, *Mysli v strashnye dni* (1943.02.04) in: idem, *Neprochitannoe... Stat'i, pis'ma, vospominanija*, Moscow 2001, p. 351.

mystic tradition: in the thought of Angelus Silesius, J. Boehme, F. Baader, Schelling and – in Frank’s case – in the poetry of Goethe, Rilke and the Russian lyricist, F. Tiutchev.

One of the most important names of the Absolute is “the Unknowable” (*Nepostizhimoe*). In this context Frank distinguishes “the Unknowable-for-us” (which is incomprehensible in the process of cognition because of the limited character of the notions), from “the Unknowable itself” that we’ll never know. This distinction leads to several significant consequences. On the one hand, each act of cognition allows us to penetrate the sphere of the Absolute – “The Unknowable”. As Frank said, the absolute being

is not far for us (...). The reality as such – what is the most known, what surrounds us from all sides: the reality in which we live, move and exist – corresponds to the Unknowable. All that is understandable and comprehensible, all what we can express conceptually – is also rooted in the Unknowable and has sense only in connection with it<sup>32</sup>.

On the other hand, the only way to cognition of the Unknowable is the awareness of the impossibility of its cognition – learned ignorance, *docta ignorantia*. Although Frank tries – unlike Soloviev – to escape metaphysical dualism, nevertheless he confesses some kind of epistemological dichotomy. Frank – strongly accenting the connection of the empirical, changeable beings with the Absolute – calls his and Soloviev’s concept by the term “ideal-realism”<sup>33</sup>. According to this, the ideal element is the foundation of the empirical reality.

#### INTUITION AS A WAY OF COGNITION OF THE ABSOLUTE

According to Frank, the Absolute as such (or the first Absolute in Soloviev’s conception) is unknowable. Nevertheless, it is the very Absolute that enables the cognition of things. How is this possible? Soloviev and Frank (and other Russian philosophers of the Silver Age) claimed that both the subject and the object of cognition are rooted in the all-unity. There is an immanent, ontological relationship between the subject and the object. Several times Frank and Soloviev illustrated their position using the metaphor of a tree (borrowed from Plotinus’ *Enneads*):

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<sup>32</sup> Ibidem, p. 391.

<sup>33</sup> S. L. Frank, *Nepostizhimoe*, p. 381.

The branches of the tree cross and combine in different ways. The branches and leaves touch one another by their external side. This symbolizes external knowledge [i.e., empirical knowledge – T.O.]. But the same branches and leaves are connected by their common trunk and roots which deliver vital juices to them. This is mystical knowledge or faith<sup>34</sup>.

According to the Russian thinkers, we can perceive the object of knowledge in the act of “faith”, “mystical intuition” (Soloviev), “intuition of all-unity” or “intuition of an integral being as such” (Frank) which is an immediate experience of the absolute reality. This means, that

To know – in all spheres of cognition – means (...) to join the empirical data of experience with the all-unity, i.e. to perceive the traces of the system of the all-unity in the sense-data. (...) “To know” something means to find its place in the eternal, all-embracing unity of being<sup>35</sup>.

As Georges Florovsky wrote, “faith” (“intuition”) in Russian philosophy

has an obvious existential priority; it gives the true assurance of existence (...). Soloviev used the concept of “faith” in a very wide sense, in which it denotes almost the same basic “insight” into existence as the “intuition” of Bergson<sup>36</sup>.

Kant considered only two causes of the “meeting” of the subject and object of cognition:

There are only two possible ways in which synthetical representation and its objects can coincide with and relate necessarily to each other, and, as it were, meet together. Either the object alone makes the representation possible, or the representation alone makes the object possible<sup>37</sup>.

Soloviev and Frank proposed the third solution. In their opinion, the intimate relationship between subject and object in the Absolute is the cognition of the process of knowledge. Hence other Russian philosophers – Fr. Pavel Florensky and Nikolai Losski – called this concept “the philosophy of homoousians” (ὁμοουσιότης).

<sup>34</sup> V. S. Soloviev, *Kritika otvlechennykh nachal*, p. 296; S. L. Frank, *Predmet znaniya*, p. 193; *Dusha cheloveka* in: idem, *Predmet znaniya. Dusha cheloveka*, p. 601. Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads*, III, 8, 10.

<sup>35</sup> S. L. Frank, *Dusha cheloveka*, p. 560-561.

<sup>36</sup> G. Florovsky, *Reason and Faith in the Philosophy of Solov'ev*, in: E. J. Simmons (ed.), *Continuity and Change in Russian and Soviet Thought*, Cambridge 1955, p. 286.

<sup>37</sup> I. Kant, *Critic of Pure Reason*, trans. by J. M. D. Meiklejohn, New York 1990, p. 72-73.

THE CONCEPTION OF UNIVERSALS IN THE LIGHT  
OF ALL-UNITY

According to Soloviev and Frank all-unity is a hierarchic organism. The ideas of genus contain the ideas of species. For example, the idea of “animal” includes the name of the species (“man”, “dog”), proper nouns (“John”, “Max”) etc. Therefore the content of a singular thing is proportional to the content of its genus (and species). If the thing has a bigger extension, the intension of its idea is bigger as well. We should add that in the debate on universals Soloviev and Frank (like most Russian philosophers) shared the position of concrete universals elaborated by Hegel and especially by the British neo-Hegelian idealists – B. Bosanquet and F. H. Bradley. According to this concept, the common in the different things (*unus versus alia*) is their foundation, the concrete (from *concreescere* – “grow together”) entirety. In Hegel’s opinion,

The concrete and true, and all that is true is concrete, is the universality (...). But absolute universality is not to be thought of either as the universality of reflection, which is a kind of consensus or generality, or, as the abstract universality and self-identity, which is fashioned by the understanding, and keeps aloof from the individual. It is rather the concrete, self-contained, and self-referring universality, which is the substance, intrinsic genus, or immanent idea of self-consciousness. It is a conception of free will as the universal, transcending its object, passing through and beyond its own specific character, and then becoming identical with itself<sup>38</sup>.

Also, Bradley claimed that the “Absolute is, so far, an individual and a system”<sup>39</sup>. In Soloviev’s and Frank’s case, “concrete entirety” is all-unity containing all beings.

On the other hand, adhering to the traditional scholastic theory of universals, Soloviev wrote that the root of the endless polemics between nominalism and realism is the identification of ideas and notions although they belong to the different types of universals. Namely, the ideas anticipate the empirical beings, so they are *universalia ante res* (“before things”, according to realism). At the same time, the ideas are expressed by the general notions. Because the general notions do not exist independently, they are

<sup>38</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. by T. M. Knox, New York 1967, § 7, 24.

<sup>39</sup> F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality: A Metaphysical Essay*, London 1897, p. 144. See H. B. Acton, *The theory of concrete universals*, “Mind”, vol. 45 (1936), p. 417-431; “Mind”, vol. 46 (1937), p. 1-13.

*universalia post res* (“after things”, in the terminology of nominalism)<sup>40</sup>. Obviously, all-unity contains both all the ideas and the notions proper to them as well. Hence, from the realistic point of view all-unity is the supreme idea (Plato’s idea of Good), whereas from the nominalistic position it is the foundation of being and notions. Frank agreed that universals considered as ideas are “before things” (*ante res*), and realized that in time they are “in things” (*in rebus*)<sup>41</sup>. As a result, Russian thinkers tried to bring together realism and nominalism.

### DIFFICULTIES WITH THE CONCEPT OF ALL-UNITY

The concept of an all-embracing universe proposed by the Russian philosophers and other idealists has some problems. Let us remember Russell’s criticisms of the Hegelian philosophy:

The view of Hegel, and of many other philosophers, is that the character of any portion of the universe is so profoundly affected by its relations to the other parts and to the whole, that no true statement can be made about any part except to assign its place in the whole. Since its place in the whole depends upon all the other parts, a true statement about its place in the whole will at the same time assign the place of every other part in the whole. Thus there can be only one true statement; there is no truth except the whole truth<sup>42</sup>.

Russell opposed the tenets of the Russian philosophers by stating that in order to know the individual thing (i.e. its quality) there is no need to know its relation to the whole. James also combated the holistic concept of cognition: “I left off by asserting my own belief that a pluralistic and incompletely integrated universe, describable only by the free use of the word ‘some’, is a legitimate hypothesis”<sup>43</sup>.

Moreover, the rooting of the empirical world in the Absolute leads to the disappearance of the border between the natural and the supernatural order. The ontological consequence of this situation is panentheism. In its epistemological aspect this means the identification of the cognition of the world with the cognition of God. This opinion was also shared by

<sup>40</sup> V. S. Soloviev, *Filosofskie nachala...*, p. 238; *Chtenija o Bogochelovechestve*, p. 67.

<sup>41</sup> S. L. Frank, *Realnost’ i chelovek*, in: idem, *S nami Bog. Realnost’ i chelovek*, Moskva 2003, p. 147.

<sup>42</sup> B. Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy and its Connection with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, New York 1945, p. 743.

<sup>43</sup> W. James, *A Pluralistic Universe. Hibbert Lectures at Manchester College on the Present Situation in Philosophy*, EBook #11984, <www.gutenberg.net>.



Soloviev's contemporaries. For example, Aleksander Vviedensky criticized him for the "mystification of cognition"<sup>44</sup>. The same statement concerns Frank who frequently repeated the famous Hegelian thought that "the Absolute, or God is the only object of philosophy"<sup>45</sup>.

In conclusion, defending Soloviev's and Frank's position, we should say that the Russian philosophers consciously referred to the Platonic (and neo-Platonic) tradition in trying to express their religious belief. In addition, the concept of all-unity neither excludes the cognition of the particular elements nor exhausts the cognition of the Absolute that transcends the possibilities of reason.

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<sup>44</sup> A. Vviedensky, *O misticizmie i kriticizmie v teorii poznanya Solovieva*, in: D. K. Burlaka (ed.), *Vladimir Soloviev: pro et contra*, p. 195-200.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. S. L. Frank, *Absolutnoe*, trans. by A. G. Vlaskin, A. A. Yermichev, in: idem, *Russkoye mirovozzreniye*, Sankt-Peterburg 1996, p. 58; *Filosofia i religia*, in: P. V. Alekseev (ed.), *Na perelome. Filosofskie diskussii 20-ch godov*, Moskva 1990, p. 321.



## DIE GRUNDLAGEN DES MODERNEN FUNDAMENTALISMUS

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**Abstract.** The idea of fundamentalism is repeatedly present in mass media and often occupies the center of religious and political discussions. There are some sociological conditions of fundamentalism and different applications of the term in mass media. The psychological research tries to explain the phenomenon as well. The philosophical analysis put the question of the nature of fundamentalism. The following text tries to give an answer to such a question. The fundamentalism seems to be no traditional, but inherently a modern movement that it's religious convictions puts absolutely through, mainly in politics.

