

## The Effable and The Ineffable

This book struggles with an ancient, yet always relevant question: what is the criterion of correct knowledge, when is knowledge stamped by the validity of the truth, and when is it simply erroneous? What is the criterion of truth?

This book suggests such a criterion, one that has been tried and proven for several centuries and reflects experience in the Greek culture: to distinguish between knowledge that is generated by understanding and knowledge that is generated by relationship. The former provides an individualist-centred utilitarianist knowledge, that defines what, how and why. The latter introduces us in the dynamics of the shared empirical immediacy which is perpetually being completed yet is never exhausted.

Science of any kind is not necessarily utilitarianist: it may illuminate the experience of relationship. However, Philosophy and the Arts are effectively cancelled if they slide into utilitarianism.

In its English translation, this book may pose a constructive challenge as a central gnoseological dilemma that marked the twentieth century may be considered within an English context. This dilemma is the choice between comprehension vs relationship, Greek apophaticism vs Augustinian legalism, T. S. Eliot vs Bertrand Russell.

Christos Yannaras

## Winchester *Modern Orthodox Dialogues*

THE WINCHESTER MODERN ORTHODOX DIALOGUES examine the theological and cultural conversations currently taking place within the Orthodox Christian world. *Modern Orthodox Dialogues* also examines conversations between Orthodox Christianity and Western Christianity. In addition, the series hopes to facilitate additional conversations and avenues of communication between the East and the West. For this reason, it presents and highlights established Orthodox Christian thinkers whose thought is not known in the West. The *Winchester Modern Orthodox Dialogues* will promote new approaches and new voices to contribute to continuing conversations within Christianity.

*Winchester Modern Orthodox Dialogues 1*

# The Effable and The Ineffable

The Linguistic Boundaries of Metaphysical Realism

Christos Yannaras

Edited and with an Introduction by Andreas Andreopoulos

Translated by Jonathan Cole



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## Winchester *Modern Orthodox Dialogues*

General Editor: Andreas Andreopoulos

THE WINCHESTER UNIVERSITY PRESS is pleased to publish *The Effable and The Ineffable: The Linguistic Boundaries of Metaphysical Realism*. This title is a translation of *To rito kai to arrito: Ta glossika oria realismou tis metafysikis* by Christos Yannaras, first published in 1999 in Athens by the Ikaros Press. A second edition of *To rito kai to arrito: Ta glossika oria realismou tis metafysikis* was published in 2008. *The Effable and The Ineffable: The Linguistic Boundaries of Metaphysical Realism* is a translation of the second edition.



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## THE EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

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IT GIVES ME IMMENSE PLEASURE to see the publication of the English translation of *The Effable and the Ineffable* by Christos Yannaras, a work that was initially published in Greek over twenty years ago, yet still constitutes one of the best ways for readers to explore the depth of modern Orthodox theology, and the interconnection of several of the recurrent themes in the thought of Yannaras. This volume is the first in a series of forthcoming publications in modern Orthodox thought through Winchester University Press, and it gives a clear indication of the aims and intents of the series. I would like to thank the late Neil McCaw from WUP, who saw the need for the book series and helped me set it up. Special thanks are also due to Dimitris Panagopoulos, who supported the vision, and shouldered singlehandedly the cost of the translation.

Eastern and Western Christian thought, based respectively on the Greek and the Latin legacy, had enjoyed a long period of dialogue and cross-fertilization in early Christianity. The ideas of Greek and Latin, but also Syriac Fathers were circulated widely in the early Christian world. Likewise, images, liturgical practices, festal celebrations and theological ideas in different forms, genres and shapes, were part of the Christian experience, and travelled in different ways from one place to another, with no special sense of ownership by a distinct local culture. Or, to put it in a different way, Christianity as a way of life was free from geopolitical claims, and pointed instead to a way that tried to embrace the universal and complete condition of the human being. As we read in the *Epistle to Diognetos*, 'Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity. [...] But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to

clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life.<sup>1</sup>

Since then, much has changed. Several historical, cultural and mainly political conditions made the communication between East and West more difficult and less open. Although the schism of 1054 AD, the year when anathemas were exchanged between the Papacy and the Patriarchate of Constantinople, is usually seen as the conventional date for the separation between the East and the West, other events and other reasons for this separation were perhaps much more important. Theological and philosophical thought began to develop in increasingly incompatible directions, until some time in the 13<sup>th</sup> or the 14<sup>th</sup> century it became impossible for theologians and philosophers to operate within the same conceptual paradigm. In addition, the lamentable Fourth Crusade and the sack of Constantinople by fellow Christians, embedded very deeply in the minds and the hearts of the Greeks a distrust of the West, that has never been completely lifted. Finally, after the second fall of Constantinople, this time by the Ottomans in the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, theology rapidly declined in the East, and became less relevant to Western Europe, which followed a distinct and productive path of its own, that resulted in what we may refer to as the common Western theological systematic language.

This lack of communication lasted for centuries, even if individual people occasionally explored the 'other side'. In addition, as Georges Florovsky has explained thoroughly, instead of developing further in its own direction, a good part of Eastern theology followed a path of confusion, by approximating terms and concepts borrowed from the West, which it had nevertheless not digested and not modified in a meaningful way that would reflect its own reality and would suit its own needs.

Nevertheless, a meaningful exchange of ideas took place for the first time after several centuries, with the generation of Russian theologians and philosophers who were expelled by the communist revolution and settled in Western Europe and North America. That group of intellectuals

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1 *Epistola ad Diognetum*, 5, PG 2, 1173.

faced a dual task that had not been faced by anyone in centuries: first, to understand in depth the philosophical language of the West, and second, to articulate their own theology in a way that would make sense to the Western theologians with whom they were starting to share their ideas. Perhaps this attempt to re-establish some meaningful communication with the West, which took place naturally, without the pressure of official channels, not in the context of a formal interdenominational dialogue, was the single most effective contribution of the theologians and philosophers of the Russian diaspora.

This renewal in theological and philosophical expression, however, brought additional results in the Orthodox world. The language of personhood, otherness and communion, apophaticism and the limits of language, allowed Orthodox theologians to express their experience using a fresh approach, more precisely tuned to contemporary life and the modern paradigm.

Christos Yannaras, born in 1935, follows in this path. Yannaras thinks and writes as a cosmopolitan Greek, who has studied deeply Western European thought and engages with it as one who shares in the legacy of Husserl, Heidegger, Lacan and Wittgenstein, while at the same time his spiritual background reflects the immediacy of the small church community, as well as a direct relationship with the Scriptural, the Patristic, and the ancient Greek philosophical tradition. Like several other Greek theologians of his generation, he has accepted the challenge of intercultural dialogue, initiated by the Russian diaspora, yet he has enriched it further, with certain instincts and directions that are found in a more emphatic way in the Greek, rather than in the Russian tradition, such as the insistence on freedom, relationship, and experience. Such concepts seem to be endowed with new meaning in the context of conventional language here, and yet in the way Yannaras uses them, their meaning is illuminated by their original sense. His asceticism is not the way of obedience, but the way of transcending the self in order to submit to love. His concept of freedom is not the deliberation among different choices, but the offering of the self, and the subsequent fullness of the self, in a relationship. His concept of experience is not the empiricism of

positive philosophy, but the shared experience that is defined by – and defines – a community.

In *The Effable and the Ineffable*, translated here by Jonathan Cole who put a lot of thought and care behind every word and expression, Yannaras develops his theological and philosophical view starting from the semiotics of metaphysics, its limitations, and its relationship with truth. Language accommodates, without much discernment, the real as well as the imaginary, but in the context of theology this distinction becomes critical. Yannaras explores here the role of language as a shared code of communication, vis-à-vis the metaphysical as an area that is both defined by shared experience and excluded (or misunderstood) by individual experience. In this context, the difference between shared and individual experience is basic in understanding the divergence between the Eastern and the Western approach. Yet, this is not simply a philosophical pursuit, or a study on gnoseology. God, the historical presence of Jesus Christ, the role of the Paraclete, as well as anthropology as an area inseparable from metaphysics, feature heavily in this exploration of meaning, which stresses that the essential object of theology is nothing less than the question of life and death, existence and eternity.

By challenging the limits or the strength of metaphysical language, Yannaras develops here a kind of apophaticism which is quite devoid of agnosticism. In *The Effable and the Ineffable* Yannaras approaches apophaticism not as the extension of negative theology, as is the case in Lossky, but primarily as the field where the end of Western rationalism meets Eastern meta-logical experience, where Heidegger meets Dionysios the Areopagite, and where Wittgenstein meets Maximos the Confessor. The gap between communal experience and logical or linguistic schemata acts here as a challenge to keep approaching truth, even if there is no end in this approach. The recognition of the limits of language acts as an invitation rather than as a resignation. Faith as trust, logos, in its ancient and in its Patristic sense, and an immense hunger for divine freedom show the direction of the response to this invitation.

Yannaras is not content with routine systematic theology; in fact, he does not have much patience with in-house language and theological formulations and ideas that seem to hold a lot of sway within the

denomination that generated them, but not much anywhere else. *The Effable and the Ineffable* sounds an alarm, warning us about the danger of the collapse of empirical and universally shared meaning into linguistic structures that do not correspond with physical or metaphysical reality. Yet, it is precisely this step that urges Yannaras to express the wish for an interdenominational dialogue which would start with a recognition and confession of the faults and shortcomings of each of the participating sides, rather than, as the case usually is, with the defence of their respective theological ideology. This is evident in the last chapters of the book, where he criticizes the pursuit of an absolute and reified criterion of truth, a sin to which all Christian denominations have occasionally fallen, seeking their particular justification in some sort of higher authority which is nevertheless possessed by them – such as the authority of a supreme leader, the authority of a closed text, or the authority of an ostensibly eternal tradition.

It is in this spirit that *The Effable and the Ineffable* is presented here for the first time in English. Our hope is that English readers will gain a better understanding of modern Orthodox Christian thought, and regardless of whether they will appreciate or disagree with it, they will engage with it at a level that honours the sincerity and the demand for the theology of life and death, existence and eternity, with which this book was written.

Fr Andreas Andreopoulos  
Winchester  
December 2020



## TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

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SEVERAL CHALLENGES CONFRONT the translator of Christos Yannaras' work. One such challenge is that he uses a number of Greek terms for which there are no adequate English equivalents, or, where an ostensible equivalent does exist, it is liable to mislead. Compounding this challenge is the fact that some such words appear frequently throughout the text and are integral to its overall meaning. It is worth noting, as an aside, that many of these same problematic terms are defined by Yannaras in ways that vary from their common meaning in Modern Greek, and thus they also present something of a challenge to the native Greek-speaking reader of Yannaras' work. Happily, some of the terms that fall into this category in the present work are defined at some point within the text itself. Where this is not the case, however, I have provided definitional explanations at the first occurrence of the term in a translator's note.

A second challenge is that Yannaras frequently inserts non-standard hyphens between the constituent parts of Greek terms in order to highlight their etymological meaning, something which obviously cannot be replicated in English translation. Where appropriate I have translated the etymological sense of the term within the text itself, while drawing attention to this unique feature of Yannaras' writing in a translator's note.

Another challenge relates to Yannaras' creative use of the Greek language. In some cases, Yannaras coins new vocabulary. In other cases, he employs common words in Modern Greek in novel ways. This feature of Yannaras' distinctive Greek prose necessitates, on occasion, some equally creative translation in order to convey the sense of such words in a way that is both intelligible and native, to the extent possible, in English prose. Where the translation deviates significantly from the literal Modern Greek meaning of a word, I draw attention to this in a translator's note. In addition to maintaining the fidelity of

the translation, this approach, along with that of drawing attention to Yannaras' idiolectic use of non-standard hyphens, is intended to provide readers with a sense of both the creativity and originality of Yannaras' vocabulary and style, something readily apparent to those able to read the original text in Greek.

I have relied on the New Revised Standard Version for English translations of biblical passages cited by Yannaras. I have made minor adaptations in cases where the New Revised Standard Version translation is clearly at variance with Yannaras' reading of the same passages, or where the rearranged syntax in the English translation does not fit Yannaras' integration of the original syntax into his prose, bearing in mind that all biblical quotes are taken from the Greek of the Septuagint. Such adaptations are noted in translator's notes. Where the New Revised Standard Version is not credited, the translation is my own. In the case of quotations of work originally in German and French, namely that of Wittgenstein and Lacan, I have relied on existing English translations identified in the relevant footnote.

I have similarly drawn on existing translations of patristic texts, where possible, again making minor adaptations in order to reflect Yannaras' interpretation of those texts as necessary. As with biblical quotations, Yannaras quotes all patristic texts in their original Greek (as they appear in the *Patrologia Graeca* edited by J. P. Migne). Yannaras quotes a number of patristic texts for which no English translations exist. I have translated these passages with the invaluable assistance of Fr Andreas Andreopoulos and Fr Doru Costache. As such, translations of patristic passages that do not credit an existing English translation are my own.

The transliteration of Greek words follows the conventions of Modern Greek transliteration, with the exception of instances where Yannaras writes the term in its Classical Greek or Koine form, in which case the transliteration follows the conventions for the form of Greek in question. I thank both Norman Russell and Sotiris Mitralaxis for kindly consulting on the translation of several difficult and/or obscure Modern Greek words.

I acknowledge a special debt of gratitude to Fr Andreas Andreopoulos, whose patient and careful review of the manuscript, along with

his wise counsel in relation to some thorny translation problems, decidedly improved the final product. I also echo Fr Andreopoulos' acknowledgment, in his introduction, of the generous support of Dimitris Panagopoulos, without whom this translation never would have seen the light of day.

Finally, and certainly not least of all, I extend my sincerest thanks and appreciation to Christos Yannaras for graciously and patiently responding to numerous requests for clarification of the Greek text. Yannaras writes often of the unique, distinct and unrepeatable otherness of personhood. In many respects, translation is the most intimate form of relationship with the personal otherness of a text and its author. Deepening my relationship with Christos through this translation has been a personally enriching blessing for which I am ever grateful.

Jonathan Cole  
London  
December 2020



The Effable and  
The Ineffable



## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

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I REGARD THE BOOK *Person and Eros* as the first milestone in my personal journey as an author. In that book I sought to examine responses to the *ontological question*, as I understand them, offered in the Greek philosophical literature of the early and medieval Christian period, albeit in a way that makes sense today, by using a rational methodology.

I believe that book constitutes the foundation or starting point for a *critical ontology*, i.e. an attempt to answer the problematic of existence (its meaning and first cause) in a way that is open to critical validation and empirical refutation—an answer free of a priori explanations and ever subject to more comprehensive clarification and more lucid examination (or to empirical refutation).

As I wrote in the preface to the fourth edition (1987):

Both the starting-point and the mode of the approach presuppose an empirical investigation. And the experience is not exhausted in what is affirmed by the senses. Nor is it simply an intellectual fact—a coincidence of meaning with the object of thought. Nor is it even an escape into a nebulous ‘mysticism’, into individual existential ‘experiences’ beyond any social verification. By the word *experience* I mean here the totality of the multifaceted fact of the *relation* of the subject with other subjects, as also the relation of the subject with the objective givens of the reality surrounding us.<sup>2</sup>

Relational experiences are indicative of the personal mode by which humans exist and act and the *logos*-possessing mode by which the world is activated and exists—a *logos*-possessing mode that denotes *personal*

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<sup>2</sup> Translator's note: translation taken from Christos Yannaras, *Person and Eros*, trans. Norman Russell (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2007), 9. Adapted.

creative activity. For a critical ontology, the starting point for approaching the existential event is the experiential reality of personhood. The means of access (that which makes personhood accessible to knowledge) is *eros*—the ecstatic character of relationships.

My books that followed *Person and Eros* probed the implications of a critical ontology for the way we make sense of the various dimensions and challenges of human life (the disciplines of the so-called human sciences): *Freedom of Morality* (ethics), *Rationalism and Social Practice* (epistemology), *Proposals for a Critical Ontology* (historical-materialist positivism), *Reality and Illusion in Political Economy* (economics), *Postmodern Metaphysics* (postmodern worldviews) and *The Inhumanity of Rights* (law and politics). In *The Schism in Philosophy*, I tested proposals for a critical ontology centred on personhood as an interpretive key to understanding the schism that has separated the Western European and the Greek philosophical traditions. In *Orthodoxy and the West*, I tested those same proposals as a foundation for forming a philosophical history of Modern Hellenism.

In the present book I approach a second milestone in my personal journey as an author. It is an endeavour that precedes, from a systematic perspective, the articulation of a critical ontology, because it seeks to examine the presuppositions underlying the empirical transition from the *signifiers* to the *signifieds* in that articulation. I seek criteria by which to distinguish reality from illusion in our experience of relationships (shared and communally attained knowledge) given the way that experience is enmeshed with language (and the latter's reifying function).

Even proposals for a *critical* ontology are capable of signifying illusory relationships: failing to prevent the confusion of real relational experiences with their psychological substitutes. Words, and the sentences they form, might express *feelings* rather than *meanings* that refer to knowledge of signifieds. The meaning of signifiers might be restricted merely to their common usage in language, to 'the way this use meshes with our life'— the mode by which we have learned to use

signifiers, but also to connect them to specific feelings of certainty, and to experience them in a particular way.<sup>3</sup>

Linguistic references to the *existence of the human being after death* are here proposed as a means of testing the real or illusory character of ontological proposals. The question of the existential event itself—its meaning and first cause—is constitutively interwoven with the enigma of death. All ontological interpretations are finely poised between nihilistic agnosticism and hope in life after death, and in the realistic or imaginary character of that hope. Intellectualism and mysticism—analysis of existential experiences and psychological auto-suggestion—are the means, or the modes, by which human needs are vested in ontological certitudes that reject the ephemeral character of our individual existence.

We speak of the need for ontological certitudes, because the question of whether they are realistic or arbitrary is not merely an epistemological or theoretical problem. How one responds to the question of life after death gives *meaning* to every aspect of daily life, such as the way that individual and collective priorities are ordered and the diverse ways that civilisations have been historically constituted. It is no accident that in the course of history every civilisation has left its mark principally in the form of altars and sanctuaries (vestiges of a shared certainty that ‘the solution of the riddle of life in space and time lies *outside* space and time’<sup>4</sup>), or (for the first time in the case of today’s historical-materialist monism) in signs of the desacralisation of life (a tangible insistence on denying the sacred).

The writings of Heidegger were the spark and catalyst for *Person and Eros*, where I walked in the footsteps of a teacher, as it were. My opposition to his proposals (not to his language and questions) has proven to be particularly fertile. Wittgenstein plays this role in the pages that follow. I believe these two names, among the many that have accompanied and guided my pursuit, have left a greater mark on my labour as an author more than any others (the quality of result of that labour is another

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3 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar*, trans. Anthony Kenny (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), Part I, 1:28–29 (64–65).

4 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness, with introduction by Bertrand Russell (London: Routledge, 1974), 6.4312.

matter). It was my timely captivity to the enchanting audacity and daring hope of Maximos the Confessor that granted me the ease with which I have been able to spend time, intimately and lovingly, with Heidegger and Wittgenstein.

Christos Yannaras

January 1999

Athens

## Chapter 1

### THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN REAL AND ILLUSORY EXPERIENCE

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1. There is no self-evident or straightforward way to separate *real* experience from *psychological substitutes* for real experience, to distinguish reality from illusion.

1.1. Take, for example, the common experience of being in love. People ‘feel’ in love. They live the exhilaration of erotic enthrallment, convinced that their experiences are true and real. Yet after only a short while this intoxicating sense of fulfilment can disappear, radically altering their perspective. Was their experience just an explosion of superficial feelings (an illusion) or the reality of love?

1.2. Religious experiences provide a second example: the unflappable certitude of metaphysical beliefs, rapturous devotion and the heights of extreme emotional intensity. Yet should one’s health suddenly fail, the uncontrollable anxiety of death rears its head in a genuine foretaste of the completely unknown, the utterly unrelatable and absolute solitude. Was the gathering of metaphysical certitudes, of religious excitement and of spiritual raptures all just an illusion? What is the *reality* that religious experiences refer to when one is facing the prospect of death in the absence of any comforting hope for a transition to something familiar and desirable?

1.3 Many more examples are easily found: what reality does the fanatical ideologue experience, or the person sacrificially enlisted in a political cause, or the courageous warrior in an absurd war? By what criterion are we to distinguish genuine friendship from psychological dependence, willing obedience from the kind of discipline that destroys

will, or the intimate bonds of the family from the dynamics of conformity and auto-suggestion?

1.3.1 Even acts of supreme self-sacrifice are capable of serving an inflated super-ego: 'If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing'.<sup>5</sup>

2. The confusion of psychological illusion for reality has primordial underpinnings in language: the attempt to understand signifiers can easily descend into illusory knowledge of what is signified.

2.1 There is a distinct difference between language and reality: language only *signifies* reality. Linguistic signifiers, i.e., words and syntax, are merely conventional markers of reality.

2.2 Language is a convention. Yet, conventional language shapes our experiential *relationship* with reality, defining it with structured concepts. Language composes and articulates reality. We cannot conceive, define or signify anything beyond the possibilities granted by our language.

2.2.1 We do not owe the *possibility of logos*<sup>6</sup> to language. We do, however, owe to it our constitution as *logos* thinking subjects. If *comprehension* of signifiers can easily descend into illusory knowledge of the signifieds, then confusion over reality and fantasy has its basis in the field in which we are constituted by *logos*.

2.3 A linguistic signifier does not signify reality itself, but rather our subjective relationship with reality—a relationship that is distinct from every other subjective relationship with the same signifieds. A common linguistic signifier serves to coordinate our subjective relationship with references to the same signified shared by all the subjects who speak the same language.

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor. 13:3. Translator's note: unless otherwise specified, all biblical translations are taken from the NRSV.

<sup>6</sup> *Logos* is that which reveals what someone or something is and allows access to knowledge of it as a consequence of that revelation. In this regard it captures a number of distinct English concepts that should be read together: logic, reason, principle, cause, speech, communication and gesture.

2.3.1 This coordination allows me to test the accuracy of my own subjective references, even if the real or illusory nature of my relationship with what is signified is not guaranteed by accurate semantics alone. The word ‘love’, for instance, refers speakers of a common language to a shared mental image by which possible semantic misuse of the term can be detected. However, the correct usage of a word within the framework of a particular linguistic code does not confirm the reality of our subjective experience of being in love.

2.3.2 When a linguistic signifier signifies our subjective relationship with sensible signifieds, then the reality of those signifieds can be immediately verified by our individual senses. The challenge of verification arises when a signified is not a sensible object, but a quintessentially subjective relationship in the form of an event, such as love, faith, friendship, obedience, communion, freedom, and so forth—or when a signified is intellectually derived from relational events, such as justice, virtue, God or immortality, amongst others.

2.4 Language exists independently of me. It is a collection or arrangement<sup>7</sup> of signifiers (signs) that refer to given subjective relationships with reality. My own relationship with reality is incorporated into this given nexus of references via a shared language. My induction into a language constitutes my participation in the *relational logoi*<sup>8</sup> (signifiers) that secure collective and *shared* access to reality.

2.4.1 Language itself is just a totality of conventional signs for collectively or collaboratively referring to reality—a conventional means (a useful tool) of relational communion with reality. However, this nexus of conventional signifiers represents the only possible means of subjectively accessing the relational *logoi* that make reality *intelligible* and *shared*. Language makes us participants in the *logos* of reality. It constitutes us as *logos* thinking subjects.

3. Prior to induction into language, the potential of *logos* rests solely

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<sup>7</sup> *Syntaxi*: also ‘syntax’.

<sup>8</sup> Translator’s note: plural of *logos*.

in the referentiality of primal desire, i.e., libido. The *desire* to live is always referential, always activated as an impetus towards relationship, the fulness of union and sex as co-essentiality. Signifiers—the primordial foundation of *logos*—emerge in order to signify the potential of a realised response to vital desire. It turns desire into a concrete demand and moulds it into a referential desire. They form a relationship out of *logos*. It is undoubtedly there, in desire, that the essential primordial process by which I am inducted into language is determined—my formation into a *logos* subject.

3.1 This is why language can initially trap us into confusing what is real with what is desirable. Language is the only means at our disposal for a *logos*-possessing<sup>9</sup> (comprehensible<sup>10</sup> and shared<sup>11</sup>) relationship with reality, and because language is embedded in desire, it can also be undermined by desire. Desire can replace the real *referent* of my *logos* reference.

3.1.1 Fantasy, which is an organic function of desire, intervenes by reorienting the meaning of signifiers towards signifieds that are imaginary possibilities of responding to desire.

4. If libido is life's primal desire—the urge towards *life-as-relationship*—then the *urge-towards-death* is also primally given (an ego-focused, self-centred impulse which inhibits relationship, and a tendency to self-enclose in individualistic self-defence or in selfish non-communion).<sup>12</sup> *Eros* and death, referentiality and narcissistic self-sufficiency, are

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9 *Logiki* is the adjectival form of *logos*, in the sense construed by Yannaras. There is no ideal way to translate this adjective in English and thus '*logos*-possessing' has been adopted here and throughout for the adjective *logiko*. The common meaning of *logiko* in Modern Greek is 'rational' or 'logical'.

10 *Kata-noiti*: Yannaras places a hyphen between the constituent parts of the Greek adjective *comprehensible* to highlight its etymological sense, *according to mind*, i.e., 'in the mind'.

11 *Koinonoumeni*: the verb *koinono* can also be translated 'to commune'. In its verbal form it is translated throughout as 'share/d'. However, the reader should be aware of its connection to the noun *koinonia*, translated throughout as 'communion'.

12 See (indicative only) Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. C.J.M. Hubback (London: International Psycho-analytical, 1922), especially IV and V; Sigmund Freud, *Triebe und Triebchicksale*, 1915; and Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *Vocabulaire de la Psychanalyse* (Paris, PUF, 1981), 372–373.

the existential facts that primordially rule the subject. The desire for life-as-relationship wrestles with the instinctive demand for life centred on the self.

4.1 The natural demand and necessity of self-centred life tends to reverse the direction of libido, vesting it in self-eroticism—a cannibalistic version of the object of vital desire. The bearer of desire's instinctive tendency is to devour every possible source of response to desire, to appropriate the 'field of the Other' as a means of securing the self in the ultimate non-communion, which is death.

4.2 But language is also capable of trapping us into confusing the original *referentiality* of signifiers (the urge towards life) with a self-serving construal of signifieds (the urge towards death). Our relationship with signified reality is mediated by an understanding of signifiers that can give the illusion of control over, and a sense of appropriation of, the signifieds: 'I signify, therefore I possess. I understand, therefore I rule'.

4.2.1 'We think that what happens in the case of the names happens also in the case of the things'<sup>13</sup>

4.3 So love, faith, friendship, obedience, justice, virtue, God and immortality may just be signs that refer to the intellectual phantasms of illusory desire or self-preserving beliefs—signs and phantasms divorced from the relational experiences of real signifieds.

4.3.1 This is why it is difficult (perhaps the most difficult thing of all) to separate the experience of reality from *psychological substitutes* for real experience—to distinguish what is real from what is imagined, yet desired, or from intellectual belief. It takes great effort to maintain relationships in their genuine nature, and to not let them deteriorate into the subjugation, domination or appropriation of the second party to the relationship—the Other.

4.3.1.1 Since language expresses and shapes human relationships with

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<sup>13</sup> Aristotle, *On Sophistical Refutations*, trans E.S. Forster (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1955), 165a, 8-9.

*The Effable and The Ineffable*

reality, its own field, above all else, sets the boundaries of the struggle to distinguish reality from illusion.

## Chapter 2

### INTELLECTUAL IDOLS: CONFUSING SIGNIFIERS AND SIGNIFIEDS

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1. We speak of metaphysics (what is beyond (meta) physics<sup>14</sup>) with words such as God, soul, and immortality. Such words are likely understood in the same way by all. However, what could ‘understood’ mean in the case of words derived from abstract concepts?

‘Understanding a word’ may mean: *knowing* how it is used; *being able to* apply it.<sup>15</sup>

1.1 Correct usage of a word within the context of a given language confirms its successful comprehension. Comprehension is the subjective correlation of a word with the meaning it has in a shared language, i.e. with what this same word means for everyone. Collective comprehension is demonstrated by a word’s usage.

The use of a word in the language is its meaning.<sup>16</sup>

1.1.2 Correct usage indicates that the meaning of a word has been understood successfully, i.e., what the word signifies within the function of the language. In such cases, the word has been understood as a linguistic signifier, irrespective of whether or not the signifier conveys knowledge of the signified to which it refers.

I want to say the place of a word in grammar is its meaning. But I might also say: ‘the meaning of a word is what the explanation

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14 *Meta-ti-fysiki*: literally ‘after-the-physics’. Yannaras here hyphenates the constituent parts of the Greek term for metaphysics (*metafysiki*) in order to highlight its etymological meaning.

15 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar*, Part I, 1:10 (47).

16 *Ibid.*, Part I, I:23 (60)

of its meaning explains’<sup>17</sup> —[i.e., its use]. The explanation of the meaning explains the use of the word.<sup>18</sup>

1.2 Explaining the meaning of the words ‘God’, ‘soul and ‘immortality’ can only clarify the way these words are used and function semantically within the language. Whether or not these words denote real or imaginary signifieds is not something that can be determined merely by comprehending their meaning.

1.2.1 The meaning of a word (what it signifies<sup>19</sup>) has nothing to do with whether it corresponds to an existent or non-existent, or to a real or imaginary signified. The meaning of words such as ‘centaur’, ‘mermaid’, ‘sphinx’ and ‘tragelaphus’ can be understood correctly. Using these words correctly within a language will ensure successful comprehension. Yet what is signified by that correct usage remains non-existent and imaginary. What could confirm their non-existence? Surely not deficient comprehension (or non-comprehension) of their meaning.

1.3 Understanding the meaning of words can validate our emotional experiences or the experiential modes that accompany comprehension, but never anything more.

We say to a child ‘No, no more sugar’ and take it away from him. Thus he learns the meaning of the word ‘no’. If, while saying the same words, we had given him a piece of sugar he would have learnt to understand the word differently. (In this way he has learnt to use the word, but also to associate a particular feeling with it, to experience it in a particular way).<sup>20</sup>

1.3.1 The words ‘God’, ‘soul’ and ‘immortality’ are capable of being both accurately understood and accompanied by particular feelings, of being experienced in specific ways—feelings of fear and awe, the sense of losing control, just judgment or submission to an authority may all

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17 Ibid. Part I, I:23 (9). Translator’s note: square brackets Yannaras’.

18 Ibid.

19 Translator’s note: In Greek the words ‘meaning’ (*simasia*) and ‘signify’ (*simainei*) are etymologically connected in a way that they are not in English.

20 Ibid., Part I, II:28 (64).

be associated with the above signifiers. Alternatively, they may be vested with the psychological need to find refuge in wanted certainties.

1.3.2 Comprehension of the above signifiers might function in the same way that knowledge of the rules of chess does: the multiplicity of *functional* meanings possessed by each word possibly corresponds to the multiplicity of permissible moves of each chess piece. Comprehending signifiers might also function in the same way that coefficients do in solving mathematical problems—signifying a first cause, the necessary incorruptibility of non-material, objective vindication, the need to connect the corruptible to the incorruptible, and so on.

I can have the possible ways of applying a word in my head in the same sense as the chess player has all the rules of chess in his head...<sup>21</sup> When someone interprets, or understands, a sign in one sense or another, what he is doing is taking a step in a calculus (like a calculation).<sup>22</sup>

2 Language is a trap capable of imprisoning us by substituting what exists and is real with autonomous intellectual functions and their emotional corollaries or concomitant experiential modes.

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21 Ibid., Part I, I:10 (49).

22 Ibid., Part I, I:13 (51).

## Chapter 3

### RELATIONSHIPS: EXPERIENCE AND SYMBOLISM

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1 What is an effective alternative to the autonomy of comprehension, to its epistemic self-sufficiency?

What mode of comprehension is not restricted to correct intellectual reception and usage of linguistic signifiers, but also confirms the reality or non-reality of their signifieds?

What could secure (or open) access to knowledge of reality via signifiers?

By what means might we distinguish the existent from the non-existent, what is real from intellectual idols?

2 A possible answer might be: ‘only relationship’ (the relational event, relational experiences, the epistemic immediacy of relationships).

2.1 Event, experience, epistemic immediacy—we need words that provide a starting point for explaining the meaning of ‘relationship’, for relationship too is a word whose meaning requires explanation.

2.1.1 The words that may explain the *meaning* of relationship have their own meaning that also must be understood correctly. Only through successive and repeated comprehension can one arrive at the correct reception and use (before anything else) of the word ‘relationship’.

2.2 Let’s look at the way this word is used in Greek:

‘Relationship’ [Σχέση–*schesi*] is derived from the verb ‘to have’ [ἔχω–*echo*] (σχήσω–*schiso* in the future tense and ἔσχον–*eschon* in the aorist). The word denotes the ‘how’ of having<sup>23</sup>—an event, something that happens or

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<sup>23</sup> *To pos echein*: literally ‘the how to have’.

an action, i.e., a referential event, happening or act. The ‘how’ specifies a mode, the mode of referring—‘to have-as-towards’<sup>24</sup> someone or something, ‘towards the other’.

The right hand, then, is not right by nature, but is understood as such according to its relationship towards the other.<sup>25</sup>

‘God’ denotes nature; ‘Father’ denotes his relationship towards the Son.<sup>26</sup>

A beloved is bound to their lover, neither bodily nor because they are in the same space, but by virtue of a relationship.<sup>27</sup>

2.2.1 What is signified by the word ‘relationship’ (its meaning) is an event, state or act of reference. ‘The reference, proximity, analogy, similarity, connection or interdependence that exists between two or more things...communication between people, familiarity with someone or something...a close acquaintance, familial relationship, friendship, erotic bond, care, or love’.<sup>28</sup>

2.3 We could speak of two kinds or types of events, situations or acts of reference that are signified by the word ‘relationship’: one entails the dialectical connection between people or things external to (before) the subjective, and a second where the subjective is itself determinant of (a factor in) in the relationship.

2.3.1 The relationship between two or more mathematical values, two or more objects in space, or the relationship between cause and effect, capital and labour, and that amongst chess pieces, are all examples of connections whose knowledge is exhausted merely in comprehension.

2.3.2 A subject’s relationships, whether with other subjects or with objects given in reality, constitute a modal ‘how’, the knowledge of which is not exhausted in the comprehension of merely a single signifier,

24 *To echein os-pros*: literal translation.

25 Diogenes Laertius, *Lives and Eminent Philosophers* 9: 87.

26 Athanasios the Great, *Dialogue I on the Trinity*, PG 28:1153d.

27 Nemesios Emmesis, *On the Nature of Man*, PG 40:600b.

28 Dimitrios Dimitrakos, *Μέγα Λεξικόν τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς Γλῶσσης* [*Grand Lexicon of the Greek Language*], Vol. 8 (Athens: Domi, 1958), pp.7054–7055.

a single objective meaning or a single definite sense. This is because, when a subject forms a relationship, all its referential and epistemic capabilities converge and work together, e.g., sensations, intellect, judgment, imagination, intuition and emotional sensitivity. And these capabilities represent modes that actualize a subject's *otherness*. Each of this subject's relationships is a realization and manifestation of subjective otherness—a unique and unrepeatable event or action, irreducible to the uniform comprehension implicit in a definitive meaning.

3 By 'experience' we mean the subjective knowledge that arises from the immediacy of a subject's relationships—from the convergence and contribution of all of this subject's epistemic capabilities in respect of the relationships it realises. This kind of knowledge (knowledge through trial)<sup>29</sup> refers to the 'complete' knowledge ('in accordance with all'<sup>30</sup> our epistemic capabilities). We differentiate experience, in the sense of whole<sup>31</sup> or complete knowledge, from the partial or elliptical character of knowledge provided merely by the comprehension of a language's signifiers or merely by the impressions of the senses.

3.1 'Experience' and 'relationship', on their subjective construal, have interpenetrating, but not necessarily identical meanings. Relationship can have a wider meaning than experience. In referring to a work of art we can talk about a poetic-creative relationship that produces a physical piece of art, i.e., an artist's relationship with their material. We can also talk about a relationship that produces scientific conclusions, i.e. the relationship between the observer and what is observed. Experience, on the other hand, may also refer to a non-relational subjective experience, as in physical pain, mental pain or fear of death. Still, experience is always a source of knowledge and relationship is always an event that is experienced.

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29 *En-peira*: a reference to the etymology of the Greek word for experience (*empeiria*). Trial here has the sense of 'attempt' or 'test'.

30 *Kata-to-olon*: literally, 'according to the all'. An allusion to the etymology of the Greek term *katholiko* translated 'complete' immediately before. *Katholiko* also means 'whole', 'universal' and 'catholic'.

31 *Akeraii*: also 'indivisible'.

3.2 Experiential knowledge has an absolutely subjective otherness to it, which is why it cannot be shared as such.

3.2.1 Even in cases where subjects form mutual relationships and participate in the same reciprocal event, the experiential knowledge furnished by those relationships remains unique and distinct for each subject. This is because experiential knowledge arises from the existentially given otherness of each subject's mental processes and referential actions.

4 Experiential knowledge can only be *shared* indirectly, through the significatory code of a language, or by means of artistic, musical or dance expression.

4.1 Subjective experiences may be *shared* through language when linguistic signifiers function primarily as *symbols*, and only secondarily as intellectual meanings.

4.1.1 By 'symbol' we mean a linguistic (or some other such) sign that 'brings together'<sup>32</sup> (places with, coordinates) partial<sup>33</sup> subjective experiences to form a common reference to a single experientially accessible signified. Symbols perform the function of prompting or sparking in each subject the recollection or re-living of that subject's unique and distinct relationships with particular signifieds.

4.1.2 The word 'apple', for example, is a meaningless acoustic-vocal synthesis to the ear of someone who speaks a different language. To someone who speaks the same language, however, that particular sound recalls their relational experiences with a particular fruit, which they have learned to signify or to name using the same phonemes.

No sound is by nature a noun: it becomes one, by becoming a symbol.<sup>34</sup> Words spoken are symbols or signs of affections

32 *Σύν* and *βολέω-βόλος-βολή*: See Pierre Chantraine, *Dictionnaire Étymologique de la Langue Grecque* (Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 1968), 162. Translator's note: Yannaras is here highlighting the root of the Greek word for symbol (*symvolo*) i.e., *syn-vallo*—'to put with'.

33 *Epimerous*: 'partial' in the sense of part of a larger, more complete whole.

34 Aristotle, *On Interpretation*, trans. Harold P. Cook (London: William Heinemann, 1938), 16a.27–28.

or impressions of the soul; written words are the signs of words spoken.<sup>35</sup>

4.1.2.1 We know what an apple is through the unique and distinct subjective relational experience that each of us has with that particular fruit. This experience is imprinted on our 'soul', as 'a passion<sup>36</sup> of the soul', not in the form of an intellectual 'theory' (cf. Aristotle's distinction between 'experience' and 'theory'<sup>37</sup>). When the utterance 'apple' is heard, it prompts in each subject the recollection of relational experiences with that particular fruit, in addition to correlating that subject's experiential reference with those references of other subjects to the same fruit.

4.2 When a word is uttered, then, in the context of the linguistic communication between two subjects, it establishes an immediate inter-subjective relationship by coordinating individual experiences, thus facilitating experiential communion. At that point the utterance functions as a *symbol*, by bringing together or coordinating the recollections of individual experiences to form a common reference—it transforms a common linguistic reference into a *shared* experience of immediate inter-subjective relationship.

4.2.1 Utterances, of course, are only potentially *symbolic* (a dynamic possibility). An utterance could be received individually as merely a reference to an intellectual meaning, the recollection of a particular individual thought—an intellectual 'phantasm'—rather than the recollection of a relational experience. Or, it might establish linguistic communication as a moment of incidental convergence between separate understandings of the meaning of that communication. Or again, the semantic accuracy of the utterance might be verified solely on the basis of its correct linguistic use.

4.2.2 The function of language does not necessitate, nor does it automatically establish, relationships of shared experience. Linguistic communication is always open to an unlimited spectrum of relational

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 16a.3–4.

<sup>36</sup> *Pathima*: 'passion' in the philosophical sense of the term.

<sup>37</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, 1258b.11.

possibilities, notwithstanding its underlying basis of shared semantic utterances and a commonly accepted syntax. This spectrum ranges from the non-communion that results from the idiosyncratic private construal of linguistic signifiers to the active participation in a shared inter-subjective reference to an immediate common experiential.

