Revelation and Participatory Eschatology:
A Constructive Evaluation of James K. A. Smith and Emmanuel Levinas

By

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This dissertation is dedicated to my extremely patient wife, Aubry.

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Introduction

One of my mentors passed away in March of 2020, not of COVID, but of a stroke. I remember sitting in the office and classroom of Theodore Jennings as he opened new windows in my mind to understand the scriptures and the theological traditions of Christianity. Few teachers have inspired me as him. I had chosen to study at the Chicago Theological Seminary because I read his book, *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Economics* as an undergraduate. I found that I cared deeply about Christianity's relation to politics and economics, and I wanted to learn more from this thinker! Yet, towards the end of that provocative text, Jennings asks:

> How shall we explain to ourselves that nearly one-third of the earth's inhabitants claim to believe the gospel, while leaving human relations as much characterized by greed and violence as ever they were before the gospel was first sounded forth among the poor of Galilee? If the gospel is about transformation, how is it that two thousand years of proclamation have had so little effect? How is it that the wealthiest nations on earth, and the greediest and most violent, are those that claim the highest proportion of 'Christians'? How is it that the gospel of Jesus Christ, so far from producing radical change, has instead become a cloak for avarice and arrogance, for a willful deafness to the cry of the poor and of the earth itself? How is it that the message of good news for the poor has become a sedative for the privileged while the poor perish?[1]

This quotation is a melancholy way to bring an exciting and provocative book towards a conclusion, but I came to realize that this is something of a trend in the Wesleyan tradition. Two years before his death, John Wesley wrote a sermon entitled, "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity." In the sermon he asks:

> Why has Christianity done so little good in the world? Is it not the balm, the outward means, which the Great Physician has given to men to restore their spiritual health? Why then is it not restored? You say, Because of the deep and the universal corruption of human nature. Most true. But here is the very difficulty. Was it not intended by our all-wise and almighty Creator to be the remedy for that corruption? An universal remedy for

[1] Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Economics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990): 186.

> an universal evil? But it has not answered this intention. It never did. It does not answer it at this day. The disease still remains in its full strength: wickedness of every kind, vice inward and outward in all its forms, still overspread the face of the earth.[2]

Over the years, I have been unable to get away from these questions.

I was introduced to theology in the 1990s when it was trendy to write about capitalism and theology. I was enchanted by these efforts to connect justification with justice. It seemed to me that we were on the cusp of perhaps a new reformation or, at least, a new revival. Once the message of the evils of capitalism and the calling of God to serve the oppressed was proclaimed in our churches, surely people would begin to repent of their greed. God would honor that repentance and we would see a new flourishing of the gospel. We would be able to set aside the disturbing questions of Jennings and Wesley.

Except, even as theological treatises on the topic multiplied and some pastors took up the message from their pulpits, I watched most churches simply ignore, if not persecute, these prophetic voices. I was disheartened, and I began to wonder about the truth of Christianity. What is the truth of Christianity? Does it have a truth in an age of classical liberalism, existentialism, and nihilism? I watched family members and close friends renounce their faith and identify as atheists, and I wondered why I had not done the same. What is there here for me? If those I grew up with who warned me of the dangers of 'nominal Christianity' and who taught me to seek God earnestly in prayer and the scriptures, if these mentors and role models from my childhood could so easily dismiss God's call to serve the poor and the oppressed, how could this faith be 'real'? There is no defense, no apology, for the questions of Jennings and Wesley. Christianity is a failed religion.

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[2] John Wesley, "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity," *The Works of John Wesley* 4, Albert C. Outler, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987): 86-87.

Why, then, did I stay?

Perhaps I stayed because I began teaching philosophy, and because I read Charles Taylor's book, *Modern Social Imaginaries*. I was searching for a heuristic lens through which to perform a postmortem evaluation of Christianity. How did things go so wrong? I found the beginnings of such a heuristic lens in Taylor's concept of social imaginaries, those popular, pre-theoretical ways of making sense of our everyday lives. I combined Taylor's imaginaries with the transferable logic of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*. I began to speculate that Western thought has been guided by two metaphysical models. At the time, I was working in higher education administration, and the language of models permeated my environment. Models were ways to simplify complex situations in order to create predictability. I wondered if philosophy and, by extension, theology might also utilize *unrecognized* models. As I taught "Introduction to Philosophy," I began to apply these models to the thinkers that I taught in that class. Could these models provide an interpretive lens to better understand and make sense of Plato, Augustine, Scotus, Descartes, Locke, Kant, Beauvoir, and others? Over time, I became more confident that these models were useful and explanatory. They created predictability, in a sense, within philosophy and theology. Additionally, these models might help to explain the questions posed by Jennings and Wesley. They might explain why Christianity has failed.

The models I identified were already mostly visible in Taylor's work, though he did not formalize them as such nor did he apply them in the ways that I have done. The first model is a participatory hierarchy based on a conceptual reliance on transcendence. This model is obvious in the work of Plato, but it is discernable broadly in classical thought up to the time of Scholasticism. In Aristotle, for example, we find a concept of entelechy which connects all of nature teleologically to a transcendent or cosmic purpose. In Augustine, we find a doctrine of

providence that assures us that God is working out God's will in each detail of our lives and, indeed, in all of creation.

The second model took longer to discern and picture. I refer to it as an economic network based on a conceptual reliance on liberty. Louis Dupre's work was instrumental at this stage. He argues that the introduction of Christianity into mainstream Western thought began to erode the ontological hierarchy, though he uses the language of an ontotheological synthesis, which is also helpful. The question is, what was so disruptive about Christianity? The answer has to do with how Augustine and subsequent Christian scholars thought about God's sovereignty. Divine sovereignty increasingly came to entail God's unrestrained liberty to do whatever God wills. Through the work of Duns Scotus, Martin Luther, and then René Descartes, the prior understanding of divine will increasingly became applied to the human will. Whereas in classical thought, we had to look to transcendence to discern the Good, the True, and the Beautiful, in modern thought, we the people must collectively negotiate these things among ourselves. At this point, Western Christianity is a scion of this liberal economic model. The implication is that no amount of call to serve the poor and the oppressed can take significant root in the popular imaginations of Western Christians. Jennings's and Wesley's questions are destined to echo hollowly for the foreseeable future, and now we have a good idea why that is.

However, and this is the thesis of my dissertation, the idea that Christianity has been captured by a particular metaphysical model would also imply that it could potentially be liberated by a new model, a third model. Taylor's work shows us that while these models, or imaginaries, are not something we can simply voluntary select because they run more deeply in our psyches and cultures than a simple choice, over time they can be contested and replaced.

My next question was whether there was already any evidence within philosophy, which I was still teaching on a regular basis, of what Thomas Kuhn might call anomalies in our research, things that the prevailing paradigms or models were no longer satisfactorily addressing? Was there evidence of anyone already addressing these anomalies at a level such that a new model might have the chance to emerge? I slowly began to suspect that the work of Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Barth, Bultmann, Levinas, and Marion (among others) might be pushing back against the model of a liberal economy without attempting to retreat simply to an ontological hierarchy, a retreat that I was seeing in Radical Orthodoxy and some strands of narrative theology. If these thinkers were doing more than just pushing back against a liberal economic model, what novel model might be discernable in their work? I suggest that the most appropriate term to capture the spirit of their constructive projects is 'participatory eschatology.' Their projects point to something surprising, mystical, and excessive that raises questions about what we have come to take for granted in our daily lives, in our philosophy, and in our theology. This dissertation is my attempt to refine this intuition and to begin to develop it in the context of theological prolegomena. I have used this model of a participatory eschatology to address the doctrine and concept of 'revelation.'

Like so many important words, 'revelation' is a placeholder. Theologically, how can we understand revelation in the light of radical individualism, classical liberalism, and existentialism? In light of nihilism, Michel Foucault's regimes of power, or Thomas Kuhn's paradigms? How do we understand revelation in the aftermath of Trumpism? It seems that revelation must be a placeholder, a concept capable of standing for nearly anything that we want it to stand for and as a vessel capable of being filled with anything with which we wish to fill it. I had already wrestled with this issue for several decades before turning to it in this project.

Having been raised in an Evangelical home and active in the church and the church youth group, I was instructed to seek out God's will for myself and the things in my life. Yet, over time I wondered, even if God were somehow to bypass all mediation and to communicate directly with a human person, maybe directly into their brain, would that somehow allow revelation to be other than a placeholder? Given what neuroscientists and cognitive psychologists think they know about how the brain works and the larger socio-political context of language as a constraint of meaning, it seems unlikely that under any circumstances God's revelation would exceed the neurobiology, language games, and intersectionality of the historical context. This recognition is more than Evangelical, young adult angst. It is an issue of theological prolegomena. Is not the task of theology, at some level, the articulation of the revelation of God for this time and this place? If so, then the ambiguity around the nature of revelation is an urgent issue for theologians. Despite the preponderance of reflections on theological method over the recent decades, the issue has not been resolved. Physicists do not abandon challenges in their field simply because a lot of ink has been spilled without results and more trendy issues have emerged to distract them. Theology is not a discipline committed to what is interesting or novel, ready to move on once a new fad emerges. Theological prolegomena and method are less interesting at the moment, but they are no less important for their inability to be attractive to search committees.

With that background in mind, I became fascinated when I read James K. A. Smith's, *Speech and Theology*. Here he addresses the problem of revelation as something that is located "at the very foundations of philosophical and theological method,"[3] as something on which the

[3] James K. A. Smith, *Speech and Theology: Language and the Logic of Incarnation* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002): 3.

possibility of theology hangs.[4] From the start to the finish of his project, which spans numerous texts, Smith teases out and addresses these central theological issues of revelation, theological language, and interpretation. In his engagement with these broad projects, he has leveraged the phenomenological tradition as a means to re-evaluate the central Christian doctrines and traditions in energetic and impressively creative ways. Yet, as innovative, prolific, and visionary as Smith's work has been, I found myself with misgivings about the positions he had developed. He wants to return to Augustine, Nicaea, and Aquinas in order to provide a solution to revelation and hermeneutics, but doing so requires us to retreat backwards into an ontological hierarchy. Given our modern context, his solution does not seem generalizable. Interestingly, he also wants to validate pluralism and modes of theological voluntarism, which require a liberal economic model. Finally, neither the church nor any themes of eschatology seem to be distinguishable in his project. It is this confusion of the two traditional models and the absence of a true alternative model that I realized was the source of my discomfort with his project.

While I was reading Smith, I found his strong critiques of Emmanuel Levinas to be strangely surprising. In particular, I was shocked by Smith's objection to Levinas's concept of revelation. As I turned my attention to Levinas's work in *Totality and Infinity*, my puzzlement increased. It seemed to me that Levinas's view of revelation was compelling, in large part because there was something eschatological about it. However, while I began to discover tacit eschatological themes across Levinas's work, I realized that when critiques of his work landed, they were often due to Levinas's highly individualistic anthropology. There is *one* Same and *one* Other who find themselves in this asymmetrical relation. In this sense, Levinas still has a foot in

[4] *Ibid.*, 151.

the prior models, particularly that of the liberal economy where the subject is the discrete owner of their own properties and choices.

By this time, I had begun teaching courses in theology along with philosophy. Reading William Cavanaugh's *Torture and Eucharist* for my ecclesiology course, I began to suspect that the limitations of an individualistic anthropology were beginning to be recognized. Eschatologically, we anticipate a communion of the faithful who have come to be perichoretically united in the Triune God just as Jesus prayed in John 17. The Church is the proleptic witness to this coming communion. The Spirit's call of holiness comes, not to individuals, but to the Church. The Church is formed by this gracious call and in faithfulness to this call. To a large extent, I have applied a Wesleyan *via salutis* to the Church within an eschatological framework.

That is a summary of the following project, but here is the chapter breakdown. In the first chapter, I walk through Smith's phenomenology of revelation, with an emphasis on the elements of his position that are most distinctive as well as relevant to my own project. In the second chapter, I make a broader and more detailed case for the heuristic value of the three metaphysical models for theology.[5] In the third chapter, I turn to Levinas and the origins of the third, eschatological model, which will be a strong test of my thesis. In the fourth chapter, I will continue to support my thesis with a fuller development of the participatory eschatological model from the intersectionality of Levinas's phenomenology and a holiness theology. In the fifth chapter, I apply the participatory eschatological model to ecclesiology. Other than the trajectory of the argument as a whole, the concept and doctrine of revelation runs throughout each chapter

[5] The utility of these models apply equally to philosophy.

bringing an overall coherence to the project and justifying my choices of Smith and Levinas as lynchpins for the project as a whole.

While, despite my thesis, I do not pretend that I have 'fixed' the failure of Christianity in this project, I have found hope. Perhaps that hope will remain only a personal hope, but it is my prayer that in my teaching and my writing that perhaps I can share this hope with others. In many respects, this dissertation, like many before it, has been a work of therapy for myself. Perhaps that is exactly what it means to be a theologian. Perhaps a theologian is less of a translator, working to translate God's revelation to a particular time and place, and more of a therapist seeking to bring about self-awareness and a modicum of reconciliation to the Church. *Fides quaerens salutem*.

CHAPTER 1

James K. A. Smith: Concept and Revelation

A natural theology which does not strive to be the only master is not a natural theology.[6]

Let me receive thy light, even from afar, even from the depths. Teach me to seek thee, and when I seek thee show thyself to me, for I cannot seek thee unless thou teach me, or find thee unless thou show me thyself.[7]

1.1 Introduction

My interest in James K. A. Smith's work centers on his investigation of the phenomenological problem of transcendence and its "paradoxical revelation."[8] Smith's analysis of this problem leads him to questions about the conditions of the possibility of philosophy and theology themselves,[9] questions of transcendental conditions (Immanuel Kant), existential conditions (Martin Heidegger), and the erotic reduction of Jean-Luc Marion or the ethical conditions of Emmanuel Levinas. Smith notes that the first two reductions "privilege immanence as the condition for knowing or appearance. In other words, that which is transcendent . . . must show up within the horizon of immanence."[10] While Smith does demonstrate commitment to transcendental or existential reductions, he is fundamentally committed to the transcendent

[6] Clifford Green, Ed., *Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991): 172.

[7] Anselm, "An Address," in *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham*, Eugene R. Fairweather, trans. (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1970): 72-73.

[8] Smith, *Speech*, 17.

[9] . . . how will it be possible to speak of that which is transcendent, that which is beyond language and exceeds conceptual determination. The project of this book is to push this formalization [of Derrida's] even further, to locate this problem at the very foundations of philosophical and theological method (*Ibid.*, 3).