### EINFÜHRUNG

Der Fundamentalismusbegriff hat ihren Ursprung in den USA, Anfangs des 20. Jhs., als 1919 die „World's Christian Fundamentals Association“ gegründet wurde und für ihr Credo die zwölfbändige Schriftenreihe „*The Fundamentals. A Testimony to the Truth*“ (Chicago 1910-1915) annahm. Die Bewegung bekämpfte die modernistischen Phänomene innerhalb verschiedener Kirchen, sie stand u.a. für die göttliche Herkunft und Irrtumslosigkeit der Bibel und für andere Dogmen der Katholischen Kirche. Sie förderte den Kreationismus und bekämpfte zugleich die Evolutionstheorie in den öffentlichen Schulen, wandte sich gegen die Philosophie von F. Nietzsche, Frauenemanzipation, den Sozialismus, gegen Alkoholkonsum und Prostitution (Riesenbrodt 2004, p. 16). Sie hatte die Absicht, den Gefahren damaliger Zeiten ein absolutes Fundament entgegenzusetzen, das die Gläubigen und andere Menschen auf Dauer retten könnte.

Wir beobachten auch eine Renaissance des Fundamentalismus in unserer Zeit. Ab den 1980er- Jahren haben wir mit einer Wiederbelebung und Ausweitung des Fundamentalismus in den USA zu tun. Die Einwande-

zung der Nicht-Protestanten aus Lateinamerika und asiatischen Ländern in den 1960er Jahren, und zugleich der Kulturwandel mit Hippiskultur, Drogen und sexueller Revolution, provozierten eine Mobilisierung der konservativen Kräfte, die zur Gründung von „Moral Majority“ von Jerry Falwell führte. „Moral Majority“ war ein Bündnis der fundamentalistischen Gruppen von Protestanten, Katholiken, Mormonen und Juden, und sie übte später einen wichtigen Einfluß auf die Präsidentenwahlen von 1980 aus. Diese Bewegung war anfänglich nicht direkt politisch engagiert und konzentrierte sich vor allem auf die Probleme wie Abtreibung, Bibellektüre und Gebet in öffentlichen Schulen. Die Tendenz zur Politisierung stieg aber ständig und setzte sich durch. Die konservativen religiösen Richtungen zeigten sich politisch stark in den islamischen Ländern. Ende der 1970er-Jahre stürzte die iranische Massenbewegung das pro-westliche Regime des Schah und Ayatollah Khomeini errichtete den „islamischen Gottesstaat“ (EB, 2009). Die fundamentalistische Richtung nahm damals auch in Afghanistan zu, wo die Mudschaheddin um die Befreiung aus der sowjetischen Besatzungsmacht kämpfte. In Saudi Arabien und in Ägypten entstehen die aktivistischen Gruppen, die auch als „islamistisch“ bezeichnet werden und oft in den terroristischen oder militärischen Anschlägen verwickelt waren. Auch im Judentum erweckte der Krieg 1967 die messianische Dimension des religiösen Zionismus. Mehrere national und religiös geprägte politische Richtungen blieben in Kontakt mit radikalen Gruppierungen wie Gusch Emunim und setzen sich bis heute für die Eroberung Palästinas ein, für ein Land, das laut dem Plan Gottes Israel versprochen wurde. In den vergangenen zwanzig Jahren beobachtet man einen steigenden religiösen Extremismus unter verschiedenen buddhistischen, hinduistischen, sikhischen und konfuzianischen Richtungen. Neben ihren genuinen Merkmalen kopieren sie nicht selten die Art und Weise der islamischen Fundamentalisten. Auch bei den Hindus, deren Religion von Natur her tolerant sein sollte, weil sie verschiedene Inkarnationen desselben Gottes anerkennen, sind Merkmale des religiösen Fundamentalismus deutlicher geworden, weil ihre politischen Folgen sich mit Unterdrückung der religiösen Minderheiten, politischem Engagement, und nicht selten terroristischer Gewalt, verbinden. Nennen wir nur die Auseinandersetzung um den Ayodhya Tempel. Dass der Fundamentalismus fast keine religiöse Tradition verschont, läßt nachdenken.

Der Begriff „Fundamentalismus“ verbindet sich mit religiösem und emotionalem Leben. Die Psychologie, Sozialpsychologie, bzw. die Religionspsychologie benutzen meistens den Begriff „Dogmatismus“ oder „closed mind“, während der Begriff „Fundamentalismus“ überwiegend in

der Soziologie und Politikwissenschaft verwendet wird. In der Psychologie bezeichnet als dogmatisch jemanden, der sich an geschlossenen und nicht an offenen Überzeugungssystemen orientiert, wer das Gemeinsame unter verschiedenen Gruppen überseht und verharrt in Vergangenheit, Gegenwart oder Zukunft, ohne zwischen den Zeiten wechseln zu können. Dogmatiker bewerten die Überzeugungen, die sie für falsch halten, emotional negativ und verachten Andersdenkende. Sie sind also intolerant (Grom, 2007, p. 156). Es ist interessant, dass die psychologische Analyse des Fundamentalismus mit den soziologischen und den politischen Analysen übereinstimmt. Es fehlen aber genaue Vergleichstudien, die den Zusammenhang der soziologischen und politischen Ebene mit der der psychologischen darstellen würden. Psychologisch gesehen sind die fundamentalistischen Bewegungen reaktionär, ihr Kampf um die eigene Tradition ist zugleich ein Kampf gegen die Säkularisierungs- und Relativierungsprozesse; sie sind des weiteren selektiv, d. h. sie verteidigen nur bestimmte Aspekte der Tradition; sie nutzen die modernen technischen Kommunikationsmittel und Medien; sie pflegen einen moralischen Dualismus (Manichäismus), der der verdorbenen Welt das Böse zuschreibt und sich selbst als „gut“ bezeichnet; sie kultivieren einen Absolutismus und Irrtumsfreiheit der religiösen Schriften, die von Gott eingegeben, mit wissenschaftlichen und historisch-kritischen Methoden nicht nachgeforscht werden dürfen; sie verkünden einen Messianismus, der einen Sieg des kommenden Messias über das Böse verspricht. Der Fundamentalismus wirkt in Zusammenhang mit der Fremdenfeindlichkeit, mit der Angst vor dem Identitätsverlust, und ist charakterisiert durch eine unterentwickelte kognitive Komplexität. Er kann auch psychologisch belastend sein und bereits bestehende pathologische Tendenzen fördern (Grom, 2007, p.160-162). Wir werden sehen, wie sich die psychologische Analyse des Fundamentalismus in den weiteren philosophisch-politischen Analysen widerspiegelt.

Es gibt mehrere Ursachen, die beim Entstehen des Fundamentalismus in den letzten zwanzig – dreißig Jahren mitgespielt haben. Bei der Beschreibung der verschiedenen Elementen, die bei der Entwicklung dieses Phänomens mitgewirkt haben, sollte man zuerst die sogenannten allgemeinen und komplexen Ursachen, Gründe und Tendenzen beschreiben, die aber kein Wesen des Fundamentalismus bilden. Diese allgemeinen Ursachen prägen die Politik, Wirtschaft und das Sozialleben, so daß der Fundamentalismus sich herauskristallisieren und zu einem modernen Phänomen wachsen kann. Unser Ziel wäre also zuerst das Umfeld des Fundamentalismus zu beschreiben und anzuschauen, ob es möglich wäre, sich seinem Wesen zu nähern.

Zuerst stellen wir das Umfeld dar, in dem der Fundamentalismus sich entfaltet, und dann beschäftigen wir uns mit dem Wesen des Fundamentalismus.

## ALLGEMEINE URSACHEN

### **1. Krise der säkularen Ideologien und Rückkehr der Religiosität in Europa**

Ende der 80er Jahre und Anfang der 90er Jahre verlieren die weltlich orientierten Ideologien ihre politische und soziale Kraft. Nach dem Bruch des Kommunismus gewinnt im ehemaligen Ostblock die Religiosität mehr an Vertrauen. Obwohl die religiöse Lage in den früheren kommunistischen Ländern recht unterschiedlich war, kann man doch eine Revitalisierung der Religion feststellen.<sup>1</sup> Das Vertrauen in die Kirchen und hohe Erwartungen von der Kirche sind am Anfang der politischen und wirtschaftlichen Veränderungen gestiegen.

Allgemein kann man sagen, dass die Religiosität von ganz Europa durchschnittlich erhalten geblieben ist, obwohl ein tieferes, persönlicheres Bekenntnis zu Gott in meisten Ländern eine geringe Gruppe umfasst. Aber auch in diesem Bereich erlebt der Westen eine leichte religiöse Renaissance nach der Krise des weltorientierten Materialismus und wendet sich gerne verschiedenen neuen religiösen Phänomenen und religiösen Traditionen zu.

### **2. Ökonomischer Faktor**

Der ökonomische Faktor spielt beim Fundamentalismus keine geringe Rolle. Das Versprechen der ständigen ökonomischen Entwicklung und der allmählichen Verbesserung des Lebensstandards ist nicht langfristig in Erfüllung gegangen und war dazu lange Zeit nur Monopol der reichen Länder. Die Benachteiligung der dritten Welt kann leicht dazu geführt haben,

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<sup>1</sup> Über die unterschiedliche religiöse Lage der europäischen Ländern und die Revitalisierung der Religion Europas: J. Casanova, *Die religiöse Lage in Europa*, in Joas/Wiegandt (Hg.): *Säkularisierung und die Weltreligionen*. Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 2007, S. 322-357.; Tomka Miklos, *Entwicklung in Gesellschaft und Kirche in Ost-Mitteuropa*, in: Renöckl (u.a.) (Hg.): *Rudern auf Stürmischer See. Sozialethische Perspektiven in Mitteleuropa*, Wien/Wirzburg 2006, 288-300.; David Martin, *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory*, Ashgate, London 2005.

daß die Religionen eine Artikulierungsform des radikalen Widerstandes gegen die Ausbeutung seitens der reichen Länder geworden sind. Der Fundamentalismus kann ein religiöser Ruf nach der Gerechtigkeit sein, indem alle Mittel recht sind, um wieder weltweit einen gerechten Zustand herzustellen. Das gilt nicht nur für die armen Länder, sondern auch für sozial benachteiligte Schichten der europäischen Gesellschaften: „Fundamentalismus wird so zur Protestbewegung ökonomisch und sozial benachteiligter Schichten“ (Gabriel 2005). Aber dieser religiöse Ruf nach Gerechtigkeit vermischt sich mit einem kulturellen Ressentiment. Menschen, die ökonomisch benachteiligt werden, erleben eine eigene Kultur und Religion als ‚Verlust des Selbstgefühls‘ – wie es Thomas L. Friedman formuliert. Die Rückständigkeit der arabisch-islamischen Welt gegenüber dem Westen, erleben viele Muslime als Mangel an Würde. „Diese kognitive Dissonanz erzeugt Wut und verleitet viele dazu, sich radikalen Gruppen anzuschließen und einfach loszuschlagen oder Gruppen wie al-Qaida passiv zu unterstützen“ (Friedmann 2008, p. 674). Jede Kultur ist zur Entwicklung berufen und diejenigen, die es nicht schaffen in Konkurrenz auszuhalten, erleben die Entwicklung als Bedrohung der eigenen Identität. Sie wollen der Entwicklung nicht nachfolgen, sondern infolge der Stagnation geraten sie in eine Sehnsucht nach „Rückkehr zum Idealzustand des 7. Jahrhunderts, und sie wollen das 21. Jahrhundert beherrschen“ (Friedmann 2008, p. 676).