5 Linguistic communication always preserves and reflects the indeterminate and unlimited dynamic of relationship as an event. Relationships will forever remain a struggle for individual self-transcendence, and as a struggle they will always entail the ever-present possibility of failure. For example, relationships could become alienated in such a way that makes them merely intellectual correlations, private psychological illusions or unilateral imposition, domination and subjection, i.e., different ways of rejecting interpersonal communion.

5.1 When relationships of interpersonal communion are attained, on the basis of the whole epistemic experience, the primary function of language becomes *symbolic*, although the signifiers themselves continue to be used relationally. When reinforcing individuality assumes priority, however, language functions in a primarily *semantic-oriented* (utilitarian) fashion and linguistic signifiers become reified, to the extent possible, as ‘constants’ of communication. Thus, the signifiers replace experiential participation in the reality of signifieds.

5.2 *Symbols* help to maintain the priority of experience by coordinating incomplete individual experiential access to reality through common references to that reality— experiential communion assumes precedence as a means of verifying reality, while words and utterances are understood relationally and serve as useful symbolic tools.

If someone concurs as to things, I won't disagree as to the words...  
for truth for us is not in words, but in things...nor does my goal  
relate to words, but the whole dispute is about things.<sup>38</sup>

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38 Gregory Palamas, ‘Τόμος συνοδικός τῆς Συνόδου τοῦ 1351’ [*Synodal Tome of the Council of 1351*], in *Τὰ δογματικά καὶ συμβολικά μνημεῖα τῆς Ὀρθοδόξου Καθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας, τόμος I* [*Dogmatic and Symbolic Monuments of the Universal Orthodox Church, Vol. I*], ed. Ioannis Karmiris (Athens, 1960), 379–380.

5.2.1 Wittgenstein did not consider, or perhaps he ignored, the etymology and primordial meaning of *symbol*. He used the word ‘*symbol*’ to mean ‘a sign with a sense’.<sup>39</sup> He saw in the symbol the ‘expression’ (Ausdruck) of a sense, what it is that ‘characterises the form and content’ of a sign: ‘in order to recognise a symbol by its sign we must observe how it is used with a sense’.<sup>40</sup>

Overlooking the etymology of *symbol*—the linguistic coordination of relational experiences—appears to be the pivotal point at which Wittgenstein’s otherwise ingenious treatise on epistemology proves ultimately to be inadequate (a discrete systematic treatise would be required to substantiate this claim). By equating language merely with the explicit demonstration of senses as they are conceptualised in thought,<sup>41</sup> along with the explicit demonstration of the logico-syntactical use of linguistic signs,<sup>42</sup> Wittgenstein was led to the extremely problematic position (which he subsequently disavowed in some notes<sup>43</sup>) of identifying the limits of language with those of logic, which are also the limits of the world.<sup>44</sup> This produces serious epistemological gaps, and in the process makes philosophy a totality of nonsensical (without sense) propositions,<sup>45</sup> thus either reducing it to merely ‘a critique of language’,<sup>46</sup> or simply substituting it with ‘propositions of natural science—i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy’.<sup>47</sup>

Still, the *symbolic* function of language—language as signifiatory of relational experiences and as a product of recalling and provoking relationships of complete epistemic immediacy—is tacitly, or unwittingly,

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39 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 3.31: ‘I call any part of a proposition that characterises its sense an expression (or a symbol)’; and 3.32: ‘A sign is what can be perceived of a symbol’.

40 *Ibid.*, 3.326.

41 *Ibid.*, 4–4.001, 4.022: ‘A thought is a proposition with a sense. The totality of propositions is language’; ‘A proposition *shows* its sense’.

42 *Ibid.*, 3.327: ‘A sign does not determine a logical form unless it is taken together with its logico-syntactical employment’.

43 See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar*, Appendix 4A & B (210–214).

44 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 5.6–5.61: ‘*The limits of my language* mean the limits of my world. Logic pervades the world: the limits of the world are also its limits’.

45 *Ibid.*, 4.003: ‘Most of the propositions and questions to be found in philosophical works are not false but nonsensical’.

46 *Ibid.*, 4.0031: ‘All philosophy is a ‘critique of language’.

47 *Ibid.*, 6.53.

assumed by Wittgenstein when he speaks of ‘things that cannot be put into words...They make themselves manifest...They are what is mystical’,<sup>48</sup> or when he also says that ‘the sense of the world must lie outside the world’,<sup>49</sup> or again when he notes in relation to his own philosophical work (the *Tractatus*):

My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognises them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.)<sup>50</sup>

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48 Ibid., 6.522: ‘There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. *They make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical [das Mystische].’

49 Ibid., 6.41.

50 Ibid., 6.54.

## Chapter 4

### LINGUISTIC MEANING AS A 'PASSAGE TO THE PROTOTYPE'

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1 We speak of God, the soul and immortality. In all likelihood, these words are commonly understood by all. However, their common comprehension does not guarantee that they refer to existent and real signifieds.

1.1 It is possible that these words refer to signifieds that do really exist. But it is equally possible that what they signify is non-existent. They might refer to facts that are commonly (immediately and completely) experienced. Or they might just point to the products of collective imagination.

2 When linguistic signifiers refer to tangible objects such as an apple, a pigeon or the sea, it is easy to test whether their comprehension recalls for the subject information about the existence of the signifieds or experiences of an immediate relationship with them. However, experiential verification of what exists and is real does not always, nor necessarily, result from a tangible relationship—it is not restricted to sensory impressions alone. A significant amount of knowledge about reality arises from the trust we place in interpersonal relationships, from the experience and nature of inter-subjective relationships, and not from what we can individually grope and touch in the sensible world.

2.1 How can we judge whether the linguistic signifiers that refer to non-tangible facts actually point to physical realities, or whether their significatory references only extend to concepts that are imaginary, purely intellectual, or the product of psychological auto-suggestion?

2.1.1 Knowledge can be exhausted in the mere comprehension of

information in a narrow sense, i.e., intellectual concepts alone. Such a comprehension will likely fill the absence of relational experiences of signifieds, or the absence of participation in interpersonal relationships of shared knowledge with commonly accepted meanings. A subject's comprehension is also likely to be interpolated by psychological substitutes for 'collective'<sup>51</sup> experience ('according to the whole' through our epistemic capabilities). These substitutes are invariably oriented towards the individual, and manifest as projections of insecurity, the fear of growing up and fortifying the ego with transcendent certitudes.

2.2 How can we avoid equating signifieds with their mere linguistic meaning or turning signifiers into autonomous intellectual idols? How can we distinguish existential references to what exists, yet is not sensible, from our psychological need to construe the non-existent as existent? How can we avoid the psychological perversion of comprehension so that we only verify what exists and is real?

2.2.1 Linguistic signifiers recall, prompt and orient our existentially given referential capability. Signifiers are capable of activating this given referentiality as *ecstatic* potential, i.e., the possibility of having a relationship with signifieds. But then again, perhaps not—they might simply recall information or mnemonic images of signifieds. Mnemonic images do not necessarily constitute recollection of relational experiences of signifieds.

2.2.2 If someone says: 'tell us about Alexander the Great', we immediately recall all the information we have read, heard and seen that comprises our mnemonic image of him, although we probably also inject our personal feelings into the information. If someone says: 'tell us about your mother', on the other hand, our mnemonic images are vested with an immediate lived reference, an immediate epistemic experience and the recollection of relational reciprocity. If, when someone says: 'tell us about God', we recall mnemonic images consisting purely of intellectual information and individual psychological experiences, then our language betrays that we are talking about someone who does not exist.

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<sup>51</sup> *Katholiki*: also 'catholic' and 'universal'

3 Language exists independently of our subjective relationships. It is therefore possible to use words from the common linguistic code without having ever realised the relationships fundamentally signified by each of them. It is possible to treat words as nothing more than signifiers, compensating for our lack of experience of what they signify with either imaginary representations or psychological projections.

3.1 The non-relational use of a shared language's signifiers can easily descend into equating knowledge with the mere comprehension of signifiers. Because signifiers are conceptually fixed and stable, and because they are understood uniformly by every subjective intellect, they may be vested with our individual need for objective certainty—our psychological need for control, appropriation and ownership of knowledge of the real.

Moreover, the semiotic transcription of reality into a shared language conveys, to a large extent, our relational experiences with actual facts, but in the process, virtually every semiotic transcription (even the transcription of non-relational intellectual conceptions and psychological projections) misidentifies 'reality' with illusion.

4 Let's consider for a moment words like centaur, mermaid, sphinx and tragelaphus. We understand what these words signify. We even have a mental image (a representational form) of the 'species' that they refer to. Their signifieds are identified solely with our intellectual conceptualisation of them, i.e., with the eidetic, creative visualization of fragmentary elements from reality which have been formed into imaginary entities. True comprehension in this case relates to understanding figments of the imagination—comprehension does not signal a relationship with physical reality.

4.1 We would describe someone who believed that these intellectual phantasms were real as hopelessly naïve and credulous—someone convinced that centaurs, mermaids, sphinxes and tragelaphi actually exist. Such superficial credulity is the result of a person bypassing relational experience instead placing their trust in intellectual concep-

tualisation as the sole means of verifying what exists and is real. Such a person ends up psychologically investing in illusory concepts.

4.1.1 This type of superficial belief in supernatural phantasms of the intellect is perhaps not the preserve of a handful of naïve people alone. It may also be the foundation upon which entire metaphysical systems and religious traditions and their practices have been built, accounting for millions of followers over many centuries. Confusing reality with illusion is a critical factor in human inadequacy and failure—or, in the language of Christianity, the ‘fall’ of humankind.

4.1.2 Of course, words such as centaur, mermaid, sphinx and tragelaphus do not just function as self-contained literal concepts. They can also function as allegories, when they ‘address something else’<sup>52</sup> beyond their eidetic intellectual signification. They are capable of symbolising a relationship with reality, because relational experiences can be recalled more lucidly when the other party to the relationship (the one that is external to the subject) is depicted by imaginary representations that exaggerate the properties and characteristics of the object. The fictitious ‘phantasm’ of the centaur, for example, depicts the boor, the barbarian or male lust. The ‘phantasm’ of the sphinx depicts the bearer of an enigmatic threat. The tragelaphus depicts the monstrous perversion of certain things and conditions, and so on.<sup>53</sup> By this semantic process, then, words such as these no longer refer to non-existent signifieds, but

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52 *Allo-agorevoun*: literal translation. Yannaras is here highlighting the etymological meaning of the Greek word *alligoria* (allegory).

53 George W. Botsford and Charles A. Robinson, *Hellenic History* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 191: ‘On either side of the shield were carved battles of giants and of amazons, on her sandals a struggle between Lapiths and Centaurs. Thus was suggested, as in the western pediment at Olympia, the triumph of civilisation over barbarism’; Konstantinos Eleftheroudakis, *Ἐγκυκλοπαιδικὸν Λεξικόν* [*Encyclopaedic Lexicon*], s. v. ‘κένταυρος’ [*centaur*]: ‘a human upper half with the lower half being a horse. According to tradition, they lived between Pilius and Ossid and were boorish and lascivious’; and Dimitrakos, *Grand Lexicon of the Greek Language*, s. v. ‘γοργόνα’ [*mermaid*]: ‘A *daimon* of the sea possessing a female body down to the waist and the body of a fish below that with one or two fins at the end of the tail; metaphorically used to denote a large bodied, ugly or ill-tempered woman’; and s. v. ‘τραγέλαφος’ [*tragelaphus*]: ‘an imaginary animal with the body of a deer and a goat; metaphorically: a strange, monstrous or perverse creature’.

to real experiences—they recall, prompt and coordinate experiences of what exists and is real.

4.2 Let us now consider an example of the opposite of extreme naïve credulity: someone who regards as real and existent only that which can be sensibly verified—only those signifieds, within the semantics of a language, that we use to form relationships via our senses. Such a person is self-condemned to ignorance of the reality denoted by signifiers irreducible to consistent surface description, i.e. to our Euclidean representational ability. Such a person is self-condemned to ignorance of the reality that is denoted and shared by the language of poetry, allegory, and today also of quantum physics.

4.2.1 Wave–particle duality, the beyond-space, holistic connection of elementary particles, the ten dimensions of space where the foundational processes of the quantum field are active, the movement of electrons backwards in time (a movement that turns it into a positron), the simultaneous passage of the same photon from two different polarizing beamsplitters, and so on, are all examples of signifiers that do not refer to signifieds open to sensible relationship, nor to allegory or the arbitrary inventions of the intellect or imagination. These are examples of verified facts about reality that are not subject to sensible or representational perception.

4.2.1.1 The language of quantum physics mentioned above as an example consists of signifiers that refer to an active, ‘becoming’ reality—a reality of active relationships. In this language the relational dynamic manifests as the mode of reality, but also as the mode of knowing reality. Knowledge does not entail subjective verification of physical facts or ‘states of affairs’ (Sachverhalten<sup>54</sup>). Rather, knowledge entails participation in actual relationships—it is what follows from the relational event.

4.2.1.1 Knowledge in this sense certainly relativises what is sensible and intellectually apparent, not in the sense of making what is apparent

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54 Cf. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 1: ‘The world is all that is the case’; 2: ‘What is the case—a fact—is the existence of states of affairs’.

ambiguous or questionable in and of itself, but in the sense of freeing what is apparent from being mistaken for the definite objectivity of signifiers. Knowledge is a relationship that cannot be exhausted by sensory impressions and data. Rather, it is realised dynamically and without predetermination through the participation of the observer in what is being observed, and, outside of the scientific endeavour, as the immediacy of the subject's communion with the existential becoming of reality.

'Fire' presupposes both something burning and something doing the burning, and 'coolness' presupposes something made cool and something doing the cooling... 'sight' presupposes both something seen and something seeing... for it is not possible to know or to talk about relationships in the absence of the things being related.<sup>55</sup>

5 The words 'God', 'soul' and 'immortality' are capable of functioning linguistically as self-contained literal concepts that have no semantic reference beyond their illusory intellectual conceptuality. They may also function as allegories, symbolically 'iconising' (coordinating a unified meaning) psychological substitutes focused on the individual, born of existential insecurity mixed with the yearning to transcend death. In the end, they may also function as linguistic signifiers that refer to the reality of actualized relationships, a reality not subject to sensible or representational perception, and accessible only via the subject's experiential participation in signified relationships.

5.1 From their earliest historical appearance, Christian communities, or churches—at least as far as the oldest texts and sources attest, as interpreted by subsequent tradition, i.e., the so-called Orthodox or Eastern tradition—adopted the aforementioned signifiers (then already extant in language) exclusively in the sense of the third function outlined above: as referring to the reality of active relationships, a reality that is not subject to sensible or representational perception, and which is accessible only via the subject's experiential participation in signified relationships.

5.1.1 In the earliest Christian and orthodox understanding, humanity

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<sup>55</sup> Maximos the Confessor, *Disputation with Pyrrhus*, PG 91:316cd.

was not called by the gospel to accept, adopt or embrace intellectual concepts. Rather, the gospel called the human being to *participate* in relationships that constitute a unified ecclesial community (the ‘body’ of each local Christian gathering). Relationships constitute the *mode* of ecclesial reality and ecclesial reality’s mode of *knowing*.

5.1.2 If we extract from this *mode* ‘truths’, ‘ideas’, ‘dogmas’, ‘ethical principles’, ‘mystical visions’ and so on, i.e., if we go down the route of making the semantics of ecclesial-centred experiences autonomous and self-sufficient, then we create a language that refers solely to intellectual concepts or psychological projections—a language that does not spread the good news regarding a particular *reality*.

6 We could summarise the Christian good news of the gospel in the following phrase: ‘We know God by cultivating a relationship, not by understanding a concept’.

## Chapter 5

### THE REALISM OF CONSISTENT APOPHATICISM

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1 'We cannot conceive God, let alone talk about him'.<sup>56</sup>

In principle, what we understand and express by the word 'God' is a meaning. That meaning refers to a signified that can neither be conceived nor articulated.

2 Correctly understanding the meaning of the word 'God' itself excludes the possibility of understanding and articulating the signified to which it refers.

3 We nevertheless understand the meaning of the word 'God' primarily by transferring its meaning to substitutionary concepts for what it signifies—signifieds such as the first 'cause', the supreme 'being', absolute 'spirit', and so forth.

3.1 We understand the meaning of the word 'God' by shifting its meaning onto things in the world ('cause', 'being', 'spirit') or by shifting its meaning onto our conceptualisation of possible states in the realm of subjective perception (always in connection to other rational propositions).

3.1.1 Hence we understand the word 'God' in conjunction with the experiential logic of *causality*: it is logical (in accord with the presuppositions of our epistemic experience) for the existential event and the world as it exists, which is to say all possible states in the realm of subjective perception, to have a single originating cause. We call that cause 'God'.

3.1.2 Understanding God as a first cause logically presupposes that he is *uncaused*. We can only understand the meaning of 'uncaused' as the

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<sup>56</sup> Maximos the Confessor, *Commentary on 'On the Divine Names'*, PG 4:200c.

semantic antithesis of 'caused', which is to say only in a narrow sense. We have no experiential data that could offer, even by way of analogy, knowledge of the uncaused. What 'uncaused' signifies lies outside all the possible conditions of our given experience.

3.1.3 The meaning of 'uncaused' is semantically connected to the meaning of 'uncreated'. We also conceive the uncreated exclusively in the sense of an antithesis to experiential knowledge of the created. We understand it as a signifier, but what it signifies remains inaccessible to epistemic conceptualisation.

3.2 We talk about the uncaused and the uncreated 'according to the measure of our language (for we are unable to transcend it)'.<sup>57</sup>

3.3 Using that same 'measure' of linguistic logic we define God by ascribing to him adjectives that are semantically intelligible by virtue of their senses being strict antitheses. The words 'timeless', 'infinite', 'unrestricted', 'supersubstantial', 'formless', etc., are concepts only by virtue of antithesis. They are incapable of constituting a positive, if even only intellectual, conceptuality.

4 The meaning of existence itself cannot be intellectually associated with the signifier 'God', since the uncreated cause of the existential event is necessarily (within the bounds of our perceptive capabilities) something other than the existential products of that cause.

In reality there is no exact likeness between caused and cause, for the caused carry within themselves only such images of their originating sources as are possible for them, whereas the causes themselves are located in a realm transcending the caused, according to the argument regarding their source. Take a familiar example: joys and woes are said to be the cause in us of joy and woe without themselves being the possessors of such feelings. The fire which warms and burns is never said itself to be burnt and warmed. Similarly, it would be wrong, I think, to say that life itself lives or that light itself is enlightened, unless such words happened

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., PG 4:189b.

to be employed in a different sense to suggest that the things caused preexist more fully and more truly in the causes.<sup>58</sup>

4.1 What is under discussion here is the way that we understand meaning. The signifiers ‘being’ and ‘existence’<sup>59</sup> both orient our experiential access towards the common quality of the things that exist within the entire world—to their quality of ‘existence’. If we assume that the things that exist are created, then their common quality of existing cannot logically be attributed also to their uncreated cause.

4.1.1 We only know ‘being’ and ‘existence’ as the created result (conceptually at least) of an uncreated cause. We further know that signifiers that refer to something caused cannot logically signify the quality of its cause - this is beyond the capabilities of the rational methodology we use to substantiate something.

4.1.2 That is why ‘one cannot speak of existence at all when it comes to God, for he pre-exists, which is to say that he is prior to existence itself’.<sup>60</sup>

(The divine) is not and cannot be grasped; thus you cannot understand it, for it does not exist; this is what ignorant knowledge means.<sup>61</sup>

4.2 The signification ‘he who is the cause of what exists’ refers to something different from and other than what we know as existence, using our capabilities of perception. He who is the cause of what exists is non-existent (‘not a being at all’)<sup>62</sup> in relation to anything we understand as existent.

5 However, the referential function of signification still preserves the presupposed constitutive potential of language and logic—the referentiality of the human subject. Reference to the unknowable, incomprehensible and ineffable God, if purged of all semantic substitutes for the

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58 Pseudo-Dionysius, ‘The Divine Names,’ in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid, with Paul Rorem (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 64 (PG 3:645cd).

59 *To Einai-yparchein*: literally, ‘the to be-to exist’.

60 Maximos the Confessor, *Commentary on ‘On the Divine Names’*, PG 4:212a.

61 *Ibid.*, PG 4:245c.

62 *Ibid.*, PG 4:189c.

unknowable signified, can, purely as a referential experience, constitute a type of knowledge of the unknowable, an experience of knowledge located beyond intellect, imagination and kind.

When (the mind) circles around the incomprehensible God from every direction, only then does it attain what it seeks.<sup>63</sup>

God becomes known in ignorance [...] an ignorance greater than any utterance [...] Immortality, incomprehensibility, unknowability and whatever else can be attributed to him, not in the sense of the opposite of non-being, but in the sense that any of his properties are ineffable and inconceivable to all; because he transcends everything as he stands apart from every being, and is not grasped or understood by any created being.<sup>64</sup>

5.1 Consistent epistemic identification of the unknowable certainly entails an intellectual conception of a meaning that lacks a signified. It could, however, entail an experience of referentiality that presupposes a relationship free of any potential epistemic appropriation, possession or domination over the signified. Christian tradition insists that it is possible for humans to experience God, but only on the premise that they consistently renounce any intellectual–semantic substitute for his given unknowability.

[The divinity] is neither soul nor mind, nor does it possess imagination, conviction, speech, or understanding. Nor is it speech per se, understanding per se. It cannot be spoken of and it cannot be grasped by understanding. It is not number or order, greatness or smallness, equality or inequality, similarity or dissimilarity. It is not immovable, moving, or at rest. It has no power, it is not power, nor is it light. It does not live nor is it life. It is not substance, nor is it eternity or time. It cannot be grasped by the understanding since it is neither knowledge nor truth. It is not kingship. It is not wisdom. It is neither one nor oneness, divinity nor goodness. Nor is it a spirit, in the sense in which we understand that term. It is not sonship or fatherhood and it is nothing known to us or to any

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, PG 4:224c.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, PG 216d–217bcd.

other being. It falls neither within the predicate of nonbeing nor of being. Existing beings do not know it as it actually is and it does not know them as they are. There is no speaking of it, nor name nor knowledge of it. Darkness and light, error and truth—it is none of these. It is beyond assertion and denial. We make assertions and denials of what is next to it, but never of it, for it is both beyond every assertion, being the perfect and unique cause of all things, and, by virtue of its pre-eminently simple and absolute nature, free of every limitation, beyond every limitation; it is also beyond every denial.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, 'Mystical Theology,' in *Pseudo-Dionysius the Complete Works*, 141 (PG 3:1045d–1048ab). Adapted. Translator's note: square brackets Yannaras'.

## Chapter 6

### CREATED AND UNCREATED—*LOGOS* AND PERSON

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1 The distinction between ‘created’ and ‘uncreated’, within the given limitations of our perception and experience, creates a first opening to potential knowledge about what is inconceivable and inexpressible in metaphysics.

1.1 The signifier ‘created’ (creature) refers to the experience of identifying the product of creative activity<sup>66</sup>. From the perspective of our experience, ‘to create’ signifies ‘to build’, ‘to manufacture’ or ‘to construct’ (from which we also get ‘art’,<sup>67</sup> e.g., I create or construct a work or art. The result of my creation is something ‘created’, a ‘creature’, which presupposes creative activity and the factor of action.

1.2 Human perception and experience function in such a way as to recognise in the products of creation (construction) elements of distinctiveness that reveal characteristics and abilities of the creator–builder, whether personal (unique and distinct) or common characteristics (those belonging to a common kind of creators–manufacturers). In both cases the result of the creative act (the thing created) functions, in terms of our perception, as a *logos*–revelation of the creator’s distinctiveness—it manifests the one who acted.

1.2.1 Beavers’ lodges and beehives make it clear that the variables of action belong to common kinds, i.e., a common and undifferentiated ability arising from their nature or essence. A painting by Van Gogh or a symphony by Mozart similarly reveal an ability–action of common

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<sup>66</sup> *Energeia*: also ‘energy’.

<sup>67</sup> Translator’s note: *techni* (art) is etymologically connected to the Greek verb *teucho* (to construct).

human nature or essence, albeit expressed in a unique, distinct, and unrepeatable way by the singular *hypostasis* of a particular creator—the *logos* of a creator’s *hypostatic* otherness.

1.3 Sensible reality, within the limits of our perception and experience, can be either created, random or eternal—any other possibility transcends our abilities of perception. The prospect that reality is a consequence of *chance* is inconsistent with our rational perception and experience and is irreducible to the constitutive elements of meaning.<sup>68</sup> The prospect that reality is *eternal* negates the epistemic process, transfixing us to the unknowability and irrationality of what exists. That leaves the prospect that the world is created (something that necessitates further inquiry).

2 The human capacity for *logos* seems to be founded in referentiality, which is to say in the causal connections of conditions as we experience them. If the referentiality of desire is a prerequisite for the development of language (‘the emergence of the first signifier in the field of the Other’),<sup>69</sup> then the causal connection between the signifier and the ability to respond to desire constitutes a mode of referentiality, a mode by which language is formed, the formation of the subject through *logos*.

2.1 This means that construing the sensible world as created belongs to the mode by which our perceptive and rational capabilities function. Construing the world as random or eternal constitutes a misuse of this mode, which is why they are also incompatible with our perception of *logos*—they are *without logos* or *contrary to logos*.

2.2 A child is born and raised in a house with a van Gogh painting hanging on the wall. The presence of the painting is, from the outset, given and self-evident in the life of the child. At some point the child asks: ‘Who painted that painting?’ The child is told: ‘Van Gogh, a Dutch

68 For more detailed analysis, see Christos Yannaras, *Postmodern Metaphysics*, trans. Norman Russell (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2004), Parenthesis 1—‘The ‘logical place’ of chance’, 67.

69 See Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), 198, with more extensive analysis in Christos Yannaras, *Ὄρθος λόγος και κοινωνική πρακτική* [*Rationalism and Social Practice*] (Domos: Athens, 1990), 152–158.

painter from the 19th century'. But the painter remains just as unknown to the child as he was before the child was given this answer. Later, the child happens to read some biographies of van Gogh and is enriched by the information. But the information does not connect the painting, which is part of the child's life, with the painting's creator. It is only once the child begins to discover the otherness of the *logos* in the painting's artistic expression that it begins to 'know' van Gogh. Eventually, what it means for the child to know van Gogh is that whenever it lays eyes on another painting by the same painter, the child says, 'this is van Gogh'.

2.3 The totality of what has been created presupposes, by logical causal connection, an uncreated creator. 'Who made everything that exists?—God. Who made God?—No one. The cause of the created is uncreated'. The answer negates the epistemic process, transfixing us to the idea that God is unknowable and beyond reason. The uncreated is a semantically narrow concept. It cannot be applied to the epistemically familiar, such as substance, existence, life, number etc., since these all originate in the experience of the created. It is only once someone begins to see in the reality of the world the otherness of *logos* and the uniqueness of the creative act that they begin to 'know' God. It is the 'revelation' of the distinctive *logos* in the created that allows us to experientially understand the activities of the uncreated.

2.4 To *know* another person is to discern in the acts of their existence a unique, distinct and unrepeatable character, an absolute otherness in their bodily presence, voice, gaze, smile, gesture, movement, thought, judgment and creative ability. The other person does not become known to us by virtue of their tangible physical mass, but by virtue of their activities, through the mode by which their existence is actualized. In any event, their physical mass is also an active event and not a static datum.

2.4.1 I have never met Mozart. He would have remained as unknown to me as any of his erstwhile neighbours and fellow citizens, had I not discovered the otherness of his actualized music.

2.4.2 My ability to perceive through experience is rational because it allows me to receive the existential distinctness of the other as a *logos* of

epistemic revelation. This reception is simultaneously an activity of *logos* on my own part (unique and distinct). My encounter with the actualizing *logos* of another person's existential distinctness is what is signified by relationship.

3 I discover in the reality of the world an otherness of *logos*, a uniqueness of creative activity. The cause of this *logos*-possessing otherness continues to be incomprehensible and unintelligible (in its uncreatedness). However, through the created results of its acts, it opens itself up to becoming known by me via the mode presupposed by my own epistemic perceptiveness, i.e., the mode of relationality.

3.1 We know that relationships constitute experiences with an unlimited epistemic dynamic—epistemic experiences ranging from simple familiarity, furtive impression or superficial mnemonic images, to considered knowledge, actively perfected knowledge or the complete<sup>70</sup> immediacy of knowledge provided, *par excellence*, by love<sup>71</sup>—a complete relationship of reciprocal self-surrender and self-offering.

3.1.1 Relationships always entail experiences of unlimited epistemic potential through their *logos*-possessing acts—always as a reference to and reception of the *logoi* of actualized existential otherness.

3.2 If the world is created, and if human experience of the uncreated world points to a creative activity determined by *logos*, then it is within the world that relationships of mutual reference between the created and uncreated are formed through *logos*. Thus, the mode of *logos*-possessing relationships manifests, in our perception and experience, as a potentiality shared by the uncreated Creator of the world and by created humankind.

3.3 We discover in the reality of the world a *logos*-possessing otherness (a unique creative activity), which is to say that we experience the uncreated as it actualizes the world, and actualizes within the world, as a *logos* calling us to enter into a relationship—a call to enter into *logos*—

<sup>70</sup> *Katholiki*: also 'universal' or 'catholic'.

<sup>71</sup> *Erotas*: being in love, erotic love, the intimate love between couples.

possessing relationship with the uncreated, to experiential knowledge of and participation in its otherness. The otherness of the calling *logos*, which evokes and produces relationships, is analogous, as far as human perception and experience are concerned, to the quintessentially human creative activity, i.e., to the intentional active call to enter into a relationship addressed to each one of us by the creative *logos* of another person.

4 My human existence can be distinguished from that of all other created beings on account of three fundamental characteristics which human beings alone possess:

- humans treat physical reality as a *logos*-possessing reference to them;
- humans produce *logos*-possessing references that form relationships with physical reality through *logos*; and
- humans are able to form *logos*-possessing relationships that are free from the preconditions of spatio-temporal necessity.

These three characteristics (or these above all others) constitute the meaning of the linguistic signifier ‘person’, i.e., *personal* existence.

4.1 We discover in the reality of the world an otherness of *logos* calling us, a call analogous to that which we discover in a painting or symphony, which is to say that we experience the uncreated actualizing the world’s becoming through a mode that is *personal*. This means that we can form *personal* relationships with the uncreated that are free from the predetermined necessities of either createdness or non-createdness. In and of itself the uncreated remains incomprehensible and unintelligible. Yet it still becomes accessible to us by referring to us in our own *personal* epistemic and relational mode, i.e., as a *personally* actualized call to enter into a relationship.

4.2 Within the linguistic semantics of human experience we can state the following: The uncreated Creator of the world acts in a *personal* mode and is *personal* in his indirect (mediated through the world) relationship

with human beings. The *logos*<sup>72</sup> of the created allows humans to refer to the uncreated cause of the world with the signifiers ‘*Logos*’ and ‘Person’.

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<sup>72</sup> *Logikotita*: literally, ‘*logos*-ness’.

## Chapter 7

### THE CALL OF *LOGOS* AND RELATIONSHIPS POSSESSING *LOGOS*

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1 The *logos*<sup>73</sup> within the created manifests, among other things, in the human ability to refer (using *logos*) to an uncreated cause of the world and to associate with that uncreated cause the signifiers *Logos* and Person. The human *logos* recognises the otherness of creative activity in every expression of the created. Moreover, humans encounter this *logos*-possessing otherness as a response to their own *mode* of accessing reality through *logos*. They discover that they are able to refer to the uncreated by means of *logos* reciprocity—by the subject's ecstatic mode of *logos* relationality.

1.1 *Logos*-possessing relationships are not always *ecstatic*. Indeed, the *logos*-possessing human subject 'is born in so far as the signifier emerges in the field of the Other',<sup>74</sup> i.e., *logos* responds to the referentiality inherent in human existence. However, *logos*-possessed referentiality can easily turn into intellectual autonomy and individualistic self-sufficiency. This is why the individual intellectual verification of a *dialectic* such as relationality also occurs through *logos*, whereby the created is understood as thesis, the uncreated as antithesis, and the signifiers *Logos* and Person as synthesis. But while this dialectical schema might offer individual intellectual certainty, it does not secure participation in the experiential immediacy of relationships. Experiential knowledge of *Logos* and Person presuppose the knowing subject's *ecstasis* ('standing outside'<sup>75</sup>)—the recognition that the goal of subjective reference is external to the subject's own intellectual self-reliance.

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73 *Logikotita*: literally, 'logos-ness'.

74 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI*, 199.

75 *Ex-istamai*: an allusion to the etymology of the Greek noun *ekstasi* ('ecstasis').

1.2 The uncreated becomes accessible to the created via the signifiers *Logos* and Person only when these signifiers are vested in the recognition of the mode of the uncreated's activity, which institutes the created and makes it capable of *self-actualizing* the institutive mode of its existence.

But let God be the guide of our words and our concepts, the sole intelligence of intelligent beings and intelligible things, the meaning behind those who speak and of what is spoken, the life of those who live and those who receive life, who is and who becomes all for all beings, through whom everything is and becomes but who by himself never is nor becomes in any way anything that ever is or becomes in any manner. In this way he can in no way be associated by nature with any being and thus because of his superbeing is more fittingly referred to as nonbeing. For since it is necessary that we understand correctly the difference between God and creatures, then the affirmation of superbeing must be the negation of beings, and the affirmation of beings must be the negation of superbeing. In fact both names, being and nonbeing, are to be reverently applied to him although not at all properly. In one sense they are both proper to him, one affirming the being of God as cause of beings, the other completely denying in him the being which all beings have, based on his pre-eminence as cause. On the other hand, neither is proper to him because neither represents in any way an affirmation of the essence of the being under discussion as to its substance or nature. For nothing whatsoever, whether being or nonbeing, is linked to him as a cause, nor being or what is called being, no nonbeing, or what is called nonbeing, is properly close to him. He has in fact a simple existence, unknowable and inaccessible to all and altogether beyond understanding which transcends all affirmation and negation.<sup>76</sup>

1.2.1 We recognise in the significations 'beings' and 'things become', 'mind', 'thinking' and 'things thought', 'speech' and 'things spoken',

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<sup>76</sup> Maximus the Confessor, 'The Church's Mystagogy' in *Maximos Confessor: Selected Writings*, trans. George C. Berthold, with introduction by Jaroslav Pelikan (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), 185–186 (PG 91:664a–c).

‘life’, ‘things living’ and ‘things that have lived’ the semantic verification (a *logos* image) of the uncreated’s mode of activity, which institutes the created and makes it capable of activating its own institutive mode of existence. In all that is and happens, in the ‘how’ of what exists and happens, we recognise the *logos of personal* otherness—a *logos* that calls the created to respond to the institutive mode of its existence.

2 The function of human perception and experience (in other words, the function of *logos*-causal connections) presupposes a stable centre of reference, a ‘place to stand on’<sup>77</sup> for activity, reference and *logos*—a ‘kernel’ (*Kern*, as Freud called it<sup>78</sup>) for the *hypostatic* potential of *logos*, reference and activity. In the context of human beings we call this kernel of referential capability the ‘subject’ or ‘*hypostasis*’, albeit in the knowledge that the signification we attribute to the kernel is somewhat overwrought. We assume that the kernel actualizes, references and reveals a ‘someone’, but the meaning of that ‘someone’ is inaccessible, since any possible meaning will identify that ‘someone’s’ manifestation rather than who that ‘someone’ is in and of themselves. That ‘someone’ is intrinsically unknowable and is not subject to definitive meaning (they are ‘non-sense’<sup>79</sup>). They can be approached only as they reference and act, only as *logos* attests to them.

2.1 The *hypostatic* kernel that is prior to any activity and which makes itself known through its acts cannot be construed as either nature, existence or entity, nor as non-existence or *non-logos*. It is signified as created when it manifests and acts with its created activities, and it is assumed to be uncreated when it manifests and acts with activities that are free from the limitations of createdness (as in the unconstrained activity that constituted the world or the beauty of the world’s becoming).

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77 *Pa sto*. Translator’s note: from the saying of Archimedes ‘Give me a place to stand on [*pa sto*], and I will move the Earth’.

78 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI*, p.250 : ‘...to isolate in the subject a kernel, a *kern*, to use Freud’s own term, of *non-sense*’.

79 *Ibid*. Translator’s note: The Greek term *noima* can mean both ‘meaning’ and ‘sense’ in English. The Greek translation of Lacan’s ‘non-sens’ used by Yannaras is *mi noima*, which could also be translated ‘non-meaning’, and relates to the term translated ‘meaning’ immediately before, *noima*.

It is only through these acts that we may infer an actor, and the actor itself can only be known by the way that it manifests and references. No *logos* can define it, for every *logos* is the result of an activity or a response to an actualized reference.

2.1.1 Although the term *person* also denotes activity, its linguistic function is to signify, albeit catachrestically and by convention, reference to the ineffable *hypostatic* possibility of free and unconstrained activity through *logos*. We only know that the *person* is self-consciousness, freedom and otherness by virtue of its acts. However, the meaning of the word ‘person’ also functions as a reference to the inaccessible kernel or cause of its revealed activity, both in respect of the human being’s *personal* existence and God’s *personhood*.<sup>80</sup>

3 God actualizes being and becoming by the *logos*-mode that allows us to refer to him as the *personal* cause of beings and what has become. As the cause of being and becoming (he neither is nor becomes), he cannot himself be signified by the signifiers ‘existence’ or ‘non-existence’, ‘being’ or ‘non-being’.

3.1 Our reference to God is only possible by virtue of the mode by which he actualizes our created existence, i.e., the call towards the possibility of a relationship with him founded in *logos*. Relationships are actualized on the basis of the acknowledged deep distinction between created and uncreated activity, without removing the ability of created human beings to experience epistemic immediacy and referential reciprocity, including the possibility of real *erotic reciprocity*.

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<sup>80</sup> *Prosopo*: literally ‘person’. Greek does not have a distinct word for ‘Personhood’ like English does. Wherever the translation ‘personhood’ appears it corresponds literally to the Greek word ‘person’ (*prosopo*).

## Chapter 8

### REVELATION: EXPERIENCE AND LANGUAGE

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1 If, within the limits of human perception, experience and language, the uncreated becomes accessible through the signifiers *Logos* and *Person* (the mode of *logos*-possessing relationships), then the uncreated's accessibility, as with any relationship founded on *logos*, presupposes an experiential spectrum of unlimited epistemic dynamic.

1.1 Relationships can be indirect (through the *logos* of the universe), but also direct (experientially immediate).

2 The Christian church's identity is founded on eyewitness testimony to the incarnation of God—to God's intervention in history 'in the person of Jesus Christ'.<sup>81</sup> Does this testimony to the created revelation of the uncreated find its locus primarily in the *logos* of human perception and language?

2.1 In light of the possibilities of language we could define the signifier 'uncreated' as a reference to anything that constitutes 'freedom from all existential limitation'. At the same time, the uncreated becomes accessible to human perception, experience and language through the signifiers *Logos* and *Person* (the mode of *logos*-possessing relationality). *Logos*-possessing relationships further constitute the mode by which

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81 Luke 1:2: 'Just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word'; 1 John 1:1-2: 'We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us'; 2 Cor. 4:6: 'For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ'; John 1:14: 'And the Word became flesh and lived among us'. NRSV adapted: 'person' in 2 Corinthians 4:6 is translated 'face' ('face' is the most common meaning of *prosopo* in Modern Greek).

human persons and acts become known. We infer the existence of a poet from a poem, a musician from music and a distinct personal cause from the *logos*<sup>82</sup> of the world. We signify these inferences by the same signifiers, albeit without violating the meaning of the uncreated as freedom from any existential constraint.

2.1.1 The fact that we can use the same two signifiers (*Logos* and *Person*) to specify the way that we reference the created and uncreated suggests the possibility of experiential access to a common signified (in both instances). Maintaining consistency within the bounds of linguistic logic (of human perception and experience) and excluding irrational or illusory intellectual inventions, we can accept that the signifiers *Logos* and *Person* make accessible for us both parties in the relationship between the human being and the uncreated. The human being is a *Logos*–person, as is God.

2.2 God’s intervention in history (his incarnation) finds its locus in the *logos* human perception and language provided:

- a) it does not undermine the meaning of *Logos* and *Person* as possibilities of experientially referring to the created and uncreated; and
- b) it does not undermine the meaning of ‘uncreated’ as freedom from all existential constraint.

2.3 We can comprehend the signifiers ‘*Logos*’, ‘*Person*’ and ‘freedom from any constraint’. Comprehension here means a clear and shared intellectual image that also constitutes the meaning of such signifiers. ‘Meaning’ refers to potential experiences, or to the empirical conditions that make such a potential intelligible. The concept of the ‘Incarnation of God’ draws, with linguistic (rational) consistency, its meaning from the significations ‘*Logos*’, ‘*Person*’ and ‘freedom from any constraint’. Does this meaning refer to empirical facts that can be verified historically? Is the good news of the Incarnation historically realistic?