[10] *Ibid.*, 19.

showing up within the horizon of immanence, which I take to be his concept of the structure of revelation. This structure of revelation is phenomenological, in the vein of Edmund Husserl.

In this chapter, we will trace the conditions of the appearance of transcendence that Smith establishes in *Speech and Theology* (ST). The first is *der Anknüpfunspunkt*, or the point-of-contact between the transcendent and the immanent, between God and humanity. The second condition is the semiological structure of the incarnation in which God is simultaneously present and absent. The third condition is a reverse participatory ontology that Smith attributes to Augustine and in which God condescends to the finite without raising the finite up.

These three conditions of the appearance of transcendence stem from two prior commitments. First, Smith staunchly rejects anything remotely Gnostic. For him, that means the finite is not just good but also complete (while not being perfect).[11] The implication of this completion is that nothing can be added to the finite as a condition of the appearance of transcendence. The finite is complete *a se*. Second, Smith is committed to the possibility of speaking of God or of transcendence in a mode that eliminates the possibility of conceptual violence. *Comment ne pas parler?* How (not) to speak? He proposes a new concept of the

[11] Smith does not explain how the finite can be both good and complete without being perfect. That said, his notion of ontological completion raises important and unaddressed theological questions. Craig Keen states: ". . . being filled with the Spirit is not like filling a sack with flour. It is not being completed or finished (cf. John 19:30). It is movement. One might note that H. W. Wolff defines the *nepeš* that Adam becomes when God breathes into Him (Genesis 2:7) as 'neediness' which is free to hope in and to praise Yahweh." Craig Keen, "The Church and the Culture: A Little Reflection on the *Assumptio Carnis*," *The Wesleyan Theological Journal* 24 (1989): 98. In other words, completion might be understood more in terms of the fullness of relation. And when the Hebrew Bible talks about the flesh (*basar*) that is the human person, that term carries the connotation of "frailty, weakness, helplessness, ephemerality, vulnerability, morality." Craig Keen, "The Transgression of the Integrity of God," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 36, no. 1 (Spring, 2001): 77. To talk about vulnerability or frailty is not to speak about culpability or blame. We would not be blaming the finite for being. Smith's concept of Gnosticism may derive from an overly-forensic hamartiology. To stand in need of God is no fault or sin. It is, instead, to be a creature.

Smith's christology may be closer to "the great exegetes of Antioch—Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Nestorius, and even Theodoret of Cyrus" who when they understand the humanity of Jesus, "they understand this humanity not merely as distinct from the divinity, but as 'autonomous' and personalized" John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1983): 32.

concept, a non-predicative, formally indicative 'concept,' which itself follows the logic of incarnation, which turns out to be the logic of analogy, thereby rending both theology and philosophy possible.

Smith critiques the work of Marion and Levinas for eliminating the possibility of revelation. In a way, these thinkers reintroduce a Meno paradox into the heart of revelation: ". . . if the Wholly Other were *wholly* 'Wholly Other,' how would we know it even 'exists'?" Smith asks.[12] There would be no conditions under which the transcendent could appear. And if it did, we should not be able to perceive it. So, we cannot know it exists, we cannot perceive it, and "the possibility of communion (even in love) would be precluded."[13] Therefore, Smith concludes that Levinas and Marion eliminate the possibility of revelation.

The question that Smith leaves unexamined in his critique of Levinas and Marion is what does revelation reveal? Smith's conditions of revelation coupled with his commitment to speaking nonviolently of God and his critiques of Levinas and Marion suggest that he conceives of revelation epistemologically. Revelation unveils knowledge, which is why Smith approves of the term *disclosure*, which clarifies what is meant by revelation. This is also why Smith remains committed to Husserlian phenomenology with its basis firmly rooted in experience.

Theologically, there are reasons to be concerned with Smith's project. First, Smith wants to bracket issues of christology in his deployment of the incarnation. However, the result of this bracketing of christological issues is that his logic of incarnation replicates the heresies of Docetism and Arianism. Recall Smith's interests in establishing the possibility of philosophy and theology themselves. Can the possibility of theology be based upon such heresies? Second,

[12] Smith, *Speech*, 158.

[13] *Ibid.*

because he reads Gnosticism through a Derridean lens of metaphysical presence, Smith is committed to the completion or fullness of finitude, again without being perfect. Theologically, this position commits Smith to a realized eschatology, which Avery Dulles says verges "on the denial of Christianity."[14] While there are Christian theologians like C. H. Dodd who can be said to stand in this space, it is not clear that Smith recognizes that he is one of them.[15] Finally, in its epistemology, Smith's position commits him to a classically liberal or economic epistemology in which the investment of intellectual labor implies that knowledge becomes the private property of the knower. Arguably, this epistemological position places him in the modern camp of "imploding secular reasoning" that his sometimes affiliation with Radical Orthodoxy would want to evade.[16]

Interestingly, in his second introduction to *The Fall of Interpretation* (FOI), Smith acknowledges that the text had no constructive doctrine of revelation.[17] Smith further indicates that he sees this as a weakness. In ST, Smith takes up the theme of revelation, though sometimes in an indirect way through the question of the conditions of the appearance of transcendence. This account of revelation is still not sufficiently constructive. In this chapter, my intention is to

[14] Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1974): 101.

[15] According to Dulles, "In later works Dodd admitted that his own term, 'realized eschatology,' was not an entirely happy one. His main concern, however, was to insist on the essential completeness of history in Jesus, and to demythologize some of the New Testament apocalyptic . . ." (Ibid., 102-3). Note the parallel between Dodd's concern for historical completion and Smith's concern for finite ontological completion.

[16] Smith quoted Graham Ward: "That first volume [of Radical Orthodoxy] is not primarily addressed to Christian theologians but to the imploding world of secular reasoning with which it opens." James K. A. Smith, *Introduction to Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004): 69. Additionally, Smith characterizes John Milbank's work as a contestation of the "'ontology of violence,' which construes human intersubjective relationships as governed by power and war" (*ibid*., 71). Smith's anti-Gnostic commitment allies him with Milbank's program on this point and might help to explain Smith's rejection of Levinas.

[17] James K. A. Smith, *The Fall of Interpretation: Philosophical Foundations for a Creational Hermeneutic* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012): 8.

examine the conditions of the possibility of revelation that Smith sets out for us.[18] What has to be true for revelation to be plausible?

Two doctrinal commitments shape the methodology of Smith's work. The first is a severe, perhaps excessive, rejection of 'Gnosticism.' This commitment arguably extends from Smith's conversion experience into a fundamentalist and legalistic Christianity.[19] It leads him to affirm an ontological position in accordance with his stance on revelation. The second doctrinal commitment, which is to the incarnation, seems to be more artificial in that Smith strips away the actual christological component and uses the remainder to support a semiology that justifies his account of revelation. These two commitments are intertwined throughout his work, making it difficult to tease them apart to discuss separately. We will begin with his staunch rejection of 'Gnosticism' and its positive corollary of the goodness of finitude.

1.1.1 The Goodness of Finitude

'Gnosticism,' given a very specific meaning, is an important heuristic lens for understanding Smith's work.[20] The term itself appears 18 times in FOI and six times in NO, but its presence is far more ubiquitous in Smith's frequent allusions to the goodness or fallenness of finite being. At the heart of Smith's concern is "a gnostic identification of finitude with

[18] Rather than working almost scientifically as Kant did in resolving Hume's problem of induction, Smith is working from a doctrinal position to solve the problem of conceptual violence.

[19] *Ibid.*, 3.

[20] I use single quotation marks around 'Gnosticism,' to indicate the specific sense in which Smith is using that term. In a more traditional sense, Gnosticism implies a second god or demiurge, who created the world. Because the world was created by a lesser god rather than the supreme God, creation is lacking, perhaps even evil. Salvation comes through a personal knowledge of the supreme God. Gnosticism can take many forms, but Smith has focused in on the theme of finite incompletion, separated it from its demiurgical source, and problematically made it his single canon and theological starting point.

fallenness,"[21] which he sometimes associates with a Neoplatonic "devaluing of creation."[22] For Smith, 'Gnosticism' results from any suggestion that finite creation is incomplete, deficient, or lacking in and of itself. He states that within Western hermeneutics is an incipient 'Gnosticism' that "continues to construe creational finitude and human be-ing as 'essentially' fallen."[23] We might expect Smith, an Evangelical scholar, to solve this problem through a doctrine of depravity or original sin. Whereas a prelapsarian finite being might be considered to be complete, a postlapsarian finite being would be cursed and cut off – incomplete. However, Smith rejects this solution because of its hermeneutical ramifications.

Hermeneutically, Smith is committed to the goodness of plurality. This commitment leads him to reject any notion that, in Eden, Adam and Eve were free from the 'curse of interpretation.' We see Sir Francis Bacon working with this type of notion, that interpretation is a curse, in his *New Atlantis* where he conceives of Adam and Eve possessing a far greater clarity in Eden.[24] We see John Wesley working with this type of notion in the eighteenth century as well.[25] Smith calls this "a certain 'traditional' evangelical theology" that he identifies with Richard Lints

[21] Smith, *Fall*, 1.

[22] *Ibid.*, 139. The subject index for Gnosticism states, "See also Neoplatonism" (*Ibid.*, 228).

[23] *Ibid.*, 138. Smith's association of Gnosticism with the inherent limitations of interpretation is interesting in light of many traditional teachings that human sin corrupted the *imago dei*, resulting in the inability to know and to love God. The ability to know God is surely more theologically central than general conceptual hermeneutics. It seems that Smith centralizes general hermeneutics, from which he then precedes to speak about how we can know and speak of God.

[24] Val Dusek, *Philosophy of Technology: An Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006): 41.

[25] "And probably the human spirit, like the angelical, then discerned truth by intuition. Hence [Adam] named every creature as soon as he saw it according to its inmost nature." John Wesley, "The End of Christ's Coming," *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology*, Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991): 444.

and Rex Koivisto.[26] He rejects Richard Lints's claim that "in the beginning, Adam and Eve enjoyed *perfect clarity* in their comprehension of the purposes and presence of God."[27] For Lints, interpretation is a result of sin, but such a position presumes that plurality is sinful, something to be overcome.[28] Smith rejects this position.

In contrast, Smith asserts that because finite creation necessitates a plurality of interpretations, pluralism must have always been God's plan. Smith seems this as the only conclusion that avoids the Gnostic assertion that finite creation is deficient. Smith reads the Genesis account to require prelapsarian interpretation. There was not an original unity or clarity that was lost with the Fall. Rather, plurality has been with us from the beginning. Plurality is part of finite being, and plurality is good. Plurality and pluralism are part of God's intentions for creation that we should expect to continue eschatologically.[29]

In the "Endnotes" to FOI, Smith provides further clarification of his intuitions related to 'Gnosticism.' He argues that Marcion's heresy set "redemption against creation, spirit against flesh."[30] Smith finds in certain Pauline readings the seeds of 'Gnosticism' in the way that Paul uses terms like 'world' and 'flesh.' Whatever else happens in redemption, Smith insists that it does not fix or complete the original (i.e., prelapsarian) creation. It is a little more difficult to interpret what Smith means by 'flesh,' because that term has a technical sense in Pauline scholarship that differentiates 'flesh' from 'body.' What Smith seems to mean by 'flesh' is

[26] Smith, *Fall*, 32.

[27] Quoted in Smith, *Speech*, 35. Emphasis original.

[28] *Ibid.*, 57.

[29] Smith, *Fall*, 31-32.

[30] *Ibid.*, 230.

simply finite being, which arguably is close to what Paul means by 'body.' When Smith argues that Marcion set spirit against finite being, Smith's concern is presumably the relative devaluation of finite being in contrast to the spirit.

The positive corollary to 'Gnosticism' is Smith's commitment to the goodness of finite being. The goodness of creation is possible only through a metaphysical and an ontological completion. Smith asks:

> Is it possible to speak of a 'good' creation that is deficient? . . . [E]ither creation is complete (which does not mean 'perfect') and therefore good, or creation involves a lack that must be supplied, which thereby impugns the original status of creation.[31]

We might trace two ramifications of Smith's position. First, there appears to be an eschatological implication that ontologically nothing can be added to or disrupted by the future or the infinite. He develops this claim explicitly in FOI where he critiques Wolfhart Pannenberg, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Jürgen Habermas for their "*eschatological immediacy model*" that "turns out to be a version of foundationalism."[32] With those thinkers, finite being is something to be overcome in the eschaton. We will see that this position becomes the basis of his critique of Levinas and Marion. Consequently, in a move reminiscent of C. H. Dodd, eschatology is replaced by or realized in the incarnation for Smith. The theological fact of the incarnation is further evidence of finite ontological completion.

Second, there is an implication related to the capacity of creation to receive revelation. Smith raises the debate between Emil Brunner and Karl Barth over an *Anknüpfungspunkt*, a point

[31] *Ibid.*, 69. Smith seems committed to a version of the modern isolated individual, complete and good in and of itself, lacking nothing, and without need. This vision of the human being grows more out of the Enlightenment than out of the scriptures, where the term *nephesh* arguably suggests the neediness of the human being, perhaps associated with the throat as "the organ that takes in food and satisfies hunger." Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974): 11. In other words, the *nephesh* specifically implies a lack that must be supplied.

[32] Smith, *Fall*, 64, 65. Emphasis original.

of contact between God and humanity. In the context of this debate, Smith allies himself with Brunner and against Barth. Smith states that:

> Barth is concerned that in Brunner's 'formal' point of contact or *capacity* for revelation there remains a hint of a 'material,' a natural knowledge of God which would not be revelational but the possession of a self-sufficient humanity . . .[33]

For Barth, the problem is the imperialism of theological immanence. He witnessed the effect of this immanence first-hand in German National Socialism.[34] On our own and within the bounds of our own inherent capacity, human beings cannot reason our way to God or the things of God. In contrast, Smith considers Barth's position to be one of ontological 'Gnosticism.' As we have noted, his interpretation of Gnosticism drives a great deal of Smith's overall work on the topic of revelation and interpretation. If even a formal or passive capacity is enough to condemn us, then our being itself is the source of violence, Smith argues. Smith categorically rejects that possibility. In his rejection of ontological 'Gnosticism,' Smith is committed to an ontological completion, which will then shape his view of the 'logic of incarnation.' For this reason, Smith downplays Barth's position, arguing that Barth's *Nein!* should apply only to an active revelatory capacity on the part of human beings. Of course, Smith would agree with Barth that when we attach 'happy hyphens' to Christianity we run real risks, but such hyphenation is the result of an active capacity within humans, not the passive one that Smith endorses.[35] Of course, we cannot

[33] Smith, *Speech,* 167.