Die durch ökonomische Benachteiligung entstandene Mangel an Würde, Erniedrigung und Rückständigkeitsgefühle gegenüber der reichen Welt vermischen sich mit einem religiösen Streben nach Überlegenheit. Religion als Kompensation der ökonomischen Unterdrückung wird noch lange Zeit eine Quelle des Fundamentalismus bleiben.

Die neueste finanzielle Krise kann inzwischen auch dazu beigetragen haben, daß der Zusammenbruch des Bank- und Finanzsystems weltweit eine religiöse Interpretation bekommt und durch radikale Gruppen religiös interpretiert werden kann, sodass die Medien weltweit eine apokalyptische Vision davon verbreiten.

### **3. Globalisierung und Verlust an Selbstbestimmung**

Die Exportware der säkularen Politik, nämlich „Demokratie“ und „Menschenrechte“, wird oft von vielen arabischen und asiatischen Ländern abgelehnt als Bedrohung der eigenen sozialen und politischen Identität und zugleich als Bedrohung der religiösen Werte. Die Zunahme der fundamentalistischen Tendenzen kann man dort erwarten, wo die Globalisierung – durch Slogans von „Demokratie“ und „Menschenrechte“ – die traditionel-

len religiösen und kulturellen Werte relativiert oder in Frage stellt. Die Ablehnung der westlichen Werte in der arabischen oder muslimischen Welt hat auch mit der Angst vor politischen Veränderungen zu tun. B. Cooper weist darauf hin, daß die Globalisierung viele arabische Eliten in Bedrohung setzt. Sie wollen keine Globalisierung und damit keine Liberalisierung zulassen, damit sie die eigene politische Macht nicht verlieren, und gerade diese Macht war bisher durch traditionelle politisch-religiöse Strukturen kontrolliert (Cooper 2004, p. 17). Die Freiheit des Westens wirkt für die politischen Eliten der islamischen Welt wie ein Chaos, weil die soziale Ordnung oft durch die Ausübung der religiösen Normen und Gesetzen geleitet wurde. Sie beschreiben die westliche Freiheit und Wohlstand als eine aggressive Verführung, die mehr mit religiösem Bösen zu tun hat als mit der Befreiung. Der Konsum macht das Leben nicht reicher, sondern trivialisiert es (Cooper 2004, pp. 18-19). Zugleich sind die staatlichen Strukturen der islamischen Länder nicht stärker geworden. Der Staat bietet oft keine neuen politischen Ideen oder keine dauerhafte soziale Sicherheit an. Der radikale Islamismus nutzt es und wächst auf den Schultern des schwach gewordenen Staates (Vgl. Cooper 2004, pp. 18-19).

Die Globalisierung löst des weiteren eine neue Form der Armut in den großen Metropolen der Länder auf dem Weg der Entwicklung aus. Sie ist mit Unstabilität, Unvorhersehbarkeit verbunden. Im Unterschied zur Armut auf dem Land, die mit Zugehörigkeit und sozialer Stabilität abgesichert ist, sieht die Armut in pseudo-westlichen Metropolen der Entwicklungsländer drastischer aus und kann Identität, Selbstgefühl oder Selbstschätzung gefährden. Die religiöse Zugehörigkeit und sogar Neigung zur radikalen islamischen Netzen gibt in diesem Kontext das Gefühl der kulturellen Zugehörigkeit und scheint immer besser zu sein als alles, was eine chaotische Metropole anbietet. Eine Moschee in Kairo oder Damaskus mit ihrer Pracht wirkt in der chaotischen Landschaft der Metropole wie eine Oase der Ordnung und Harmonie und versorgt die Gläubigen mit Würde und Anerkennung.

Globalisierung hat in vielen Ländern nur eine teilhafte Modernisierung aufgebaut, die mehr Unsicherheit und Unzufriedenheit mitbringt als gar keine. Z. B. Ausbildung ohne Arbeitsangebot, oder mediale Werbung und ohne Möglichkeiten, die angebotenen Waren sich kaufen zu können, wecken Reizgefühle, ohne sie jedoch zu stillen. Die Ausbildung an den Schulen und Universitäten geht nicht zusammen mit den Arbeitsangeboten. Das bringt Frustration der gut ausgebildeten mittleren Schicht der Gesellschaft und bestätigt das Gefühl, daß die passive Ökonomie der arabischen Ländern sich immer weiter von dem weltlichen Standard entfernt.



#### **4. Modernisierung: Komplexität und Kontingenz des Lebens**

Die moderne Gesellschaft hat viele Prinzipien und Autoritäten der hierarchisch konstruierten Gesellschaft in Frage gestellt. Zugleich entdeckt der westliche Mensch eine Vielfalt an Angeboten im Bereich der Werte, Autorität und der Religion. Der moderne Mensch befindet sich in einer neuen sozialen Situation. „Es mangelt der modernen Gesellschaft nämlich nicht an Werten: sie sind nur nicht mehr hierarchisch geordnet und kollektiv verbindlich. Deshalb drängen sich Bilder wie Wertekaleidoskop oder eben Wertekarussell auf“ (Bolz 2005, p. 8). In Anlehnung an Niklas Luhmann formuliert z. B. Norbert Bolz die Diagnose unserer modernen Welt durch Komplexität und Kontingenz (Bolz 2005, p. 13). Die systemdifferenzierte Gesellschaft hat eine derartige Komplexität erreicht, daß jedes Element mit einem beliebigen anderen Element vertauschbar ist. „In der modernen Welt hat die Komplexität keinen Gegenbegriff mehr – deshalb wächst die Sehnsucht nach Einfachheit; die Religion Simplicity bekommt Zulauf“ (Bolz 2005, p. 19). Das oberflächige und einfache Weltbild, das die fundamentalistischen Bewegungen anbieten, ist sicherlich ein Gegenmittel zu einer komplexen, unverständlichen Welt.

Die Kontingenz, also Ersetzbarkeit und gleichwertige Vielfalt der Optionen und funktionale Äquivalenz prägen die moderne Welt. Der Fundamentalismus bietet nicht nur einen Ausweg aus diesem Chaos der orientierungslosen Optionen, sondern einen klaren Weg für Identität, Lebensstil, Werte, Weltanschauung und Selbsthingabe. Dieser Ausweg mag auch ein „flacher“ oder oberflächlicher Ausweg sein, doch reizt und lockt viele zu seinem Anhänger zu werden.

#### **5. Säkularisierung und Religion**

Die Säkularisierung und Abwertung der traditionellen Religionen bedeuten nicht eine Abwendung von der Religiosität. Bereits die scheinbar religionsfeindlichen politischen Bewegungen wie Nazismus und Kommunismus wirkten oft wie eine Art der Ersatzreligionen. Die versuchten die Sehnsucht nach dem Sinn des Lebens zu stillen und auf die Identitätsfrage eine Antwort zu geben. „Ideologien im starken Sinn des Wortes sind Bewegungen, die mit atheistischen Weltprojekten die Form des eifernden Monotheismus nachäffen“ (Sloterdijk 2007, p. 188).

Neben dem Säkularisierungsprozeß beobachten wir zugleich einen neuen Prozeß der religiösen Tendenzen, Fragen und Sehnsüchte, die mit der postmodernen Welt auf keinen Fall in Widerspruch stehen. Das religiöse

Phänomen wurde durch Säkularisierung nicht unterbrochen, sondern auf andere Bereiche verschoben und es erlebt eine Renaissance nicht nur auf dem amerikanischen Kontinent und Asien, sondern auch in Europa.

### Das Wesen des Fundamentalismus

Man darf nicht nur bei dem Umfeld eines Phänomens stehen bleiben, sondern man muß versuchen sein Wesen zu finden und es zu beschreiben. Es geht um einen Ausgangspunkt für weitere Debatten über den Fundamentalismus.

Man kann mit einer Arbeitsdefinition des Fundamentalismus anfangen, die im weiteren vertieft werden sollte. Martin Riesenbrodt schreibt: „Als ‘fundamentalistisch’ kann man demnach solche religiösen Bewegungen und Gemeinschaftsbildungen der Moderne bezeichnen, die eine von ihnen wahrgenommene, dramatische Krise durch eine ‘exakte’ Rückkehr zu vermeintlich ewig gültigen, heiligen Prinzipien, Geboten oder Gesetzen zu überwinden suchen. Fundamentalisten gehen davon aus, daß es eine zeitlos gültige Ordnung der Welt sowie eine darauf beruhende, religiös verbindliche fromme Lebensführung gibt, die einst in einer exemplarischen Gemeinschaft verwirklicht waren“ (Riesenbrodt 2004, p. 18).

Wir haben es mit einem breiten Prozeß der Sakralisierung zu tun, der verschiedene Bereiche der Wirklichkeit umfassen will durch Regelung und Kontrolle der Lebensführung, Idealisierung patriarchalischer Autorität und Moral. Dieser Prozeß hat stets eine religiöse Basis und religiöse Quelle und erst dann vermischt er sich mit Politik und anderen Bereichen. Der Fundamentalismus ist vor allem ein religiöses Phänomen und kann wahrscheinlich in jeder Religion vorkommen. Er ist universal in dem Sinne, daß er auf keine Religion beschränkt werden kann. Jede Religiosität trägt also ein Potential am fundamentalen, extremer Deutung, weil sie meistens mit Begriffen wie ‘Absolut’, ‘Gott’ und ‘Letztes Gericht’ zu tun hat. Ideologischer Mißbrauch solcher Konzepte bereitet eine gute Basis für eine fundamentalistische Tendenz.

H. W. Schäfer schlägt eine formale Definition des Fundamentalismus vor (Schäfer 2008, pp. 18-21). Sie besteht aus drei Bestandteilen.

**1. Religiöse Absolutsetzung:** Der Fundamentalismus beinhaltet eine religiöse Überzeugung und setzt sie als eine absolute Überzeugung fest. Die Absolutsetzung der Überzeugungen ist kein Privileg der Religionen, aber im Bereich der Religionen ist es leichter, eine absolute Geltung einer Glaubensüberzeugung zuzuschreiben. In den Religionen geht es meistens

ums Ganze. Der Inhalt des jeweiligen Glaubens spielt dabei eine äußerst wichtige Rolle. Um die religiösen Inhalte absolut zu setzen, braucht der Fundamentalismus eine besondere Einstellung zur religiösen, politischen und sozialen Autorität. Deswegen idealisiert man oft die patriarchalische und politische Autorität und zugleich ihre strenge Morallehre (Riesenbrodt 2004, p. 20). Dabei verlangt er einen tieferen Gehorsam und grenzenloses Vertrauen auf die Autorität.

