

Murderers of the Real: Transaesthetics and the Art of Holiness

This paper explores the ontology of the beautiful from the standpoint of competing logics, i.e., ways of speaking the *Logos*. The first is a *theo*-logic centered on the analogy of being, which uniquely regards reality as Logos—a structured hierarchy of the real, a ‘Who’ rather than a ‘What’—which provides an ontology of beauty as *desirable being*, and ultimately, *the* desirable Being. The correct response to reality is thus holiness, the sacral separateness of God imparted to, and thus borrowed by and reflected through, creatures. The competing logic is what Baudrillard calls the *simulacral*, in which the real is suspended by its own model; the image exposes the poverty of the real and causes it to disappear altogether, revealing a *transaesthetics* of banality and indifference, a totalizing counterfeit of the real that is beyond real difference, beyond Logos—and therefore beyond structured hierarchy, beyond beauty and ugliness. The simulated real is thus the world of the spectacle, the world as product of consumer gaze. A way to repudiate the simulation, the murderous image, to uncover the real always and already grounding the image is to return to Logos: to emplace the image in a hierarchically relational context within Logos. The upshot is that, when so emplaced, the gaze of the image tells a different story: the world is not one of consumerist spectacle but of mutual self-gifting. Amidst the barbarism of the dislocated consumer ego, we can conscientiously commune with neighbor and turn away from what Augustine termed fellowship with the demons.

...perhaps at stake has always been the murderous capacity of images, murderers of the real, murderers of their own model as the Byzantine icons could murder the divine identity.

- Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*

There have been and still are geometricians and philosophers, and even some of the most distinguished, who doubt whether the whole universe, or to speak more widely, the whole of being, was only created in Euclid's geometry[.]

- Ivan Karamazov in Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*

Quine tells us that the “curious thing about the ontological problem is its simplicity.”¹ The question “what is there?” can be answered with everything,” “and everyone will accept this answer as true.” Perhaps this is a place to start in any ontological discussion²—what demands the world must be subject to in order to provide a something-or-other—particularly any ontological discussion concerning the inerasable mark left from that salubrious, yet slippery, sexiness we call beauty. But what are we looking for when looking for beauty? Its explanation? If so then we have already lost it: beauty is not to be found in any of its reductive elucidations; the express purpose of any

¹ W. V. O. Quine, “On What There Is,” *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 2, No. 5 (Sep. 1948): 21.

² See David Manley’s introductory essay “Introduction: A Guided Tour of Metametaphysics,” in *Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundation of Ontology*, eds. David J. Chalmers, David Manley, and Ryan Wasserman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 5: “...the two historical figures who have had the most influence on the contemporary debate are clearly Carnap and Quine.”

elucidating is to make clear one thing by substituting another, only easier to handle. A non-reductive solution is on the horizon, but our long-range aim is directed elsewhere: not away from the beautiful toward its other, but toward the beautiful itself—in order not to lose that which is sought after. William Empson suggests as much in his magisterial commentary on the uses and power of words:

What is needed for literary [artistic] satisfaction is not, ‘this is beautiful because of such and such a theory,’ but ‘this is all right; I am feeling correctly about this. I know the kind of way in which it is meant to be affecting me.’³

We must, in other words, search until we find a *way of being* akin to that of the beautiful which draws our admiration. George Steiner has it correctly when he says that “The best readings of art are art.”⁴

This word ‘being’ complicates Quine’s ‘simple’ answer to the question addressing it; for if we find that it is discardable, then another—albeit not another *something*—must take its place. Kris McDaniel explains this adequately: “An answer to the question of being will tell us what it is *to be*, rather than merely tell us what there is.”⁵ But then the question is reversed: why being? Why not *nothing*? If this nothing, this non-being, replaces the something of being, “‘provides’ what it does not itself have—namely being,”⁶ then our question of ontology, of being—along with our question of beauty, that seeming sexiness of being—is considerably complicated. This is not the only enemy on the horizon of the real; the question can be further complicated by asking: why not

³ William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 2nd Ed. (Plano: Seabrook Press, 1949/ 2016), 254. Gadamer has stated this explicitly in the context of his hermeneutical project: the dual function of art is its ability to transform us, a process in which *recognition* plays an important role: what “we experience in a work of art and what invites our attention is how true it is—i.e. to what extent one knows and recognizes something and oneself.” See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 3rd Ed., trans. eds. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Bloomsbury, 1960/ 2013), 118.

⁴ George Steiner, *Real Presences: Is there anything in what we say?* (New York: Open Road Media, 2013), 17.

⁵ “Ways of Being,” 292, in *Metametaphysics*, emphasis original. In a way, as I will develop by §2, Quine is trivially correct that the answer to the question of the number of existents is maximal: all the beings exist. The question is transferred to what *beings* are, and thus what being *is*, apart from any appeal to bound variables, which is a discussion parasitic on the question of being itself, as McDaniel suggests. My concern is, like McDaniel’s, developing a logic expressive of being *qua* being. See Quine, “On What There Is,” 31f.

⁶ Conor Cunningham, *Genealogy of Nihilism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), xiv.

the *virtual*? Why not the *hyperreal*, rather than the *unreal*? This should be understood as a prizefight in a higher weight class.⁷

The terms of these renewed ontological questions can be summarily thrust forward, at least at this beginning, by looking toward the grammars of being—those tactics by which something presented is received and expressed, made known and unmasked. This question can be unpacked as, “Is there or is there not a meaning to being?”⁸ Whether there is or not Quine cannot say; the sort of thing meanings are is “a moot point.”⁹ Our logic, the rules by which we express being in language, must account for the phenomenon in its entirety and be adopted in proportion to its merits. The chief criterion of merit in mind here is explanatory power: the degree of exactness and inclusivity which the being there is can be said to be, given a discourse operating on a given logic.¹⁰

In what follows I discuss this renewed ontological question in three movements. I intend these to be connected more through successive currents toward a faraway shore rather than through welding parts together, concerning the salvaging of being—including that sexiness of being called beauty—from those grammars which would leave it null, or worse. The discussion bridges the articulation of this grammar to its embodiment: recall Empson’s comment that what is required is a *responding* to beauty, and not merely its *describing*; and this requires not only the grammar of a discourse but those of lived action as well. The movements are as follows: in §1, I introduce the terms of the debate in slightly more detail; beauty calls us, we respond. But what is it that calls? Here I stroke *Plato’s Beard*¹¹ and ask about the real to point towards a metaphysics appropriate for

⁷ The former question will be discussed in §1, but only to be dismissed in favor of a superior hypothesis; the latter question is taken up in §2 and discussed at some length.

⁸ Steiner, *Real Presences*, 200.

⁹ Quine, “On What There Is,” 28f. We will see in §1 that Quine falls on one failed side of the ‘question of being,’ as I have put it casually here.

¹⁰ I do not intend any tension between the terminology of ‘logic’ and ‘grammar,’ but loosely follow the designation by which grammar is “a list of symbols or rules for constructing symbols of the logical language...” See Alexander T. Oliver, “Calculus,” in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 1st Ed., ed. Ted Honderich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 114.

¹¹ Quine, “On What There Is,” 21. We’ll see that Plato’s beard may need tugging even when he is clean shaven.

creatures. The beautiful will be seen as what is desirable in the real—that which is borrowed and reflected from its infinite source—and an account will be sketched concerning its proper response: the imparting of, and striving toward, the God’s own holiness in creatures. Thus, the correct response to beauty, including the beauty of art, is to strive to become holy.¹² In §2 I introduce a more serious contestant into the prize fight: the *simulation*: that counterfeit of being disturbingly suggested in its every image; the continuing threat of substitution that images hold over the imaged. I suggest here—in a discussion concerning the grammars by which the world is made spectacle in the consumer gaze—a movement toward pride: the simulation entices human action toward sin, that self-determination “which re-enacts the logic of the fall: to have a-part of the world apart from God”¹³ which throws us down, as with Lucifer.¹⁴ Finally, in §3, I seek the most painful resolution to help us walk away: God narrates the real *pedagogically* by stimulating the conscience, thereby disrupting the career of evil. I present evil in the form of a traumatic interruption of the real which draws the real away from itself and into the domain of the spectacle, the hyperspace of commercialism and consumption. I suggest this domain to be, along with St. Augustine, the domain of the demonic, drawing us away from a condition called “Life” toward the self-obliteration of the simulation. Conscience is thus a weapon that breaks our long-standing fellowship with the demons, the nefarious “consumers *par excellence*.”

§1: *The Real? A problem.*

Truth is in history, but history is not the truth.

- Nicolás Gómez Dávila (“Don Colacho”), *Annotations on an Implicit Text*

¹² I will understand art principally in its Aristotelian form as the “capacity to make.” Cited in Edward Veith, Jr., *State of the Arts: from Bezalel to Mapplethorpe* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), 30.

¹³ Cunningham, *Genealogy*, 172.

¹⁴ This point is made in Homily 8 in Basil the Great, *On the Human Condition*, trans. Norma Verna Harrison and Verna E. F. Harrison (Yonkers: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2005).

Finding the correct understanding is often like wandering until what is searched for is found. But this wandering must have direction, an orientation toward that which is searched for. But by what means is this orientation acquired? Alasdair MacIntyre explains that the task of the philosopher is “to express the concepts embedded in the process of our lives in order to help us live morally worthy lives.”¹⁵ One of these concepts is the basic question of orientation: “what is going on here?”

MacIntyre expresses this as a problem of contextual ordering:

We are often paralyzed between not knowing what to treat as evidence unless we know what schema to adopt; and only knowing what schema to adopt after having an idea of what to treat as evidence.¹⁶

When dealing with the artistic it is required to enter a space within which art can be, as was hinted at with Empson and Steiner’s comments above, responded to *as* art. Yet to speak of the aesthetic is not entirely warranted. Giorgio Agamben has recognized this in his reflections on the mode of entrance into the world of art: to think there is a special organ for recognizing the beauty in art (*pace* Kant) in a disinterested way is “as grotesque as if someone had claimed that man breathes not because his entire body needs it but only to satisfy his lungs.”¹⁷

Art is thus a space that drags us in, that forces our compliance with its jarring “harmony between sense as meaning and sense as substance.”¹⁸ “Beauty’s power,” it can be said, “is perhaps experienced most intensely in the way it pulls a person out of him or herself toward something that was previously beyond the person’s individual consciousness.”¹⁹ Indeed, part of the reason to call

¹⁵ Cited in Stanley Hauerwas, *Working with Words* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 203.

¹⁶ See “Epistemological crises, dramatic narrative, and the philosophy of science,” in *The Tasks of Philosophy: Selected Essays: Vol. 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 4ff.