[34] Green, *Karl Barth,* 173-74.

[35] According to Green, "Happy little hyphens were used between, say, the words 'modern' and 'positive,' or 'religious' and 'social,' or 'German' and 'Evangelical,' as if the meaning then became self-evident. The fact was overlooked that all this pointed to the presence of a Trojan horse within which the superior enemy was already drawn into the city" (*Ibid.,* 174-75).

actively reason to God or source theological authority in nature, politics, or society.[36] But Barth was wrong, Smith believes, to reject the merely formal and passive human capacity to receive revelation in Brunner's theology.

Smith argues throughout both FOI and ST that there must be a condition by which the self receives any revelation from the Other. Therefore, whether God's self-revelation comes only through the Christ or whether it comes in some other modality, Smith insists that human beings still have to be able to receive that revelation. He leverages Kierkegaard's work in the *Fragments* and the *Postscript* fairly significantly. However, we should note that for Johannes Climacus, it is the god itself that is the condition in these texts rather than the creature. Smith limits the possibility of such a condition to the finite receiver, raising questions about his use of Kierkegaard's texts. He seems unable to imagine the possibility that such a condition would come graciously, even mercifully, and exogenously in a way that would call the receiver beyond themself because, in his view, any such occurrence would be a judgment against the metaphysical status of the recipient.[37]

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[36] The line between Husserl's phenomenology and an authorized, active, method does seem to be "blurred" in Smith's work. Husserlian phenomenology becomes the lens through which Smith interprets the incarnation, notably at the expense of christology. Once Smith adopts the incarnation sans christology, it seems hard to claim that he has not crossed the line into an active capacity.

In a later writing, Smith seems to recognize the above concern: "I would now say that there is an internal tension in the book: on the one hand, I argue—in postliberal and Radically Orthodox fashion—that philosophical reflection on language should begin unapologetically from the logic and wisdom embedded in the specificity of the Incarnation; that our thinking about words and speech should be fundamentally shaped by the Word made flesh. But on the other hand, the project is framed as one where philosophy somehow clears the space for theology to have a right to speak; phenomenology 'makes possible' theology. As such, there remain traces of an apologetic project in ST. It is this latter aspect of the project which Bowald rightly notes as a linger correlationism." James K. A. Smith, "Continuing the Conversation," *The Logic of Incarnation: James K.A. Smith's Critique of Postmodern Religion*, Neal DeRoo and Brian Lightbody, eds. (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2009): 217.

[37] This structure of the condition itself being an act of grace has its own Augustinian roots in preventing grace, later iterated on by John Wesley and reintroduced as prevenient grace. In Wesleyan theology, every person is born dead to God but no person is left in such a state. Through the Spirit, God calls to each person, awakening their spiritual senses so that people can begin to perceive the things of God. See Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998): 76-77. The 'condition,' in a Wesleyan context, is the

When Smith argues for a formal capacity of revelation, we should take note of the implications. According to Louis Dupré, for the Greeks, *form* was "both a physical quality and an intellectual principle."[38] When Jewish and Christian theology separated God from the cosmos as its creator, the implication was that the real could no longer appear in an "orderly, intelligible way."[39] The consequence was that finite being was no longer complete because it lacked a point-of-contact with the divine. Smith's commitment to a formal point-of-contact, which will play out through the logic of incarnation, can be viewed as a retrieval of a Hellenistic concept of *form*. Smith's appeal to the incarnation was not the first Christian attempt to conserve what Dupré calls a Hellenistic ontotheological synthesis. Dupré notes that a similar appeal to the incarnation was used to justify icons during the iconoclast controversy.[40] Then, there was the religious humanism of Francis of Assisi who "extended the effect of the Incarnation to the entire created world," not entirely unlike Smith's own deployment of the incarnation.[41] However, the outcome of Assisi's position was the nascent elevation of the particular individual over and against the universal: "the highest spiritual meaning resided in the individual."[42] Smith's embrace of a pluralism of interpretations and the goodness of pluralism fits here as well. Perhaps unsurprisingly, language became as important for the nominalist movement that emerged in Medieval theology as

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dead spiritual senses. Yet, because they are dead, another condition is required. That second condition is the awakening power of prevenient grace operative through the Holy Spirit. Here we find a theological account that avoids the Gnosticism that Smith fears while still amenable to the concerns of fundamental conceptual violence found in those thinkers Smith rejected in FOI. That said, Wesley's empiricism comes with its own challenges and should not be assumed to be a sufficient response to Smith's project.

[38] Louis Dupré, *Religion and the Rise of Modern Culture* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008): 6.

[39] *Ibid*.

[40] *Ibid*., 7.

[41] *Ibid*.

[42] *Ibid*.

language is for Smith. The importance of language leads Smith to a semiological interpretation of the incarnation discussed below. Before turning to semiology, we will turn to the ontology that makes Smith's logic of incarnation functional. The question is whether this is an incarnation without a Christ.

1.1.2 Reverse Participatory Ontology

Another condition of revelation is necessary for Smith's position, and that is a participatory ontology, which is a "logical extension" of "the goodness of finitude."[43] A participatory ontology assures a metaphysical connection between the finite and the infinite. This ontology cannot be a repetition of a Platonic participation due to the 'Gnostic' vulnerabilities of that model. Consequently, God does not raise us up, out of the limitations of finitude characterized by its shadows and epistemic illusions. Here is where the incarnation becomes instrumental to Smith's project. Here we find the basis of his 'logic of incarnation.' To think the incarnation "one would have to reverse the movement of Platonic 'participation.'"[44] God, the Infinite, condescends, moves downward, and thereby overcomes the metaphysical incommensurability between the infinite and the finite, "between God's transcendence and our 'perception.'"[45] God comes into human reach, enters finitude, becoming available to human experience. God goes to the place where God cannot go so that what is not-God is no longer a barrier for God. Smith concludes, "The result of this condescension is that we see 'divinity become weak by his sharing in our "coat of skin"' (C 7.18.24), and yet it remains *divinity* that we

[43] Smith, "Continuing the Conversation," 219.

[44] Smith, *Speech,* 125.

[45] *Ibid.*, 124.

'see.'"[46] God's metaphysical condescension in the incarnation makes God available for human beings to perceive and to experience the divine. It is the corollary of the goodness of finitude.

As we see from the quotations above that emerge from Smith's reflection on Augustine's sermon based on John 1:1 ("In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"), the bones of Smith's main argument are rooted in Augustine's philosophy of language and Smith's adaptation of that philosophy to the incarnation. Pivotal to Smith's case is Augustine's argument that the word in my mind, given utterance by my voice, goes out to you and is in you while not departing from me. This claim, involving the instrumentality of language is the basis of Smith's doctrine of the incarnation, which becomes his epistemic model.

One of the things that this model does for Smith is that it overcomes the challenge of conceptual or metaphysical violence. Recall that in his "Introduction," Smith identifies conceptual violence as a threat to the possibility of theology (and philosophy).[47] Concepts are inadequate because God "transcends all conceptual determination."[48] To the extent that the discipline of theology – words of God – requires human beings to speak of what is beyond the capacity of language and beyond the capacity of concepts, any speech of God requires the theologian to ask forgiveness for what they have said. Theology becomes a sin. However, if God has overcome the incommensurability between infinity and finitude through an analogical logic of incarnation, then God incarnates theological speech, God enters into human concepts without ceasing to be transcendent, other, beyond, and absent in that incarnation. Do we still have to ask forgiveness for doing theology?

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[46] *Ibid.*, 125.

[47] *Ibid.*, 3.

[48] *Ibid.*

Smith encounters some headwinds at this point. While working through Aquinas's account of how it is possible to know God, Smith notes that in Aquinas:

> this (im)possibility is overcome by grace, though I will concede that this is not quite an incarnational account, since here it seems to be a matter of 'raising up' the human intellect to the level of the divine, rather than a movement of descent from the divine.[49]

This quotation is important because it makes visible Smith's underlying commitment to humanity and finitude *as it is*. How could Smith commit to anything else given his rejection of a 'Gnosticism' that makes it sinful *to be* by considering finitude somehow incomplete? As a consequence of this commitment, the logic of incarnation becomes "an affirmation of finitude, materiality, and embodiment."[50] Through logic, the incarnation is made to affirm and sanctify humanity right where we are and as we are. Rather than God becoming human so that humans might become God (Athanasius's logic of incarnation?), God just becomes human. Ultimately, Smith's concept of the incarnation appears to truncate grace in the name of affirming the finite.

Smith sees himself as committed to the context of phenomenology such that in his work the language of meaning *is* the language of being.[51] However, even as Smith embraces a participatory ontology, we must not forget that even in God's condescension, something about God remains absent and incomplete in that movement. God remains transcendent even in God's immanence. The incarnation remains semiologically incomplete. Therefore, Smith needs a 'new' phenomenology based in Augustine and the young Heidegger, though not *the* new phenomenology based in Levinas, Marion, Chrétien, et. al. In Smith's 'new' phenomenology, the

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[49] *Ibid.*, 165.

[50] *Ibid.*, 156.

[51] See Emmanuel Levinas, "God and Philosophy," *Basic Philosophical Writings*, Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996): 130-31. I do not mean to suggest that phenomenology necessitates this connection between meaning and being, but that for Smith, meaning requires connection to being. For this reason, his project requires a participatory ontology.

'concept' indicates without grasping its object. Theology ceases to be a sin only as theological 'concepts' indicate without grasping.

1.2 The Semiology of Incarnation

For the early humanists, such as Lorenzo Valla, "the nominalist conception of language . . . establishes a new, more direct link between thought and reality."[52] Smith is certainly not replicating nominalist conceptions of language, but a semiological link between thought and reality, or between the finite and the infinite, is an important mechanism for his concept of revelation. Smith turns to analogy to account for that link. The invisible God who prohibits images became visible in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, thereby overcoming the incommensurability between finite and infinite being. To the Chalcedonian account of the incarnation, Smith adds an analogical principle "whereby the difference is known by means of the same."[53] He sees this principle as being the logic of incarnation "where the Infinite is known by means of a finite appearance, without losing its infinitude."[54] Therefore, the incarnation becomes, for Smith, the model of the analogical principle *par excellence*. Importantly, the analogical principle has a semiological structure.

1.2.1 A Volitional Withholding

Before we can analyze the semiological structure of Smith's logic of incarnation, we need to understand what makes this semiological structure necessary. This structure of incarnation is important for Smith's project because it explains how God can reveal Godself to finite beings,

[52] *Ibid*., 9.

[53] Smith, *Speech,* 166.

[54] *Ibid.*

"show[ing] up in terms that the ego can understand," while also remaining transcendent.[55] How can God show up in a way the ego can understand without suffering some manner of ontological, conceptual, epistemological, or phenomenological violence wherein transcendence is reduced to immanence?[56] He argues that God is not subject to such violence because something of God remains absent in the incarnation.[57] This absence, which prevents the metaphysical violence of reducing transcendence to immanence, is the basis of Smith's logic of incarnation.

For the moment, let us set aside theological concerns about what of God could be absent in the incarnation, despite the creed's insistence that Jesus is fully God and fully human, presumably without remainder in either case.[58] Let us set aside christological concerns about Smith's position and the possibility of God's divisibility, as if, perhaps, there were some "hidden divine essence that is untouched by this [incarnational] outgoing."[59] There is also the question of how Smith thinks that a certain absence protects against violence.[60] I will refer to this violence as 'metaphysical' because (1) of Smith's commitment to God showing up in terms the ego can understand, while wanting to avoid Levinas's image of (2) forcing the Other to play a role in

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[55] *Ibid.*, 49.

[56] *Ibid.*, 127.

[57] *Ibid.*, 126.

[58] Smith claims to bracket all "strictly christological" issues from his own project, wanting to "invoke the Incarnation as a metaphor" (*Ibid.*, 10). However, that metaphorical bracketing seems illegitimate given the theological discussions of Gnosticism, Marcionism, the Barth/Brunner debate, and his later text, *The Nicene Option*. The incarnation clearly functions as more than a metaphor in Smith's work, albeit *sans* christology. Smith's refusal to engage with christology creates numerous problems for his position.

[59] Keen, "Transgression," 92.

[60] Is the incarnation, as a theological event, not a movement of divine openness, vulnerability, and eventually violence in the crucifixion? Does God really need to be saved? Can Smith's God still be the God of all of the damned and Godforsaken? Can the God who is untouched by violence be in solidary with the marginalized, disenfranchised, and oppressed? Is it not the case that in the incarnation, "in Jesus Christ God suffers with suffering human being, God is rejected with rejected human being; in entering into human life as it is plunged into total destruction, God has 'tasted damnation, death and hell'" (*Ibid.*, 93).

which it no longer recognizes itself.[61] It often seems as if Smith imagines this violence in ontic or substantive terms, which is why he can declare confidently that God is not subject to such violence. What preserves God from such violence while presumably not preserving the human other from such violence? Presumably it is because something of God's being or nature is always withheld in revelation, while perhaps this is not the case for finite beings.[62] Something of God is withheld precisely because God is transcendent. Therefore, because of that metaphysical remainder, God cannot be reduced to a role in which God cannot recognize Godself. God has a metaphysical anchor that prevents God from being reduced to the Same. Hence, there will necessarily be a plurality of interpretations because no singular interpretation will contain God.

In his concern to avoid even a hint of Gnosticism, Smith wants to explain that this metaphysical remainder, which he often refers to as the divine withholding and which might be described phenomenologically as a lack of intuition, is in no way "a structural 'poverty' or 'deficit' attributed to the ego's finitude."[63] We cannot blame the finite being for the divine remainder as if finitude was simply incapable of receiving the fullness of God.[64] That incapacity

[61] "But violence does not consist so much in injuring and annihilating persons as in interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves, making them betray not only commitments but their own substance, making them carry out actions that will destroy every possibility for action." Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, Alphonso Lingis, trans. (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969): 21. Levinas makes this statement in the context of war: "The visage of being that shows itself in war is fixed in the concept of totality, which dominates Western philosophy" (*ibid*.). The highly metaphorical and poetic nature of the "Preface" renders its meaning challenging, particularly without appeal or reference to the remainder of the text.

[62] Admittedly, Smith's discussion of appresentation in ST makes it hard to argue that finite things do not also hold something in reserve. I am unable to give a charitable account of Smith's position at this point. Therefore, it seems to me if we look too closely here, we may find an untangling of Smith's project.

[63] Smith, *Speech*, 53.