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<sup>82</sup> *Logikotitia*: literally, ‘*logos*-ness’.

2.3.1 Relationships are the only means by which to verify and confirm historical references—through either direct relationships (sensory observation of the event in question) or indirect relationships (faith and trust in the testimony of eyewitnesses).

2.4 The historicity of the good news of the Incarnation presupposes either direct (sensory) or indirect (credibly testified) verification of the related signifiers ‘*Logos*’, ‘*Person*’ and ‘Freedom from existential constraints’. That is to say that it presupposes:

- a) direct or indirect verification of the existence of a historical person who forms the locus of the event of God’s Incarnation; and
- b) direct or indirect verification of that particular historical person’s freedom from the constraints of createdness, beginning with confirmation of his resurrection from the dead.

2.4.1 We need to directly or indirectly verify the historicity of the Incarnation so that the questions it raises for us can be approached from a firm foundation. Still, verification becomes increasingly possible (as is the case in all *logos*-possessing relationships) thanks to the unlimited epistemic dynamic of experience.

2.4.2 Directly or indirectly verifying (substantiating historically) that the actions of a particular historical person annulled or transcended the constraints (natural laws) of createdness, e.g., virgin birth, miracles, resurrection from the dead, is not the only way of epistemically approaching the facticity of God’s Incarnation. If the uncreatedness of the *Logos*-Person becomes historically accessible to us through its natural existence, then the historicity and accessibility of this natural-supernatural presence can only be signified (not confirmed) in the form of confirmed information.

2.4.3 The rational scope of information about God’s incarnation is defined by the signifiers ‘*Logos*’, ‘*Person*’ and ‘Freedom from existential constraints’. All three signifiers refer to a mode of existence. The realism of that mode of existence is confirmed primarily by personal experiential access to it.

3 The historicity of the Incarnation and the Resurrection reveals, or inaugurates, the existential potential of created human nature: a historical person (a natural individual) realised in practice the mode of the uncreated, which is to say the mode of freedom from all existential constraints. If, as far as human perception, experience and language are concerned, the uncreated is free from existential constraints, then it also has the freedom to take on a created human nature that lacks the constraints of createdness. What is unprecedented about the Incarnation is that it reveals the possibility that humans can embody<sup>83</sup> existential freedom from createdness.

3.1 The mode of freedom from the constraints of createdness—the mode of the Incarnation–Resurrection—is not verified through its fortification by reliable information, nor merely by the semantic coherence of a rational field of information.

3.1.1 The Incarnation and the Resurrection do not signal the relationship between humans and the uncreated in terms of a unilateral human reference to the inscrutable uncreated (the reference of sensible signifiers to hypothetical supersensible signifieds via intellectual inferences, critical insight or imaginative perceptiveness). Rather, they signal the active initiative of the uncreated to form a relationship with human beings (an experiential relationship that is directly accessible to humans). Through the Incarnation and Resurrection, God offers human beings a relationship that is immediately and existentially possible.

3.1.2 We signify this initiative–offer of the Uncreated to human beings with the word ‘revelation’.

3.2 Revelation signifies that the uncreated, which according to our rational perception is the creative existential cause of the created, institutes, manifests or offers (makes accessible to the created) a mode of existence that is held in common with that of the uncreated—a mode of freedom rather than of necessity, freedom from every existential

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83 *Sarkonei*: literally, ‘enflesh’.

constraint of nature or substance, and consequently also from the existential constraints of createdness.

3.2.1 Revelation institutes a relationship between the uncreated and the created according to the terms by which the created is able to enter into relationships. That is why revelation is a historical event—an intervention of the uncreated into the world of time. The vesting of the revelatory action of the uncreated in language is also a historical event. History and language are what make revelation real, and what make freedom from createdness a real existential possibility accessible to the created.

3.3 The historical and linguistic flesh of the revelatory event does not reside in the information about the event, but the *Logos*–Person that embodies it. What revelation foremost reveals is a name—the unique means of signifying personal otherness. That name is Jesus Christ.

3.3.1 The word ‘God’, along with its the corresponding Semitic word ‘El’—originally and poetically equivalent to ‘Elohim’—is not a name. It is a signification of the ineffable, inconceivable and incomprehensible uncreated—a signification that attributes hypothetical properties and capabilities of uncreatedness to a particular agent, creator and governor of the world. Even if we vest the word ‘God’ with rational and personal properties, it still signifies a meaning (that of first cause) rather than the *name* of a person.

3.3.1.1 It is even clearer in the case of words such as ‘Yahweh’, ‘Allah’ and others similar to these found within the vocabulary of other religious traditions, that they are attributive adjectives for the uncreated, signifying the Lord, the Almighty, the Holy One, without referring to the uniqueness and intimate immediacy of a singular person.

4 Jesus Christ is the name of a person who enters into history as the God–man, i.e., fully God and fully human. What capabilities do human perception and experience have at their disposal to validate or invalidate the dual divine–human nature of Christ? If we were to approach this historical person with the presuppositions and methodology of the professional historian, we could possibly verify his historical existence

and some information about the ‘paradoxical’ or ‘supernatural’ character of his miraculous acts. But confirming the historicity of Christ in this way would not verify his divine–human nature. It would not perform the function of *revelation*.

4.1 Revelation depends on the credible historicity of the person Christ, but is not limited to the verification of his historicity. Historicity vests the uncreated’s revelatory activity in language and signifiers, and a signifier merely refers to a signified—it is not a substitute for it.

4.2 The historicity of the person Christ points to his divine–human nature, to the extent that this historicity denotes, manifests or reveals (as signification and as an act) a *mode of relationship*, which is at the same time a *mode of existence* and a *mode of knowing*. We signify this mode linguistically by the word ‘love’.<sup>84</sup>

4.2.1 As a mode of existence and knowledge, love signifies (has the meaning of) ‘to exist and to know *because* one loves and *to the extent* that one loves’, i.e., to draw existence itself, as well as knowledge, not from given (necessary) natural capabilities (of divine or human nature), but from the freedom of a loving voluntary relationship of self-transcendence and self-offering.

4.2.2 What revelation reveals is the *name* Jesus Christ—the only name of a historical person that refers to the personal realisation of a *mode of existence* that is free from the constraints of createdness, which is to say the mode of love. Jesus Christ does not reveal the uncreated in conceptual objectivity, but rather the personally realised mode by which the uncreated exists. Jesus Christ is himself the historical subject of that mode.

4.3 The locus of Christ’s revelation in *logos* is not the identification of ‘signs’ of a supernatural (with respect to created nature) theophany associated with his historical person. Such signs of superiority, transcendence and overturning the terms and necessities of created nature would make God an object subject to sensible observation or

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<sup>84</sup> *Agape*.

transform him into an intellectual idol. They would limit him, at risk of hyperbole, to the symptomatology of creation.

4.3.1 According to eyewitness accounts, the miracles Christ performed did not represent ‘signs’ of the uncreated’s supernatural power, domination or authority over creation. They were ‘signs’ of nature’s liberation and freedom from the existential constraints of createdness.

4.4 Christ reveals God primarily through the *mode* of his own personal historical existence—the mode of *kenotic* incarnation, sacrificial self-denial, self-offering crucifixion and resurrection from the dead, which is to say a mode that is free from anything predetermined by divinity and anything constrained by createdness. He is himself the historical subject of existential freedom—he whom we call freedom.

4.5 Christ’s historical person is revealed, according to the written testimonies of those who witnessed his presence, to have existed and acted not out of himself as an autonomous ontic individual, but in *reference* to his ‘Father’. He drew his existence and activity from the freedom of relationship (the love) towards his ‘Father’ and not from his natural (whether divine or human) ontic individuality.

5 As a linguistic signifier, the word ‘Father’ refers to a particular kind of relationship—one with a begetter, a cause or source of the personal *hypostasis* and life. When this word is attributed to an uncreated God it further signifies (in our rational conception) the uncreated’s mode of existence. God exists as ‘Father’ and not as ‘Substance’. He exists as the begetter of *hypostases*. He does not exist because his substance or nature compels him to exist. Rather, he exists because he freely (timelessly and lovingly) *instantiates*<sup>85</sup> his being by proceeding towards the distinction of *hypostases*.

5.1 Because Christ exists *in reference* to the Father, he is semantically designated as ‘Son’. He is the Son of God. He owes the ontological origin of his uncreated *personal hypostasis* to God the Father’s uncreated

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<sup>85</sup> *Ypostasiazei*: literally ‘hypostasises’. The verb ‘instantiate’ can also be read as ‘hypostasise’ throughout the text.

*personal hypostasis*. The signified of the signifier ‘uncreated’ (the ‘what’ of Divinity) remains inaccessible to our perceptive capability—the words ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ (in terms of their principal linguistic signification) denote fatherhood and sonship, not substances. They denote begetter and begotten, two distinct *hypostases* in a relationship of existential communion.

5.1.1 The revelation that we recognise in the historical person Jesus is located first and foremost in the mode by which he references the uncreated—not in reference to a ‘higher being’ (to a substance, idea or concept), but to a Father. It is not an intellectual, emotional or psychological reference, but rather a mode of existence: drawing existence and life from the freedom of a loving relationship with the Father.

5.1.2 This freedom can be witnessed in the acts of the historical Jesus. His historical existence is actualized by the activities and capabilities of his created human nature, while still being unbound by the constraints of createdness, something verified by the signifiatory determination: ‘fully God and fully human’.

5.2 The revelation of God as Father, i.e., the revelation of the mode by which God becomes accessible, establishes God’s revelatory *Logos*.

5.2.1 The Son is also a *Logos*-revelation of God. He is the sole revelation of the uncreated that is beyond intellectual hypotheses and allusions—the only beginning, possibility or precondition of revelation (‘in the beginning was the *Logos*’).

5.2.2 This means that all events that reveal God within the context of our perceptive capabilities are actualized through the *Logos*-Son. The most important events that reveal God are the creation of the world (the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of the world) and the historical Incarnation. The common factor in both events is the *Logos*-Son of God.

5.2.2.1 God-*Logos* is revealed in the creation of the cosmos, just as the poet is revealed in a poem, or a composer in their music. He is also revealed in the *personal* embodied immediacy of the historical Incarnation.

5.3 In being revealed both as the creator of the cosmos and as the historical Jesus, the *Logos* does not reveal his own existential autonomy. Rather, he is revealed as the Son of God the Father. His sonship reveals his personal otherness—he references the Father and testifies about the Father.

5.4 But the Father too, attested as personal otherness by the *Logos*, is affirmed by referencing the *Logos* as a Son. His personal otherness is revealed in fatherhood.

6 The realism of this revelation is found first and foremost in its respect for the limits and capabilities of language, which similarly constitute the limits and capabilities of human perception and experience. In human language and perception, the relationship of fatherhood to sonship echoes a ‘registered’ polarity, a causal projection and causal dependency. On its own this relationship would undermine the uncaused character of the uncreated (the completeness of its mode of existential freedom), if revelation did not also disclose a third personal otherness in the form of the Spirit or Paraclete, to whom both the sonship of the *Logos* and the Fatherhood of God refer.

6.1 In all languages and traditions the word ‘spirit’ tends always to denote the main (somewhat ineffable and non-reified) elements of the identity of a particular existence, i.e., that which makes it what it is.<sup>86</sup> Within the context of the linguistic realism of revelation, the Spirit of God, as the third personal otherness of the one uncreated, signifies that which makes God who he is—an existential plenitude in a communion of free *personal hypostases*, immeasurable goodness *hypostatically* willed, complete *eros*.

6.2 Within the context of the linguistic realism of revelation, the Spirit of God cannot be separated from the Father and the Son. It is revealed

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<sup>86</sup> See Joachim Ritter, Karlfried Gründer, and Gottfried Gabriel eds., *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Vol. 3 (Basel: Schwabe-Verl, 1974), s.v. ‘Geist’; Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, Vol. 6 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1965), s.v. ‘Πνεῦμα’ and ‘πνευματικός’; and Xavier Léon-Dufour, ed., *Vocabulaire de théologie biblique* (Paris: Cerf, 1974), s.v. ‘esprit’.

together with the Father in the person of Christ, as the *hypostatic* ‘factor’ of the Logos–Son’s existential reference to the Father, and the Father’s to the Son.

6.2.1 In the linguistic semantics of the uncreated’s revelation, *hypostatic* ‘factor’ signifies that the Father’s relationship with the Son, and the Son’s with the Father, are completed as an existential event, not in the polarity of mutual causal dependency, but in the free and loving inclusion of the Spirit, which is also a *personal hypostasis*, in a unifying relationship. We say that ‘the *Logos*, by his existence, testifies about the Father in the Spirit, and the Father wills, acts and reveals his existence and freedom through the *Logos* in the Spirit.

6.3 By this signification the word Spirit discloses the identity of God—that which the uncreated is (‘God is Spirit’<sup>87</sup>). It discloses the freedom of *personal hypostases* from any existential constraint—freedom as love, love as existential fullness, a shared fullness, the removal of all dependency, all deterministic association, all necessity.

6.4 Human language cannot speak about the uncreated beyond what it receives as revelation—manifestation of the uncreated in historical time. The uncreated’s activity (cosmic *logos*<sup>88</sup>—the historical Jesus) refers to the uncreated’s being, and this act of reference is denoted by the linguistic signifiers ‘Fatherhood’, ‘Sonship’ and ‘Spirit’. Cosmic *logos* and the incarnation’s historicity are *from* the Father, *through* the Son and *in* the Spirit.

6.5 The Spirit’s *hypostatic* otherness is denoted by the signification ‘procession from the Father’—a procession from the Father alone for the purpose of linguistically signifying the primordial unicity of the uncreated’s being. The word ‘procession’ differs in meaning from ‘begetting’, although it does denote provenance in a common existential cause. The begetting of the Son and the procession of the Spirit have two distinct meanings that, when expressed together, mutually relativise the

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<sup>87</sup> John 4:24.

<sup>88</sup> *Logikotita*: literally, ‘*logos*-ness’.

ability to comprehend them using depictions from created reality. They function linguistically to signify, in a mutually complementary fashion, freedom from any association with creation, effusion or moulding.

6.5.1 The signification ‘procession of the Spirit from the Father’ gives meaning to the Father’s begetting of the Son in terms of the begetting Father’s freedom in relation to the Son, and the begotten’s freedom in relation to the Father—a freedom that constitutes the Father’s will as a begetting love for the Son and the Son’s will as an obedient love for the Father. Correspondingly, the signification ‘begetting of the Son’ gives meaning to the procession of the Spirit from the Father in terms of the freedom of the Father who sends forth the Spirit in relation to the Spirit itself, and the freedom of he who proceeds in relation to the Father—a freedom that establishes the Father’s will as ‘proceeding’ love for the Spirit and the Spirit’s will as the love that actualizes the power of the Father.

6.5.2 ‘Timelessly and lovingly’, the Father neither ‘constructs’, ‘creates’ nor ‘moulds’ *hypostases* out of his substance. Rather, as a *person* he confirms his will and freedom to exist ‘as one proceeding towards the distinction of *hypostases*, indivisibly and without diminishing his own totality’.<sup>89</sup> He begets the Son and sends forth the Spirit, thus constituting Divinity as a Trinitarian existence, identifying his being with the freedom of love.

7 The uncreated remains unintelligible, incomprehensible and ineffable to humans. The acts of the uncreated (cosmic *logos*<sup>90</sup>—historical Jesus) allow us to infer that the first cause of what exists is an event of unlimited existential freedom and not inexorable (and inexplicable) existential necessity.

7.1 The linguistic formulations that signify the uncreated’s freedom are derived from the historicity and language of revelation—not in the sense of information that might satisfying our epistemic curiosity, but

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<sup>89</sup> Maximos the Confessor, *Commentary on ‘On the Divine Names’*, PG 4:221a.

<sup>90</sup> *Logikotita*: literally ‘*logos*-ness’. The term’s common meaning in Modern Greek is ‘rationality’.

as the call to our own participation in the mode of freedom, which is to say the uncreated's mode of existence. The language of this call is verified by means of participation. The criterion of verification is existential experience rather some kind of 'correct reasoning'.

7.1.1 The linguistic formulations that signify the uncreated's freedom are derived from the historicity and language of revelation. In the language of revelation, the Son takes on flesh 'by the Holy Spirit (and the virgin Mary)'. His acts, which remove the constraints of createdness, are accomplished 'in the Spirit', and are 'signs' that the Spirit of God 'is fulfilled in him'. He is himself the *Logos*—revelation of God. But only 'the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, teaches everything'<sup>91</sup> and 'leads to all truth'.<sup>92</sup>

7.2 The linguistic formulations that signify the uncreated's being find their initial basis in human experience and comprehension, because they are drawn from the semantics of humankind's being. Humans have a single and *multi-hypostatic* nature and the Divinity has a single and *tri-hypostatic* nature. *Personal hypostases* constitute both humanity and the Divinity. By the word 'person' we signify *hypostatic* otherness with respect to the common kind of nature, or, in the case of the uncreated, *hypostatic* freedom from all existential predetermination.

8 The ecclesial community bases the meaning of the existence of the human being as *imago Dei* on the experiential understanding of this common linguistic semantics. For humans, the incomprehensibility of the uncreated mediates between the image and its prototype. Yet, the image itself refers to the 'how', not the 'what', of the prototype. It echoes a mode of existence, not a substance.

8.1 In the language of ecclesial experience humans exist 'in the image', but also 'according to the likeness', of God.<sup>93</sup> The signification 'likeness' refers to the dynamic of the image—the human being's mode of existence is an existential fact (an image), but also an existential potential (a likeness). Human beings can transform their *hypostatic* otherness, with

91 John 14:25. Translator's translation.

92 John 16:13. Translator's translation.

93 Genesis 1:26.

respect to the common kind of their nature, into *hypostatic* freedom from the existential predeterminations imposed by created nature, thus attaining the mode or the ‘how’ of the uncreated’s existence.

8.2 God is triune, a trinity of *personal hypostases*. Humans are *multi-hypostatic*, a multitude of *personal hypostases*. God’s being is united and indissoluble, freedom in unity of will and act. Humankind’s being is existentially sundered into as many ‘particles’ as there are wills and activities of self-existence—wills and activities of created nature with a given beginning and inexorable end. Humankind’s being is sundered into *hypostases* of natural (mortal) acts (corporeal and psychological), each *hypostasis* with its own chronological beginning and end. We know human existence as the *hypostasis* of natural (mortal) acts. We know it as natural individuality, albeit an individuality of actions capable of instantiating personal otherness.

8.2.1 The otherness of each human being is not merely its natural uniqueness and distinctness in relation to all others, e.g., the uniqueness of its DNA, physical and mental characteristics or *logos*—creative activity. It is also the capacity to intentionally differentiate itself from the dictates of the nature that is common to its kind (common to every human being), i.e., the possibility of being (relatively) free from impersonal<sup>94</sup> urges and instinctive needs. The language of ecclesial experience affirms that this possibility of intentional freedom from nature can reach as far as realising existential freedom ‘according to the likeness’ of the uncreated—for existence to be loving freedom rather than a *hypostasis* of certain natural acts.

8.2.2 The language of ecclesial experience also brings with it the not so negligible problems of linguistic logic, which is to say problems related to the reliability of our linguistic–perceptive ability. Human freedom from nature also signifies freedom from the mortality of that nature. But following death, what nature does this human *hypostasis*, free from nature, instantiate? By what natural acts is *hypostatic* otherness at that point actualized, given it draws its existence from loving relationships

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<sup>94</sup> *Aprosopes*: ‘impersonal’ in the sense of common, not unique.

rather than from mortal nature? If thought, judgment, imagination and will are natural acts that expire upon death, what self-consciousness and wilful choice could an existence free from nature instantiate?

Where are we to locate the ontological realism (signified with language) of the good news of the gospel regarding the possibility of human existence 'according to the likeness' of God?

## Chapter 9

### NATURAL ONTOLOGY AND RELATIONAL ONTOLOGY

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1 The titanic philosophical struggle over ‘being’<sup>95</sup>—a timeless struggle to explain the fact of existence, the meaning of existence and the first cause and ultimate purpose of existence—has swept humans, like a whirlwind, around this one and only single question: whether existence definitively ends with death or whether it continues after death, whether the metaphysical promises made by religions have real (verifiable) effect, or whether they are simply the projection of human desires.

2 Christian ecclesial experience has arguably developed the most lucid language for propagating the good news of freedom from death. It has spoken of the *personal hypostasis* of human existence and of its otherness with regard to nature, a dynamic otherness that denotes the possibility of *freedom* from the constraints of createdness. Ecclesial experience affirms that God existed in the *mode* of the human being in the historical *person* Jesus Christ, thus bestowing upon humans the ability to exist (as human beings) by the uncreated’s mode of freedom—to constitute a *hypostasis* of life by virtue of their ‘adoption’ by God rather than by virtue of the natural activities of their created nature.

2.1 The linguistic semantics of ecclesial metaphysics is one of the most suitable spheres in which to test critically the linguistic possibilities of experiential realism, i.e., whether linguistic signifiers refer to signifieds

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95 Plato, ‘Sophists’ in *Plato’s Sophist: A Translation with a Detailed Account of its Theses and Arguments*, ed. James Duerlinger (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 246a: ‘And indeed there seems to be something like a battle between giants and gods going on because of their argumentation about being’.

of possible experience, or merely to significations vested in psychological needs or the illusion of desire.

3 In early Christian sources the semantics of linguistic references to life after death did not emerge from the problematics of philosophical ontology. That did not even enter the equation. Their language was primarily symbolic and illustrative, taking for granted a general religious confidence in the continuation of human existence after death. Just as there is an absence of ‘evidence’ for the existence of God, so too is there an absence of ‘evidence’ for the existence of life after death. What was of importance was recording the experience of a new relationship both with God and with death.

3.1 A case in point is the approach of the Sadducees, who ‘say that there is no resurrection, or angel, or spirit’.<sup>96</sup> When Jesus was asked who, following the resurrection of the dead, would be husband to a woman who had successively married seven brothers, he replied:

Those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection.<sup>97</sup>

3.1.1 Moreover, in order to refute the Sadducees’ objections to the idea of resurrection, Jesus added that, when God spoke to Moses through the burning bush, he revealed himself to be the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob: ‘now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive’.<sup>98</sup>

3.1.1.1 Wittgenstein said:

Does it make sense to point to a clump of trees and ask ‘Do you understand what this clump of trees says?’ In normal circumstances, no; but couldn’t one express a sense by an arrangement of trees? Couldn’t it be a code? One would call ‘propositions’ clumps of trees

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<sup>96</sup> Acts 23:8.

<sup>97</sup> Luke 20:27–39; Matt. 22:23; and Mark 12:23.

<sup>98</sup> Luke 20:38.

one understood; others, too, that one didn't understand, provided one supposed the man who planted them had understood them'.<sup>99</sup>

3.2 Let's see which clumps of propositions in the gospel text about the Sadducees can be understood (using as a criterion the way that language corresponds to common experience) and which cannot, while remaining open to the possibility that the one who planted them understands them.

3.2.1 We read the proposition 'God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob' as denoting verification of an actualized relationship. An actualized relationship presupposes, according to the *logos* of common experience, that both of the factors constituting the relationship actually exist.

3.2.2 If God is the uncreated cause of everything that exists, then his relationship with personal existences (existing because of God) that once possessed a *hypostasis* of created nature, but no longer do so, must be free from the necessities of created nature (self-preservation and self-perpetuation). We are unable to say how human beings can exist in personal relationship with God without their existence instantiating a created human nature. We can, however, comprehend that for this to happen the human being's mode of existence must be free from the necessities (of an autonomous and perpetual existence) that govern created human nature, e.g., free from the need 'to marry' or 'be given in marriage'.

3.2.3 This mode of existence must further be free from the necessity of death, which presupposes 'resurrection from the dead'. It must also be a mode free from the bonds of temporality, thus presupposing 'another age' ('that age') of existential reality after death.

3.3 In our language, 'a son of the resurrection' signifies someone born in resurrection, which is to say that someone was given the gift of resurrection in the same way that birth grants life.

3.3.1 There is no immortal element in the created nature of human beings. The 'immortality of the soul' is a philosophical speculation. It

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<sup>99</sup> Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar*, Part I, 1:1 (39).

has no rational place in the language of the ecclesial gospel. The ecclesial gospel speaks of death and resurrection. It suggests that resurrection is something akin to a second birth.

3.4 The gift of resurrection, i.e., participation in ‘that age’, is not granted automatically to all people. ‘Those who are considered worthy of a place in that age’ are singled out in the text of the gospel, a distinction that clearly presupposes that others are not ‘considered worthy’.

Are we to assume that those not fortunate enough to merit resurrection remain dead? In the language of the gospel does ‘dead’ mean ‘non-existent’, or does it perhaps mean being in an inactive relationship with God?

3.4.1 The words ‘dead’ and ‘existent’ are antonyms in our language. The same goes for the words ‘existent’ and ‘unrelated’. The significations ‘son of the resurrection’ and ‘son of God’ connote God’s mediatory adoption of human beings—a second birth that follows death, or which is not abolished by death.<sup>100</sup> Language, using the ontological categories at our disposal, is unable to demonstrate the existence of signifieds for the terms ‘second birth’ and ‘adoption’. Nevertheless, it signifies a possibility and clarifies the rational<sup>101</sup> scope of that possibility. In contrast, the signifiers ‘existing’ and ‘unrelated’ do not have, in our language, a common rational locus.

3.4.2 Those fortunate enough to merit a ‘second birth’, i.e., resurrection, ‘cannot die anymore’. This gospel pronouncement has a rational aetiology: resurrection is being born into life, not once again into mortality (those considered worthy of resurrection ‘are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection’).

3.4.2.1 If non-death represents an active relationship with God and

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100 John 3:3: ‘...no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above’; John 3:6: ‘What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit’; John 11:25–26: ‘Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die’; John 5:21 ‘Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes’; and John 5:24: ‘...anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life’.

101 *Logiko*: the adjective of *logos*, which has wider connotations in Greek than suggested by ‘rational’, including communication and revelation.

death represents non-relationship with God, and if relationship is freedom and freedom is one of the elements that constitute the linguistic signifier 'person' (the image of God in human beings), then the meaning of the gospel expression 'they cannot die anymore' must be understood as signifying that they cannot die because their free desire to live is confirmed through their relationship with God.

By the same signification we understand the proposition: God is not obligated by his 'nature' or 'substance' to exist. Rather, 'he continually affirms his free will to exist, and it is precisely his trinitarian existence that provides that confirmation: the Father, out of love (i.e., freely), begets the Son and sends forth the Spirit'.<sup>102</sup>

3.5 The material nature of human beings, along with the psychosomatic activities of that nature, disappears with death. What nature and activities, then, are instantiated by the existential *hypostasis* (reality) of the 'sons of the resurrection'?

The language of the gospel provides an initial answer: created nature does not have the ontological autonomy to determine, on its own, the existential event. The existential event is not primarily determined by nature. It is primarily determined by its relationship with the Creator of nature and the Cause of existence.

Moreover, in the resurrection birth there is a firstborn: the historical Jesus. Following his resurrection, Christ did not exhibit a different nature, but rather the same human nature in a different relationship with God.

4 Philosophy has developed a language capable of expressing ontological definitions (or interpretations) of created nature. Could that same language serve to express a relational ontology?

4.1 The difference between the language of natural ontology and relational ontology appears to be analogous to the difference between

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<sup>102</sup> John Zizioulas, 'Από τὸ προσωπεῖον εἰς τὸ πρόσωπον: ἡ συμβολὴ τῆς πατερικῆς θεολογίας εἰς τὴν ἔννοιαν τοῦ προσώπου' [*From Mask to Person: the Contribution of Patristic Theology to the conception of the person*] in *Χαριστήρια εἰς τὴν τιμὴν τοῦ Γέροντος Χαλκηδόνου Μελίτωνος* [*Festschrift in Honour of Venerable Father Meliton of Chalcedon*] (Thessaloniki: Patriarchal Institute for Patristic Studies, 1997), 299.

the language of Newtonian physics and quantum physics. The language of Newtonian physics specifically conceives reality and our experience of it as a mechanistic totality of certain entities. Quantum physics, using its own language, has a different conception of that same reality and our experience of it—a totality of actualized relationships.

4.1.1 The Newtonian formulation of physics is founded in the language of Euclidian geometry. In order to articulate the general theory of relativity, Einstein drew on Riemann's language of geometry. Quantum physics primarily uses the mathematical language of probability theory and group theory. A new kind of mathematics is required to articulate a contemporary theory that combines relativity with quantum mechanics.<sup>103</sup>

4.2 Our interpretation of reality (whether in the case of physics or ontology) differs with the language we use to approach that reality. Language is not simply a means of communication and understanding. It is above all a mode of viewing, thinking, inquiring and questioning.

4.3 One could maintain that there is today a physics of nature and a physics of relationship: a scientific viewpoint that observes and examines the functional totality of certain entities in physical reality, and another scientific viewpoint that observes and examines in physical reality the relational event of the human *logos* and the *logos* of cosmic becoming.

4.3.1 As far as the anthropic principle of quantum physics is concerned, human consciousness is the only receptor capable of receiving information from quantum waves. I say human consciousness rather than the human brain, because consciousness does not exhibit the kind of quantum behaviour that could affect the reception of information, whereas the brain is subject to the mechanical wave behaviour of matter. This means that reality is formed by the human being's participation in it. Without the active encounter between human consciousness and the wave of knowledge or data that constitutes the quantum wave—i.e.,

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103 See Paul Davies and Julian Brown, eds., 'Edward Witten' in *Superstrings—A Theory of Everything?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

without the relationship of the human *logos* with the *logos* of nature—no existential event is established. The existential event is the relational encounter itself and not something separate from it.<sup>104</sup>

5 With these methodological clarifications in mind, we return to the Sadducees, those who ‘say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit’.

In order to affirm resurrection after death, the gospel responds by introducing the concept of ‘God’s adoption of the human being’ and ‘the second birth of the human being’. We understand these concepts indirectly, in the same way that we understand indirectly the meaning of quantum waves. In principle, understanding is a function of the methodological framework (the mode of viewing, thinking, inquiring and questioning) within which a linguistic code with significations like ‘quantum wave’ or ‘divine adoption–second birth’ may operate. We understand the meaning of these words when we look for the existential event as relationship, not a given self-existent entity, in their signifieds.

5.1 In Christ’s response to the Sadducees, resurrection to a state of non-death constitutes a mode of existence that is also attributed to the angels—this is why those who are fortunate enough to merit participation in ‘that age’ are described as ‘being like angels’.

Reference to the signifier ‘angels’ deepens our ontological aporia—the referential scope is no longer restricted to the created world (its meaning and uncreated cause), but includes a second and different reality that is also created, but is nevertheless immaterial, timeless, imperishable and immortal, which can only be understood indirectly (without tangible interconnections).

5.1.1 Our ontological aporia is further deepened by the fact that the signifier ‘angels’ (in biblical language) brings with it the signifiers ‘demons’ and ‘devils’. The word ‘demon’ refers to created existences, which

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104 See John D. Barrow and Frank J. Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 288ff, 497ff, 557ff; Alastair Rae, *Quantum Physics: Illusion or Reality?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), Chapter 5; and Yannaras, *Postmodern Metaphysics*, 170–172.

are, like angels, immaterial, timeless, imperishable and immortal, albeit with manifest logical inconstancy with respect to the methodological framework of relational ontology, because demons are presumed to be in non-relation with God (in rupture, opposition or rebellion), according to the meaning they are given in the Bible. One thus recalls the difficulty of identifying a common rational field for the signifiers ‘existing’ and ‘unrelated’—a difficulty connected with the idea that humans could exist after death without resurrection and adoption.

5.1.2 The meaning of the word ‘freedom’ provides a fundamental key to understanding relational ontology: relationship is identified with the existential event of loving freely, where love is a form of self-existence in freedom that can be identified with the Trinitarian–personal First Cause of the existential event.

Within the methodological framework of this perspective, the concepts ‘freedom–love’ and ‘First Cause’ would lack a common rational field if the loving–creative Cause of what exists removed freedom from existence, i.e., if it were to impose loving relationships as an existential necessity<sup>105</sup> and eradicated the existential possibility of non-relationship, rupture, opposition or rebellion.

5.1.3 The existence of demons, or human beings who exist after death, but are actively and wilfully non-relational, does not violate the methodological framework (and its attendant language) of a relational ontology. What exists owes its existence to God’s loving call (the call to being out of non-being), without that call compelling a positive loving response i.e., without removing the possibility of rejecting or resisting relationship.

5.1.3.1 If the existence of angels and demons is *personal*, as it is for humans—the existence of *logos*-possessing subjects capable of realising or rejecting relationship—and if the uncreated’s call that establishes the *logos*-possessing subject is solely and absolutely loving, and moreover if freedom is the constitutive and irrevocable characteristic of *personal*

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105 Alienating love to the point of assuming a plant-like inoffensiveness and alienating relationships to the point of inactive passivity.

existence, then the meaning of the *immutability* (the condition beyond change) of the positive or negative response to the love of God does not belong to the rational field that is determined by the meaning of ‘person’.

5.2 In 1957, Hugh Everett advanced an explanatory proposal in the context of quantum physics that has come to be known as the ‘many-worlds theory’ or the ‘split-universe model’.<sup>106</sup> It relates to the problem of measurement in quantum mechanics, i.e., the problem of verifying the wave behaviour of matter at the macroscopic level.<sup>107</sup>

5.2.1 The theory, formulated in highly specialised mathematics, albeit with ‘attractive mathematical elegance’,<sup>108</sup> proceeds from the experimental observation that ‘the 45° photon passing through the HV polarizer does not pass through one channel or the other, but in some way we find very difficult to model, it passes through both’.<sup>109</sup> The hypothesis that every quantum event has two or more possible outcomes, and, since these events can branch continuously, that their number must be enormous, has been confirmed in the laboratory.

5.2.2 The theory postulates that in every state of like measurement—in multiple phases of each quantum procedure—the presence of the existent and real undergoes a branching effect. We must postulate then for every

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106 See Everett’s first publication: Hugh Everett, ‘Relative State’ Formulation of Quantum Mechanics,’ *Reviews of Modern Physics* 29 (1957). See also Bryce Seligman Dewitt and Neill Graham, *The Many Worlds Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973); and Paul Davies, *Other Worlds: Space, Superspace and the Quantum Universe* (London: Dent & Sons, 1980).

107 Every manifestation of reality is possible thanks to the wave behaviour or wave function of matter in the microscopic dimension. (The transmission of light, i.e., the presupposition of each manifestation—of each existential verification in the macrocosm—can also be attributed to this behaviour). However, the moment one of our apparatuses records the results of measurement, the wave function being recorded acquires a particular value that is dependent on our method of measurement. All other possibilities are eliminated (the probabilistic character of quantum reality ‘collapses’). So, it is the act of measurement that converts a potential state into reality. Still, if quantum theory is to be universally applicable, our measuring apparatuses are included in the quantum system. Consequently, the reality recorded by an apparatus will also be probabilistic and lacking specific meaning, until recorded by a second apparatus that measures the first, and in turn is subject to measurement by a third, and so on *ad infinitum*.

108 Rae, *Quantum Physics*, 75.

109 *Ibid.*, 107.

such possible branching (for every possible orientation of the polarization of photons) a complete resulting separate reality. In the same way that when a single photon simultaneously passes through two channels of the HV polarizer there is no interaction between the two as they exit, in every one of the emergent realities (in each one of the multiple universes) there is no means of transmitting information regarding what happens in the other universes.<sup>110</sup>

5.2.3 Where are all these universes? The answer is that they may all be ‘here’ where ‘our’ universe is: by definition universes on different branches are unable to interact with each other in any way (unless they are able to merge in the very special circumstances mentioned earlier) so there is no reason why they should not occupy the same space. Alternatively, we can imagine the universes stacked up in some extra dimension of space we know nothing about.<sup>111</sup>

5.2.4 Our interest in the many-worlds theory and the split-universe model does not hinge on our ability to judge the scientific worth or validity of the theory, or its explanatory scope. It is of interest to us purely as an *example of a language* that lays claim to scientific realism using signifiers that have signifieds which are inaccessible to both sensible verification and the intellectual (definite) transcription of what can be sensibly verified.

5.3 This kind of language, which is indicative of our desire for a realistic scientific picture of what lies beyond our rational macroscopic experience, could serve as a catalyst for demythologising biblical references to a world of angels and demons, i.e., to purge our understanding of biblical language from associations with mythical creations of the imagination and to give to the signifiers ‘angels’ and ‘demons’ a realism that can be verified through relationships that are incapable of definitive intellectual transcription.

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110 The succinctness of this formulation is excessively schematic and certainly does not do justice to the scientific weight of the theory. For a more reliable and detailed explanation, see the chapter ‘Many Worlds’ in Rae, *Quantum Physics*, and the chapter ‘The Many-worlds Interpretation’ in Barrow and Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle*.

111 Rae, *Quantum Physics*, 79–80.

5.4 The Newtonian perspective and mindset, which is often dominant in religious settings, is more easily reconciled using a language that identifies ‘angels’ and ‘demons’ as entities distinguished by their activities, i.e., distinguished by phenomena such as so-called spiritualism<sup>112</sup> or demon possession<sup>113</sup> (as distinct from psychopathy). No one can easily dismiss these linguistic identifications, in the same way that one cannot dismiss the identifications of Newtonian physics at the level of macroscopic experience. Still, the ontological questions raised by biblical references to a ‘world’ of angels and demons remain unanswered by the language of macroscopic verification.

5.4.1 Ontological questions remain unanswered when their signifieds cannot causally be connected to a functional and intelligible apprehension of reality. The diversity of answers offered to ontological questions is a consequence of efforts to fill as many gaps as possible in our understanding of that aspect of reality we are trying to signify.

5.5 In the language and perspective of the Bible, the signifier ‘angels’ forms part of the interpretation of the divine *mode* of existence and life. This mode is *ecstatic*,<sup>114</sup> with the potential to create unlimited existential possibilities of communion and participation in the fullness of divine love. The uncreated personal origin of what exists is not signified exclusively in relation to the *cause* and *meaning* of our material universe. The Bible’s figurative references to a world of ‘angels’ do not reflect the interpretive parameters of a philosophical ontology. Rather, they testify to a *relationship* with yet another creative dimension of God’s *mode* of existence.

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112 Spiritismus or New Spiritualism: a movement that first appeared in the US in 1848 that claimed to be a positive science and sought to communicate with the departed and ‘good spirits’ through mediums who provoked supernatural phenomena and ‘materialisations’ of spirits that could be photographed and so on. See Arndt Röttgers, ‘Spiritismus’ in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Vol. 9, 1401ff.

113 See Gustav Mensching, ‘Besessenheit,’ in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Vol. 1 (Tübingen: Mohr-Verl, 1957), 1093.

114 Pseudo-Dionysius, ‘The Divine Names,’ 82 (PG 3:712b): ‘...through the superabundance of his *erotic* goodness, [God] is carried outside himself...He is, as it were, beguiled by goodness, by love, by *eros*...and he does so by virtue of his...ecstatic capacity to remain within himself’. Adapted. Lubheid translates *eros* as ‘yearning’. Translator’s note: square bracket’s Yannaras’.

5.5.1 The common *personal* mode in which God (the creator of all), humans and angels exist forms the axis for the connection and the mutual interpenetration of the angelic world and our material universe. In Biblical language, this connection is primarily signified as co-activity in the common *erotic* impetus of creatures to return to their Creator. Angels minister the human response to divine *eros*, which is why ‘there is joy in the presence of the angels’<sup>115</sup> when this response is realised in the person of even a single human being.

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115 Luke 15:10.

## Chapter 10

### THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF THE HUMAN BEING

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1 No one can talk about death in and of itself, i.e., no one can signify it from the perspective of lived experience. In the semantics of language, death is simply a physical event (a natural phenomenon) or the subjective experience of living in anticipation of that event.

2 So what comes after death? It is first and foremost an intellectual possibility that cannot be approached from within lived experience. As a general rule, in the case of analysis of an intellectual possibility, language becomes opaque and misleading. It is very difficult to separate *projected* desires from *signs* of genuine existential possibility. How do we know what is just vacuolation through psychological certitude, often cloaked in the authority of religious ‘revelation’, and what is verifiable testimony to the expansive possibilities of personal relationships?