2. **Politisierung:** Der Fundamentalismus beinhaltet eine universalistische Dominanzstrategie oder allgemeine Geltung. Die Tendenz, die ganze Welt zu beherrschen oder mindestens mehrere ihrer Gebiete, gehört zum Wesen dieses Phänomens. „Fundamentalisten versuchen bestimmte Praxisfelder oder gar ganze Gesellschaften nach ihrem in gesellschaftspolitischen Utopien gewonnenen Glauben zu gestalten“ (Schäfer 2008, pp. 18-21). Das heißt, praktisch ist der Fundamentalismus immer politisch, weil er die Inhalte des Glaubens praktisch einsetzen will. „Genau diese aktive Teilnahme an der grundlegenden Politisierung der Gesellschaft (...) macht Fundamentalismen zu *modernen* sozialen Bewegungen“ (Schäfer 2008, pp. 18-21).

Zugleich sind die beiden Kriterien miteinander eng verbunden: „Absolutsetzung der eigenen Überzeugungen ist also nur in Zusammenhang mit Dominanzstrategien fundamentalistisch. (...) Gesellschaftliche Dominanzstrategien sind also nur im Zusammenhang mit Absolutsetzung fundamentalistisch“ (Schäfer 2008, pp. 18-21). Es gibt des weiteren mehrere Fundamentalismen, weil die Glaubensinhalte und konkrete Situationen unterschiedlich das Phänomen prägen.

3. **Modernität:** Schäfer fügt also ein zusätzliches Kriterium ein, um die religiösen Fundamentalismen deutlicher darzustellen. Die Fundamentalismen sind moderne Bewegungen, sie entstehen als Antwort oder Reaktion auf die Moderne, oder aber wachsen aus dem Zusammenleben innerhalb den modernen politischen und sozialen Lebensbedingungen. Die Fundamentalismen sind also modern par excellence: „Religiöse Fundamentalisten entstehen in der Auseinandersetzung religiöser Akteure mit den Bedingungen einer modernen Gestaltung des gesellschaftlichen Zusammenlebens“. Weil das Schlachtfeld der Fundamentalisten – so Schäfer – die Konflikte um das *moderne* Leben selbst sind, sehen wir eine instrumentalisierte Nutzung der Tradition und zugleich eine Neigung seitens der Fundamentalisten zur modernen Technik. M. Riesenbrodt ist der Überzeugung, daß „der Fundamentalismus eine Synthese zwischen selektiven Elementen der Tradition

und Moderne formt“. So entsteht sogar einen „modernen“ Traditionalismus, der manchmal eine radikalisierte Form des echten Traditionalismus darstellt. Der Fundamentalismus bildet nicht nur eine moderne Bewegung, die mit anderen modernen politischen und sozialen Richtungen in Wettbewerb tritt. Er versucht auch – so Z. Bauman und P. Berger – die Reaktion auf die Moderne und ein Heilmittel für ihre negativen Folgen zu werden: „One may conclude, that religious fundamentalism is a legitimate child of postmodernity ... Fundamentalism is a radical remedy against that bane of postmodern/market-led/consumer society – risk-contaminated freedom“ (Bauman, 1997, p. 184). Selbst die neueste Literatur über Osama bin Laden berichtet, dass er nicht ein Produkt der mittelalterlichen Mentalität oder einer strengen „islamistischen“ Schule ist, sondern vor allem ein Produkt der modernen Welt, ihrer Konflikte, Ideen, schneller Kommunikationsmittel, medialen Bilder und modernen Phantasien (Halliday, 2009, p. 12).

Der Fundamentalismus idealisiert die Vergangenheit, aber keine echte Vergangenheit, sondern eine fiktive Vergangenheit. Die Elemente der Tradition werden auserwählt und oft aufs Neue interpretiert oder neu dargestellt. Es soll in der Vergangenheit doch eine „goldene Zeit“ gegeben haben, in der die soziale und politische Ordnung als Muster dafür diene, wie man die heutigen sozialen Probleme lösen oder effizient weiterführen kann. Diese fiktive Vergangenheit wird in der Gegenwart interpretiert, um die Probleme von Heute zu lösen. Dadurch bildet der Fundamentalismus keine pure traditionalistische Tendenz, sondern eine radikalisierte Mischung der selektiven Elemente von Tradition und Moderne (Riesenbrodt 2004, p. 19). So formiert sich eine ideologische Mischung der erfundenen Vergangenheit und der imaginierten Zukunft, eine Mischung der mythischen Erzählungen und chiliastischen Lehren. Gleich wie die Vergangenheit im Dienst der aktuellen politischen Bedürfnissen des Fundamentalismus steht, steht auch die fiktive Zukunft im Dienst des Aktuellen. Die Gesellschaftskritik wird ausgeübt durch eine „heilgeschichtliche Deutung der Gegenwart“. Das moderne Merkmal des Fundamentalismus erkennt man an der chiliastischen Lehre, die die Gegenwart aus der imaginären Zukunft interpretiert und darstellt. In diesem Sinne besitzt der Fundamentalismus ideologische Züge und steht in Konkurrenz zu anderen Ideologien die sich mit der Zukunft beschäftigen wie Nationalismus, Liberalismus und Marxismus.

**4. Andere Eigenschaften und Merkmale** des Fundamentalismus vertiefen die Beschreibung in den Punkten 1-3. Der Fundamentalismus als eine moderne Bewegung, verbreitet die manichäische Vision der Geschichte und der aktuellen Weltsituation. Er stellt der säkularen Geschichte, das heißt

der Modernität, Aufklärung, Wirtschaftswachstums und der menschlichen Autonomie eine besondere Form der Heilsgeschichte mit theozentrischem Weltbild entgegen. Die säkulare Geschichte soll ein Degenerationsprozeß bilden, also Abfall von den ewigen, göttlichen Prinzipien und Gesetzen. Das bezieht sich vor allem auf die westliche Kultur, die sich intellektuell und sozialmoralisch vergiften sollte (Riesenbrodt 2004, p. 23). Es handelt sich „um einen apokalyptischen Kampf zwischen den göttlichen und den satanischen Mächten“ (Riesenbrodt 2004, p. 24).

Sexualmoral und Familienleben werden ideologisch durch Fundamentalismen kontrolliert. Die Fundamentalismen „lehnen den modernen geschlechterneutralen Individualismus ab und setzen ihm einen Geschlechterdualismus entgegen“ (Riesenbrodt 2004, pp. 24-25). Die Beziehung Mann-Frau ist auf ewig von Gott hierarchisch vorbestimmt, indem die Frau dem Mann unterordnet ist und sich nur traditionell mit Haushalt und Kindern beschäftigen darf. Die Familie und vor allem der weibliche Körper unterliegen einer ständigen Kontrolle. Die Kontrolle wird durch eine Ideologie ausgeübt, die sich ständig mit den Fragen nach Geschlechterbeziehung und Sexualmoral beschäftigt. Solche Fragen dominieren sogar den politischen Diskurs und wirtschaftliche Probleme.

## FOLGEN DES FUNDAMENTALISMUS

### 1. Flache Religiosität

Der Fundamentalismus entfernt die Religiosität von ihrer Quellen und ihrer wahren Tradition und verschiebt sie auf eine oberflächige Ebene. Die Vielfalt der religiösen Weltanschauung verschwindet und an ihre Stelle tritt eine vereinfachte und flache Religiosität. Es ist also nicht erstaunlich, dass viele islamitische Gruppen schwache religiöse Bildung vorweisen: „Many of those attracted to Islamist Movements are technically rather than religiously educated. (...) some Islamists see the traditional learning as an impediment to their revolutionary dreams, as indeed it is“ (Cooper 2004, p. 20). Solch eine vereinfachte Religiosität kann politisch und sozial leicht instrumentalisiert werden. Das wäre wahrscheinlich ein Hinweis dafür, dass ein vertieftes Religionsleben und ernsthafte Kenntnis der religiösen Tradition nicht ein Katalysator, sondern das Hindernis des Fundamentalismus sein können. „Je stärker der Fundamentalismus (und die Ortodoxie) bei christlichen Seminarstudenten ausgeprägt ist, desto geringer ist die kognitive Komplexität in deren Denken (Grom, 2007, p. 161).

## 2. Freund und Feind Unterscheidung

Die Unterscheidung zwischen Freund und Feind als Quelle der politischen Identität und des politischen Geschehens kommt von C. Schmitt und ist neulich von S. Huntington in seinen Begriff „Kampf der Kulturen“ eingeführt worden. „Wer ist mein Feind?“ – Die Antwort auf diese Frage bestimmt unsere eigene politische Gestalt. (Vlg. Palaver, 2004, p. 154) Den Feind zu bestimmen, bestimmt die eigene politische Identität und kann sie sogar retten, wenn das Identitätsgefühl verloren geht oder schwach geworden ist.

Fundamentalistische Bewegungen fördern *Freund und Feind Unterscheidung* in politischer Praxis und zugleich bitten ein manichäisches Bild in der Politik (Schäfer 2008, pp. 84-85). Sie versuchen, ihren Kampf nicht als einen eigenen dazustellen, sondern ihn als einen Kampf der Kulturen zu modellieren. Gerade bin Laden hat diese symbolische und mediale Darstellung des weltweiten Kampfes der Kulturen als ein der wichtigsten Erfolge der Angriffe von New York am 11. Sept. 2001 anerkannt (Schäfer 2008, pp. 69-70). Den Feind zu zeigen stärkt die Identität. Deswegen richteten sich die Angriffe auf Manhattan und Washington – nicht um die USA oder Europa zu erobern – sie wurden nicht grundsätzlich „gegen“, sondern „für“ den Islam unternommen. Es ging vor allem um die Verwicklung der USA in einen breiteren Konflikt, um die politische Szene als Kampf zu modellieren: „The ‘planes operations’, as it was originally called (...), was designed to be a spectacular piece of theatre, what anarchists used to call ‘Propaganda of de Deed’, a provocation that would draw the US military into further, an costly conflicts in the Middle East, primarily Afghanistan” (Halliday, p. 12). Fundamentalismen sind also spezialisiert auf die Eskalation von Konflikten, vor allem derer, die eine Identitätsverstärkung versprechen (Schäfer 2008, p.26).