[64] Perhaps this commitment that the finite should be capable of God is part of what leads Smith to critique Levinas's doctrine of revelation, which derives from a concept of excess. To what extent must finite being be capable of all things in order not to be Gnostic?

would strike of Gnosticism. But if the remainder or withholding is not due to the ego's finite capacity, to what do we owe it? Why would God not fully give Godself? The focus is now on God's volition. Smith says:

> [I]t is the phenomenon itself which does not give itself entirely. The inadequacy of perception [signifies] . . . the phenomenon's assertion of its right to privacy, its right to refuse to appear, its right to preserve itself as transcendent and thereby maintain its identity.[65]

Smith picks up this language of 'rights' from Marion's "The Saturated Phenomenon," where Marion was addressing the principle of sufficient reason in light of Kant's definition of 'possibility.'[66] That does not strike me as the same thing as a 'right to privacy,' particularly within a contemporary geo-political context of state surveillance and digital tracking. Rather, it appears as if Smith may be using the language of rights equivocally to introduce a concept more in line with classical liberalism. Smith claims that his analogical logic, in which the transcendent subject appears and withholds itself, is based on the phenomenon's right not to appear.[67]

If this reading is correct, then the reason that something of God is withheld is not necessarily due to God's metaphysical transcendence but rather it is due to God's volition. That reading then raises questions about why finite beings cannot exercise a similar volition to privacy. This turn to classical liberalism, with language of rights and volition, within a larger phenomenological context is surprising. It seems to mimetically repeat the Medieval debates over whether the will or the intellect has priority in the divine life. And while John Duns Scotus

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[65] *Ibid.*

[66] Jean-Luc Marion, "The Saturated Phenomenon," *The Visible and the Revealed*, Christina M. Gschwandtner and Others, trans. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008): 21.

[67] Note again that this 'right' would presumably apply to any phenomenon.

maintained a sophisticated account of divine freedom, which was not reducible to choice,[68] doctrines of theological voluntarism, in which the good stems from the divine will, were sure to follow.[69] In the context of the debates over intellect and will, if we give priority to the intellect, then God seemingly must recognize an external, higher authority.[70] If, however, God's will has priority over God's intellect, then God remains sovereign at the cost of a certain moral and epistemological arbitrariness. Now, in a phenomenological context, God exercises the liberal privilege of any phenomenon, which is its right not to appear, except in Smith it seems reserved for God alone. Is this 'right' exercised in the incarnation? Why can I or you not exercise this 'right'?

This issue arises because Smith seems to anthropomorphize the phenomenon. He says that "the phenomenon must give up its transcendence in order to make a showing."[71] Here we find a potential reason why God can exercise this right when you and I might not. God is transcendent in ways that you and I are not transcendent. God gives up this right to appear and asserts this right to remain transcendent. In contrast, what Levinas and Marion are saying is that, epistemologically, for the Same to understand the Other, the Same must truncate the Other, reduce the Other to the Same's totality. There is something of Kant's transcendental unity of apperception at play in Levinas's claim. The Same can understand the Other by applying

[68] Thomas A. Shannon, *The Ethical Theory of John Duns Scotus: A Dialogue with Medieval and Modern Thought* (St. Bonaventure: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2013): 49.

[69] Suarez states, ". . . the whole basis of good and evil in matters pertaining to the law of nature is in God's will, and not in a judgment or reason, even on the part of God Himself." Francisco Suarez, "A Treatise on Laws and God the Lawgiver," *Selections from Three Works of Francisco Suarez*, Thomas Pink, ed. (Carmel: Liberty Fund, 2019): 210.

[70] Scotus insisted that "none of God's knowledge is caused by anything external to himself." Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 48. Nevertheless, other Medievals, such as Henry of Ghent do make God's intellect passive, entailing that divine knowledge can be caused by things external to God (ibid., 50-51).

[71] Smith, *Speech*, 7.

concepts to the Other. Then the Other appears as an experience, but in a way that the Other no longer recognizes itself. The agent here is the Same, the self, the unified, monarchial subject. This is the violence that appropriately concerns both Levinas and Marion.

In contrast, Smith places agency – in this case, but not consistently in every case – with the phenomenon rather than the subject. The phenomenon, says Smith, has a 'right to appear' as well as a 'right to privacy.' When the phenomenon is forced to give up its transcendence in order to appear, then the phenomenon is subjected to violence. We might consider it to be a mode of exploitation, though Smith does not use that word. Here we encounter a fundamental source of misunderstanding between Smith and Levinas. Smith's semiology turns out to be a recognition that our hermeneutical totality does not encompass the fullness of the Other, which is of course true. But is that enough to preserve transcendence and to protect against metaphysical violence? That is the question. In contrast to Smith, Levinas, argues that the Other has the capacity to call the Same beyond its enclosed hermeneutical totality through its questioning and critique of the Same's reductive interpretation of the Other. Smith and Levinas are making wildly different claims, phenomenologically and hermeneutically speaking.

It is because Smith is still working from a modern, liberal-economic model that he can speak of transcendence in this giving-withholding structure or rhythm. He must emphasize the primacy of the will and of phenomenal rights to do so. Isolated subjects/objects have rights to their private property, foremost of which is the appearance of their own physical bodies. There is an epistemological consequence for Smith's position. We can never know anything with certainty, which is the consequence of modernity generally. Smith accepts this consequence by arguing that pluralism is God's intention for creation. Consequently, the quest for certainty yields conceptual violence, which is the nature of epistemological imperialism. Smith's decision

is to embrace skepticism by displacing concepts with signs or icons. 'Concepts' only formally indicate their referent.

That said, when Smith goes on to claim that "God reduces himself to the sphere of immanence," that is a different claim altogether.[72] Smith insists that God *must* appear in a way finite being can receive God by validating finite being where and as it is, without obligation to deny one's finite self. And even though God must appear this way, it is still God's *choice,* Smith says, to condescend to appear "under finite conditions."[73] Presumably, God is happy to do it. But if this position yields the type of epistemological colonialism or imperialism that Levinas claims, then can Smith's position differ significantly from the colonial British or Americans claiming that Africans are happy as slaves? Is Smith's position more than a scandalously weak justification for theological exploitation? Is kenotic self-giving the same as enforced reduction? Imperialism, colonialism, and exploitation are the necessary outcomes of classical liberalism.

Choice is the justifying apparatus par excellence of modernity. *Choice,* linked fundamentally to the economic liberalism of rights and private property, which are the mechanisms of imperialistic violence.

1.2.2 The Semiological Turn

Perhaps having an intuition that he has gone too far, or perhaps forgetting that he has gone too far, Smith pulls back from his strong language of divine reduction above. The incarnation becomes, for Smith, "a mode of manifestation that both makes God present to the

[72] *Ibid.*, 59. Smith argues that in Kierkegaard's work with the Learner's Paradox, the giving of God is "an *incarnational* giving. The Wholly Other (the god, the Unknown) appears *within* immanence, condescends to finitude. Why? Because it (i.e. finitude) is the condition of possibility for the self to know the Wholly Other. The Other must show up in terms which the self can understand, which are finite. God reduces *himself* to the sphere of immanence" (*Ibid.*).

[73] *Ibid.*, 61, fn. 60.

immanence of human perception but also retains the transcendence of the Wholly Other. In short, it is a *nonreductive* manifestation."[74] Setting aside the textual contradiction, the context of this quotation is linguistic rather than metaphysical or epistemological as was the case above. The incarnation and the *semiological* logic that Smith builds around it becomes the model not just for God's revelation but for *comment ne pas parler* – how (not) to speak – of what is beyond language. We might note that Smith seems to conceptualize transcendence as a fusion of presence and absence. Something is not present to the gaze or to the interpretation. Something is held in reserve, perhaps left up to the imagination. It seems almost teasingly erotic.[75] The dialectic of presence/absence is the logic of the sign, which arguably supports Smith's logic of incarnation more than the incarnation itself does.

As Smith develops this position, he retreats from phenomenology to what he calls the *proto-phenomenology* of Augustine's semiology, read through a Derridean lens. Through semiology he finally overcomes the incommensurability between finite and the infinite in the incarnation. In other words, he turns the phenomenon of Jesus of Nazareth into a sign pointing to the eternal, transcendent (noumenal?) Son. However, because a sign is incomplete without its

[74] *Ibid*., 219. Emphasis added.

[75] While much has been made of the erotic or desire within the past generation of scholarship, perhaps culminating in Marion's *Erotic Phenomenon*, we might have reasons to be wary of such moves. Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, Stephen E. Lewis, trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). Looking back on the origins of modern philosophy and science, we find traces of a sexualized violence turned outward towards nature and the Other. We can recall Descartes' ball of wax that has to be distinguished "from its outward forms – take the clothes off, as it were, and consider it naked." René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy with Selections from the Objections and Replies*, John Cottingham, trans. (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1986): 22. Likewise, "[Francis] Bacon often analogized the relationship of the inquirer to nature as that of a man to woman and used metaphors of seduction, unveiling, and force to describe the process of inquiry" (Dusek, *Philosophy of Technology*, p. 42). Certainly, Smith never gives any such suggestion of sexualized domination in his writings, but if Derrida is correct that context is everything, then this Western genealogy should perhaps raise suspicions about erotic motifs. Western thought, as a destruction of transcendence, has been a violent colonizing of what the Other keeps back or holds in reserve. The absence of the Other has proven no barrier against imperialistic violence. It is not clear how Smith imagines that would be different with God.

referent, Smith's incarnation becomes 'incomplete' in this semiological sense, which is what allows it to function analogically. Smith states:

> The Incarnation is precisely an immanent sign *of* transcendence – God appearing in the flesh. Thus it is a structure of both presence and absence: *present in the flesh, and yet referring beyond*, the Incarnation – as the *signum exemplum* – retains the structural incompleteness of the sign which is constitutive of language . . . Divinity, while it cannot be reduced to this body, is nevertheless infleshed [*sic*.] in it and thus signaling beyond itself. This is why the God-man is a *mediator* between divinity and humanity, finitude and the Infinite. This is also why, for Augustine, all signs function as mediators: they are precisely that which both appear and at the same time maintain what they refer to in their transcendence. By referring or pointing to what is other than themselves, signs make knowledge of transcendence possible.[76]

Presumably Smith would not want to say that the incarnation is theologically incomplete, in the sense that God is not fully present in the person of Jesus. Making that claim would put him at odds with Chalcedonian orthodoxy. Except, how can the incarnation be semiologically incomplete without being theologically incomplete? And Smith did actually say in the quotation above that the incarnation is theologically incomplete: "present in the flesh, and yet referring beyond." To what would the incarnation refer beyond itself? What is not present in the incarnation? In this context, Smith's language of a mediator begins to ring of Arianism.

In his pursuit of revelation, Smith wants the logic of the incarnation to be the means of overcoming Husserl's recognition that "one's consciousness [is] essentially inaccessible to another."[77] Smith states:

> But this is precisely where Augustine's incarnational account of language indicates the possibility of overcoming this incommensurability without erasing it. For in my words, I am able to bridge this chasm and make 'present' (in a weaker sense) my thoughts to another in a way which makes connection possible, but at the same time preserves the difference. It seems to be precisely a 'relation without relation' of which Levinas speaks, for the word is able to be *both* present *and* absent, appearing within the sphere of the

[76] Smith, *Speech*, 123. Emphasis added.

[77] *Ibid.*, 125.

> same without being reduced to the sphere of the same, presented to perception but maintaining its otherness.[78]

The reason that the incarnation is central to Smith's position is because of the divine presence in the finite human person Jesus. For Smith, then, language works in a manner analogous to the incarnation. The speaker remains present even while absent in speech. My consciousness becomes given, through the logic of the incarnation, in language. Everything depends on whether the incarnation is a semiological event with metaphysical status – the sign must make *present* the referent.[79] This incarnational logic then must be transferable to human language and communication through the semiological structure. If all of this happens, then Smith has a strong position. If not, then his position deflates rather quickly.

1.2.3 Formal Indication

In and of itself, a Christian philosophy of the incarnation makes possible the philosophy of language in Smith's argument. But another piece is needed: the 'concept.' When Augustine/Smith argue that nothing is learned through signs, Smith sees here the genesis of Martin Heidegger's formal indication: "Look: *sarabarae!*"[80] We indicate or point to what is to be

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[78] *Ibid.*

[79] Smith's position is challenging to discern because at times he uses ontological language of presence, as we see here. At other times he suggests a more modest "indication":

> This will be followed by an analysis of the strategy of "confession," considering the project of the *Confessions* and the way in which this shapes the constitution and employment of language as an incarnational medium which allows one to indirectly "indicate" the secret of the self, without disclosing the secret to the generalizing mechanisms of the "public." In short, in confession, one does (not) tell the secret (*Ibid.*, 116).

However, it is not yet clear that the modest notion of indication would still address Husserl's *essential* inaccessibility of the other's consciousness. It might indicate the essence of the other's consciousness without making that essence accessible. After all, we are not telling the secret. Yet, would that not apply to the ontological language of presence in the incarnation? Did Smith not insist on an absence that preserves the secret even within the incarnate presence?

[80] *Ibid.*, 119.

learned beyond language. A sign must be "*constituted* as a sign" for it to have meaning.[81] We have seen Smith's claim that a sign alone is structurally inadequate without the thing – the referent. This is the incommensurability between the sign and the thing, or, the thing is not the sign, or the sign "must be accompanied by the experience of the thing itself."[82] Of course, this presumes a certain commensurability at the heart of language, that the thing can house or clothe itself in the sign. This is the movement of incarnation – the Son taking on the form of the slave,[83] becoming sin for us.[84] Importantly, that was the movement of the Son. In terms of the movement of the disciples or the witnesses, it is the sign that puts on the thing – we clothe ourselves in the Christ.[85]

Interestingly, at points throughout the text, Smith attempts to pull away from the intellectualized knowledge of the Western traditions in favor of a more affective knowledge. These are the kinds of moves that make Smith such an interesting and inspiring thinker. Unfortunately, most of these comments and discussions occur in the footnotes, perhaps indicating that Smith is not yet fully confident in them or comfortable with them, almost as if he were indicating something that he cannot or will not quite grasp.[86] He repeatedly returns to Pascal's saying: "The heart has its reasons which reason itself does not know."[87] The question is how this affective quality of pretheoretical experience is taken up into Smith's 'concept,' his

[81] *Ibid.*

[82] *Ibid.*

[83] Phil. 2:7.

[84] 2 Cor. 5:21.

[85] Rom. 13:14.