¹⁷ Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, trans. Georgia Albert (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), §3, Loc. 171. Gadamer expresses this similarly in his condemnation of that consciousness—what he calls ‘aesthetic consciousness’—that distorts the subject matter of art: aesthetic consciousness, that process by which aesthetic subject matter is ‘extracted’ from an object and decontextualized from its place within the economy of the object in which it inheres, “creates an external existence for itself” and fails to recognize that “The pantheon of art is not a timeless present that presents itself to a pure aesthetic consciousness, but the act of a mind and spirit that has collected and gathered itself historically...” See *Truth and Method*, 79 and 87, respectively. Steiner offers a convergent remark: “Aesthetic perception knows no Archimedean point outside of discourse. The root of all talk is talk.” See *Real Presences*, 60.

¹⁸ Terry Eagleton, *Materialism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 24.

¹⁹ Brendan Thomas Sammon, *Called to Attraction: An Introduction to the Theology of Beauty* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2017), 6. I assume that *prima facie* art is beautiful and the beautiful is, even if not literally, artful. Although, see the discussion surrounding Note 98 below for a contrasting perspective. The reasons for my rejection of this alternative is the central topic of this study.

anything beautiful in part rests on this suction *ad alterum*, the displacement of self toward another that is often, but not always, welcome. Objects themselves can therefore be said to possess this capacity for drawing-out-of-oneself, or beauty,²⁰ and in order for this beauty to pull us out of ourselves, it cannot exert its gravitational force apart from the mass with which that force is interdependent. Yet, like physical interactions, forces²¹ operate within the context of an order of being, and so make possible the capacity for representation in the objects of art; in order to represent, after all, there must be something there to represent. As Baudrillard reminds us, “The very definition of the real becomes: *that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction.*”²² And this “is why order always opts for the real. In a state of uncertainty, it always prefers this assumption.”²³ Following this reasoning, the capacity to make objects which draw us out of ourselves, even in states of uncertainty, is an activity that is always biased toward the real; and any logic that takes this data as real *prima facie* ought to be favored with respect to those that do not.

Beauty, then, is that which tends toward the real. Something really draws us out. But what is it to be real? To make headway on this question can begin by asking another, that of how to *define* the real. Paul J. Griffiths points out that “Thought doesn’t have to proceed by way of definition (although it can); often, appeal to clear cases of the phenomenon under discussion is

²⁰ Hegel reminds us, picking up on Aristotle’s understanding as art as the capacity to make, that the adjective ‘beautiful’ cannot be predicated on all objects, but only those that are products of human agency, created for the human sensory apparatus, directed toward contemplation, containing “an *end* bound up with it.” See his “The Philosophy of Fine Art,” in *Aesthetics: A Reader in the Philosophy of the Arts*, 4th Ed., eds. David Goldblatt, Lee B. Brown, and Stephanie Patridge (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 496. Emphasis original. I do not mean to endorse this fully, but only the notion that ‘beautiful’ cannot be predicated univocally between the objects of human craft and those of the natural world.

²¹ Here I use ‘forces’ in an idiosyncratic way, akin to the classical conception of motion: “for those philosophers and theologians prior to the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century, motion tends to be presented as a more mysterious category which is not confined to spatial or local motion. Rather, it may apply to moral as well as physical movements: learning, growing, ripening and thinking count as motion, just as much as the movement of bodies through space.” See Simon Oliver, *God, Philosophy, and Motion* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 1. See p. 36 in the referenced text for more details.

²² Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. Phil Beitchman, Paul Foss, and Paul Patton (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 1983), 146. Emphasis in original.

²³ Baudrillard, *Simulations*, 41.

preferable...”²⁴ There are other options to consider, then, and that would be easy enough—even ugly things can be beautiful when looked at in an unusual way. Relevant to the present discussion, even Jesus himself is taken as having had somewhat of a brutalized appearance in early Church tradition.²⁵ Nonetheless, to ask whether there is a definition of something first asks if it is definable, which calls for what Cunningham has understood as a kind of theatre of the real with a “horizontal” and a “vertical” component. What we need is not the real’s moving imagistic projection—its dramatic recitation—onto a stationary observer within the boundaries of a stage production, but the dynamic interaction between the moving, historically unfolding, ever-changing play, along with the stage it is set on: the unchanging, ahistorical, stationary context within which the dramatic performance unfolds.²⁶ A definition of the kind that we are looking for must carve a middle road between the extremes of either of these two components, overemphasized and at the expense of the other. What we need is a definition appropriate for things, including beautiful things, as *created*: a metaphysics that “concerns the suspended tension between” the drama and the stage—the changing occurrences of the play intelligible in the context of the changeless framework of the stage—as mutually interdependent and proceeding “according to the *in fieri*—becoming—of a back-and-forth relation...”²⁷

This middle way is the only alternative to those stases of being drawing their water from the wells of the precocious, even eccentric, pre-Socratic metaphysicians, Parmenides and Heraclitus.

²⁴ See “Letter to an Aspiring Intellectual,” *First Things*, May 2018. Available online:

<https://www.firstthings.com/article/2018/05/letter-to-an-aspiring-intellectual>.

²⁵ Tertullian, “Of Idols,” in *Apologetic and Practical Treatises*, Vol. 1, trans. Rev. C. Dodgson (London: J. G. F. and J. Rivington, 1842), 246: “That Lord walked in humility and lowliness... in visage and aspect without beauty...”; see also 252ff for a note regarding its accuracy as a historical judgment, irrelevant to my present remark. Michel Henry most eloquently summarizes this paradox of the visible and the invisible (a paradox open to differing judgments on beauty and ugliness relevant to this comment in the main text): “But you cannot see the Father—nor, for that matter, the Son, since you cannot see the Son unless you see the Father in him.” *I Am the Truth: Toward a Philosophy of Christianity*, 1st Ed, trans. Susan Emmanuel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 92. More on this below.

²⁶ Cunningham, *Genealogy*, 261.

²⁷ Erich Przywara, *Analogue Entis: Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm*, trans. John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2014), 124.

Cunningham says as much: in response to this dilemma, we must “begin to develop an alternative logic... [that] takes the form of a discourse that articulates itself in terms of analogy, participation, the transcendentals, and divine ideas.”²⁸ These techniques properly belong to *theo*-logic²⁹ and feature a dynamic interplay between being and becoming sufficient for providing a definition of beauty with respect to *Logos*, that concept which, for the purposes of the present work, “specifically denotes the second person of the Trinity, the eternal Lord who was incarnated on earth as the Christ.” This *Logos* is both “omnipresent as architect and accessible as Lord *within* the world,” all creaturely intelligibility being “subsumed into the larger governing principle.”³⁰ If the *Logos* is denied, then all definitions that attempt dynamic, *in fieri* emplacements of beings within *Logos* become totalitarian. Steiner explains: to think that any word can “stand in lieu of, as a surrogate for, the perfectly inaccessible ‘truths’ of substance, is to abuse and demean it.” Only a “*Logos*-order” implies the “supposition of ‘real presence.’” In any other case, “The truth of the word is the absence of the world.”³¹ And in the absence of the thing, all that is left in the power of the word is to lie.³²

What is in mind here is that perennial conflict between “pure synchrony,” the unchanging sameness of being in Parmenides, and “pure diachrony,” the ever-changing difference of becoming in Heraclitus. Erich Przywara explains this dilemma: at the extremes, we are left with the total disjunction

between a theopanism of ‘God alone’ (whereby God is or does essentially everything and the creature is or does essentially nothing) and a pantheism of the ‘world alone’ (whereby the world is essentially

²⁸ Cunningham, *Genealogy*, xvii. Each of these will be reflected on in this paper, though not necessarily in order, except for divine ideas, which are touched on only obliquely.

²⁹ Cunningham, *Genealogy*, 260.

³⁰ For these comments see Justin M. Lasser, “*Logos* Theology,” in *Encyclopedia of Eastern Orthodox Christianity*, ed. John Anthony McGuckin (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 370f. This is the *What* of *Logos*; shortly we will arrive at the deeper question of the *Who* of *Logos*.

³¹ Steiner, *Real Presences*, 95f.

³² “Emerging from its own powerlessness, the power of language suddenly becomes frightening, shaking up reality, twisting it up in its frenzy.” See Henry, *I Am the Truth*, 9.

everything and God is essentially nothing).³³

David Bentley Hart expresses this as the unavoidability of metaphysics given these alternatives: the “critique of metaphysics... is often only another metaphysics.” The question of validity, for Hart, is whether metaphysics is to be understood narrowly or broadly. Understood narrowly, metaphysics is problematically “a term descriptive of philosophy’s various attempts to compose all of reality in its reflections under the form of a circumscribed totality”;³⁴ and understood broadly, metaphysics is a legitimate pursuit not resulting in ontological violence identified with “merely that realm of conjecture that exceeds what is evident in the empirical order of discrete causes... in order to speak of the ontological possibility... of a world that is impotent to account for its own being...”³⁵ Przywara explains two points in relation to this expanded metaphysical conception: that a middle way affirms (1) “that the finite is grounded and derives its being from absolute being,” and that “finite being cannot be equated with its divine ground but remains both essentially distinct from it and infinitely transcended by it”; and thus “in view of this similarity and difference... one may speak of an essentially *analogical* relation between the finite and the infinite.”³⁶ The middle way, then, provides a perpendicular axis that bisects the ‘vertical’ of being and the ‘horizontal’ of becoming. To think analogically is to exit the being/ becoming dichotomy and to enter a richer conception of being not subject to the vagaries, and failures, of the Parmenidean and Heraclitean extremes.

This middle, theo-logical way involves the *analogia entis*, the analogy of being which is “the shared unity of being common to all creatures [which] also bears in itself the radical diversity of

³³ For this quote of Przywara, see John R. Betz, “Translator’s Introduction,” in Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 51. Cunningham refers to these categories as ‘ontotheology’ and ‘meontotheology,’ respectively. See his *Genealogy, passim*.

³⁴ See Kevin Hector, *Theology Without Metaphysics: God, Language, and the Spirit of Recognition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 9 for a different articulation of this same issue.

³⁵ David Bentley Hart, *Beauty of the Infinite: An Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 13f.

³⁶ Cited in Betz, “Introduction,” in *Analogia Entis*, 46.

differences among beings.”³⁷ *Analogia entis* offers a prospect for an expanded vision of metaphysics breaking apart the narrow, sterile, and calcified systems of Parmenides and Heraclitus. To be a creature is to be in dynamic ontological tension between being and becoming.³⁸ Yet neither Parmenides nor Heraclitus—neither theopanism nor pantheism—accounts for the createdness, and thus creatureliness, of beings. Plato explains to us the former position: a thought cannot be a thought of nothing, but of something: a something that *is*.³⁹ Thus we can ask along with Plato’s Parmenides: “won’t you necessarily think either that each thing is composed of thoughts and all things think, or that, although they are thoughts, they are unthinking?”⁴⁰ As the Eleatic Stranger (a disciple of Parmenides) challenges Theaetetus in *Sophist*: “Try to say something correct about that which is not, without adding either *being, one, or numerical plurality* to it.”⁴¹ Parmenides, taken as a figurehead for this position, takes being to be pure synchrony, as thought always and already thinking, and thus, in Przywara’s terminology, theophanic. Each being is identical to Being, what it is to be, *qua* being.

