

**FLESHLESS IDEALISM AND WORD  
INCARNATE:  
A RE-EXAMINATION  
OF EASTERN ORTHODOX  
APOPHTICISM ON THE HEELS  
OF CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHICAL  
IMMANENTISM**

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**I. Theology and Postmodernism**

If anything, the majority of western theologians (including those of an unrepentant realist persuasion) have certainly felt more at home in the present postmodern milieu. Theology seems to have currently gained a new and unprecedented relevance among its various secular sister-disciplines, one strongly reminiscent of the golden days of Continental «dialectical theology», which stood proudly —if only briefly— on its feet as the true measure of the world. Alas, the world was soon to take decisive revenge on this pretentious, unenlightened, and by all appearances arbitrary discourse: the successful wedding of traditional empiricism with modern development in logic and linguistic philosophy brought the Christian kerygma to its knees, pronouncing upon it the ancient charge of foolishness. Religious utterances were readily dismissed as *nonsensical*, resistant as they were deemed to algorithmic verification and just as immune from falsifiability, abortive products of emotive reasoning, and the fruit of pious wishful thinking.

The dominant scientific picture was equally as discouraging, until the self-righteous edifice of positivism began to draw fire on itself from the most disparate quarters. Beginning with Thomas Kuhn, Imre Lakatos and Paul Feyerabend in epistemology, the assault on scientism and essentialism moved on to suggestions of more extreme radicality, following the extension of literary criticism and the liberties thereof to reason that had been developed from Kant to Hegel — or whether it more or less radically rejects it.<sup>1</sup>

If Habermas is a well-known advocate of Reason, devoted to the redemption of the so-called Enlightenment project than at work to undermine it, Richard Rorty, by contrast, provides the finest illustration of a deconstructor bent on purging cultural debate from the ontological question and the legitimacy of transcendental reason:

No organism, human or non-human, is ever more or less in touch with reality than any other organism. The very idea of «being out of touch with reality» presupposes the un-Darwinian, Cartesian picture of a mind which somehow swings free of the causal forces exerted on the body. The Cartesian mind in an entity whose relations with the rest of the universe are representational rather than causal. So to rid our thinking of the vestiges of Cartesianism, to become fully Darwinian in our thinking, we need to stop thinking of words as representations and to start thinking of them as nodes in the causal network which binds the organism together with its environment.<sup>2</sup>

At the risk of perhaps gross simplification (which is all that this tight introductory note sadly permits), we could designate this manifold recent iconoclasm by the somewhat controversial term of «postmodernism». Also known under Lyotard's memorable catch-phrase, «the end of grand narratives», postmodernism reflects the collective efforts of French iconoclasts Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, and their most prominent American follower just quoted, neo-pragmatist Richard Rorty. Among several others, these theorists have given language a totalizing predominance over «reality», presenting it as an utterly contingent and all-encompassing phe-

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1. Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996) p. 208.

2. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin, 1999), p. xxiii.

nomenon devoid of transparency and the ability to represent, with a view in mind of transforming everything into a polyphonic text. The rationale behind this seemingly impossible, but nonetheless trendy, move concerns the liberation of the voice of the «other» and the concomitant legitimacy of hitherto marginalized discourses, including that of madness.<sup>3</sup>

How is this all related to theology? Die-hard Lutherans and Barthians were quick to notice the proximity of Protestant orthodoxy's founding premise of an «infinite qualitative distance» between God and creation, with the cathartic near-frenzy for otherness promulgated by the sages of postmodernism (see, for example, Graham Ward's *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology*,<sup>4</sup> but also Roman Catholic Jean-Luc Marion's «postmodern» critique of Scholasticism in his *God Without Being*).<sup>5</sup> But more crucial is the twofold convergence in the sphere of language. It should always be kept in mind that postmodernism is basically a *linguistic* revolution, since after all it is the justification of free-play textuality versus the long-time dominance of monophonic spoken word, which salvages the voice of otherness. To give room to everyone, our statements ought to be *apophatic* in nature, namely, to resist all enclosure in fixed meanings, after the paradigm of traditional negative theology, which had chosen to speak about the divine in multiple negative terms, out of respect to God's enexhaustible mystery.

## II. Is patristic apophaticism «postmodern»?

To the extent that Christos Yannaras' *Heidegger and the Areopagite* likewise brings apophaticism's relevance to the recent cultural and philosophical debate about the covert totalitarianism of modernity, it may rightfully be classified among the list of postmodern manifestos. And yet, how damagingly misleading this label would be to Yannaras' book is made evident once it is sufficiently realized that his embarrassingly *realist* thesis is grounded not in language or textuality, but in the empirical Palamite doctrine of the *essence-*

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3. Cf. Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, Richard Howard, trans. (New York: Pantheon, 1965), and Jacques Derrida's critical commentary on it in *Writing and Difference*, Alan Bass, trans. (Chicago: the Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 31-63.

4. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

5. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995.

*energies* distinction. One is in peril of missing the book's entire point if scant attention is paid to the particular meaning of apophaticism with which the author operates: apophaticism is therein assumed to mean that «the truth is never exhausted or fully relayed in its formulation».<sup>6</sup> «Definitions, whether positive or negative, are best only approximations; they have limited validity, and becoming aware of these limitations constitutes the authentic core of apophaticism».<sup>7</sup> Thus apophaticism argues from the incompleteness of all knowledge to its tentative status and the need of «dispensing with ultimate formulas», of maintaining «an openness to reality and a freedom over against systems, conceptions and final theories or dogmas».<sup>8</sup> But it is of the essence to underscore that the bottom line of apophaticism is not skepticism or an epistemological despair, only a caution that the reality of things, to whatever extent it may be accessible to us, lies independently of our linguistic and conceptual conventions.

Such an underplay of linguistic isomorphism with the world is, of course,

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6. Daniel Bulzan in «Apophaticism, Postmodernism and Language, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 3 (1997): 261-278, approaches pseudo-Dionysian apophaticism from an entirely different angle, seeing only analogies between a radical version of it and the untenable excesses of Derridean deconstruction. He finds radical apophaticism's major weakness to be that its method is loosed from any theological accountability, and then cites with approval Dumitru Staniloae on the insufficiency of apophaticism and the need for it to be complemented with a *positive* theology, lest it dissolves Christian faith to a mystical skepticism that gets theology nowhere. While Bulzan's caveats are useful and well taken, they mainly concern (by his own admission) a radical version of the apophatic method, frequently invoked in scholarly attempts to correlate negative theology with the thought of Wittgenstein and Derrida. I believe such hopeful comparisons are doomed to failure, neglectful as they are of the pre-nominalist, pre-modern intellectual framework of Greek patristic apophaticism and its consequent realism. Quite as easily overlooked in contemporary discussions of apophaticism is also the *ecclesiological* factor involved in its conception and theological application, given the fact that patristic literature is the product of Church theologians mindful of the doctrinal, liturgical and pastoral commitments of a genuinely ecclesial theological work. In light of these circumstances, I consider Yannaras' reading of Dionysian apophaticism a more faithful depiction than other alternatives in circulation. For an excellent introduction to the apophaticism of the Eastern Church, designated as «the freedom of theology over against all conceptual necessity», see Marios P. Bezgos, «Apophaticism in the Theology of the Eastern Church: The Modern Critical Function of a Traditional Theory», *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, vol. 41, No 4 (1996), 327-357.

7. Bezgos, p. 356.

8. *Ibid.*

at the heart of current theories of textuality. Where Yannaras parts ways with postmodernism is in his repudiation of isomorphism for the sake of *reality*, not language. His «top-down» realism, running as it is counter to the tide of horizontal phenomenalism correlative with linguistic analysis and deconstruction, places him on opposite ends from non-realist contemporaries like Don Cupitt<sup>9</sup> and Mark Taylor.<sup>10</sup> For it sees our true measure as being God, and by extension the material product of His energies known as the physical creation, not an infinite linguistic play. And in the context of this patristic realism, it is above all *divine* (Trinitarian) otherness that enhances and protects the sanctity of human uniqueness, giving it as Yannaras and John Zizioulas would say its true ontology.<sup>11</sup> For if God is the inscrutable wholly Other, resistant to ontic objectification and unknowable in His essence, then so is His living icon, the irreducible human person. But then language is once again demoted to its non-suggestive role as a necessary but incomplete instrument of conveying our *personal* and *empirical* partaking of all modes of physical and personal otherness besides our own individuality.

It goes without saying that any attempt at hamstringing the pronounced hermeneutic prerogatives of language currently in acceptance would nowadays amount to a suspect (if not hubristic) offense to the dearest doctrine of the established philosophical canon: that which sees all reality as inescapably filtered to us through language. To be sure, a naïve return to a simplistic representational view of language would be neither feasible nor desirable even among realist theologians, for no adequate Christian anthropology can fail to appreciate the qualitative difference which language makes to any cultural aspect that is distinctively *human*. As Paul Tillich put it, «Man is free in so far as he has language. With his language, he has universals which liberate him from bondage to the concrete situation to which even the highest animals are

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9. Don Cupitt, *Taking Leave of God* (London: SCM Press, 1980); *The Long-Legged Fly: A Theology of Language and Desire* (London: SCM, 1991); «Anti-Realist Faith», his contribution to *Is God Real*, J. Runzo, ed. (London: Macmillan, 1993).

10. Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984).

11. Metropolitan John (Zizioulas), *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993); also, «The Doctrine and the Holy Trinity: The Significance of the Cappadocian Contribution», in *Trinitarian Theology Today*, Christoph Schwobel, ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), pp. 44-60.

subjected». <sup>12</sup> Similarly, John Milbank, one of the most promising theologians at work in the West today, has recently affirmed that «the post-modern embracing of a radical linguisticity, far from being a “problem” for traditional Christianity, has always been secretly promoted by it. <sup>13</sup> The problems begin, as I shall argue shortly, when language gradually assumes the assertive role once held by the transcendental mind. For then the resultant problem is not really, as is often suggested, a kind of «loss of the world» for the sake of textuality, but rather an entrapment to an all-immanent, anthropocentric vision which «cuts reality down to size», <sup>14</sup> to borrow a well-known phrase of Thomas Nagel.

Given, then, the parameter of this prevailing non-representationalism, the picture spilling off the pages of *Heidegger and Areopagite*, like Jean-Luc

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12. Paul Tillich: *Theologian of the Boundaries*, Mark Kline, ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 191.

13. *The World Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), p. 85. Milbank's enthusiastic theological endorsement of the so-called «linguistic turn» exhibits the rather widespread confusion of wedding early patristic linguistic conventionalism (or «instrumentalism», as Milbank puts it) with the linguacentric excesses of analytic and continental philosophy. In my view the union is spurious because, as I shall try to explain, at no point in the patristic corpus does language become co-extensive with reality, enough so as to dictate ways in which reality is to be perceived. In their distinct, pre-modern reasoning, the Cappadocians in particular mounted a skepticism on linguistic representation to refute the Eunomian system of necessary reference, whose purpose was to establish the ontological disjoinment of the Son from God the Father. To demonstrate the philosophical validity of their neo-Arian agenda, Aetius and Eunomius proclaimed the essence of God to be nameable and comprehensible, as a prolegomenon to isolating one concept («ungenerate») as the single ontological characteristic of the Father, by virtue of which His monism is preserved. In other words, they argued that the Fathers' *essence* (as opposed to the Son's) was being «ungenerate», hence truly and *uniquely* God. Eunomius' extant corpus is available in R. P. Vaggione, *Eunomius: The Extant Works* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987). Following the appearance of Basil's *Contra Eunomium* (364), Eunomius produced his *Apologia Apologiae*, a point by point refutation of Basil's above-cited work preserved only in fragmented form in Gregory of Nyssa's own subsequent *Contra Eunomium* (381-384). The debate is highly instructive and relevant nowadays, for it clearly demonstrates that not only is apophatic realism virtually at home with conceptual conventionalism, it is in fact radically incompatible with all forms of linguistic essentialism, provided the aforementioned asymmetry between reality and language is honored, a crucial point curiously missed by many a theologian conversant with contemporary philosophy of language, Milbank included.

14. *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986).

Mation's work, may be roughly accounted for as at once pre- and post-modern, with an unashamed keenness on the ontological question. Its main claim, briefly put, is that language can never be a substitute for reality, or narrative for personal experience. In the words of Gregory Palamas himself, «and should there be agreement among ourselves over the things, I care not about words ...since for us the truth lies not in sayings but in the things ...so that our task is not aimed at words, but the whole strife focuses on things».<sup>15</sup> Stated in somewhat broader terms, the apophatic mode of cognition promoted in these pages sets up its open-ended empiricism over against the temptation for surrogate idealistic artifacts, be they concepts, ideologies (of the secular as well as the religious sort) or similar mental constructs. The book may well be read as a critique of *idealism* in all of its insidious manifestations (religious, philosophical, linguistic, etc.); and Yannaras would doubtlessly deem postmodern and neo-pragmatist phenomenalism to be a radical version of linguistic idealism, intellectually fascinating perhaps, but pernicious for the purposes of theology.

Derrida and Rorty, on the other hand, would probably see in all this the resurgence of an obsolete «metaphysics of presence», an unfortunate regress to the Greek world of essentialism and the traditional divide of intrinsic versus accidental natures. For a number of reasons I find this anticipated critique unfair. In the first place, it brushes aside the cumulative pains of key patristic figures such as Maximus the Confessor, the Cappadocians, and Gregory Palamas, to remove the preeminence of substance and its adjacent determinism from Christianity's ontological commitments. More important still, Eastern apophaticism, as Yannaras interprets it, challenges the very precursor of positivism, i.e., the Scholastic notion of *ratio*, which survived the subsequent thrust of Ockham's nominalism, only to be later resuscitated by Descartes and further shielded with his *cogito*. French and American deconstructionists, on the other hand, may share stronger ties with the positivism of «via moderna» that they care to admit, working as they are to bring modernity's nominalist disjunction of signifieds from their signifiers to its logical conclusion by discrediting signifieds of all ontological content.

All this helps explain why Martin Heidegger strikes Yannaras as a healthier, at any rate as a more appropriate and balanced deconstructor of Euro-

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15. Gregory Palamas, «The Synodal Tone» (1351), in Ioannis Karmiris, *The Dogmatic and Symbolic Monuments of the Orthodox Catholic Church* (in Greek) vol I (Athens, 1960), p. 703.

pean metaphysics than his left-wing grandchildren. For Heidegger, besides having being the original and most seminal critic of onto-theology<sup>16</sup> (the confusion of Being with beings, which Heidegger attributed to western metaphysics all the way back to its systematic dawn in Greece), he also took *Da-sein*'s materiality and thrownness in an independently-existing world for granted, for which reason he probably never worked out a systematic and detailed epistemology. His was a lonely voice raising uneasy and disconcerting reminders of the century's conceited intellectual nihilism and ontological destitute. Not surprisingly, it takes an iconoclast sufficiently harmonized with the earthiness and bodily physicality of human existence to turn nothingness into a dignified object of philosophical inquiry, after centuries of metaphysical concealment and burial. All this of course despite the incongruous centrality which Heidegger, too, assigned to language in accord with his otherwise estranged analytical colleagues: «Language is the house of being where man ek-sists by dwelling».<sup>17</sup>

### **III. The so-called «linguistic turn» in philosophy and its Kantian connection: The idealist roots of positivism.**

1. But there may also be a more unexpected and intriguing kinship that first meets the eye between postmodernism and the «transcendental» project of modernity, as the latter is expounded in *The Critique of Pure Reason*. «Modernity», says Gilles Deleuze, «is defined by the power of the simulacrum», to which the philosopher of religion Charles Winquist adds, «Post-modern philosophy and theology is a rethinking in the wake of modernism. It is a thinking in explicit recognition of the power of the simulacrum».<sup>18</sup> Mo-

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16. The decisive Heideggerian text has been «The Onto-theological Constitution of Metaphysics», in *Identitat und Differenz*, Joan Stambaugh, trans. (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).