[86] For example, see Smith, *Speech*, 105, fn. 6.

[87] Blaise Pascal, *Pensées and Other Writings*, Honor Levi, trans. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 158.

doctrine of revelation, or his logic of incarnation. Perhaps the closest that we get is Smith's work with Kierkegaard on the topic of indirect communication.

To a large extent, Smith views Heidegger's *Anziege formale* as an outcome of Kierkegaard's doctrine of indirect communication in the *Philosophical Fragments* and the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.[88] In the *Fragments*, Climacus argues that the contemporaries have no advantage over those who come historically later in time, except to "[attest] to the appearance of the god."[89] Historical contemporaneity becomes an occasion for faith for the contemporaries, while for later generations the reports, attestation, or testimony of the contemporaries becomes that occasion. Heidegger's *formal indication* and Kierkegaard's *attestation* both serve as a witness in an important sense.[90] They point to something beyond themselves.[91] In Climacus, the contemporary enjoys no advantage in terms of faith, but their witness is imperative for other generations. Further, the communication of the contemporary generation cannot be a direct communication, a communication, as it were, of the brute facts of history. This communication must be "in the form of faith."[92] Smith boils down this *form* of faith

[88] I will refer to Climacus as the pseudonymous author of the *Fragments* and *Postscript* from this point.

[89] Smith, *Speech*, 88.

[90] Witness and testimony have emerged as an important topic in recent epistemological work. For example, Steven L. Reynolds, *Knowledge as Acceptable Testimony* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

[91] Of course, we could hear Marion's icon here as well, which Smith notes (Smith, *Speech*, 92-4). Earlier Smith had noted "that the origin of all concepts may be 'iconic' or heuristic, but through sedimentation can also become idolatrous" (*Ibid.*, 13, fn. 10). But is not God *the* concept par excellence? Did not the concept of God recover the external, embodied world in Descartes' *Meditations*? Concepts and images are not functionally dissimilar. And, if God is a concept, if human beings construct images/concepts of God, can one make an idol even of God? The answer is self-evident, and I argue that when God stops speaking, God too becomes an idol. When the relation to God is mediated through vision or images (aka. concepts) rather than through discourse, as Levinas would say, then yes, God too can be an idol. As Nazarene theologian, Michael Lodahl, states, "Mental images of God can be just as idolatrous as metal images of God." Michael Lodahl, *The Story of God: Wesleyan Theology and Biblical Narrative* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1994): 109.

[92] Smith, *Speech*, 89. Soren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*, Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992): 103.

to the "heart of the matter" that "the god has been in human form."[93] Smith puts a lot of weight on these words of a humorist who rescinds what he has said at the end of the *Postscript*.[94] We should also recall that this pseudonym was named after a monk who taught that humans can ascend to heaven on their own power; notably at odds with St. Augustine.

Nevertheless, Smith seems to conceptualize the 'concept' to function like the contemporary who indicates or attests to the god through 'indirect communication.' Indirect communication is Climacus's way of maintaining the relationship between a person and the god. This relationship is the source of passion, inwardness, and truth as subjectivity. Smith focuses on the inwardness of the relationship as the 'essential secret,' which allows him to return to his question of *comment ne pas parler?*[95] The interiority of the god-relationship, which is an essential secret, must yet be communicated as it alone can become the occasion of faith for others.[96]

Smith seems to argue that Climacus is "produc[ing] an alternative form of communication - a non-objectifying language."[97] In my reading of Climacus, he is arguing that it is the journey, the how, the way, precisely as the mode of the relationship, that *is* indirect

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[93] Smith, *Speech*, 89. Soren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985): 104.

[94] Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 617-621.

[95] *Ibid.*, 79-80.

[96] It strikes me that there is a similarity here to John Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace. For Wesley, every human being in the state of mere nature is entirely dead to God. We have no agency in ourselves whatsoever to even twitch in God's direction. Yet Wesley insisted that God leaves no person in the state of mere nature, but rather the Holy Spirit comes to each person to quicken their spiritual senses so that they may begin to hear God's call and seek after God. See Runyon, *New Creation*, 27-42; Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994): 83-93. Wesley's empiricism is its own issue, but perhaps it is that same empiricism that we find haunting Smith's project.

[97] Smith, *Speech*, 91.

communication. What is important for Climacus is that the human person comes to find themselves standing before the god. In this standing, there is the ongoing, un-collapsible tension between the historical and the eternal. Consequently, it is the *fear* of God as opposed to a clearer conception of God that is at stake.[98] This standing-in-relation is the communication at the heart of Climacus's work. In a sense, one *might* argue anachronistically that Climacus established a new language game with rather specific rules. If that is the case, Smith cannot simply apply the rules of a specific language game ubiquitously or universally beyond that specific context. One must stand in the context of the game for the rules – the grammar – to apply. Consequently, while Smith is clearly trying to establish a non-objectifying language, it does not seem that this was Climacus's or Kierkegaard's project.

All of that may be moot, because at this point in the text, Smith turns to Heidegger in order to note that "for Heidegger, not only the God-relation, but facticity itself is characterized by this radical singularity which is incommensurate with its articulation in language."[99] Climacus becomes an occasion to relate to Heidegger, or more specifically, the young Heidegger of pre-*Being and Time*. Smith describes Heidegger's formal indication:

> as a way of pointing to phenomena and at the same time allowing them to maintain their otherness and alterity in facticity. Thus the concepts forged in the early Freiburg period are attempts to signal or indicate phenomena and structures of factical life without de-worlding them—that is, without wresting them from the flux of lived experience in order to become dead specimens of objective theoretical thought."[100]

Whereas Climacus was struggling with how to communicate an essential secret, something interior to the person, Smith argues that Heidegger is using formal indication to communicate

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[98] Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 544.

[99] Smith, *Speech*, 91.

[100] James K. A. Smith, "Alterity, Transcendence, and the Violence of the Concept: Kierkegaard and Heidegger." *International Philosophical Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (1998): 371.

something exterior. Heidegger is arguing that even historical, objective truth cannot be so directly communicated. There is incommensurability between "factical, pre-theoretical experience" and "theoretical thought."[101] Therefore, in both the interior and the exterior, something transcends language as a mode of communication.[102]

Importantly, Smith is drawing a parallel between 'communication' in Climacus and 'language' in Heidegger. As we know from Ludwig Wittgenstein, communication is broader than formal grammar and language. What connects language and communication for Smith seems to be structures of semiology, which also exceeds the capacity of language. Smith sees semiology as the answer to the question of how to communicate what is outside of language, though he does not clarify his position in such succinct terms.

In terms of revelation, the role of semiological structures raises questions about the how versus the what of revelation. This distinction between the *how* and the *what* was important for both Climacus and Heidegger. The iconic nature of the Heideggerian formal indication resists, to some degree, any notion that revelation can produce content just as much as does Climacus's indirect communication. What content would we take from an arrow pointing beyond itself (to return to the central semiological issue)? If the 'arrow' is equatable with revelation, then in terms of the *what*, we would end up in a Derridean situation the impossibility of revelation and of 'the revelation to come.' It is always deferred. But this does not seem to be what Smith has in mind.

> The reception of the Scriptures as the Word of God—and the reception of them as *binding* upon faith, thought, and practice—is thus directly linked to their ability to communicate to us God's will for his covenant people. Authority, then, is linked to

[101] *Ibid.*, 376-77.

[102] *Ibid.*, 372.

> *authorship* and, more specifically, to the *communication* of the Author's will (intention) to the community.[103]

Revelation includes content or the *what* for Smith, at least in terms of the *what* of God's will and intentions. Can we reduce divine will and intention to the interiority of a personal relationship occasioned semiologically? Yes, but can we do so when the revelation of that will and intention authorizes Scripture as the Word of God? At that point, have we not moved out of the realm of Climacus's interior passion and into the realm of the universal? Have we not reduced the pre-theoretical to the theoretical? Much depends on what Smith means by revelation, will, intention, and authorization.

In one of his early articles, Smith conceives of the concept as formal indication "questioned and putting into question."[104] On one hand, the concept of God's will and intention, as a formal indication would function to continuously question and put into question what it means for the Scriptures to be the written word of God. Revelation would function to disrupt the conservation of content and doctrine. Revelation would open or clear a conceptual and existential space for the advent of God, in this sense. No formal content would be provided, but rather an occasion expedited by questioning and being put into question. In another early publication, Smith says that "the truth is in (the) pointing."[105] The open question for Smith is how God is present in the pointing. Is anything more revealed than the occasion of truth, which may or may not amount to a moment of decision?

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[103] Smith, *Fall*, 200. Emphasis original.

[104] Smith, "Alterity," 378.

[105] James K. A. Smith, "How to Avoid Not Speaking: Attestations," in *Knowing Other-Wise: Philosophy at the Threshold of Spirituality*, James H. Olthuis, ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997): 229.

1.2.4 Conclusion

Smith wants to maintain that his logic of incarnation is the logic of analogy. It is the logic of Aquinas, and sometimes that of Husserl. But before it is the logic of analogy, it seems to be the logic of semiology. God is both present and absent in Smith's metaphor of the incarnation just as God is present and absent in human analogical language. How is it that God is present and absent in analogical language moves us to the third condition for the possibility of revelation, which is a reverse ontological participation.

1.3 Disclosure or What is Revealed?

Once the conditions and mechanisms of revelation are established, what happens in revelation? While Smith's doctrine of revelation includes a personal element – the revelation of a person – his insistence on the overcoming of conceptual violence and incommensurability suggest that Smith is primarily interested in some type of content of revelation, in contrast to a relationship or an ethic. Revelation has to be received according to the mode of the receiver.[106] Human beings who receive this revelation have to be able to speak of it in a meaningful way. These are Smith's consistent concerns, and they drive his project.

1.3.1 The Ontology of Revelation

Smith's revelation is ontological, with some epistemological and linguistic ramifications. One of the challenges that Smith does not seem to recognize is that he is using ontological properties of presence and absence in order to address epistemic and linguistic questions. His theological concerns for Gnosticism also lead him in an ontological direction. In itself, that may not be problematic. There is certainly a close relationship between ontology and epistemology.

[106] Smith, *Speech*, 159.

The problem arises when these categories are mixed uncritically, with the category of language thrown in for added complexity. Smith was asking how God can be known by revelation, an epistemological question. He was asking how finite beings can then speak of the God known by revelation, a question of language. Despite his declaration that "I do not mean to disclose an ontology which will function as a 'corrective' to theology," he seems to do just that.[107] His solution is highly ontological. In the incarnation, God is non-reductively present and absent. It is not clear how this ontological answer truly moves the epistemological and linguistic conversations forward, that is, unless Smith is proposing that theology's native language is the metaphysics of participatory ontology, of hierarchy, and of presence. Is that where theology finds its voice and ceases to speak in tongues? Is this God's language, as it were – the language of Plato and Augustine and John Milbank? In that case, we would expect to find some version of epistemological recollection or illumination. We might even expect the issue of language to disappear altogether, except perhaps as expression or representation. Is that what happens?

In some respects, language takes the place of Platonic recollection and Augustinian illumination in Smith's project. He says that "*language* plays a crucial role in maintaining a relationship with the other . . . and respects its transcendence."[108] In Plato, the immortal, reincarnated soul recollects what it has already known. In Augustine, the Holy Spirit illumines the mind. In Smith, it is language, reduced to semiology, that connects the human intellect to the transcendent.

[107] *Ibid.*, 155.

[108] *Ibid.*, 30. Emphasis original.

In light of this role of language, Smith conceptualizes revelation as *aleitheia* – as the truth of disclosure.[109] Revelation must "take place in terms that the ego can understand."[110] He gives the example of a friend writing a note to him in Japanese. Because he does not know Japanese, the note remains a secret. He lacks the condition necessary to receive the revelation. Likewise, God must show up in a way that we can receive God.[111] Smith insists that his position is not reducible to the egological violence as Levinas contests. The ego does not dominate God just because God shows up in a way that the ego can understand.[112] Further, the Other gives itself freely, not under conditions of exploitation. Finally, this revelation does not reduce transcendence to finitude because there is a remainder that is withheld in revelation. We have addressed these assertions already in this chapter.

1.3.2 Language of Faith

The question again is, "What does revelation reveal?" Smith's answer to that question perhaps comes in the form of his own question, which he poses to Levinas: "But if knowledge is relegated to immanence – to comprehension and conceptualization – can transcendence or alterity be 'intelligible'? Would transcendence be something we could 'know'"?[113] His question

[109] The Greek language, particularly the Koine Greek of the New Testament, already has a word for revelation, *apokalypsis*. It seems clear that Smith is following Heidegger at this point.

[110] *Ibid.,* 159.

[111] The example of a Japanese translation is an equivocation when it comes to putting something into words that transcends language. While no translation from one language to another is perfect in that there are nuances and subtleties of one language lost to another, that loss is surely not on par with the infinite entering into finitude. To suggest that God must take into account our finitude is surely descriptive rather than prescriptive, except that Smith's allergy to Gnosticism requires him to assert that the fault is not in the capacity of finitude.

[112] *Ibid.*, 160. Arguably, this is true until we then inquire how we can put God's revelation into words. Once language is introduced, so is violence. Additionally, God's revelation is not salvific so long as it is understandable within the limitations of the ego.

[113] *Ibid.,* 31.

suggests that revelation reveals epistemic content and that intelligibility maps onto knowledge without remainder. Smith claims that revelation reveals a secret. The mode of revelation is incarnational – God condescends to meet us where we are. In that mode, God reveals what has been unknown, thereby making it known. The knowledge of revelation, however, is the knowledge of faith rather than comprehension, he claims.[114] The knowledge of faith is born from the 'concept,' which does not attempt to grasp or possess what is known.

In a footnote on Marion's review of the ontological argument, Smith notes that "the very condition of Anselm's 'speculation' is faith."[115] At stake is whether we understand faith to be a set of propositions or a condition of 'believing without evidence' or a mode of rationality itself or whether we consider faith to be a mode of relation: faithfulness or loyalty, themes that are prominent in the Greek *pistis*.[116] Smith, to my knowledge, does not clarify his concept/'concept' of faith in any of his writings.[117] That said, he often uses it as an alternative to philosophical reason, which leads the reader to perceive it as a non-rational cognition. But what kind of non-rational cognition? Smith's lack of clarity around this topic is a limitation of his project. However, if we conceptualize faith as faithfulness or loyalty – a relational concept – then faith acquires a non-cognitive, non-predicative, affective epistemological capacity. Faith is a commitment, in this sense, to the Other – both to the divine and to the non-divine Other. We

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[114] *Ibid.*, 163.