Cunningham explains the reverse position, the “Heraclitean stasis” that takes differences in being as not real “except at the virtual level of data,” evaporated into descriptions of its structures and sub-structures toward the ultimate disappearance of the explanandum.⁴² These systematic

³⁷ Sammon, *Called to Attraction*, 146. Sammon continues: the *analogia entis* holds that being is “not some ‘thing’ that becomes discernible and comprehensible through correct categories and concepts. Rather, it is a happening where unity gives itself in diversity and difference, and there diversity and difference approach and always-arriving unity.” See 149. This ‘middle way’ which is explored by Cunningham through his theo-logic carves a path between Parmenides and Heraclitus, between pure synchrony and pure diachrony: otherness “is attended to by approaching the alterity through sameness, which as sameness is difference...” See Cunningham, *Genealogy*, 261.

³⁸ Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 135. Hart explains this in another way, following his comments concerning ‘expanded’ metaphysics cited above. We identify creatures based on their characteristics of being: *bounded*, within limitation; *conditioned*, borrowing from and dependent on another; *changing*, subject to alteration; *contingent*, accidental with respect to another; *extended*, dimensional and enclosed; and *temporal*, subject to the clock. See Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 99f.

³⁹ See Parmenides 132b. John M. Cooper, “Parmenides,” in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, associate ed. D. M. Hutchinson (Indianapolis: Hackett., 1997).

⁴⁰ Parmenides 132c.

⁴¹ 239b. See John M. Cooper’s translation in *Plato: Complete Works*. Emphasis original.

⁴² Cunningham, *Genealogy*, 260. Cunningham in 172 describes this spectral fate of a simple leaf: “If we describe a leaf, looking to modern discourse to provide such a description, we will see nothing. We will see nothing but the disappearance of the leaf as, and at, the utterance of every ‘word.’ The leaf will always be subordinated to structures and sub-structures. The leaf will never be

descriptions will give us “nothing *as* something.”⁴³ Heraclitus, in Przywara’s terms, takes being as pure diachrony, thoughtless thought, and thus is pantheistic. Being as such is identified with beings. It is the exact reversal of the previous position: the Heraclitean rabbit to the Parmenidean duck.⁴⁴

Concerning the Parmenidean and Heraclitean stases alike, it is, as Empson counsels, impossible to determine whether what has occurred in this theoretical space has been a rhetorical *accumulatio* or rather a genuine explanation: “if [the critic] has explained something, it may be because he has managed to do the same unexplained thing over again.”⁴⁵ And the Parmenidean or Heraclitean critic has not, within these respective systems, explained anything at all: reductionism, the substance of both horns of the dilemma of “narrow” metaphysics, as a global explanatory impulse, is doubly incoherent.⁴⁶ For one, any reduction applies equally to the subject as the object of reduction, to that which reduces and to that which is reduced; but to reduce the subject’s capacities for understanding into units out of which that very understanding is based undermines the capacity by which the reduction itself is to be understood—understanding disappears into its systematic description. For another, such a reduction explains nothing but the position of the reduced thing within the schema containing it, and in so doing leaves unquestioned the nature of the units into which the reduction is re-expressed.⁴⁷ Given that we are looking for “what it is to be,” and given that each narrow metaphysical position leaves unacknowledged this central concern, these reductive options cannot be entertained.

seen or said.”

⁴³ Cunningham, *Genealogy*, 173. Emphasis original.

⁴⁴ This image carries with it the double disappearance Cunningham identifies as an earmark of nihilism—where you have the duck, out goes the rabbit; but when you relocate the lost rabbit, out now goes the duck. See Peter Hacker, “Duck-rabbit,” in *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 207.

⁴⁵ Empson, *Ambiguity*, 249.

⁴⁶ This expanded notion of reduction includes Cunningham’s presentation of nihilism as ‘plenitudinous,’ providing all that being offers, only without—I use the term not in the strictly mereological sense. See *Genealogy*, xiii.

⁴⁷ On these points see the sophisticated simplicity of Rowan Williams, *Being Human* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2018), 21f. Catherine Pickstock has written on the disappearance of difference—in the present case, the difference between subject and object—that attends any ‘spatialization’ of knowledge, of which reduction is a type. This spatialization (μάθησις) homogenizes all knowledge as items in a topographical list “which [apprehends] reality as an undifferentiated ‘given.’” See Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 1997), 54.

Parmenides reduces being by assuming that being *is*, but then the very central issue has been presumed, which is thoughtless. Heraclitus reduces being by assuming that being *is not*, but then there is no thought, no meaning, to being—there is no longer any being *there* to be made sense of.⁴⁸ From every angle, being itself is not explained—it is either taken as “moot,” uninteresting—as though it were obvious that being *is*—or else there is nothing there to *be*: being *is not*. The middle way of the *analogia entis* avoids this by placing being and becoming, synchrony and diachrony, in a rhythmic oscillation of mutual interdependence at the level of creatures. Becoming is never purely “intra-historical eventuality”; being is never purely “super-historical truth.”⁴⁹ Being is rather beyond becoming, beyond history, but known in it: “truth-in-and-beyond history.”⁵⁰ Cunningham’s theo-logic is meant to bring this to light.⁵¹

Following the theo-logic, the transcendentals—the grounds of thought and being—must be understood as moving in two directions, corresponding to the tension between the pure synchrony and pure diachrony mentioned above: a biconditional from thought to being and from being to thought, neither one more fundamental than the other. Concerning the thought-to-being conditional, Przywara explains that the true, good, and beautiful can be the transcendental grounds of thought

⁴⁸ See Cunningham, *Genealogy*, 169f. and 260 for a sample of this line of reasoning.

⁴⁹ Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 147.

⁵⁰ Betz, “Introduction,” in *Analogia Entis*, 63ff.

⁵¹ Betz in his “Introduction,” 30ff. explains that the *analogia entis* can be found in rudimentary form in Greek antiquity but was originally used as a device for expressing proportion in mathematics. Strictly speaking, the Greeks did not have a concept of creation, and so reduced “being to a univocal concept,” and in so doing compromised “the kind of distinction between God and creation that the *analogia entis* absolutely maintains.” The Greeks “had begun to think analogically inasmuch as they had begun to consider the question of unity in view of the patent diversity of being, i.e., the problem of the One and the Many.” The two “dialectical extremes” of this analogical search are mentioned as being represented in Parmenides (“all is being”) and Heraclitus (“all is becoming”) discussed above. I take it that objections to analogical metaphysics, in the confident rebuttals typified in Edward J. Carnell, *Introduction to Christian Apologetics: A Philosophic Defense of the Trinitarian-Theistic Faith*, 4th Ed. (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1948/ 2007), 144-151 that two terms connected by analogy are nothing but univocal expressions of what is similar between the objects referred to by the terms, and equivocal concerning their dissimilarities, are mistaken. Analogy itself, as Cunningham tells us in *Genealogy* 182, is not a relation of concept but a relation of judgment: it is the *thinker* that is analogical, not the thought, and so the being which judges is already in a relation of createdness with respect to God, who bestows the “ungivable gift of himself” to creatures: “Analogy is therefore itself analogical as it seeks by likeness and unlikeness to trace this situation.” Betz explains that both univocity and equivocity are corresponding errors. Univocity is the error of *presumption*, “of assuming that our words mean the same thing when applied to God and creatures”; while equivocity is the error of *agnosticism*, “of assuming... that our words, when applied to God, have only ambiguous reference.” This parallels the twin errors of the pre-Socratics. See “Translator’s Introduction,” in *Analogia Entis*, 39f.

as such, and together point to a being as such contiguous with those grounds; the plurality of thought points to its unity in being. Concerning the being-to-thought conditional, Pzywara's explains that thought, both in comprehending "the threefold radiance of truth, goodness, and beauty... aims at a comprehension of being... in its unity," and in its "pure comprehension of being... moves, according to its intention, towards a comprehension of being's threefold radiance."⁵² The unity of being points to its plural manifestation in thought. Thus the true, good, and beautiful are ontologically identical to being, given the *analogia entis*, appearing in thought as subspecies of being, as being that is desired, the very end of desiring as such.⁵³ There is therefore a "transference" relation between the transcendentals such that if the true can be understood only in a specific way, then via transference the beautiful must be understood in the same way.⁵⁴ If being is "the beyond of thought,"⁵⁵ the transcendent source of thought toward which it moves and finds its end, then beauty is also the 'beyond of thought,'⁵⁶ that transcendental being desired for its own sake.

Since being is analogical, and Logos is the principle of being, transcendent and immanent all at once, then the task is to search for a vocabulary expressive of the theo-logic to identify that which is transcendent and immanent in this way. Logos itself is taken to fit this bill, and since it is found to be analogical, there must be a term such that, analogically, it may be used to speak of the

⁵² Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 130.

⁵³ Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 127.

⁵⁴ Ermanno Bencivenga, *Theories of the Logos* (New York: Springer, 2017), 43 calls this transferability a relation that "understands opposite predicates and views [them] as different ways of looking at the same thing, different modes of it in the way in which everything ordinarily taken to be an independent thing turns out to be..." In his *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, ed. D.P. Curtin, trans. E.W. Watson and L. Pullan (Amazon Digital Services LLC, 2019), Bk. 1, Chs. 9-12, *passim*, John Damascene explains that God "contains all being in Himself," but is named negatively (*apophatically*) in accord with his essence, and positively (*kataphatically*) in accord with his operations, i.e., energy words, actions, and modes. We name God either: (a) by naming "what He is not"; or else (b) by naming "something of these things which are consequential to His nature or operation," and that, as the cause of all things, God "can be named after all things—even after things which are opposites..."

⁵⁵ Cunningham, *Genealogy*, 260.

⁵⁶ I understand thought as "movement of the soul," roughly akin to what Simon Oliver has indicated. See also Jonathan P. O'Callaghan, *Thomist Realism and the Linguistic Turn: Toward a More Perfect Form of Existence*, 1st Ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), *passim*.

transcendent and the immanent at the same time. Bishop Maxim Vasiljević holds that truth “cannot be objectively understood, but it can be encountered as a Person...”⁵⁷ ‘Person,’ in other words, is that term which bespeaks the real without necessarily suggesting the created. The vocabulary of personhood understands the term ‘Person’ and being analogically related to ‘person’—in the everyday sense—and provides a term which, in the theo-logic, can be used to analogically express the relationship between the transcendent and the immanent, uniting them into one. Przywara’s understanding of analogy will be used here: that relation by which “two things are proportionately similar to two other things (as in the relation of the tranquility of the sea to the serenity of the air)...”⁵⁸ ‘Person’ is included in the vocabulary that calls forward both aspects of Logos, those principles of being immanent to creaturely existence as well as the transcendent ground on which the creaturely, *in fieri* becoming “lives and moves and has its being.”⁵⁹ Logos, then, is Christ, the God-man: the *analogia entis*, the very analogy of being himself,⁶⁰ the unique Person-in-and-beyond persons. The transference relation now takes on its full significance: if Christ is the true, he is then also the beautiful. The After Communion prayers in the Eastern Orthodox Church reflect this: “For You are, indeed, the true object of our desire and the inexpressible gladness of those who love You, O Christ our God, and all creation praises You unto the ages.”