17. This line comes from Heidegger's essay «Letter to Humanism», in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 213. But for Heidegger's complete statement on language and its centrality to his thought, see his essays published in English as *On the Way to Language* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982).

18. Charles E., Winquist, *Desiring Theology* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 91. Deleuze's statement is quoted from Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, Mark Lester and Charles Stivale, trans. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 256.

ernity's predilection for the «simulacrum» instead of for the thing-in-itself, on the one hand, and its concurrent cry for objective and unbiased knowledge, on the other, not only aren't mutually contradictory but together make up an engrossing but fatal paradox at the heart of modernity: the categorical separation of *meaning* from *truth*, a disjunction which I see as critical in the recent process of modernity's fragmentation and downfall.<sup>19</sup> I submit that the source of this paradox lies in the retreat of ontology and the concurrent rise of non-representationalism that are constitutive of Kant's «Copernican revolution».

The Kantian connection to contemporary anti-representationalism may more clearly stand out if we pause briefly to consider the nature of Kant's idealism in comparison with the idealism associated with Plato and his theory of the Forms. Despite the ontological preeminence in Plato's dualist worldview of the heavenly and eternal world of the Ideas over our terrestrial realm, it would be a serious anachronism to call Plato an idealist. For he was above all an ontologist, promoting a metaphysical picture of what he considered to be *true being* whose standing lay *independently* of any human involvement or contribution to it. It may be a matter of dispute whether his exact motives were metaphysical or political in nature (in other words, if his ontological edifice was meant to offer humankind salvation from the things feared the most since the dawn of conscious reflection, i.e., from time and death, or if his purpose was to provide a sophisticated rebuttal to the Sophists' challenge, which threatened the moral and communal values of the Greek *polis*). Whatever the case, so adamant was Plato to defend the true measure of Reality over mere opinion (δόξα) that he came to identify the latter with *non-being*, intertwining ontology with epistemology in a powerful metaphysical mix aiming to

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19. One of the reasons that the first *Critique* stands as a watershed in modern intellectual history is that it elevates the human subject to structurer of all phenomenal (i.e., perceivable) reality, in a transcendental arrangement to which even God is submitted. But human subjectivity (like all idols) is too fragile to usurp God's place, and as a result «the center simply doesn't hold»: this line became the hallmark of late modernity, when the fragmentation and disintegration (in the sense of meaninglessness) of the age became more and more apparent. As Colin E. Gunton says, «Modernity is the era which has displaced God as the focus for the unity and meaning of being... When the unifying will of God becomes redundant... the focus of the unity of things becomes the *unifying rational mind*». In other words, «When God is no longer the one who holds things together, demons rush to fill his place. An impersonal one replaces the despised one of traditional realism, and the slavery is greater than before». Cf. *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995), p. 28.

discourage all reliance on rhetoric, as it was taught by Protagoras and his circle: «Because the Sophist runs away into the darkness of non-being, in which he has learned by habit to feel about, and cannot be discovered because of the darkness of the place»,<sup>20</sup> warns the Eleatic stranger who serves as Plato's mouthpiece in *The Sophist*. In actual fact, Plato was a realist, not an idealist,<sup>21</sup> if no a realist in the ordinary sense, a metaphysical realist all the same.

Idealism, by contrast, is a recent product of the modern European spirit. It begins (and is actually analogous with) the problem of *representation* as it arises in Cartesian «skepticism» and its efforts to reconcile *res cogitans* with *res extensa*, the knowing subject and the accuracy of its representations of the external world. When Locke formulated his empiricist response to the Cartesian problem of the origins of true knowledge he left unresolved the pending (and nagging indeed) riddle of accounting for whatever may lie past the veil of our perceptions, choosing (as Descartes did before him) to steer the content of knowledge from the ordinary and direct apprehension of an external world to «appearances» or ideas in the mind. In a process of *reifying* appearances, Locke solidified his epistemic model of *indirect representation* which has lately been referred to as *idea-ism*, the theory that our immediate knowledge concerns not external objects, but ideas or sense-data in our own minds.<sup>22</sup>

Our faculties carry us no further towards the knowledge and distinction of substances, than a collection of those sensible ideas

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20. *The dialogues of Plato*, trans. B. Jowett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953) vol. 3, p. 408. «Being no only *is*. It is also *known*», writes the Platonist scholar John Wild on the connection of ontology with epistemology in Plato, attributing Sophistic relativism to a disastrous «misunderstanding of being» having its roots in the «ontological inversions... of the apprehensive faculties, which always accompany the complex phenomenon of Sophistry». Cf. his *Plato's Theory of Man* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1948), pp. 240-41.

21. Except insofar as we see in idealist terms Plato's overall effort to counter the mechanistic materialism of Anaxagoras, Empedocles and Democritus by means of a moral-teleological cosmology, beginning with *Phaedo* and culminating in the *Timaeus* and the 10<sup>th</sup> book of the *Laws*, where the whole of nature is portrayed as a live organism animated by the Soul. Vassilis Calfas sees Aristotelian teleology as a modified heir to this Platonic motif of the ultimacy of the Soul. Cf. his *Plato's Timaeus and Aristotle's Physics II* (Athens: Polis, 1995 & 1999, resp.) for a thorough analysis of this theme.

22. The term is coined by Alan Musgrave who makes a plausible and coherent link between empiricist epistemology and idealism in his *Common Sense, Science and Scepticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); see esp. chapters 5-7.

which we observe in them; which, however made with the greatest diligence and exactness we are capable of, yet is more remote from the true internal constitution from which those qualities flow, than a countryman's idea is from the inward contrivance of that famous clock in Strasbourg, whereof he only sees the outward figure and motions.<sup>23</sup>

To convey his skepticism about the cognitive possibility of ever breaking past this veil of ideas to their true, underlying realities, Locke drew a distinction between *real* and *nominal* essences, a distinction fated to exert a decisive sway upon subsequent epistemological reflection, as is obviated to its striking anticipation of the monumental Kantian divide of the *phenomena* from the *things-in-themselves*. As Locke puts the matter,

This, though it be all the essence of natural substances that we know, or by which we distinguishing them into sorts, yet I call it by a peculiar name, the *nominal essence*, to distinguish it from the real constitution of substances, upon which depends this nominal essence, and all the properties of that sort; which, therefore, as has been said, may be called the *real essence*...<sup>24</sup>

This distinction is in line with the antecedent dualisms drawn earlier by Locke in his *Essay*, i.e., his well-known divides, first of *simple* and *complex* ideas, and then of *primary* and *secondary* qualities. By positing a mysterious «real essence» of things inaccessible to our senses, Locke does render, I think, knowledge of the external world problematic, even as he tries to meet this difficulty squarely in Book IV of the same treatise. There, he considers in anticipation the most crucial objection to his «empiricist idealism», as I would like to describe his system:

To what purpose all this stir? Knowledge, say you, is only the perception of the agreement or disagreement of our own ideas: but who knows what those ideas may be? ...It is no matter how things are: so a man observe but the agreements of his own

23. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Abridged and Edited by Raymond Willburn, Book III, ch. VI, 9 (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd, 1948), p. 227.

24. *Ibid.* Book III, ch. VI, 1, p. 223.

imaginations, and talk comfortably, it is all truth, all certainly. Such castles in the air will be as strongholds of truth, as the demonstrations of Euclid. That a harpy is not a centaur is by this way as certain knowledge, and as much a truth, as that a square is not a circle. But of what use is all this fine knowledge of *men's own imaginations*, to a man that inquires after the reality of things? It matters not what men's fancies are, it is knowledge of things that is only to be prized: it is this alone that gives a value to our reasonings, and preference to one man's knowledge over another's, that it is of things as they really are, and not of dreams and fancies.<sup>25</sup>

Put otherwise, the vital conundrum addressed to Locke is, «How shall the mind, when it perceives nothing but his own ideas, know that they agree with things themselves?»<sup>26</sup>

Locke's answer is typically foundationalist, in the sense that he seeks recourse to his demarcation between «simple» and «complex» ideas, pointing to the former as the ultimate point of contact between our sensory organs and the objects of our experience:

First [there] are simple ideas, which since the mind, as has been showed, can by no means make to itself, must necessarily be the product of things operating on the mind, in a natural way, and producing therein those perceptions which by the wisdom and will of our Maker they are ordained and adapted to. From whence it follows, that simple ideas are not fictions of our fancies, but the natural and regular productions of things without us, really operating upon us... Secondly [and by contrast], all our complex ideas, *except those of substances*, being archetypes of the mind's own making, not intended to be copies of anything, nor referred to the existence of anything, as to their originals, cannot want any conformity necessary to real knowledge.<sup>27</sup>

It seems, then, that the immediacy ascribed to the so-called «simple» ideas

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25. Ibid. Book IV, ch. IV, pp. 272-3.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid. pp. 273-4.

is what, according to Locke, saves the day and our confidence in the harmonious correspondence of our perceived ideas with the external world. But by persisting as Locke does on his key idealist presupposition, that «[i]t is evident the mind knows not things immediately, but only by the intervention of the ideas it has of them»,<sup>28</sup> I fear that for all of his empiricism, Locke leaves room enough for skepticism to step in and lie dormant, until it gets picked up by Hume and made the cornerstone of the latter's all-out, epistemological nihilism.

Hence, from the doctrine of idea-ism, it was only a short step, *via* Berkeley and finally Kant, to the more radical standpoint of idealism, which assigns mind an active role in world-making. With the exception (notable for our purpose here) that whereas Berkeley, like Descartes before him, brought God in the picture as an ultimate ontological court of appeal, Kant reserved that role solely for the human subject and its transcendental constitution, now blown out of all previous proportion. If anything, it seemed for a long time afterward that the Kantian accomplishment, prompted as it was by Hume's devastating assault on induction, provided a more secure basis for knowledge (if only knowledge *as indirect representation*) than did the Lockean model. This it managed by building up an impressive epistemology wherein the mind enjoys an overtly active and transcendental role, where it previously served as a passive receiver of sense-data.

Plato would probably have protested this epistemic restriction to the phenomena, interested as he was in accessing the essences of things. Nor would he appreciate the subject's centrality in constituting the phenomenal world, since from the viewpoint of his maximalist realism truth transcends us, and indeed overwhelms us. To such an extent, in fact, that Platonic philosophy may be compared to a complex and gigantic *war of worlds*, wherein war is fought for the true world: shadowy images from the sensuous and fleeting world compete to win our affections, while the true philosopher's strenuous task is to divert people's minds from images to *realities*, to the sunlit world of real things. In such a realist scheme of things epistemology is always underplayed somewhat, since preeminence is given not to *how* one knows but to *what* truly exists and merits attention as the locus of truth. Bertrand Russell, this century's foremost realist philosopher who sometimes exhibited strongly Platonic tendencies, explicitly downplayed epistemological pursuits in themselves precisely because he feared that they generated his metaphysical foe, idealism. As he relates,

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28. Ibid. p. 273.

I reverse the process which has been common in philosophy since Kant. It has been common among philosophers to begin with how we know and proceed afterwards to what we know. I think this is a mistake, because knowing how we know is one small department of knowing what we know. I think it is a mistake for another reason: it tends to give to knowing a cosmic importance which it by no means deserves, and thus prepares the philosophical student for the belief that mind has some kind of supremacy over the non-mental universe, or even that the non-mental universe is nothing but a nightmare dreamt by a mind in its un-philosophical moments.<sup>29</sup>

But if «modernity», by contrast, is «defined by the power of simulacrum», rather than by an invested faithfulness to ontological archetypes and to reality as such, as Gilles Deleuze maintains, then Russell seems to have had a point in seeing a direct link between traditional epistemology and idealism.

As is well-known, the appearance of Cartesian thought has traditionally been taken to signify the beginning of modern epistemology, but until the time of Kant (i.e., in the Leibniz-Wolffian school) ontology still took precedence over epistemology. Following Kant, epistemology gains its hitherto unchallenged ascendancy. Kant brought in the conditions of the possibility of knowledge as the most pressing intellectual concern (his system heralded also the demise of natural theology and its replacement by moral theology). It should be specified here, of course, that even in the Kantian paradigm ontology is ultimately unavoidable if his system is to avoid collapsing into an extreme idealism (for example, of the Berkeleyan kind) or into phenomenalism. Indeed, the German philosopher insisted on the reality of the external

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29. *My Philosophical Development*, A. Wood, ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1959), p. 16. It will be remembered that Russell's turn-of-the-century conversion to realism reflected his disappointment over the nebulous, metaphysical arbitrariness of idealism, as it had then been revived in Britain by people like Bradley and Mac Taggart. Consumed as he was with his life-long urge of putting together an increasingly accurate representation of reality, of what truly merits the name of existent, Russell delimited reason to a handmaid of Truth, thus making epistemology subservient to ontology. See also *The Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969), p. 38, for an equally as explicit attribution of the origins of idealism to epistemology: «The grounds on which idealism is advocated are generally grounds derived from the theory of knowledge, that is to say, from a discussion of the conditions which things must satisfy in order that we may be able to know them».

world (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B42-43, B44, A28, A36, where he preserves the standard spatiality we are accustomed to while holding fast to its transcendental ideality at the same time) bringing in the notion of the *things-in-themselves* (ibid. B45, B59), so as to safeguard the *transcendental* nature of his idealism. Knowledge is, after all, impossible if the existence of the world is in question; every epistemology begins to determine the type of ontology which is henceforth to be legitimate.

It will be remembered that central to Kant's argument was the rejection of knowledge-free objects, that for something to qualify as an «object» at all, it must unwaveringly conform to the *human*, spatio-temporal mode of perception, apart from which nothing is known and beyond which epistemic access is categorically denied. The radical consequence following from this premise, and which constitutes the heart of idealism, is that the (human) *conditions* of intuiting knowledge determine the very *content* of knowledge. (His parallel insistence on the ontological sameness between phenomenal objects and objects as they are in themselves does not bridge the sharp epistemological gap between the two, nor was it meant to suspend his epistemic embargo on reason's illegitimate essentialist probes).

Herein allegedly lies the heart of social constructivism (a branch of post-modern epistemology), which sees knowledge as the conventional product of power structures. Incidentally, to the extent that classical Marxism shares this principle, may not it also be called *idealist* in some sense? (The irony is obvious here, given the orthodox left's self-description as «dialectical *materialism*»). Richard Rorty cites (in obvious personal disagreement, of course) a similar point as the standard criticism of representationalists against non-representationalism (such as his own), saying that the latter is «transcendental idealism in linguistic disguise... one version of the Kantian attempt to derive the object's determinacy from that of the subject».<sup>30</sup> He mentions Bernard Williams as a typical realist horrified by such claims as Martin Heidegger's (for example) that «Newton's Laws, the principle of contradiction, any truth whatever — these are true only as long as *Dasein is*».<sup>31</sup>

It goes without saying, of course that in Kant's case the conditions are always *a priori*, the Kantian subject *transcendental*, and the project unmistakably foundationalist. Postmodernism, on the other hand, rose up in reac-

30. Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth: Philosophical Papers*, vol. 1, p. 4.

31. Ibid. Heidegger's statement comes from *Being and Time*, Macquarrie and Robinson, trans. (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 269.

tion to foundationalism and to the Enlightenment paradigm of «oppressive, monological tradition», of which the Kantian project is an integral part, if not its very heart. Nonetheless, the Kantian restriction of all meaningful cognition to the phenomenal plane was to be amply exploited, even drawn well out of proportion, by the devotees of «intratextuality» and akin literary theories. What was in its original context in the first *Critique* a divide designed to suspend the arbitrary ventures of pure reason in sensibly impermissible territory, for the sake of protecting the wonderful (and binding) clarity of Newtonian objectivity from the murky arbitrariness of metaphysics, swelled nowadays into an overwhelming linguistic phenomenalism. Kant, while certainly no raving empiricist, had postulated the vacuity and pointlessness of any epistemic reliance on reason alone, when the latter is devoid of any sensory input. In such a case, i.e., when a purported cognitive claim is deduced on purely rational grounds without the slightest reference to sensory experience, the claim can only be a merely conceptual, not a factual, one, constituting a fine example of what Kant calls an antinomy (a paradoxical statement whose lack of sense is owing to its lack of correspondence with the real, in other words the *phenomenal* world). Thus was Kant able to sustain his devastating attack on metaphysics in the Transcendental Dialectic section of his first *Critique*, having already disposed of ontology altogether by the end of the Transcendental Analytic. Again, however, this restriction of the human mental gaze to the finite, down-to-earth immanence of the phenomena alone never intended to spawn phenomenalism, for it was precisely with the purpose of offsetting Hume's nihilism in mind that Kant set out to produce his system. And the strategy pursued towards that goal was to ground phenomena in *a priori* causes while keeping their ontological identity with their noumenal aspect.