[115] *Ibid.*, 111, fn. 100.

[116] Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*, Kittel, Gerhard and Friedrich, Gerhard, eds. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1985): 1454. According to Bromiley, *pistis* means primarily faithfulness and then religious trust before then meaning faith. In Judaism, faith carried a connotation of trusting obedience, with an emphasis often on 'obedience' (1462). The notion of belief derives from the root, *pist*. Arguably belief is necessary for trust or faithfulness, just as belief is necessary for knowledge. However, neither faithfulness nor knowledge can collapse back into belief alone - fideism.

[117] The need to clarify the concept of faith leads to another issue in Smith's writing about whether there is a legitimate need for the content of concepts. Can we merely 'point to' faith? Or is the 'concept' that Smith is establishing only for that which is exterior to language, namely, God or human others?

might call it an ethical obligation to the Other. It seems justified, therefore, to conceptualize faith as faithfulness, trust, or loyalty given the coherence that we gain within Smith's overall project.

Coming back to Climacus, and this argument is tricky due to the layers of pseudonymous work, faith seems to affect a personal, subjective connection with the god. This personal element of faith is why historical contemporaneity contributes no privilege in the *Postscript*. If we were dealing with the content of revelation, one would expect that the nearer one is to the source the more certain one could be of the reliability and truth of that content. But if we are dealing with something other than content, if we are dealing with a person or if we are working within an affective or, perhaps, a social epistemology, then the relation takes a certain primacy over content. Of course, it is not the case that content is irrelevant. We must know *things* about those with whom we have relations. But in another sense, *things* never deliver unto us the relationship. Therefore, while *content* accompanies the relationship and might even be the occasion of the relationship, it never delivers the relationship.

Let us return to Smith's claim that the "knowledge" of revelation is more in the nature of faith than comprehension.[118] Smith uses scare quotes here, perhaps to indicate that knowledge is, after all, still about something epistemic. For Smith, this non-knowledge-oriented relation becomes a relation of revelation, which is to say, of knowledge. It is not my intention to explicate Climacus's position here, let alone Kierkegaard's. I am largely relying on Smith's own reading of the *Fragments* and his response to those readings. Smith emphasizes the god's condescension to become the lowest possible human so that he would be above no human being. Rather than seeing this as an example of relational passion and love, Smith sees this as the

[118] Smith, *Speech*, 163.

structure of analogy within a participatory ontology. Ontological analogy alone allows the transcendent to reach down to the conditions of the receiver without ceasing to be transcendent[119]

At this point, Smith is able to state confidently, "Analogy is an incarnational account of knowledge."[120] Note the absence of the scare quotes used previously. Also, at this point, Smith is declaring this position to be Thomistic, despite the fact that Aquinas has not been referenced meaningfully in the text up to this point.[121] However, Smith notes that Husserl appealed to the structures of analogy in his Fifth Meditation. Smith's reference to Husserl's own 'reliance' on Aquinas raises the question of whether all of this work has really been a justification of Husserlian phenomenology from the beginning.

1.3.3 The How and the What of Revelation

In his work with Heidegger, and occasionally elsewhere, Smith emphasizes the *how* over the *what* of revelation, but this emphasis is not consistent throughout his project. Mostly in the first half of the text, Smith will ask Derrida's question: *Comment ne pas parler?* The question is *how not to speak*. But then Smith tweaks the question to become:

> How will it be possible to 'put into words' that which exceeds language? How will a phenomenology of the natural attitude (factical life) avoid the theoreticization which accompanied Husserl's project?[122]

[119] *Ibid.*, 164.

[120] *Ibid.*

[121] Smith's engagement with Aquinas reintroduces a topic that emerged early in Smith's work, the distinction between knowledge and comprehension. This is an important distinction that deserves and requires more sustained attention. Aquinas, working out of a participatory ontology, could make this meaningful distinction. If, however, we model reality otherwise than a participatory ontology, can we continue to make this distinction between knowledge and comprehension? Put otherwise, does the distinction between knowledge and comprehension require particular metaphysical commitments? As we have seen, the answer is Yes.

[122] *Ibid.*, 84.

First, this is not the same question as Derrida asked. Second, here in this quote, we find Smith's ultimate question, the telos and goal of his larger project. Here the emphasis is not quite on the *how* but has shifted to "put[ting] into *words*" – conveying the content, the *what*. This too is an area where Smith tends to slip back and forth between competing emphases throughout his project.

When the question is on the *how*, it is possible to begin to imagine the possibility of a new economy or a new model of meaning. When the question is on the *what* or the content of speech, the content of revelation, the theoretical meaning of what is communicated, then the dominant economy or the dominant metaphysical model of a culture is normally assumed. In assuming such a model, we duplicate the imperialism and violence inherent to that model. In a contemporary North American context, the economy (which is the dominant model of meaning in that context), is the origin of the grammar that allows the content to become meaningful. Focusing on the *how* can bring both grammar and its metaphysical source into critical focus – revelation, if you will. Focusing on the *what* usually uncritically assumes the dominant grammar, allowing that grammar once more to become invisible. We lose revelation at that point. To Smith's point, if we speak, we say *something*. There is *always* content. My concern is keeping a clearer distinction between the *how* and the *what*. That there is content does not necessitate its primacy. Perhaps more important is the underlying model of meaning.

When Smith remains focused on the *how*, he couches it in the structure of the 'concept' itself. This identification of the *how* with the tool – with the 'concept' – rather than the agent of meaning is one of my biggest concerns with Smith's project. For Smith, the 'concept' cannot be conceptual, which is to say, it must avoid grasping.[123] To avoid grasping, the 'concept' will

[123] *Ibid.*

formally indicate its referent, in an iconic manner. Does the 'concept' itself resist grasping or is it the agent using the concept that would grasp or resist grasping? If the agent is committed to grasping and 'concepts' disallow grasping, will the agent not simply reach for another tool that will grasp? Is the agent unable to utilize a tool in a manner the tool was not intended? It seems to me that the tool, the concept or the 'concept,' is necessarily at the mercy of the agent. The success of Smith's project requires that claim to be denied, but it is a denial implicitly assumed in his project rather than one he explicitly addresses. Consequently, this denial of the agent's agency over the 'concept' is implausible.

We find Smith's commitment to content in his conceptualization of revelation in terms of the Meno Paradox.[124] Smith relies heavily on Climacus's *Fragments* to resolve the Meno Paradox of how we can learn what is unknown. The god must create the condition for learning. Importantly, Smith notes that the relation between the learner and the god must be one of equality. However, where for Climacus, that equality is necessitated by the relationship, for Smith, it becomes a basis of analogy. This is one of several innovations that Smith layers on top of Climacus's position, already himself, as we recall, a pseudonymous persona.

If Smith were disinterested in the epistemic content of revelation, it is hard to see how he would object to Levinas and Marion. It is precisely the 'absolute' and 'unconditioned' nature of revelation in the French thinkers that raises Smith's ire. In his words, Levinas and Marion "preclude the very possibility of revelation."[125] Smith nowhere objects to the intersubjectivity in Levinas. Smith does not suggest that there cannot be a relation to the Other. However, Levinas is

[124] *Ibid.*, 161.

[125] *Ibid.*, 156.

highly critical of revelation as disclosure.[126] Levinas is here differentiating between the content of revelation, i.e., disclosure, and a content-marginalized, ethical revelation, which is the ethical relation to the Other. The ethical relation – the *how* – is the mode of Levinasian revelation and stands in contrast to the *what* of epistemic content in Smith. Revelation, in Levinas, reveals ethical, relational obligations or commands, which call the Same beyond the limitations of its own horizon of meaning.[127] Any revealed content is penultimate in nature to that ethical obligation. It seems that when Smith objects to Levinas, he is objecting to the way that Levinas's marginalizes the penultimate, dogmatic content of revelation.

Smith is concerned with an epistemic and an ontological relation. Levinas is concerned with an ethical relation beyond or prior to knowledge and being, to which we commit (or are already committed) before we know the demands.

Is it possible that Smith and Levinas are speaking past one another? After all, it is not the case that Levinas disagrees that finitude is the condition for receiving the Other. Levinas goes to great pains in his metaphor of atheism to insist on this point. Levinas's argument is that so long as revelation leaves us there, in our atheism, we remain trapped in the totality of the Same, without the possibility of escape. Arguably, while Smith is trying to save God from conceptual or metaphysical violence, Levinas is intent to save the Same. It is we, the Same, who require escape. It is the Same who requires salvation from itself. Here Levinas seems more faithful to the incarnation than does Smith.

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[126] Levinas, *Totality*, 65-6.

[127] Of course, one would rightly argue that an obligation must be understandable and capable of linguistic contextualization. I think that such simple arguments miss the point of the more radical difference between Levinas and Smith's doctrines of revelation. The point is not to eliminate content but to *place* content. A more important concern is the possibility of that obligation to be corrupted for personal gain, the possibility of the ethical obligation becoming an idol.

1.4 Critique

Before concluding the chapter, I will offer three critiques of Smith's concept of revelation that are relevant to this dissertation. The first relates to his deployment of the incarnation. The second relates to the situation of language within larger economic contexts. The third relates to the potential for theological colonialism in Smith's project.

1.4.1 Misuse of the Incarnation

Phenomenologically, there is a problem with Smith's methodology. Is the incarnation, which is at the heart of Smith's entire project, a phenomenon that is experienced as any phenomenon? Is a doctrine that has been worked over by councils and theologians for hundreds and hundreds of years, is that an immediate phenomenon like any phenomenon, given to human experience? No doubt Jesus of Nazareth was an historical person who was experienced by other people. That is a different kind of claim from the doctrinal, dogmatic, and confessional claim related to the incarnation. That is to say, the incarnation only becomes a phenomenon after it is ecclesiologically interpreted as such. In a provocative way, without the Church there is no incarnation. In that sense, I will argue later that, in fact, the Church is a condition necessary for the possibility of revelation.

Theologically, there is another problem. When the incarnation is utilized in service to a liberal, economic agenda to empower the liberty of the Same, then the incarnation itself has been betrayed. The incarnation must be *comprehended,* rather than known, *for it to be utilized economically and liberally*, for it to become a methodology. Smith has comprehended the incarnation by reading it reductively through the context of signs and referents and by bracketing

all explicit christological content.[128] This subversion of the incarnation is precisely what is entailed by 'conceptual violence' – a utilization of the concept, which is always already in service to another end. Concepts are never ends in themselves. In other words, it is not the impossibility of the sign that is at stake. *It is the impossibility of the sign to escape systemic and structural violence that is at stake.* As has been said, there are no innocent words. Certainly, *the* Word is no exception, if the history of Christianity and Western civilization is anything to go by.

1.4.2 Language and the Nonviolent Concept

Smith's project is committed to the ethics of the concept. He wants a non-violent 'concept,' and he argues that non-violence is equated to non-predication. However, across a variety of disciplines in the twentieth century we are repeatedly shown that violence is housed in structures and systems, the very systems that give rise to language and meaning. There is an economy of language and signs – systems of signification.[129] Levinas recognizes something like this when he says that "language, far from presupposing universality and generality, first makes them possible."[130] Language imposes a heteronomy upon speakers, which allows for universality and generality – at least, in its expressive function, which seems to be the function that Smith is interested in. In this expressivist, generalist case, things "disappear beneath their form."[131] Ultimately, Levinas claims, that:

> language is universal because it is the very passage from the individual to the general, because it offers things which are mine to the Other. To speak is to make the world

[128] Smith, *Speech*, 10.

[129] For example, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson, trans. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

[130] Levinas, *Totality*, 73.

[131] *Ibid.*, 74.

> common, to create commonplaces. Language does not refer to the generality of concepts, but lays the foundations for a possession in common.[132]

Importantly, it is the direction from the Same outward that establishes the power dynamics and economics of language, making universal claims based on subjective, particular experiences. Smith's silence on the economy of language and signs is startling. Yet, when Augustine prayed for 'mercy' due to the incapacity of language,[133] we today can sympathize with this prayer: "Lord, have mercy due to the economic exploitation at the heart of our language."

Augustine is concerned with what can be learned with(out) signs.[134] What if only 'worldly' or 'fleshly' things could be learned within the system of signs that is language? Is this not similar to Husserl's phenomenological claim in the *Ideas*?[135] What if only economic things can be learned within this system? What if transcendent things, like justice or love or hospitality, required another linguistic mode beyond a system of signs and referents? In such a case, it would

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[132] *Ibid.*, 76

[133] "Have mercy so that I may find words." Augustine, *Confessions*, Henry Chadwick, trans. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998): 5.

[134] In the dialog, Augustine says to Adeodatus, ". . . you have explained words by means of words. That is to say, you have explained signs by means of signs and familiar things by the same familiar things." Augustine, *Against the Academicians and The Teacher*, Peter King, trans. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1995): 99. Adeodatus later says, "I admit that sound, smell, flavor, weight, heat, and other things that pertain to the rest of the senses, despite the fact that they can't be sensed without bodies and consequently are corporeal, nevertheless can't be exhibited through [pointing] a finger" (*Ibid.*, 100). Augustine responds by reminding Adeodatus how deaf people and pantomimes communicate so effectively with hand gestures. Augustine says that the pantomime is so good that " he . . . won't indicate a word with a word. He'll nonetheless still indicate a sign with a sign" (*Ibid.*, 101). As Augustine continues to explore the role of signs and indications in communication, he fails to note the cultural genealogies of gestures and finger arrangements themselves. When pointing at an object, it is culture that tells us what the finger arrangement indicates. In Japanese martial arts, complex finger arrangements are made to channel energy: mudras. When I point at an apple, what is to say that I am not trying to channel my energy toward the apple or the apple's energy to me? Why am I not communicating with the spirit of the apple? Or why follow the direction of my finger toward the apple rather than backwards towards me? After all, three other fingers on my hand are pointing back to me whenever I point at an object. In part, this was Wittgenstein's point about language games. The rules of the game determine meaning in a context. Gestures are not transferable between games; not if their meaning is to be preserved.

[135] While I sympathize more with the 'new phenomenologists' on this topic, Smith has clearly aligned himself with Husserl throughout ST. He has not sufficiently addressed Husserl's mandate that phenomenology bracket God.

not be the incompleteness of the sign pointing beyond itself that yielded the transcendent. That incompleteness would be only another mode of power relations.