The correct response to beauty is therefore for the immanent to participate in the transcendent,

⁵⁷ Maxim Vasiljević, “Introduction: History, Truth, Holiness” in *History, Truth, Holiness: Studies in Theological Ontology and Epistemology*, trans. Daniel MacKay (Alhambra: Sebastian Press Publishing House, 2011), xvii. Gadamer hints at this without going all the way: Absolute reason is “not a possibility for historical humanity. Reason exists for us only in concrete, historical terms—i.e. it is not its own master but remains constantly dependent on the given circumstances in which it operates.” See *Truth and Method*, 286.

⁵⁸ See Aquinas’ commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* 1016b-1017a, cited in Betz, “Introduction,” in *Analogia Entis*, 38f.

⁵⁹ Cf. Acts 17:28. There can be a linking—a real difference, a real other, really bridged and interconnected—between the transcendent and immanent, creature and Creator, because there first was real otherness in the Godhead. Charles C. Twombly, *Perichoresis and Personhood: God, Christ, and Salvation in John of Damascus* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2015), 39: “Uniqueness of origin... creates real and indelible differences within the Trinity.” John Behr explains: ‘God’ is not a general category—a genus with a species—but rather “It is ‘the God overall’ who is known specifically as ‘Father’ and the characteristic marks of the Son and the Spirit relate directly to him: the Son alone shines forth in an ‘only-begotten mode,’ while the Spirit, proceeding from the Father, subsists, has his *hypostasis*, from the Father alone, but is known with and through the Son.” Cf. John Behr, *Formation of Christian Theology, Vol. 2: The Nicene Faith, Pt. 2* (Yonkers: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2004), 420.

⁶⁰ Sammon, *Called to Attraction*, 153.

the creature to participate in the Creator. Charles Twombly explains that participation is “that notion taken from Platonic thought that bespeaks of one reality reflecting and ‘dwelling in’ an archetypal form of that same reality.”⁶¹ This means that the superhistorical truth of transcendental beauty must “dwell in,” be made present in, or transfer its mode of being to, creatures and their artifacts enfolded in intrahistorical eventuality. Each direction of this biconditional is accounted for: borrowing from Gadamer, intrahistorical eventuality is linked to superhistorical truth in identifying the ontological mode of art as play, that “natural process”⁶² by which viewers are linked with art in a continuing unfolding of one and the same being⁶³; and following St. John Damascene, the superhistorical truth is linked to intrahistorical eventuality in identifying the created realm as a site of unfolding communion with the transcendent: “An image is a likeness depicting an archetype, but having some difference from it, the image is not like the archetype in every way.”⁶⁴

Through play, the immanent (the drama, intrahistorical eventuality) is made participant in the playwright, the transcendent (the stage, superhistorical truth). This requires the linking of the concepts of Person with that of persons,⁶⁵ which in turn must be articulated in the grammar of *holiness*. Holiness is that concept which indicates the radical other separate from creation, bestowing that separateness—the transcendent mode—to creatures from the Creator. Vasiljević explains that to be holy is to be: (1) separate from the rest; (2) to be “different and exempt from [others]”; and (3) to be what is held separately as having special application to, and service for, God.⁶⁶ Šijaković tells us that “Holiness means the most real and the most complete Being,” that it

⁶¹ *Perichoresis and Personhood*, 88.

⁶² Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 106 and 109.

⁶³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 349, Cf. 235f.

⁶⁴ John Damascene, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, trans., intro. Andrew Louth (Yonkers: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003), Bk. 1, Ch. 9.

⁶⁵ Hector tells us helpfully that language must be used to connect compatibles to one another, i.e. speaker-speaker: “one answers to objects *by* answering to one’s peers.” See Hector, *Theology Without Metaphysics*, 12. It is important to keep in mind here, *pace* Hector and recalling Note 51, that although the present discussion concerns concepts, the real thrust of analogical metaphysics holds that concepts can be related analogically precisely because beings themselves are always and already analogical.

⁶⁶ “Holiness and Otherness: From Holiness as an Ethical Concept to Holiness as a Hypostatic Concept,” in *History, Truth, and*

“is the primary ‘reality,’” and “an unearned gift and its responsible acceptance.” Responsibility is thus a triadic relation: (1) I am responsible for (2) the other and thereby responsible (3) before a third. Responsibility is the way of facing the other, and ultimately the Other, God. I am accountable to persons in being accountable to the Person in-and-beyond them: “Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.”⁶⁷ Holiness is thus that fundamental response by which being *qua* being, and via transference beauty *qua* desirable being, is apprehended by creatures, which respond to being’s desirability by becoming more like the transcendent source of beauty, God.⁶⁸ This notion will be developed in §2 while exploring the conflict between the real and the simulation, what will be revealed as a new battle with an old enemy.

§2: *Simulating the Real? An enemy of old, anew.*

...pornographic art [is sadistic] precisely to the degree that sexuality is objectified... made the object of libidinal waste and servitude [, finally producing] the ultimately trivial, though powerful, facsimile text of masturbation.

- George Steiner, *Real Presences*

Of course, every culture has its theatres of cruelty, where the emotionally diseased can enjoy the torments of others at leisure... and most ancient peoples were quite frank in the pleasure they derived from the public humiliation, torture, and execution of captured enemies, or criminals, or outsiders... They speak of the very special sadism of the disinterested voyeur[.]

- David Bentley Hart, *The Christian Revolution and its Fashionable Enemies*

In §1 the question of being and its reversal ‘Why not *nothing?*’ was answered and clarified by claiming that, so long as the analogy of being is maintained—the *analogia entis*—then the

Holiness, 2.

⁶⁷ Cf. Matt. 25:45. See also Bogoljub Šijaković, “Holiness, Responsibility, Autonomy” in *The Presence of Transcendence: Essays on Facing the Other through Holiness, History, and Text*, trans. Predrag Čičovački, (Alhambra: Sebastian Press Publishing House, 2015), 22ff.

⁶⁸ The other’s inability to be comfortably emplaced within our mastery and possession is a sign of their holiness. See Williams, *Being Human*, 38. See also Robert Bernasconi’s entry “the Other,” *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 637, when he points out Derrida’s understanding—a starting point shared by the major protagonists in my discussion here—“that in some way the Other cannot be encapsulated within the thought-forms of Western philosophy without reducing the alterity of the Other.” Hector speaks of logocentric (*nota bene*: not Logos) metaphysics as having two components: (1) essentialism—that there are idea-like essences dissimilar from the concrete realities of objects; and (2) that these dissimilar realities are “bridged” by an a priori “correspondence.” See *Theology Without Metaphysics*, 14. Betz explains that “the explicit intention of Przywara’s *analogia entis*... is precisely to explode the confines of immanence, by analogically relating it to a God who... is exceedingly *beyond* it.” This is seen as widening the gap between God and creature, not undermining it, following Derrida’s counsel. See his “Translator’s Introduction,” in Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 57. Emphasis original.

“extremes” of pure synchrony, ‘being alone,’ Parmenides, and of pure diachrony, ‘becoming alone,’ Heraclitus—those great bastions of the nothing—are avoided, and beauty is given its proper place in Logos as being’s very desirability. Now the follow-up question is asked, “Why not the *virtual*? Why not the *simulated* real?” If the real is, as Baudrillard puts it, that which cannot be repressed without equating the repressed with the real,⁶⁹ then the only alternative is not *nothing*, i.e., the not-real, *unreal*—since this answer lies at the end the failed horns of Western metaphysics⁷⁰—but the *simulated* real:

All of Western faith and good faith was engaged in this wager on representation: that a sign could refer to the depth of meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange—God, of course.⁷¹

But a simulation always and already is in a process of “exchange in [and with] itself” with no engagement with the real. The simulation—and the accompanying logic of the *simulacral*—does not inquire about “the *distribution* of the real,” but suggests, instead, “over and above its object, that *law and order themselves might really be nothing more than a simulation.*”⁷²

Umberto Eco, in his fascinating study “Television and Aesthetics,” is concerned with the endogamy of signs: “The real problem is that what is of interest is not so much the single variations as ‘variability’ as a formal principle, the fact that one can make variations to infinity.”⁷³ Signs appear to point only toward other signs, and ultimately toward themselves. In the economy of Plato’s Beard, what is privileged—that which gives meaning to the sign—is neither Logos, what Derrida mistakenly equates with a Parmenidean “logocentric... privileging of presence”⁷⁴ in the

⁶⁹ Baudrillard, *Simulations*, 40.

⁷⁰ Although Cunningham believes that “both traditions are nihilistic.” Parmenidean metaphysics leads to nihilism, while the Heraclitean “is the realized *logic* of nihilism.” See *Genealogy*, xiii. This is a point I have not emphasized in this discussion, taking Przywara’s position emphasizing the incompleteness of both extremes, rather the collapse of one into the other, and both into absurdity. There is however no tension between these approaches.

⁷¹ Baudrillard, *Simulations*, 10f. See also the following citation.

⁷² Baudrillard, *Simulations*, 38. Emphasis original.

⁷³ In *Aesthetics: A Reader*, 2018, 408f.

⁷⁴ Jacques Derrida, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe In *Heidegger, Philosophy, and Politics: The Heidelberg Conference*, 1st Ed. ed. Mireille Calle-Gruber, trans. Jeff Fort, Jean-Luc Nancy (Foreword) (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 32.

sign, nor is “a present-being... in any form”; it is rather that which must “refer simultaneously to the entire configuration of its [a sign’s] meanings.” The sign, for Derrida, “represents the present in its [the referent’s] absence.”⁷⁵ Signs vary, and at the root of talking itself is just more talk.⁷⁶ But given that Derrida’s “Heraclitean stasis”⁷⁷ is one of the two tangles in Plato’s Beard, the variability of signs which he correctly notices must be understood in another way. Where the simulation is different is that it operates outside the theopanic-pantheistic economy: it is not that referents never arrive, *pace* Derrida, but that signs and referents never were different in the first place. It attacks Logos, and its attendant theo-logic, directly. Simulation is neither a nothing (an equivocal Derridean sign), nor a something (a univocal concept):

Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal...the product of an irradiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere. [These models are not parodies, or reproductions, or imitations; a model] is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself...⁷⁸

Although to simulate in a way makes present the absent referent of the sign,⁷⁹ as with Derrida, yet contra Derrida, signs are “murderous... murderers of the real, murderers of their own model as the Byzantine icons could murder the divine identity.”⁸⁰ The “Heraclitean stasis” sidesteps the real, opting for its equivocal alternative in pure text; the model however *kills* the real, replacing the real with its own counterfeit. To give a loose illustration distinguishing the two while anticipating a forthcoming theme: a divorce from a wife may leave only memories and empty spaces on what used to be shared furniture; but marriage with a sex doll, following the ambitions of a curious Kazakh bodybuilder in the news recently, replaces a wife with counterfeit woman. The plastic ragdoll does not kill simply by substituting the living with the dead, although in a sense this is

⁷⁵ Jacques Derrida, “Différance,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 3-27, *passim*. Available: <https://web.stanford.edu/class/history34q/readings/Derrida/Differance.html>.