3 Death, as the end of existence, certainly raises questions about the nature of human existence itself, the nature of the existential event: the first cause and its meaning, whether it is completely dependent on the physical necessities that govern it, or not. It is impossible to answer such questions, or even to pose them, with the methods, criteria and language of a nature-centric phenomenism. They belong to a different epistemic domain (the domain of the ‘toothache’)<sup>116</sup> and a different perspective on reality.

4 In any case, humans discover, even at the level of objective phenomena, that their existence differs from that of all other living

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<sup>116</sup> Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar*, Part I, 1:64 (105): ‘...the phenomenon of pain which I describe when I say something like ‘I have toothache’ doesn’t presuppose a physical body. (I can have toothache without teeth)’.

beings. We signify these apparent differences by the word *logikotita*<sup>117</sup>—humans possess intellect, judgment, imagination, language, active will and foresight. Humans have long regarded these unique capabilities as forming a distinct endowment (‘soul’ or ‘spirit’) that differs qualitatively from their corruptible and finite nature, which is to say as an aspect of existence that is not subject to death.

4.1 Christian experience came along, however, and denied in a quite realistic way existing philosophical speculations about the immortality of the soul. It affirmed that human *nature* is created and thus irrevocably finite, that with death the human being’s entire psychosomatic nature comes to an end and ‘can no longer act through the parts of the body, nor speak, nor remember, nor judge, nor desire, nor reason, nor remember, nor become angry, nor perceive’.<sup>118</sup>

4.2 Then along came the theory of evolution to inject modern humans with the doubt that perhaps all spiritual and psychic capabilities are simply products of their biologically advanced brains. Nevertheless, this kind of simplistic anthropology stumbles in the face of the difficult problems of neurophysiology. For example, how is the enormous polymerisation of brain functions composed and ‘focused’ in conscious experience? Why do experimental studies detect temporal inconsistency between neural function and ‘psychic’ events (brain cell activity can both precede and follow ‘psychic’ events of conscious awareness)? What is the missing factor, which is not subject to the quantum behaviour of matter, that selectively ‘reads’ from the mass of higher brain centres or ‘plays’ like a pianist on the keyboards of brain cells in order to compose conscious experience?

4.3 And yet, even if human *logikotita* were regarded as just an advanced form of animal *logikotita*, there is still another difference that would undermine the simplifications of naturalistic phenomenalism: while animals develop their ‘logical’ capabilities in order to adapt to the natural conditions in which they live, human beings alone have gone

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117 Translator’s note: literally *logos*-ness.

118 Anastasius of Sinai, *Viae Dux*, question 89, PG 89:36.

against this logic of natural adaptation and created, by virtue of that opposition, civilisation and history. Human beings are even capable of destroying the natural world in order to create their own world.

Humans resemble animals to the extent that they are forced to submit to what is given them. Any freedom from such submission is a sign of human uniqueness.<sup>119</sup>

5 The possibility of human *freedom* from the *logikotita* of human nature (natural necessity) stems from an empirically confirmed and active existential otherness. What is ‘other’ to nature is the existential possibility of un-predetermined relationships.

5.1 Even if the birth of the biological subject belongs to the logic and prescriptions of nature, the birth of the *logos*-possessing subject is nevertheless the work of relationships: ‘The subject is born in so far as the signifier emerges in the field of the Other’; ‘the subject, *in initio*, begins in the locus of the Other’.<sup>120</sup>

5.1.1 Relationships, not nature, form and constitute the existential particularity of human beings. Natural *logikotita* does not institute existential relational events. Relationships establish *logos*, not the other way around.

5.1.2 What is distinctive about the human being is the *potential* for its natural *erotic* urge for life (the libido) to be turned into a concrete desire and demand for *relationship* that constitutes a *mode of existence*. This potential can be signified linguistically as ‘extra-natural’, in the sense that it is what allows the human being to resist the logic of natural adaptation. The case of anorexic infants provides a revealing example: ‘they make themselves die’, demonstrating that their ‘psyche’ is determinative of their existence and incomparably stronger than the natural urge for life and ‘self-preservation’.<sup>121</sup>

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119 See John Zizioulas, *Ἡ κτίσις ὡς Εὐχαριστία: Θεολογική προσέγγιση στο πρόβλημα τῆς Οἰκολογίας* [*Creation as Eucharist: A Theological Approach to the Problem of Ecology*] (Athens: Akritas, 1992), 98–101.

120 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI*, 198–199.

121 The example is taken from Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*,

5.2 However, before the primal referentiality of the human subject can materialise in the form of either an affirmation or rejection of a relationship, we assume that there exists a *hypostatic kernel* (*Kern*, as Freud called it) of ‘non-sense’ (*non-sens*, as Lacan called it), since the kernel exists and is identified only once it is manifest and referenced via the relational mode, i.e., the *mode* of *logos* or meaning.

6 The relational mode is the extra-natural fact that affords us metaphysical<sup>122</sup> hope—the hope that it is not just the *logos*-possessing subject that is the product of relationship, but also the ineffable ‘kernel’ of our existential *hypostasis* (which only becomes known as it references according to the mode of relationships). It is what affords us hope that a *hypostatic* response to an extra-natural ‘call-to-relationship’—the existential factor of referential reciprocity, the party in a relationship—is possible.

6.1 Then, it might be possible for the subject to be ‘reborn’ after death, i.e., it might be possible that the uncreated activities of the transcendent calling Other, rather than natural *logikotita*, can instantiate the subject, and still not violate the ‘rational field’ of Lacan’s proposition that ‘the subject is born in so far as the signifier emerges in the field of the Other’. Moreover, from an epistemic perspective, the rational form of Lacan’s proposition refers to perceptible signifieds, and their rational form does not exhaust evidence that they exist.

My beginning and my *hypostasis* came from your command that fashioned me.<sup>123</sup> For God’s work is his *logos*.<sup>124</sup> His *logos* endures forever.<sup>125</sup>

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trans. Kathleen Blamey (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987), 177: ‘An anorexic infant makes himself die, his psyche is stronger than his biological regulatory system’.

122 *Meta-fysiki*: the hyphen, which is not standard in Modern Greek, highlights the etymological sense of the Greek term for metaphysics: ‘after-physics’.

123 Funeral Service, 41, (Sydney: St Andrew’s Orthodox Press, 2011). Adapted: *Hypostasis* is translated ‘substance’ in the St Andrew’s Orthodox Press translation.

124 Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Hexaemeron*, PG 44:73a.

125 1 Pet. 1:25. NRSV adapted.

## Chapter 11

### THE ‘LOGICAL’ IMPLICATIONS OF SIGNIFYING WHAT LIES BEYOND

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#### PART A

1 The texts of the New Testament, which record the early Christian experience, refer to human existence after death using a language of images and symbols— allegorical representations of sensible experience. There are only two instances in which we find an attempt to recount direct verification by historical persons of an experience of what lies beyond death.

2 One of the two instances comes from the apostle Paul. Speaking in the third person, he recounts his own personal experience, as he makes clear later in the text, saying:

I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. And I know that such a person—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows—was caught up into Paradise and heard words that are ineffable, that no mortal is permitted to repeat. On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses.<sup>126</sup>

2.1 The passage discloses a personal experience of access to the ‘realm’ of the uncreated—the ‘realm’ that ‘God has prepared for those who love him’<sup>127</sup> and which awaits humans after death.

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<sup>126</sup> 2 Cor. 12:2–5. NRSV adapted. The NRSV translates *arrita rimata* as ‘things that are not to be told’. I have translated this ‘words that are ineffable’ in order to more clearly draw out the connection of the language in this passage with the Greek title of the present book: *To rito kai to arrito—The Effable and the Ineffable*.

<sup>127</sup> 1 Cor. 2:9.

2.2 The person disclosing this experience affirms that it is ineffable—there are no linguistic signifiers with which to signify it or make it commonly understood.

2.2.1 Consequently, the testimony's credibility cannot be tested on the basis of its formulation. Validation therefore shifts to and depends on the credibility of the person giving the testimony. We cannot know first-hand, and thus verify, the declared experience. We can either trust in the person making the testimony or not.

2.3 Our philosophical aporias relating to what lies beyond death still remain unanswered—the language of the testimony makes no use of ontological categories. Indeed, the epistemic organ through which the event was experienced is unknown. It might have been experienced in the body and thus through the epistemic capabilities of created nature, or it might have been experienced 'out of the body'.

2.4 The testimony provides certainty that the person who lived the experience had complete awareness of his individual identity. Irrespective of whether his experience was that of a physical entity 'in the body' or one freed from his physical entity ('out of the body'), he retained his self-consciousness.

2.5 The experience was lived 'in Christ', i.e., as a function of a specific relationship with Christ's person. Access to the 'realm' of the uncreated resulted from a relationship, not from natural capabilities. It was a relational event. In addition, self-conscious participation in the experience of the uncreated—'I know that this man was caught up... and he heard'—is affirmed by the addition of 'in Christ'—the person's self-awareness of *hypostatic* identity continued to be referential, a constant self-conscious otherness with respect to a particular Other.

2.5.1 The expression 'in Christ' (inside Christ or with Christ) denotes an immediate loving reciprocity—*erotic* self-offering and corresponding acceptance of the offer in fullness.

2.6 The *mode* in which the experience was lived is signified by the word

‘capture’, which denotes a mode that was neither sought after nor which anyone could resist.

2.7 The *locus* of the experience is expressed using the ‘opinions’<sup>128</sup> of the era—the ‘capture’ was experienced as though it were a passage to paradise, a translocation ‘up to the third heaven’.

2.7.1 The word ‘paradise’, which means garden, allegorises in the language of Paul’s day (and in biblical language) a *mode* of being—it uses a location as an allegory for a *mode of relationality*, for relationships with God, fellow human beings, and God’s creation. It relates to a relationship of peace that is a source of existential plenitude, not threatened by possessive designs, nor by time, decay or death.

2.7.2 The expression ‘up to the third heaven’ reflects the biblical use of the word ‘heaven’. The Bible makes a distinction between a ‘natural heaven’, which forms part of created nature like the earth (hence ‘heaven and earth will pass away’<sup>129</sup>), and heaven as a mode of reference to the non-dimensional existence of God. Because this second sense refers to the non-dimensionality of divine presence, love and providence, it cannot be conceived as a reality apart from God.<sup>130</sup>

2.7.2.1 The ranks of first, second and third heaven presumably denoted in Paul’s day semantic distinctions that aimed to avoid conceptual confusion. The first heaven described the natural firmament, the second described ‘heaven as a generic religious concept that contrasted with earth and what is found on earth’,<sup>131</sup> and the third described the presence (throne) of God.<sup>132</sup>

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128 Ἐν δόξῃ: the commonly held opinions according to the language and categories widely understood in Paul’s day. See Aristotle, *Topica*, trans. and ed. E.S. Forster (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1960), 100b.20: ‘Generally accepted opinions, on the other hand, are those which commend themselves to all or to the majority or to the wise—that is, to all of the wise or to the majority or to the most famous and distinguished of them’.

129 Matt. 24:35.

130 See Léon-Dufour, *Vocabulaire de Théologie Biblique*, s.v. ‘ciel’.

131 Hermann Cremer, *Biblisch-theologisches Wörterbuch des neutestamentlichen Griechisch* (Gotha: Leopold Klotz, 1923).

132 Helmut Traub and Gerhard von Rad, ‘οὐρανός’, in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, Vol. 5, 512ff.

2.7.3 The experience to which the 'capture' led was lucid enough to allow verification. It is signified through the sense of hearing ('he heard words'). However, the lucidity of the experience was a kind of private subjective knowledge with no possibility of being shared through language, or of being reified by commonly understood signifiers. The one who experienced the 'capture' attests that 'he heard words', but that those words were ineffable—'words that are ineffable, which man may not utter'.

2.7.3.1 The meaning of the participle ἐξὸν [*exon*]<sup>133</sup> is twofold: 'it is permitted' and 'it is possible'. Experience of the uncreated cannot be signified by the language of the created—the limits of my language mean the limits of my world'.<sup>134</sup> Moreover, it is not appropriate to even attempt to signify such an experience in common language—that would create an 'intellectual idol' divorced from the reality of the uncreated.

3 However, transcending the limitations of language is a *hope* rather than an obstacle for Paul. He believes this can be done, confirming in one of his other epistles that upon entry to the mode of the uncreated 'tongues will cease'<sup>135</sup> for the purposes of realising the 'completion' of knowledge. Words constitute only an indirect form of knowledge, and in the case of words that refer to the reality of the uncreated, their signifieds are mere representational reflections of the created, a type of enigmatic knowledge—'for now we see in a mirror, dimly'.<sup>136</sup> At the 'then'<sup>137</sup> in which we vest our hope, indirect knowledge will disappear—'but when the complete comes' knowledge will consist of relational immediacy ('person to person').<sup>138</sup>

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133 The participle of the impersonal verb ἐξεῖναι (*exeinai*): 'it is not permitted to sacrifice on the golden altar' (Herodotus); 'You might be fortunate enough to marry' (Aeschylus); and 'It is possible to be saved' (Plato). Translator's note: *exon* appears in the Greek of 2 Cor. 12:4: 'was caught up into Paradise and heard words that are ineffable, that no mortal is permitted [*exon*] to repeat'.

134 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 5.6.

135 1 Cor. 13:8.

136 1 Cor. 13:12.

137 Translator's note: 'then' (*tote*) refers to the 'then' of 1 Cor. 13:10 (found in the official Greek Orthodox edition of the Bible but not in the Greek used for the NRSV translation): 'but when the complete comes, [then] the partial will come to an end'.

138 1 Cor. 13:9–10, 12: 'For we know only in part...but when the complete comes, the partial

3.1 In the first thirteen verses of 1 Corinthians, chapter 13, Paul clarifies (evidently as the person who experienced the ‘capture’) which possibilities or preconditions of the created do or do not disappear upon entering the mode of the uncreated:

‘As for prophecies, they will pass away’—this is readily intelligible given time, just like space, is simply a function of the presence of matter, something confirmed today by quantum mechanics. ‘Outside’ of a reality determined by time there exists no future that would allow prophetic prediction to function.

‘As for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away’. This clearly relates to the function of language and the epistemic mode through which we experientially come to know in the context of our earthly life. The immediacy of ‘person to person’ brings with it its own language and knowledge. It is the immediacy of communion, thus presupposing a different kind of knowledge that is both articulated and shared.

3.1.1 It is a matter of distinguishing between the partial or fragmentary and the complete and perfect: ‘For we [now] know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end’.<sup>139</sup> Language currently (now) signifies our relational experiences without ever exhausting those experiences. The knowledge provided by our sensory, intellectual and any other epistemic capabilities (as they presently stand) can never exhaust the reality of the other before us. ‘Then’, ‘partial’ knowledge and its ‘partial’ expression will pass away, because ‘the complete’ will become reality.

3.1.2 Paul defines the difference between the ‘partial’ and the ‘complete’ by analogical reference to an example from our earthly experience: ‘When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways’.<sup>140</sup>

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will come to an end ...For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face’. Translator’s note: I have translated ‘face to face’ as ‘person to person’ in the main text (they are the same word in Greek) to more accurately reflect Yannaras’ reading of the passage.

<sup>139</sup> Translator’s note: square brackets Yannaras’.

<sup>140</sup> 1 Cor. 13:11.

3.1.2.1 A child's language (mode of speaking), thinking (an activity of the mind, an activity not only of the intellect, but also of the will), and reasoning (a mode of calculating, analysing and inferring) differ from an adult's language, thinking and reasoning. Moreover, a child cannot foresee the development that awaits it in adulthood.

3.1.2.2 Entering the *mode* of the uncreated entails a process of maturation, the likes of which a child can neither conceive nor experience.

3.1.3 The 'complete' brings to an end the 'partial' in the same way that adulthood brings childhood to an end. While we find ourselves in the 'partial', we can only hope for the 'complete'. For the time being (now) this hope comprises the analogical anagoge of linguistic expression and experiential knowledge towards the fulfilling immediacy of *logos*-possessing communion to come (then). That said, we do not know exactly what 'person to person' communion and knowledge means.

3.2 'Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known'. The difference between 'I know' and 'I will know fully' is a difference in terms of hope and in terms of the mode of knowledge—'then' I will know according to the mode in which the one who called me to being from non-being has known me. I will know according to the mode in which I am known, the mode that constitutes my being, my existential *hypostasis*.

3.3 Knowledge about God in the present (now), as it is described by ecclesial experience, represents an echo of the mode of knowledge for which we hope—'you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God'.<sup>141</sup> Knowing God is not knowing an object of the senses or the intellect. It is not knowledge accomplished by virtue of a subject's epistemic capabilities. Humans know God, to the extent that they do so at all, by the relationship (surrendering to the relationship) through which God knows them, the relationship that *constitutes* humans as personal existences.

4 Words semantically echo the earthly experience of knowledge

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141 Gal. 4:9.

(‘partial’ knowledge), which is why ‘tongues will cease’ in the post-world relationship with God for which we hope. Still, words such as ‘person’, ‘knowledge’, ‘complete’ and ‘love’ bring with them an experience of the dynamic of hope.

4.1 Paul affirms that ‘love never ends’.<sup>142</sup> ‘Never’ here is clearly contrasted with the cessation of tongues, prophecy and ‘partial’ knowledge. The word ‘love’ signifies an experiential dynamic that is experienced in earthly life as a perpetually imperfectible perfection. Yet, it does not disappear in life after death. It does not ‘end’ with the adulthood that comes upon entering the ‘realm’ of the uncreated.

4.2 In Paul’s language the signifieds of the words ‘person’, ‘knowledge’ and ‘complete’ are presupposed realities accessible to the epistemic dynamic of experience, realities that correspond to the epistemic dynamic of experiencing love. They are words that denote verification of experiences lived ‘in part’ during earthly life and that will not cease or end after death.

5 If love is preserved in the ineffable mode of the uncreated, then what we know as ‘relationship’ in earthly life will also endure. If relationships are preserved, then the *otherness* of each party to the relationship, i.e., each singular identity, is also preserved. Therefore, self-consciousness, thought, *logos*-possessing referential existence, communion in *logos* and personal desire continue to be active in some form.

5.1 In what *natural activities* are the self-awareness of personal identity, the *logos*-possessing referentiality of relationships and the vital communion of love active, given that the activities of created human nature are definitively extinguished at death? What *ontological foundations* could support the hope of the Church? By what criteria could we distinguish the lived dynamic of hope and its ontological realism from the experiential dynamic of psychological wishful thinking?

5.1.1 We leave these questions hanging for the moment and simply note here that they have been posed, and are presupposed, in the

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<sup>142</sup> 1 Cor. 13:8.

The 'logical' implications of signifying what lies beyond language of ecclesial experience. Ecclesial experience does not seek refuge in psychologically convenient appeals to axiomatic principles or ontologically deficient 'supernatural' explanations. The language of ecclesial experience represents an unceasing struggle to avoid the pitfalls of psychological wishful thinking, a struggle to preserve the realism that comes from the insights provided by the dynamic of *relationships*, and not the observation of nature—'the whole struggle is about things'.<sup>143</sup>

6 *Mutatis mutandis* (reiterated as a constant reminder): an ontology founded in relationality differs from one founded in nature, in the same way that the language of quantum physics differs from the language of Newtonian physics.

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143 Gregory Palamas, 'Synodal Tome of the Council of 1351', 380.

## Chapter 12

### THE ‘LOGICAL’ IMPLICATIONS OF SIGNIFYING WHAT LIES BEYOND

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#### PART B

1 The second instance in which the early Christian texts of the New Testament record direct verification by historical persons of an experience of what lies beyond death, is the narrative of the Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor found in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke.<sup>144</sup> The narrative is corroborated by the personal testimony of Peter.<sup>145</sup>

1.1 At a time and place specified in detail (six days after Christ’s strong rebuke of Peter ‘in the district of Caesarea Philippi’,<sup>146</sup> according to Mathew and Mark, or eight days according to Luke) Christ chose three of his disciples—Peter, James and John—and led them ‘up a high mountain apart, by themselves’. An unwritten tradition clarifies that it was Mount Tabor, where Jesus ‘was transfigured before them’.

1.2 The word ‘transfiguration’ denotes a change in form, without altering or undermining the identity of the one transfigured. The gospel texts identify the elements of this changed form using iconological similes:

— ‘his face shone like the sun’;

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144 See Matt. 17:1–8; Mark 9:2–10; and Luke 9:28–36.

145 2 Pet. 1:16–18: ‘For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honour and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, ‘This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased’. We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain’.

146 Matt. 16:13.

The ‘logical’ implications of signifying what lies beyond

- ‘his clothes became dazzling white’ (Matt.), ‘his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them’ (Mark).

1.2.1 An abundance of dazzling light is the image used by the ecclesial experience to portray any episode in which the presence of God is physically sensed. It is not a matter simply of an experience of the psyche, but an experience of the senses, albeit one which finds no counterpart in common human understanding, and which can only be rendered familiar through analogy—it is a sensation *like* being dazzled by a strong light, *as if* one were looking directly at the sun.

1.2.1.1 On account of the theoretical dispute surrounding the sensible experience of Christian ascetics, the Church’s synodal testimony clarified in the 14<sup>th</sup> century that:

- the physical sensation of God’s presence, expressed by the analogy of seeing dazzling light, does not constitute sensible knowledge of the uncreated God, but rather experiential participation in, and knowledge of, God’s activities—not of the created result of divine activity, but an experience of sensible participation in and knowledge of the *uncreated activities* of the uncreated God.
- the sensible participation of created humans in knowledge of uncreated divine activities is not achieved via their natural epistemic capabilities, but by the grace and gift of the fullness of relationship between the created human being and the uncreated God—a fullness that neither removes nor bypasses the natural capabilities for sensible knowledge. Rather, it merely transcends the semantic capabilities of language, in the same way that the unique experience of every relationship does.

1.3 On Mount Tabor, the three disciples were bestowed the pinnacle of fulfilled relationship, not an objective<sup>147</sup> (ontologically inexplicable) ‘supernatural’ demonstration of the uncreated’s majesty.

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147 *Anti-keimeni*: The Greek word for ‘objective’, but with a hyphen to highlight its etymological sense of ‘lying before’, and thus connoting ‘objective’ in the sense of a real event in the physical world.

1.4 Christ did not cease to be a physical<sup>148</sup> human presence on Mount Tabor—indeed he was still wearing his ordinary clothing. The physical face of Jesus, as it was known by his disciples, ‘shone like the sun’, and his ordinary material clothing became ‘dazzling white’.

2 The testimony of the disciples’ experience on Tabor confirms that the existential gulf between created matter (corruptible and ephemeral) and the reality of the uncreated is not unbridgeable in the way that our intellectual categories presuppose. We are not talking here about mutually exclusive existential conditions that can never converge. The created results of the uncreated divine activities are able to participate in the *mode* in which their uncreated cause exists, provided the dynamic of relationships constitutes an ontological condition that is as real as ontic presence.

3 The sensation of Christ’s transfiguration was further accompanied by the sensible verification of two deceased persons—Moses and Elijah. The gospel text indicates that the disciples had no difficulty in recognising them. They knew instantly that it was Moses and Elijah who had appeared before them. We can conclude then that the lived experience of full relationship with Christ establishes very clearly the *hypostatic* (eponymous) otherness of every person who participates in the same relationship with Him.

3.1 The gospel text does not clarify whether the presence of Moses and Elijah was ‘in the body’ or ‘out of the body’, or whether the disciples’ recognition of them occurred on account of their form or by some other means. On the basis of the ontological explanatory capabilities of our perception we can exclude the possibility that their presence was bodily, as both of them had died centuries before. We can also exclude the possibility that they were recognised on account of their form, as iconographical representation of great figures from the past was not part of Israel’s tradition.

3.2 Still, Moses and Elijah appeared ‘talking with’ Christ, without any

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148 *Fysiki*: the same word for ‘natural’ in Greek.

record of what they said, and in what language. Perhaps 'talking with' was meant to convey the disciples' sense that these two figures from the Old Testament appeared in direct communion with Christ. In any event, Peter's sensation was expressed through an awkward ('he did not know what to say') and fearful ('for they were terrified'<sup>149</sup>) request for the joy of the moment to be prolonged in any way possible: 'Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah'.<sup>150</sup>

3.2.1 In the case of the Tabor experience of Jesus' divinity and the existential presence of two deceased men, language did not 'cease', nor did sensation of material things 'come to an end'. Peter sought to perpetuate this blessed co-mingling through a practical solution from everyday life on earth—for the disciples to make three dwellings in order to house (and thus make permanent) the presence of the transfigured Christ, as well as Moses and Elijah.

3.2.2 It is likely that the language of the gospel narrative is merely illustrative or suggestive of experiential information 'that no mortal is permitted to repeat'.<sup>151</sup> There are, nevertheless, indications of the disciples' disposition that resulted from this lived experience. Peter prioritised Christ's wishes ('Lord...if you wish') and then overlooked the disciples' need for a dwelling to accommodate them at this time of blissful co-mingling. These elements are indicative of a relationship that constitutes a *mode of existence* that is self-transcendent and self-offering.

4 As the gospel describes it, Peter's awkward and fearful expression was interrupted by the sensible intervention of the Father's presence. This intervention is denoted linguistically as the sensation of 'a bright cloud'.<sup>152</sup>

4.1 In the language of the New Testament era the word 'cloud' was charged with a very specific theological meaning—the physical presence of clouds makes the infinite and limitless sky perceptible, while at the

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149 Mark 9.6.

150 Matt. 17:4.

151 2 Cor. 12:4.

152 Matt. 17: 5.

same time obscuring it. Thus the words for cloud—‘νεφέλη’ [*nefeli*], ‘νέφη’ [*nefi*], ‘γνόφος’ [*gnofos*]—function allegorically to denote the experience of divine presence and knowledge, and at the same time the concealment of the infinite and dimensionless.

4.1.1 During the exodus of the Hebrew people from Egypt, ‘God went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud’.<sup>153</sup> On Mount Sinai, God was present in the form of a ‘dark cloud’<sup>154</sup> that protected the ‘glory’ of God from the idolatry-prone gaze of human beings. Accessible, yet at the same time impenetrable, this cloud allowed Moses to commune with God without seeing him face to face. If the cloud protected the divine glory, it also revealed it at the same time. When Solomon founded the temple ‘a cloud filled the house’<sup>155</sup> and God addressed Job ‘through a hurricane and clouds’.<sup>156</sup>

4.2 In Matthew and Mark we read that ‘a bright cloud overshadowed’ the three disciples on Mount Tabor. The sentence is written in an unusual linguistic code that requires a ‘key’ if it is to be decoded. That key is the way that ‘cloud’ has been used in the Hebrew tradition. Thus, what it means to say that ‘I comprehend’ the sentence is that I understand that it signifies that the three disciples had a tangible experience of God’s presence. However, comprehending this signification does not amount to verification of the event. Language is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for making a personal experience known.

5 I need an accurate understanding of language, accompanied by all the necessary ‘keys’ with which to decode its meaning. But understanding sentences in a language only *points* me to signified experiences. It does not make me a *participant* in those experiences. If I misconstrue comprehension of that linguistic reference for the experience of participating in the event signified, then I substitute lived reality for psychological illusion.

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<sup>153</sup> Exod. 13:21.

<sup>154</sup> Exod. 19:16.

<sup>155</sup> 3 Kingdoms 8:10. Translator’s translation.

<sup>156</sup> Job 38:1. Translator’s translation.

5.1 The *mode* of language differs from the *mode* of experiential participation. The *mode* of experiential participation is signified linguistically by the words 'relationship', 'faith-trust', 'communion' and 'self-surrender'.

6 The linguistic semantics of the disciples' experience on Tabor offers the following description<sup>157</sup>: '...and from the cloud a voice said: "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"'<sup>158</sup> If the text serves as a reference to a manifest experience, and is not just an example of linguistic pragmatics, then we can treat the account as ontological evidence.

6.1 The account shows indirectly that the grace-gift of the fullness of human relationships with God represents a *logos*-possessing communion with just as much lucidity as that found in the spoken word and the sensible hearing-comprehension of the spoken word.

6.2 The *rational* lucidity of human communion with God (in its charismatic-revelatory fullness) constitutes affirmation of the 'Father's' relationship with the 'Son' in the fullness of unity and blessedness. It further indicates that a relationship of faithful trust and self-surrender is the only *mode* by which humans can access knowledge of the uncreated ('listen to him!').

6.3 The semantics of the gospel text further indicates that the gift of the fullness of human relationship with God transcends the existential terms of created human nature—it is also experienced by the natural human being as a threat to the existential self-sufficiency and self-determination of that nature. Thus, 'when the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear'.<sup>159</sup> Even when Peter initially addressed Christ 'in his glory', he was 'overcome by fear'. By contrast, Moses and Elijah, who had been freed from the restrictions of nature's

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157 *Peri-grafei*: Yannaras hyphenates the Greek word 'to describe' to produce the etymological meaning: 'writes about'.

158 Matt. 17:5.

159 Matt. 17:6.

*The Effable and The Ineffable*

existential autonomy, thanks to the intervention of death, appeared to be also free of any fear in their relationship.

## Chapter 13

### A RELATION-CENTRED KNOWLEDGE OF PHYSICS AND METAPHYSICS

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1 Humanity has lived with false certainties regarding the reality of the sensible world for most of its historical existence. The illusion that the earth was at the centre of the universe and that the sun and the planets revolved around it reigned universally for a long time.

It wasn't until the 16<sup>th</sup> century that Copernicus refuted this geocentric worldview and demonstrated mathematically that the sun is at the centre of a spherical universe and that the earth, along with the rest of the planets, revolve around that centre.

Several years later, Kepler determined that planets move in elliptical orbits, with the sun forming one of the two foci of each ellipse. He also calculated the speed of their revolution.

At the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Galileo confirmed by telescopic observation Copernicus and Kepler's mathematical calculations.

Then Newton condensed all the laws that had been outlined by his predecessors into a single law, the universal law of gravity: the motions of celestial bodies are determined by the gravitational force exercised by them, which is directly proportionate to their mass and inversely proportionate to the square of their distance.

1.1 The Newtonian version of reality offered substantiated assurances of scientific precision and integrity. It solidified in people's minds a confidence in *positive* knowledge about the sensible world.

1.2 In the 20<sup>th</sup> century new research conditions (with new mathematics and new technologies) overturned confidence in Newtonian certainties. Reified 'accuracy' gave way to methodological relativity, and research

became grounded in the *falsifiability* of propositions that explain the world.

A new post–Newtonian conception of physical reality began to take form with the appearance of Max Planck’s quantum theory about energy (1900), Einstein’s special theory of relativity (1905), Niels Bohr’s establishment of quantum mechanics (1913), the general theory of relativity (1916), Louis de Broglie’s wave–particle duality theory (1924), Werner Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle (1925), Erwin Schrödinger’s wave formula in quantum mechanics (1926), Max Born’s introduction of the probabilistic conception of the behaviour of matter (1928), P.M. Dirac’s theory of antimatter (1930), and Richard Feynman’s creation of quantum electrodynamics (1950), as well as the more recent chaos systems theory.

1.2.1 With these indicative milestones, research (not limited to the names above) called into question, and ultimately overturned, a number of foundational certainties in Newtonian physics. One could say, albeit in a highly generalised way, that Newtonian physics presented the world in the image of a mechanically organised totality of given entities that are connected and interact according to the same strict causality and determinism, irrespective of their multitude and size. By extending the constant space-time co-ordinates (causality and regularity) that reveal physical phenomena in our everyday macroscopic experience, Newtonian physics believed that precise laws could be applied to every phenomenon, thus ascribing complete and universal force to mechanistic causality.

1.2.2 In contrast, subsequent data produced by research presents an image of matter, and consequently of the world, as a totality of actualized relationships with dynamic indeterminacy—a totality of contributing changes, where the changes themselves uniquely constitute reality. At the same time, however, a consistent description of what is undergoing change remains impossible.

1.2.2.1 Today we know that every single one of our explanatory models of reality is mediated by our own calculations (mathematical simulation), which can only be relatively accurate for an insignificant period of time

relative to the age of the universe (even in the case of 10 million years), and with only limited accuracy with respect to determining the value of each variable. The number of variable factors that constitute or affect natural phenomena is so vast that no truly accurate estimation can correspond to reality.

1.3 Meteorology provides a characteristic example of a scientific field in which the relativity (the unreliability of positive knowledge) of natural-sensible phenomena (their causal interpretation) can be readily understood: a small disturbance in the atmosphere doubles in two days, meaning that it grows in force by a factor of one thousand in ten days, and by one million in the course of a month, thus reaching macroscopic scale.

1.3.1 This is the paradigmatic and iconic phenomenon of the so-called *butterfly effect*: a butterfly flaps its wings in Hong Kong, and by the time it has drunk the nectar of several flowers, its initial flutter has become an imperceptible disturbance in the air. That disturbance becomes a draught, the draught becomes wind and eventually the wind becomes a cyclone that sinks a boat in the Gulf of Mexico! The image is supposed to convey the fact that, in order for us to make meteorological predictions ranging from one to two months, we would have to know how all of the butterflies on the planet flutter their wings.<sup>160</sup>

1.3.2 Disturbances in the atmosphere, the dance of cyclones and anticyclones, as well as rainfall and storms, constitute an experiential-sensible reality. However, this reality, in spite of its sensible-experiential accessibility, is inaccessible to scientific knowledge—at least as far as determining underlying causes is concerned—and thus to long-term prediction. Even if we were to identify successfully with mathematical precision the infinite causal origin of atmospheric disturbances, i.e., every butterfly's flutter across the whole planet, reality would still defy scientific causal explanation and prediction. This is because the relationships between the system's diverse variables do not develop in a predetermined manner, nor do they develop, for that matter, by sheer

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160 Ivar Ekeland, *Tò χάος [Le Chaos]*, trans. Marios Verettas (Athens: Travlos-Kostarakis, 1995), 55.

chance. Certain evolutionary ‘selections’, which can neither be located nor predicted, intervene to ensure that the system functions naturally.

2 In recent European history (principally after the 13<sup>th</sup> century, when an enthusiastic faith in scientific positivism emerged in the West), metaphysical inquiry appears to have been infected with a jealous inferiority complex towards natural science, lacking, as it does, the apodictic integrity of sensible observation, experimentation and mathematical simulation. This jealous inferiority complex is clearly evident in the way that theological and philosophical writing sought to demonstrate that the terms of metaphysical inquiry are completely commensurate, with respect to apodictic integrity and scientific method, to those of scientific inquiry.<sup>161</sup>

2.1 The effects of this contest between metaphysics and physics are still with us today, principally in the form of religious language and the mindset generated by that language. It can be seen in the predominance of various forms of intellectual certitude, conclusions based on abstract apodictic reductionism and deterministic interconnections, which is to say certainties that are analogous to the Ptolemaic or Newtonian belief that explanatory models equate with reality itself.

2.2 Yet, the indeterminacy of the factors found in all metaphysical explanatory proposals is incomparably more radical than the indeterminacy of the conditions one finds in some natural phenomena. It is not just that experimental verification and mathematical simulation are excluded from metaphysical inquiry. It is, above all, the inability of language to signify existential possibilities that are not dependent on physical space and time, nor on the definite (reified) location that is presupposed by the very operation of language.

2.2.1 Thus it is the *intellect*, shaped by *psychological need*, that exclusively assumes the role of mediating the signifiers of explanatory propositions and their metaphysical signifieds. This is why the ‘compensation’ (in

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161 See, for example, Marie-Dominique Chenu, *La Théologie comme science au XIIIe siècle* (Paris: Vrin, 1969); and Ulrich Köpf, *Die Anfänge der theologischen Wissenschaftstheorie im 13. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen: Mohr-Verl, 1974), where one can find an extensive bibliography.

the psychological sense of the term) of the jealous inferiority complex exhibited by metaphysics towards physics has manifested primarily as either an absolutized *rationalism* or an absolutized *mysticism*, and often as a paradoxical mix of both of them.<sup>162</sup>

3 The language of ecclesial experience in the first Christian centuries (and subsequently in its non-alienated Orthodox versions) consistently insisted on the epistemological principle of *apophaticism*: the refusal to equate knowledge merely with comprehension of the form in which it is articulated in language. The language of ecclesial metaphysics functions in a purely indicative and referential manner. It refers to a relational experience, to the *achievement* of relationship—to that knowledge which results from transcending intellectual curiosity and psychological insecurity, the knowledge of faith-as-trust.

3.1 In the perspective of ecclesial apophaticism, experiential access to and relationship with the signifieds of metaphysical semantics cannot be attained purely by individual effort. Access is mediated by participation in the ecclesial *mode* of living—in that kind of *personal* and *loving relational communion* that forms the ‘body’ of the Eucharistic community. Only by experiencing the ecclesial *communion of relationships* can one progressively attain some indirect knowledge (‘through a mirror, dimly’) of what is signified by words like ‘person’, ‘personal *hypostasis*’, ‘life-giving activity’, ‘grace’, ‘love’ and ‘freedom’.

3.1.1 The Church does not call humans to embrace certain ideological principles, to accept a code of ethical behaviour, or to live out some kind of psychological (mystical) religiosity. It calls humans to participate in a *relational mode* (practice) that progressively leads to an existential ‘transition’ from the individual to the person. The practices of fasting, charity, temperance, prayer and participation in the liturgy are not, in the ecclesial perspective, ‘religious duties’, and therefore opportunities for individual reward. Rather, they provide guidance towards human

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162 Even though luminaries of Western intellectualism, such as Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, Albert the Great and John Duns Scotus, are typical representatives of apodictic positivism, they still proclaimed the ‘mystical’ character of knowledge about God and the inability of the intellect to know the transcendent.

‘re-birth’, whereby humans are ‘born’ in the place of the Eponymous Other, no longer existing according to the mode of *nature*, but the mode of *relationships*.

3.2 In any event, we cannot avoid expressing the relational experience of ecclesial communion using the linguistic semantics of each given time and culture. That is to say that one cannot avoid the entanglement of ecclesial language (in its testimony of metaphysical experience) with the representations and images of the commonly accepted worldview of each historical period. Constant *apophatic* vigilance is therefore required in order to prevent the bridge that leads to real experiences of signifieds from being subordinated to signifiers and images of the worldview of the day.

4 Paul makes two substantive references to human life after death, which support the need for careful *apophatic* vigilance vis-à-vis metaphysical language. The first reference occurs in his first epistle to the Corinthians:

But someone will ask, ‘How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come? Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. Not all flesh is alike, but there is one flesh for human beings, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish...So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body...The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.’<sup>163</sup>

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163 1 Cor. 15:35–49.

4.1 The iconological language of this passage is drawn from the timeless and unchanging experience of the natural seed. When a person sows a seed, they do so ‘in hope’, unable to intervene in the process of germination and bloom. They simply put their *trust* in the vital power of the seed, which they attribute either to nature itself or to the providence of the Creator of nature. At any rate, the process, in which the sower can only have *faith* and trust rather than direct influence, begins with the seed’s decay, followed by decomposition and then death. The seed rots and dissolves into the soil, transmitting its vital power to the germination resulting from its own death, which constitutes a new and different flesh, that of a plant capable of bearing fruit—‘a fruit multiplying a hundredfold’.<sup>164</sup>

4.1.1 The image works independently of the fact that it is contextualised in an ancient worldview. It also works independently of what we know today about the various biochemical processes involved in the germination of seeds. The image detaches metaphysical explanation from intellectual curiosity, focusing it instead on the struggle of faith-as-trust. The faithful surrender to death in the same way that they surrender the seed to the earth’s embrace, in the hope that it will find nourishment and live again.

4.1.1.1 The image also works analogously to the way that people surrender themselves to sleep in order to find relief from fatigue, doing so in the assurance that they will re-awake to the immediacy of relationships. In this case it also functions independently of an understanding of the biological processes that restore and renew the functioning of the body and mind in the course of sleep.

4.1.2 In the case of both germination and sleep, the human being evidently trusts in either the given (unexplained) ‘wisdom’ of nature or the providence of nature’s personal Creator-Logos. Still, this hopeful trust is lived as experiential certainty, the kind of knowledge that also facilitates our access to metaphysics. If it is the Creator’s providential love, rather than chance, that bestows the seed’s nature with the power

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164 Luke 8:8. Translator’s translation.

of germination, and human nature with the regenerative restoration of sleep, then the person of faith can entrust their own surrender to death to that same love.

4.2 The kind of knowledge that functions as faith-as-trust neither satisfies nor removes intellectual curiosity. Questions still remain: ‘How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?’—‘How can [a human] exist outside that in which it received its natural being?’<sup>165</sup> These questions remain unanswered. But for the person of faith they are questions devoid of the uncertainty and insecurity of non-relational hopelessness.

4.2.1 Faith admits doubt, whereas one *knows* that they can trust. And one knows trust through the experiential immediacy of the achievement or gift of relationships. We ask about the unknown towards which we are all moving without any anxiety about the potential existential void ahead, i.e., the threat of becoming nothing.