Smith, like many great thinkers, notes that Augustine frets over the incapacity of language to express what Augustine wants to say.[136] This leads me to wonder, why must language be the means of praising God and communicating God? Why can justice or ethics not do these things? If the Psalms talk about the heavens and earth declaring God's glory, what makes us think that human language is the paramount mode of praise? If Ludwig Wittgenstein recognized that communication encompassed more than just language, why has Smith not recognized that? Yet Smith, and presumably Augustine, are committed to a linguistic mode of praise, which is reasonable, even if giving primacy to such a mode is perhaps more questionable.

Against this backdrop, it is not surprising to find Augustine praying: "Have mercy so that I may find words."[137] So many of the ancient and early modern writers began their writings like this or came to this point in their writings. One thinks of Anselm alongside Augustine.[138] What if this prayer was more than just empty piety? What if this prayer expressed the truth of the structure of knowledge and communication – that knowledge comes from mercy and grace? What if the 'mercy' were *precisely* the incapacity of words? What if 'mercy' was the excess of transcendence that called us beyond ourselves and our words? That caused us to recognize our

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[136] Smith, *Speech*, 114.

[137] Augustine, *Confessions*, 5.

[138] "Let me discern Your light whether it be from afar or from the depths. Teach me to seek You, and reveal Yourself to me as I seek, because I can neither seek You if you do not teach me how, nor find You unless You reveal Yourself." Anselm, *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, Brian Davies and G. R. Evans, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998): 86.

As he begins his *Confessions*, Augustine quotes from the Psalms: "Grant me Lord, to know and understand (Ps. 118:34, 37, 73, 144) . . ." (Augustine, *Confessions*, 3).

cognitive-linguistic, even our tribal, inadequacies? That called us to something higher – humility, love, justice, and responsibility for the Other?

1.4.3 Theological Colonialism

Musings aside, Smith finds in Augustinian accounts of praise a non-objectifying, non-predicative language about God.[139] Smith again returns to the point that it is not the *what*, but the *how*, that matters. But if language is more than semiology, if it is economic in nature, then there may end up being nothing about praise that protects it from corruption.[140] Anecdotally, I have attended Christian worship services that praise God for how much God loves us and has sacrificed for us. That message is biblical and true,[141] but the consistent and seemingly exclusive emphasis on that message across many weeks creates another possible message capable of shaping the experiential horizon of the congregants: God worships us. This message drives a good portion of Evangelical America. God loves us so much and would do anything for us, even to the extent of sacrificing God's only beloved Son to a torturous death. Could God possibly love *us* anymore? We are *that* special to God. *You* are that special to God![142] We come to think that we deserve this love, that it is our right. In fact, it starts to seem that God's life revolves around us, almost as if God worships us, perhaps the ultimate colonialization – theological colonization.

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[139] Smith, *Speech*, 128-29.

[140] In regards to praise and worship, Karl Barth reminds us that "even public worship as the center of the life of the community is at every point a human action . . . Hence the whole occurrence is not protected from misunderstanding and abuse." Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, vol. 4, part 2, *Church Dogmatics*, G. W. Bromiley, trans. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958): 709.

[141] We have only to consider John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." Is it coincidental that this verse is probably the most well-known verse in the Bible among Americans? It affirms *us*.

[142] This is certainly a liberating message for the oppressed, but in the context of the empowered and wealthy it merely becomes another mode of self-affirmation and theological colonialization. After all, if God is willing to sacrifice God's own Son to a torturous death *for us*, why not brown and black people too?

There is always a message behind any sign, indicator, or icon. There is always content. And that is why the *how* must be considered the source of ultimate meaning because it is the origin of the message that is received and heard and ultimately shapes our pretheoretical expectations for daily life. There is always content, but the *how* must be the interpretive and authorizing source of the *what*.

My argument here is that even the icon can be betrayed when the direction it points is co-opted or subverted. The Bible, perhaps the most mainstream icon in the West, can be subverted to point to racial, cultural, and economic imperialism rather than gracious redemption. Jürgen Moltmann had previously made the point that the cross itself has been idolized across Christian and Western history.[143] Icons are not impervious to idolatry no matter how sacred they may be. This fact reiterates that what is at stake is the *how* rather than the *what*. And while Smith may focus on the young Heidegger, Heidegger's concern for the *how* above the *what* was a consistent theme across his lengthy career.

1.5 Conclusion

In his 2021 book, *The Nicene Option* (NO), Smith touches again on the theme of Gnosticism, but at that point he links it to the Kantian binary of noumena and phenomena. This is interesting, because it is not clear that humanity would feel a need for the ontological capacity to receive revelation prior to Kant's 'Copernican' revolution, at which point phenomena and noumena were forever cleaved.[144] To this extent, Smith's project can perhaps be viewed as an

[143] "We have become far too used to [the cross]. We have surrounded the scandal of the cross with roses. We have made a theory of salvation out of it. But that is not the cross." Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, Translated by R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993): 36.

[144] Perhaps John Locke's assertion of primary and secondary qualities would have still created difficulties, but not on par with Kant.

attempt to overcome Kant. Smith uses the language of embodied particularity in order to 'redeem' the phenomena, as it were.[145] Presumably that redemption would be ontological such that the phenomena would no longer be lacking anything found in the noumena. To that end, he returns to the incarnation. As the title suggests, Smith wants to claim that the great councils "[affirmed] that humanity and divinity are not mutually exclusive."[146] In some sense, that is precisely what the creeds say, but they also recognize the logical and existential contradictions that this claim makes. The creeds recognize the mystery of incarnation in the juxtaposition to exclusive ontological language.[147] Importantly, Smith's work in NO shows that his later writings remain consistent with his early works in regard to his views on Gnosticism and incarnational logic.

Smith's project is important, but his primary turn towards a philosophical and theological model based in a participatory ontology causes him to fall short of his goal. His rejection of sources that might move beyond a participatory ontology cause him to fall short of his goal, sources such as Levinas and Marion. The complexity of his project, working with so many moving parts, raising and addressing so many different questions, and his inability to keep them all clear in his writing creates great difficulty for him and his reader. It is this set of commitments

[145] "For those with any theological sensibility, this move by Derrida to eschew particularity and embodiment and point to a 'pure' ideal has the feel of a Gnostic aspiration . . . The pattern that emerges is what I call [Derrida's] 'logic of determination' that sees particularly and embodiment as inherently violent, faulting creatures for being finite." James K. A. Smith, *The Nicene Option: An Incarnational Phenomenology* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2021): 4.

[146] Ibid., 6.

[147] It is one thing to assert that "the divinity of the Son was not 'violated' or 'contaminated' by becoming flesh," and another thing to say that the creeds affirm "the goodness of finitude and particularity," as if what was assumed did not need to be saved (*Ibid.*).

and complexity that seems to drive his strange rejection of Levinas. Had he read Levinas (or Marion) more charitably, perhaps he would find therein other options – more gracious options.

Smith deals with modernity by trying to retreat from it, but he continues to leave the (modern) human subject at the center of the drama of communication and knowledge. What would happen, instead, if the self was not empowered to choose but instead was put under an obligation so that our only alternative to responsibility is to kill the Other; to kill God, perhaps by placing our own liberty of choice at the heart of salvation because our own epistemic labor is at the heart of revelation and communication. What if knowledge is by grace through faithfulness and not by works? What would that look like?

The entire Christian doctrine of the incarnation insists that in the person of Jesus, the Word of God, we find the fullness of God and the fullness of the human being. God is conveyed in the Christ. Or is this interpretation of the incarnation too simplistic? In relation to Levinas's claim that things/referents cannot clothe themselves in the totality, how should we consider Paul's claim that the Son became sin for us, rejecting the form of God to take on the form of the slave? Paul's claim is that in doing so, the Son inverted the signs of the world (see Paul's deployment of cross language in 1 Cor. 1:4-3:9).[148] The Son does not communicate himself through the totality, but instead overcomes the totality in his excess. It turns out that Smith's logic of incarnation is too simplistic and cross-sectional. It takes a formal structure at a moment of time and ignores the surrounding narrative and power dynamics.

[148] "What is of greatest interest at this point is that Paul can characterize his message in a way that seems similar to the description of 'deconstruction' (in which weakness and strength change places) and to justice." Theodore Jennings Jr., *Reading Derrida/Thinking Paul: On Justice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006): 70. See also, Theodore Jennings Jr., *Transforming Atonement: A Political Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009): 150-158.

What if, instead, of trying to understand or to grasp or to know, we ourselves were understood, grasped, and known? What if this were the direction of theological, graced knowledge? What if this were the direction of revelation, and, consequently, of salvation?

Smith has passed off the violence of finitude onto the inadequacy of the sign. For Smith, it is not finitude that is found wanting, but the sign itself.[149] The sign needs the referent to complete it, perhaps much as nature needs grace? This is one of the areas where Smith seems either inconsistent or undisciplined. In what sense would it be problematic to suggest that finitude is incomplete without the eternal, much as the sign is incomplete without the referent? Why not turn all of finite being into a sign that indicates beyond itself?

And, what if the 'concept' did not try to clothe the thing itself but merely pointed to it? This indicative view of the 'concept' is more in line what Smith wants us to consider. The sign indicates. Could it be that is all the sign did? The sign is just an arrow pointing towards the thing, which could never be housed within language? That is certainly not reflective of the incarnation. It is not that Jesus just points us to God, but that Jesus *is* fully the Second Person of the Trinity. So how does the logic of incarnation inform Smith's utilization of Augustine and Heidegger? At this point, Smith takes an odd route. He says this:

> Hence, at times I must *believe* where I cannot *know*; where the sign fails, I learn the thing by faith. The result is not a comprehending knowledge, but belief, the non-knowing of faith: *sans savoir, sans avoir, sans voir*. Here we are taught by the inner Teacher – Christ.[150]

The final part of that quotation regarding the inner Teacher is a reference to Augustine, but it is the fullness of the quote in conjunction with the incapacity of the sign to do more than point to

[149] Smith, *Speech*, 120.

[150] *Ibid*.,

the thing beyond that is odd. Certainly, there appears to be a danger of anti-intellectualism and fideism here: a replacement of reason and knowledge with mere belief. Or is Smith doing something more interesting? I would like to believe that, but he simply gives no indication, no sign, of anything other than the sentiment of anti-intellectualism. When faith is a substitute for reason or for knowledge, then it is no longer about faithfulness or loyalty but rather propositions void of evidence.

Augustine says that the self finds its enjoyment in God.[151] Notice that creation is a mode of the Creator, for Augustine. This is structurally not unlike Levinas's notion that the face of the Other is a mode of the infinite. We love the creation, says John Wesley, as it leads to the Creator.[152] Through the Other, says Levinas, we are called to holiness. Yet, Augustine, the compatibilist, and Wesley, the Arminian, still embrace self-agency, properly understood. In contrast, Levinas renders the self passive. Herein is a major difference, and perhaps this self-passivity, this divestment of the self, is what makes Smith so uncomfortable with Levinas

If my above criticisms are correct, then what does Smith's new 'concept' get us? What is its value-proposition? My conclusion in this section is that Smith has solved a problem that did not require a solution. Additionally, his proposed solution does not actually provide the benefit that he claims.

[151] "You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you" (Augustine, *Confessions*, 3).

[152] John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1966): 13.

CHAPTER 2

Evolutionary Metaphysics: Hierarchy, Liberty, and Eschatology

Philosophy has its own mythic assumptions.[1]

As Christ "died to make men holy, let us die to make men free."
– Julia Ward, "Battle Hymn of the Republic"

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we saw that Smith's project is based on a particular ontological commitment. Within this commitment, he is trying to assert a particular metaphysic. Metaphysics is important to Smith's project because, as Federico Campagna puts it, our metaphysical commitments "define the architecture of our reality, and . . . structure our contemporary existential experience."[2] However, these metaphysical commitments are not timeless, objective, or volitional. They evolve through complex network interactions involving history, culture, religion, and the sciences. Therefore, it is not clear that ontological commitments can or should be simply and unproblematically declared as Smith does in his inter-textual project.

In this chapter, we will turn to an investigation of the constitution and meaning of collective metaphysics. Charles Taylor's work on social imaginaries was my original inspiration for this chapter. Taylor describes social imaginaries as pre-theoretical ways in which we

[1] Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins, *A Short History of Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996): 15.

[2] Federico Campagna, *Technic and Magic: The Reconstruction of Reality* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021): loc 143. Kindle.

collectively, as a society, imagine reality to fit together.[3] Campagna, too, speaks of "a certain type of ordering of our world, and of ourselves within it,"[4] but it is not quite clear that he has picked up on the social basis of this order. Frank, Grinspoon, and Walker present the possibility that metaphysics, as a model of reality, is evolving due to a network of complex and interdependent cooperative forces.[5]

It is out of these evolving metaphysical models of reality that rationality, values, and meaningfulness arise. While it is possible to have competing social imaginaries or, what I will refer to as models of reality, one is likely to emerge as dominant at a given time in a given society due to the fundamental commitments of each model. Smith's ontological commitment reflects a premodern, hierarchical Western model. Interestingly, despite this classical commitment, much of Smith's position uncritically integrates aspects of the modern, economic Western model. In contrast, Levinas perhaps offers us a third model that is structured eschatologically.

2.2 On the Evolution of Models

When I talk about 'metaphysical models,' I intend a theoretical, metaphysical representation of a system too complex to address outside of an idealized and simplified representation. Having identified several idealized metaphysical models (e.g., hierarchical, economic, eschatological), we can then study various effects associated with changing these models. How do our models affect our anthropology, ethics, or doctrines of revelation? In this

[3] Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004): 23.

[4] Campagna, *Technic*, loc. 186. Kindle.

[5] Adam Frank, David Grinspoon, and Sara Walker, "Intelligence as a Planetary Scale Process," in *International Journal of Astrobiology* (2022): 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1017/S147355042100029X

section, I will briefly synthesize Frank et al.'s concept of planetary intelligence with Taylor's work on social imaginaries as a prologue to an evolutionary metaphysics. If metaphysics is evolutionary, then perhaps models are all that we metaphysically have.

2.2.1 Knowledge and Social Systems

I begin with a recent article in which the authors speculate on the possibility of planetary intelligence. The utility of this source is not in relation to the possibility of planetary intelligence but rather the analysis that the authors provide relative to intelligence and to knowledge. Their arguments raise implications for knowledge itself. Rather than considering knowledge as (1) a property of the knower, i.e., a person's justified, true belief, (2) at an isolated moment in time, knowledge might be conceptualized as a collective property across time. Presumably, these altered conditions of knowledge would dramatically reframe the Gettier Problem in epistemology, in which a person's knowledge is a result of luck and thereby unjustified. Gettier problems are important because they identify gaps between our intuitions of knowledge and the conditions required for knowledge. Gettier problems are problems because of the two conditions stated above: (1) knowledge is individual and (2) it is cross-sectional. Postulating a collective, longitudinal constitution of knowledge, many of the Gettier instances could be resolved.