Be that as it may, once the floodgates of such a watertight non-representationalism were opened, the outcome was bound to be cataclysmic in force. To the extent that Kant strove to demarcate sense from nonsense by means of a rigid epistemology, he has admittedly fertilized the soil out of which positivism was to grow (the anti-representationalism of Carnap's *analytic-synthetic* distinction bespeaks of its Kantian origins). But inasmuch as his edifice rendered human subjectivity the structurer of all perceivable reality, as well as the sole arbiter of what may register as knowable, it can be said to have laid the groundwork for the subsequent disputation of realism, representationalism, and finally, as we shall see, of all reasoned discourse.

In briefer terms, the intellectual circumstances surrounding the rise of

Kant's non-representationalism could be restated as an interplay between naturalism, on the one hand, and a philosophical doctrine exempting the mind from a total embeddedness in nature, on the other. Naturalism, of course, encompassed Hume's excessive empiricism and its notoriously nihilistic consequences for knowledge, but as a standpoint it was premised on the ostensibly innocuous link between humankind and nature (an assumption fully congruous with the materialist spirit of the times, and certainly more so later, following the advent of Darwinian evolution). In attacking the epistemological implications of naturalism, as Hume so inexorably relayed them, Kant saw fit to take the bold measure of putting the cart before the horse, so to speak, and question the validity of naturalism apparently at the expense of common sense: if knowledge is indeed possible (as it must be), then what is humanly experienced as «nature» must be conformable to the mind. But then the mind must be endowed with a transcendental mechanism, such that it imposes universal and similarly upon our acts of moral choice. For the postmodernists, on the other hand, and necessary structures upon the human experience of an objective world, all things transcendental, either as metaphysical metanarratives or in the form of sweeping generalizations, are anathema and must be rejected by virtue of their unfounded hubris to claim for themselves the benefit of an external anchorage point, from which «reality» can be assessed and explained in its entirety. But as I will attempt to show in the following chapter, the current disenchantment with all-encompassing, transcendental schemes and categories pursues rather than abandons the Kantian project in one crucial manner: it subdues its ontological commitments to the intratheoretic apparatus of a relative but equally as anthropocentric anti-representationalism, and so it looks more like a de-transcendentalized, or *naturalized* Kantianism, than a radical subversion of it, sometimes marked with conspicuous idealist overtones.

2. As soon as this thoroughly anthropocentric non-representational epistemology gets a firm hold upon the Western mind, modernity has actually been born. True to their Kantian matrix, modern as well as postmodern forms of non-representationalism similarly posit an inextricable link between reality and human cognition, minus the original transcendental connection. Michael Dummett, himself on the anti-realist camp, captures this vital correlation in his brief but telling description on the present «realism versus anti-realism» debate:

The fundamental difference between the anti-realist and the

realist lies in this: that... the anti-realist interprets «capable of being known» to mean «capable of being known *by us*, whereas the realist interprets it to mean «capable of being known by some hypothetical being whose intellectual capacities and powers of observation may exceed our own.<sup>32</sup>

Here we are at the heart of analytic philosophy, whose quintessence (and Achilles' heel in my view), the conviction that knowledge can be neither *non-linguistic* nor *impersonal* (i.e., linguistically or humanly unmediated), is so neatly captured in Hillary Putnam's following summary:

What I am saying, then, is that elements of what we call «language» or «mind» *penetrate so deeply into what we call «reality» that the very project of representing ourselves as being «mappers» of something «language-independent» is fatally compromised from the very start.* Like relativism, but in a different way, realism is an impossible attempt to view the world from Nowhere. In this situation it is a temptation to say, «so we make the world», or «our language makes up the world», or «our culture makes up the world»; but this is just another form of the same mistake. If we succumb, once again we view the world — the only world we know — as a *product*. One kind of philosopher views it as a product from a raw material: Unconceptualized Reality. The other views it as a creation *ex nihilo*. *But the world isn't a product. It's just the world.*<sup>33</sup>

As the above passage indicates, latter-day non-representationalism diverges from the original Kantian counterpart in a crucial twofold fashion: not only has it abrogated all transcendental pretensions in what seems like a *naturalized* Kantianism,<sup>34</sup> following in that respect (especially in its radical,

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32. Michael Dummett, «Truth», in *Truth and Other Enigmas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1978), p. 24.

33. Hillary Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face*, James Conant, ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1992), p. 28 (all italics are his).

34. On this point, consider Thomas Pavel's concurring description of this process of gradual de-transcendentalization: «Equally striking and equally omnipresent [by the adversaries of structuralism] was the critique of subjectivity and truth. Indeed, Levi-Strauss

postmodern version) a Hegelian-like historicity and relativization: it has furthermore suffered, from its earliest days as logical positivism, a complete embeddedness in language, an inescapable incorporation in human modes of conceptualization. Here we are already past the long dominant, Cartesian category of the detached thinker who is distinct from both world and language, and whom Kant had further shielded with a transcendental capacity of *a priori* knowing. But besides these progressive adjustments, its Kantian makeup is still unmistakably recognizable. Case in point, Putnam's more recent rejection of the realist myth of «Unconceptualized Reality», part of his broader project of formulating a modest, «internal realism» in response to both metaphysical realism and relativism, which entails strong Kantian overtones, as Putnam himself so eagerly acknowledges: «...I hope it will become clear that my indebtedness to Kant is very large, even if it must by “this side idolatry”. For me, at least, almost all the problems of philosophy attain the form in which they are of real interest only with the work of Kant».<sup>35</sup>

Contemporary non-representationalism is represented by two deeply estranged but at bottom kindred traditions. The former of these is a more rigorous and positivistic right wing with an anti-metaphysical axe to grind, comprised of the so-called «analytic» philosophers. The other one, owing its beginning in Heideggerian phenomenology and Gadamer's hermeneutics, is more latterly carried over in the diverse and provocative discourses collectively making up the backbone of the cultural phenomenon known as post-modernism. My thesis is that each of these sides corresponds to different forms of idealism, respectively: the right wing, for all its linguistic holism,

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defined his conception of myths as Kantianism devoid of a transcendental subject [while] Barthes asserted that the death of the author is the only provider of meaning. Notice that the critique of humanism, subjectivity and truth is by no means restricted to French structuralists. It characterizes all philosophical trends, which after recognizing that subjectivity cannot serve as a foundation for knowledge, looked for new solutions in the realm of language». Cf. Thomas Pavel, *The Feud of Language — A History of Structuralist-Thought* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992), pp. 5-6.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 3. It is necessary to point out that, because the Kantian edifice can lend itself to an array of different, even contrasting applications, its kinship with modern and postmodern non-representationalism, far from being immediately obvious, is actually more apt to be vehemently contested. For example, Putnam's eagerness to attribute to Nelson Goodman's (and by extension, to Rorty's) ideas «a form of idealism as extreme as Hegel's or Fichte's!» but not of the Kantian type, makes perfect sense as soon as we realize how instrumental Kant has been in Putnam's latest efforts to construct an ordinary «realism with a small “r”». Cf. *Realism with a Human Face* (*ibid.*).

does after all take the physical world and its causal connections more seriously in its epistemic practices, but ends up adjusting its ontological categories to the proportionality of a strictly human cognitive possibility: the left wing, on the other hand, exhibits fewer qualms in dispensing with the restraining normativity of an «outer» reality and so it reaches more startling idealist conclusions, as in the celebrated, if exaggerated by conservative critics, absorption of all aspects of reality into a polyphonic «textuality».

But as I just said, the earliest traces of a residual Kantianism in analytic philosophy coincide with the birth of the Vienna Circle and its own *linguistic non-representationalism*.<sup>36</sup> Otto Neurath's linguistic holism, or Rudolf Carnap's following demarcation of questions of existence into «internal» and «external» ones, are good instances of logical positivism's scientific phenomenalism of language:

The concept of reality occurring in these internal questions in an empirical, scientific non-metaphysical concept. To recognize something as a real thing or event means to succeed in incorporating it into the system of things at a particular space-time position so that it fits together with the things recognized as real, according to the rules of the [linguistic] framework. From these [internal] questions we must distinguish the external question of the *reality of the thing world itself*... Many philosophers regard a question of this kind as an ontological question

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36. As George Romanos explains in *Quine and Analytic Philosophy: The Language of Language* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1983), pp. 23-4, «There was more than a slight Kantian flavor, then, to the positivist program... The cutting edge of Kant's approach was the observation that there could be no pure perception of reality unmediated by human conceptualization... Thus any knowledge of the world is necessarily relative to such a conceptual scheme, and the idea of any absolute or direct apprehension of reality is rejected as an impossibility. This is essentially the same outlook positivists came to adopt, except that, whereas Kant had located the organizing conceptual manifold through which all experience is filtered on the structure of the human mind, the positivists saw it now embodied in the very language of science... Kant's strictures against projecting the features of our conceptualizations *onto reality itself* were paralleled by similar positivistic structures against projecting the features of linguistic systems onto their subject matter... Shifting the conceptualization burden from human nature [where Kant had placed it] to language was also important and establishing the *logical independence* of the new epistemology from the rest of science. It represented a move away from psychological introspection to *purser «logical analysis»* (italics provided).

which must be raised and answered *before* the introduction of the new language forms. The latter introduction, they believe, is legitimate only if it can be *justified by an ontological insight supplying an affirmative answer to the question of reality*. In contrast to this view, we take the position that the introduction of the new ways of speaking does not need any theoretical justification because it does not imply any assertion of reality... the acceptance of a linguistic framework must not be regarded as implying a metaphysical doctrine concerning the reality of the entities in question... Thus the question of the admissibility of entities of a certain type or of abstract entities in general *is reduced* to the question of the acceptability of the linguistic framework for those entities.<sup>37</sup>

If, by way of illustration, Bertrand Russell's realist phase is contrasted against Carnap's «linguistic Kantianism», it seems as if Russell's resistance to linguistic autonomy were the result of his decisive emancipation from the spell of idealism that was dominant at the end of the 19th century.<sup>38</sup> It is well-known that Bertrand Russell's *realist* viewpoint and unmistakably ontological interests contributed to his estrangement from the positivists' agenda, and made him a notable exception in 20th century philosophy. His real focus was the *world*, not *language*, so contrary an aim to positivism's intents that it prompted A.J. Ayer's reaction: «...the philosopher, as an analyst, is not directly concerned with the physical properties of things. He is concerned only with the way in which we speak about them».<sup>39</sup> It was precisely here, of course, that Russell begged to differ, chastising logical positivism's program as an unfortunate retreat from the investigation of reality, a fruitless and pedantic indulgence akin to medieval scholasticism:

37. Rudolf Carnap, «Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology», in *Problems in the Philosophy of Language*, Thomas M. Ólschewsky, ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1969), pp. 686-95. Originally published in Carnap, *Meaning and Necessity* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1956).

38. The point of my comparison/contrast between Russell and the logical positivists isn't, of course, to insinuate the existence of idealist elements (however minute) in the work of the latter, but only to plead that the positivists fell on the scientific side of post-Kantian philosophy, their linguistic phenomenalism suggesting the infiltration of a modified Kantian connection to their efforts at eliminating metaphysics.

39. Alfred J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (New York: Dover, 1950), p. 57; cited from Romanos, p. 33.

You cannot, without incurring an endless regress, seek the significance of a proposition in its consequences, which must be other propositions. We cannot explain what is the significance of a belief, or what makes it true or false, without bringing in the concept «fact», and when this is brought in the part played by verification is seen to be subsidiary and derivative... There is, I think, a danger that logical positivism may develop a new kind of scholasticism, and may, by being unduly linguistic, forget the relation to fact that makes a statement true... Absorption in language sometimes leads to a neglect of the connection of language with non-linguistic facts, although it is this connection which gives meaning to words and significance to sentences.<sup>40</sup>

Contemporaries like Carnap and Schlick, by contrast, harbored an eschewal for ontology (for Carnap it was even a dirty word) in consistency with their *analytic/synthetic* distinction that demoted questions of world description to a somewhat lower status, leaving them to the natural sciences. Russell's contrasting promise was to take us down to the ultimate building blocks of reality, an aspiration Wittgenstein considered just as metaphysical as the idealism Russell and Moore had had set out to destroy. Russell's strongly realist proclivities seem to have been spawned by his stormy reaction to idealism, whereas the positivists' dual divide of propositions may have been conceived under the spell of Kantianism's positivistic side, and therefore not entirely unrelated to idealism.

In distinct but overlapping ways, the work of Wittgenstein and Quine only augmented Carnap's investment in linguistic frameworks as indispensable loci of meaningful talk. Despite a number of differences between them, chief among which is Quine's scientism in contrast to Wittgenstein's moralism and well-known distrust of science and technology, the two were in fundamental agreement on a number of important points concerning matters of linguistic meaning and reference.

Quine's thought, in particular, revolves around a cluster of highly popularized philosophical catchwords such as «indeterminacy of translation», «ontological relativity», «naturalized epistemology», «holism», and so on, all of which add up to his eliminative program to undercut the logical and semantic legitimacy of discourses involving extra-human ontological categories.

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40. Bertrand Russell, *Logic and Knowledge* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 377, 380, 381.

The resulting picture shows the concept of truth to be an «immanent» property, solely internal to human languages and theories. For all the immense complexity of his life-work, Quine was never too fearful of epigrammatic statements of his program: «Truth is immanent and there is no higher. We must speak from within a theory».<sup>41</sup> And, should we also choose to be as laconic in drawing a first sketch of his strategy, we could describe it in terms of a materialist and empiricist nominalism that not only relativizes reference to a high degree of indeterminacy (enough so as to decisively undermine the notion of independent, free-floating «meanings»), but even stretches the limits of language so much as to declare it co-extensive with thought and the whole of reality. It is this last feature of Quine's project that in my view threatens with defeat the materialist character of his nominalism,<sup>42</sup> and brings it perilously close to what I would call «linguistic idealism», an oxymorous fault given the anti-metaphysical orientation of the philosophies sprung out of the so-called «linguistic turn». At first glance, Quine's disavowal of the analytic/synthetic distinction in his famous essay «Two Dogmas of Empiricism» may seem to blur positivism's water-tight divide between questions of logic and questions of fact, thus granting ontological questions some renewed, if minimal (that is to say, relative) legitimacy. But the truth is that Quine undermined this classic distinction not in the name of realism, but in defense of his all-encompassing pragmatism, an enhanced and *empiricised* version of Carnap's reduction of «reality» to linguistic frameworks:

Carnap, Lewis, and others take a pragmatic stand on the question of choosing between language forms, scientific frameworks; but their pragmatism leaves off at the imagined boundary between the analytic and the synthetic. In repudiating such a boundary, I espouse a more thorough pragmatism.<sup>43</sup>

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41. «Things and their Place in Theories», in *Theories and Things* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1981), pp. 21-2.

42. Hilary Putnam has recently faulted Quine's «immanent epistemology» on precisely these grounds, pronouncing it a self-defeating project in the context of what may initially seem a questionable, if not hubristic, comparison of Quine with Rorty: see «A Comparison of Something with Something Else» in *Words & Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1996), pp. 330-350. We shall take a closer look at Putnam's sustained critique of Quine's self-described «robust realism» later in this section.