4.3 *Overcoming* anxiety about death is a fruit of the *knowledge* provided by relational experiences. It is equally possible, however, to *circumvent* anxiety about death through the effects of psychological auto-suggestion, vacuolation by ideological ‘certitude’ and typical forms of ‘repressing’<sup>166</sup> or ‘suppressing’<sup>167</sup> the eventuality of death. *Distinguishing* psychological experience from real relational experiences is a perpetual struggle.

4.3.1 Even identifying death with sleep, or the mutation of a germinating seed, can easily become a way of psychologically *circumventing* anxiety about death. These two images are simply relative and indicative

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165 John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans. Lazarus Moore, with introduction by M. Heppell (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), Step 26, 107 (217). Adapted. Translator’s note: square brackets Yannaras’.

166 *Verdrängung—refoulement—repression*: an unconscious defensive mechanism by which ideas, images, feelings or memories are kept out of the consciousness.

167 *Unterdrückung—répression—suppression*: mental activity or function that tends to erase from consciousness something unpleasant or uncomfortable (an idea, image, feeling or memory). Repression differs from suppression to the extent that the latter is an unconscious process. See Laplanche and Pontalis, *Le Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse*, 392ff and 419ff.

approximations, as existential co-ordinates<sup>168</sup> are erased upon death and human nature vanishes. It takes more than an intellectual and psychological familiarity with imagery in order to face death with peaceful acceptance.

4.3.2 Ecclesial experience is suspicious of subjective experience.<sup>169</sup> It insists on the realism of shared relationships. Paul ties the image of a seed's mutation through germination to the historical person of the incarnate God in order to illustrate the transition to another *mode of existence* through death—the *resurrection* mode.

4.3.2.1 The existential reality of the man of *dust* is different to that of the man of *heaven*—‘just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven’.<sup>170</sup>

(The word ‘image’ here has the sense of the Hebrew ‘kabod’, which is synonymous with glory, disclosure or revelation. It is not possible to locate the human *hypostasis*. It is known, disclosed or revealed by virtue of being ‘clothed’ in its nature of dust during its presence on earth, and in uncreated Grace in its heavenly presence following death.

4.3.3 Knowledge of ‘the image of the man of heaven’ (the *mode of resurrection*) is not restricted to subjective intellectual–psychological acceptance of historical information about Christ’s resurrection from the dead. It is an experience of shared and communally achieved faith-as-trust in the existential possibility of resurrection—an experience that formed the ecclesial communion of relationships and that has held it together over time.

5 We speak of an ecclesial ‘body’, i.e., a vital relational communion, that is iconologically analogous to the organic living unity of the body’s limbs. The ecclesial communion of life is a *mode of existence*, a mode

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168 *Syntetagemenes*: i.e., existence in space and time.

169 Translator’s note: the first reference to ‘experience’ is *empeiria*, which has connotations of an objective, external experience that happens to the subject. The second reference to ‘experiences’ refers to *viomata*, which has connotations of internal, individual subjective experiences.

170 1 Cor. 15:49.

archetypically realised in Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection: we don't first exist, and then subsequently love, rather we exist because we love, and only to the extent that we lovingly share our existence. I love, therefore I exist. It is drawing one's existence not from finite created nature, but from existentially unlimited relationships—the loving response of the crucifixion (an act of complete self-transcendence) to the call of the One who raised us out of nothingness and continually calls us into being from non-being.

5.1 The person of faith searches for the existential possibility (*mode*) of resurrection in the struggle of ecclesial communion without finding *explicit*<sup>171</sup> answers to their intellectual curiosity. We are not talking about the kind of knowledge that information provides, but rather about an experiential certainty that is not subject to intellectual–linguistic categories: *mutatis mutandis*, as in being in love.

5.1.1 Intellectual curiosity, with language as its organ, belongs to a mode that prioritises the individual's survival, a mode that confirms existence through the *cogito*—a mode that is irrevocably ephemeral and finite. Faith belongs to the mode of *eros* and self-transcendence, i.e., to a love that knows no existential boundaries.

5.1.2 The *erotic* relationship with Christ's resurrection is the path and language by which one can experientially reach certainty regarding life after death—a certainty that is experientially shared and communally achieved. It is akin to the certainty that lovers enjoy in the silence of the 'one flesh' in faithful imitation of the anticipated 'cessation' of language—'then...when the complete comes'.

5.2 A realistic foundation for hope depends on the historicity of Christ's resurrection:

For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile...We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ—whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are

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<sup>171</sup> *Rites*: the same adjective translated 'effable' in the present book's title.

not raised...If Christ has not been raised...Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, and has become the first fruits of those who have died...for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ.<sup>172</sup>

6 The second paradigmatic reference by the apostle Paul to human existence after death (the issue under discussion) comes from his first epistle to the Thessalonians:

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.<sup>173</sup>

6.1 The readers addressed by Paul in the preceding passage (1 Cor. 15) are those who say that there is no resurrection of the dead, which is why the illustration he used there (the wheat seed must die in order to sprout a new form of existence) also functioned as an argument—it is an apodictic analogy. However, Paul did not write to the Thessalonians to address their objections, but rather to support and comfort brothers and sisters in faith, which is why the linguistic illustration that he uses betrays no apodictic concern. It is proclamatory and adopts the contemporary expression of the day—the ‘opinions’ or worldview then commonly held.

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172 1 Cor. 15:12–22. Translator's note: Yannaras has rearranged the order of the verses for emphasis.

173 1 Thess. 4:13–17.

6.1.1 Paul shared without reservation—indeed confirming that he spoke ‘by the word of the Lord’—the belief of his contemporary believers that the universal resurrection of the dead (the second coming of Christ) would take place in the time of the first apostolic generation, i.e., that Paul himself would be among those living at the moment the world and history came to a sudden end.

This does not preclude the possibility that Paul might have used the reference to himself and to his contemporaries as a rhetorical technique for portraying more clearly what would happen to those living at the coming of Christ.

6.1.2 Paul’s language clearly borrows images and symbols from the historical tradition of the Hebrew people that would have been familiar to his contemporaries. He mentions the ‘trumpet of God’ and the ‘voice of the archangel’, images that allude to the appearance of God on Mount Sinai when ‘the sound of the trumpet was very loud’,<sup>174</sup> and to the mediatory role between humans and God attributed to angels in Mesopotamian tradition.

6.1.3 Paul uses categories from the earthly experience of *space* and *motion*—‘the Lord...will descend from heaven’ and ‘we will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air’.<sup>175</sup> One might regard these expressions as binding metaphysics to apperceptive experiences of the physical, and indeed to a pre-scientific worldview. But there is no hint of any interest in an ontological interpretation of things hoped for. He does not succumb to intellectual curiosity.

6.1.3.1 It is the voice of faith-as-trust speaking here, and in a relative language that is clearly accommodated to contemporary apperception. It is faith that is being communicated and shared, not information.

6.1.3.2 This language, which confirms faith while relativising information, has often been misinterpreted throughout history as a deliberate (and necessary) abandonment of reason—faith has often

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<sup>174</sup> Exod. 19:16.

<sup>175</sup> 1 Thess. 4:16–17. NRSV adapted.

been identified with an attempt to invalidate the intellect (e.g., fideism: ‘believe and don’t investigate’) and to subordinate it to the acceptance of unexplained axiomatic principles, treating symbolic images as reality.

6.1.3.3 Equating faith with irrationality (*credo quia absurdum*) does not necessarily mean transcending individualism, or self-surrendering to loving trust. It could just as well represent self-centred psychological acceptance, i.e. the polar opposite of faith as ecclesial experience, (shared and communally achieved experience). It could also merely represent the perversion of faith in such a way that it becomes a matter of individual ‘mystical’ belief, or fortified individual psychological confidence.

6.1.4 Paul does not relativise his expression and accommodate contemporary apperceptions so that he can lead people to irrationality. Instead, he does so in order to communicate and share his faith. If he were to speak about the resurrection of the dead today, i.e., at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century AD, and if he were to use imagery more consistent with our scientific understanding of the world, i.e., indeterminacy and relativity, he would still use a language that did not seek to satisfy intellectual curiosity. This is because the only thing being shared is faith-as-trust in metaphysical hope. Moreover, any information mediated by language will always be illusive.

6.2 A more contemporary expression could perhaps help facilitate shared access to the *event* of faith-as-trust, but it could never be a substitute for that event. No doubt, we would be more comfortable with a language that spoke of Christ’s anticipated presence in terms of ‘coming’ from beyond space and time, much in the same way that the conditions of physical reality detected today transcend our experiential horizon, thus rendering useless the representational function of language that determines entities, sizes and quantities.

6.2.1 In reality, if the point at which space and time begin is not subject to spatial and temporal measurement (our calculations arrive at an infinite regress at the point and moment of the ‘Big Bang’<sup>176</sup>), it would be more

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176 See, for example, Vasilis Xanthopoulos, ‘Κοσμολογία’ [*Cosmology*] in *Η φυσική σήμερα*

effective to communicate using similar linguistic signifiers to discuss the desired escape from the endless succession of prior to subsequent, as well as from any dimensional coordinates.

6.2.2 One could reasonably argue that any discussion of life after death using images and representations from mundane macroscopic experience does great disservice to the communicative efficacy of attempts to clarify the event of faith-as-trust—especially today, when the language of natural science is utterly transcendent with respect to its representational–depictive semantics (without of course implying a conception of reality that is beyond experience or that is exclusively intellectual or imaginary).

The language of physics today can inspire a more substantial and profound metaphysical surprise or wonder, compared to the language that preserves the Newtonian imagery of metaphysical signifieds.

6.2.3 For someone living in the apostle Paul’s day the word ‘heaven’ signified the visible firmament, which was dotted with stars at night and filled with light from the passage of the sun during the day. It was a vast space, but one that was also tangible and familiar—it extended the visual horizon beyond the mountains and the sea, something like an extension of the three-dimensional private space of the city or the home. Such a person could expect the Lord ‘to descend from heaven’ with the tangible immediacy with which they could expect beneficial rain or a gentle breeze. For those of us living today this same word ‘heaven’ denotes something that has no location. It refers to a ‘space’ that is finite but boundless, which is inaccessible to our experiential apperception ‘defined’ by tens of billions of galaxies, none of which marks the edge of the universe. On the contrary, each one is ‘surrounded’ by all the others, which are isotropically and almost homogeneously distributed, at a depth of about fifteen billion light years.

6.2.4 In Paul’s day people were able to integrate the expectation of Christ’s second coming with their own temporal historical horizon, measured by the evangelist Luke according to precise generational

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II [*Physics Today* Vol. II] (Heraklion: Crete University Press, 1991), 353–354.

succession, working all the way backwards to Adam and God.<sup>177</sup> Today we know that the earth is 4.6 billion years old, the sun 5 billion years old, and our galaxy at least 10 billion years old. We locate the first appearance of the human species at perhaps more than forty thousand years ago.

6.2.4.1 The extent to which we can identify *logos*-possessing subjects, i.e., the presence of human beings as persons, is tentative and uncertain. How human were those creatures from the depths of prehistory that can only be identified by measuring the cranial volume of a very small number of fossilised bones? Who could say today what the boundary between human beings and advanced anthropoids is, both in possibility and actuality? How are ‘all people’ made immortal by Christ’s second coming? Who, from our perspective, are ‘all people’, given we do not know where to place the chronological beginning of the true human?

6.2.5 Moreover, by what version of time are we to incorporate our expectation of a universal resurrection, when we know that time is a conventional function of our macroscopic experience, which does not apply to reality as a whole, at the subatomic level, for instance? Time cannot exist without the transmission of light, since this alone ‘distinguishes kinds’ (constitutes a specifying<sup>178</sup> event) mass and motion.

6.2.5.1 How are we to conceive the resurrection of the dead in space and time when we know that space and time do not ‘contain’ existence, but rather arise as a consequence of the materiality of what exists—the mass–energy and the gravitational effects exercised by matter?

6.3 Today we understand the concepts ‘infinite’ and ‘absolute’ as categories denoting a *mode* and not an expanse or limitless measurement. We know that what exists, and is real, is not exhausted by physical location or quantifiable confirmation. That which exists and is real, even in the most ‘positive’ of scientific observations, is the experience of a *mode* of active revelation accessible only via the unlimited epistemic

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<sup>177</sup> See Luke 3:23–38.

<sup>178</sup> *Eiditiki*: adjective of *eidōs*—‘species’ or ‘kind’.

dynamic of relationality. This is why we speak about an experience of the *modal* absolute.

6.3.1 The earthly presence of human beings is a given physical reality that can be self-confirmed through *relational* experience in terms of the modally limitless dynamic of *logical* reference. The *objective* universe too is a given physical reality in its greatest and smallest dimensions, that becomes known to us only as an actualized *logos*, which is to say as a *mode* of active revelation that corresponds to the human being's *personal* capacity for modally unlimited reference through *logos*.<sup>179</sup>

6.3.1.1 Thus, what we call 'reality' manifests as a metaphysical<sup>180</sup> relational event involving two modally inexhaustible factors of *logos* that are constitutive of relationships: the human being's existence in *logos* (a personal existence) and the actualization of the universe through *logos* (by the mode of personal *logos*).

6.4 If the existent and real is *known* and *exists* in the *logos* of relational events, then we can speak of the resurrection of the dead in Christ in terms of a *change*, on a graduated scale of quality or existential plenitude, in the *personal* relationship between the created and the uncreated. Epistemic access to this change ('we will all be changed'<sup>181</sup>) is still only possible through faith-as-trust. The language of the contemporary scientific worldview could potentially help facilitate the propagation of metaphysical hope, but it cannot replace the loving struggle of faith-as-trust.

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179 See Yannaras, *Postmodern Metaphysics*, Thesis 2:1: 'The experience of the modally infinite', and 2: 'The experience of the private absolute'.

180 *Meta-fysiki*: 'after-physics'.

181 1 Cor. 15:51.

## Chapter 14

### THE DIFFICULTY OF DELINEATING A METAPHYSICAL ONTOLOGY

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1 Let us return to the following intellectual aporia: ‘how can [the human being] exist outside [the body] in which it received its natural being’?<sup>182</sup> Language can delineate this aporia, but it cannot solve it. Even so, the terms that identify the aporia probably suggest possibilities for overcoming it: ‘there are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical’.<sup>183</sup>

1.1 Let us focus on examples of such words that have apodictic potential, i.e., those which demarcate our existential reality and our aporia regarding its definitive end. These words might also *point* to the potential of the *mystical* achievement that we earlier specified as ‘faith-as-trust’, which is not subject to language.

2 ‘Nature’: this word denotes the existence of common kinds, what is common to a particular kind in existence, i.e., the totality of characteristics that constitute a common *form* or *mode* of existence. ‘The holy fathers used the terms ‘essence’, ‘nature’ and ‘form’ to describe that which was said by many to be common, i.e., a specific kind, as in ‘angel’, ‘human’, ‘horse’, ‘dog’ and so on’.<sup>184</sup>

3 ‘*Hypostasis*’: this word denotes each separate existential realisation of nature, i.e., each individual existence, which recapitulates all the characteristics belonging to a natural common kind, albeit in a unique and

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182 John Climacus, *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 26,107 (217). Translator’s note: square brackets Yannaras’.

183 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 6.522.

184 John of Damascus, *Capita Philosophica (Dialectica)*, in *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, Vol. 1, ed. Besorgt Bonifatius von Kotter (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1969), 94.

distinct way in respect to other *hypostases* that possess the same nature. ‘The holy fathers termed the partial ‘individual’, ‘person’ and ‘*hypostasis*’, for example: Peter, Paul...For essence [nature], by its activity, exists in it [the *hypostasis*].’<sup>185</sup>

The will and the mode of willing are not the same, just as the power of sight and the mode of perception are not the same. Will, like sight, is of nature. All things which have an identical nature have identical abilities. But the mode of willing, like the mode of perception...is only a mode of the use of a power, of the employment of will and of perception. And the same distinction may be applied to things as well.<sup>186</sup>

4 ‘Activities’<sup>187</sup>: this word denotes the existential characteristics of nature, which are never static, but always ‘becoming’ (in relation to both animate and inanimate existents). Such characteristics manifest as powers and potentialities of nature, as modes by which the existence of natural common kinds can be realised and known.

Physical activity is nature’s efficient motion, such as the logical motion of the mind—vital, sensing, nourishing, increasing and generating, and the motion that comes from impulse, which is to say the motions of the body—imagination, memory, passion, desire and will, i.e., appetite and so forth.<sup>188</sup>

4.1 Each separate existent *instantiates*, i.e., makes a real and particular existence, the activities that are characteristic of a specific nature. Nature, which is to say the activities belonging to a common kind through which existence is realised and known, only exists in the form of *hypostases*. *Hypostases* are nature’s *mode of existence*: ‘human nature is not regarded as existing in one single *hypostasis*, but rather in Peter, Paul and all other human *hypostases*’.<sup>189</sup>

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185 Ibid., 94, 109. Translator’s note: square brackets Yannaras’.

186 Maximos the Confessor, *The Disputation with Pyrrhus of Our Father Among the Saints Maximus the Confessor*, trans. Joseph P Farrell (Waymart, PA: St. Tikhon’s Seminary Press, 1990), 10 (PG 91:293a).

187 *Energeies*: also ‘energies’.

188 John of Damascus, *Capita Philosophica (Dialectica)*, 25.

189 Ibid., 110.

4.2 Natural activities always occur through *hypostases*. The common kind to which activities belong denotes the ‘what’ of nature, while the otherness of their *hypostatic* expression reveals the ‘how’ of individual *hypostases*.

5 A human *hypostasis* represents each and every individual human existence, every natural individual, every human. Every human being recapitulates the universal common kind of shared human nature, the existential characteristics and capabilities of human universality, i.e., the body and mind’s natural activities and operations which *constitute* human existence, which make human beings exist.

5.1 Nevertheless, a *hypostasis* is something more than just the partial individual realisation and manifestation of natural activities and operations. That ‘something more’ is the unique, distinct and unrepeatable otherness of a *hypostatically* realised nature that is manifested by its *attributes*. We use the term ‘attribute’ to describe the existential characteristics ‘that differentiate one *hypostasis* from another’<sup>190</sup>: ‘If we were to consider attributes collectively, they would still denote just a single person’.<sup>191</sup>

5.1.1 Attributes signify the modal–morphological otherness of each *hypostasis* with respect to all other *hypostases* belonging to the same kind. However, every human *hypostasis* especially and uniquely possesses the existential potential of *active–willing* otherness, i.e., the *hypostasis*’ potential to determine its own otherness through creative activity and every realised relationship, to determine its otherness in relation to the given necessities and existential predeterminations imposed by natural common kinds.

5.2 Nature too is more than just a community of morphological characteristics, more than just the commonly given activities–operations of *hypostases* that share the same essence. Natural common kinds also manifest as an existential opposition to *hypostatic* otherness. Natural

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190 Ibid., 83.

191 Ibid., 165.

activities—operations constitute a commonly given and undifferentiated *necessity* that stands in opposition to the active—willing otherness of *hypostases*.

5.2.1 A human *hypostasis* is *self-determined* as an active—willing otherness, while simultaneously *distinguishing itself* from the commonly given operations and necessities of nature.

5.2.2 Nature manifests existentially as ‘another law’<sup>192</sup> that is opposed to the freedom of *hypostatic* otherness.<sup>193</sup> Nature also manifests as the existential becoming of inexorable *decay* and the ultimate *extinction* of bodily and psychic activities in the form of the sickness and death that define individual existence.

6 ‘Otherness’ and ‘common kind’ are concepts that refer not only to formal<sup>194</sup> characteristics, but also to existential facts, i.e., to experientially verifiable antithetical existential *modes* that are interwoven into the singular event that is the human *hypostasis*.

6.1 Otherness is confirmed experientially by the *hypostasis*’ freedom from nature, while *hypostasis*’ common kind is confirmed experientially by its subjection (existential obligation) to the *necessity* of nature.

6.1.1 Those practiced in ascetic knowledge of human nature express the existentially inherent commonality and antithesis of both nature and *hypostasis*—common kind and otherness, necessity and freedom—using terms such as: ‘this beloved adversary of mine (and yet not mine), the flesh’<sup>195</sup>. The word ‘flesh’ here retains its biblical sense<sup>196</sup> of signifying the existential autonomy of nature and locating existence purely within the *mode of nature* and not the *mode of relationship*.

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192 Rom. 7:23.

193 See Romans 7:15–24: ‘I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate...but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind...’

194 *Morfika*: the adjective of *morfi* (‘form’, or ‘shape’).

195 John Climacus, *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 15, 31 (150).

196 See Eduard Schweizer, F Baumgärtel and R Meyer ‘Σάρξ’ in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, Vol. 7, 98ff.

6.1.2 The experientially verifiable existential antithesis between *hypostasis* and nature reveals, or makes evident, the existential potential of the *hypostasis* to be free from nature, which is to say of the *hypostasis* actively and willingly transcending the necessities and existential pre-determinations imposed by nature. Ecclesial experience regards this potential freedom as an aspect of what it means for humans to exist ‘in the image of God’—an aspect that determines the existential reality of personhood.

7 We come to know the personal *hypostasis* and we verify the *imago Dei* only through the historical experience of the incarnation of God the *Logos*. The historical person of Christ confirms the existential freedom of his *hypostasis* from any pre-determinations and necessities of divine and human nature alike.

7.1 Christ’s personal *hypostasis* discloses a *mode of existence* that is free from the necessity of nature. It is neither divine nor human *nature* that determines the beginning and the end of the event of Christ’s existence, but rather the *hypostasis* of God the *Logos*. Christ does not *instantiate*<sup>197</sup> an existentially prescribed nature. Nor is he bound by the existential pre-determinations of nature. He *instantiates* two natures and two natural activities with absolute freedom in relation to the necessity of nature.

7.1.1 ‘When the Word of God became flesh...he showed forth the image truly, for it was his image’.<sup>198</sup> The human being’s personal *hypostasis* represents the image of God and that mode of existence that makes the *hypostasis* free from nature and capable of *instantiating* the activities of a different nature, precisely in the same way that the *Logos*, which is uncreated with respect to nature, *instantiated* the activities of created human nature.

7.2 The transition from the *image*, as dynamic potentiality, to its existential realisation entails establishing a new existential reality altogether: a second creation with a new First Ancestor, a ‘second Adam’,

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197 *Ypostasiazei*: literally, ‘hypostasise’.

198 Irenaeus, *Irenaeus on the Christian Faith: A Condensation of Against Heresies*, ed. and trans. James R Payton (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2012), 169 (5:16.2)

who is Christ. The incarnation of God the *Logos* establishes a new *mode of existence*, a ‘new creation’.<sup>199</sup>

7.3 The Christian Church also clearly associates *immortality* with the existential potentiality of humankind’s original creation in the image of God. It affirms that human *hypostases*, even *before* the *Logos* became flesh, did not disappear upon death. With his death on the cross Christ ‘descends’ to ‘Hades’—not to a *place*, but to a *mode* of death—and ‘proclaims certain redemption to those in sleep there’.<sup>200</sup>

8 In exactly what way does a ‘sleeping’ *hypostasis* represent an existential event?

8.1 In death, the individuality of nature—the psychosomatic reality of the human being—disappears. Death erases all the activities and capabilities of human nature: bodily operations, thinking, reason, imagination, judgment, memory and desire. Following death, ‘the soul [*hypostasis*] is no longer able to act as it once acted through the limbs of the body—it can neither speak, nor remember, nor decide, nor desire, nor reason, nor feel anger, nor gaze. Instead the soul exists in some sort of independent self-consciousness’.<sup>201</sup>

8.2 What does an existence ‘in some sort of independent self-consciousness’ mean?<sup>202</sup> What is *instantiated* by a *hypostasis* that has no nature after death? How is *the hypostasis* actualized as an existence with no natural activities? What is it about the *hypostasis* that remains immortal: an uncreated or divine element, or something analogous to the platonic soul?

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199 2 Cor. 5:17.

200 *Dawn service of Holy Saturday*, chant 6 (poem by Kosmas Maioumas).

201 Anastasius of Sinai, *Questions and Answers*, trans. Joseph A Munitz (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2011), Question 19.6 (91). Adapted. Translator’s note: square bracket’s Yannaras’.

202 Plato defines the word *σύννοια* (*synnoia*) as ‘an intelligence with grief and without speech’. Plato, *Definitions*, 415e 1. Euripides specifically defines the meaning of grief as the remorse of consciousness: ‘...at the same time aware [*συννοία*] of what a dreadful thing she has done in plotting to kill Andromache...’ Euripides, *Andromache*, trans. and ed. David Kovacs (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995), 805.

The difficulty of delineating a metaphysical ontology

Within the bounds of linguistic possibility, let us turn to two specific formulations that might help to provide answers to these questions.

## Chapter 15

### THE METAPHYSICAL LOCUS OF THE *LOGOS*- POSSESSING SUBJECT

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The subject is born in the field of the Other.<sup>203</sup>

My beginning and my *hypostasis* came from your command that  
fashioned me.<sup>204</sup>

1 That which we call a human ‘*logos*-possessing subject’ (existential self-awareness or the *self* of each human being) is a function of biological individuality and that individuality’s psychosomatic activities and operations. The *logos*-possessing subject is an exclusive function of its referentiality and potential to form relationships.

1.1 This referentiality is actualized through natural activities and operations, principally that of desire. In speaking of referentiality, however, we identify an event that presupposes certain given facts, which experiential logic obliges us to regard as existing *beyond* and *prior* to natural referential activity itself, which is to say *prior* to the mode of desire. We presuppose a ‘he’ who does the referencing, i.e., a *hypostatic* ‘kernel’ of subjectivity that precedes the act of referencing, and the capability that he in principle possesses to reference in a unique and distinct mode via natural referential activities.

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203 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI*, pp. 198–199: ‘If the subject is what I say it is, namely the subject determined by language and speech, it follows that the subject, *in initio*, begins in the locus of the Other...The subject is born in so far as the signifier emerges in the field of the other’. These formulations of Lacan’s were not written for the purposes of clarifying or referring to the ontological problem of philosophy. They are incorporated into a framework of psychoanalytical interpretation. Nevertheless, they still represent linguistic propositions capable of facilitating a different perspective of anthropological analysis.

204 *Funeral Service*, 41.

1.2 We do not know the *logos*-possessing subject as an exclusively ontic fact, which is to say as a biological–psychological entity that can be described definitively, but rather as the dynamically activated potential to realise unique and distinct *relationships*. What is signified by the term ‘*logos*-possessing subject’, then, is an existential vehicle which carries the potential to form relationships through acts of reference.

1.3 By using speech to identify what is *prior* to speech, we transform the prerequisites of *logos*<sup>205</sup> (the existential *hypostasis* and the existential potential of *logos*-possessing reference) into speech, which is to say that we transform them into something other than what we presuppose speech to *be*. Only constant awareness of the difference between the signifiers of a language and what they signify in reality can vindicate such an endeavour.

2 We presuppose a *hypostatic* ‘kernel’ that precedes the existential referentiality of the subject that references through *logos*: ‘[we] isolate in the subject a kernel, a *Kern*, to use Freud’s own term, of *non-sense* [*non-sens*],<sup>206</sup> or indeed something that transcends any *hypostatic* potential to think meaningfully—the presupposed existential ‘vehicle’ of referential–*logos* potential.

2.1 A ‘subject’ is not defined by its meaning. Such a reduction would constitute the ‘active annihilation’ of the subject.<sup>207</sup> But then what other possibility is there in terms of meaning, when meaning is a case of the subject’s self-determination or self-awareness?

The realism of psychoanalytic interpretation says that the alternative possibility is ‘that which stands beneath the meaning: the subject’s being [*hypostasis*].<sup>208</sup>

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205 *Logikotita*: literally, ‘*logos*-ness’. It also means ‘rationality’. The term translated ‘speech’ in this context is *logos*.

206 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI*, p.250. Translator’s note: first brackets translator’s, second brackets Yannaras’.

207 *Ibid.*, 81. ‘The mode of my presence in the world is the subject in so far as by reducing itself solely to this certainty of being a subject, it becomes active annihilation’.

208 *Ibid.*, 211. Translator’s note: square bracket’s Yannaras’. I have translated Yannaras’ Greek translation of Lacan at this point in order to draw out the etymological allusions he makes. For reference, Sheridan’s translation of the relevant passage is: ‘the subject is

2.2 If meaning incorporates *being* without exhausting its definition, then the choice of meaning is not simply biased—it is manifestly incomplete. However, a unilateral choice of *being* would suffer from the same deficiency as the subject's self-determination:

2.2.1 Whatever the choice operating may be, [it] has as its consequence a *neither one, nor the other*..If we choose being, the subject disappears, it eludes us, it falls into non-meaning. If we choose meaning, the meaning survives only deprived of that part of non-meaning that is, strictly speaking, that which constitutes in the realisation of the subject, the unconscious.<sup>209</sup>

2.3 The realism of psychoanalytic interpretation insists on prioritising the awareness that the *logos*-possessing subject cannot, of its own accord, self-determine with sufficient fullness. Whether we choose the *meaning* of 'subject' or whether we persist with its *being*, the subject's self-determination (self-awareness) would still be a kind of deficient and relative knowledge.

2.3.1 If we locate self-determination in the *meaning* of 'subject', we omit aspects of subjective *being* that are not controlled by the intellect, such as the unconscious. However, if we choose the reality of subjective being, a reality which cannot be reduced to meaning, then we fail to locate the *hypostatic* particular and we abandon the subject to the obscurity of non-sense.

2.4 Does this all mean that the *logos*-possessing subject is 'determined by the other' and that it becomes accessible and more fully known only when it is determined by 'the other'? Indeed, this is the case, if by the expression 'being determined by the other' we mean that the *logos*-possessing subject is self-defined and known only through reference, i.e., only as a referential and relational event. The realism of psychoanalytic interpretation confirms that even the *unconscious*, which is a vital aspect

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there beneath the meaning'. 'Stands under' is a literal translation of the classical Greek *istatai-ypo*, which Yannaras here uses to allude to the etymological meaning of the word *hypostasis*, which literally means 'standing under'.

209 Ibid. Translator's note: brackets translator's. The 'it' refers to 'the *vel* of alienation'.

of subjective *being*, not controlled by the intellect, ‘is structured like a language’.<sup>210</sup>

2.4.1 In saying that the unconscious is structured like a language we denote the definite referentiality of the unconscious, i.e., both the referential mode by which the unconscious is formed, and the referential character possessed by what we might call the ‘content’ or ‘deposit’ of the unconscious, since that content cannot be unrelated to the structure that provides its form. Both the structure, then, and what is being structured, correspond with language, in the sense of a complete syntax of signifiers, which is to say referential and relational events.

2.4.2 One cannot conceive of a referentiality without a ‘locus’ or ‘field’ of reference. Moreover, one cannot conceive of a *logos*-possessing reference without the *logos*-presence of an ‘Other’<sup>211</sup> forming that ‘locus’ or ‘field’ of subjective reference.

3 A human infant emerges in its mother’s body without possessing intellect, judgment, imagination or articulate speech. What it possesses primordially is the *capability* to reference through *logos*, a capability actualized through desire.

3.1 The empiricism of psychoanalytic interpretation confirms that an infant’s primordial desire possesses *logos* by virtue of that desire being *erotic*, i.e., the desire for the fulfilment of relationship. This desire transcends, exclusively in human beings, all biological expediency and constitutes a ‘life instinct, that is to say, immortal life, or irrepressible life, life that has need of no organ, simplified, indestructible life’.<sup>212</sup>

3.2 The infant’s desire for life as fulfilling (*erotic*) relationship is mediated by its need for food and the identification of the food with its source, which is to say its mother’s body. The first signifier emerges in

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210 Ibid., 149. See also Jacques Lacan, *écrits II* (Paris: Seuil, 1971), 203.

211 Translator’s note: Yannaras’ use of the capitalised ‘Other’ corresponds to Lacan’s use of *l’Autre* in *Seminar Book XI*.

212 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI*, 198: ‘It is the libido, *qua* pure life instinct, that is to say, immortal life, or irrepressible life, life that has need of no organ, simplified, indestructible life’.

the 'field' of the mother's body. This is where the potential of response is located. By locating the potential of response, desire can be transformed into a concrete demand that evokes the appearance of the signifier in the field of the Other.

3.2.1 The appearance of this signifier (the seed that generates language) 'gives birth' to the *logical* subject. It realises (makes particular) referentiality and manifests the given impetus towards life as a fulfilling relationship.

3.3 We speak of the 'impetus' towards life in terms of a relationship and the *desire* for a relational life because life-as-relationship is never a definitive fact. The Other in a relationship is never a permanent *physical* presence. The first signifier emerges in the field of the mother precisely because the mother represents desired nourishment and relationship. Moreover, she is *desired* because she appears on the infant's horizon as both presence and absence.

3.3.1 Since the impetus towards life is desire for the Other, and since the presence of the Other can never be definitively possessed, the possibility of both the Other's presence and absence, i.e., the *possibility of a relationship*, is the field in which the first signifier emerges.

3.3.2 The infant's desire for life and fulfilling relationship is mediated through its need for food. The Other (the mother) is desired through the otherness of food, but desire goes beyond that otherness. Desire for the mother, i.e., for a fulfilling relationship, is more than the mere need for nourishment. It is this 'something more' that establishes the *logos*-possessing subject.

3.3.3 The mediating need of the *other* forms the natural prerequisite for the signifier to emerge in the place of the Other, i.e., the birth of the *logos*-possessing subject. *Natural* need facilitates the emergence of the given *metaphysical* potential to form relationships. If the signifier merely located the *physical other*, it would not constitute a foundation for *logos* and language—its function would be equivalent to that of the so-called 'Pavlovian reflexes', as is the case with most irrational animals.

3.4 The signifier ‘logos-possessing subject’ denotes the potential of responding to desire rather than simply to need. Desire for the Other—the possibility of fulfilling relationship—transcends biological need. This is why the *logos*-possessing subject ‘is born in so far as the signifier emerges in the field of the Other’.<sup>213</sup>

3.4.1 Food, sexual pleasure and beauty can transcend biological need: vital desire for the Other is mediated by the desire for food, pleasure and beauty. Yet, even the most complete satisfaction of the physical need for food, pleasure and beauty would not exhaust the vital metaphysical desire for the Other.

3.5 The subject is self-determined and known only as it refers through the mode of *logos*, the mode of *relationships*. Only the experience of referentiality through *logos* allows us to speak of the existential conditions necessary for reference—the *hypostasis* (Kern) of the one doing the referencing and the *possibility* of reference as a *mode of existence*.

3.5.1 The relational event ‘gives birth’ to the subject, making concrete both the referring *hypostasis*, as well as its *mode* of existence, a mode that manifests as *logos*. The ‘concrete’ in the relational event is disclosed in the *otherness* of the terms (or factors) that constitute the relationship. Otherness is always determined through contrast. It is always a function of the ‘referent’<sup>214</sup> presupposed by the referential relationship. Moreover, once this subjective otherness manifests in a relational event, it refers to the *hypostatic* reality of the subject that *precedes* even the relationship itself, *prior* even to the *hypostasis*’ mode of existence.

4 The extent to which *vital* desire—the original characteristic of the *logos*-possessing subject—is in itself *erotic*, i.e., desire for the

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213 ‘Dans un même mouvement, le besoin de lait révèle à l’enfant le désir de la mère. Il y a une faille dans l’objet qu’il croyait unique, le lait-mère. Cet objet ne se réduit pas tout entier au besoin qu’il en a. La déhiscence dans l’objet répond à la coupure qui articule en lui besoin et désir...La mère est d’un autre ordre, celui de l’Autre. C’est dans cette articulation de l’autre à l’Autre, de cet autre qui est et qui n’est pas l’Autre, que se développe chez le petit d’homme sa structure de *sujet* qui noue au besoin de l’autre le désir de l’Autre’. Denis Vasse, *Le Temps du désir* (Paris: Seuil, 1969), 28–29.

214 *Enanti*: a preposition that can mean ‘opposite’, ‘in front of’, ‘against’, ‘in relation to’ or ‘compared to’.

fullness of relationship, is due to the fact that it references *existence* by immortalising existing-in-otherness<sup>215</sup>. It is only in relationships that subjective otherness can be realised as *hypostatic* identity, and this is why the immortalisation of *hypostatic* identity is possible and desirable only *in relation to* a similarly absolute *hypostatic* Otherness that is existentially unrestricted and indestructible.

4.1 If my vital desire is for the Other (a prerequisite for the formation and immortalisation of my *hypostatic* identity), then I have an experiential basis upon which to determine the *hypostatic* ‘kernel’ of my subjectivity as an existential *response* to the Other’s *call-to-relationship*. *I desire, therefore I am*,<sup>216</sup> in which case both my desire and my own very existence are only realised *in relation to* the *hypostatic* (and *essential*) distinctness of the Other.

4.2 It is not a question of *dialectically* defining the subject in relation to the *physical* other, since the existence of the Other is not ontic, and thus not *physical*. I am not a subject because I am distinct from the Other of my vital reference, nor because I am self-determined in regard to the Other, but rather at a level that is *existentially prior*: I am a subject because I constitute a *hypostatic existential response* to the Other’s *call* towards fulfilling relationship, and thus the immortalisation of my otherness.

4.2.1 The realism of ecclesial experience affirms that ‘my beginning and my *hypostasis* came from your command that fashioned me’.<sup>217</sup> God’s creative call establishes the human being’s *personal hypostasis*. That *hypostasis* is the existential result of the call to being from non-being. And the *hypostasis* is *personal* when God calls forth beings from non-being, capable of a relational communion of freedom with him.

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215 *To yparchein-en-eterotiti*: literally ‘the to exist-in-otherness’.

216 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI*, 154: ‘*Desidero* is the Freudian *cogito*’.

217 *Funeral Service*, 41.

## Chapter 16

### THE EXISTENTIAL POTENTIAL OF THE PERSONAL HYPOSTASIS

1 The realism of ecclesial experience confirms that God's personal creative call establishes the human being's personal *hypostasis*.

1.1 Today, the language of this hermeneutic proposal can no longer be regarded as arbitrary from the perspective of linguistic pragmatics, particularly as we have become accustomed to a language that expresses the empiricism of contemporary physics and clinical psychology. If the anthropic principle of contemporary physics provides a sound basis for thinking that it is impossible to distinguish between the existential fact and its verification by the human being (achieved epistemically through relationship), and if the consciousness or awareness of the human being is a term or presupposition for constituting an existential fact out of a quantum event, and therefore out of the entire cosmic event,<sup>218</sup> then the linguistic signifiers 'real' and 'existent' must primarily refer to experiential signifieds of concepts such as 'relationship', 'logos' and their *hypostatic* presupposition, 'person'. In this perspective, the signification 'logos-possessing personal relationship' summarises and judges the realism of hermeneutic proposals that refer to the *mode* that establishes the existential event, whether from the quantum structure, the behaviour of matter or the formation of the human subject via *logos* 'in the realm of the Other'.

1.2 How is this *logos*-possessing call able to construct a tangible *hypostasis*? We discern something vaguely analogous in art, whereby the tangible *hypostasis* of a painting, statue or piece of music is 'instituted'

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218 See my book *Postmodern Metaphysics*, Thesis 1.3.

by the *logos*-possessing call directed by the artist to those who partake in the art. The artwork's *hypostasis* is an existential 'imprint' of the artist's personal (existential) otherness communicated through *logos*.

1.2.1 Artistic creation forms an empirical basis upon which to understand the proposition that the *logos* of God is a *work of art* with a '*hypostasised* nature'.

1.2.1.1 The will of the personal God to share his uncreated existence with created personal existences can be understood as an active (through work<sup>219</sup>) will, and thus God's work is his *logos*: 'for in the case of God his work is his *logos*'.<sup>220</sup> And God's *logos* 'endures forever'.<sup>221</sup>

1.3 However, in the consistent language of the Church 'the heavens were made by the *logos* of the Lord, and all their host by the breath of his mouth'<sup>222</sup> and 'heaven and earth will pass away'.<sup>223</sup> The created product of the uncreated divine activity will have an existential conclusion, just as it had an existential beginning. However, only in relation to human *hypostases* does ecclesial language affirm that 'they sleep in Hades' *even after death*.

1.3.1 What does this difference in the existential duration of *hypostatic* realisations of the divine *logos* signify? What location does it refer to? In all likelihood, it refers to the experientially verifiable difference between the human being's personal *hypostasis* and the *hypostasis* of every other creation of God, i.e., a difference in the *mode of existence*.