⁷⁶ Recalling Steiner’s comment given in Note 31.

⁷⁷ Cunningham, *Genealogy*, 230.

⁷⁸ Baudrillard, *Simulations*, 2ff.

⁷⁹ Baudrillard, *Simulations*, 5.

⁸⁰ Baudrillard, *Simulations*, 10.

exactly what it does; it kills more precisely because it shows that woman as such was never alive to begin with. Wives, from Penelope to the present, have always already been passive plastics for consumption. The Kazakh, it may come as a surprise, is really a metaphysical visionary.

The simulation has deep historical roots. In icons, what is simulated, in the view of Baudrillard, is the presence of the divinity himself: but the divinity is “volatilized into simulacra which alone deploy their pomp and power of fascination—the visible machinery of icons being substituted for the pure and intelligible Idea of God...”⁸¹ Icons, furthering this line of thought, suggest a terrible truth about divinity: “that ultimately there has never been any God, that only the simulacrum exists, indeed that God himself has only ever been his own simulacrum... [the] images [conceal] nothing at all.” Simulations are beyond truth and falsity, and so by transcendental transference, beyond beautiful and ugly: simulation is beyond all differentiations and establishes “a radical law of equivalence and exchange, the iron law of its power.”⁸²

Baudrillard explains that modern society—that genetic abnormality that he etiologically traces to Byzantine iconoclasm—takes place “after the orgy...the moment when modernity exploded upon us, the moment of liberation in every sphere.” Once this was all over, all that is left to do is “simulate the orgy, simulate liberation,”⁸³ echoing Eco’s notion of endogamous variability. Any congruity of thought and being and value, explains Baudrillard—in a restive undermining of the Parmidean-Heraclitean dilemma—does not reduce but *produce*: it produces “a cancerous proliferation” and a “locus of metastasis,”⁸⁴ that unstoppable swelling of the hyperreal. This stasis

⁸¹ Baudrillard, *Simulations*, 8f.

⁸² Baudrillard, *Simulations*, 43.

⁸³ “After the Orgy,” in *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena*, trans. James Benedict (London and New York: Verso, 1993), 3. E. Michael Jones has authored a book in the very same year, from a diametrically opposed cultural and theological position, holding that “modernity is rationalized lust.” See *Degenerate Moderns: Modernity as Rationalized Sexual Misbehavior* (South Bend: Fidelity Press, 1993/2012), 17. Peter Gay expresses this in similar fashion, again from a contravening cultural and theological position to both authors cited here: modernism is that “climate of thought, feeling, and opinion” which holds to the “conviction that the untried is markedly superior to the familiar, the rare to the ordinary, the experimental to the routine.” See *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy: From Baudelaire to Beckett and Beyond* (New York: WW Norton, 2007), 2f.

⁸⁴ “After the Orgy,” *Transparency of Evil*, 7f. This point is revisited in the disturbing “Body Without Organs” illustration of

must turn cancerous, for “where there is stasis, there is metastasis.”⁸⁵ As the simulation proliferates, it becomes harder to separate it from the real and to “prove the real.”⁸⁶

Baudrillard calls this metastasis *transaesthetics*, the simulation of Logos that enters the ontologically flattened trans-territory: “aesthetics becomes Transaesthetics,” converging in the “transversal” space where “no discourse may have a metaphorical relationship to another, because for there to be metaphor, differential fields and distinct objects must exist.” This produces a “total metonymy” where each part becomes the whole and total substitution becomes possible “between any sphere and any other.”⁸⁷

Total metonymy, that interchangeability of whole with each of its parts, the blending of a thing, or word, with each and every of its associations, obliterates the other, and thus, obliterates holiness, the responsible reception of the other. Otherness is not the same thing as difference, as Baudrillard maintains: “One might even say that difference is what destroys otherness.” If meaning in language is mere differentiation, “the radical otherness of language is abolished.”⁸⁸ Likewise, if difference

Deleuze and Guattari, mirroring the metonymic multiplication of Baudrillard’s *simulacrum* applied to the dislocation of the human body from any inside-outside dynamism (e.g. “I like drugs because they make me feel good”) into the single horizontal territory of the inside, only and alone: “*Cancerous tissue*: each instant, each second, a cell becomes cancerous, mad, proliferates and loses its configuration, takes over everything; the organism must resubmit it to its rule to re-stratify it, not only for its own survival, but also to make possible an escape from the organism, the fabrication of the ‘other’ BwO on the plane of consistency.” Emphasis original. See their *Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 163.

⁸⁵ “Transaesthetics,” *Transparency of Evil*, 15.

⁸⁶ Baudrillard, *Simulations*, 41.

⁸⁷ “Transaesthetics,” *Transparency of Evil*, 15. This metonymy is not to be understood as pantheistic, as ‘world alone.’ There is only world, simulated—this will be returned to. Concerning the relation of discourses to one another, Oliver explains that the function of analogy—what is simulated in transaesthetics—is the way to genealogically associate all discourses to one another organically and contiguously, principally bridging the discourses of physics and metaphysics. See *Philosophy, God, and Motion*, 2 and 138.

⁸⁸ “The Melodrama of Difference,” *Transparency of Evil*, 127. See also “The Hell of the Same,” 116: “If all information is contained in each of its parts, the whole loses its significance.” Baudrillard expresses this with more precision in *Simulations*, 84f., that in hierarchies, “sings are limited in number, and are not widely diffused, each one functions with its full value as interdiction, each is a reciprocal obligation between castes, clans or persons. The signs therefore are anything but arbitrary. The arbitrary sign begins when, instead of linking two persons in an unbreakable rapacity, the signifier states referring back to the disenchanting universe of the signified, common denominator to the real world toward which no one has any obligation.” It is only when “nothing separates one pole from the other, the initial from the terminal: there is just a sort of contraction into each other” in the transaesthetic space, producing that seriality of self-reference eluded to above by Eco. See *Simulations*, 57. Cunningham agrees: If “infinity is a quantitative matter of degree then it cannot allow for a real ontological difference.” See his *Genealogy*, 30. Eagleton has also eluded to this state of decontextualization: the further communication falls away from its context in the material which speaks it, the greater the degree to which language is no longer grounded in the context that gives it place and presence: “Body and language can thus come to be at odds with each other...” See *Materialism*, 26.

between beings is mere differentiation, the radical otherness of the other has been abolished. Thus the trans-territory is a metonymic hyperspace of banality and indifference: when “everything is aesthetic, nothing is beautiful or ugly anymore, and art itself disappears.”⁸⁹ This “transaesthetics of banality” is nothing but the “pure circulation of images,”⁹⁰ a self-referring seriality of imagistic circulation, a veritable “pornography of the void,” to appropriate Cunningham’s terms.⁹¹

The late priestmonk and theologian Seraphim Rose claimed that “pornography is the devil’s iconography.” Cunningham, at least, understands the ‘Heraclitean stasis’ as pornographic and objectifying, shared with Steiner’s epigraph to this section. But the notion finds a superior fit in the simulation: pornography, for all its reduction, is also *pro*-duction;⁹² it produces by replacing the real body with its simulation, its virtual substitute, without ever suggesting the unreal. Masturbation may indeed be the facsimile text of sex, but it does not copy the other, only the sex; the sex doll by contrast simulates not the sex, but the woman.⁹³

G. K. Chesterton once said something to the effect that any claim that says of the light of the moon that it is as bright as the sun at the same time also says that the light of the sun is as pale as that of the moon. This critiques the Parmenidean-Heraclitean economy with precision. But the simulation does not compare one light with the other; there is no question of whether there really is any light there at all. Given the simulation, the woman is the sex doll; there is no question of whether one is ‘the other’ *to the other*—otherness was always lacking between them: the sex doll is proof-text of that woman is long dead. Masturbation may copy the sex, but the sex doll murders

⁸⁹ “After the Orgy,” *Transparency of Evil*, 8.

⁹⁰ “After the Orgy,” *Transparency of Evil*, 11.

⁹¹ *Genealogy*, 258.

⁹² Following Eco’s themes of serial variability, pornography is also *product*-ion.

⁹³ Hervé Juvin recognizes this with elegance: there will be a new prohibition on sex in a hypersexualized world: “The number of adolescents sexually blocked by the need for sexual performance and the obsession with unattainable technique to guarantee mutual satisfaction lends conviction to the idea of a quest for satisfaction without sexual exchange, of a generalized autosatisfaction in which the other becomes so similar to the self and at the same time so untouchable that relations with him or her are excluded.” See his *Coming of the Body*, trans. John Howe (London and New York: Verso, 2010), 80.

the woman. The doll is not the woman's reduction but her metonymic replacement; the doll is woman, but everything is woman, therefore nothing is woman: "The radical Other is intolerable: he cannot be exterminated, but he cannot be accepted either, so the negotiable other, the other of difference, has to be promoted."⁹⁴

Since God is ultimately the radical Other, his image in the "Byzantine icons made it possible to stop asking whether God existed—without, for all that, ceasing to believe in him."⁹⁵ The historical roots of the issue now become apparent: that is why "Attacking images, John [Damascene] seems to be saying, is not just to attack the actual icons, but more seriously to threaten something central to the whole fabric of Christian theology."⁹⁶ Michel Henry explains, alongside John Damascene but contra Baudrillard, that the Byzantine icon possesses a "plastic arrangement of its elements" such that it "is like the reflection of a metaphysical composition that assigns each thing its place according to the degree of its ontological participation in the One." Artworks thus possess the in-and-beyond structure of the *analogia entis*: "How can the work of art belong to a real world defined by sensibility and also be situated beyond it, beyond its support, in a pure imaginary?... in the end, every work of art is presented to us as an enigma, a mystery full of sense."⁹⁷ Art, instead of reflecting the in-and-beyond structure of the image emplaced in its relational context within the Logos, becomes simulation when it replaces that which it intends to

⁹⁴ Baudrillard, "The Melodrama of Difference," *Transparency of Evil*, 133. Baudrillard's notion of "difference" here should be understood as "differentiation": Baudrillard's "difference" is not genuinely other-producing. See Note 42 above and its attendant paragraph in the main text.