43. Willard Quine, «Two Dogmas of Empiricism» in *Problems in the Philosophy of Language*, pp. 416-17. Originally published in *The Philosophical Review*, LX (1951) then in *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1953).

In *Word and Object* Quine coins the term «semantic ascent» to describe and account for this shift of his «from talk of objects to talk of words».<sup>44</sup> By his own account,

What comes of the association of sentences with sentences is a vast verbal structure which, primarily as a whole, is multifariously linked to non-verbal stimulation [his empiricism]. These links attach to separate sentences (for each person), but the same sentences are so bound up in turn with one another and with further sentences that the non-verbal attachments themselves may stretch or give way under strain. In an obvious way this structure of interconnected sentences is a single connected fabric including all sciences, and indeed everything we say about the world.<sup>45</sup>

As a devout empiricist, of course, Quine keeps his holism conditioned to non-verbal stimulation, with enough materialist implications for it to withstand a wholesale identification with left-wing pragmatism, e.g. of the Rortyan type and its own purposes. Nonetheless, «the power of a non-verbal stimulus to elicit a given sentence commonly depends on earlier associations of sentences with sentences»,<sup>46</sup> so that, in the last analysis, «[e]ven where the conditioning to non-verbal stimulation is so firm... there is no telling to what extent it is original and to what extent it results from a shortcutting, by transitivity of conditioning, of old connections of sentences with sentences».<sup>47</sup>

Thus Quine seems to have championed (along with Wittgenstein, as we shall next see, and his heir apparent Donald Davidson<sup>48</sup>) the most central presupposition of 20th century philosophy, which has recently been referred to in connection to his work as «linguacentrism». Alexander George, who penned the term, accounts for Quine's engaged perspective as follows:

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44. See the concluding section of *Word and Object* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1960), pp. 270-76.

45. *Ibid.* p. 12.

46. *Ibid.* p. 10.

47. *Ibid.* p. 13.

48. The Davidsonian model is the most consistent pursuer of Quine's elimination of semantic or mental reifications and corresponding foundationalist, extratheoretical notions of reference. A good entry point to Davidson's program is his *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), which includes a number of Davidson's most important essays on language and meaning.

Quine has insisted that nonsense awaits if one fails to recognize that one must work from within, that one cannot leap outside language and all systems of belief to evaluate these as from a distance. The view bears a great affinity to Frege's position on the unintelligibility of wholesale justification of logic. Harry Sheffer called this view «logocentrism»<sup>49</sup> and generalizing we might label Quine's central view «linguacentrism».<sup>50</sup>

To qualify his point, George cites a somewhat lengthy passage from Quine (already partially quoted above) that is illustrative of the latter's «intra-linguistic immanentism», and which I wish to add here in its entirety because I see in it the epitome of the anti-realist standpoint, even if bathed in Quine's notoriously naturalistic colors. Says Quine:

To recognize [indeterminacy of ontology] is not to repudiate the ontology in terms of which the recognition took place.

We *can* repudiate it. We are free to switch, without doing violence to any evidence. If we switch, then, this epistemological remark itself undergoes appropriate re-interpretation too; nerve endings and other things give ways to appropriate proxies, again without straining any evidence. *But it is a confusion to suppose that we can stand aloof* and recognize all the alternative ontologies as true in their several ways, all the envisaged worlds as real. It is a confusion of truth with evidential support. *Truth is immanent, and there is no higher.* We must speak *from within a theory*, albeit any of various.<sup>51</sup>

Wittgenstein analogously makes language co-extensive with both world («The limits of my language mean the limits of my world», *Tractatus*, 5,6) and discursive thinking (e.g., *Philosophical Investigations* 329, 337, 338, 342, and esp. 344), so that for anything to qualify as meaningful thought, it must be

49. The reference given by George is, Harry Sheffer, «Review of Principia Mathematica, volume I, second edition», *Isis*, vol. 8 (1926): 226-31.

50. Alexander George, «On Washing the Fur Without Wetting It: Quine, Carnap and Analycity», *Mind*, vol. 109, No 433 (January, 2000): 1-24.

51. Willard Quine, «Things and their place in Theories», in *Theories and Things* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1981), pp. 1-23; cited from George, *ibid.* 14-15 (italics provided).

expressible in coherent public idiom, and vice-versa. And no sooner is the possibility of *wordless thought* tossed out, than metaphysical questions follow suit, for language (now seen as a relative and conventional medium) is denied the license to entertain pre-or extra-linguistic meanings with foundationalist aspirations.<sup>52</sup>

52. Consider, among many more, the following passages: «The tendency [has been traditionally] to assume a pure intermediary between the propositional *signs* and the facts. Or even to try to purify, to sublime, the signs themselves. — For our forms of expression prevent us in all sorts of ways from seeing that nothing out of the ordinary is involved, by sending us in pursuit of chimeras» (PI 94); «...And we rack our brains over the nature of the *real sign*» (PI 105); «We are under the illusion that what is peculiar, profound, essential, in our investigation, resides in its trying to grasp the incomparable essence of language...» (PI 97); «[whereas, when disillusioned]... we are not *striving after* an ideal, as if our ordinary vague sentences had not yet got a quite unexceptionable sense, and a perfect language awaited construction by us...» (PI 98); «We see that what we call “sentence” and “language” are not the formal unity that I imagined [under the aforementioned state of illusion], but is the family of structures more or less related to one another... We are talking about the spatial and temporal phenomenon of language, not about some non-spatial, non-temporal phantasm». (PI 108).

A further and crucial consequence is that language is thereby restricted to the humble role of simply *describing* the world as it is (in its observable, *phenomenal* aspect) instead of being considered capable of piercing it to see it from the «outside», so to speak, and by means of which to reach «essentials» or *ultimate* conclusions: «We feel as if we had to *penetrate* phenomena: our investigation, however, is directed not towards phenomena, but, as one might say, towards the “possibilities” of phenomena...» (PI 90); «We must do away with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place» (PI 109); «When I talk about language (words, sentences, etc.) I speak the language of every day...» (PI 120); «Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it. For it cannot give it any foundation either. It leaves everything as it is» (PI 124); «Philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything. — Since everything lies open to view there its nothing to explain» (PI 126) — a point already anticipated in the *Tractatus* (T 2.0123 and T 4.5). Hence the initial, Tractarian exhortation, to leave everything that can only be shown unsaid (T 4.1212) corresponds roughly to the aforementioned injunction in the *Investigations* to replace explanation with mere description (109), above all because descriptive accounts are depthless. I submit, following, Prof. Burton Dreben's lead, that the main difference between the two works consists in methodology: whereas the former aspired to produce *a priori* grounds for distinguishing sense from nonsense once and for all, the latter works its iconoclastic analysis in an *ad hoc* manner, assuming a multiplicity of language uses and as a result suggesting that metaphysics can only be dissolved in a piecemeal fashion: «Problems are solved (difficulties eliminated), not a *single* problem. There is not a philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies» (PI 136). That is why prof. Burton Dreben called the *Philosophical Investigation* an enlargement of the *Tractatus*, and why, finally, I have chosen to describe

Wittgenstein's so-called «later» period is very often described in terms of a «hermeneutical turn», in other words as a relinquishment of his earlier realist proclivities and a gradual endorsement of a pluralistic and contextualist understanding of language and meaning. This popular assessment of Wittgenstein's corpus seems especially appealing to theist philosophers of religion and theologians, who applaud his subsequent conversion for the new opportunities they take it to afford theology.<sup>53</sup> Above all, they see in the concept of «language games» the liberating prospect of theology's emancipation, by means of conceptual clarification and hermeneutics, from such mighty empiristic formulation as Ayer's criticism<sup>54</sup> of the «verifiability» principle, responsible for the classical formulation of which is Anthony Flew.<sup>55</sup> But what these theological and other appropriators of the «later» Wittgenstein miss, or conveniently overlook, is the key intent underpinning both of his phases, which is to make all philosophical (i.e., metaphysical) problems vanish by being exposed as nonsensical (and, in a sense not unlike Karl Barth's, as idolatrous, according to Burton Dreben).<sup>56</sup> At work behind this relentless icono-

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Wittgenstein's model as «anti-hermeneutical», i.e., as disallowing, instead of encouraging and legitimizing (as his concept of «language-games» misleadingly suggests), any non-relative, non-falsifiable discourse.

53. For example, Fergus Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1986), D.Z. Phillips, *Faith After Foundationalism* (London & New York: Routledge, 1988); *Wittgenstein and Religion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994) and Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description, With Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer and Wittgenstein* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1980).

54. A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976); also, *The Central Questions of Philosophy* (Harmondsworth, 1976).

55. Cf. his «Theology and Falsification», in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, Anthony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre, eds. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964), pp. 96-130.

56. My reference is to the late Burton Dreben's seminar lectures on Wittgenstein and analytic philosophy at Boston University which I had the good fortune to attend from 1994 to 1996, and in which he persistently challenged the division of Wittgenstein's work into two distinct phases. In his monograph, *The Continuity of Wittgenstein's Thought* (Ithaca & London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1996), John Koethe quotes Dreben approvingly, although not without some disagreement (p. 5, n. 5) as he also attributes an underlying continuity to Wittgenstein's thought about language: «My contention is that Wittgenstein's ways of thinking about language show a considerable degree of continuity and that a certain broad principle runs throughout his work, both early and late: language's semantic aspects—what a word means, what a sentence says, what its truth-conditions are—are *shown or manifested* by its use; but these semantic aspects cannot be described or characterized discursively in

clasm lies a twofold incentive: the attainment of intellectual tranquility (PI 133), and the progressive removal of ephemeral systems of thought for the sake of God's own revelation to be seen and accepted as such. Hence Wittgenstein's efforts were spent in showing how and why all metaphysical constructs, contrary to their grand foundationalist pretensions (including those of mathematics) are simply ephemeral, that is to say, *relative*.<sup>57</sup>

If so, the *Philosophical Investigations* is erroneously described as a «hermeneutical» work in the line of H-G. Gadamer's intentions.<sup>58</sup> It must be seen

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informative or explanatory ways» (p. 1). Koethe's philosophical theorizing in Wittgenstein's work, as opposed to Dreben's assessment of the methodology of the *Investigations* as a purely descriptive one. «As is well known», Koethe writes, «Wittgenstein in his later work disavows any pretensions toward philosophical theses or arguments. But an assessment of these disavowals has to be tempered by the reflection that it is not at all obvious what philosophical theses and arguments *are* in the first place or what Wittgenstein took them to be. What I want to suggest in this chapter is that the rejection of the kinds of philosophical theorizing that form the targets of his therapeutic or destructive mood does not discredit what might be characterized (in line with the ocular metaphor I am trying to elaborate in this book) as the sort of "constructive" one and that this vision in turn emerges only by contrast with the conception of philosophy it helps to deflate» (p. 49). Koethe spells out Wittgenstein's constructive vision in pp. 64-71. My personal leaning (although admittedly not as informed as Koethe's) is toward Dreben's construal of Wittgenstein's intents and purposes as anti-theoretical throughout, but the entire dispute is peripheral to my main point that Wittgenstein's «deflationary mood», as Koethe calls it (p. 53), vis-à-vis all metaphysics (including mental processes and transcendental relations) makes it unsuitable for theology.

57. With the exception of logic, Wittgenstein sees already in the *Tractatus* everything as relative (or «accidental», as he puts it: «There are no pictures that are true *a priori*» (Tractatus 2.225); «There is no compulsion making one thing happen because another has happened. The only necessity that exists is *logical* necessity» (T 6.37); «This procedure [i.e., induction] has no logical justification but only a psychological one» (T. 6.3631), etc. By the time of the *Philosophical Investigations*, even logic (previously seen as tautological) is naturalized.

58. P. Christopher Smith, after running a list of striking similarities between Gadamer and Wittgenstein in *Hermeneutics and Human Finitude: Toward a Theory of Ethical Understanding* (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 1991), pp. 105-17, contrasts Wittgenstein's «critical» (i.e., negative) contextualism with Gadamer's all-out hermeneutical intentions, his point being that while both philosophers aimed at restoring words to their *ordinary* meanings (PI 116), for Wittgenstein meaning was still determined (if provisionally) by isolating *the* appropriate «language-game» as temporary home to a word, *at the exclusion of all other games*. Gadamer, by contrast, by following Heidegger, insists on our *total* embeddedness in language, which consequently calls for an «unlimited richness of meaning» (p. 123) with affirmative and constructive philosophical repercussions (pp. 117-31). Costis Coveos sets Wittgenstein's analysis further apart from the positive projects of «constructive» philosophers falling into the hermeneutic tradition, like Dewey, Gadamer and Rorty. What seems to

in precisely the opposite terms, as an on-going anti-hermeneutical disclaimer, whose contextualism was strictly designed to do no more than *describe* our various *uses* of words (and that only in order to indicate the *relative* character of language), in a manner disqualifying the amassing of linguistic regularities that metaphysicians turn into essentialist foundations for their systems: «Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all, - but that they are *related* to one another in many different ways» (PI 65). Quite ironically, then, despite the so-called «later» Wittgenstein's promotion of a view of language roughly indistinguishable from that of the hermeneuticists, his purpose were diametrically opposed to theirs, in being *therapeutic* (and in that sense, positivistic) rather than *dialogical*, as so clearly evidences another important passage (314), this time from the compilation of fragments published posthumously by his editors as *Zettel*:

Here we come up against a remarkable and characteristic phenomenon in philosophical investigation: the difficulty –I might say– is not that of finding the solution but rather of recognizing as the solutions something that looks as if it were only a preliminary to it. «We have already said everything. – Not everything that follows from this, no *this* itself is the solution!»

This is connected, I believe, with our wrongly expecting an explanation, whereas the solution of the difficulty is a description, if we give it the right place in our considerations. If we dwell upon it, and do not try to get beyond it.

The difficulty here is: to stop.<sup>59</sup>

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be common among these, he says, is a wish to prolong and help sustain philosophical dialogue indefinitely by drawing attention to ever unexamined alternative nuances. But Wittgenstein, Coveos reminds us, was simply not interested in linguistic «alternatives» for their own sake. The reason he pointed to the conventional and pluralistic function of language was not to suggest a possible «enrichment» of our lives should we chose to look at things from multiple perspectives, but only to help us see that philosophical problems, when looked at in more ordinary and mundane ways (with the help of linguistic analysis), disappear as pseudoproblems. Simply put, what Wittgenstein («earlier» or «late», for that matter) opted for, was *tranquil silence*, not *dialogue*. Cf. Coveos, *Everything is Borne in Language: Essays in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein* (in Greek) (Athens: Kardamitsas, 1996), pp. 370-4.

59. *Zettel*, G.E.M. Anscombe & G.H. von Wright, eds. G.E.M. Anscombe, trans. (Berkeley & Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1967), p. 58e. Putnam, on the other

In the last resort, his purpose was to establish a permanent ban on the natural human inclination to voice the ineffable and to lend verbal expression to what can only speak *for itself*, namely what is «higher».