1.3.2 This difference preserves, from a human perspective, the meaning of God's *freedom*, which is also a freedom from the limits of *being* and *non-being*, as they are understood from our perspective. God is signified as 'the cause also of nothingness; he causes the being or non-being of all beings that are subsequent to Him'.<sup>224</sup>

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219 *En-ergo*: literally 'in-work'. Yannaras is making an allusion to the etymological root of the Greek word *energeia* which is translated here and throughout as 'activity'.

220 Gregory Nyssa, *On the Hexaemeron*, PG 44:73a.

221 1 Pet. 1:25.

222 Psalm 33:6 (32:6 in the Septuagint). NRSV adapted.

223 Matt. 24:35.

224 Maximos the Confessor, *Commentary on 'On the Divine Names'*, PG 4:260d.

1.3.2.1 The meaning of words such as ‘being’ and ‘nothingness’, ‘beginning’ and ‘conclusion’, ‘becoming’ and ‘unbecoming’, ‘placing’ and ‘removing’ are all more epigenetic (subsequent) than the meaning of the word ‘God’, since ‘through him it is known what these things are’. This is why one can ascribe ‘beyond being’ to God’s existence alone, in order to denote that he ‘does not belong to those things that exist and that can be spoken of, nor to those things that do not exist and cannot be spoken of’.<sup>225</sup>

1.4 God’s *fashioning* command, which institutes the personal *hypostasis* of the human being (as an image of the *hypostases* of the life-giving Trinity), and his *creative* command, which gives existence to everything else, do not manifest as a singular divine activity. In the iconological language of the book of Genesis we find a progression from the general command: ‘He spoke and they were created’, to the more specific calling into being: ‘God fashioned man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being’.<sup>226</sup>

1.4.1 The human being is a *personal* existence. In the language of Scripture this signifies that God’s fashioning call–activity presupposes that humans will *hypostatically* respond to that call, i.e., the existential potential of *relationship* with God in the form of either accepting or rejecting communion with him. This call ‘builds’ an existence that instantiates the consequences of the call from the perspective of existential potential—the human being instantiates not only the

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225 Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogy*, PG 91:664bc. See also the entire passage of the preceding citation (*Commentary on ‘On the Divine Names’*): ‘The privations in [God] are beyond all being, even if we call privation ‘being’, i.e., free from subjection, incorruptible, immortal and whatever else they are. For God is none of these things, since he is prior to them. It is through him that they are known. Indeed, we cannot even say what God is not, only how ineffable and unintelligible he is. For these are not his origin. Rather, he is himself even the very cause of nothingness; he causes the being or non-being of everything that exists posterior to him. Moreover, this nothingness is privation. It has its being on account of the non-being of existents, and yet does not exist on account of his being above the creatures.

226 Gen. 2:7. NRSV adapted.

*fashioning* activity of God, but also his *calling* activity, i.e., the possibility of *relationship* with him.

1.4.2 The fashioning command that ‘immediately brings nature into being’<sup>227</sup> institutes an existence that instantiates the created activities of a created nature. Yet this very created *hypostasis* has been *called* to enter into vital relational communion with the uncreated. As a created nature (body and soul), the human being’s existence dies. As an existential ‘imprint’<sup>228</sup> of the call-to-relationship its *hypostasis* is not destroyed by death.

1.4.2.1 In relation to the ontological categories of human language and thought, what could the expression ‘existential imprint of a call-to-relationship’ signify? How are we to conceive that the *hypostasis* of every human being can exist (without instantiating a nature and the activities of that nature) solely as the ‘imprint’ of the call that institutes it, even if that call is conceived as existentially indelible?

1.4.2.2 A preliminary answer is that this particular formulation might have some hermeneutic efficacy even though it exceeds our epistemic capabilities. There are explanatory proposals in ontology, as also in the quintessentially ‘positive’ science of physics, that expose the limits of our epistemic capability. An indicative example (introduced by quantum mechanics) is our limited ability to simultaneously determine *position* and *momentum*. Wave particle-duality forces us into a probabilistic understanding of sensible reality itself.<sup>229</sup>

1.4.2.3 Let’s take the following illustrative comparison: in the theory of general relativity, space and time cannot exist without the transmission of light, which ‘distinguishes by kind’<sup>230</sup> mass and motion. On its own, the *existence* of light does not constitute space and time. The constitution of the kind of space and time that are able to determine the curvature

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227 Gregory Nyssa, *On the Soul and Resurrection*, PG 46:124b.

228 Gregory Nyssa, *On Making of Man*, PG 44:228: ‘...Such as in the imprint of a seal’.

229 See Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time: Updated and Expanded Tenth Anniversary Edition* (New York: Bantam Books, 1996); and Rae, *Quantum Physics*, Chapter 6.

230 *Eidopoiei*: a verb which literally means ‘kind-make’ or ‘species-make’.

of each motion and orbit in the universe presupposes the *transmission* of light, curved by the gravitational effect of matter. One could adopt the formula that space and time *exist* (without instantiating nature and its activities) as an ‘imprint’ of (*mutatis mutandis*) the ‘being-making’<sup>231</sup> transmission of light that is a precondition of their institution.

2 Let us further critically examine, at least at the linguistic level, the implications raised by the ontological proposition that ‘the human being’s personal *hypostasis* does not dissolve with death’.

In the language of psychoanalytic experience we say that the ‘*logos*-possessing subject is born in the field of the Other’. However, according to the logic of our language, what is *born* in the field of the Other is presupposed as the *vehicle of referential potential*. That vehicle *exists* ‘prior to’ the instantiation of the natural referential activity that constitutes its birth. We signify this vehicle, within the clear limitations of our epistemic capacities, as a ‘kernel’ that *exists* prior to actualized nature, in which case it is not predetermined by nature.

2.1 The primordial characteristic of this ‘kernel’, or vehicle, of existential reference is precisely its *logos*-possessing referentiality. Thus, in its hypostatic reality, *before* any actual reference, we signify this ‘kernel’ as referential readiness, as the recipient or imprint of a call to reference. By existentially distinguishing the referring ‘kernel’ from the event of natural reference, we can speak of the *hypostasis*’ existential distance from nature, and hence from death.

2.1.1 If the human being’s personal *hypostasis* (as an ‘imprint’ of the divine creative call-to-relationship) is to be conceived as distinct from nature, then it must also be conceived as distinct from will. And thus, the way the human being responds to the existential call from God will signify a complete existential event (*mode of existence*), and not merely an expression of natural will. Human beings do not exist by virtue of their created nature and then *in addition* enter into communion with God. They *exist* because they are in communion with God and do so *to the extent* that they are in communion with God.

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231 *Ontopoiios*: literal translation.

2.1.2 The human being's natural will is incapable of transcending the existential capabilities of its created nature. It cannot establish an existential event of communion between the created and the uncreated. This is why the Church rejects *ethics*, as it is something that relates exclusively to the natural will. Instead, the Church moulds its own *asceticism* with a view to changing the human being's *mode of existence*.

2.1.3 For this same reason the virtue of the 'righteous' in the Old Testament was unable to bring to life personal *hypostases*, leaving them instead to 'sleep' in Hades. No doubt their virtue reflected the kind of genuine acceptance of God's call that could establish their *hypostases*. But this acceptance was restricted to the possibilities allowed by created natural action, i.e., to ethical consistency and observing the law.

2.1.3.1 Before the incarnation of God the *Logos*, human nature functioned as a 'dividing wall' separating the human being's personal *hypostasis* and the existential potential of this *personal hypostasis*—a wall between the 'image' and 'likeness'.<sup>232</sup> Created nature had become the impregnable existential boundary of what it meant to be a *hypostasis* in the image of God. Although the human being's *hypostasis* was *personal*, it only *instantiated* the ephemeral existential fact of the natural individual, and could not transcend it. It was only able to *instantiate* created activities, i.e., from a created and therefore mortal nature. The vital desire for the transcendent Other could only ever be mediated by created substitutes and thus could never be fulfilled.

3 In the person of Christ, the human being's created and mortal nature was *co-instantiated* with the uncreated 'nature' of God the *Logos*—the single *hypostasis* of Christ was actualized as an existential event via both *created* and *uncreated* natural activities.

(In the language of the Church, we use the word 'kenosis'—willing emptying and voluntary abandonment—to denote the fact that in

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<sup>232</sup> Translator's note: The Greek text is literally a 'wall between the *in the image* and the *according to the likeness*'. 'In the image' and 'according to the likeness' are references to the language of Gen. 1:26 in the Septuagint: 'Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness....'

Christ's personal existence the uncreated activities of the divine 'nature' were in a state of *abeyance*, with only an echo of them evident in the Transfiguration on Tabor and in his miracles).

3.1 The *flesh* and *blood* of the historical Christ were the blood and flesh of a material and mortal human being—the created nature we all hold in common. Yet, this individual human nature actualized, together with the divine nature of the *Logos* (without confusion, change, division, or separation), the singular *hypostasis* of Christ. Two natures, two activities and two wills—the created and the uncreated, the existentially finite and the existentially infinite, *being* and *beyond being* instantiated (existing *hypostatically*) in the person of the historical Jesus.

3.2 In Christ's person, created nature ceased to be a 'dividing wall' between the human being's personal *hypostasis* and its existential potential. For this, and for this reason alone, the person of the historical Christ gave us access to the meaning of *imago Dei*—the truth of personal *hypostasis* as it is signified in the case of the uncreated *hypostases* of the divine Trinity.

3.3 The foundational *imago Dei*—the existential result of the fashioning of the human *hypostasis* by divine command—is signified in Christ as complete 'likeness' to the uncreated's mode of existence. The created activities of human nature are received by the Son's uncreated (uncreatedly actualized) *hypostasis* and actualize the existential event of his incarnation. The created activities of human nature do not cease to instantiate a *personal* existence, as they do for all humans, but they do so according to the mode of uncreated existence and life, a mode that is free from the existential limitations of createdness.

3.3.1 The receipt of created nature in the existential event of the incarnation of God the *Logos* abolishes the 'dividing wall'. Created nature no longer represents the impregnable existential boundary of the human being's *hypostasis*, since this same nature has been acquired and existentially actualizes the *hypostasis* of the uncreated.

3.4 What previously prevented the human being's personal *hypostasis*

from sharing in the existence of the uncreated God and from being made ‘participants of the divine nature’<sup>233</sup> was its created nature, the existential potential of which was circumscribed (hemmed in) by the limits of createdness. The moment this existential delimitation was removed, the human being’s personal *hypostasis* became free to instantiate existence, not solely through the activities of created nature, but now also through the *bestowed* (offered as Grace)<sup>234</sup> uncreated activities of divine life.

3.4.1 This is why the Church spreads the good news that Christ, ‘in rising from the grave, resurrects with him the whole race of Adam’,<sup>235</sup> and by his resurrection from the dead ‘there is no one in the grave’.<sup>236</sup> Thus, despite the extinction and disappearance of the human being’s natural created activities upon death, its *hypostasis* is now able to instantiate the existential potential of its institutive call, which is to say the Grace (bestowal of life) of uncreated divine activities. All created human *hypostases exist* after death in an existence actualized by the uncreated activities of the divine *eros* that gives life to that existence: ‘for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ’.<sup>237</sup>

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233 2 Peter 1:4. ‘Participants’ is *koinonoi* and thus semantically connected to the verb *koinonein*, translated ‘sharing’ in the same sentence.

234 Translator’s note: ‘bestowed’ (*charizomenes*) and ‘grace’ (*chari*) are etymologically connected in Greek.

235 *Resurrection Service on Easter Sunday*, chant 6.

236 John Chrysostom, *Easter Sunday Service, Catechetical Oration*.

237 1 Cor. 15:22.

## Chapter 17

### FREEDOM IS ALSO THE CAUSE OF NOTHINGNESS

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1 The created *hypostasis* of every human being continues to exist after death, no longer instantiating its created nature, but the uncreated life-giving activity of divine love.

1.1 This hermeneutic proposal, drawn from ecclesial experience, is not, in principle, incompatible with our linguistic logic and comprehension. The ontological *significations* it contains are articulated in a *meaning* that is rationally accessible. The proposal *transmits* its meaning to us, it ‘shows’ us its meaning.

1.2 The proposal’s constitutive ontological significations are:

- the human being’s *hypostasis* as an existential ‘kernel’ that *precedes* all signification, i.e., *prior* even to the *logos*-possessing reference that forms the thinking subject;
- the existence of a *personal* First Cause of what exists and is real: the ‘Other’ to which the human *logos* refers; and
- *love* as the teleology of existence: the actualized creative revelation of the *personal* First Cause’s *mode of existence*.

1.2.1 We comprehend the proposal’s constitutive significations, but the meaning it conveys leads to an epistemic dead-end:

If every created human *hypostasis* exists after death by instantiating the uncreated activities of divine and life-giving love, and no longer by instantiating its created nature, then the existential union of God and the human being becomes *obligatory* after death. In other words, humans are deified by necessity. But that would then abolish what we presuppose ontologically, i.e., the *personal* character of the *hypostasis*. The *mode*

that makes the *hypostasis*' existential realisation *personal* is abolished—existence as relationship, relationship as freedom, and freedom as *hypostatic* otherness.

1.2.1.1 The epistemic dead-end contained in the proposal could also be articulated as follows: we can understand personal *existence* as *relationship*, and we can also understand *non-relationship* as personal *non-existence*, but we cannot know personal *existence* as *non-relationship*. In the logic of our language (and experience), the signifiers 'personal existence' and 'non-relationship,' as well as 'relationship' and 'personal non-existence,' are mutually exclusive.

1.2.1.2 If indeed the human being's personal *hypostasis* instantiates life-giving divine love after death by *necessity*, then relational freedom is denied, and personal existence along with it. If the otherness of a personal *hypostasis* is to be preserved after death, it must be actualized as the freedom to either accept or refuse an existential relationship with life-giving divine love.

1.2.1.3 We could argue, according to the logic of our language and experience, that only those human *hypostases* that had exercised their free will to exist in relationship with God through their created activities will continue to exist after death, while those *hypostases* that freely refused such a relationship will degenerate into non-existence after death.

1.2.1.4 However, such a view would mean, as far as the logic of our language is concerned, that the created activity of human will and freedom has the potential to abolish the *hypostatic* product fashioned by the uncreated's act, and therefore that there is a negative factor within the divine Creation capable of annulling what has been created. This would then imply that there are two First Causes—one that generates *being* and a second (equally powerful) that generates *nothingness*. Therefore, the reality of existence would be a dualistic polarity between 'good' and 'evil', relativising, and possibly negating, divine existence as love.

2 We find in Maximos the Confessor what is probably the most comprehensive attempt at probing the potential of language and its

ontological categories, with a view to eliminating this contradiction. His explanatory proposal is to recognise that God is ‘also the cause of nothingness; he causes the being or non-being of all beings that are subsequent to Him’.<sup>238</sup> This means that non-being also *exists*—it too is a product of God’s fashioning activity. However, it exists as a *hypostatic possibility* of the free act of *refusing existence*, i.e. refusing relationship.

2.1 What could ‘a personal *existence* that refuses to exist’ mean? From the perspective of our language it signifies an epistemic exclusion that nevertheless still performs some hermeneutic function. It indicates that existence is defined as *personal* when it constitutes, before any reference or relationship, *freedom*, which, in principle is to say the *hypostatic* potential of either relationship or non-relationship.

2.1.1 In the logic of our language, the freedom of God’s love represents a comparable example—we understand it principally in terms of the possibility of love or non-love. However, freely choosing love is God’s *mode* of existence, instantiating divine Being in the Trinity of *Persons* who realise the fullness of existence and life as a communion of love.

2.1.2 The freedom of God’s love is also actualized in the call that fashions and institutes the human person. And as an uncreated activity that instantiates divine existence and life, it is not abolished by the created person’s refusal of existence-as-relationship with the One who calls it to existence-as-relationship.

2.2 Maximos’ proposal interprets ecclesial faith-as-trust as follows: God (‘out of the profusion of his intense love’)<sup>239</sup> ‘is united with all men [once the existential boundaries of the created end], as he himself knows’.<sup>240</sup> Union with God, for all those who freely accept it as a gift of grace, represents the existential fullness sought after and desired by the

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238 Maximos the Confessor, *Commentary on ‘On the Divine Names’*, PG 4:260d.

239 Translator’s note: Maximos the Confessor, ‘Various Texts on Theology, the Divine Economy, and Virtue and Vice,’ in *The Philokalia*, Vol. II, ed. and trans. Gerald E H Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), 86 (Fifth Century).

240 *Ibid.*, 20 (Fourth Century), adapted.

logos-possessing subject (those worthy according to grace), a source of ‘divine and inconceivable pleasure’.<sup>241</sup>

2.3 All those who refuse existential union with the *Grace* of divine life-giving activity do not abolish the union—they nullify life-giving acceptance of the gift, i.e., the possibility of existential plenitude. They exist, but do so ‘contrary to grace’ (in divergence from Grace). Put differently, they bring themselves towards non-existence without ceasing to exist—‘they absurdly bring themselves towards non-being... willingly exchanging being for non-being’. And this movement heightens deprivation of existential plenitude—‘the indescribable pain brought about by the privation of such pleasure’.<sup>242</sup>

2.4 *How*, and more importantly *when*, does a human being’s freedom determine their acceptance or refusal of God’s Grace of— their union with the divine love that grants life either ‘in grace’ or ‘contrary to grace’? Maximos provides an answer with respect to the ‘how’. He says: ‘according to the underlying quality of their disposition’. The ‘underlying’<sup>243</sup> quality of each human being’s disposition presupposes that that disposition determines the *mode* of their union.

2.4.1 But ‘quality of disposition’—the mode by which each human

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241 Ibid.

242 Maximos the Confessor, ‘Various Texts on Theology, the Divine Economy, and Virtue and Vice’, 20 (Fourth Century), adapted: ‘Nature does not contain the inner principles of what is beyond nature any more than it contains the laws of what is contrary to nature. By what is beyond nature I mean the divine and inconceivable pleasure which God naturally produces in those found worthy of being united with Him through grace. By what is contrary to nature I mean the indescribable pain brought about by the privation of such pleasure. This pain God naturally produces in the unworthy when He is united to them in a manner contrary to grace. For God is united with all men according to the underlying quality of their disposition, as he himself knows; and, at the creation of each person, He provides each person with the capacity to perceive and sense Him when He is united in one way or another with all men at the end of the ages’. See also Maximos the Confessor, *On Various Aporias*, PG 91:1084d–1085a; and Maximos the Confessor, *Commentary on ‘On the Divine Names’*, PG 4:305b: ‘Do not think that sin is what happens in us, such as adultery or injustice or any other such thing; rather, it is what Dionysius the Areopagite says it is: falling short of the natural motion, i.e., the order of the good, thus bringing ourselves the irrational which is contrary to nature and non-existence in every respect’.

243 *Ypokeitai*: the Greek term for ‘subject’ (*ypokeimeno*) comes from the verb translated here as ‘underlying’, thus ‘underlying disposition’ is semantically connected to the term ‘subject’.

being's *hypostasis* is *disposed* towards communion with God—cannot be actualized as natural will after death, since death erases all created activity. 'Quality of disposition' can never refer to the natural activity of the will.

2.4.2 Maximos has carefully chosen his words. He speaks of 'quality', which in the philosophical language of his time meant 'the character of a syllogistic proposition as either affirmative or negative'.<sup>244</sup> What we are talking about here is the affirmative or negative character of an existential self-offering, and not of an activity, such as reasoning or decision. We are talking about the human being's underlying willingness or unwillingness to offer themselves to God.

2.4.3 Maximos recognises in the human being's post mortem hypostasis, which is devoid of nature, a 'qualitative disposition' towards union with God, which has already been moulded. What ontological content can we attribute to the signifier 'moulded'?<sup>245</sup> A possible answer is that the 'existential imprint' (the human being's *hypostasis* after death) has not only been marked by God's call to being<sup>246</sup>, but also by the human being's existential disposition (positive or negative) in response to that call.

2.4.3.1 Maximos' formulation is as follows: God grants the sensation (experience) of either 'divine and inconceivable pleasure' or 'indescribable pain [caused solely by the deprivation of that pleasure] to those with whom he is united, as he himself knows'. The primary cause of this sensation is God and his love, which 'moves' him to enter into union with every human. However, humans are responsible for whether this sensation is marked by pleasure or pain—it depends on 'the underlying quality of their disposition', commensurate with how 'each human being has moulded themselves [freely and of their own accord] in response to the one who will be united completely with all human beings at the end of the ages'.<sup>247</sup>

244 See Georgios Babiniotis, *Λεξικό της Νέας Ελληνικής Γλώσσας* [*Dictionary of Modern Greek*] (Athens: Centre for Lexicology, 1998), s. v. 'ποιότητα' [quality].

245 *Diaplasmenos*: from the verb *diaplatho*—to give form or shape to something.

246 *Ontopoios klisi*: literally 'being-making call'.

247 Translator's note: square bracket's Yannaras'.

2.4.3.2 We might better understand the ontological content of the signifier ‘moulded’ by drawing a semantic parallel to the freedom of God’s *love*, bearing in mind, of course, the substantive difference between the created and the uncreated. Love represents God’s *free* choice, and as his freedom to choose, it perpetually (and timelessly) constitutes his *mode* of existence: this is what instantiates Divine Being. We could articulate this idea as follows (for the purposes of meeting the needs of rational language): God is *tri-hypostatic* (an indissoluble realisation of his *hypostatic* love) because he ‘moulds’ his own ‘existential imprint’ out of his freedom.

2.4.3.3 The freedom to choose, part of the *imago Dei*, also marks the human being’s *hypostatic* reality. Choice determines the *mode* in which the human being’s *hypostasis*, which survives death, is disposed towards divine and life-giving love. After death the human being’s *hypostasis* instantiates God’s call to being, but it also instantiates the human being’s decision (what has been ‘moulded’ by its *hypostatic* otherness or *mode*) to accept or deny that call. After death, the human being’s *hypostasis* (now devoid of nature) exists as an ‘existential imprint’ of God’s *call* and the *freedom* of the one who has been called.

2.5 According to Maximus, it is in God’s nature (it is who he is) to bring about the ‘inconceivable pleasure’ or ‘indescribable pain’ that accompanies his union with human beings (it is his nature to create—he is accustomed to create)—as an abundance of loving goodness. We are not talking here about particular acts of God that *reward* or *punish* humans. The separation of humans into the *worthy* and *unworthy*, following death, is not understood by Maximus in terms of categories of dispensing justice, but as definitions of *modes of existence* ‘moulded’ by human freedom, that are either ‘beyond nature’ or ‘contrary to nature’.

2.5.1 Human nature does not possess the *logoi* (terms or presuppositions) of the mode of existence that is ‘beyond nature’, nor the laws (necessary preconditions) of the mode that is ‘contrary to nature’. The divine and inconceivable pleasure that constitutes the sensation or experience of a human being’s positive response to union with God is ‘beyond nature’

i.e., beyond the existential possibilities of the created and a gift of the fullness of life. The indescribable pain (constituted by the deprivation of that inconceivable pleasure, not by some action) is 'contrary to nature' i.e., divergent from natural 'specifications' of the human being's existence as a person (the 'specifications' of existence as relationship).

2.5.2 When a *hypostasis* instantiates the uncreated activities offered by Grace, its existence, although still created, is *beyond nature* and *according to grace*. When a *hypostasis*' union with God (via the uncreated activities of Grace) is not actualized into an existential event that is a relationship (into an active likeness of what is being participated in), it exists *contrary to nature* and *contrary to grace*.

## Chapter 18

### WHAT IS SIGNIFIED BY 'FUTURE JUDGMENT'

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1 The content of the gospel signification 'future judgment' can be understood as the human being's 'moulded' *hypostasis* after death 'according to the underlying quality of each person's disposition' (with consistent adherence to the 'field of *logos*' defined by an ontological interpretation of those terms).

1.1 The *judgment* of humankind (humankind's separation into 'worthy' and 'unworthy' for the purposes of 'receiving [God's] complete union with all men at the end of the ages') has already occurred, according to the gospel texts of ecclesial tradition, and will continue to be in force for as long as the adventure of natural existence walks the tightrope of freedom.

2 The parabolic image of 'future judgment'<sup>248</sup> foretells that Christ will separate people 'one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats'. This iconological language indicates that at the time of *judgment* it is not the one who separates that decides the outcome of that separation. He simply certifies the separation. Judgment has already occurred and relates to an *existential*, rather than *moral*, separation: the 'good' sheep are not separated from the 'bad' sheep, rather sheep are distinguished from goats.

2.1 In the symbolic language of this parable the 'worthy' and 'unworthy' alike appear to be ignorant of the basis upon which they are separated. Both groups put the same question to their Judge<sup>249</sup>, a question

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248 Matt. 25:31–46.

249 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?'

that relates to their earthly behaviour towards him, and which is historically infeasible, since Christ never intervened in History incognito. It is possible that this symbolism intimates that the criterion of judgment is not the human being’s incomplete and fragmentary relationship with the transcendent (e.g., God, religious obligations, moral duties) during the course of earthly life, but the quality or mode of all interpersonal relationships that constitute human life—whether or not these really were relationships of loving self-transcendence and self-offering.

2.1.1 Truly caring for the hungry, the thirsty, strangers, the destitute, the sick and those in prison, are generally regarded to be acts of virtue in all religions. From the perspective of the ontological semantics found in the ecclesial tradition, such acts represent an achievement and measure not simply of moral behaviour, but of a *mode of existence*. This mode orients or ‘moulds’ the openness towards relationship found in the human being’s personal *hypostasis*—the openness of responding to the divine call-to-relationship that is institutive of the *hypostasis*.

2.1.2 In the language of the gospels, one’s behaviour towards fellow human beings who are suffering is identified as behaviour towards Christ.<sup>250</sup> For when humans, in their relationship with fellow humans, successfully transcend their nature and their individualism (are free of their instinctual egocentricity), they attain a *mode of existence* that also permits direct communion with God.

3 It is important to reiterate that, when we say in the language of ecclesial ontology that God ‘exists’, we do not tie the meaning of his existence to an ontological fact, such as God’s ‘nature’ or ‘essence’. Rather, we signify his free will to exist, a will that is continually confirmed in the love of the Father who *begets* the Son and *sends forth* the Spirit, as in the way that the freedom of the Son’s love, and that of the Spirit, constitute existential *hypostases* in relational communion with the Father. This freedom of love instantiates (forms into personal *hypostases*) the

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250 ‘...Just as you did it [or did not do it] to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me [or did not do it to me]’. Translator’s note: the passage is Matt. 25:40 with text in square brackets from Matt. 25:45.

trinitarian Divinity's Being, with the Father's personhood the 'source' or 'cause'. By analogous signification the love of the human being towards fellow humans confirms a human being's free will to exist 'according to the likeness' of the *mode* of divine trinitarian order—to draw existence from the freedom of love rather than the necessity of nature.

4 The criteria set by the gospel for *judging* human beings—for separating them into 'worthy' and 'unworthy' for the purposes of union with God after death—include behaviour 'towards one another', as well as the direct relationship humans have with God. However, this immediate and direct relationship cannot be classified under the signifier 'behaviour'. The signifier 'faith', in the sense of loving trust in and self-surrender to God's love, is a much better fit:

Those who have faith in him are not judged; but those who do not have faith have already been judged.<sup>251</sup> Anyone who hears my word and has faith in him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life.<sup>252</sup>

4.1 We can draw a connection between the gospel's reference to those who 'have already been judged' and Maximus' 'fashioned': every human *hypostasis* is preserved after the death of its nature 'in which it received its being' in the sense of an existential openness to be in a personal relationship with God or not. This openness has been 'fashioned' or 'judged' by the human being's prior exercise of personal freedom 'in nature', i.e., the practice of genuine *love* towards one's fellow human beings and *faith* in God. Love and faith—love as faith and faith as love—are the criteria by which the judged are distinguished from the non-judged.

4.2 The personal freedom that imprints the post-death *hypostasis* with the *mode* or *readiness* towards *reception* of union with God is mediated

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251 John 3:18.

252 John 5:24. NRSV adapted. Translator's note: the NRSV has 'believe' in place of 'faith'. I have used faith to make clearer the semantic link evident in the Greek between Yannaras' 'faith' (*pisti*) and the participle *pistevon* ('have faith in' or 'believe') in the biblical passage. I have also exchanged 'not condemned' in the NRSV for 'not judged', in order to more accurately reflect Yannaras' reading of *eis krisin*.

by the natural activity of will. However, it belongs to the character of *hypostasis*, not the potentiality of nature. In the perspective of ecclesial ontology, personal freedom (as existential potentiality) is a Grace or gift that characterises the very call of God that establishes the human being’s *hypostasis*.

4.2.1 It is difficult to denote more clearly with linguistic signifiers the semantic difference between ‘freedom of will’ and ‘freedom of *hypostatic* openness’. Still, experiencing the signified difference (albeit allusively) gives the Church a reason to pray for the salvation of the dead<sup>253</sup>, for the intervention of Grace with respect to *hypostatic* openness and for their inclusion in the ‘land of the living’.<sup>254</sup>

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253 Translator’s note: Yannaras here uses the biblical term *kekoimimeno*i, literally ‘those who have fallen asleep’, commonly translated as ‘dead’ in English editions of the New Testament.

254 The *Triodion* (a liturgical book containing the church services of the pre-Easter period of Lent) and the Saturday Synaxarion before Sunday of the Last Judgment explain the reasons why the Church, on this day, prays for the salvation of the dead, irrespective of what use they made of their freedom during their life on earth. There are three indicative instances mentioned in the Synaxarion in which the prayers of the living for the departed altered the already ‘moulded’ *hypostatic* disposition of even highly impious individuals:

‘For what is done on behalf of them benefits their souls (requiems, alms and services), as is evident from the lives of many saints, especially that of Saint Makarios, who, upon coming across the bare skull of a deceased Greek pagan while travelling, asked: ‘do those in Hades feel at all any sense of comfort?’ [The skull] replied: ‘they say that they are very much at ease knowing that you, father, pray on behalf of the departed’. For the great and prayerful man did this out of his desire to learn whether there was any benefit to those who had already died.

But then again, Gregory the Dialogist, having saved Emperor Trajan through prayer, was told by God: never again pray on behalf of someone who is impious.

Indeed, Empress Theodora, as it is told, saved the God-hater Theophilus through the saints and confessors by snatching him away torture’.

Ecclesial tradition has always insisted upon the synecdoche of absolute divine love for humans and its unrestricted respect for human personal freedom which is included as a part of that love (even when freedom instantiates the rejection of loving reciprocity). That is why the Church has never accepted the one-sided version of ‘the restoration of all’ (the salvation of all people) at the end of the ages—just as it also has not accepted the legal inventions of Roman Catholicism regarding ‘purgatory’ (purgatorium: a ‘place’ where all those who did not manage to submit to penance while on Earth serve expiatory sentences for their sins).

Ecclesial tradition, nevertheless, adheres to the *personal* character of the human being’s *hypostasis*—a character that is not abolished at death. Moreover, if freedom is not ephemeral or natural, but the institutive and unchanging characteristic of the personal *hypostasis*, then the idea that the *hypostasis*’ openness is unalterable (unmodifiable) after death is incompatible with the truth of personhood.

Thus, the ecclesial tradition’s interpretive proposal that the human being’s personal

5 No amount of reasoning can provide certainty regarding the continuation of human existence after death, let alone determine the measures and criteria by which God judges people following death. All rational analysis ultimately runs aground on crucial questions that cannot be answered:

5.1 What freedom of *hypostatic* openness and ‘underlying quality of disposition’ are the countless infants who die prematurely able to mould in relation to God? Then again, even the longest life seems to provide an insignificant amount of opportunity to mould one’s *hypostatic disposition* given the grave consequences it has for a life after death that is beyond time. Using the logic at our disposal, it would be scandalously unjust to think that the incomprehensible existential possibilities of post-death union with God are determined during an earthly life subject to the necessities of createdness. How can we reasonably accept that the existentially constrained and highly deficient can judge and determine the complete and perfect?

5.1.1 How much personal freedom in the underlying (*hypostatic*) *disposition* is permitted by the innumerable limitations of the natural will that actualizes that *hypostatic* disposition? To what extent do hereditary traits, innate passions, unconscious urges and the factors determinative of the state of one’s psychological condition, such as the family, immediate social environment, level of cultural development, health or sickness, prosperity or poverty, determine one’s *hypostatic* openness to relationship, outside the control of personal will and freedom?

5.2 Historical attempts at answering these questions, using a kind of acrobatic legalistic logic, have produced naive explanations that devalue and undermine the very pursuit of metaphysics itself, even if they have efficaciously served as psychological hallucinogens.

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*hypostasis* is preserved after death lends great hope that the loving prayers of the living might transform the ‘moulded’ *hypostasis* even of the impious deceased, without violating their freedom. It is not possible to more clearly denote how this transformation takes place with linguistic signifiers. Still, one can get a sense from the semantic coordinates ‘person’, ‘love’ and ‘freedom’ when they refer to ontological givens—to the mode of existence of the uncreated God and created humans.

5.2.1 All rational analysis of the transcendent, as well as efforts to document it 'objectively', look like the products of a language trapped in the psychological dictates of desire and the fear of death. Even the experiential sensation, or immediate lived experience, of the difference between the otherness of a living presence and the indifference of a dead body is not enough to substantiate that some existential condition survives death. Besides, this 'objective' sensation or lived experience is undermined by a verified spectrum of conditions that blur the distinction: senility, severe mental impairment, mental illness and the death-like state of a coma. Who can stipulate what the boundary is between the human and the non-human, between personal otherness and unitary nature?

6 What we are left with is the experience of relationship and the fact that such experience, even in the sense of knowledge of the here and now, is capable of transcending the capabilities of language, and constituting empirical, albeit ineffable, knowledge.

## Chapter 19

### THE ONTOLOGICAL MEANING OF GRACE

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1 In contemporary physics, when our attempts to resolve a problem are put on hold because of the inadequacy of our mathematical methods (their inability to signify further complexity or indeterminate relationships), we look for an alternative (new) mathematical language and method capable of supporting our explanatory endeavours. The demands of research in physics have created, and continue to create, new branches of mathematics, because mathematical language has never claimed to functionally represent definitive entities. It is a language that signifies relationships. That is why it is able to demonstrate both the existence of presupposed relationships that are inaccessible to observation and signifieds containing content that we do not fully comprehend.<sup>255</sup> In such cases mathematics functions like a musical score—we can ‘read’ and perceive the melody, but no melody has ever been understood through representational logic.

1.1 The language of representational logic is even more manifestly insufficient when it comes to confirming or refuting our posited metaphysical explanations. Could we alter our language and method in order to signify the possible reality of our relationship with the transcendent? Might there exist a mode of epistemic investigation capable of referring to the preservation of the human being’s personal *hypostasis* beyond death?

1.1.1 The Christian church says: ‘yes, there is faith’. And in the understanding of the Church the word ‘faith’ does not signify the passive abandonment of reason for the sake of irrational intellectual convictions

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<sup>255</sup> See John Schwartz, ‘Superstrings’, in *Superstrings—A Theory of Everything?*.

and beliefs, or for the sake of psychological auto-suggestion. Ecclesial faith represents a different kind of logic and language altogether. Its epistemic function differs from the rational depiction of the 'states of things' (Sachverhalten) in space and time. Faith presupposes an active stance, won by effort, towards the transcendent that differs in kind to intellectual curiosity—it is a different mathematics entirely from basic arithmetic or Euclidean geometry.

1.1.2 Faith converges with our natural intellect. It is not synonymous with irrationality or delusion. Yet, that convergence does not define the epistemic dynamic of faith. When a member of the Church says, 'I believe', we understand this to signify, using contemporary logic: 'I trust because I love'. I trust the *logos*-possessing love that I sense in the wisdom and beauty of nature, perhaps too in my own story. I seek out this love even when my own circumstances, natural or historical, show it to be absent. However, it is somewhere here that the convergence between faith and conventional logic ends, i.e., at loving relationships and their prerequisites: *hypostatic* otherness and freedom from any preconditions of necessity, although the boundaries of the epistemic dynamic of faith do not end there.

1.2 The movement from trust in the intellect to personal and intimate love, or the nostalgia of love, inaugurates a relational dynamic that is itself epistemically fertile. The knowledge one can obtain through *relationships* does not resolve the problems of representational logic. Instead, it fills the void created by these problems with the certainty provided by reciprocal love.

1.2.1 What guarantee or certainty is there that the faith-as-trust of love reflects a real relationship rather than auto-suggestion or delusion? There is none, since the outside observer's logic provides no criterion by which they can be distinguished. Only the experience of one who participates in such relationships can provide that certainty, and even then, illusion and misapprehension remain open possibilities.

1.3 The experience of participants testifies that real faith is born in a real void, i.e., in the chaotic absence of guarantees and certainties.

Once all confidence in the intellect, logic, feeling, mystical experience, virtue, law and higher authority is removed, faith emerges clearly as the real certainty of *relationship*. The human being must be stripped of its psychological substitutes for reality, and the transformation of those metaphysical substitutes into an imaginary physics. The human being must further abandon its own (natural) potential for existence, knowledge and hope, and accept death as the real annihilation of nature, thus arriving at utter despair and complete self-abnegation. Only then will there be a readiness to accept and see clearly the gift of faith and the vital 'sense'<sup>256</sup> of a real *relationship* with God.

1.3.1 As Isaac the Syrian, with the experience of the desert, affirmed:

There is nothing more powerful than despair. It cannot be vanquished by anyone...Nothing is more daring than when a person cuts hope out of their life in his mind...Because all affliction occurs beneath death, and he stooped down, accepting death...The wonder of God's love for humanity is known when it appears in the lives of those who have lost their hope in him. And it is there that God reveals his power to save. For humans never come to know the divine power when in ease and comfort.<sup>257</sup>

2 Our natural existence and intellect are not the result of our individual choice. Perhaps, they are a gift bestowed, perhaps the result of chance, i.e., the result of unintelligible or inexplicable condemnation. Gift implies a relationship, the facticity of a relationship, and therefore the possibility of experientially examining the real or illusory character of relationships. 'Chance' presupposes nothingness, condemning us to an utterly absurd existence with no escape.

2.1 The same linguistic distinction could also be applied to 'faith'. Faith is either the gift of a relationship that is capable of being actualized by individual freedom, or it is, by definition, a psychological illusion. If faith is a kind of relationship, then it implies the existence of an un-pre-determined epistemic dynamic, albeit one that carries with it the danger

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<sup>256</sup> *Aisthisi*: 'sense' as in sensation, not meaning.

<sup>257</sup> Isaac the Syrian, *The Ascetical Life*, (Nikiforos Theotokos), Oration 19.

of slipping into illusion. If faith is, by definition, an illusion, then there is no scope for further knowledge.

2.1.1 If we accept that faith is not an illusion, how might we define it within the terms of our conventional (linguistic) logic? The language of the gospels provides an outline of a definition in a single image: the night that Christ approached his disciples, who were on a small boat endangered by a storm, ‘walking on the sea’.<sup>258</sup> The disciples did not know whether Christ was a ghost or real, an illusion or the truth. Peter took it upon himself to obtain experiential verification: ‘Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water’. ‘Come’, Jesus said to him. ‘So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus’.<sup>259</sup>

2.1.1.1 Peter did not walk on water because Christ ‘miraculously’ (magically) suspended the force of natural laws, but because Peter put his trust in Christ’s call. By leaping into the water and going towards Christ, Peter *existed* in a *relational* mode rather than a *natural* mode, which is why he was able to transcend the laws and necessities of nature. Yet, ‘when he noticed the strong wind he became afraid’<sup>260</sup> and reverted to being subject to nature, once again existing by the terms of nature. He was subject to the need for self-preservation, to fear. So he began to ‘sink’ and Christ described him as being of ‘little faith’.<sup>261</sup>

2.1.2 Here we have a historically attested event with a proposed ontological interpretation. That interpretation is intelligible within the framework of our linguistic logic. However, rational comprehension alone does not amount to verification of the proposed interpretation. In this case verification requires a different epistemic process, one that is experientially accessible, yet not made known in objective semantic terms.

3 The notion that a human being’s personal *hypostasis* continues to exist even after death is an ontological claim with a less rationally

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258 Matt. 14:25.

259 Matt. 14:28–29.

260 Matt. 14:30.

261 Matt. 14:31.

intelligible basis than Peter walking on water. At least Peter walking on water is an image that is accessible to our representational logic, even if it is questionable on rational grounds. On the other hand, the idea that a human being's personal *hypostasis* exists after death, without a nature and consequently without action or kind, and outside of coordinates in space and time, is a hypothetical proposition that is completely inaccessible to our representational logic.