## 3. Re-Theologisierung der Politik

Die Re-Theologisierung des Politischen ist eine Tendenz der politischen Szene, die der Fundamentalismus fördert und stärkt. Sie entfaltet sich in: Die Re-Militarisierung von Religionen, die Re-Privatisierung des Krieges und Wiederkehr der diskriminierenden Form eines „gerechten Krieges“. (Burger 2005, p. 85). Dabei geht es um eine neue, politische Mobilisierung, die u. a. von den drei Monotheismen vertreten wird. Es geht hier weder um die „politische Theologie“, die eine säkularisierte Form der theologischen Begriffe im staatlichen Bereich sehen will, noch um die

Ersatzreligionen für die Massenbewegung. Die traditionellen Religionen scheinen heute in den Konflikten eine immer größere Bedeutung zu erreichen und dienen nicht selten als eine Erklärungsquelle für Anfang und Fortfahren eines Konflikts. Auch die einzelnen Personen spielen oft in den Konflikten eine entscheidende Rolle. Solche einzelne religiös motivierte Kämpfer behaupten sie sich als Gotteskrieger, die eine besondere Mission zu erfüllen haben und faszinieren die Massen. Die idealistische Motivation der Selbstmordattentäter hat eine besondere Macht über die Anhänger. Das hat bereits F. Dostojewski zur Sprache gebracht hat: „Wer beschlossen hat, sich selbst zu töten, der ist Zar“ (Vlg. Burger 2005, pp. 88-89). Nach den terroristischen Anschlägen am 11. Sept. 2001 versuchten die USA nicht nur einen religiösen Kontext ihrem Kampf gegen den Terrorismus zuzuschreiben, sondern auch den Anspruch auf die Machthegemonie mittels des „gerechten Krieges“ zu stilisieren und zu legitimieren.

#### 4. Terrorismus als häretische Inszenierung

„Gewalt ist eine Konsequenz fundamentalistischer Radikalisierung“ (Schäfer 2008, p. 82). Aber religiöse Gewalt muß einen Grund haben, warum sie überhaupt angewandt wird. B. Cooper, in Bezug auf die Theorie des Totalitarismus von H. Arendt und das politische Denken von E. Voegelin, versucht, die religiöse Gewalt als eine Krankheit des Geistes (*disease of the spirit*) zu beschreiben, die in den Ideologien des 20. Jh., d.h. Kommunismus und Nazismus, zu finden ist: „the spiritual disorders that are present among contemporary terrorists are expressions of what Arendt indicated by the term *ideology*“ (Cooper 2004, p. 25). Man kann ohne weiteres die geistige Unordnung innerhalb der Ideologien wie Kommunismus oder Nazismus mit der im Terrorismus vergleichen. Die spirituelle Unordnung der terroristischen Gewalt hat viel zu tun mit Verlust an Vernunft und an der ordentlichen religiösen Erfahrung und ist mehr mit den sektiererischen oder häretischen Bewegungen vergleichbar als mit der traditionellen Religion. Extreme Gewalt bringt zum Ausdruck eine tiefe magische Sehnsucht, die Wirklichkeit ändern zu wollen, obwohl sie nicht zu ändern ist. Für die Individuen unter geistlicher Unordnung scheint die Gewalt keine pragmatische, zielorientierte Handlung zu sein, sondern ein magisches Instrument für die Verwandlung der Wirklichkeit. Die Gewalt verleiht ein illusorisches Dominanzgefühl, rettet die verlorene Ehre und ermöglicht symbolisch, den extremen Kampf zwischen Gut und Böse weiterzuführen. Die terroristischen Selbstmordattentäter töten meistens „die unbeteiligte Dritten“, die mit dem Kampf direkt nichts zu tun haben. Das Ziel ist nicht

wichtig, wichtig ist aber den Kampf als religiösen Kampf weiterzuführen und ihn medial zu verkünden. Die mediale Seite des Terrorismus ist besonders wichtig. Es kam inzwischen fast zu einem Bund zwischen Terrorismus und Medien. Der Terror ist ein theatralischer Akt und erfüllt nur dann seinen Sinn, wenn er medial weltweit kommuniziert wird (vgl. Cooper 2004, pp. 32-33). Der Terrorismus kann ohne Medien nicht leben. Wenn eine terroristische Attacke in den Medien nicht erscheint, muß man mit der Eskalation der Gewalt rechnen. Aber auch die Medien brauchen den Terroristen, sie brauchen sich gegenseitig. Sie sind mit dem Terrorismus zu einer symbiotischen Beziehung gewachsen (Cooper 2004, pp. 32-33; Bolz 2007, pp. 57-60).

### **5. Verlorene Freiheit**

Die Freiheit ist nicht nur in den Konsum- oder kapitalistischen Gesellschaften dem Risiko ausgeliefert. Der Individualismus verspricht eine grenzenlose Freiheit, die sich leider wegen der Vielfalt an Angeboten und ihnen damit verbundenem Risiko nie verwirklichen kann. Wer eines wählt muß auf das andere verzichten. Wer zu viel wählt geht das Risiko der Abhängigkeit ein. Der Fundamentalismus, der sich als ein Heilmittel gegen einen grenzenlosen Individualismus modelliert, gerät zugleich in ein anderes Extrem. Der Fundamentalismus bietet zwar einen klaren „religiösen“ Sinn, zugleich aber setzt er die individuelle und dadurch auch soziale und politische Freiheit in Bedrohung: „Fundamentalism promises to develop all the infinite powers of the group which – when deployed in full – would compensate for the incurable insufficiency of its individual members, and therefore justify the unquestionable subordination of individual choices to the rules proclaimed in the group’s name“ (Bauman, 1997, p. 184). Die Freiheit geht verloren durch einen kritiklosen Kult des politischen oder religiösen Leaders. Das mangelhafte menschliche Individuum kann allein die Freiheit nie verwirklichen. Im Fundamentalismus wird es klar, dass es leichter ist, die eigene unsichere Freiheit der Vollmacht der Gruppe unterzuordnen, als sie nur allein verwirklichen zu wollen.

### **SCHUßWORT**

Der Fundamentalismus scheint letztendlich eine Konstruktion der individuellen, institutionellen, politischen oder religiösen Identität zu sein. Er



bietet die Identität dort an, wo sie fehlt, und stiftet einen Sinn, wo es an ihm mangelt. Und weil die Moderne gerade durch identitätslose Komplexität und Kontingenz einerseits, andererseits durch militärische Konflikte und politische Spannungen geprägt ist, erfüllen die fundamentalistischen Bewegungen die Sehnsucht nach Identität durch utopische Konstruktionen der Gegenwart. Sie engagieren sich in die Konflikte und spenden den Sinn des Lebens. Man muß auch dazu sagen, dass nicht alle fundamentalistischen Bewegungen völlig fundamentalistisch sind nach allen Merkmalen, die hier beschrieben worden sind. Es steht aber fest, dass gerade dieses Phänomen in den letzten Jahrzehnten universal geworden ist und gehört zum Bestandteil unserer globalisierten Welt.

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## BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTICES

**Michelle-Irene Brudny** *Hannah Arendt. An Intellectual Biography*. Melville House Publishing, 2008.

Several recently published translations of the biography of one of the most prominent twentieth century Jewish philosophers seem to have filled the void which existed in this area in Poland. Apparently Michelle-Irene Brudny had a very difficult job in satisfying the experts on Hannah Arendt's life and philosophy, as her book was published relatively late – in 2006. Inevitably then, her work was compared and judged against the most recognised biography of Arendt written by Elisabeth Young-Bruel in 1982 (still unavailable in Polish translation). The Rouen-based professor, aware of this publication, as well as several other renditions of Arendt's biography, started her book by acknowledging all other writers who had addressed the life and work of the Jewish philosopher.

Following Brudny's approach and discussing all publications would show how difficult her task was, but let me just focus on the books which might be familiar to the Polish reader. In 1987, the professor of political science Wolfgang Heuer published Arendt's biography in Germany. A Polish edition of his work appeared in 2009. Twelve years later, in France, Julia Kristeva started a series titled *Female Genius: Life, Madness, Words* with a volume dedicated to Arendt: *Hannah Arendt* (Polish edition 2007). Another attempt at a summary of the philosopher's life and work dates to 2005 with the book published by Laure Adler (translated into Polish in 2008). In the meantime, in 1995, a controversial book written by Elisabeth Ettinger – *Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger* – was published in the USA. (Polish translation 1998). This particular publication was described by Brudny as "a tale woven with fantasy" (see p. 32). Arendt and Heidegger's correspondence was falsified to such an extent – according to Brudny – that Hermann Heidegger (the philosopher's son and the executor of his will) decided to publish the letters again. She pointed out in her book that Ettinger's publication is, to this day, a source of other, equally distorted, descriptions of the relationship between the pair of famous philosophers (as for example in Claudio Magris' book).

Michelle-Irene Brudny's book does not add any new facts to what we already know about Hannah Arendt's life. She begins by reminding the reader that Hannah Arendt was born into a family of German Jews in Linden on 16 October, 1906. She goes on to describe her difficult childhood – her father's death, escape from Königsberg, where she grew up, and problems with adopting to the new school in the outskirts of Berlin just a few months before the outbreak of WWI. Brudny sees these events as ones which led to Arendt's taking the Abitur exam

externally, a year earlier than her peers, while she was already a student of Berlin University. The next chapters see young Hannah move to Marburg, where she befriended many interesting people of her generation. One of them – Hans Jonas – was to remain a close friend till her death. It was also where she met professor Martin Heidegger and had an affair with him. They split, and their passion, which later evolved into friendship, was severely tested by Heidegger's decision to join the ranks of the NSDAP (the National Socialist German Workers' Party) in 1933. Michelle-Irene Brudny goes on to describe Hannah Arendt's and Günther Stern's wedding in 1929, and her work on a dissertation on the concept of love in the thought of Saint Augustine, under the existentialist philosopher-psychologist Karl Jaspers. Facing problems with Stern's habilitation the couple decided to move back to Berlin, from which they were forced to escape in August 1933, in the wake of anti-Semitism. First Günther fled the city, and then Hannah – following her eight day arrest and interrogation by the Gestapo. Arendt reached Paris via Prague, Genoa and Geneva. In 1936, still in the French capital, she met and fell in love with her future husband Heinrich Blücher, a well-read self-educated poet and philosopher. Brudny highlights the ease with which Arendt mixed with new and fascinating people, which resulted in a friendship with Walter Benjamin. Arendt and Blücher got married in 1940, in France, even though it was no longer a safe place. The situation deteriorated after France's capitulation and abolishment of the protection that the country had offered to Jews. Faced with the danger of imprisonment, most Jewish refugees sought their safety in the USA. Hannah and Heinrich Blücher followed the example of others. Only in New York, after difficult years of exile, could the couple enjoy the prospect of a happy life and fruitful academic career. In the epilogue of her book, Brudny describes Hannah Arendt's death on 4 December, 1975.