Should we wish to find a theological counterpart to Wittgenstein's non-hermeneutical positivism, the most likely candidate would doubtless be his contemporary Karl Barth, who likewise denounced all systems of thought as vain and idolatrous human constructs:

Whenever thou sayest «I» or «we» or «it is so», thou dost exchange the glory of the incorruptible for the sake of the corruptible... thou dost imprison and encyst the truth... by some pretended *insight of vision*... thou dost manifest thyself ignorant of His secret... By beholding folly as the folly of others, thine own folly cries out to heaven. Even negation of this world and perception of the paradox of life; even submission to the judgement of God and waiting upon him; even the behaviour of the «Biblical Man» - *if these proceed from the adoption of a point of view, of a method, of a system, or of a particular kind of behaviour*, by which men distinguish themselves from other men - are no more than the righteousness of men.<sup>60</sup>

hand, offers a contrasting reading of Wittgenstein's intentions, seeing as he does unmistakably pluralistic and dialogical purposes in it, which he traces all the way back to what he sees as the *incipient* pluralism of Kant's thought: «I hope to combat the prevalent idea that Wittgenstein is simply an "end of philosophy" philosopher», he says, «i.e. the idea that the whole "message" of the later philosophy of Wittgenstein is that philosophy is analogous to a neurosis, and that the purpose of Wittgenstein's work is simply to enable us to "stop doing philosophy"». Cf. *Pragmatism: An Open Question* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 27. Putnam's chief argument to that effect is that «[u]nderstanding a language game is sharing a form of life. And forms of life cannot be described in a fixed positivistic meta-language» (ibid. p. 48; his italics). At the same time, he is bent on contesting the popular and admittedly too easy delineation of Wittgenstein as a relativist, holding as he does «with Quine as against Rorty that language games [as Wittgenstein presents them] can be criticized (or "combated"); that there are better and worse language games» (ibid. p. 38). While being in full concurrence with Putnam's repudiation of relativist readings of the Austrian thinker, I find myself unable (perhaps erroneously) to share his view of Wittgenstein as a patron of dialogical philosophy, for all the reasons stated so far in this paper.

60. Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Second chapter (Oxford: Oxford University Press) pp. 56-7 (italics provided). Barth's methodology has been critiqued, correctly in my opinion, as positivistic by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New

And as he adds elsewhere,

The «Moment» of the movement of men by God is beyond men, it cannot be enclosed in a system or method or a “way”... The law of the Spirit of Life is the point of view –*which is no point of view!*–by which all human boasting is excluded». <sup>61</sup>

Likewise, Wittgenstein’s categorical injunction that one «be silent» concerning what one cannot speak about (*Tractatus*, 7) amounted to nothing short of a «wordless religion». <sup>62</sup> As he wrote once,

I can well imagine a religion in which there are no doctrinal propositions, in which there is thus no talking. Obviously the essence of religion cannot have anything to do with the fact that there is talking, or rather: when people talk, then this itself is part of a religious act and not a theory. Thus it also does not matter at all if the words used are true or false or nonsense.

In religion talking is not *metaphorical* either’ for otherwise it would have to be possible to say the same things in prose. <sup>63</sup>

In that respect, Wittgenstein’s work (especially in its «earlier», Tractarian, form) fits in with the anti-metaphysical project of the Vienna Circle positivists, with the exception of his private philosophical motives. But the Kantian inspiration of this cathartic project can hardly pass unnoticed either,

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York: The Macmillan Co, 1968), pp. 170-1. It is true, though, that in his book on Anselm Barth mitigates his austere methodology by way of a startling endorsement, contrary to expectations, of Anselm’s understanding of faith as «seeking understanding», an endorsement that’s curiously at odds with his notorious non-hermeneuticism. In fact, so anxious is Barth to defend Anselm’s so-called ontological argument from widespread misconceptions of it (and to dissociate it from the scholastic notion of *analogia entis*), that he recommends his work on Anselm as «the one [among all his books] written with the greater satisfaction», a statement which doubtlessly challenges my positivist appraisal of him. Cf. Barth, *I Changed My Mind*, John Godsey, ed. (Richmond: John Knox, 1966), pp. 42f.

61. Ibid. Third Chapter, p. 110 (italics provided). This passage is followed by Barth’s injunction to Christians to abandon the murky, so to speak viewpoint of «religion» (which includes metaphysics) for the viewpoint of Jesus.

62. This is how P. Engelmann describes Wittgenstein’s aim in *Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein with a Memoir* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), p. 135. Cited from Cunningham, p. 86.

63. Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 305.

for wasn't Kant a loner among the Enlightenment *philosophes* in setting about to «abolish *knowledge*, to make room for *faith*?<sup>64</sup> A faith purified from idle speculation and metaphysical nonsense not by the construction of a newer dogmatic system, but «by closing up the sources of error»,<sup>65</sup> as Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and its subsequent enlargement, the *Philosophical Investigations*, were later to do. «Sophistication consists in the attempt to deduce the knowledge of God... by rational necessity and to apprehend and prove its necessity. There is no need for this», warned Kant in anticipation of anti-theoretical theologians, since «[I]n religion the knowledge of God is properly based on faith alone...Sophistication in religious matters is a dangerous thing... A speculative basis is a very weak foundation for religion». <sup>66</sup>

I think that, at bottom, the «realism versus anti-realism» debate comes down to contesting or upholding the merits of an epistemic immanentism along the lines sketched by Quine above. We have touched upon this point already, when mention was made (in Dummett's definition, and immediately thereafter) of the categorical rejection of *idealized* (i.e., non-human) epistemic limits by modern as well as postmodern anti-realists. Here I would like to elaborate a bit further on this hotly disputed issue. For it is of the essence to see what it is exactly that motivates both sides to *keep the notion of truth commensurate* (as anti-realists do) *or incommensurate* (as realists do) *with the possibility of its justification*.

An interesting and plausible argument hurled from the moderate camp of anti-realism raises the specter of *alienation*, and the dangers of metaphysical estrangement from our humanity, as attendant to all philosophical viewpoints entailing a confidence in epistemic realism and transcendence. That is to say, when such viewpoints allow for the possibility of a broader truth or truths exceeding our mental and cognitive capacities. For such a possibility, apart from its proved tendency to spawn fanciful but vacuous metaphysics (which, as the history of ideas easily demonstrates, are subject to no form of critical scrutiny, verification of falsification), bear also the further undesirable consequence of diminishing the self-worth of «human, all too human» norms, values, needs and interests. The well-known strong realist, Thomas Nagel, admits as much when he says that [his claim that the world may contain not only

64. See the «Preface to the Second Edition», *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Vasilis Politis, ed. (London & Vermont: Everyman, 1996), p. 21 (B XXIX).

65. See *ibid.* p. 22 (B XXXI).

66. See his *Lectures on Ethics*, Louis Infield, trans. (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963), p. 87.

what we don't know and can't yet conceive, but also what we could never conceive] «amounts to a strong form of *antihumanism*: the world is not our world, even potentially,» since «it may be partly or largely incomprehensible to us not just because we lack the time or technical capacity to acquire a full understanding of it, but because of our nature».<sup>67</sup> Conversely, the transition from foundationalism and realism to holist theories of meaning involves an uncompromisingly emphatic reaffirmation of humanism. As Stephen Toulmin puts it, all post-modern science must start by *reinserting humanity into nature*, and then integrate our understanding of humanity and nature with practice in view.<sup>68</sup> Thus, where realists might tend to read a vulgar version of utilitarianism off of anti-realism, especially in its pragmatist expression, anti-realists by contrast see only a noble effort to salvage the normativity of the human perspective from «higher» so to speak, metaphysical moves to subdue and restrain it. Nicholas Wolterstorff hits the nail on its head when he discovers that,

At issue is whether or not we are at home in the world. The anti-realist sees metaphysical realism as an alienating perspective; it regards the world and even ourselves as something out there, *over against us and alien to us* with which we have to cope [my italics]. The goal of the anti-realist is to show us that this is mistaken; we are not thus alienated. His path towards that goal is making us see that we are the *makers* of our world [italics in the original]. We are no more alien in the world than the artist is alien to his work which mirrors him back to himself as its maker... But to regard ourselves as world-makers is to regard the world as an *expression* of ourselves.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Thomas Nagel, *The View From Nowhere* (Oxford & New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989), p. 108 (italics provided).

<sup>68</sup> Stephen Toulmin, *The Return to Cosmology: Postmodern Science and the Theology of Nature* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985), pp. 210, 237ff, 257 (italics provided); cited from J. Wenzel van Huyssteen, *Essays in Postfoundationalist Theology* (Grand rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), p. 267.

<sup>69</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, «Realism Versus Anti-realism: How to Feel at Home in the World», in *Realism: Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, vol 59, Daniel O. Dahlstrom, ed. (Washington, D.C.: American Catholic Philosophical Association, 1984), p. 184.

If Wolterstorff's point is borne in mind, we are better equipped, I think, to appreciate the wisdom of Rorty's recent caveat, that one is better off turning a deaf ear to those claiming to know what God, or History, wants,<sup>70</sup> even as we choose to cast a more critical look on Rorty's broader agenda. And certainly, Putnam's parallel (but considerably more modest and, to my mind, more responsible) efforts to formulate a humbler, less pretentious and more accountable sort of realism<sup>71</sup> strikes a resonant chord with all who are alive to the dangers (social, political, religious, etc.) inherent in the undesirable (and, indeed, unbiblical) brand of excessive realism known as *essentialism* or the metaphysics of substance.

But there is just as interesting a flip side to these and similar anti-realist warnings, the upshot of which being a counter-worry that the progressive retreat of realism sets the scene for the concurrent influx of subtler and more insidious forms of idealism, all exhibiting a *lack of humility*, by attempting, in Nagel's memorable phrase, «to cut the universe down to size».<sup>72</sup> To offer a plausible illustration of this instance, we would need to add a few words to this modern version of idealism already alluded to earlier in this chapter as «naturalized Kantianism».

The particular kind of idealism concerning us here, which realists like Thomas Nagel and William P. Alston<sup>73</sup> see as the most likely metaphysical usurper following the eclipse of realism, is an interesting, but well-concealed, variant of its traditional counterpart of the mind (as espoused by Bishop Berkeley), at first sight bearing little or no relation to its original matrix. In its present, widespread manifestation, idealism «holds that what there is is what we can think about or conceive of, or what we or our descendants could come to be able to think about - and that this is necessarily true because the idea of something that we could not think about or conceive makes no sense».<sup>74</sup> In other words, far from making the old metaphysical claim that «to exist is to be perceived», latter-day idealists stipulate that what there is, or what is the case at any rate, *concedes necessarily* with what is a possible object of thought *for us*. By so doing, they tend to replace the earlier anthropocen-

70. See his latest collection of essays published as *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), especially ch. 14: «Failed Prophecies, Glorious Hopes», pp. 201-209.

71. See his aptly-titled *Realism with a Human Face*, already quoted above.

72. Nagel, *The View From Nowhere*, p. 109.

73. See especially his latest work, *A Realist Conception of Truth* (Ithaca, Cornell Univ. Press, 1996).

74. Nagel, p. 90.

trism, which visualized all existents as dependent upon human perception, with a more naturalistic version subjecting all significant ontological discourse to the possibility of human conceptualization, beyond the reaches of which significant (that is to say, meaningful) talk collapses. Otherwise stated, non-realists conflate or make co-extensive, in a decisively reductive move, what there *is* and what we can *think* and thus *talk* about, thereby rendering human understanding the measure of all things, although admittedly without ending up necessarily in relativism.

But relativism is hardly the problem that realists apprehend as obtaining from the reductivist idealism just described. For relativism may be another word for pluralism, and after all pluralism is an intrinsic constituent of all realist perspectives, such as Nagel's, which recognizes «that there are other things we haven't been able to connect with yet, and that there may be still others... with which creatures like us could never make such a connection, because we couldn't develop the necessary responses or the necessary concepts».<sup>75</sup> The real problem stemming from the prevailing «empiricist immanentism» or «linguacentrism», as espoused by the outspoken devotees of the «linguistic turn», seems to be rather the *a priori* infliction of an intellectual confinement to a «downsized» universe, so to speak, whose actual dimensions are directly proportionate to *our* (nowadays, linguistic) conditions of meaning and measurement. And while by no means is it premised by anti-realists that «the world is as we interpret it», or (as Derrida's unsympathetic critics routinely put it) that «there is nothing beyond the text, since all reality is textuality», etc., we are nonetheless faced here with a plausible and well-meaning but to my mind disturbing perspective, which *renders all existents relative to our human viewpoint*. And what is newly distinctive about this classical idealist reduction is the application of linguistic analysis, by means of which questions of *truth* apparently collapse into questions of *meaning*. I think Michele Marsonet is fair when he sketches this minor (if decisive) shift within a persistent and-roughly-indistinguishable idealist pattern as follows:

The idealist claims:

(A) We cannot step out of *thought*: if we admit that there is an external reality which transcends thought, then, by the same act of thinking it, this alleged external reality is no longer tran-

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75. Ibid. p. 109.

scendental. It follows that we can never overcome the cognitive identity between being on the one side, and thought on the other.

But most analytic philosophers would paraphrase (a) in the following manner:

(B) We cannot step out of *language*: if we admit that there is an external reality which transcends thought, then, by the same act of thinking it, this alleged external reality is no longer transcendental. It follows that we can never overcome the cognitive identity between being on the one side, and language on the other.

We can say, thus, that for classical idealism whatever is foreign to thought is unknowable, while for the analytic tradition whatever is foreign to language is unknowable as well.<sup>76</sup>

Scholarly research on this subject is not necessarily congenial to Marsonet's conclusions. Frank B. Farell, although of a similarly realist persuasion, sees no threatening traces of idealism in the work of right-wing philosophers of language such as Quine or Davidson. «Meaning», says he, «[as Quine and Davidson reformulate it] rather becomes public and knowable, and amenable to investigation by science».<sup>77</sup> This view, however, is now contested by no less a personage than Putnam himself, who has recently appeared less convinced of the robustness of Quine's realism. In one of his latest works, Putnam sets for himself the bold and indeed unthinkable task (for most people versed in the philosophy of language) of blurring the lines between Quine's relative ontological commitments and Rorty's flat-out phenomenalism or, as he puts it, between the former's scientism and the latter's historicism.<sup>78</sup> In the process of a careful reconstruction of Quine's arguments, supported by a close and faithful textual engagement, Putnam appears anxious to distance his own «internal» realism from Quine's doctrine of «immanent truth». Quine's replies to critics notwithstanding, that neither the authority of ontology nor the authority of epistemology is in any way impaired by being seen as «immanent»<sup>79</sup> (a claim Quine tries to further substantiate by his famed

76. Marsonet, p. 109.

77. Frank B. Farell, *Subjectivity, Realism and Postmodernism: The Recovery of the World in Recent Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), p. 74.

78. See his essay «A Comparison of Something with Something Else», in *Words & Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1996), pp. 330-350.

79. *Ibid.* p. 348.

recourse to the materiality of neurology and nerve endings stimulations as the empiricists basis of his system), Putnam faults his internalism as hopelessly Protagorean, as a sort of «transcendental Skinnerianism»<sup>80</sup> not qualitatively different from Rortian intersubjectivity and culturalism.

What reasons does Putnam offer to justify his verdict on Quine? If I have him right, Putnam sees an unresolved tension plaguing Quine's epistemology, one that arises from the strained coexistence in it of two incompatible doctrines, the radical inscrutability of reference, where «there is no fact of the matter as to whether an arbitrary sentence is true», and scientific physicalism. He argues that the former is bound to defeat the latter, and, along with it, their author's entire claim to realism (that is, to the reformed, immanent realism espoused by Quine):

The traditional notion of «reality» as that against which all our claims have to be squared was correlative with certain other notions. The idea of squaring a claim with reality went with the notion that our claims were *about* reality. But Quine wants to drop any and every notion of intentionality except a purely disquotational or immanent notion. Can one keep reality and drop intentionality?<sup>81</sup>

In other words,

Quine is asking us to think that there is something about which we should be «realists *and* telling us that the relation between our thoughts and that something is purely «immanent», that is, internal to our language and theory; that that language and theory do not have a relation to that something which is singled out in a way that can be scientifically determined by rational inquirers independently of how or whether we interpret them. This sounds like saying that there is a reality, but you aren't really thinking about it, you only pretend you are thinking about it. Or like saying there isn't a reality, but you pretend there is one whenever you think, and you have to take seriously the reality you pretend there is.<sup>82</sup>

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80. Ibid. p. 349.

81. Ibid. p. 346.

82. Ibid. p. 347.

Putnam's arrival at these conclusions is by way of carrying Quine's idea of relative reference through to its ultimate consequence. In *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*,<sup>83</sup> Quine tried to forestall an immediate objection to his theory of reference: if reference is granted sense only relative to a background language, what of the infinite regress into further and further background languages, relative to which each of these would in turn only make sense? Quine's reply invokes the relational doctrine of space, with its lack of an absolute position or velocity, as an analogue to the intra-linguistic relationality and relativity of reference:

When we are given position and velocity relative to a given coordinate system, we can always ask in turn about the placing of origin and orientation of axes in that system of coordinates; and there is no end to the succession of further coordinate systems that could be adduced in answering the successive questions thus generated.