⁹⁵ "Transaesthetics," *Transparency of Evil*, 17. Derrida explains that "in language there are only differences without positive terms. Whether we take the signified or the signifier, language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonetic differences that have issued from the system." See his essay "Différance," in *Margins of Philosophy*.

⁹⁶ Andrew Louth, "Introduction," in *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*.

⁹⁷ Michel Henry, *Barbarism* trans. Scott Davidson (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004), 32 and 35f. respectively.

reproduce: art loses “the desire for illusion, and instead raises everything to aesthetic banality, becoming *transaesthetic*.”⁹⁸

The chief threat the simulation poses to the Logos, what I have expressed in terms of the *analogia entis* and its attendant theo-logical grammar, is that it works outside the economy of reduction in the expanded sense in which it has been formulated here. This is because, in the *simulacrum*, both the subject and the object of any would-be reduction are simulated: the simulation is a double of what Michel Henry has called Life, the “hypo-static” space of phenomenologically pure interiority beyond mere biological life which is characterized by “*the very fact of sensing or experiencing oneself and nothing else*.”⁹⁹ Life, he says, radically undermines the “ek-static” separation of subjects from their objects—what Henry considers to be the defining mistake of modern philosophy—which considers the object as “something that is set apart from and placed in front of the knower.”¹⁰⁰ Life is the substrate undergirding what Merleau-Ponty has intriguingly called the phenomenon not simply of touching, but of “being able to touch myself touching...”¹⁰¹ This radically interior space of touching myself touching myself, which Henry calls Life,¹⁰² is not

⁹⁸ Baudrillard, “The Conspiracy of Art” in *The Conspiracy of Art* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2005), 25. Gadmer tries to retaliate: the contrasting position to this kind of differentiation, what Gadamer calls ‘aesthetic differentiation’ is that which “creates an external existence for itself.” By contrast, “aesthetic non-differentiation” does not divorce synchrony from diachrony, but attempts to unite them, player and play, drama and stage, intrahistorical eventuality with superhistorical truth. This is moving toward the direction I am espousing here. See *Truth and Method*, 79 and 121, respectively. Yet, foreshadowing the discussion in this and the last section, radical hermeneutics of Gadamer’s kind “is merely one theoretical articulation of a transformation that is always already being affected by the market: persons... must be reduced to economic selves... [being enriched] only under the form of subjective choices made from a field of morally indifferent options...” It is thus, on my reading, part of the problem of the demonic. See Hart, *Beauty of the Infinite*, 432. Gadamer himself explains what he learned from Heidegger: his “having taught me that logocentrism was in a way the destiny of the West.” See Derrida et al., *Heidegger, Philosophy, and Politics*, 8.

⁹⁹ Henry, *Barbarism*, 6. Emphasis original.

¹⁰⁰ See “Translator’s Introduction” in *Barbarism*, vii.

¹⁰¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, ed. Claude LeFort (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 9.

¹⁰² I simply assume in this work that the concept of Life is compatible with—and, with suitable adjustment, an extension of—the *analogia entis*. See John Behr, *Becoming Human* (Yonkers: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2013), where he expresses the hypothesis that the internal space of humanity, the space of so-called touching myself touching, what I have neglected in the main text body to call ‘Iipseity’—the hypo-static subjectivity of the subject—is one radically overtaken by the presence of the transcendent Holy Spirit, growing the divine crop from the inside, so to speak. Behr explains: “*Christ, as human, completes what he himself, as God, has predetermined to take place*. If this is the case, then we have yet to become human—and, as St. Ignatius testifies so resoundingly, we only and finally do so by following Christ through our own *martyria*, our own witness and confession of him.” See 37f; emphasis original. Jean-Claude Larchet testifies to this in-and-beyond structure of the internal tactility: “It is important to note that the divine-human reality to which the saints have acceded by grace is manifested in and

nullified but rather simulated: the hyperspace is one in which sign and referent break down and subjects and objects are no longer ontologically isolated but radically entangled. The simulation is not the *nothing*, the space of death,¹⁰³ but is instead *simulated Life*: a counterfeit living in a fictitious faux-internal hyperspace of detecting myself self-detecting, or, if put even more automatically, scanning myself self-scanning.

There is a scene in the graphic novel *Watchmen* where author Alan Moore has narrates character, a disturbed socio-pathological inner-city hero flabbergasting a prison psychiatrist while contemplating a Rorschach sketching: yes, I gaze into an abyss, yes, *the abyss gazes also*. Jacques Lacan has spoken movingly of the “gaze” as a “stain,” a “spot” of externalized desire, a desire removed from the subjectivity of the subject and placed within the space of intergazing he calls the *objet a*: “*The object a in the field of the visible is the gaze... the gaze is the instrument through which light is embodied and through which... I am photo-graphed.*”¹⁰⁴ This stain, this middle-place between subject and object, is the localization of the “preexistence of a gaze—I see only from one point, but in my experience I am looked at from all sides.”¹⁰⁵

My gaze, my subjectivity, leaves my body. Where does it go? How does this ‘middle-space’ turn into a ‘hyperspace’? Juvin supplies an interpretation. This detachment of the ego from material

through their bodies.” Larchet, *Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Donley (Yonkers: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2017), 90. Pickstock expresses this in her characteristically unique way. The Eucharist, she says, is the only locus where sense and reference, sign and signified, are stabilized into one: “the theological body turns *everything* into sign, in such a way that the distinction itself between thing and sign can no longer be sustained.” See *After Writing*, 261. Although other important objections have been raised to Henry’s notion of Life, I believe that these adjustments can answer the dilemma present in his account of Ipseity, to be glossed over in the present work, that can be found in Christina Gschwandtner, “How Do We Become Fully Alive? The Role of Death in Henry’s Phenomenology of Life,” *The Role of Death in Life: A Multidisciplinary Examination of the Relationship Between Life and Death*, eds. John Behr and Conor Cunningham (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2015), *passim*.

¹⁰³ See Pickstock, *After Writing*, 36, for her characterization of the Derridean sign as ‘death.’ Derrida presents an account of language as acting upon a passive and depersonalized speaker, rather than language as a speaker’s action, “erasing his *act* of speech, and thereby erasing the speaker himself... There is no subject. There are only objects, death(s).” Compare this with Note 71, where Baudrillard similarly discusses, following the present point in the main text, the central error of representation in the semiotic systems of what I have flippantly called the economy of Plato’s Beard, cf. Note 74.

¹⁰⁴ Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: WW Norton, 1998), 105f. Emphasis original.

¹⁰⁵ Lacan, *Four Concepts*, 72. Lacan continues (p. 74): the stain is that which is “valuable in marking the pre-existence to the seen of a given-to-be-seen.”

conditions has the ironic effect of producing a world in which all that is real is the body itself, the ego disappearing into the now purely immaterial unreality in its dislocation from matter:

Our everyday reality is made largely by virtual, digital slaves who are learning very thoroughly how to dispense with memory, analysis, reason, and judgement... [the suggestion] of mental prosthesis, prosthesis of memory, skill or knowledge. The machine can substitute itself for the mind; indeed it is already doing so.¹⁰⁶

The ego is now neither a mind nor a body: both are digitalized. And the body is no longer simply a stain, a location where the seer is first being seen, but a renewed axis along which the phantom of the “detached ego” can be “committed to the new trinity of health, security, and pleasure” in order to transform itself as it sees fit.¹⁰⁷ Plato’s Socrates concurs: “It is surely necessary that a man who is ruled by desire and is a slave to pleasure will turn his body into whatever is most pleasing to himself.”¹⁰⁸

The body becomes, paradoxically, all that remains of the real once the ego is immaterialized and dislocated from embodiment. All that is left is a space of bodies, a space of visibility—a place not of the radical interiority of touch, but of simulated interiority, a “seeing oneself self-seeing.” Therefore the real ultimately becomes the given-to-be-seen with no true tactile depth, the *spectacle*: “we are beings who are looked at, in the spectacle of the world.”¹⁰⁹ Chanon Ross

¹⁰⁶ Juvin, *Coming of the Body*, 39.

¹⁰⁷ Henry Novello, “Evangelizing Culture in a Technological Age: Faith as Lived Culture,” *The Australasian Catholic Record*, Volume 91, No 2 (April 2014), 222. I will take ‘ego’ in the phenomenological, rather than psychoanalytical sense, not as the stain of symbolized absence, the symbolizing of the non-symbolic Unconscious, the ‘field of the other.’ Lacan in *Four Concepts*, 188 states that “Through the effects of speech, the subject always realizes himself more in the Other, but he is already pursuing there more than half of himself. He will simply find his desire ever more divided, pulverized, in the circumscribable metonymy of speech.” Agamben has complained of this creation-out-of-nothing of the speaking subject from the unrepresentable abyss in his *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience*, trans. Liz Heron (London and New York: Verso), 31, also *passim*, where he holds that the subject must find their subjectivity neither in speech (where it is depending upon its being spoken), nor outside of it (where it disappears into the impenetrable un-said and un-sayable), but instead in a deeper, non-discursive sayable he calls *infancy*. Otherwise, he says here, all we are left with is “a transcendental subject which cannot be given substance or psychologized in any way...” On this point, Cunningham has called Kant’s way of transcendentalizing of the ego as “a single monistic feat of dissolution.” See *Genealogy*, 74. Rather, I take ego as the site in which the subject accesses Life, the transcendental subjectivity (as opposed to nullity) of the ego: “It is within Life’s relation to [itself], in effect, and only there, that the ego relates to its self.” The ego adds the ‘me’ to Self. See Henry, *I Am the Truth*, 148 and 138 respectively.

¹⁰⁸ “Phaedrus” 238e in *Plato: Complete Works*. Indeed, this goes for language itself: the postmodern postulation that ‘all is language’ is “predicated upon language as an instrument of control by a detached ‘spiritualized’ human self.” See Pickstock, *After Writing*, xiii.