3.1 The rational part of the Church's metaphysical hope—that which is accessible to language and to a logic that can be shared—ultimately rests in a fundamentally existential possibility: the replacement of *nature* by *grace* after death. (The preservation of personal *hypostatic* identity is a function of the fundamental ontological locus of *nature* or *grace*, since one can only conceive the *hypostasis* in terms of the realisation of the existential activities of either nature or grace).

3.1.1 According to our experiential logic, the *first cause* of human nature must be either inexplicable *chance* or the personally actualized *grace* of a creator God. If it is chance, then the death of a human's individual nature also erases its existential *hypostasis*. If grace is the ultimate cause of nature, and if human nature is formed as a gift of existential potential for loving relationship with its personal Cause, then *grace* precedes nature with respect to the origin of the existential event, and it can therefore subsequently be (after the end of nature) the cause of the existential event's continuation.

3.2 It is no accident that in ecclesial language and practice God is appealed to as the *father* of human beings:

[He] is a symbol of the *hypostatic* and existent adoption to be bestowed through the gift and grace of the Holy Spirit. In accordance with it, once very human particularity is overcome and disclosed by the coming grace, all the saints will be and be called sons of God ...<sup>262</sup>

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262 Maximus the Confessor, 'The Church's Mystagogy', 203, (Chapter 20) (PG 91:696cd), adapted.

3.2.1 Ecclesial experience (through the voice of Maximos, but not his alone) speaks of God *adopting* humans in their *hypostasis*, i.e., in their realised otherness, and as they really exist. Humans become children of God, not symbolically or allegorically, but in a particular existential *hypostasis* that is formed by the gratuitous *grace* of the Holy Spirit, and not any longer by human nature. Nature—the property of being human, that which constitutes the human self—is ‘covered’ and ‘overcome’, i.e., is existentially restored and repaid in abundance by the descent of grace. Adoption signifies that the human being’s existence as personal otherness remains created, even as this existence is actualized by the uncreated activities of the Holy Spirit: the *hypostasis* no longer instantiates a created nature, but rather uncreated grace.

3.2.2 According to the language and semantics of the Gospel, ‘what is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit...‘You must be born from above’<sup>263</sup> Human salvation, the possibility of humans becoming saved,<sup>264</sup> i.e., becoming complete and whole and attaining the full existential potential of *personal hypostasis*, presupposes a second birth, a new beginning for the human existential event. The phrase ‘to be born from above’ signifies that the human being begins to exist by the terms of the existential freedom of the uncreated, by the *mode* of the ‘Kingdom’ of God, which is to say the mode of divine sovereignty and authority over the existential event.

3.2.3 In the language of the Church, the Spirit of God is the heavenly king who grants life. The Holy Spirit is revealed as the one who actualizes every potentiality of life. That is why the Holy Spirit is called ‘Paraclete’—a unique existential support<sup>265</sup> and comfort during the earthly experience of mortality and the foreboding threat of death.

3.2.3.1 The Spirit is the cause of living matter, according to the Biblical account of the first day of creation: “The Spirit of God swept over the face

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263 John 3:6–7.

264 *Soos*: ‘whole’ or ‘complete’. The Greek word for salvation, *sotiria*, is derived from the word *soos*, and therefore at the linguistic level salvation means to become whole, complete.

265 *Paraklisi*: semantically connected to Paraclete (*Paraklitos*).

of the waters'.<sup>266</sup> The Spirit is also the cause of the deification of human nature: it came upon the virgin Mary in order to incarnate Christ. The Spirit is further the cause of the Church's formation as an institution: The Paraclete Spirit descended upon the disciples and apostles on the day of Pentecost. By invoking the Spirit the created kinds of bread and wine instantiate the uncreated activities of the Son and *Logos*. Throughout History the Spirit 'is full of prophecies, perfects priests, teaches the ignorant wisdom and makes theologians out of fishermen'.<sup>267</sup> Any transcendence of the necessities and constraints of created nature is a *grace* or gift of the Holy Spirit.

3.3 The Church also attributes the ontological interpretation of its metaphysical hope to the Spirit of God, the personal creative cause of every vital revelation. It offers the following explanation that is rationally adequate and subject to the verification of faith: humans exist after death (after the mental and physical activities of their nature have been extinguished) thanks to the activities of the Paraclete. After death, humans instantiate the uncreated activities of the Holy Spirit in the form of existential events of personal uniqueness and distinctness, actualizing through these activities a human existence that is free of created constraints. The Paraclete is our future body:

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's inner being [*koilia*] shall flow rivers of living water.'" Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.<sup>268</sup>

3.3.1 At the time the Septuagint was translated, the word *koilia*, which means 'belly', had come to stand for the human's 'inner being', what

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266 Gen. 1:2. NRSV adapted.

267 *Sunday of Holy Pentecost*.

268 John 7:37-40, adapted. Translator's note: *Koilia*, literally 'belly', is here translated as 'inner being' in order to connect the word with the specific definition Yannaras gives it immediately below in 3.3.1. *Koilia* is translated as 'heart' in the NRSV translation of John 7:38.

is 'prior to' or 'deeper than' the natural operations by which human existence is actualized.<sup>269</sup> From that ineffable 'kernel' of subjectivity 'shall flow rivers of living water': the Spirit's activities transmit life in the same way that created nature requires water to live. The gift<sup>270</sup> of the Spirit's activities will instantiate the personal uniqueness of every human so that it constitutes an existential event after the death of their nature.

3.3.2 Before Jesus' *glorification* 'there was no Spirit'. The 'glory' of Jesus, in the Hebrew sense of *kabod*, represents the complete revelation of the fullness of existence and life in his person. And the fulfilment of true existence and life is revealed in Christ's person through his voluntary death on the cross—he freely and completely subjected his human will to the divine will. Death itself was abolished by Christ's death, because death is part of the existential autonomy of created nature, while complete existential surrender to the Father represents true existence and life, life as relationship and loving reciprocity.

3.3.3 The glory and the life-giving death of Jesus also inaugurated the Paraclete's mission: 'for if I do not go away, the Paraclete will not come to you'.<sup>271</sup> With his death on the cross, resurrection and ascension, Jesus 'goes away' in order to bring humans closer to God, to enthrone the 'clay' on the 'throne' of Divinity. And then the Paraclete 'comes' because there no longer exists a dividing wall preventing him from making a home in man,<sup>272</sup> from giving life to the personal *hypostases* of human beings. Now, 'whether we live or die'<sup>273</sup>, 'it is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh [the existential potential of our created nature] is useless'.<sup>274</sup>

4 Perhaps the only realistic ontology is one that explains the phenomenon or question at hand on the basis of its intended end: 'what

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269 See Johannes Behm, 'κοιλία' in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, Vol. 3, 788–789.

270 *Chari*: also 'grace'.

271 John 16:7. NRSV adapted.

272 John 14:23.

273 Rom. 14:8.

274 John 6:63. NRSV adapted.

*The Effable and The Ineffable*

we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him'.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> 1 John 3:2.

## Chapter 20

### PROOFS, FEELINGS AND SYMBOLS

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1 What *reality* does mathematics refer to? What *reality* does metaphysics refer to?

1.1 In the case of questions such as these ‘we are up against one of the great sources of philosophical bewilderment: a substantive [such as mathematics or metaphysics] makes us look for a thing that corresponds to it’.<sup>276</sup>

1.2 We ask, ‘what is time?’, ‘What is meaning?’, ‘What is knowledge?’, ‘What is thought?’, and ‘What is number?’ We cannot point to anything to which these words correspond. Nevertheless, we learn their meaning experientially to the extent that when we use them, they ‘mesh with our lives’ and become ‘part of our lives’.<sup>277</sup>

2 Let us consider mathematics in more detail. Does mathematics truly reference nature? Is it a technical language of calculations and measurements that reflects the logical structure of the sensible world? Or is mathematics a true reality independent of nature? Is that why its propositions function as absolute truths, capable of serving as a means of verifying all other scientific propositions with logical form and structure?

2.1 Construing mathematics as an autonomous ‘pure science’ with absolute and unalterable power, which is to say as a reference to the reality of truth itself, is an a priori decision of a methodological or even psychological character. It caters to the human need for a scientific

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<sup>276</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, ‘The Blue Book’, in *The Blue and Brown Books: Preliminary Studies for the ‘Philosophical Investigations’*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969), 1. Translator’s note: square brackets Yannaras’.

<sup>277</sup> Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar*, Part I, 1:28–29 (64–65).

method that can ‘objectively’ distinguish between reliable and unreliable knowledge. It also caters to the psychological need for an ‘objective’ truth that we can individually possess (through systematic learning) or have mastery over, a reinforced confidence about one’s own knowledge of reality and the ability to impose the validity of one’s own certainties upon others.

2.2 At the other end of the spectrum there is the realism of freedom from psychological necessity and subordination to methodological codes, i.e., the experiential adventure of a relationship with reality, and knowledge as the ever present risk of that relationship’s success or failure—the risk of more truth or less truth, more error or less error. Relationships with the real and the existent are ultimately indeterminate (there is an un-predetermined dynamic in knowledge of truth) because they are a function of the knowing subject’s *existential otherness* and the *composition of physical* reality through *logos*. Every relational event, from the most personal encounter to the most methodologically rigorous scientific observation, is a struggle for knowledge, which is why all scientific truth always constitutes an ‘incomplete perfection’, a conditional validity ever subject to more complete elucidation.

2.2.1 In this perspective mathematics is a type of language that forms part of the totality of human *logos* (expressive) possibilities, a useful tool or medium for making relational experiences more widely known and for sharing the knowledge furnished by the immediacy of relationship.

3 The decision to make mathematics an autonomous reality of truth, separate from the reality of nature, corresponds exactly to the construal of metaphysics as *sacred knowledge* (*sacra scientia*).<sup>278</sup> What is metaphysics, and what *reality* (distinct from physics) does it refer to? Western scholastic thinkers posed these questions in the Middle Ages, but they were the ‘wrong questions to ask. For the first time in human history metaphysics was treated as an autonomous reality, which like

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278 Thomas Aquinas, ‘On Boethius on the Trinity’, in *The Trinity and the Unicity of the Intellect*, trans. Rose E. Brennan (St Louis: B Herder, 1946), Part 3, 6.1: ‘Must we proceed according to the mode of reason in natural science, according to the mode of learning in mathematics, and according to the mode of intellect in divine science?’

mathematics was accessible to the intellect alone. Scholastic thinkers believed that knowledge of metaphysical reality, disconnected from human experience and the adventure of relationship, was open to rational apodictic proofs and constituted a 'pure science' that was not inferior to the coveted reliability of mathematics. Metaphysical propositions were thought to obey rules, axioms and principles (*regulae*, *axiomata* and *principia*) with absolute equivalence to mathematical logic.

3.1 From that point on, history—at least that of the so-called Western world—has been filled with division and rivalry, an endless battle between rationalists and empiricists, positivists and visionaries, sensists and fideists, and materialists and idealists. Generation after generation (millions of human lives) have lived lives hamstrung by the confusion generated by the antagonisms that grew out of asking the wrong question: 'what does metaphysics refer to if it relates to a scientifically verifiable reality? This question was never posed in Greek antiquity, nor early Christianity. Even for Plato, the father of idealistic ontology, the goal was not to 'prove' with unquestionable reliability the existence of God, the immortality of the soul or a non-sensible and intellectual world, but to *interpret* and *share* experience of the metaphysical and the ineffable.

3.2 Metaphysics, like mathematics, is a language for interpreting and sharing *relational* experiences of what exists and is real. Metaphysics is a function of experiencing what exists and is real, a function of experiencing the *meaning* and the *first cause* of what exists, a function of experiencing existential otherness, beauty, art and *eros*—every possibility and hope of constituting an existential event via freedom from time, space, decay and death. The language that refers to such connections, those between the realism of relationships and what exists, is not the same as the language used in measurable verification and representational expression. It is not the language of the Newtonian worldview, which does not even suffice for signifying the epistemic access we have today to the subatomic or astrophysical realm. Nevertheless, it is still a language of empirical realism, if realism is defined by relational experience rather than vesting reliability in a selection of apodictic methods.

3.2.1 There will always be some who experience their relationship with existence and reality as a function of the nonsensical and irrational, or chance and purposelessness. This is a different type of metaphysics, equally inaccessible to 'objective' substantiation and the language of measurable verification and representational expression. The realism of the metaphysical interrelationship between existence and reality stems from the realism of un-predetermined *relational* experience, not technical calculations and measurements. The existential event's *meaning* or *non-meaning*, its reference to a *first cause* or inexplicable *chance*, the *rational* or *irrational* character of beauty, and existential otherness as *hypostatic* or *non-hypostatic* freedom from the necessities of nature are all judged in the *mode of relationality*, in the unrestricted boundaries of the dynamic of relationships.

4 Wittgenstein offers perhaps the most ingenious dissection of this particular mode of relating to existence and reality to come out of the post-medieval civilisation of the West, i.e., *modernity*. This mode strips the metaphysical functions of existence and reality from the epistemic dynamic of relationality, restricting epistemic verification to the representational correspondence between thought, language and reality.

4.1 Thought, language and physical reality share a common composition and structure in *logos*. This common composition and structure marks the posited boundary of the epistemic dynamic of the human being's relationship with reality. The limits of feasible human knowledge consist of the world, understood as the totality of 'facts' (not things)<sup>279</sup> and 'language', understood as the totality of propositions,<sup>280</sup> where a linguistic proposition is an image of physical reality.<sup>281</sup> Anything that lies outside the world, such as its meaning,<sup>282</sup> ethics and aesthetics,<sup>283</sup> absolute good and absolute value,<sup>284</sup> also lies outside of language. Any

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279 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 1.1.

280 *Ibid.*, 4.001.

281 *Ibid.*, 4.01.

282 *Ibid.*, 6.41.

283 *Ibid.*, 6.421.

284 Ludwig Wittgenstein, 'A Lecture on Ethics,' *The Philosophical Review* 74, no.1 (1965), 12.

attempt to state the meaning of what exists, or ethical and religious truths, adds nothing to our knowledge. They are obviously nonsensical:

The tendency of all men who ever tried to write or talk Ethics or Religion was to run against the boundaries of language. This running against the walls of our cage is perfectly, absolutely hopeless. Ethics so far as it springs from the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolute valuable, can be no science. What it says does not add to our knowledge, in any sense. But it is a document of a tendency in the human mind which I personally cannot help respecting deeply...<sup>285</sup>

The experiences of running up against the walls of our cage, for all those who have experienced it, has intrinsic absolute value. They cannot be conceived as references to factual language, precisely because their value lies outside the world of facts.<sup>286</sup>

4.1.1 There is an epistemological problem with Wittgenstein's position regarding the 'ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolute valuable': he rejects their reification as an essential reality open to epistemic access via the scientific mode of thought. Our desire to *say* something about all this is perfectly understandable, but only if we understand that what we say constitutes a subjective psychological fact that adds nothing to our knowledge. Subjective psychological experiences are one thing, knowledge of reality is another. The mode of knowing reality—the scientific mode of thought—applies to the natural sciences but is utterly ineffective when applied to metaphysics. It cannot secure even a single grain of knowledge. As Wittgenstein characteristically wrote:

- a. Philosophers constantly see the method of science before their eyes, and are irresistibly tempted to ask and answer questions in the way science does. This tendency is the real source of metaphysics, and leads the philosopher into complete darkness.<sup>287</sup>

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285 Ibid., 11–12.

286 Ibid., 3–12.

287 Wittgenstein, 'The Blue Book', 18.

- b. Both the atheist who derides religion because he finds no proof for its doctrines and the believer who tries to prove the existence of God have fallen victim to idolatrising natural science's mode of thought. Religious beliefs are analogous to natural scientific theories and we cannot accept or reject them using the same standard of proof.<sup>288</sup>

4.1.2 It is impossible to disagree with Wittgenstein's arguments. The crucial question, though, is whether the only value in something that cannot be known using the apodictic methods of the natural sciences is subjective and psychological. Indeed, knowledge of *personal otherness*—the unique, distinct and unrepeatable character of each *person's* existence and activity—as well as knowledge and evaluation of *beauty*, cannot be reified into a linguistic formula or verified with substantiated evidence. Does this force us to classify such epistemic experiences as subjective feelings and rule out any possibility that they can be shared and verified, which is to say distinguished from illusion and fantasy?

4.2 It seems to be very difficult for people in the European cultural tradition (even for an innovative genius like Wittgenstein) to avoid becoming trapped in the polarity of *res cogitans*—*res extensa*, which is their dominant mindset (the result of historical habits formed over centuries). Wittgenstein rejects and opposes the reification of the epistemic method into a 'scientific theory of truth'—the deterministic-mechanistic understanding of meaning. He hastens, however, to replace scientific theory with something else from the objective realm: the *grammar* of language. (Grammar has to do with the possibility of knowledge and not the verification of truth. It tells us what does and does not make sense, what we can and cannot say with language—to that extent the grammar of language mirrors reality).

4.3 Even Wittgenstein did not suspect that the major and principle epistemic fact is the experiential immediacy of *relationships*, and the minor and secondary fact is the operation of thought and language. He

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<sup>288</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970), 58.

was unaware that the knowledge produced by relational experience is signified, attested and shared by language, but never exhausted by the way it is articulated in language—hence the linguistic articulation of knowledge does not equate to the knowledge itself.

4.3.1 If we ignore the primacy of relationships, then language (the grammar of language) becomes the cage upon whose walls all our metaphysical inquiries collide. Wittgenstein is not sympathetic to the naivety of logical positivism, which regards all metaphysical inquiry as ‘philosophical nonsense’. His concern is the distinction between *talking* and *showing*: ‘there are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical’.<sup>289</sup> For Wittgenstein, non-sense entails trying to articulate what cannot be articulated, that which in any event will be contained, though not expressed, in an utterance (saying in words truths that are emotional, moral and religious).

4.3.1.1 However, if ‘that which makes itself manifest’ can become accessible to the individual without the aid of language (without being articulated in language), then we are talking about a subjective psychological experience that is *not shared*, and thus not capable of distinguishing reality from illusion. Well before Wittgenstein, Basil of Caesarea used the term ‘intellectual idolatry’ to describe the substitution of epistemic relational experiences for derivatives produced by the operations of the individual intellect, which are then legitimised by being incorporated into the obvious semantic connections found in language.<sup>290</sup> The sense, for example, that I can give to the word ‘God’ will necessarily correspond semantically to the rational coordinates of my own created reality. Hence it will be an intellectual creation of mine, and mine alone. It cannot signify *God’s otherness with respect to all that exists*. Therefore, whatever meaning we give to the word God will deny what God *is*.

4.3.1.2 For Basil of Caesarea, however (and for the Greek mindset), the

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<sup>289</sup> Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 6.522.

<sup>290</sup> Basil the Great, *On the Prophet Isaiah*, PG 30:276c: ‘...they turn themselves into idols through intellectual idolatry’.

word ‘God’ can refer to the second term in a personal (the subject’s) relationship and can function as a linguistic sign in conjunction with the experiential epistemic immediacy of relationship. Then the verification of a language’s referential function is transferred to its communal corroboration—to the possibility that the truth of a personal relationship with the uncreated can be corroborated by all who have experienced it.

4.3.1.3 The word ‘God’, therefore, does not function as a meaning (something possessed and controlled by the individual *cogito* as a *res extensa*), but as a *symbol*: ‘It puts together’<sup>291</sup> or coordinates the partial personal experiences of a particular relationship with the transcendent, and refers to the ineffable *logos* of the unique and distinct lived experience of that same relationship.

4.4 Wittgenstein rejected the ‘scientific mode of thought’ as a means of approaching religious faith. He rejected metaphysics as *sacra scientia*—an autonomous reality of truth accessible only to the intellect, like mathematics. But he still retained the Western European insistence on the certitude that thought and language represent the only possible means of verifying and sharing knowledge, given the *grammar* of language is the only mirror onto reality. Hence, he was forced to reject the possibility of metaphysical knowledge. Although, according to Russell, Wittgenstein ‘was at the height of his mystic ardour’,<sup>292</sup> he accepted that religious faith was the exclusive preserve of emotions and one’s way of life. He had no interest in whether Christianity was *true* or not, but only whether it offered some help in the struggle against an unbearable and meaningless existence.<sup>293</sup> As a matter of conscience, and only after great examination, Wittgenstein opted for a psychological version of faith—the modern insistence on replacing ontology with psychology.

4.4.1 It is clear from the most ingenious exemplars of modern European philosophy (Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Wittgenstein) that the ontological

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291 *Syn-vallei*: Yannaras is drawing attention to the etymology of the Greek word for ‘symbol’ (*symvolo*).

292 Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1990), 210.

293 *Ibid.*, 122.

void, or dead end, of modernist metaphysical inquiries has a clear epistemological foundation: the West lacks historical–experiential formative habits or apperceptions of the *symbolic* function of language, of accessing knowledge through *relational* experience (participating in what is to be known) or through the *communal verification* of epistemic relationships (‘when all people are of the same view and everyone individually attests to it’<sup>294</sup>). The West lacks a tradition of the *apophatic* use of language, i.e., the refusal to restrict epistemic experience to linguistic articulation (to have reliable epistemic experiences instead of fantasy or illusion, even for ‘what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived’<sup>295</sup> in order to have a vision of ‘words that are ineffable, that no mortal is permitted to repeat’).<sup>296</sup>

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294 See Democritus in Hermann Diels, ed., ‘Fragments from Theophrastus: On Sense Perception’ in *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, vol. 2, 6th ed. rev. by Walther Kranz (Berlin: Weidmann 1952), 119.

295 1 Cor. 2:9.

296 2 Cor. 12:4. NRSV adapted.

## Chapter 21

### THE LEGAL JURISDICTION OF METAPHYSICS

1 Why is hope in the concept of life after death so closely connected to the deliverance of justice, particularly in Christianity?

1.1 Belief in some form of human immortality exists (faintly, inconsistently or more lucidly) in all religious traditions—its roots disappear into the depths of prehistory. Yet, there are few instances (Christianity being the main one) where this belief entails the certainty that after death, and outside of the world, humans are rewarded or punished for the life they live on earth.

1.1.1 One could argue that the phenomenon of religion clearly develops in tandem with the development of scientific thought and philosophy, and that there is a parallel between progress in human understanding of nature, and in the attempt to understand metaphysics. Moreover, in both cases there is a clear evolution from simplistic and naïve beliefs to more structured, complex and profound explanations.

2 Indeed, in Christianity the certainty that earthly evil is punished and earthly good rewarded can be traced back to its origins. The following sayings in the New Testament provide indicative evidence of this:

- ‘...It is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that judgment’,<sup>297</sup>
- ‘...The hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the

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<sup>297</sup> Heb. 9:27. NRSV adapted.

resurrection of condemnation'<sup>298</sup>... 'into eternal punishment'<sup>299</sup>... and 'torment'<sup>300</sup>... 'there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth';<sup>301</sup>

- '...To eternal punishment' '...being in torment...' '...there men will weep and gnash their teeth';<sup>302</sup>
- 'For if we wilfully persist in sin after having received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries';<sup>303</sup>
- 'But by your hand and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. For he will repay according to each one's deeds'.<sup>304</sup>

2.1 These verses alone would have sufficed to kindle a climate of *metaphysical legalism* within the heart of Christianity. Moreover, it is historically well known that the spark that kindled this climate was utilised liberally, especially after Christianity's encounter with the culture and mindset of Roman law. In the writings of figures such as Tertullian, Ambrose of Milan and Augustine, legal moralism solidified as the self-evident goal of Christian preaching. The social and political institutions that historically followed, primarily in Western Europe during the Middle Ages, rank among the most oppressive human expressions of religious legalism.

2.2 There is an evident tension in the earliest records of the ecclesial experience that is difficult to interpret: the judicial mindset coexisted alongside the categorical condemnation of religious legalism: the 'curse' of the law.<sup>305</sup> Condemnation of the idea that individuals are legally justified, i.e., the morally virtuous self-sufficiency that upholding the

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298 John 5:28–29.

299 Mat. 25:46.

300 Luke 16:23.

301 Mat. 24:51.

302 Matt. 25:46; Luke 16:23; and Matt. 24:51.

303 Heb. 10:26–27.

304 Rom. 2:5–6.

305 Gal. 3:13.

law affords individuals, is at the very centre of the gospel (Christianity's foundation and fundamental identity), and is regarded as synonymous with *death*. A prerequisite of a life free from temporality and mortality is the relinquishment of all individual expectation of legal reward, i.e., relinquishing trust in one's own ability<sup>306</sup>: 'for we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law'<sup>307</sup>, and then giving oneself to Christ's love, and to a *relationship* with him.

2.2.1 It might be easier to understand a society's greater or lesser adherence to legalism as a function of its level of cultural development. It is abundantly clear that what predominates in culturally primitive societies, or those in cultural decline, is a concern to define the boundaries of 'good' and 'evil', justice and injustice, using the principles of law and utility. Ontological problems then become inaccessible to most people—there is no interest in critically examining (experientially verifying) the existential possibility of human immortality, or whether life after death is real or illusory. What prevails is the demand that somewhere and somehow earthly evil is punished and earthly good rewarded.

2.2.2 In the Greek or Hellenistic world of early Christianity, ecclesial experience was expressed using perhaps the most profoundly innovative and philosophically consistent metaphysical ontology known to history. At the same time, there were also exponents of judicial priority, principally those who wrote up canons and codes for evaluating individual virtues or sins. Still, the overarching priority, which was expressed in ecclesial worship and art, the 'provisions' stipulated by ecumenical councils and the institutional organisation of the Church, was to demonstrate and share the experience of this new *mode of existence*, the mode of freedom from time and death.

2.2.3 In contrast, a superficial Christianity, expressing itself primarily in terms of religious legalism, emerged in the culturally primitive societies of Western Europe, following the dissolution of the Western Roman empire (476 AD) at the hands of the barbarian tribes that invaded and

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306 Luke 18:9.

307 Rom. 3:28.

settled its territory. This narrow legalism was established principally in the form of Augustine's judicial moralism, which led ultimately to the secession of Western Christianity from the body of early Christian ecclesial unity and tradition in 1054 AD.

2.3 From that time until today, for whole centuries, the Christian 'West' lived, as it continues to live, under the legalistically defined terror of sin and anxiety over the threat of eternal punishment. It developed a complex body of casuistic law with countless variants: the Roman Church's Codex Juris Canonici, Lutheran Pietism, Calvinist ethics, Methodist, Baptist and Quaker puritanism and the idolised moralism of Anabaptists, Old Apostolics, the Salvation Army, Zwinglians and Congregationalists.

2.3.1 Each one of these groups, along with many others, represents the codification of legalistically defined guilt. They also represent generations of people, numbering in the thousands and millions, who lived their one and only life on this earth in the hell of repressed desire, masochistic deprivation and in relentless anxiety and panic about retribution after death.

3 One could conclude that the general universal human belief in *life after death* is a consequence of the psychological repression of the fear of death, which is a nature-centred experience, a typical 'projection' of an instinctive desire for individual immortality. However, the generalisation and aphoristic absolutisation of this psychological interpretation does not expand our epistemic horizon. On the contrary, it increases the number of unanswered ontological questions. It would seem more epistemologically productive to separate concern over the existential possibility of immortality from the demand that justice be delivered following death. The psychological interpretation of this demand is not restricted to the 'logos-possessing field' of metaphysical ontology.

3.1 The aphoristic absolutisation of this psychological interpretation treats faith in life after death as derivative of the demand for the deliverance of justice. It locates and exhausts the genealogy of metaphysical ontology in the following schema:

- Fear of death generates in humans a sense (as an experiential identification) of evil;
- This sense of evil raises the question of its *cause*;
- The question of the cause of evil points to some primordial *guilt*, such as the judicial interpretation of ‘original sin’, and to individual perpetuation of that guilt, which unavoidably brings about individual death;
- Guilt gives birth to the need for *redemption* and *atonement*;
- The need for atonement demands an objective evaluation of guilt, along with the demarcation and containment of evil in the form of the *law*;
- The demands of the law lead to the establishment of *moral* prescriptions;
- Moral duties require a metaphysical basis for their justification, i.e., certitude regarding *recompense* (reward or punishment) for moral behaviour; and
- The need for certitude locates recompense *outside* the world and *beyond death*.

3.1.1 This genealogical schema exemplifies (in oversimplified, albeit clear, form) merely one possible evolutionary explanation for metaphysical ontology—the possibility that the psychological experience of the fear of death generated the need for belief in life after death. However, the issue of life after death could just as well have different origins, of a non-psychological variety. It might have emerged as a function of rationally referring to the meaning or purpose of human existence and history. It could have emerged as a function of experiencing the difference between human *personhood* and human *nature*, i.e. experiencing the existential *otherness* of personhood as freedom from natural necessity. It could also have emerged as a function of the experiential verification of ‘the birth of the subject in the field of the Other’, and the list goes on.

3.1.2 The most imperceptible symptom is the way that the priority of

psychology (the need to mitigate fear of death) is cloaked in *theoretical metaphysical systems* that are constructed with impeccable logic, where metaphysics functions autonomously from experience in the same way that mathematics does.

3.1.3 This process of psychological cloaking is particularly evident when a *metaphysical ideology* is treated as a ‘faith’. When does *ideology* enter the picture? When metaphysics functions on the basis of a priori intellectual certainties, i.e., individual beliefs. When this occurs, ideology is expressed, as a rule, in linguistic and intellectual categories that depict the sensible world without any regard for relationality. An ideology uses the logic and images of nature to refer to what is beyond nature. It employs the categories of time and space to refer to what is timeless and dimensionless. Ideologies also commonly push questions and difficulties relating to earthly justice into the entirely inaccessible field of metaphysics, e.g., questions of who will be vindicated, who will be punished, and with what penalties.

4 The tension is striking, and yet it has dominated history. We do not know what existence after death might signify, or what kind of language (which ontological categories) we might use to identify it. We do not know how to conceive of a *hypostasis* with no *nature* (natural acts that the *hypostasis* could instantiate) and no *kind*, and which is also outside the coordinates of space and time. And yet with our logic, which does not have at its disposal the apperceptions with which to comprehend the possibility of life after death, we still try to render justice after death, and we still run institutions with the authority to forgive or condemn before death catches up to us.

4.1 Our experiential logic, when applied consistently, demonstrates the infeasibility of delivering justice even during life on earth. How much personal freedom, and hence attribution of guilt, is permitted by the countless limitations of our natural will? To what extent do hereditary traits, innate passions, unconscious urges and the factors determinative of the state of one’s psychological wellbeing—the family, immediate social environment, level of cultural development, health or sickness,

prosperity or poverty—limit, inhibit, distort or negate personal will and freedom?

4.1.1 Moreover, if delivering justice is all but infeasible during life on earth, how can we justify the predetermined codes that vindicate or punish people after death? Even if we could determine with the utmost precision the level of individual guilt within the complex psychological, sociological or circumstantial conditions of life on earth, only a myopic and inhuman conception of justice could base penalties and rewards that are endless and irrevocable on these conditions.

4.1.2 With the logic at our disposal, it seems outrageously unjust to think that the ‘incomprehensible’ existential possibilities that God’s love has in store for us after death are to be judged during a life on earth, a life subject to the necessities of createdness. How can we accept in all reason that something existentially limited and thoroughly deficient could decide and determine something complete and perfect?

4.2 Historically, attempts to answer to such questions using acrobatic judicial logic have produced childish explanations that mock and belittle our very pursuit of metaphysics, even if such answers have served a useful purpose as psychological hallucinogens.

4.3 We don’t have a compelling explanation for the absurdity of evil that reigns over human history and life on earth. Our epistemic abilities are incapable of identifying any cause or purpose of evil, whether it be the criminality that lurks in the very structure of human life and the multifarious ways in which humans sadistically torture each other, or whether it be flagrant injustice and callous exploitation, or whether it be the despair of the starving, the wailing of defenceless victims, terror in the eyes of those who suffer violence, the triumph of the schemer and slanderer, or incurable disability, horribly painful diseases and the anguish caused by premature death. These evils, in all their endless and ghastly variety, are inexplicable and enigmatic. Judicial explanations that try to attribute these evils to generic collective guilt and ancestral sin collapse under the weight of their deplorable naivety and inadequacy.

5 Our ignorance regarding the cause of evil and our longing to see justice triumph encourages us to vest our hope in survival after death, in the possibility of an existential reckoning after death. Our hope is not to see the guilty punished—they too are victims of the limitations and restrictions of our created nature. Rather, our hope is to see restitution for the innocent who have suffered.

5.1 This demand (longing and hope) may or may not be a function of judicial logic. Judicial logic betrays our resistance or refusal to accept the inadequacy of the epistemic capacities of our nature—a refusal to transfer the potentiality of knowledge to trust in *relationships*, to *faith*: I believe and trust God in all matters that are left inexplicable and enigmatic because of the deficiency of my nature. If my relationship with God is an experience that confirms his love, I deposit my entire hope for the deliverance of justice in that love. I gain nothing by knowing the means by which justice is delivered. My one and only concern is the reality of my relationship with God and my redemption from psychological illusions.

6 Redemption from psychological illusions (from ‘error’ as they are characterised in the language of ecclesial experience) is neither straightforward nor the product of sheer will or the rational decisions of human beings. Real personal *relationships* are attained through a long and arduous practice in self-abnegation and self-offering. Ecclesial experience unambiguously attests to this. It is not assured by sentimental euphoria. On the contrary, it is granted when despair is complete—the individual’s sense of hopelessness regarding his or her ability to realise or achieve a *relationship* with the uncreated.

## Chapter 22

### SEXUALITY AND ITS ESCHATOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

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1 Release from psychological illusion means being free from the urge of the egotistical self-sufficiency<sup>308</sup> that is characteristic of human nature (existential and epistemic self-sufficiency). But it also means being free from ‘the other side’ (the inverse version) of psychological illusion—freedom from the sinister guilt produced in humans by the ‘sacrilegious’ demands of nature for existential and epistemic self-sufficiency, the need to be equal with God.

2 *Sexuality* seems to be the origin of the primeval guilt of demanding equality with God, given it perpetuates the existential autonomy of nature. It is no accident that the concept of sin, even original sin, is connected in the consciousness of many religions (particularly Christianity) to human reproductive activity. Correspondingly, the demand that sin be punished in the afterlife also centres primarily on the punishment of ‘unlawful’ sexual activity.

3 However, one could rightly point out that a central pillar of ecclesial experience (the Church’s good news of the gospel) is its emphasis on the original meaning of the Greek word for ‘sin’. Before acquiring the sense of violating a law, breaking rules or a culpable and punishable act, the word ‘sin’ in Greek (*hamartia*) meant ‘missing the mark’, i.e., failing to reach a target or goal, or ‘being unsuccessful’.<sup>309</sup> Thus in the Christian

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308 ‘Ichtriebe’—‘pulsion du moi’—‘ego instincts’. See Laplanche and Pontalis, *Vocabulaire de la Psychanalyse*, 380–383.

309 See Dimitrakos, *Grand Lexicon of the Greek Language*, Vol.1, s.v. ‘ἀτευξία’: ‘to fail to meet the objective, to miss the target. In Homer it often generally means failure in archery’; Babiniotis, *Dictionary of Modern Greek*, s.v. ‘ἀτευξία’: ‘to miss the target, to fail’ (e.g. missing the target in archery); For the etymology of the word see Chantraine,

perspective, the principal, or perhaps sole human sin is *death*, i.e., missing the target of a life that is indestructible and unrestricted.

3.1 And again, because in the Christian perspective death is not the necrosis and disappearance of biological individuality, but rather the *denial* or *absence* of a *relationship* with God (the human being's existential self-sufficiency and autonomy, which is still bound by the finitude of createdness), sin represents the human being's *failure* to realise existence-as-relationship. Sin and death are missing the target, and the target in this instance is the human being drawing its existence from *relationship* instead of *nature*, existing because the human being loves and to the extent to which it loves. By extension, any refusal to love and any individual expression of selfishness or self-love is sin, in the sense of a failure to transcend and offer one's self, and as capitulation to death.

3.2 If this interpretive lens constitutes a fundamental principle of the Christian good news (gospel), then it makes no sense to identify, from a Christian perspective, sexuality *per se* with sin. Sexuality, as with every other natural human faculty or activity, functions as sin and death when, and if, it is subject to and serves the selfishness, egocentrism or self-love of individuals. In contrast, when sexuality constitutes real self-transcendence and self-offering, i.e., actualized love, it represents an achievement of life and becomes a practice that frees one from death.

3.3 According to the standards and criteria of ecclesial experience, there is nothing in God's creation that is 'evil' in and of itself, that is primordially malign, immoral or wicked. This is why there is no 'divine law' that could distinguish what is 'evil' from what is 'good', thus setting rules for humans, i.e., what is *permitted* and what is *prohibited*, what they

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*Dictionnaire Étymologique de la Langue Grecque*, 71; For the Christian meaning of the word see Maximos the Confessor, *Commentary on 'on the Divine Names'*, PG 4:305bc: 'Sin, which is to say, missing the target and falling short of what is befitting, is also called the aimless privation of this, in contrast, metaphorically, to archers firing on the target. In the same way that those who succeed in hitting the target, which is to say the point before the archers at which they are aiming (which is indeed called a target), those who hit outside the target miss ['sin'—*amartanousin*] what is befitting. [We sin] whenever miss the good and motion according to nature, i.e. order, and we bring ourselves the irrational that is contrary to nature and in every respect inessential non-existence'.

ought and ought not to do, so that people can find individual vindication and win rewards and accolades, that is to say props for individual self-sufficiency that lead one into the trap of death. There is only one choice confronting people: the choice between life or death, love or selfishness.

4 Why then, as is so often the case, and especially in Christianity, do we find this emphatic (and almost one-dimensional) identification of the sex drive and its operation with sin? There are obviously both real and illusory reasons for this identification.

4.1 The real reasons are that it is no accident that we signify sexuality as an *urge*, a peremptory and intense natural need that corresponds to the necessary drive of self-preservation, namely eating and drinking. It is natural in the sense that all instinctive needs are common, generic and characterise all humanity. It does, of course, operate at the level of individuals, as a necessity governing individual existence. However, because it constitutes a *natural* necessity, it comes into conflict, *in initio*, with *logos*-possessing referentiality and *personal* freedom, i.e., the existential *otherness* of *personhood* with respect to natural conditions.

4.1.1 Instinctive needs bind humanity to the existential independence and autonomy of natural individuality. They function as a constraint on personal freedom from nature, and hence as an obstacle to self-transcendence, self-offering and loving relationships. They restrict existential potential to the limits of nature, to the existential finitude of natural individuality, i.e., to death and *sin* (missing the target of life).

4.1.1.1 This does not mean that natural urges irrevocably bind human existence to the necessity of death—accepting such an idea would negate the field of *logos* established by a person's experience of existential otherness in relation to nature, an experience that points to the personal *hypostasis* of the human being. The personal *hypostasis* is experientially confirmed as being not only a *logos*-possessing and willing opposition to natural urges, but primarily as the transformation of an urge's natural activity into an ecstatic<sup>310</sup> event of self-transcending relationship—we

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310 *Ek-statiki*: Yannaras hyphenates the constituent parts of the Greek word *ekstatiki*

transform the need for nourishment into a relationship of shared life, and we transform sexual need into loving self-transcendence, self-offering and the fulfilling unity of loving existential interpenetration.

Without the power of desire there is no longing, and so no love, which is the issue of longing; for the property of desire is to love something. And without the incensive power, intensifying the desire for union with what is loved, there can be no peace, for peace is truly the complete and undisturbed possession of what is desired.<sup>311</sup>

4.2 Ecclesial experience unequivocally affirms that desire, longing and love<sup>312</sup> are natural faculties, capabilities and activities which can serve the self-transcendence of nature, i.e. the existential freedom of *love*.<sup>313</sup> The power of sexual desire, along with its affective (instinctive) character, does not have, as far as ecclesial experience is concerned, the character of sin, guilt, rebellion or the demand to be equal with God. Sin is not identified with nature, nor are its activities. Sin makes nature and its activities *existentially autonomous*, since that autonomy means death.

4.2.1 This is why affirming sexuality and removing its association with guilt is accompanied in ecclesial practice by *ascetic* resistance to the natural *necessity* of desire, longing and erotic love—resistance to making sexuality autonomous with respect to the freedom of love. It is experience, once again, that confirms that sexual need, like the need for nourishment, binds existence to the necessities of nature, even when it serves the ecstatic event of self-transcending relationship. This does not mean that the ecclesial *mode* of existence—the mode of freedom from the existential limitations of createdness—implies the rejection of either food or sexuality. What it does mean, however, is that the mode of freedom is an unceasing lifelong *ascetic* practice of freedom—a real way of confirming one's *hypostatic disposition* towards freedom. That is why

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(ecstatic) to highlight the etymological sense of 'standing outside of'.