*In practice* of course we end the regress of coordinate systems by something like pointing. And in practice we end the regress of background languages, in discussions of reference, by acquiescing in our mother tongue and taking its words at face value... But what of position and velocity *apart from practice*? What of the regress then? The answer, of course, is the relational doctrine of space; there is no absolute position or velocity; there are just the relations of coordinate systems to one another, and ultimately of things to one another. And I think that the parallel question regarding denotation calls for a parallel answer, a relational theory of what the objects of theories are. What makes sense to say is not what the objects of a theory are *absolutely speaking*, but how one theory of objects is interpenetrable or reinterpretable in another.<sup>84</sup>

Or, in Putnam's condensed restatement of this comparison, «[t]here are not in the world such things as positions or velocities; there are only relative positions and relative velocities. And similarly there are not in the world such things as denotations; there are only relative denotations».<sup>85</sup> But Putnam

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83. (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1969).

84. Ibid. p. 49 (italics provided); cited from Putnam, *Words & Life*, pp. 337-8.

85. Ibid. p. 338.

thinks the analogy is flawed, since even relative position (in pre-relativistic physics) enjoys an absolute or invariant status that should be acceptable to any number of impartial observers at a time, regardless of which coordinate systems they individually use. This isn't the case with relative reference as Quine intends it, because as Putnam shows, he interjects *interpretation* down to the point of specifying the background language itself without which (i.e., unless one acquiesces in it) there is no fact of the matter as to the truth value of any sentence. The only reasonable outcome obtaining from this position, according to Putnam, would be the admission that in one's own language calling a sentence «true» amounts to nothing more than simply reaffirming the sentence.

Putnam considers this a disturbing outcome, for a consistent application of it to the concepts of truth and reference would downsize them to an immanence bordering perilously on current literary theories of «intratextuality»:

Someone who simply denied that we ever talk about anything except language would, one presumes, be pulling our leg. But Derrida does not deny that *viewed from within*, texts talk about many things. That texts refer to all sorts of things –to Dracula and Frankenstein, to the proletariat and the downfall of the West, to the libido and the superego, *in the sense of immanent reference*– is certainly not something Derrida denies. If, however, the crime with which Derrida is charged is to deny that there is any absolute sense, any sense except the immanent one, in which texts stand in a relation of reference to the «real world», surely Quine belongs in the prisoner's box along with Derrida. Somehow the change of language from «il n'y a pas de hors texte» to «truth is immanent» changes intellectual pretenders to first-rate philosophers.<sup>86</sup>

Putnam isn't, of course, negligent of Quine's exhortation that we stick to first-class science as the most rigorous intellectual activity which gives us the best in terms of knowledge with predictive power. But he does worry, at the same time, that «once truth goes "immanent", there is no reason [as Rorty holds] to privilege science over literature, or over ethics, aesthetics, and so forth».<sup>87</sup> Thus he presents Quine as standing closer to Rorty and Derrida than

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86. *Ibid.* p. 341.

87. *Ibid.* p. 343.

he would certainly care to admit, but on opposite ends from people like Karl Popper, whose confidence in the growth of scientific knowledge stemmed from his subscription to the traditional idea of truth deriving from a real, and above all, absolute, correspondence between language and the world:

The difference between Quine and Popper is precisely that for Popper there is, and for Quine there is not, an interpreter-independent fact of the matter as to whether an arbitrary sentence is *true*. Quine has deconstructed the notion of truth by making it something «immanent» rather than something «transcendent». Of course this deconstruction is not a simple throwing away. But it isn't a simple throwing away for Derrida either.<sup>88</sup>

I am personally not as convinced that Quine can be so confidently lumped with the left-wing linguacentrists as Putnam suggests here,<sup>89</sup> for all the support that his startling idea lends to my main thesis, i.e., of there being a common idealist backbone to those analytic and Continental schools of thought collectively belonging to the so-called «linguistic turn». But if so much as Marsonet's analysis alone holds, as presented above, then all realists, especially those of a religious bent, would immediately consent that in both versions of idealism which he describes, something valuable and essential has been lost sight of. It isn't theism, because religious sentiment and idealism have enjoyed amicable partnerships in the past (for example, Berkeley's idealism was designed for the purpose of offsetting the related evils, as he saw them, of skepticism and atheism). The real loss is somewhat subtler and more covert, involving a dwindling of catholicity and the concomitant espousal of

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88. Ibid. p. 342.

89. Jonathan Dancy sketches a more «conservative» picture of Quine's philosophy, tempering his holism by suggesting that in an important way Quine may also be classified as a foundationalist, due to the distinction that he draws between observation and non-observation sentences. Because Quine grants the former of these just enough self-containment and autonomy of meaning («observation sentences do not report private events such as the occurrence of a sensation. They report the occurrence of certain sensory stimuli, and the stimuli are here thought of as publicly available») they can serve as basic units of meaning without which language-learning would be impossible in the first place. Unlike flagrant holists, Quine is also an adamant empiricist, which means that for him «there are data and there is theory», a good reminder, Dancy concludes, that «one cannot be an empiricist without being a foundationalist». *Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), pp. 100-1.

a «monophysite», so to speak (if we may seek recourse to a useful theological term) or human-centered epistemological complacency, limited to what is strictly humanly *thinkable* and *sayable*.

I should specify here, before moving any further, that in faulting classical as well as modern idealists with a «dwindling (or loss) of catholicity» what I'm basically doing is taking them to task on charges of *heresy* in the term's original meaning of forsaking holism for the sake of partiality, in this case the partiality of a flat-out humanistic phenomenism. It will be remembered that in the classical Christological controversies, particularly those of the first centuries A.D., heretical views were mainly critiqued on grounds of *one-sidedness*, namely as instantiating a selective amplification of one aspect or another of the person of Christ (the human or the divine, accordingly) at the expense of the whole picture. In every instance, the overblown pick was deemed by mainstream Church theologians to be arbitrary and so was condemned, as presumed to have been based on a partial and biased vision with totalizing pretensions.<sup>90</sup> My point is that one could draw some interesting analogues between the reductivist tendencies (if such they truly were) of those early Christianity theological dissidents and some western European philosophers writing just prior to the sweeping appearance of the Kantian paradigm, and especially under its spell thereafter, down to our present day. On this reading, today's offhand (*a priori*, that is) dismissal of any and all extra-human ontological possibilities is just as one-sided as was, for that matter, scholasti-

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90. I am indebted for this insight to Chrestos Yannaras and his elegant of «orthodoxy» as catholicity: «The word *heresy*», he writes, «means the choice, selection and preference of one part of the truth to the detriment of the whole truth, the catholic truth. Heresy is the opposite of *catholicity*. The heretics absolutized just one aspect of the experiential certainty of the Church and so inevitably relativized all others. The procedure of this absolutization was always intellectual — a theoretical preference which usually simplified and schematized the understanding of the ecclesial truth. Classical examples in history are *Nestorianism* and *Monophysitism*. The first absolutized the humanity of Christ, the second his divinity. And in both bases, they relativised and finally destroyed the one entire truth of the incarnation of God, of the God-manhood of Christ. Nestorianism preached an ethical model of a perfect man, monophysitism an abstract idea of a fleshless God». *Elements of Faith: An Introduction to Orthodox Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), pp. 15-6. Of course, one can well raise serious questions as to the soundness and validity of this orthodox picture of theological normativity, for example, based on a Nietzschean interpretation of (Church) history. But here I am using it mainly as a useful metaphor for illustrating the one-sidedness of metaphysical idealism.

cism's contrasting self-contained preoccupation with increasingly finer metaphysical distinctions and abstractions, cerebrally conceived but thinly grounded in empirical reality. I see both tendencies as manifestations of the primordial human instinct to make sense of a frightening and complex cosmos by lifting up the human spirit to an ultimate arbiter of what is really the case. It matters little, I think, if our self-exaltation occurs by means of unconsciously projecting everything that is human to an otherworldly, idealized image thereof (as Feuerbach so perceptively exposed), or as a result of the seemingly opposite process of metaphysical contraction, that is, by picturing reality as necessarily graspable, and in principle knowable by us. The pronounced anti-metaphysical *empiricism* of the latter, more recent circumstance, should not blind us to the idealism latent in it, if by the term «idealism» in the present context is denoted its reductive anthropocentrism. All the more so, in fact, considering the linguistic constitution of this modern nominalism's ontological commitments. For «as language is a relatively new entry in the history of reality», Marsonet points out,

It cannot have any sort of ontological supremacy. Not only is this so: it is likely to hide the non-linguistic dimensions of our human nature while, being restricted to mankind, it cannot explain a very large number of the features of reality as such. Let us then stress that science, instead, always tries to enlarge (and to deepen) as much as possible our vision of reality and, in order to do this, we must push our sight both toward the past –when mankind did not yet exist– and the future – when mankind perhaps will no longer be there. This in turn means trying to gain a good comprehension of *reality as a whole*: human and non-human, mental and non-mental, linguistic and non-linguistic. Certainly language has a role in this enterprise, although not a unique one. By trying to reduce an extremely complex reality to something much simpler, this approach cannot even explain *why* language was born and *for what purposes*. Language becomes a sort of divinity which is supposed to explain everything while, since it is a rather mundane and imperfect product of the human mind, it needs indeed to be explained by tracing its origins which, as we said, are both social and practical. So the authors who –like Quine– [Marsonet concludes] mean to replace any argument on reality with arguments on human language that talks about reali-

ty are bound to miss the richness of reality itself: this is the reason why we need a semantic descent replacing Quine's ascent.<sup>91</sup>

It is my contention that the *semantic descent* urged for by Marsonet in his paper could be modeled along the lines of apophaticism's major premise of an asymmetric relation between language and reality, and as supplemented by Gregory Palamas' realism focusing on things (πρόγματα) rather than on terms of words (λέξεις).<sup>92</sup> For in the last analysis and from a Christian perspective at least, the salvation of humankind was not effected by rhetoric but by the physical events of the Word's incarnation and resurrection.

3. I therefore find it an unfortunate occurrence, in the light of these considerations, that the countermovements to positivism, hermeneutic and neo-pragmatism, uphold and themselves rest on the selfsame understanding of language as an all-encompassing, and non-transparent phenomenon, responsible for our total embeddedness in linguistic phenomenalism (what Jaakko Hintikka has dubbed «Lingua Universalis», as opposed to «Calculus Ratiocinator»<sup>93</sup> Unlike Rortyan pragmatism, of course, the hermeneutical model of Gadamer raises a more plausible critical comment on the naive and untenable, indeed, myth of «cognitive detachment» presupposed by Cartesian epistemology. All the same, however, there is no doubt that Gadamer's Heideg-

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91. Marsonet, pp. 117-18.

92. Thomas Nagel draws a crucial distinction between the content of thoughts and the particular forms they might assume which I think conveys roughly the same asymmetry between language and reality (where the latter exceeds and determines the former) that is central to apophaticism. Nagel attributes idealism to «a refusal to distinguish between two ways in which the human point of view enters into our thoughts — as form and content. The content of a thought», Nagel specifies, «may be quite independent of its particular form — independent for example; *of the particular language in which it is expressed*. All of our thoughts must have a form which makes them accessible from a human perspective. But that doesn't mean they are about our point of view or the world's relation to it. What they are about depends not on their subjective form but on what has to be referred to in any explanation of what makes them true. The content of some thoughts transcends every form they can take in the human mind». Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, pp. 101-2 (italics provided).

93 Jaakko Hintikka, *Lingua Universalis Vs Calculus Ratiocinator: An Ultimate Presupposition of Twentieth-Century Philosophy* (Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997).

gerian<sup>94</sup> starting point of man's full-fledged immersion in the world reduces the world of experience to a Kantian-like phenomenalism too heavily grounded in human finitude.

But is it really the case that this world is a world of being-in-itself which leaves behind all the relativity of factual existence and the knowledge of which could be called an absolute science? Is not the very concept of an «absolute object» a contradiction in terms? Neither the biological nor the physical universe can, in fact, deny its concrete existential relativity. In this, physics and biology have the same ontological horizon that it is impossible for them, as science, to go beyond. Their knowledge is of what exists, and this means, as Kant has shown, as it is given in space and time and is an object of experience.<sup>95</sup>

The overlap should hardly seem surprising, considering the positive appraisal which the category of human finitude receives by both Kant and Heidegger, notwithstanding Heidegger's protestation at efforts like Kant's to establish the link between man and the world, instead of assuming it in the first place. Small wonder, then, that certain of Gadamer's passages, such as «all thinking about language is already once again drawn back into language... [for] we are always already encompassed by the language that is our

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94. Appropriating Heidegger's already mentioned idea that «language is the house of being where man exists by dwelling», Gadamer proclaims the primacy of language in everything that is human: «Language is not just one of man's possessions in the world, but on it depends the fact that man has a world at all. For man the world exists as world in a way that no other being in the world experiences. But this world is linguistic in nature» *Truth and Method*, (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), p. 401. And as he states elsewhere, «Language is not one of the means by which consciousness is mediated with the world. It does not represent a third instrument alongside the sign and the tool, both of which are also distinctively human. Language is by no means simply an instrument, a tool. For it is in the nature of the tool that we master its use, which is to say we take it in hand and lay it aside when it has done its service. That is not the same as when we take the words of a language, laying ready in the mind, and with their use let them sink back into the general store of words over which we dispose. Such an analogy is false because we never find ourselves as consciousness over against the world and, as it were, grasp after a tool of understanding in a wordless condition». Cf. *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. and ed., David E. Linge (Berkeley & Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1977), p. 62 (italics provided).

95. *Truth and Method*, p. 410.

own»,<sup>96</sup> might lend themselves (misleadingly, perhaps) to relativist readings of his work.<sup>97</sup>

Here I find myself in complete agreement with Robert C. Neville's critical appraisal of hermeneutics in his aptly titled *Recovery of the Measure* as a worthwhile project in need of some reform:

Therefore, hermeneutics cannot be generalized to a metaphysics itself. One must still ask the question of truth. Is a given interpretation right, not just about what a thing means, but about what the thing is? The reality of the things includes its meanings. Yet the meaningful reality of the thing should be the measure by which any given interpretation, or even strain of interpretations, is judged with regard to the truth.

Hermeneutics must be made critical in a special sense that transcends the hermeneutical project. The project is already critical in the sense that it has extraordinary subtlety in correcting its interpretations so as to be ever more nearly right about what its subject matter means. The additional sense of criticism must ask whether the interpretation is right about what the subject is. This is a devious problem to grasp, for hermeneutics itself tends to the idealism that says the subject matter is its meanings. We have to drive a wedge between what the subject matter is, including its

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96. *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p. 62. The linguistic turn in modern philosophy has been greeted with enthusiasm by a number of leading contemporary theologians. These include George Lindbeck's neo-Barthian «cultural-linguistic» model rooted in Wittgenstein's philosophy, and David Tracy, who finds it helpful in withstanding positivism's limitation of rationality to a narrow philosophy of consciousness. Cf. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Westminster Press, 1984), and Tracy, «Theology, Critical Social Theory and the Public Realm», in *Habermas, Modernity and Public Theology*, Don S. Browning and Francis Schussler Fiorenza, eds. (New York: Crossroad, 1992), pp. 19-42. Although I applaud Tracy's efforts at a public theology accountable to «the kind of critical reflection, dialogue and argument» demanded of all other disciplines, I must confess my uneasiness concerning a wholesale endorsement of the so-called «linguistic turn» for theological purposes. For I fear that it is but the flip-side to Cartesianism and its narrow philosophy of consciousness rather than a handy alternative to it, an offspring of late modernity and not the means of overcoming the latter's undesirable reductionism.