¹⁰⁹ Lacan, *Four Concepts*, 75.

explains: “The phrase ‘society of the spectacle’ describes a consumer society in which spectacle both facilitates commoditization and becomes itself an object for consumption.”¹¹⁰ It is a space in which the “image-as-idol plays a significant role in cultivating desire and molding it around the processes of production and consumption,”¹¹¹ a space “resulting in a sophistic ‘virtual reality,’ or a realm of mere fiction which is manipulable, ironic, and uninhabited.”¹¹² Henry has called this society *barbarous*, “an impoverishment and a degradation”¹¹³ of the shared Life he calls culture which, following Baudrillard and the cronies of the simulation, has turned metastatic, a world that “spreads like cancer.”¹¹⁴ Barbarism is the simulated, falsely lived, illusively untouched, hyperspace in which the self finds its technological obliteration, a space where human subjects are “replaced by abstractions, by economic entities, by profits and money, then treated mathematically, digitally, statistically, counted like animals and counting for much less.”¹¹⁵ “The technological world,” swallowing up everything in its path, “thus spreads like a cancer.”¹¹⁶

This mathematization of the human subject, the reduction of the real to the untactile visible, leaves the consumer ego without Logos, without a hierarchical, narrative superstructure to be placed in, no history and no ecology of being which contextualizes the ego as organically rooted in a space of mutual and interdependent self-giving, what Henry calls “giving the gift of one’s own flesh.”¹¹⁷ The detached consumer ego then has no recourse to action, and no principles embedded within any of its acts, that do not stem from their sovereign choosing selves. This is a total capitulation to what

¹¹⁰ Ross, *Gifts Glittering and Poisoned: Spectacle, Empire, and Metaphysics* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2014), 2.

¹¹¹ Ross, *Gifts Glittering*, 84.

¹¹² Pickstock, *After Writing*, 42.

¹¹³ Henry, *Barbarism*, 5.

¹¹⁴ Henry, *Barbarism*, 54.

¹¹⁵ Henry, *I Am the Truth*, 275. See also *Barbarism*, 19f. where Henry explains that “barbarism... is not an incomprehensible and disastrous event that strikes culture from the outside at the height of its bloom.” It is rather a “successive contamination of every domain of social activity, the gradual disappearance, in the organic totality of the human ‘world,’ of its aesthetic, ethical and religious dimensions...”

¹¹⁶ Henry, *Barbarism*, 54.

¹¹⁷ Henry, *Barbarism*, 69.

Jean-Claude Larchet has said about the fall, echoing what St. Paul calls the “old man”: “The body is a locus of contradictions,” he says, the war of being “one in two substances,” the postlapsarian opacity of our living bodies to the energies of God, darkened, dense, and heavy, a coagulated fleshliness of the ego newly burdened, having inherited the viral infection of ancestral sin.¹¹⁸ Any space which replaces the mutual self-gifting of living flesh to living flesh, approximating Henry’s turns of phrase, with this form of consumptive, wasting consumerism, is the space of barbarity, the digital “hell of the same.”¹¹⁹ The following and final section will conclude with a discussion of God’s providential solution to this prideful self-dislocation: his pedagogical narration of the real as conscientious and conscience-inducing in creatures which, when appropriately obeyed, severs what St. Augustine has called the fellowship with the demons.

§3: *Learning the Real? A conscientious transmogrification.*

Only pain is intellectual, only evil interesting. This is the treason of the artist: a refusal to admit the banality of evil and the terrible boredom of pain.

- Ursula K. Le Guin, “The Ones Who Walk Away from *Omelas*”

...let’s assume that you were called upon to build the edifice of human destiny so that men would finally be happy and would find peace and tranquility. If you knew that, only to attain this, you would have to torture just one single creature, let’s say the little girl who beat her chest so desperately in the outhouse, and that on her unavenged tears you could build that edifice, would you agree to do it?

- Ivan Karamazov in Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*

The key component of a return of the human creature into the Logos fold, and the pacifying of the human will and the restricting of the opportunity to sin—the prideful exertion found in the consumer ego’s hegemony in the simulation—is a renewed interest in *conscience*, that is, *taking conscience seriously*. Conscience “censures us for our own wrong acts, inner as well as outer”; it is that activity

¹¹⁸ See *Theology of the Body*, 1, 17, and 32f. respectively. Cf. Col. 3:9f.

¹¹⁹ Recalling Note 88.

of self-accusation concerning which St. John Chrysostom has remarked, “‘he who lives in wickedness experiences the torments of hell prior to hell, being stung by his conscience.’” Conscience should “intensify a person’s efforts to obey,”—to obey their emplacement in Logos— which nevertheless can be “put to sleep, [deadening] man’s higher functions.”¹²⁰ What, in principle, does conscience prick the ego into obeying? At first, simple abstinence from, and at last, the systematic transformation of, evil and sin.

Evil, St. Gregory of Nyssa explains, is not the absence of good but its *privation*, its non-being where it ought to be.¹²¹ St. John Damascene concurs that evil “is no more than the privation of the good, just as darkness is the absence of light”; it is “not a substance, but an accident.”¹²² Yet for its substantial absence, evil’s presence in history, including its seeming impossibility of being eradicated from human subjectivity and community, offers itself as a prolonged, productive, and dramatic undertaking—a *career*. Evil, Šijaković explains, is: *mysterious*: imposing and jarring; *fascinating*: an attention-seeking horror show; *brutal*: a spectacle of obscenity; *banal*: unremarkably commonplace; *spectacular*: attractive and demanding nurture and growth; and *incomprehensible*: not sourced in a ‘what,’ but in a ‘who.’¹²³ And since we are beings living in the creaturely tension, this gives, as St. Symeon notes, a changeable fleshliness to creatures such that no falling away from the wellspring of all being can ever be necessitated.¹²⁴ To sin, in the context of our simulated consumer hyperreal, is to deny one’s own fleshliness as creature, as Pickstock

¹²⁰ Both passages can be found in Constantine Cavaros, *Byzantine Thought and Art* (Belmont: Institute for Byzantine & Modern Greek Studies, 2000), 43f.

¹²¹ Cited in Šijaković, “On the Nature of Evil,” *The Presence of Transcendence*, 50.

¹²² *Exact Exposition*, Bk. II, Chs. 4 and 7 respectively.

¹²³ See Šijaković, “On the Nature of Evil,” *The Presence of Transcendence*, 46ff. I am certain this is not intended as an exhaustive list. Evil is also *fun*. St. Symeon explains: “In considering the sin by which Adam sinned when he was in the glory and enjoyment of Paradise, no one will find that it was done out of necessity or infirmity, or for any good reason at all, but solely out of disdain for the commandment of God, out of the ingratitude and apostasy which Adam showed with relation to God his Creator.” See *First-Created Man*, Homily 10.1.

¹²⁴ Adam was clothed in flesh and so a “creature subject to change” and thus unable to “fall into complete apostasy from God” like the fallen fleshless demons. See Symeon the New Theologian, *The First-Created Man: Seven Homilies by St. Symeon the New Theologian*, 4th Ed. trans. Fr. Seraphim Rose (Platina: St. Herman Press, 2013), Homily 10.1.

intimates, to deny “our dependency on a transcendent source which ‘gives’ all reality as a mystery, rather than” to affirm the consumer ego “as adducing our suspension over the void.”¹²⁵ To abstain from, and then transform, sinful activity is a task fundamentally starting from conscience.

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, unpacking what Cavarnos labels as the “teacher” and “natural book” talked of by the Greek Fathers,¹²⁶ has expressed conscience in two distinct manifestations: conscience as *synderesis* and conscience as *conscientia*.¹²⁷ Synderesis is “the first so-called ontological level of the phenomenon [of] conscience [which] consists in the fact that something like an original memory of the good and the true (they are identical) has been implanted in us,” in Henry’s words, traces of the Living inheritance present in the ego, while conscientia is an acting judgment: “The guilt lies... not in the present act, not in the present judgement of conscience, but in the neglect of my being that made me deaf to the internal promptings of truth.” Conscience as such, in its dual foundation, is what John Henry Cardinal Newman has called “a dutiful obedience to what claims to be a divine voice, speaking within us”: not a rule without exceptions, nor any totalitarian demand of “an ‘Absolute’ obedience,” but rather a guide that mediates between personal judgments and communal urgency.¹²⁸ Conscience isn’t truth, but a witness to the truth, as St. Paul says: “I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted” (1 Cor. 4:4). Conscience, in its dual presence as ontological and phenomenological, recalls that unique melody we called Life: conscience lives, and refuses to stop living.

Ursula K. Le Guin offers an unforgettable story of a utopia, the city of Omelas, free of selfishness, conflict, suffering, and the miasmatic worries and fears of everyday life, except in one small, very small, instance: there is a child—“it” is the child’s name—locked in a fetid chamber,

¹²⁵ *After Writing*, xii.

¹²⁶ *Orthodoxy and Philosophy* (Belmont: Institute for Byzantine & Modern Greek Studies, 2003), 194.

¹²⁷ “Conscience and Truth,” in *On Conscience: Two Essays* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 30-37.

¹²⁸ “A Letter Addressed to the Duke of Norfolk on Occasion of Mr. Gladstone’s Recent Expostulation [1875],” in *Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching*, Vol. 2 (Norderstedt: Hansebooks, 2019), 255 and 243f. respectively.

neglected and underfed, chained among smut, mysteriously enabling the functioning of the utopian city:

They all know it is there, all the people of Omelas. Some of them have come to see it, others are content merely to know it is there. They all know that it has to be there... the beauty of their city... [depends] wholly on this child's abominable misery... To exchange the goodness and grace of every life in Omelas for that single, small improvement... that would be to let guilt within the walls indeed.¹²⁹

Yet it is the self-accusation of conscience that prompts that change known as *metanoia*, is that turning from sin in contrition and repentance toward greater affective commitment to God and neighbor, toward the Christ that is Logos and the neighbor that is his image. The hyperreal in now returns to the real, the murderous image now returns to the image as a kind of “self in-and-beyond the ego” that is Life, returning to a culture of Life by which we recognize the immeasurable interior depth of the other: “That is why the world is not a pure spectacle offered to an impersonal and empty gaze.”¹³⁰

The world-as-spectacle, as object of the consumer ego, of what Steiner has called the domain of libidinal waste, puts humanity in what St. Augustine calls the fellowship with the demons: “having both perfect, immortal bodies and insatiable desire, demons [are] beings of limitless capacity for wicked passions of the soul. They [are] consumers *par excellence*.”¹³¹ The ego as consumer of spectacle is in communion with the demons in that the ego *qua* sovereign consumer “does not rise as high as God... but he rises high enough to occupy the space between immanence and transcendence that Augustine calls the fellowship of the demons. In this space he is like the demons in that he is both captive to the passions of the soul and detached from material reality.”¹³² To exit this fellowship, to disrupt this evil communion, God, as St. Symeon says, pedagogically allows the decrees of sin to become “the law of nature... the decree of God [to

¹²⁹ “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas,” in *The Wind's Twelve Quarters: Stories* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004).

¹³⁰ Henry, *Barbarism*, 16.

¹³¹ The words are Ross', *Gifts Glittering*, 79. He is following St. Augustine in his *City of God*, 9.7.

¹³² Ross, *Gifts Glittering*, 90f. See also pp. 79 and 86.