The originality of Arendt's biography as written by Michelle-Irene Brudny, then, lies not so much in the treatment of the philosopher's private life as in the portrayal of what could be called her intellectual achievements. The Rouen-based professor describes her discovery of an unpublished text titled *Antisemitismus* in the Congress Library in 1992. At that time she found it very unlikely that a text could exist that had not been published yet either by Arendt herself, or one of the executors of her will. However, after a thorough examination and analysis of the manuscript, Brudny put forward a hypothesis that the date of conception of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* – one of Arendt's most prominent works – could be "moved back in time". Before Brudny's discovery it had been assumed that the earliest essays that made *The Origins of Totalitarianism* were written by Arendt in 1943 or 1944, so during the time when Hannah already lived in New York. The text found by Brudny dates back to Arendt's Paris period, 1933-1940. The Rouen-based professor drew the conclusion, then, that Arendt began her work on *The Origins of Totalitarianism* when she still lived in France.

This interesting discovery is not the only strength of Brudny's publication, however. She also offers a clear and comprehensive description of the way Jews were treated in Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century. Brudny based

her observations on the work of such established Jewish philosophers as Gershom Scholem, Hermann Cohen and Martin Buber. This part of the book constitutes an especially interesting read because the writer brings back from relative obscurity a lot of interesting representatives of Jewish thought who shared the same fate as Hannah Arendt, and allows the contemporary reader to understand their view of historic events they witnessed.

Another interesting element in this biography is Brudny's hesitation to describe Arendt as a "philosopher". Several times she insists on calling Arendt "just" a thinker. This seems justified by the fact that Arendt herself often stressed that she "thought" first, and then quickly noted down her conclusions. Also the aversion of the author of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* to being called a "philosopher" is well known and documented. Still this term may be a little unfair if we take into consideration the sheer amount and quality of intellectual heritage that Arendt left. *The Human Condition*, *Willing*, or *Thinking* are not only firmly based on philosophical texts, but also the conclusions presented in these works have a distinct philosophical character. Such a simplified approach to Arendt may result from the fact that Brudny decided not to mention *Thinking* in the biography, claiming that the Jewish philosopher did not edit the work herself. However she seems to forget that it is the first volume of the series called *The Life of the Mind*, and that – when she died – Arendt not only had already finished writing the second volume titled *Willing*, but also the title page of volume three – *Judging* – had been already resting in her typewriter.

Brudny focuses also on Arendt's style, or rather the lack of it. She describes her writings as "aphoristic and categorical". She highlights Arendt's willingness to form judgements contrary to common opinions expressed at that time. Such was the case with *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* in which, using historical data, Arendt drew her original conclusions which she had to defend till the end of her days. To Brudny's justice, she does not limit herself to describing the controversy connected with the reception of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, but also reminds the contemporary reader that Arendt's other works, such as *The Origins of Totalitarianism* also were welcomed with a dose of criticism.

Working on a biography of someone as established as Arendt, it is extremely difficult to come up with thoroughly original material. Yet professor Brudny undertook this challenge, and managed to portray Arendt's life and intellectual work in an interesting and inviting manner. What distinguishes her work from other biographers is that she used unpublished texts, new translations of Arendt's works and letters, and that she tried to show the philosopher's relationship with Heidegger in a new light. All of these, as well as other interesting issues analysed in the biography, make the book much more than a mere copy of biographies published previously. It is truly a very insightful publication for everybody interested in Hannah Arendt's political philosophy.

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***Philosophy of Religion. An Almanac. Volumes I & II. Moscow: Russian Academy of Sciences, 2007 & 2010.***

This almanac is published by the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Its editor in chief, Vladimir K. Shokhin, is in charge of the division of Philosophy of Religion at the Institute. The Institute was originally founded by the prominent Russian phenomenologist Gustav Spet in 1921 (then it was called the Institute of Scientific Philosophy). The communist authorities wanted it to diffuse the ideology of dialectical materialism, and yet it defended the liberty of philosophical discourse; as a result many of its members were subjected to repression under Stalin. Since the second half of the 20th century the Institute has become a big center of philosophical research. The Institute publishes 13 reviews (including the Philosophical Journal) and three almanacs.

The Almanac of Philosophy of Religion has so far been published in two volumes comprising 2006-2007 and 2008-2009. It is hard to overestimate the importance of such an edition in the Russian philosophical horizon. This branch of philosophy was the first to suffer from the abovementioned attempts to impose dialectical materialism in the soviet epoch. The Marxist “philosophy” of religion was reduced to understanding religion as the opium of the people (or, in Lenin’s even more simplifying formulation, opium *for* the people). Marx regarded religion as a false consciousness – and there can certainly be no philosophy of false consciousness. Marx considered abolishing religion, which is the illusory happiness of the people, as a step towards their real happiness. Besides, religion was meant to express the interests of the bourgeois ruling classes, being a dominant ideology called to legitimate exploitation. According to Marx and Engels, communism abolishes all religion, and all morality, instead of constituting them on a new basis.

Most of the Russian religious thinkers such as Georges Florovsky or Nicolai Berdyaev had to move abroad and the greatest Russian orthodox theologians wrote in exile (such as Alexander Schmemmann, for example).

In the second half of the 20th century some thinkers in the Soviet Union did research in the domain of theology, both biblical and natural (the most prominent was Father Alexander Men), and in the history of Christian culture (like Sergey Averintsev); there were also good specialists in Chinese, Indian, Arab cultures etc. who had to face the religious problematic in their work, but philosophy of religion as such remained taboo.

After the fall of the communist system the taboo on religion was lifted. The Orthodox church as well as other confessions and religions began their expansion. Many people in today’s Russia identify themselves as believers even if sometimes the level of religious education leaves something to be desired. No doubt faith (Christian faith anyway) needs the assistance of reason, and the philosophy of religion can be of great importance here. Besides that, the almanac is called to restore in Russia the continuity of philosophy of religion (which is one of the most

popular and developed branches of philosophy in the west and yet hardly known in today's Russia), the continuity of which was broken in the communist era.

It is perhaps not fortuitous that the almanac comes into being as late as 15 years after the fall of the communist ideology; indeed, philosophy needs time to reflect on past events and processes and to grasp their sense, and haste is out of place when reflection is concerned. The situation today in the religious sphere in Russia necessitates philosophical reflection, but it also makes such a reflection possible, which was not quite the case a couple of years ago when this situation was still in the making. This makes the publication of the almanac in Russia very timely.

The almanac is conceived as an international periodical and it is edited with the participation of the Society of Christian Philosophers. It is also an interdisciplinary edition; besides philosophers and specialists in religious studies the Institute collaborates also with theologians. Philosophy of religion is supposed to play a coordinating role in these interdisciplinary studies of religion. The structure of the almanac (in its first issue) is as follows: the first section is devoted to metaphysical reflection on the identity of philosophy of religion, on its subject-matter. As V. Shokhin, the editor-in-chief, remarks, the discussion of this topic is needed because of the existence of different conceptions on this issue; the problem of the proper area of philosophy of religion does not seem to be unequivocally resolved. The second section deals with particular problems and it is supposed to have some thematic unity: for example, in the first issue it outlines contemporary theism. The third section is historical (in the first issue it considers the history of natural theology). The fourth section contains translations of classical texts in philosophical theology as well as works of Russian philosophers and theologians. The last section consists of book reviews.

The first volume of the Almanac contains 497 pages; it is particularly noteworthy that the second section contains articles by leading analytical philosophers of religion such as R. Swinburne's comprehensive article on the Anglo-American philosophy of religion (a theme of particular interest for the Russian reader), Robert Adams' *Divine Necessity*, E. Wielenberg's *Omnipotence Again* and N. Wolterstorff's *God is Everlasting*. The third section, as already mentioned, is devoted to the history of Natural Theology from antiquity to the Middle Ages.

I would like to present briefly V. K. Shokhin's long (about seventy pages) introductory article *On the Genesis of Philosophy of Religion: the Problem and Its Most Plausible Solution* as an example of successful application of the historical approach to a (meta)theoretical problem. The article aims at defining the very identity of philosophy of religion by more precisely defining its subject-matter. This goal is absolutely legitimate given that philosophy by definition includes a more significant amount of self-reflection than any other discipline; it is called to constantly define and redefine itself, its own role and scope. Philosophy of religion is no exception, and V. K. Shokhin undertakes a convincing attempt to delimit its proper sphere of studies by having recourse to the history of reflection on the philosophy of religion. Here we deal with an attempt to give a historically grounded solution to a (meta) theoretical problem. The validity of this method becomes

clear when we realize how much our conception of philosophy of religion changes depending on whether we set its beginnings as early as in the time of Xenophanes or the Upanishads or as late as in Kant's and Hegel's epoch. Therefore, writing a history of philosophy of religion correlates with defining its subject matter. (We may be tempted to suppose a kind of hermeneutical circle between the two, but this is not what the author explicitly states). Besides, the history of philosophical reflection and self-reflection sheds more light on theoretical problems than history normally does in other disciplines; it is due to the fact that most philosophical problems do not imply final solutions and so we can make a theoretical use even of the very first philosophic approaches to religion.

After this introduction the author proceeds to a critical review of some conceptions of the history of philosophy of religion and correspondingly to a review of definitions of this branch of philosophy. We will consider briefly those of them which clearly help define the author's own conception.

For example, the contemporary Russian philosopher Yu. A. Kimelev, in his book on philosophy of religion, distinguishes between two meanings of the term; he speaks about *philosophy of religion* in the broad and in the narrow senses of the word. If we take it broadly it will refer to a set of philosophical attitudes towards religion as well as with philosophical ways of confirming the existence of God, considering His nature and His relation to the world and to man. This relation between philosophy and religion has existed as long as philosophy itself. In the narrow sense philosophy of religion is an explicit and autonomous philosophical discourse about God and about religion. It becomes possible during Modernity when religion separates from other human activities and philosophy in its turn becomes independent from religion.

The definition of philosophy of religion as discourse on both religion and God leads Kimelev to its subdivision into the philosophical science of religion and philosophical theology coextensive with natural theology. V. K. Shokhin's criticism of this vision helps to highlight his own conception. In Kimelev's opinion philosophy of religion as the philosophical science of religion *studies* "religious knowledge"; as philosophical theology it helps *produce* the said knowledge. V. K. Shokhin shows that in this case we are confronted with a confusion of object-language and meta-language: either philosophy of religion is religiology, or it is theology; it cannot be both or otherwise we would be equally entitled to treat literary criticism and the writing of novels as the same kind of activity. The distinction will become clearer below.

The author then proceeds to a review of western conceptions of philosophy of religion. For reasons of space we have to limit ourselves to the theoretical frame of the discussion. V. K. Shokhin divides all the conceptions of the history of philosophy of religion into three categories. 1) The first category comprises those thinkers who understand philosophy of religion only in the broad sense without distinguishing the genesis of philosophy of religion from that of philosophy *tout court*. In their view philosophy of religion is identical with any philosophical connections with religion. 2) The second category is represented by those who under-



stand philosophy of religion both in the broad and in the narrow senses of the term. For them philosophy of religion originally existed as any relationship between philosophy and religion but since Modernity it has been transformed into a specialized philosophical discipline. 3) Finally, the third category includes those who accept only the narrow sense of the term *philosophy of religion*. This trilemma can be put in historical terms so that the question of the identity of philosophy of religion becomes related to the question whether philosophy of religion a) does not have any history other than that of philosophy itself, b) both has (in one respect) and does not have (in another respect) such a history, c) has its own history separate from that of philosophy as a whole.