311 Maximos the Confessor, 'Various Texts on Theology, the Divine Economy, and Virtue and Vice', 203 (Second Century 74) (PG 90:1248cd).

312 *To eran*: literally 'to love', in the sense of *eros*, which is etymologically connected by common root with *eran*.

313 *Agape*.

sexual abstinence, along with fasting,<sup>314</sup> with which it is always combined, form two fundamental coordinates of ecclesial asceticism.

4.2.2 Asceticism moulds the *hypostatic quality* of one's *disposition* towards the freedom of love. The reciprocity of God's grace, as a vital response to human openness, constitutes an existential event—the *hypostatic* realisation of freedom and victory over death.

4.3 As long as existence is tied (without the resistance of personhood) to the necessities of nature, it cannot function by the terms of freedom from the finitude of createdness (the terms of *grace*).

4.3.1 However, it is not possible to signify either the fact of being bound by the needs of nature, or the gift<sup>315</sup> of freedom from nature, using legal concepts such as obeying or disobeying rules. Whether a person is bound by or free from nature is determined by the adventure of existence, an adventure which only indirectly, symbolically, and, above all, pedagogically can be represented using legal categories.

4.4 If this ontological interpretation of ecclesial semiotics is correct, then it would indeed be nonsensical for us to predestine the post-death *quality* of one's *disposition* (the way in which a human being's *hypostasis* is *disposed* towards communion with God) on the basis of the way in which it has been moulded by sexuality. It would be nonsensical to consider participation in the *mode* of the uncreated to be a function of the codification and enumeration of human orgasms and ejaculations on earth.

5 That brings us to the illusory reasons for which sin has been identified principally (or even exclusively) with the sex drive. It is probably redundant to enumerate them, given clinical psychology has identified them in careful detail—the relevant literature is vast. Still,

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314 1 Cor. 7:4–5: 'For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to fasting and prayer...' NRSV adapted. Translator's note: the NRSV lacks 'fasting and' [*νηστεία και*] which occurs in the koine edition of the bible used in the Greek Orthodox Church.

315 *Chari*: also 'grace'.

what is of interest to us is to highlight the objections of the ecclesial experience (its ontological criteria) to making sexuality something psychologically shameful.

5.1 These objections are primarily of a practical nature—synodal canons unequivocally condemn ‘those who detest marriage’,<sup>316</sup> ‘the celibate who lord it over those who have been consecrated in marriage’,<sup>317</sup> those ‘censuring marriage and married women’,<sup>318</sup> ‘those refusing to receive Holy Communion from a married presbyter’<sup>319</sup> and those who ‘do not permit contact or association with lawful wives on the pretext of piety’.<sup>320</sup>

5.1.1 Such Church canons do not explicate their instructions with theoretical analysis. Evidently, they presuppose that the Church’s conscience has discerned reasons for prescribing each canon. In the case of the above canons we must assume that the Church’s conscience clearly concluded that belittling, disdain or detesting the sex drive and the sexual function are radically incompatible with the anthropology and ontology established by the Christian good news of the gospel.

5.2 Were these specific synodal canons historically effective? Did they free the Christian mindset from the prejudices that necessitated their articulation in the first place? It is abundantly clear that they did not.

5.2.1 Would their codification have helped to embed the church’s ontological and anthropological criteria? Would it have facilitated deeper understanding and wider implementation of the aforementioned canons? Again, no. For these criteria, which are required in order to understand the relevant canons, are clarified, either directly or indirectly, in the texts of Christian literature. Indeed, the canons by definition represent a form of codification of the Church’s criteria, a kind of moral injunction. They were created in order to function as a law, term or boundary of

316 Canons of the Synod of Gangra: canon 51. See also Vlasios Feidas, *Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία Α’* [*Ecclesiastical History Vol. 1*] (Athens: privately published, 1994), 314ff and 940ff.

317 Canons of the Synod of Gangra: canon 19.

318 Ibid., canons 1 and 9.

319 Ibid., canon 4.

320 Canons of the Council in Trullo: canon 13.

the ecclesial event—to place outside the bounds (to ‘excommunicate’<sup>321</sup>) those who, in this case, belittle, disdain or detest the sexual urge and its function. Yet, neither the canons nor their theoretical elucidation managed, in the course of centuries, to eliminate from Christian consciousness an understanding of sexuality as intrinsically sinful.

5.3 The way that humans live out their sexuality, like their experience of receiving nourishment, is probably little influenced by the theoretical prescriptions and injunctions of moral codes. The dominant social climate or prevailing mindset, according to time and place, are of much more decisive impact. Again, one’s experience of sexuality is predominantly determined by factors of personal proclivity and maturity—ultimately by a person’s ability (a function of their ascetic efforts) to separate *real* events from what are simply *psychological* events. Accordingly, the realism of people’s metaphysical experiences or hopes is determined to a large extent in the field of sexuality—whether one frees metaphysics from, or subordinates it to, existential insecurities and legal guilt, unsatisfied desires and narcissistic overcompensations, repressed and ominous complexes, and primordial subterranean prejudices.

5.3.1 Augustine provides a historical case in point. It is difficult to dissociate the *judicial* prescriptions of his teaching about the afterlife from his Manichaean fear of, and contempt, and disgust for sexuality. His image of God as a ‘sadistic father’ who delights in the torture of sinners in hell has been credibly interpreted as a reflection of his fear of an ‘emasculating father’, who demonises matter and the body in order to impose a loveless moralism that reinforces the ego. The theoretical precedent of ecclesial experience did not help Augustine in the slightest to understand that loving self-transcendence and self-offering are the heart of the Christian good news of the gospel.

6 The ability of the human being to separate what is real from what is psychological, to separate self-transcendence from self-sufficiency, and love from selfishness—i.e., life from death—is emphatically judged in the

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<sup>321</sup> Translator’s note: Yannaras is here highlighting the etymological root of the word ‘excommunicate’ *af-ORIZOUN*, which literally means ‘place outside the bounds’.

domain of sexuality. That is why the sexual domain reflects a person's metaphysical experience or hope. The real or illusory character of *relationships* is similarly judged on these two levels. Moreover, precisely because it relates to (at both levels) the existential venture of *relationship*, whereby the ontological dimension of the terms that constitute it can only be known through the experience of the relationship itself, the distinction between what is real and what is merely psychological cannot be codified in either the case of sexuality or metaphysical hope. The struggle to make this distinction is dynamically indeterminate, and as such is a *personal* achievement.

6.1 In the case of both sexuality and metaphysics, *legal* categories are only capable of functioning indicatively and suggestively with respect to distinguishing what is real from what is illusion—and only for the purposes of delimiting with extreme relativity the sense or meaning of the struggle to distinguish. When Wittgenstein's friend, Maurice O'Connor Drury, expressed to him his admiration for Origen's vision (that in the end everything would be restored and that even Satan and the fallen angels would regain their original glory) and his sorrow that this vision had been condemned as heretical, Wittgenstein replied: 'Of course it was rejected. It would make non-sense of everything else. If what we do now is to make no difference in the end, then all the seriousness of life is done away with'.<sup>322</sup>

6.1.1 The ecclesial experience rejected Origen's vision of a universal restoration. However, the Church continued to hope and pray for it. This tension represents the Church's steadfast refusal to codify its life and hope.

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322 Rush Rhees, ed., *Recollections of Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 161.

## Chapter 23

### FREEDOM AND THE THEORY OF EVOLUTION

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1 The linguistic boundaries of metaphysical realism signify *relational* experiences. The linguistic signifiers of metaphysical experience do not define the boundaries of a physical reality (verified through the senses or intellect) that is not subject to the necessities of nature. Nor do they define these boundaries by rationally reducing reality to ‘true’ propositions (verifiably distinct from ‘falsehoods’). They do not yield knowledge. Instead, they point to and demarcate a kind of knowledge that is accessible only to the immediacy of relationships.

1.1 We characterise the ability to form relationships that establish experientially immediate *knowledge* as an ability of *personhood* and, within the limits of created reality, we attribute it exclusively to human beings. It is only in human beings that sense, intellect, judgment, imagination, discernment, foresight, vision, or any other epistemic operation, are able to coalesce in *ecstatic relational* events. Only human beings obtain knowledge by ‘standing outside themselves’<sup>323</sup> (ecstatically), i.e., actively referring to the *logos* in front of them. Moreover, it is only through this self-transcendent ability that human beings gain epistemic access to themselves, fellow human beings, objects and the world. Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Lacan, each from his own particular perspective, made decisive contributions to clarifying the connection between *knowledge* and *mode of existence*.

1.2 Attributing to human beings alone the capability for *personal* (ecstatic) existence and knowledge presupposes a defining difference<sup>324</sup>

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323 *Exo-eaftou-istamenos*: literal translation. Yannaras is here alluding to the root of the Greek word for *ecstasy* (*ekstasi*).

324 *Eidopoios diafora*: literally ‘kind-making difference’.

between humans and all other living creatures. All religions and philosophies refer to metaphysics (to the human being's relationship to the *meaning* and the *first cause* of its existence and the whole of reality) in such a way that directly or indirectly presupposes an 'Adam', i.e., a true<sup>325</sup> human, a human presence that is decisively established in the world—the complete existential characteristics and properties that define human beings.

2 The theory of evolution poses a critical challenge to this functional presupposition of metaphysics. Data from geology, palaeontology and genetics force us to regard the *logos*-possessing human being ('Adam') as the product of a centuries long biological evolution within one particular branch of the animal kingdom. Metaphysical reflection—the ecstatic referentiality of *logos*—is not a constituent advantage of human existence, but the product of evolutionary mutations in its biological species.

2.1 Studying and assessing paleontological remains offers a (certainly tentative, but not arbitrary) basis upon which to sketch the evolutionary process that led to the appearance of *logos*-possessing human beings:

- The anthropoid biological species appears to have made its first appearance 35 million years ago: primates with a tendency towards (not yet elements of) anatomical differentiation from the main body of primates;
- Between 12 and 18 million years ago a type of evolution from older forms of anthropoids can be seen: a type of arboreal primate with a relatively large body and good climbing skills, which occasionally walked upright;
- Between 1 and 5 million years ago an advanced species of anthropoid appeared: the hominidae or australopiths. These were able to walk upright and had somewhat larger brains;
- From two-million-year-old fossils we can identify a species of hominid called homo habilis. This species possessed craniums with a capacity of 700 cm<sup>3</sup> and shows differences in teeth size and in

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325 *O pliris anthropos*: literally 'the complete human'.

the morphology of the face bone, pelvis and thigh bone.<sup>326</sup> Some researchers think the interior of the cranium in certain cases shows evidence of a frontal lobe (features previously not seen in australopiths) that could signify a capacity for speech;

- Some palaeontologists have identified two-million-year-old finds as stone tools used for cutting meat, wood and plants;
- Skeletal fossils dating back 1,600,000 years point to the emergence of a new, advanced species of primate, the homo erectus, which had a cranial capacity of between 800 and 1000 cm<sup>3</sup>;
- This was followed by the archaic species of homo sapiens, 400 to 700 thousand years ago, which includes the so-called Neanderthal human. This species consisted of an anatomically homogenous group of short stature with robust limbs and a cranial capacity reaching up to 1600 cm<sup>3</sup>. They made many types of tools and used fire to prepare their food;
- The human species as we know it today (homo sapiens sapiens) first appeared approximately 40,000 years ago. This species differs from archaic homo sapiens in every skeletal department. Thirty thousand years ago we find the first traces of human art in the form of cave paintings. Ten thousand years ago humans ceased to be merely hunter-gatherers and began to produce their own food, marking the dawn of agriculture.<sup>327</sup>

2.1.1 The scientific integrity of this understanding of the human being, as a *logos*-possessing subject that is the product of biological evolution, is a matter for specialist researchers rather than philosophers.

2.1.1.1 In this regard, it is worth bearing in mind Wittgenstein's judgment that

Darwin's theory has no more to do with philosophy than any

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326 The cranium of the gorilla has a capacity averaging 498 cm<sup>3</sup>. The capacity of the human cranium ranges from 1500 to 2000 cm<sup>3</sup>.

327 See J. G. Else and P.C. Lee, eds., *Primate Evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); David Pilbeam, *Human Origins and Evolution* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1986); and Roger Lewin, *Human Evolution* (New York: Freeman, 1984).

other hypothesis in natural science. Philosophy sets limits to the much-disputed sphere of natural science.<sup>328</sup>

2.1.1.2 The ‘area of dispute’ between the theory of evolution and rival explanations is demarcated by questions of the continuity or discontinuity in the evolution of

- living matter from non-living matter; and
- peculiarly human ‘spiritual’ capabilities from brain function.<sup>329</sup>

2.2 In any event, the evolutionary explanation of the human *logos*-possessing subject raises questions that are critical to the integrity of metaphysics—questions that similarly define a ‘disputed sphere’ between the theory of evolution and metaphysics. The following questions are indicative:

- If the human being’s *referentiality* through *logos* (its ecstatic capacity for relationship) is the product of biological evolution, i.e., analogous to walking upright, the ability to make tools, or even speech, must we then regard religious and philosophical references to metaphysics as simply psychological projections, or an imaginary antidote to the fear of death?
- Is the distance (progressively extended by evolution) between cave painting and the music of Mozart, or primitive communication codes and the language of Aristotle’s syllogisms, perhaps similar to that which separates primitive religiosity from theology, such as that of Maximus the Confessor? If we accept that metaphysical inquiry (with the phenomenon of religion as its corollary) evolves, i.e. follows the biological evolution of human beings, are we also forced to accept that this proves that the metaphysical referent of human evolution is non-existent?
- We find clear and widespread reference to the *meaning* and the *first cause* of what exists and is real in everything from the diversity of primitive ‘natural religion’ to the more developed faith in historical

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328 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 4.1122–4.113.

329 For more detailed analysis, see my book *Postmodern Metaphysics*, 111ff.

revelation, as well as the development of a metaphysical ontology from that revelation. If we treat this reference as an epiphenomenon of the particularity of human biology, do we diminish or increase our ignorance and aporias?

- If desire for life-as-relationship (libido) is the prerequisite condition for ‘the birth of the subject in the field of the Other’, and if that desire is understood to be an evolutionary by-product of instinctive urges—a by-product of a very slow and gradual reduction of instinctive urges, such as the urge for self-preservation—why would the evolutionary origin of the potential for *logos*-possessing relationships render the metaphysical ‘referent’ unreliable as a ‘field’ of *logical* reference and relationality?
- Even if we were to establish at some point, with scientific integrity, that the transitional leap from cerebral functions to specifically human ‘spiritual’ capabilities was the product of the evolution of a genetic program (registered in the structure of ‘governing’ molecular networks) of the hominid biological species, why couldn’t that evolutionary result constitute the existential possibility of actualizing human otherness from nature, i.e., the possibility of metaphysical experience?
- What are the boundaries between humans and non-humans, both in reality and potential, in what is certain and what is possible? What kind of science could identify those boundaries? When the natural faculties and abilities by which the *hypostasis* is *actualized* (the ineffable existential ‘kernel’ (Kern) of the *logos*-possessing subject) are undeveloped or impaired, is the defining and definite identity of the human being missing? Is the *hypostasis*’ *otherness* towards, and freedom from, *nature* (which enables an existence by the terms of relationality rather than nature) the prerogative of the human species, or merely that of the especially well-developed and healthy? How human were our prehistorical ancestors who lived in caves? What about instances of severe intellectual impairment, such as victims of mental illness, senility or Alzheimer’s disease? Or what about the untold number of embryos that have been killed

and the countless number of fertilised eggs that have been aborted from their mother's body shortly before acquiring a heartbeat? What kind of science could possibly decipher this merciless natural selection and define what a human being is?

2.2.1 Questions such as these set the boundaries, or attempt to do so, of the 'disputed territory' between the theory of evolution and metaphysics. Each question assumes the preeminent reliability of its own scientific discipline, whether biology, genetics, neurophysiology, or related disciplines. As far as philosophical metaphysics is concerned, questions like these call for critical clarification or commentary.

3 *Metaphysical* experience and its semantic articulation find their basis in the faculties and capabilities of human *nature*—not in supernatural 'magical' capabilities. Whether these faculties and capabilities are products of biological evolution or not makes no difference to the event itself of metaphysical experience and reference. The *natural* potential for *metaphysical* experience and reference could just as well be the product of long term biological evolution, without that implying (logically, at least) that the metaphysical 'referent' is a product or derivative of the advanced natural referentiality of the human being, i.e., an invention of the imagination or psychological projection.

4 Questioning the *meaning* and *first cause* of what exists presupposes a highly developed intellect and language. However, before it is even possible to ask this question, reference to the meaning and first cause of what exists can be expressed through the imagery of a mythological cosmogony, and by rites and practices of primitive worship. If we accept that referring to the cause or meaning of things, events and ultimately the whole world is an indicative epiphenomenon of human biological evolution, then exactly what problem or riddle are we trying to solve? Whether the 'referent' of metaphysics is real or imaginary is not something that can be judged by the mature form of our evolved reference to it. There is no *logical* interdependence between the human capacity for knowledge and the reality of the object known.

5 It is possible to imagine a level of human evolution, or indeed a regression to earlier stages of evolution, that does not provoke questions about the *first cause* and the *meaning* of the world—modernity provides apperceptions of such imaginings. But this imaginary (or historically validated) possibility would only provide the stability of *logos* if it implied some other kind of *logos*-possessing relationship between the human being and the world. The hypothesis of a world without *logos* does not constitute an explanation of the world—denying ontological questions, i.e., treating them as absent of having been eclipsed, confirms nothing.

5.1 It is possible to hypothesise evolutionary stages in the relationship people have with abstract paintings. People with an undeveloped referential capacity may misconstrue a painting of this kind as nothing more than a neutral object, i.e., a wooden frame with a canvass and colours. At a different stage of development they might be able to discern the depiction of feelings or symbolic meaning in the coloured canvass. At yet another stage they might recognise in the painting the creative *logos* of a particular painter's *personal* otherness (e.g., 'This is a Kandinsky').

5.1.1 We can hypothesise the existence of analogous evolutionary stages in the relationship humans have with the reality of the world.

6 The natural capacity humans have to refer to the metaphysical 'referent' possibly passes through levels or phases of evolutionary development. If, at a particular level or phase, the human being discerns in the reality of the world the creative *logos* of the *personal* otherness of the world's Creator, then the evolutionary prerequisites of such a discernment simply elucidate the natural capacity to discern, which does not then constitute epistemic necessity.

7 The natural capacity humans have to refer to the metaphysical 'referent' could very well have levels or phases of evolutionary development—from primitive religiosity to the intellectually most complete metaphysical ontology, or perhaps, to go back even further, from pre-conscious or unconscious phases or levels. Maximus the Confessor, with consistent adherence to the tradition of the ecclesial interpretation of ontology, thought the motion that formed the world's

becoming was the event of the sum total reference of creatures to their creator—the unified *erotic* urge that gave creatures their cohesiveness and which directs them to the cause of their creation: God’s love for his creation. Maximos saw this dynamic urge and *erotic* reference in every evolutionary level of the entire spiritual and material creation, e.g., in the divine *eros* that unified the world of the angels, the intense intelligible *eros* of those filled with divine wisdom, the law of the love of all human beings for each other, the spiritual *eros* or the sensible friendship with irrational animals and the physical *eros* (the accustomed aptitude) of the soulless and impassable.<sup>330</sup>

God is the first cause, uncaused and transcendent, of heavenly *eros*; for if *eros* itself is love, and as it is written that God is love, then God is clearly the *eros*, which is to say love, that unifies everything.

From there, the divine *eros* first passes to the angels. This is why it is often called angelic love, as it is there that its most unifying sense may be found. This is because no rebellion or disagreement may be found among them.

After the realm of the angels is what is called intelligible love, which is found among those who are filled with divine wisdom, the ones who belong to the Church. To them Paul says that they should agree with each other<sup>331</sup> as also the Lord said they should be one, as he and the Father are one.<sup>332</sup>

While this is about those who are truly Christian, the law of love is valid for all people. He called the logos-possessing souls intelligible, because the divine mind spoke to them.

He called the *eros* of those who are not rational ‘psychic’, such as the love that belongs only to the senses. This is because this

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330 The Maximos text in question is a commentary on the following passage from Pseudo-Dionysius’ *On the Divine Names*: ‘When we talk of *eros*, whether this be in God or an angel, in the mind or in the spirit or in nature, we should think of a unifying and co-mingling power which moves the superior to provide for the subordinate, peer to be in communion with peer, and subordinate to return to the superior and the outstanding’. Translation from ‘The Divine Names’, 83 (PG 3:713ab), adapted: *eros* is ‘yearning’ in Luibheid’s translation.

331 1 Cor 1:10.

332 John 17:11.

kind of love binds the birds when they fly as a group, birds such as swans, geese, cranes and crows. The same is true for fish, such as tuna and mullets and those who live like them. This is also true for animals that do not live in herds, as they move towards any kind of gathering that is appropriate to them.

The eros that exists in the things that have no soul or sensation is called natural, since their being or physical cohesion was a result of the word of the creator. According to the movement of life, that is the movement of nature, they too return towards God.<sup>333</sup>

7.1 The perspective of Maximos above demonstrates that the theory of evolution is perfectly capable of contributing to a metaphysics that gives meaning to the existent and real, provided we do not restrict metaphysical evidence to syllogistic conclusions and rather look for evidence in the *mode of existence* and in the experiential approach of that mode.

7.1.1 The difference between humans and all other living creatures may be called metaphysical, provided we do not restrict the difference to the natural (biologically advanced) human abilities of cognition, judgment and imagination, and provided this *mode of existence* is differentiated from the *mode of nature*.

7.2 Continuing with Maximos' perspective, the difference can be located only in the human capacity to existentially affirm or deny the *erotic* (existential) reference of the created to its Creator, which is to say only in *freedom*—in the fact that humans alone are capable of realising an *antithetical* relationship with God. Humans can attain or deny a relational mode of existence. They can oppose the innate impetus and reference of nature's *logos* to its Creator.

7.2.1 There is possibly no method by which to identify a boundary separating humans from non-humans, biological individuals from *logos*-possessing subjects, or nature from *personal hypostases*. This is because reifying such a boundary would remove the indeterminacy of

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333 Maximos the Confessor, *Commentary on 'On the Divine Names'*, PG 4:268cd–269a.

the ecstatic relational event with regard to nature—a *freedom* that is not subject to nature.

7.2.2 We signify the ecstatic (with regard to nature) event as a *relationship* that is actualized by the faculties and possibilities within nature, but realised existentially as freedom from nature. And since freedom from nature is not subject to natural constraints, the limits (sufficiency or insufficiency) of the natural potential of realising an ecstatic (with regard to nature) relational event are also indeterminate. It might be possible to identify limits to the natural capacity of the primitive, the intellectually impaired or someone with a severe mental illness to *express* relational experiences through *logos*. But it is impossible to identify the boundaries of relational *events* themselves.

8 The ecclesial interpretation of ontology sees a priestly role for human beings within cosmic reality by virtue of the potential of *personhood* for existential freedom from nature. The dynamic impetus and the *erotic* reference of creatures to their Creator are existentially given. However, only the human being's freedom can establish a relationship of *love*, which is to say an event of participation in the *mode of genuine existence*, the mode of the Trinitarian Godhead. Following Christ's example, human beings can transform their created existence into a *priestly* task of personally and lovingly offering their created selves to their Creator, thereby bringing into unity the created and the uncreated.

8.1 As long as this priestly function of vital relationship between the created and uncreated remains unfulfilled, humans will remain subject to the conditions and requirements of the created (decay, infirmity and death) —‘the whole creation [will] groan and suffer together’ with humans, until such time that they are revealed to be sons of God and ‘creation itself is set free from its bondage to decay and obtains the freedom of the glory of the children of God’.<sup>334</sup>

8.1.1 This is a majestic and comforting image. Moreover, it offers an explanation for the tragic and enigmatic rule of *evil* in nature and history.

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334 Rom. 8:21–22. NRSV adapted.

This image still leaves large experiential gaps in our understanding (commensurate to human experience), since we experience nature as an overwhelmingly supreme and autonomous power compared to the priestly role of humans: the countless victims of famines, plagues, earthquakes, floods, genetic disabilities and the feeble infants who are killed deterministically in accord with merciless ‘natural selection’ are all human existences excluded a priori from any priestly role and the possibility of transforming nature into relationship.

8.2 Speaking about the cosmic universe, Alastair Rae concludes that ‘a model of the physical world that attributes all reality to changes, while stating that it is impossible to make a consistent description of what it is that is changing, is difficult to accept’.<sup>335</sup> If the logic and language at our disposal cannot produce a coherent picture of nature, then it is impossible to coherently describe *ecstasis* (standing apart) from nature as an existential possibility for humans. We identify this ecstatic potential as something that is actualized through *logos*. We cannot identify it as an existential fact—‘we know in part’. The extent to which knowledge is whole, complete and perfect is not a function of the subject’s epistemic capacity, at least as far as the ecclesial interpretation of ontology is concerned. Rather, it is a function of the subject’s participation in and surrender to the mode through which it is known by God: ‘then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known’.<sup>336</sup>

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<sup>335</sup> Rae, *Quantum Physics*, 110.

<sup>336</sup> 1 Cor. 13:13.

## Chapter 24

### NEUROTIC METAPHYSICS

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1 The linguistic boundaries of metaphysical realism signify real relational experiences. Humans are only able to access the meaning and first cause of theirs and the world's existence through an active relationship (existential reference) with the *logos* of what exists 'before them', that is to say, only by standing outside of themselves and by taking themselves beyond nature to the freedom of relationship.

2 The greatest challenge in the self-transcendent human struggle to access metaphysics is separating the experience of what is *real* from its *psychological* substitutes: distinguishing *reality* from *illusion*.

2.1 Metaphysical illusion is a *heretical* image and version of reality, not just a false or misleading image, and not just an epistemological error. It is a *heresy* (choice or preference) of the partial and fragmentary (of individual psychological experience) at the expense of the complete (of the whole relational event). It is a case of absolutizing what is relative, something that unavoidably leads to relativization of the absolute.

2.1.1 *Heresy*, as the substitution of reality for psychological choice and preference, alters the *meaning* of reality and, as a consequence, one's *relationship* with reality. It pathologizes relationships, in a way that makes life dysfunctional, with psychological, as well as physical, consequences. Heretical experience does not entail ideological deviation from some (similarly ideological) 'orthodoxy'. We could characterise it, and not arbitrarily, as a form of *neurosis*.

2.1.2 By 'neurosis' we mean the effects of psychological and physical disturbances that can be attributed to unconscious psychological conflict, but not to changes in the nervous system or to disease in the body's

organs. Anxiety, phobia, hysteria, hypochondria and bodily dysfunction can reflect underlying experiences that are in conflict, such as desire versus social requirement, guilt versus the super-ego, or narcissistic defence versus the fear of death.

2.1.3 Desire, guilt, narcissism, the super-ego and fear of death are indicative experiential components woven into a human being's relationship with reality. Neurosis manifests when this interweaving binds ('clots') relationships and alienates them by turning them into a distrust of or opposition to life, which then forces the psychosomatic organism to express, via indirect means, its opposition to the threat from the void of non-relational isolation.

2.2 Heresy is a type of neurosis that reflects a distorted relationship with metaphysics. It represents something different or alien to real relationships—binding ('clotting') relationships to hidden defence mechanisms in the face of weakness or fear of the possible or given experiential void, an attempt to control or exploit the metaphysical 'referent'.

2.2.1 The impetus of desire and *erotic* reference are transformed into a demand for possession without the risk of having to offer one's self in response. Failure is transformed into traumatic guilt and guilt into narcissistic and moralising fortification. Fear is then transformed into an absolutized affirmation of either the material and sensible, or the ideational and immaterial. In either case it is a matter of using false psychological replacements to compensate for a lack of relationship.

2.2.2 Anxiety, phobia and insecurity are the real results of false solutions to metaphysical problems, results that habitually transform into ideological (dogmatic) certitude, fanaticism, aggression and moralistic superiority. Relationships imply risk, a preparedness to fail, and genuine Christian humility. Actively embracing these inevitable consequences of relationship prove (by common experience) to be life-affirming, the *real* result of which is health. This is in contrast to the tangibly unhealthy consequences that accompany the egocentric evasion or avoidance of the adventure of relationship.

3 In the case of Christian heresies, ecclesial experience did not confront ideological opponents, which is to say violations of theoretical formulas or axiomatic codes. It was a case of rejecting disease in order to protect health. It stood against false substitutes for relationship in order to preserve the realism of metaphysical experience.

4 Sabellianism and Arianism were, in the history of the Church, the first twin heretical (philosophically fortified) rejections of the ontological–existential *meaning* of relationships—the rejection of identifying existence, Being and the first cause of what exists with the freedom of the *loving* relational communion of the Personal *Hypostases* of Being, as proclaimed by ecclesial experience.<sup>337</sup>

4.1 Sabellianism relativised the Persons–*Hypostases* of the Divinity, instead absolutising a single divine Substance. Arianism relativised the divinity of the Son’s (and the Spirit’s) Substance in order to preserve the *hypostatic* integrity of the Persons. The Church detected in both instances the substitution of freedom (as the first cause of what exists) by necessity (as an intellectual priority).

4.1.1 According to ecclesial experience, ‘God is love’<sup>338</sup> and love alone can preserve the ontological priority of freedom—God’s *being* is not bound by the ontological conditions of nature or his substance, it is identified with the personal freedom of love. In the language of ecclesial experience, God is God because he is the *Father*—the one who confirms his free will to exist by instantiating his *being*, freely out of love, by begetting the Son and sending forth the Holy Spirit. God’s existential freedom is his trinitarian existence.

4.2 Sabellianism and Arianism insisted on the non-relational—individually and intellectually achieved—reduction of all that exists to being-in-itself, i.e., to a Higher Being, to a Divine Essence. The Church counters this by emphasising that experiential participation in the

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337 See Zizioulas, ‘From Mask to Person’, 294ff; Yannaras, *Person and Eros*, 4.10; and Christos Yannaras, *The Schism in Philosophy*, trans. Norman Russell (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2015), 27.

338 1 John 4:16.

knowledge of Being consists of a relationship with the person of the incarnate Son-*Logos* of God, who, by taking on flesh (emptying himself of all individual independent existence) revealed the *mode* by which God exists and can be known.

5 Nestorianism and Monophysitism represent a second case of twin heresies—typical examples of the neurotic absolutization of what is relative, and then subsequently relativizing what is absolute (whole or complete). The former absolutized the human element: the tangible, the individually determined and moral acts. The latter absolutized the idealized divine element: the spiritual, the incorporeal and the mystical. Oriented by these bearings, they functioned diachronically as archetypes of heretical partiality. Nestorianism persists in various forms of naturalism, historicism, the autonomy of signifiers, moralism and effective activism. Monophysitism also persists in various forms of idealism, denigration of the body and matter, the abstract ‘dematerialisation’ of signifieds, ahistorical generalisations, and mystical rapture.

5.1 Ancient heretics at least understood that their dispute centred on the *incarnation* of God, e.g., whether the historical Jesus was merely an ordinary human endowed with particular divine gifts, or whether he was God in human form. They believed in both cases that it was *nature*, human or divine, that defined the reality of the *person*. The ecclesial experience countered that, in the case of the Divinity, it is the *person* who freely instantiates nature out of love. It is the *person* of God the *Logos* who wholly and perfectly *instantiates* (establishes as a personal *hypostasis*) the nature of the historical Jesus, both divine and human (‘unchanging, immutable, inseparable and without confusion’).

5.2 Heretical partiality, in its historical variation, tends to focus exclusively on the human being, absolutising a partial version and interpretation of the relative character of its existence. The Nestorian perspective locates what is *distinctively human* purely in its quantitative difference from the psychophysical reality of animals. It absolutizes sensible experience, natural rationality, practical utilitarianism and consumerist well-being. In the Monophysite perspective, the human

being is regarded exclusively, or mainly, as a spiritual entity—a mind and will that are sovereign over instinct, urge and desire. It absolutizes abstract values, ethical ideals and transcendent aims.

5.2.1 Moreover, recognition of the *hypostatic* incarnation is missing from both perspectives—the fact that the incarnation directs one towards *personhood* (that of God and human beings) and that without the existential priority of the freedom of personhood from nature there is no subject of existential reference. There are only objects—sensible individualities or ideal conceptions—whereby psychological substitutes are transferred via neurosis, whether naturalistic or idealistic substitutes.

6 Iconoclasm and iconolatry also represent twin heretical–neurotic archetypes. The former rejects the function of *symbols* and their role in coordinating experiential communion—the difficulty of relational-experiential ‘passage’ to the prototype.<sup>339</sup> It is satisfied with individualistic intellectual certitudes, the rationalism of ‘beliefs’ and information, without complete human participation in the object of knowledge. The latter also rejects the social function of symbols, turning them into independent objective truths (individually possessed as learned or affected truths). It equates the signifier with the signified, and knowledge with comprehension of its articulation.

6.1 In both iconoclasm and iconolatry the icon depicts nature, not *hypostasis*.<sup>340</sup> This is why the former denounces icons as *idols* of the indescribable divinity<sup>341</sup> and the latter worships them as though they were the very presence of the sacred and transcendent. Iconoclasts resort to intellectual sublimation, while those who worship icons resort to an aesthetic substitute for references to the *hypostasis*. In both cases the sacred is transformed into an intelligible or tangible object, subject to individual possession, use and exploitation.

339 Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit*, PG 32:149c: ‘The value of images is that they take you to the prototype’.

340 In contrast to the ecclesial experience, which affirms that ‘it is the *hypostasis*, not nature, that is depicted by images’. Theodore the Studite, *Third Refutation*, PG 99:405ab.

341 For an indicative example, see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (London: James Clarke & Co., 1957), Book 1, 11.13.

7 Roman Catholicism and Protestantism represent two further typical cases of heresy that replace what is real with psychological substitutes. The former substitutes the ecclesial *mode of existence*—the struggle to realise the Trinitarian Prototype of life in the Eucharistic community—with the fortification of certitudes that offer the individual a Church reified in the form of institutions, an administrative hierarchy and the codification of beliefs and behaviours into disciplinary laws. The latter replaces the same genuine goal with individual access to a revelation (the Bible) that is also reified—an access that is intellectual, emotional and strictly conforms to ‘revealed’ ethical commandments.

7.1 Roman Catholicism reduces catholicity (the existential completeness of every local ecclesial Eucharist) to a *geographic universality* of totalitarian ideological and moralistic uniformity. Protestantism turns existential completeness into absolute *justification of the individual*, reducing the ecclesial event to a matter of accounting (the measured and monitored moralisation of individuals).

7.2 In both cases we see the expression of the same psychological substitutes for the fear of embarking on the risk of relationship and the adventure of freedom (freedom from nature for the purposes of realising relationship). Moreover, in both cases we find the same religification of the ecclesial event, which is to say the same vacuolation in the security of *nature* and in the individualistic focus of *natural* religiosity. Visible authority functions as an objective ‘nature’ of truth, and measurable achievements function as the objective ‘nature’ of salvation. The struggle for faith-as-trust is turned into a means of safeguarding the individual, and love is reengineered from a mode of existence into an individual virtue.

7.2.1 Typical symptoms of the neuroses that torment and deform life include crushing guilt, anxious moralism, narcissistically trying to behave angelically, fear and demonization of sexuality and escaping desire in activism. These have been imprinted on the European soul, becoming its defining features, as a consequence of Europe’s experience of the religification of the ecclesial event by the twins Roman Catholicism

and Protestantism, notwithstanding desperate and stubborn resistance to religious oppression, such as seeking refuge in naturalism, nihilism and material happiness.

8 'Orthodoxism' is the name we could use to describe the heretical-neurotic substitute for Orthodoxy. In this case too, a natural religiosity centred on the individual negates the ecclesial event, but does so by way of an utterly narcissistic and consistent insistence on the *ritual* and external reified characteristics of ecclesial orthodoxy, e.g., adhering to the letter of symbolic formularies, forms of worship and asceticism, as well as historical forms of organisation. The terms or boundaries of the ecclesial event's legitimacy and authenticity are detached from the event itself—they no longer demarcate the existential realisation of the event or the experience of participating in it. They are altered into objective safeguards that vindicate individualistic religious experience. They operate as psychological replacements for answers to existential questions.

8.1 It is a case of boasting about the possession (ownership) of historical titles of authority and legitimacy as a way of overcompensating for a lack of the real—the narcissistic demand that the individual or group who preserves and clings to authenticity and legitimacy be recognised, honoured and respected, particularly when there is little prospect of respect arising naturally. It is a matter of fleeing existential problems by seeking refuge in the past, as if it were a kind of highly evocative (psychologically and emotionally) *décor*—a past and *décor* that are transformed into an ideology and articles of individual 'belief'. The historical characteristics of ecclesial orthodoxy serve as the objective 'nature' of truth, and subordination to external characteristics serve as the objective 'nature' of salvation. Fear of the creative adventure and personal participation in the goal of existence masquerades as a higher calling and mission, but in reality merely serves to conserve the past in a way only fit for a museum.

9 Following the Second World War, various Christian religious groups (institutionally formed 'churches' or 'denominations') attempted to converge and collaborate by establishing an international religious

organisation.<sup>342</sup> At the same time, an attempted ‘dialogue’ was organised between administrative representatives from Roman Catholicism, Orthodoxism and the main branches of Protestantism, with a view to laying the groundwork for a future unification of the churches. Thus there emerged a broad international phenomenon of intra-Christian fermentation known as the ‘Ecumenical Movement’, which developed its own set of heretical–neurotic symptoms.

9.1 If heresy is the neurotic substitution of metaphysical experience, and if ‘each of us is afraid to abandon their neurosis’,<sup>343</sup> then it is not difficult to understand why the Ecumenical Movement quickly degenerated into the bureaucratic preservation of superficial and pretentious affirmations and perfunctory ‘good relations’ between hardened administrative institutions. No one had the courage to abandon their neurosis, particularly when it had been solidified in centuries-old customs. This is why it is not possible to raise and discuss the ontological substance of Christian identity within the framework of the Ecumenical Movement.

9.2 Ecumenical dialogue represses metaphysical anguish, the enigma of death and realistic hope in life after death—the vital challenges confronting the realism of the Christian good news of the gospel. These are unable to create fissures in the neurotic fortification of heretical psychologism. The Ecumenical Movement quickly descended into immature substitutes for dealing with metaphysical problems. It fell into a kind of international moralism adapted to the political–ideological fashion of the day, whether it was concern for the third world, the claims of feminism, or the fight against racism—in other words, a neurotic pan-Christian unity founded on the lowest common denominator necessary for an instrumental Christianness.

10 Freud sought to show that religion is an all-encompassing coercive neurosis.<sup>344</sup> His apodictic reasoning remains a typical paradigm, yet

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342 The World Council of Churches headquartered in Geneva.

343 Françoise Dolto, *Αὐτοπροσωπογραφία μιᾶς ψυχαναλύτριας* [*Autoportrait d'une psychanalyse*], trans. Marina Kouzenis (Estia: Athens, 1998), 137.

344 See Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1975).

is itself a heretical-neurotic image of life. It absolutizes the insights of pathology, which relativises the ‘absolute’ (experiential completeness) existential reference to the metaphysical ‘referent’—the ‘birth of the *logos*-possessing subject in the field of the Other’.

10.1 Indeed, religion and *eros* are the two unique human experiences that are located at the frontier of neurotic deviation, because in both case what is at stake is that which makes the human *truly human*—the ability to attain freedom from nature by embarking on the risk of *relationship*. A neurotic is someone who embarked, if only superficially, on that risk and failed—neurosis is the difficult price that person pays for their weakness or refusal to accept failure. Still, that person’s neurosis reflects their primordial sensitivity to and desire for *relationship* in contrast to someone who rests in the comfort of their egocentricity, someone with mundane existential aspirations. The neurotic’s neurosis glues them to *nature* for the purposes of drawing from it, via illusions and psychological substitutes, everything they failed to achieve, or did not try to achieve, in their *relationships*.

10.2 The ecclesial answer to neurosis and heresy is the invitation to humble *repentance*, i.e., for humans to confront their failures with open eyes and to humbly accept them. Acceptance means *transforming failure* into a loving relationship of self-surrender and self-offering (the gospel archetype of this transformation is the tax collector<sup>345</sup>).

10.3 A genuinely Christian ecumenical movement would be one founded on the acknowledgement and confession of the failures of every religious group that invokes the name of Christianity. Every institution-alised tradition would testify, by way of contributing to the ‘dialogue’, to its neurosis, i.e., to its heretical deviations from the struggle for *relationship*, and its imaginary substitutes for life-as-love, freedom from nature and freedom from temporality and mortality.

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345 See Luke 18:10–14.



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