Adam] of death and corruption, became a law of nature eternal and unchanging.”¹³³ Our conscience, then, must be seen as a gift of escape from the world—not to an ethereal space of demonic consumption, but into the radically interior space of Life. Life and its attendant culture, the living communion in a culture of life, is a space of reconciliation, a comprehensive finale of conscience, an ever-turning-away from trauma to the measureless interior space of forgiveness. As Ross concludes, a Christian’s “capacity to forgive *transcends an economy of exchange*.”¹³⁴ To walk away from evil is not to correct all that is evil, but to accept that fleshly changeability, the “eternal movement of Life”¹³⁵ which makes it impossible to fall completely away from God. Taking the final words of Le Guin’s story, the “ones who walk away from Omelas”—those that recognize the beauty of that hurting child, along with the conscientious need to become holy in response—“seem to know where they are going,” indeed.

It is thus the conscience as dimension of Life, as that which returns the ego from a putrefied consumer of spectacle to the gifted and self-gifting flesh, which takes us on our upward¹³⁶ journey along with the pulse of the undulating structural rhythm that is what being a creature is, analogically at home. This journey takes us not only away from somewhere, from the demonic hyperspace of the spectacle, from the world imposing negotiation with evil—but takes us somewhere, and, ultimately, to *someone*: to Life, to the unmercenary flesh of a God who is, was, and ever shall be, Life.

¹³³ St. Symeon the New Theologian, *The First-Created Man*, Hom. 38.3.

¹³⁴ *Gifts Glittering*, 128. Emphasis original.

¹³⁵ Henry, *I Am the Truth*, 159.

¹³⁶ I take this image from Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 209.

Works Cited

- Agamben, Giorgio. *The Man Without Content*. Translated by Georgia Albert. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.
- Basil the Great. *On the Human Condition*. Translated by Norma Verna Harrison and Verna E. F. Harrison. Yonkers: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2005.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *The Conspiracy of Art*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2005.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulations*. Translated by Phil Beitchman, Paul Foss, and Paul Patton. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 1983.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena*. Translated by James Benedict. New York and London: Verso, 1993.
- Behr, John. *Becoming Human*. Yonkers: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2013.
- Behr, John. *Formation of Christian Theology, Vol. 2: The Nicene Faith, Pt. 2*. Yonkers: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004.
- Bencivenga, Ermanno. *Theories of the Logos*. New York: Springer, 2017.
- Bernasconi, Robert. "Other, the." In *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 1st Ed. Edited by Ted Honderich, 637. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- John R. Betz. "Translator's Introduction." In *Analogia Entis: Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm*. Authored by Erich Przywara. Translated by John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2014.
- Carnell, Edward J. *Introduction to Christian Apologetics: A Philosophic Defense of the Trinitarian-Theistic Faith*, 4th Ed. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1948/ 2007.
- Cavarnos, Constantine. *Byzantine Thought and Art*. Belmont: Institute for Byzantine & Modern Greek Studies, 2000.
- Cavarnos, Constantine. *Orthodoxy and Philosophy*. Belmont: Institute for Byzantine & Modern Greek Studies, 2003.
- Cavarnos, Constantine. *Plato's Theory of Fine Art*, 2nd Ed. Belmont: Institute for Byzantine & Modern Greek Studies, 1998.
- Cooper, John M. "Parmenides." In *Plato: Complete Works*. Edited by John M. Cooper, Associate Editor D. M. Hutchinson, 235-293. Indianapolis: Hackett., 1997.
- Cooper, John M. "Phaedrus." In *Plato: Complete Works*. Edited by John M. Cooper, Associate

- Editor D. M. Hutchinson, 506-556. Indianapolis: Hackett., 1997.
- Cooper, John M. "Sophist." In *Plato: Complete Works*. Edited by John M. Cooper, Associate Editor D. M. Hutchinson, 359-397. Indianapolis: Hackett., 1997.
- Cunningham, Conor. *Genealogy of Nihilism*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2005.
- Damascene, John. *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*. Edited by D.P. Curtin. Translated by E.W. Watson and L. Pullan. Amazon Digital Services LLC, 2019.
- Damascene, John. *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*. Translation and Introduction by Andrew Louth. Yonkers: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Différance." In *Margins of Philosophy*. Translated by Alan Bass, 3-27. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982. Available: <https://web.stanford.edu/class/history34q/readings/Derrida/Differance.html>.
- Derrida, Jacques, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe. *Heidegger, Philosophy, and Politics: The Heidelberg Conference*, 1st Ed. Edited by Mireille Calle-Gruber. Translated by Jeff Fort. Forward by Jean-Luc Nancy. New York: Fordham University Press, 2016.
- Dostoyevsky, Fyodor. *The Brothers Karamazov*. New York: Vintage Books, 1950.
- Eagleton, Terry. *Materialism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016.
- Eco, Umberto. "Television and Aesthetics." In *Aesthetics: A Reader in the Philosophy of the Arts*, 4th Ed. Edited by David Goldblatt, Lee B. Brown, and Stephanie Patridge, Ch. 74. Abingdon: Routledge, 2018.
- Empson, William. *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 2nd Ed. Plano: Seabrook Press, 1949/ 2016.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*, 3rd Ed. Translated and Edited by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. London: Bloomsbury, 1960/ 2013.
- Gay, Peter. *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy: From Baudelaire to Beckett and Beyond*. New York: WW Norton, 2007.
- Gschwandtner, Christina. "How Do We Become Fully Alive? The Role of Death in Henry's Phenomenology of Life." In *The Role of Death in Life: A Multidisciplinary Examination of the Relationship Between Life and Death*. Edited by John Behr and Conor Cunningham, 56-78. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2015.

- Gomez-Davila, Nicholas. *Annotations on an Implicit Text*. Bogota: Villegas Editores, 2006.
- Griffiths, Paul J. "Letter to an Aspiring Intellectual." *First Things*, May 2018. Date Accessed: June 3, 2019. Available: <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2018/05/letter-to-an-aspiring-intellectual>.
- Hacker, Peter. "Duck-rabbit." In *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 1st Ed. Edited by Ted Honderich, 207. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Hart, David Bentley. *Beauty of the Infinite: An Aesthetics of Christian Truth*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2004.
- Hart, David Bentley. *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and its Fashionable Enemies*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.
- Hart, David Bentley. *The Experience of God Being, Consciousness, Bliss*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.
- Hauerwas, Stanley. "Honor in the University." *First Things*. Feb. 1991. Date Accessed: June 6, 2019. Available: <https://www.firstthings.com/article/1991/02/honor-in-the-university>
- Hauerwas, Stanley. *Working with Words*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2011.
- Hector, Kevin. *Theology Without Metaphysics: God, Language, and the Spirit of Recognition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Hegel, G H. W. "The Philosophy of Fine Art." In *Aesthetics: A Reader in the Philosophy of the Arts*, 4th Ed. Edited by David Goldblatt, Lee B. Brown, and Stephanie Patridge, Ch. 91. Abingdon: Routledge, 2018.
- Henry, Michel. *Barbarism*. Translated by Scott Davidson. London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004.
- Henry, Michel. *I Am the Truth: Toward a Philosophy of Christianity*, 1st Ed. Translated by Susan Emmanuel. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.
- Jones, E. Michael. *Degenerate Moderns: Modernity as Rationalized Sexual Misbehavior*. South Bend: Fidelity Press, 1993/ 2012.
- Juvin, Hervé. *The Coming of the Body*. Translated by John Howe. Brooklyn: Verso, 2010.
- Lacan, Jacques. *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Translated by Alan Sheridan, Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller. New York: WW Norton, 1998.
- Larchet, Jean-Claude. *Theology of the Body*. Translated by Michael Donley. Yonkers: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2017.

- Lasser, Justin M. "Logos Theology." In *Encyclopedia of Eastern Orthodox Christianity*. Edited by John Anthony McGuckin, 370-2. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.
- Le Guin, Ursula K. "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas." In *The Wind's Twelve Quarters: Stories*. New York: HarperCollins, 2004.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. "Epistemological crises, dramatic narrative, and the philosophy of science." In *The Tasks of Philosophy: Selected Essays: Vol. 1*, 3-23. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Manley, David. "Introduction: A Guided Tour of Metametaphysics." In *Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundation of Ontology*. Edited by David J. Chalmers, David Manley, and Ryan Wasserman, 1-37. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- McDaniel, Kris. "Ways of Being." In *Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundation of Ontology*. Edited by David J. Chalmers, David Manley, and Ryan Wasserman, 290-320. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Visible and the Invisible*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis, Edited by Claude LeFort. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968.
- Newman, John Henry Cardinal. "A Letter Addressed to the Duke of Norfolk on Occasion of Mr. Gladstone's Recent Expostulation [1875]." In *Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching*, Vol. 2, 175-378. Norderstedt: Hansebooks, 2019.
- Novello, Henry. "Evangelizing Culture in a Technological Age: Faith as Lived Culture." *The Australasian Catholic Record*, Volume 91, No 2 (April 2014), 214-226.
- O'Callaghan, Jonathan P. *Thomist Realism and the Linguistic Turn: Toward a More Perfect Form of Existence*, 1st Ed. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016.
- Oliver, Alexander T. "Calculus." In *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 1st Ed. Edited by Ted Honderich, 114. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Oliver, Simon. *God, Philosophy, and Motion*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2006.
- Pickstock, Catherine. *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 1997.
- Przywara, Erich. *Analogia Entis: Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm*. Translated by John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2014.
- Quine, W. V. O. "On What There Is." *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 2, No. 5 (Sep., 1948): 21-38. JSTOR.

- Ratzinger, Joseph Cardinal. "Conscience and Truth." In *On Conscience: Two Essays*, 11-40. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007.
- Ross, Chanon. *Gifts Glittering and Poisoned: Spectacle, Empire, and Metaphysics*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2014.
- Sammon, Brendan Thomas. *Called to Attraction: An Introduction to the Theology of Beauty*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2017.
- Šijaković, Bogoljub. *The Presence of Transcendence: Essays on Facing the Other through Holiness, History, and Text*. Translated by Predrag Čičovački. Alhambra: Sebastian Press Publishing House, 2015.
- Steiner, George. *Real Presences: Is there anything in what we say?* New York: Open Road Media, 2013.
- Symeon the New Theologian. *The First-Created Man: Seven Homilies by St. Symeon the New Theologian*, 4th Ed. Translated by Fr. Seraphim Rose. Platina: St. Herman Press, 2013.
- Tertullian. *Apologetic and Practical Treatises*, Vol. 1. Translated by Rev. C. Dodgson, 220-254. London: J. G. F. and J. Rivington, 1842.
- Twombly, Charles C. *Perichoresis and Personhood: God, Christ, and Salvation in John of Damascus*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2015.
- Vasiljević, Bishop Maxim. *History, Truth, Holiness: Studies in Theological Ontology and Epistemology*. Translated by Daniel MacKay. Alhambra: Sebastian Press Publishing House, 2011.
- Veith, Edward Jr. *State of the Arts: from Bezalel to Mapplethorpe*. Wheaton: Crossway, 1991.
- Williams, Rowan. *Being Human*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2018.