V. K. Shokhin then enumerates and discusses the views of historians of philosophy of religion that represent each of the three categories and proceeds to a criticism of their respective attitudes.

The edge of the criticism is directed towards the first category as completely erroneous in the author's view. The attitude of this category of thinkers is expressed in the long title of a book written by I. Berger, the first historian of religion (published in 1800); he understands philosophy of religion as the "Teachings of the Most Original Thinkers of All Times on God *and* Religion". The problem with this formulation is the same as in Kimelev's case mentioned above: here we deal with a confusion of *philosophy in religion* (religious ideas expressed in philosophical terms) and *philosophy of religion* as a philosophical discourse on religion; a confusion, in other words, of theology and religiology, both being supposed to be the object of study of one and the same discipline. This mistake seems to me to result from confusing an object-language (religious language in its occurrence) with metalanguage (correspondingly, a discourse on religious language).

We find an example of such a confusion of levels of language in the view according to which the sages of India, China and Greece made the first steps in the philosophical comprehension of religion when they posed the problem of the One (cf. e.g. H. D. Lewis *Philosophy of Religion*, *Encyclopedia of the History of Philosophy*, v. VI New York 1967). According to this view, philosophy of religion is not distinguished from religious philosophy; for V. K. Shokhin this is similar to considering the first studies of the development of the Indo-European *language* as a stage of comparative *linguistics*.

This broad understanding of philosophy of religion results from unconscious confusion based on false evidence; but there are also philosophers who consciously identify this branch of philosophy with philosophical theology which is none other than natural theology. Yet historically, argues V. K. Shokhin, natural theology always presupposed revealed theology and the reading of the book of nature was not absolutely independent from reading Scriptures; in fact they were parts of one whole. Extra-confessional theology is hardly possible, and even one of the main questions of natural theology – whether we can know God on the basis of the reasonably designed world – is answered differently by, for example Thomists and Calvinists. Besides, when identifying philosophy of religion with philosophical theology we still confuse philosophy-in-religion with philosophy of religion,

putting on the same level proofs of God's existence, the problem of His attributes *and* religious language and epistemology. This and some other considerations lead V. K. Shokhin to accept (after a criticism of the other two attitudes) the narrow understanding of philosophy of religion as the only plausible one.

He considers as philosophy of religion any philosophical discourse that has at least some elements of a theoretical treatment of religion oriented towards understanding and not towards control, according to Plantinga's formula. It concerns the origin, essence and significance of religion both taken in itself and related to other aspects of human spiritual life, as well as comprehension of basic religious categories and religious language.

V. K. Shokhin then distinguishes the prehistory of philosophy of religion from its initial history that begins in the 18th century; he proposes his own vision of its prehistory which may start, according to him, with Plato's *Euthyphro* which poses thematically the problem of piety; it continues with Cicero's "The nature of the Gods", then with Lactantius; Aquinas' contribution is also underlined as well as that of Nicholas of Cues, Herbert of Cherbury, Thomas Hobbes and Spinoza.

V. K. Shokhin's article is introductory to a series of articles on the same subject. Philosophy of religion, which is still in the making in Russia, needs to clearly define its own frontiers. But his objective is to make more precise the definition of philosophy of religion as such and not only Russian philosophy of religion. He seems to proceed from the assumption of the unity of philosophical activity. This assumption, worthy of a philosopher as it is, remains however at present a kind of Kantian regulative idea. Given the partition of philosophy roughly into analytical and "continental" (which is not the only partition that exists), this unity becomes a horizon to which we can more or less approach, but not a reality we can grasp. V. K. Shokhin's conception of philosophy of religion seems to me personally to be both logically and historically right, and yet we have to count with a plurality of particular philosophical traditions, including the one that embraces also natural theology as part of philosophy of religion (and that produces fruitful ideas). Besides that, many analytical authors reflect on the methodology of natural theology, taking its language as their object of study, and that meta-theoretical attitude is quite consistent with V. K. Shokhin's conception of philosophy of religion. However, V. K. Shokhin's attention to the history of philosophy of religion and his deep understanding of its relation to the present may contribute significantly to the philosophical discussion on religion.

The second volume of the Almanac (2008-2009) amounts to 524 pages. Some new sections are added: the section of Russian publications and archives is separated from that of classical authors. A section devoted to current events in the area of religious studies is introduced. The section on meta-philosophy of religion is represented by an article by V. K. Shokhin as well as by articles by Richard Shaeffler and Bernhard Kasper. The second section contains not only articles by English and American philosophers (such as R. Swinburne, Alvin Plantinga and others) but also those by Russian philosophers. This issue of the Almanac involves

analytical as well as “continental” thinkers. The section of classical texts includes those by Hugh of St. Victor and F.W.J. Schelling.

Below I will present three articles written by Russian authors.

V. K. Shokhin’s article “*Philosophy of Religion*”: *the Beginning of Self-Reflection* continues the author’s historical and meta-philosophical reflections from the previous volume. Here he retraces the history of philosophy of religion in the 18<sup>th</sup> century – the time of its birth. He remarks that these historical considerations are of primary importance for understanding the actual situation of philosophy of religion.

The first author of a “Philosophy of Religion” was an Austrian Jesuit, S. von Storchenau, who pursued apologetical tasks in his book. Philosophy of religion was understood as a philosophical defense of the main religious beliefs. He was followed by another Jesuit, *François Para du Phanjas*, the author of “*Les principes de la saine philosophie conciliés avec ceux de la religion, ou La philosophie de la religion*”, who was called to justify a consensus or a synthesis between the true philosophy and the true religion as well as to clarify the world-view of the Christian religion as a unity of rational and revealed theologies. This work was also meant to refute all the refutations of Christian religious principles.

The first attempt to introduce philosophy of religion into the academic milieu was made by C. L. Reinhold in his “Letters on the Kantian philosophy”. He explicitly considers philosophy of religion as a separate branch of philosophy and calls for a reformation of it. Philosophy of religion is ascribed theological tasks (a teaching about God and about the future life) but it is meant to construct the very principles of religion in this area on the basis of practical reason, according to the Kantian model.

J. F. Kleuker, in a book published in 1789, criticizes this application of Kantian philosophy to a science of religious principles. According to him, philosophy of religion would have the right to justify the teaching about God’s being and the immortal soul if there were no true “positive” religion that already contains such a justification; since such a religion exists and is known as Christianity, the Kantian enterprise is neither necessary, nor sufficient. Kleuker himself postulates a comparative approach to religions on the basis of the categories true/false, sufficient/insufficient, aimed at evaluation of religions with regard to the ideal.

Kant’s own influence on the formation of philosophy of religion seems to be ambiguous. On the one hand, in the 1780’s he did not intend to develop a philosophy of religion, considering it as part of ethics and not as a separate part of his philosophy. Only in the first edition of “*Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*” (1793) does he identify the philosophical study of religion as philosophical theology (as opposed to biblical theology) and try to find an autonomous niche for this study. In the second edition of the treatise he calls his research in the religious domain *Religionslehre*. In the “*Contest of Faculties*” (1798) he sets the borders between philosophical and theological studies of religion and outlines the principles of the philosophical hermeneutics of the Scriptures. So, on the one hand, Kant introduced a special term “*Philosophische Religionslehre*”; on the other hand, he

most probably did not conceive of philosophy of religion as a philosophical discipline in its own right.

Yet it is under the influence of his work that philosophy of religion is understood more and more as a separate area of study. Philosophy of religion is considered, for example already by the young Schelling, as a separate philosophical trend of a Kantian orientation.

Fichte treats Religionslehre as a particular application of the general philosophical system of Wissenschaftslehre. He speaks about three levels of consciousness concerning religion: 1) the religious sense itself 2) Religionslehre 3) philosophy of religion called to critically remove false ideas about God, to foster religious education and to clarify the origin and formation of the religious sense as well as to define the very notion of religion. Religionslehre is meant to clarify the relation of God to finite reasonable subjects, unlike theology which studies the Divinity in itself. Philosophy of religion becomes a theory of religion which is placed on a different level from that of religious sense; a philosopher of religion works not so much with religion itself or with its concepts as with “concepts about those concepts”.

Finally, the first history of the philosophy of religion (*Geschichte der Religionsphilosophie*) was published in 1800 by Immanuel Berger. Although his vision of the history of the philosophy of religion was too broad (it seems to have been coextensive with history of theology), the very fact of the publication of a history of philosophy of religion witnesses to the fact that by that time it was already a widely recognized and significant cultural and philosophical phenomenon.

The variety of attitudes towards philosophy of religion in the 18<sup>th</sup> century before Fichte had, in spite of numerous distinctions, one common feature: it was considered rather as a philosophical trend than as a discipline in its own right (with the exception of Kant’s ambiguous attitude). By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century it was taken for granted as a philosophical phenomenon, and work on its clarification and identification was not undertaken.

The nowadays widespread broad understanding of the subject-matter of philosophy of religion (as any intersection of philosophy and religion) recalls the situation at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century – another witness of philosophical eternal return.

Fichte seems to have been the only philosopher who understood religiology as a non-theological discourse. His three-level hierarchy of discourses seems to comprise the phenomenology of religious sense, the ontology of the relation between God and finite subjects and the philosophy of religion proper called to study manifestations of the religious and to define the concept of religion. In other words, philosophy of religion is a hierarchy of the phenomenological, ontological and categorial or conceptual dimensions of the religious – a definition that could be claimed in our time. Besides, Fichte clearly distinguishes philosophy of religion from philosophy in religion, the confusion of which, according to V. K. Shokhin, hinders one from clearly identifying the tasks and the subject-matter of the former.

In his article “*Is Hume’s Law Correct*” M. O. Shakhov poses the question of the validity of Hume’s Guillotine, asking whether values can be inferred from our knowledge about the world; to put it in other terms – whether evaluative or prescriptive statements (the distinction is not essential to the author’s goal) can be deduced from descriptive ones. The main objective of the article is to examine the well-known Humean solution of the *is-ought* problem.

That the contrary often takes place, when rational discourse is called to justify norms or values already preconceived, is quite obvious but this is not the point of this article. The author distinguishes three answers to his question: in the positive, in the negative and strictly or extremely negative. The first solution belongs to Platonism, as well as any objective idealism and to traditional Christian theology. The second solution is given by David Hume, and the third one comes from the postmodernist milieu.