97. In all fairness, however, it must be added that Gadamer's intentions are far removed from postmodernism's radical notion of *incommensurability* since he viewed language not as a source of division, but as a «point of contact», a prerequisite for dialogue even across cultures: See especially *Truth & Method*, pp. 405-6.

meanings and the interpretation of what that meaning is. For, what the thing truly means *in* a given interpretation might be an ideological or other distortion of what it truly is and *ought to be* for that interpretation.<sup>98</sup>

For the full flavor of linguistic idealism, of course, we must turn to the challenging prose of Richard Rorty. Despite his most vehement rejoinders to charges of relativism and idealism routinely leveled at his project,<sup>99</sup> I think his delineation of pragmatism is still open to criticism along those two lines. Fearful as he is of the danger of social oppression inherent in the categories of the normative and the transcendent, Rorty strives to wipe them out entirely from the scope of intellectual life by means of an all-out, non-representational holism. This kind of holism, which Rorty describes as being deplored by known realists such as Thomas Nagel and Michael Dummett, and which pushes Quinean philosophy to its limits,<sup>100</sup> makes truth an intra-linguistic affair, relative to the historicity and contingency of human discourses: «To say that truth is out there is simply to say that where there are no sentences there is no truth, that sentences are elements of human languages, and that human languages are human creations».<sup>101</sup>

98. Robert C. Neville, *Recovery of the Measure: Interpretation and Nature* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. 46-7.

99. Rorty is very well aware himself of the charges of idealism leveled at his work, and he even acknowledges a debt of sorts to idealism, though one that he takes pains to differentiate from the Kantian type. Again, of special interest should be his latest collection of essays, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin, 1999), wherein Rorty recounts his view on Christianity and religion more explicitly than ever before. Rorty would no doubt find my description of his nominalism as a «naturalized Kantianism» a ludicrous one. In his own account of his intellectual debts, Rorty speaks of himself as a Hegelian, in that he thinks of Hegel's *Phenomenology* «both as the beginning of the end of the Plato-Kant tradition and as a paradigm of the ironist's ability to exploit the possibilities of massive redescription». Cf. «Private Irony and Liberal Hope», in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), p. 78. Rorty is adamant that «the younger Hegel broke away from the Plato-Kant sequence and began a tradition of ironist philosophy which is continued in Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida» (ibid. pp. 78-9), adding in an important footnote that «[f]rom this point of view, both analytic philosophy and phenomenology were throwbacks to a pre-Hegelian, more or less Kantian, way of thinking — attempts to preserve what I am calling “metaphysics” by making it the study of the “conditions of possibility” of a medium (consciousness, language)», (ibid. p. 79).

100. Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers Volume 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 58-9.

101. Ibid.

Notice how closely Rorty's stipulation is echoed by Nelson Goodman's parallel view of language as a worldmaking phenomenon: «We can have words without a world, but no world without words or other symbols».<sup>102</sup>

What we have here is a reversal of the Platonic-Aristotelian understanding of language as a derivative, world-dependent means of communication. Plato's fundamental statement on language is made in the *Cratylus*, generally regarded as a propedeutic to the theory of the Forms as expounded in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*, and which true to Plato's realism aimed to turn our attention away from discourse to ontology, i.e., to true being. Aristotle, who was otherwise so critical of Plato, was in concurrence with his great Athenian teacher's traditional demotion of language to reality. In a famous passage from *De Interpretatione* («On Interpretation»), he sketches the following hierarchy from world to oral speech, then down to written words:

Now spoken words are symbols of affections in the soul, and written marks symbols of spoken words. And just as written marks are not the same for all men, neither are spoken sounds. But what these are in the first place signs of —affections of the soul— are the same for all; and what these affections are likenesses of —actual things— are also the same (16a).

Derridean deconstruction (one of Rorty's major influences) is a direct reaction to this Aristotelian hierarchy. Drawing heavily from Ferdinand de Saussure's decentralized linguistics, Derrida flattens the Greek «onto-theological» mindset by reversing its «phonocentric» priorities responsible for the traditional (and, to Derrida's mind) ultimately oppressive and substantialistic notion of pure meaning or «transcendental signified». Commenting on the above passage from Aristotle, he articulates a critique largely familiar from his influential essay «Plato's Pharmacy».<sup>103</sup>

If, for Aristotle, for example, «spoken words (ta en te phone) are the symbols of mental experience (pathemata tes psyches) and written words are the symbols of spokent words» it is because the voice, producer of *the first symbols*, has a relation-

102. *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1978), p. 6.

103. Jacques Derrida, «Plato's Pharmacy», in *Dissemination*, Barbara Johnson, trans. (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 63-171.

ship of essential and immediate proximity with the mind. Producer of the first signifier, it is not just a simple signifier among others. It signifies «mental experiences» which themselves reflect or mirror things by natural resemblance. Between being and mind, things and feelings, there would be a relationship of translation or natural signification; between mind and logos, a relationship of conventional symbolization... The feelings of the mind, expressing things naturally, constitute a sort of universal language which can then efface itself. It is the stage of transparenance... In every case, the voice is closest to the signified, whether it is determined strictly as sense (thought or lived) or more loosely as a thing. All signifiers, and first and foremost the written signifier, are derivative with regard to what would wed the voice indissolubly to the mind or to the thought of the signified sense, indeed to the thing itself... The written signifier is always technical and representative. It has to constitutive meaning... This notion remains therefore within the heritage of that logocentrism which is also a phonocentrism: absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and the meaning of being, of voice and the ideality of meaning... Thus, within this epoch, reading and writing, the production or interpretation of signs, the text in general as fabric of signs, *allow themselves to be confined within secundariness. They are preceded by a truth or a meaning already constituted by and within the element of the logos.*<sup>104</sup>

Derrida's means of undercutting this Greek onto-theological picture, which he sees as having held captive Western metaphysics since its earliest articulation, has been to elevate written signs to an absolute and exclusive normativity such that turns all modes of discourse into an intra-textual play of signs, wherein signifieds are stripped of any ontological content whatsoever:

From the moment that there is a meaning, there are nothing but signs. *We think only in signs...* One could call *play* the absence of the transcendental signified as limitlessness of play, that is to say as the destruction of ontotheology and the metaphysics of presence.<sup>105</sup>

104. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976), pp. 11-14 (italics provided).

105. *Ibid.* p. 50.

Derrida's fame (or notoriety, for his unsympathetic critics) is due not only to his controversial theses but in part also to his prolific output. Among his massive literature, the philosophical exchange with American analytic philosopher John Searle<sup>106</sup> would make a good entry point to the motifs and intents surrounding «deconstruction». To oppose the semantic normativity advanced by Searle, who follows J.L. Austin's speech-act (or «ordinary language») theory, Derrida instances a bold reformulation of written marks or «signs» which, in consonance with his earlier works, makes language inherently ambivalent, since signs, the most elemental linguistic units, are presented as *constitutively* indefinite, that is to say, from the very start and not merely upon subsequent use or repetition in different contexts. In plain form, Derrida's syllogism runs as follows: Granted that signs or written marks are naturally repeatable, they must also be *alterable*, namely subject to a change in meaning or intent at the moment of their inscription into another sentence. But by virtue of its presence in the innermost structure of written discourse, alteration cannot be contained within signs and naturally spreads out to destabilize sentences, paragraphs, indeed everything that is textual, thus seriously undermine the common-sense notion of «authorial meaning». Here is a good illustration of how Derrida himself visualizes this fundamental alterability and ambivalence of human discourse:

Every sign, linguistic or non-linguistic, spoken or written (in the current sense of this opposition), in a small or large unit, can be *cited*, put between quotation marks; in so doing it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts without any center or absolute anchoring. This citationality, this duplication or duplicity, this iterability of the mark is neither an accident nor an anomaly, it is that (normal/abnormal) without which a mark could not even have a function called

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106. The debate was started with John Searle's response to Derrida's article «Signature Event Context», which appeared in the first issue of the Journal *Glyph* in 1977. Included in the second issue of the same periodical, along with Searle's response («Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida»), was Derrida's rejoinder to Searle, «Limited Inc a b c...», later incorporated in his 1988 book *Limited Inc*. In the meantime, Searle had launched another attack on Derrida, published as a book review of Jonathan Culler's 1983 *On Deconstruction* in the October 27, 1983 issue of the *New York Times Book Review* («The World Turned Upside Down»).

«normal». What would a mark be that could not be cited? Or one whose origins would not get lost along the way?<sup>107</sup>

It is true that the semantic equation drawn by Derrida (repeatability = alterability) is given a complex and more sophisticated argumentation than my caricature of it suggests, although even after all is duly considered, the ensuing thesis still leaves a lot to be desired. Be that as it may, it is with such a non-ontologistic understanding of language at his disposal, that Rorty focuses his long-term efforts on the noble goal of liberating humanity from the essentialism of procrustean grand ideologies, a goal promoted most successfully by literature, whose business (as Kundera, whom Rorty quotes a length, also points out) is to expose the fundamental relativity and particularity of human affairs. Unless we turn bold enough to renounce our hitherto intellectual entrapment in ontological reference and essentialist worries, Rorty urges, unless language ceases to be employed as a means of extracting the One True description of Reality from the rubble of appearances, the prospect of human emancipation, of turning due attention to otherness, will be indefinitely postponed. «The novelist's substitute for the appearance-reality distinction», he writes, «is a display of diversity of viewpoints, a plurality of descriptions of the same events. What the novelist finds especially comic [as opposed to essentialist-driven philosophers] is the attempt to privilege one of these descriptions, to take it as an excuse for ignoring all the others».<sup>108</sup> Which is why for Rorty, as for Kundera, «the novel is the characteristic genre of democracy, the genre most closely associated with the struggle for freedom and equality».<sup>109</sup>

It would take us too far afield to discuss in any significant detail the specifics of this urge to further human emancipation and the cause of otherness by arguing for the utter contingency of the self, so as to liberate it from the totalitarianism of ideology and the flattening ontologism of «transcendental subjectivity». Not surprisingly, language and textuality are the principle instruments employed in this process of systematic de-transcendentalization of the self. The resolve to remove the disfiguring masks places upon human faces by social or ideological pressure is beyond doubt a praiseworthy and much needed task; where I beg to differ from these efforts is in their con-

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107. Jacques Derrida, «Signature Event Context», S. Weber and G. Mehlman, trans. *Glyph* 1(1977): 172-97, p. 12.

108. Rorty, p. 74.

109. *Ibid.* p. 68.

strual of personhood as a linguistic or other construct, as a conglomerate, that is, of easily dispersed elements. For I fear that picturing the self as a product of contingency is no less dangerous than loading it with the determinism of cultural and ideological propaganda. Apophaticism, on the other hand, is an invaluable tool for a balanced anthropology that seeks to maintain some irreducible core of integrity for the self without hardening that core to the point of metaphysical essentialism. To approach the subject from the angle of essence would be tantamount to reducing personhood from a *Who* to a *what* question. However, apophaticism renders such objectification prohibitive,<sup>110</sup> simply by assuming the inexhaustibility of personhood (beginning with God's), which in turn gives a relative and provisional character to all statements of man. I submit that the best alternative to anthropological *idealism* is not an anthropological *nominalism*, but an apophatic approach to personhood in all its inscrutable depth and materiality. Georges Florovsky was well aware of this when he penned the following critique of transcendental idealism and its notion of personhood, pushing for a return from Man to the Biblical actuality of real men and women:

And the substance and objectivity of Revelation is apprehended not by man's abstracting himself from himself, nor by depersonalizing himself, nor by shrinking to a mathematical point, thereby transforming himself into a «transcendental subject». It is precisely the opposite: a «transcendental subject» can neither perceive nor understand the voice of God. It is not to a «transcendental subject», not to any «consciousness-in-general»

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110. Cf. the reformulation of the question of truth by Archmandrite Sophrony from a *what* to a *who* question: «Science and philosophy ask themselves: *What* is truth? while genuine Christian religious consciousness is always directed towards the truth that is *Who*. Scientists and philosophers often look upon Christians as ill-founded dreamers, while considering that they themselves stand on sure ground, which is why they consider themselves positivists. Strangely, they do not understand the full negative extent of their "*What*". They do not understand that real, absolute Truth can only be "*Who*" and never "*What*", because *Truth is no abstract formula or idea but Life itself* [hence the identification of truth with a Person, *inasmuch as life is always enhypostatized, never in a "pure" fleshless form*]... The truth that is Who cannot be obtained through the exertions of the human reason. God as Who is only made known through a communion in being that is, through the Holy Spirit». *The Monk of Mount Athos*, trans. Rosemary Edwards (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Press, 1989), p. 79.

that God speaks. The «God of the living» the God of Revelation speaks to living persons, to empirical subjects. The face of God speaks itself only to living personalities.<sup>111</sup>

Because our main interest in this introductory note is not in cultural debate *per se* but in the material consequences of the economy of salvation and the possibility of an idiom capable of conveying, however partially, its existential relevance, I will now try to wrap up the preceding points into a final, concluding remark.

**IV. Beyond the polarities of Divine transcendence and immanence: The transition from philosophical abstraction towards a Biblical, sufficiently «incarnational» hermeneutic.**

From the perspective of an apophatic theological realism, there is no question that the non-representationalist immanentism introduced in Western philosophy by Kant does not necessarily imply the loss of a vertical dimension, at least where Wittgenstein, and nowadays Putnam, are concerned. After all, as I said earlier in this paper, every epistemology rests on a particular ontology, and Kant was obligated to posit the reality of *things-in-themselves* as a means of forestalling a fatal lapse of his idealism into a phenomenalism of the Berkeleyan sort. Hence it assumes the existence of a «higher», if inaccessible realm and it is only later, in postmodernism's radical hermeneutics that the intellectual landscape is totally flattened. But any genuinely incarnational theology would be reasonably reluctant to embrace either of these two Kantian spin-offs, given their *ahistorical* and *idealist* implications. In positivism, both ends of the dualism are so tightly sealed as to preclude their intersection. The incarnation is accordingly cancelled, God fails to touch the world, except in metaphor, and moralism looms large: «*The sense of the world (der sinn der Welt) must lie outside the world... In it no value (keinen Wert) exists... How things are in the world is a matter of complete indifference for what is higher. God does not reveal himself in the world*» (*Tractatus*. 6.41, 6.432). Evidently, as Conor Cunningham submits, «such a transcendent cannot really make a difference to finite reality, and therefore is

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111. «Revelation, Philosophy and Theology», in *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky* (Belmont, MA: Notable and Academic Books, 1989), vol. III, p. 25.

far removed from the transcendentals of active religions, with their myths, allegories and creeds». <sup>112</sup> When we glimpse into the horizontal, kaleidoscopic

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112. Cunningham, «Wittgenstein After Theology», in *Radical Orthodoxy*, John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward, eds. (London & New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 86. Unlike authors such as Fergus Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1986), and D. Z. Phillips, *Faith After Foundationalism* (London & New York: Routledge, 1988); *Wittgenstein and Religion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993) who dismiss the realism versus non-realism debate as a pseudo-dilemma, and who show a wholesale theological espousal of Wittgensteinian philosophy (more certainly so in Phillips' case), Frederic W. Norris has drawn valuable attention to a number of important differences between Gregory Nazianzen and Wittgenstein on the crucial point of true reference, in his brief but telling comparison of their linguistic conventionalisms: «The theologian views language as conventional, not natural... [however] Gregory Nazianzen always thought proper religious language referred to God; Ludwig Wittgenstein apparently could concede the God-talk had meaning within certain language-games, but he seems to have been less convinced that such words had a referent in reality». Norris, «Nazianzen and Wittgenstein», in *Arianism After Arius: Essays on the Development of Fourth Century Trinitarian Conflicts*, Michael R. Barnes and Daniel H. Williams, eds. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), p. 238. Still, he does not go all the way toward placing Wittgenstein's totalizing (in my view, Kantian) positivism under the critical light of the patristic *incarnational* hermeneutic. This decisive further step is made by Conor Cunningham, who I think wisely sees more incongruities than harmony in theological appropriations of Wittgenstein. His paper, part of a collective scholarly effort in Britain to raise a balanced and challenging theological construal of humanism and postmodernism, shows a deeper understanding of what is theologically at stake in Wittgenstein and linguistic philosophy in general than do most relevant studies. Cunningham's ideas coincide with my understanding of Wittgenstein in his highlighting the Kantian connection to the Viennese philosopher's thought as well as by questioning the habitual division of his work into «earlier» and «later» phases. «Thus for Cunningham», as the editors say in the introduction, «there are two ways of regarding Wittgenstein's project: either, after all, it is just another post-Kantian philosophy, or else it requires a specifically theological articulation for its completion» (p. 8). For a detailed account on the debate over Wittgenstein's Kantian Debt, see Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description, With Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer and Wittgenstein* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1980), pp. 64- 359-60, 362. Thiselton sees Kantian overtones in Wittgenstein's work; others, e.g., Coveos (ibid. pp. 319-22 and esp. 330-32) articulate a categorical denial of a Kantian connection, arguing from the utter relativity which Wittgenstein ascribes to language, which naturally precludes the possibility of *transcendental* readings of Wittgenstein. While in agreement with this last point, I find myself closer to Thiselton's and Ray Monk's (pp. 25-6) portrayals of Wittgenstein's personality and ideas as fitting in more sensibly within a Kantian intellectual framework, no less because of his radical and uncompromising separation of *facts* from *values*, although again his is a de-transcendentalized or naturalized Kantianism.

plane of postmodernism, accordingly, we get sucked into an ahistorical vortex wherein nothing *qualitatively* new is ever expected to occur. Just as in Wittgenstein's aphorism just cited, God cannot be envisioned as being actively engaged with His creation, much less assumed to have been born in it in specific temporal and spatial coordinates, since the salvific consequences of God's incarnation would necessitate an axiological and theological distinction of past, present and future which the current horizontal mindset dismisses. In the end, God's otherness is forsaken, creation itself divinized, and neo-paganism challenges the remaining shreds of personal theism.