In Plato knowledge about the immortality of the soul (descriptive statements) and postmortem retribution founds the necessity of observing moral norms. As a matter of fact, in Plato knowledge of the “ought” is not properly inferred from neutral judgments about what is; “ought” itself exists as an entity, as for example ideas of good or justice, that we can get to know. Philosophies that admit an objective world of values (like G. E. Moore’s) do not distinguish specifically normative judgments. Moral judgments for example are treated as representing knowledge of what is good; so there is no distinction between descriptive and evaluative.

In Christianity knowledge about the immortal soul and retribution is expressed in corresponding descriptive (even though unverifiable) propositions, but it needs to be completed by evaluative and prescriptive propositions. These are contained in biblical commandments that are instituted by God Himself. Formulated by God Himself and thus objective, they not only prescribe, but also describe the objectively existing law, and so are descriptive-evaluative by nature.

M. O. Shakhov then formulates the general rule which says that if one admits the objective existence of absolute values that are the same for everybody, these values are expressed in descriptive-evaluative propositions and there is no inferred transition from description to evaluation.

Indeed, in Christianity, for example, knowledge about God based on knowledge about the world implies not only descriptive information but a prescription as well, such knowledge becoming a duty to those who believe; therefore there is no gap between “ought” and “is”.

The Christian conception of Natural Law is correlated to a vision of Nature as created by God. In its turn, the laicized version of Natural Law derives normative judgments from human nature by itself, but in fact the evaluative and prescriptive statements of the Declaration of Human Rights have no justification in factual statements. Therefore, Hume’s law is confirmed as far as human rights and natural law conceptions are concerned: in a godless *weltanschauung* it is impossible to infer evaluative judgments from descriptive judgments about man and Nature, such that the results are convincing for everybody.

Marxism claimed the logical deducibility of its value system from its worldview, which was supposed by Marxists to be “truly scientific” and to generate knowledge about what the world ought to be like. Contrary to the Humean principle Marxism is an example of a teaching that claims adequate knowledge of reality and makes a transition from “is” propositions to “ought” propositions. And yet such refutation of the Humean principle in the case of Marxism is only partial. Marxism justifies the prescription of transforming the world by having recourse to ideals and norms derived from an adequate description of the world; yet it takes for granted the maxim that demands, once we know the objective laws of development, that we follow them in order to improve human life and do not oppose them. However this maxim is not deducible from any descriptive knowledge, strictly speaking there is no logically irreproachable transition from “is” to “ought”. Even supposing that we can adequately know the world and its laws, it does not immediately follow that we should observe or implement them.

Here is the difference between Marxism and Christianity as far as this Humean principle is concerned: in Christianity the notions of what is just and morally good have their own ontological status because they express God’s will. Norms and prescriptions being divinely instituted, the demand for their implementation is itself founded (for example, but not only, by the idea of retribution). On the contrary, non-theological conceptions of morality have either to implicitly or explicitly confer substantial character to values themselves or to relativise them to a given society or epoch. Besides that, the idea of objective knowledge has been discredited in correlation to the relativisation of ethics; Plato’s insight is confirmed according to which knowledge about the immortal soul and retribution founds ethics.

The author concludes that the answer to the question whether Hume’s Guillotine is correct should be nuanced: for Christianity and Platonism this principle is incorrectly formulated rather than simply wrong since there is no conclusion from “is” to “ought”, values being objective and existing as entities. As for worldviews that deny objective values, this principle is quite correct and entails the impossibility of a logically irreproachable grounding of ethics.

To my mind, the article shows well why Hume’s law does not apply to Platonism or Christianity (in the view of those who believe) but it does not really prove its applicability to the human rights conception and to other non-theist moral conceptions. If we take is-statements or descriptive statements to be statements about facts (and prescriptive statements would relate to values), we have to admit that the very concept of “fact” is problematic and at least for some facts the distinction between fact and value is not sharp. Besides the so-called institutional facts (for example regarding a piece of paper as money) we can ask whether there exist any value-free brute facts that would not be trivial (like “it is raining”). Certainly, this does not refute the fact-value distinction, it only attenuates the dichotomy. Nevertheless, it seems to me that Shakhov’s view on Marxism’s relation to Hume’s Law may suggest a way if not to refute, at least to make more nuanced the affirmation of the impossibility of deriving “ought” from “is” statements. Indeed, from the (descriptive) statement that the advent of communism is inevitable it does not

follow that (prescriptive statement) we should strive for its coming unless we accept another prescriptive statement, for example, that once we know the objective historical laws we should help them come true. Analogically speaking, from the statement that killing is painful or that it does irreversible harm to another person it does not immediately follow that you should not kill unless we admit another value-judgment e.g. that you should not do to another what you would not like to have done to you (of course we have to presuppose another descriptive statement, namely that nobody normally wants to be irreversibly harmed). Cannot it be that a prescriptive statement is justified by a descriptive statement in conjunction with another prescriptive statement? Strictly speaking, this does not demonstrate that prescriptive statements can be deduced from descriptive ones; rather it shows that a descriptive statement can be an argument in favor of following a prescription, an argument that has rather an action-guiding than a purely logical force. Anyway, the problem is too complex and the space is too limited to try any real solution.

In the article *Theism, Postmodernist Burial of Metaphysics and Indian Ātmavadā*, Vladimir K. Schokhin speaks about psychophysical dualism as part of the philosophical foundation of theism. Indeed, the author states that negation of psychophysical dualism deprives theism of its sufficient reason. In this case either the soul is supposed to be destroyed with the death of the body (according to naturalist reductionism) or it is considered to be just a bundle of sensations and cogitations.

For some postmodernist authors both theism and psychophysical dualism are relics of the obsolete euro-centric rationality related to logocentrism. For them (mono)theism, as well as metaphysics claiming universality, are enemies of pluralism and should be overcome together with western rationalism as a whole. In this view psychophysical dualism is to be rejected as part of the tradition of western rationality. It is precisely the last thesis (that says that psychophysical dualism is a purely occidental conception) that V. K. Schokhin intends to refute by having recourse to the Indian philosophical tradition. He briefly mentions a general logical argument against postmodern relativism (any denial of universality itself subreptively claims universality), but the edge of his criticism is directed against the historical groundlessness of discarding mind-body dualism as a phenomenon relative only to the occidental tradition. In fact this form of dualism does not occur only in the western tradition and therefore does not belong exclusively to western logocentrism.

The author outlines the history of the debate between Indian dualists (that is thinkers professing ātmavadā, a teaching about Ātman as spiritual principle) and materialists. So, for example, in the Chandogya Upanishad (VIII-VII cc. BC) it is said that those who consider Ātman as body are non-believers. So, at the dawn of Indian thought it was realized that reducing soul to body was incompatible with religious faith. During the Śramana period the problem of the body-mind relation was one of the main subjects of discussion. In the period that follows (IVc. BC-III c. AD) the main argument of materialists was that soul and its actions were unobservable whereas dualists affirmed that not all existing entities need to be

observed. Then, in the Mahabharata, materialists are said to maintain that all the causal relations work only in the material world (like, for example, a seed and a tree, or a magnet etc.); besides, the only reliable source of knowledge is sense-perception and it does not permit one to affirm any permanent principles. The dualists' response was that separation of soul and body after death does not imply the former's destruction; on the contrary, the idea that the body is the source of life is discredited by the fact that action stops after death.

Dualists of the Samkhya school argued that all the composite bodies were intended for an ontologically different principle; they cannot be conscious by themselves and need to be guided by this principle, they cannot be the subject of self-perception, and since they are perceived, they imply such a principle. Ātman is understood as the subject of predicates needed to constitute experience.

Representatives of the Nyaya school explicitly argue with materialists finding points of contradiction in their teaching.

However, the most elaborate refutation of psychophysical monism was undertaken by Śankara, the founder of the Advaita Vedanta school. It is worth presenting briefly some of his arguments: 1) Thought and memory, unlike other bodily properties, are unperceivable. 2) Understanding consciousness as an attribute of the body is absurd: it is as if fire could burn itself. 3) Unlike permanently changing bodily properties, the subject of knowledge is continual and self-identical. 4) That there is consciousness when there is body does not entail that the former is a property of the latter. According to Śankara, the main properties of the spiritual principle have nothing in common with bodily properties and the latter depend on the former more often than the contrary.

V. K. Shokhin remarks that some of the arguments of Indian thinkers in favor of dualism still retain their validity – for example, understanding the subject of experience as ontologically different from its objects and everything it can objectify, including its own bodily state; this ontological gap constitutes a condition of the possibility of experience. The argument from the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity as well as the argument from the difference between composite and simple things, and some of Śankara's arguments, can be retained in the contemporary discussion, according to V. K. Shokhin.

It becomes obvious that the labeling of metaphysics by postmodernists as a purely occidental phenomenon is not consistent with historical testimonies. Moreover, the reproach of anti-pluralism is also inconsistent: the various versions of Indian body-mind dualism represent *different* types of metaphysical mentality. Besides, V. K. Shokhin remarks that the understanding that the reduction of Ātman to the body is incompatible with religion corresponds to the theist world-view, even if the Indian thinkers did not know of the idea of a created soul.

V. K. Shokhin's article is another example of a historical approach to a theoretical problem; it postulates a close connection between mind-body dualism and religious faith. However we can ask whether psychophysical dualism is necessary for someone to be a Christian (we will not consider other religions) – given the Christian belief in the resurrection of the body. Generally speaking can't we rather



say that Christian faith or rather Christian doctrine is over-determined with regard to metaphysical theories; that is, it cannot be based on or identified with just one particular theory (Aquinas' philosophy is of course no exception) or even a certain type of theory. Besides, since we do not know well enough all the properties of matter, we cannot treat beforehand any materialism as hostile to religion – in fact only vulgar forms of materialism are. Our contemporary scientific conception of matter is much more complex than it was in ancient times. Does this mean that addressing ourselves to ancient philosophical discussions gives no epistemic gain? To my mind, not at all; indeed, Vladimir Shokhin's article shows the validity of this approach. One might be tempted to ask whether it is legitimate to consider arguments of Indian thinkers out of their proper context (which is quite different from ours; it also being the case that many of their questions are not our questions) and to employ them in contemporary discussions. And yet according to a saying of A. Gurevich, an outstanding Russian medievalist, any historical knowledge is also self-knowledge; we cannot understand ancient argumentation while abstracting from our own horizon of understanding; even if we are not entitled to impose our own categories on the ancient authors (cf. A.J. Gurevich: *Categories of Medieval Culture*. Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1985). V. K. Shokhin seems intelligently to maneuver between these extremes and he shows that history can be of use for current debates and that forgetting arguments put forward by philosophers of the past can impoverish contemporary thought.

One of the most important tasks of philosophy of religion is to clarify religious concepts, to analyze religious statements. This is particularly necessary in today's Russia where interest in religion is increasing, as is the need to understand it. In this context the appearance of a periodical presenting articles of both Russian and western philosophers and specialists in religious studies cannot but be welcomed. It suggests hope that Russian and western philosophers will further collaborate in this field, thus realizing the unity of the philosophical project two and a half thousand year old.

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