Given these considerations, which I shall here refer to collectively as «the incarnational hermeneutic», no viable correlation seems to me possible between Eastern theological apophaticism and Wittgenstein's linguistic analysis or Derridean deconstruction,<sup>113</sup> for each of the three are shown upon closer inspection to have been spawned by radically different life perspectives. To be sure, all three methods were meant as expressions of a welcome epistemological reserve with respect to truth, and there is intriguing evidence to suggest that Wittgenstein and Derrida followed strikingly similar impulses to disentangle the unholy mixing of (Greek) metaphysics and a theology

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113. I recognize that deconstruction can be of immense service to every inherently textual discipline, including philosophy and theology, if it assumes the more modest role described by Barbara Johnson in support of it: «If it were easy to remain grounded in the morally good, the history of the twentieth century would look quite different... it may well be that [deconstruction] has arisen as an attempt to come to terms with the holocaust as a radical disruption produced as a logical extension of Western thinking... In Nazi Germany, the seduction of an image of the good was precisely the road to evil. It is thus not out of "hostility" to the moral values of Western civilization that deconstruction has arisen, but out of a desire to understand how those values are potentially already different from *themselves*. By rereading the texts of writers and philosophers that have made a difference to Western history, it might be possible to become aware of the repressions, the elisions, the contradictions and the linguistic slippages that have functioned unnoticed and that undercut the certainties those texts have been read as upholding. If certainly had never produced anything but just and life-affirming results, there would be no need to analyze it. It is because of the self-contradictions and ambiguities already present within the text and the history of even the clearest and most admirable statements that careful reading is essential. Such a reading does not aim to eliminate or dismiss texts or values, but rather to see them in a more complex, more *constructed*, less idealized light». «The Surprise of Otherness», in *Literary Theory Today*, Peter Collier & Helga Geyer-Ryan, eds (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 21.

based on revelation.<sup>114</sup> I take the quintessence of their work to consist in the passionate systematic impairment of all human metaphysical constructs that seek to usurp the place of revealed truth. But whereas apophaticism seeks to resist the reduction of theological discourse to idolatry or ideology by means of exposing the limitations of words and concepts (and in fact is inseparable from its positive or cataphatic completion), linguistic analysis and deconstruction, by contrast, rest their case on a decentralized linguistic holism that, in different ways, undercuts the possibility of all positive theological statements.

Theological discourse, on the other hand, while by nature liturgical and apophatic, and despite its traditional nourishment in silence, must in the last resort entertain the liberty to make positive statements, inclusive of which should be the hermeneutical creativity to draw the existential implications of the Christian faith and thus make theology relevant and meaningful anew. But

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114. Which means, in effect, that both thinkers at some point in their intellectual career made a return trip to their Jewish roots. So at any rate suggests to me a reading of Derrida's «How to Avoid Speaking: Denials», in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, Harold Coward & Toby Foshay, eds. (Albany, New York: State Univ. of New York Press, 1992), pp. 73-142. In that paper, which Derrida calls his most «autobiographical» piece (p. 135, n. 13) he follows Heidegger's lead in juxtaposing faith and revelation to philosophy, the latter being linked to the Greek metaphysical tradition. Most important of all, he still finds Dionysian negative theology tainted with *hyperessentiality*, faulting it, that is, for preserving even after a long list of negations the Greek onto-theological tradition by still positing God in terms of a supreme Being, only now as one who remains incommensurate to the being of all that is (p. 79). In the same volume, Morny Joy («Conclusion: Divine Reservations», pp. 255-82), situates Derrida's work in the mindset of rabbinic Judaism: «What captivates [Derrida] is the idea of the absence of God. Divine alterity is evoked not so much by prophetic exportations, nor by moral injunctions, as by rabbinic interpretation... Hermeneutics does not attain definitive meaning. Any utterance reflects the indeterminate situation of a displaced people, a people who never have the certainties of Greek metaphysics. The rupture between Athens and Jerusalem. Hegel's bad infinity. Derrida at once seeks to elude and to expose Hellenic-Christian convictions. The fact of the nonadvent of the Messiah is not a calamity. It marks instead the Judaic disposition that constantly explores the limits of any reconciliation, any expectation (pp. 274-5). In regards now to Wittgenstein's intellectual debt to Jewish motifs (which, incidentally, co-existed harmoniously with his Kantian heritage, as in the remarkably similar case of Karl Barth's notoriously positivistic theology), our clue to it is Wittgenstein's own confession as it is recorded in Monk, p. 540: «Wittgenstein contrasted Drury's "Greek" religious ideas with his own thoughts, which were, he said, "one hundred per cent Hebraic"». And «[c]entral to Wittgenstein's "Hebraic" conception of religion... is the strict separation of philosophy from religion». I believe we should not be remiss if we drew a parallel between the Hebrew Bible's condemnation of idolatry, and Wittgenstein's life-long effort to undercut the natural philosophical inclination to spawn metaphysics with transcendental pretensions.

for all the important insights theologians can draw from Wittgenstein's or from the postmodernists' critiques of philosophical essentialism, logocentrism, and the metaphysics of presence, a consistent theological pursuance of these cannot escape the embarrassment of their non-dialogical, non-hermeneutical ends. For Derrida's kaleidoscopic hermeneutics is but the flip-side to Wittgenstein's non-hermeneutical positivism. In the last resort, the theologian's uneasiness with Wittgenstein's linguistic analysis is not unlike Karl Popper's discord with it,<sup>115</sup> which (in the interests of scientific realism) famously took it to task for systematically undercutting «the gift of wonder», a necessary prerequisite in Popper's mind for the progress of both science and philosophy, and just as vital, if not more so (I would add here) for theology as well. For theology is actualized precisely when, as Yannaras says elsewhere, the paradox of Siloam is continuously re-affirmed, when that is, «with a little mud of the earth, human eyes open to the wonder of life (John 9:6-7)».<sup>116</sup>

Unlike all previous exchanges between God and His creatures, the Divine entry into spatio-temporal creation under the latter's conditions and limitations is an event of unique significance because of its far-reaching transformative consequences for the entire spectrum of created reality. In His Incarnation, the eternal Word of God has touched physical existence from *within*: something real from God has hence been joined, without confusion and without division, to the human and material fabric. Hence it is the business of the-

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115. Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (London & New York: Routledge, 1989), Ch. 2 («The Nature of Philosophical Problems and Their Roots in Science»), p. 72, built evident throughout the book. «My view of Wittgenstein's doctrine may be summed up as follows. It is perhaps true, by and large, that "pure" philosophical problems do not exist; for indeed the purer a philosophical problem becomes the more is lost of its original significance, and the more liable is its discussion to degenerate into empty verbalism. On the other hand [*contra* Wittgenstein] there exist not only genuine scientific problems, but *genuine philosophical problems...*» (ibid. p. 73; my italics. Also: «For me, both philosophy and science lose all their attraction when they give up that [cosmological] pursuit — when they become specialisms and cease to see, and *to wonder at, the riddles of our world*. Specialization may be a great temptation for the scientists. For the philosopher it is mortal sin» (ibid. p. 136; my italics). In sharp contrast to Wittgenstein, Popper was imbued in realism and espoused a Russellian confidence in science's emancipatory prospect of cumulative progress, for which reason he focused on the meaning of scientific *theories*, not of sentences or propositions. But like Wittgenstein, who granted *simn* only to scientific propositions because of their intrinsically falsifiable nature, Popper also made meaningfulness correlative with falsifiability.

116. *Elements of Faith: An Introduction to Orthodox Theology*, p. xiv.

ology to spell out the exact and full meaning of Divine economy for us, to translate it namely into the contemporary idioms of human existence and ontology. Milan Kundera once remarked that any novel which stops short of venturing deeply enough into neglected and unexamined existential territory, or which fails to expose hidden truths about the human condition, by means of which to challenge reader contentment, is an *immoral* work of art.<sup>117</sup> The present lines are written with the assumption that ideology is charged with the same responsibility. Whether (and to what extent) the Church Fathers made responsible philosophical choices in their Christological and Trinitarian formulations, just as if «orthodoxy» likewise stands for anything more than metaphysical self-righteousness, are question that can only be resolved on the basis of the doctrines' ontological and soteriological content. But that, in turn, presupposes that ontology and soteriology be made inseparable again, as they were, say, in the pastoral writings of Irenaeus. Only thus can we start off the process of healing modernity's hiatus between meaning and truth, and restore theological discourse to its original concern about the world, and that not metaphorically but in the most realist and physical possible sense.<sup>118</sup>

Although the whole issue of postmodernism's origin and its alleged Kantian connection is part of a still on-going debate, there may be interesting ironies involved here. For postmodernism's immoderate (and non-dialogical) iconoclasm is largely tempered once its intellectual lineage is traced through modernity's historicized, linguistic non-representationalism back to the transcendental phenomenism of Kant's first *Critique*. Hence the frequent designation of deconstruction as «post-structuralism», a reference meant to draw attention to the movement's organic continuity with modernity and its structuralist matrix. Perhaps, finally, one would not be altogether remiss in attributing modernity's eventual fragmentation into militant heterogeneity to its residual idealism, a fragility intrinsic to discourse founded on the dismissal of the ontological question.

The possibility of a plausible and coherent exit from modernity's impasses (the most serious among which being the disjunction of *meaning* from

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117. *The Art of the Novel* (New York: Harper & Row, 1993), pp. 5-6.

118. My advocacy of theological realism in these pages overlaps in many respects with Janet Martin Soskice's project in *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977). This paper's emphasis however, unlike Soskice's, is not on metaphor but on the recommendation of an *apophatic* model of language, in terms of which ontological reference may resume its normative status in theology, purged from essentialism and naïve realism alike.

*truth*) is bound to remain elusive so long as reason prolongs its self-inflicted confinement in linguistic absoluteness. For if language is the «House of Being», as Heidegger held it was, it can also become the prison, certainly so in regards to the human spirit. This pending liberation is a task reserved for theology alone. Because only theology can give us a measure of non-human transcendence apt to contest the monophysite, complacent anthropocentrism which lies at the bottom of modernity and postmodernity alike.

## V. Conclusion

*Heidegger and the Areopagite* was translated in the hope of kindling a new and unprejudiced interest in the theological realism of the Palamite *essence-energies* distinction, especially in the West, where it has never quite found a niche. The well-known polarizing split between theology and economy, and the resultant on-going debate of privileging God *in se* over God *ad extra* (and vice-versa)<sup>119</sup> as the proper basis for theological claims, may find its resolu-

119. In the recent revival of Trinitarian theology, Catherine Mowry LaCugna has been an outspoken proponent of God *ad extra* as the starting point of theology, premising her thesis on Karl Rahner's axiom of ontological identity between the immanent and the economic Trinity. Cf. Karl Rahner, «Theology and Anthropology», *Theological Investigations* (23 vols.), vol. 9. (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), pp. 28-45, 32. LaCugna's thesis, plainly put, is that beginning with the earliest Christological and Trinitarian controversies, doctrinal theology attained a level of sophistication which first introduced intra-trinitarian considerations apart from soteriology and God's relationship to us. This tendency was grievously solidified during the Middle Ages by the Scholastics, who managed to make an abstract metaphysics out of the doctrine of the Trinity. Following Rahner, LaCugna sets out to reaffirm the essential unity between economy and theology, as the only means of demonstrating the Trinity's relevance to us. *God for Us: The Trinity & Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), esp. chapter 7. But her point of departure has been sharply contested, among many others, by Paul D. Molnar, a Barthian concerned about the compromise of God's (and humankind's) freedom ensuing from Rahner's (and LaCugna's) axiom of equivalence. For if God is indistinguishable from His involvement in history, what choice did He have in the acts of creation and redemption? Isn't God made thereby «dependent upon and indistinguishable from history?» «Toward a Contemporary Doctrine of the Trinity: Karl Barth and the Present Discussion», *Scottish Journal of Theology* vol. 49, No 3 (1996) 311-357 for Prof. Molnar's full argument and analysis.

LaCugna finds serious fault with Palamism, mainly on grounds of incoherence, following in that respect well known critiques of it, especially the famous editorial of *Istina* 3 (1974) and Rowan William's critical appraisal in his paper «The Philosophical Structures of Palamism», *Eastern Churches Review* 9/1-2 (1977) 19-26. Quite obviously, the subject cannot be further debated in the limited space of this introduction. For recent sympathetic

tion in the harmonious interplay of transcendence and immanence of Palamas' model, which shares an integral relation with apophaticism. It may, after all, be what the grandiose (and currently out of vogue) Barthian system needs for balance, as a corrective to its overbearing docetism and notoriously poor relational theology. For in the last analysis it is not the existence of God as much which should interest us, but the *degree* to which the divine touches the world and the distinctive *manner* of this contact.

**Paper abstract:**

This is an expanded version of what was originally meant as a foreword to the upcoming English publication of Chrestos Yannaras' book *Heidegger and the Areopagite: On the Absence and Ignorance of God* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, ) by the translator. Rather than furnishing an introduction to Yannaras' thought as such, the following pages aim instead to situate Eastern Orthodox apophaticism in the contemporary intellectual scene, where linguistic analysis and deconstruction (especially as they have been pioneered by Wittgenstein and Derrida) have had a swaying impact upon the modern critical look at the categories of transcendence and normativity. Despite frequent claims of fundamental resemblances between apophaticism and the aforementioned techniques, I will argue that the former perspective reflects a pre-Kantian (which is to say, a pre-modern) worldview, in stark contrast to the latter two, and may thus serve as a sounder guide to theological claims, devoid as it is of the overbearing immanentism characteristic of the philosophies shaped after the so-called «linguistic turn».

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accounts on Palamism from the broader and more informed perspective of Eastern patristic theology, see David Coffey, «The Palamite Doctrine of God: A New Perspective», *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 4 (1988): 329-358; F.W. Norris, «Deification: Consensual and Cogent», *Scottish Journal of Theology* 4 (1996): 411-428, esp. n. 15, p. 417.