Resolving Gettier problems is not sufficient, in itself, to admit a collective, longitudinal conception of knowledge. Turning to the article on planetary intelligence, Frank et al. recognize several examples of collective intelligence in situations without a centralized authority or epistemological agent. Social insects solve problems not by virtue of an autonomous agent's direction, but through a network and set of processes that operate collectively.[6] The authors note

[6] Frank et al., "Planetary Intelligence," 2.

that similar collective intelligence is displayed by viruses as well as by slime mold, which is able to navigate mazes. In terms of intelligence, then, we have evidence that it may and does operate collectively and longitudinally, at least in specific circumstances. When cognitive activity is applied to intelligence, then knowledge is implicated. Can knowledge be extended in the way that intelligence can be?

When we look at planetary life, Vladimir Vernadsky gives us the opportunity to recognize that life forms a complex, planetary system, which he called the biosphere.[7] Having postulated the biosphere, Vernadsky then went on to postulate the Noosphere in which he framed culture as a "collective cognitive activity."[8] Through feedback loops that support global sustainability to a chemical organization of matter, Frank et al. identify networks of information flows connecting individual biological cells all the way to human cities.[9] What stands out in their research is the network that allows *semantic meaning* to emerge from this collective, teleological intelligence. Information is provided through feedback loops, boundaries, and signal processing, and it is transmitted through the planetary network such that it can be acted on in ways that maintain the telos of the larger system itself. Once information attains semantic meaning, it is hard not to recognize it as knowledge, despite not being located in an individual knower. Frank et al. recognize that scientifically their work is highly speculative. Philosophically, they make compelling arguments that intelligence and knowledge may be the outcomes of complex systems rather than individual minds or a centralized epistemological authority.

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[7] See Vladimir I. Vernadsky, *The Biosphere*, M.A.S. McMenamin and D.B. Langmuir, trans. (New York, NY: Springer, 1998).

[8] Frank et al., "Planetary Intelligence," 4.

[9] Ibid., 4-5.

2.2.2 Social Imaginaries

Turning to Charles Taylor, we find clearer arguments that support a pre-theoretical and social origin of meaning. *A Secular Age,* contains a question near its beginning: Why was it nearly impossible to be an atheist prior to Descartes?[10] Prior to the early modern period, Taylor says, God was necessary for how people collectively imagined reality to fit together. To unthink God would require them to rethink all of society. Since Descartes, belief in God has become increasingly hard to maintain because society has been progressively secularized. What I mean is that since modernity, Western persons have little trouble imagining reality fitting together without God. Therefore, while God remains possible, God is also no longer necessary.

Taylor calls this pre-theoretical, collective imagination a social imaginary, which he understands as:

> the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations.[11]

Social imaginaries are rooted in ordinary people rather than in the theories of philosophers or economists or other experts. In this sense, there is something radically democratic and modern about the idea of social imaginaries that likely makes them unthinkable prior to these recent historical times. For instance, how could Plato possibly have held a theory of Forms consistently with a theory of social imaginaries of this sort? Taylor's social imaginaries tell us the origin of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful every bit as much as Plato's Forms, but Plato's position is incompatible with Taylor's. For Taylor, it is not theory or reason that bears the explanatory

[10] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007): 25.

[11] Taylor, *Imaginaries*, 23.

weight of reality, but instead, "images, stories, and legends."[12] The reader can imagine Plato's chagrine! Taylor's is a narratival metaphysics. It is not how we theorize our world that matters, but how we imagine it or the stories we tell of it. Therefore, while it would be implausible to explain modern democratic societies based as they are on popular sovereignty using Plato's Forms, Taylor's social imaginaries can be read backwards to explain the origin of the Good, True, and Beautiful in ancient times, abandoning Plato in the process.

Importantly, Taylor is *not* saying that each of us is free to simply imagine the world the way we want it to be. However, Taylor's position might explain the radical reshaping of political and social reality that happened through the Trump administration, with its declarations of 'fake news' and its assertion of 'facts' without appeal to evidence. The *social* qualifier in *social imaginaries* becomes the key. Donald Trump exercised inordinate social influence. In fact, this is another reason that Taylor prefers *imaginaries* to theories. Theory is "often the possession of a small minority, whereas what is interesting in the social imaginary is that it is shared by large groups of people, if not the whole society."[13] Because the social imaginary is deeply rooted in the populous itself, the social imaginary makes possible the common practices, values, rationalities, and general *sense of meaningfulness* for a society. The social imaginary is the common understanding that establishes "a widely shared sense of legitimacy."[14] It establishes a basis for the justification of values and rationalities.[15] We might extend Taylor's position to argue that knowledge itself is a social function.

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[12] *Ibid.*

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] While we might initially want to categorize Taylor's position as a mode of epistemological coherence, the Trump example raises questions on this point. "Coherentists think that a belief is justified when it cohere withs, or fits

In many ways, what Taylor describes as a social imaginary bears great similarity what to Thomas Kuhn has described as the paradigms that operate in times of normal science. Paradigms are regulating models that induct people into the community of scientific practitioners and assure the regularity of those communities.[16] There are currently paradigms, for example, of Newtonian physics and Einsteinian physics; Cartesian geometry and non-Cartesian geometry. In the past, there was a geocentric paradigm of the solar system. These paradigms have starting places, things that they take as foundational commitments, which allow the model as a whole to function. Metaphysical models are similar in function.

2.2. 3 Metaphysical Models

While I appreciate Taylor's terminology of *social imaginaries*, my purpose is to make visible, analyze, and critically reflect upon what has been pretheoretically developed. In this project, I have, therefore, adopted the language of *metaphysical models*. Metaphysical models provide us a model of the structure of reality itself as well as the structures of meaning and rationality derived from that model. Notably, reality need not be fundamentally ontological. I also want to provide more specificity about the structures that stand behind Taylor's "images, stories, and legends," which forms the background legitimacy and that is given voice in language. Taylor himself speaks approvingly of the philosophical notion of 'the background' as a "largely unstructured and inarticulate understanding of our whole situation, within which particular features of our world show up for us in the sense they have."[17] He uses this intuition as

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together well with, one's other beliefs." Richard Feldman, *Epistemology* (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education, 2003): 61. In the Trump example, truth becomes purely a mode of power, reminiscent of what we find in Foucault's work.

[16] Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012): 11.

[17] Taylor, *Imaginaries*, 25.

a rationale for talking about an imaginary rather than a theory. As an originating mechanism, I certainly appreciate the pre-theoretical imaginary. However, there is no reason that philosophers or theologians should not theorize based upon the pre-reflective imaginaries of a society. After all, what is a narrative but a means of articulating an imaginary, and what is a model other than a story we tell about the world?

In the early twenty-first century, the use of models is ubiquitous across fields and disciplines. The language of weather models, polling models, customer acquisition models, revenue models, and so forth are nearly household terms. In theology, Sally McFague looked at models of God, while Avery Dulles looked at ecclesial models: the church as institution, mystical communion, sacrament, herald, or servant.[18] Models, in all of their various modes, are functionally pragmatic. They help us to make and to test predictions. In so doing, they gain coherence and establish confidence. Dulles provides us with an operating definition: "When an image is employed reflectively and critically to deepen one's theoretical understanding of a reality it becomes what is today called a 'model.'"[19]

In our context, what happens when we use an image to deepen our understanding of 'reality' itself? What image would deepen our theoretical understanding of reality? I suggest that classically the metaphysical model was a hierarchical participatory ontology while in modernity the model is of a liberal economic network.

The metaphysical models that I am interested in are not ones proposed by particular scholars, such as Plato or Kant, but rather those that function within times or epochs in ways that allow entire societies and cultures to make sense of the world in which they live. Therefore, I am

[18] See Dulles, *Models*.

[19] *Ibid.*, 21.

not interested in Plato's Forms, per se, but the background assumptions that made it possible for Plato to conceive of reality in the context of Forms. As Louis Dupré would say, there is a "pattern of meaning" imposed on an entire time that "transform[s] the nature of reality itself."[20] These metaphysical models function at a level that allows them to integrate the perceptions of reality shared by divergent groups across whole societies and cultures. They orient our faith, beliefs, prayers, and aspirations. They provide the context that gives sense to language itself such that even what it might mean for a 'concept' to 'formally indicate' takes on meaning and significance from the context of the prevalent metaphysical model. The important insight comes from Dulles: We cannot "begin to speak the new language without already committing [ourselves] to a whole new set of values . . ."[21] Language, at least the ability to speak it, requires a moral commitment, which is what Taylor's imaginaries and my metaphysical models provide.

There are many ways that scholars have attempted to get at the same idea. For example, the idea of a metaphysical model that I am using is similar to how Dulles described symbols, which:

> transform the horizon of man's life, integrate his perception of reality, alter his scale of values, reorient his loyalties, attachments, and aspirations in a manner far exceeding the powers of abstract conceptual thought. Religious images, as used in the Bible and Christian preaching, focus our experience in a new way. They have an aesthetic appeal, and are apprehended not simply by the mind but by the imagination, the heart, or, more properly, the whole man.[22]

That said, particular symbols attain both their rationality and their authority through the metaphysical model of the age – or through a rival metaphysical model. Symbols are also more

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[20] Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993): 10.

[21] Dulles, *Models*, 29.

[22] *Ibid.*, 18.

local, isolated, and temporary than metaphysical models. The concept of a metaphysical model therefore helps to aggregate, clarify, and categorize the intuitions of social imaginaries, language games, paradigms, symbols, and the 'background' each of which entail a functional as well as a cognitive dimension.

Importantly, each model "brings with it its own favorite set of images, its own rhetoric, its own values, certitudes, commitments, and priorities. It even brings with it a particular set of preferred problems."[23] It is humbling to recognize that our most vaunted penetrating insights clarify only the way we model reality. We are not penetrating to being itself, nor do our models or language encompass the infinite. Ideally, by this recognition of our dependence on models, we would perhaps protect our most cherished intellectual commitments from becoming idols to us. On the other hand, it raises the specter that our most cherished intellectual and theological commitments – perhaps the authority of the scriptures or of human flourishing – may be reflections of our own social imaginations. There is a certain epistemic humility at work here in that we must recognize the tentative, fragile, and ultimately temporary status of our evolving 'knowledge.' We hold our theological and intellectual commitments with open hands.

2.3 A Hierarchical Model of Transcendence

As Taylor and Dupré recount characteristics of premodern thought, literature, art, and society, a model begins to emerge that is constituted by a fundamental commitment to transcendence. Transcendence may be imagined as Heraclitus's logos, Plato's Forms, Aristotle's teleology, Plotinus's One, or the Christian God. Transcendence, in this sense, is a monistic principle beyond humanity and nature in which humanity and nature find their fulfillment or

[23] *Ibid.*, 29.

perfection. It is the source of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. It is the source of order: moral, political, and religious. Access to this order requires a participatory ontology that allows humanity and nature alike to connect with and to participate in this higher transcendence. This hierarchical, participatory ontology, constituted by its commitment to transcendence, is the metaphysical model that explains and authorizes a broad variety of philosophical, theological, economic, domestic, and social models that functioned ubiquitously prior to early modernity and often continue to function today in increasingly socially and intellectually isolated pockets.

In a series of books, beginning with his 1993 work, *Passage to Modernity*, Dupré identifies and describes a transition from what he calls the ontotheological synthesis that formed the cultural and philosophical background of the ancient and classical periods to the dissolution of that synthesis through the medieval and into the modern periods.[24] What he means by the 'ontotheological synthesis' is a fundamental union of God, nature, and humanity, which ensured that reality was intelligible, meaningful, and purposeful. The divine perfection is replicated in the order, rationality, and structure of nature, in which humans then participate. Nature becomes the mediator of divine order and perfection to humanity. Dupré traces this ancient model back to the pre-Socratic Ionian thinkers who "had combined a physical with an anthropic and a divine component" in their notion of *physis*.[25] Dupré already finds in Thales, the first of the Greek philosophers, "an all-comprehensive, creative principle."[26] He finds in Proclus, whom he considers the last of the Greek philosophers, "the same one principle of nature [which is] the

[24] In addition to *Passage to Modernity*, Dupré authored *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) as well as *Religion and the Rise of Modern Culture*. These texts follow similar investigatory pathways.

[25] Dupré, *Passage*, 3.

[26] *Ibid.*, 16.

source of all beings."[27] The notion of a source or a single monistic principle ensures that the ontotheological synthesis entails a mode of hierarchical participation. We see this reflected in Aristotle's notion of entelechy. There is a primal purpose in everything that exists which connects that thing with the overall cosmos. Reality is purposeful, which means it is orderly. Individuals must pursue their own *aretē* (excellence), which is found in fulfilling their purpose. But, for *aretē* to be possible, reality must *be* ordered and orderly: "Nature teleologically directs organic processes to their destined perfection. It establishes the norms that things developing in time must follow if they are to attain their projected end."[28] Thus, the planets pursue a circular orbit to align ever more closely to the perfection of the circle. Not only does nature pursues *aretē*, but humanity discovers its *aretē* largely through the observance of and adherence to natural order.

For Plato, though, the very essence of the real, along with our knowledge of the real, "consist[s] ultimately of form."[29] Pythagoras had already identified a mathematical form inherent to nature. Neither Plato nor Pythagoras's position should be considered passé as today we can often overlay a digital form atop our analog, physical reality, capturing or duplicating the physical world in digital form through computer programming and algorithmic modeling. Object oriented programming (OOP), perhaps not surprisingly, takes on a hierarchical coding structure analogous to an ontological hierarchy. OOP functions by calling higher order classes or functions as instances of that higher class or function, not unlike how Plato imagined Socrates would instance the higher form of Human Being and, ultimately, the Good. Just as OOP provides

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] *Ibid.*, 17.

[29] *Ibid.*, 18.

objective knowledge of and participation in both the instances and the higher classes or functions of digital space-time, so Plato's Forms were understood to provide, not subjective, but objective knowledge of Being itself through the disciplined use of reason. Because of this synthesis and the concomitant ontological participation of a hierarchical structure, Dupré can provocatively and confidently state that under this model "it belongs to the nature of the real to *appear* and to do so in an orderly, intelligible way."[30] Reality did appear in its hiddenness, dialectically present and simultaneously absent. Yes, the physical world was a shadow of the true world of Forms, but it was a *real* shadow.

Reality cannot give itself in this Platonic way, nor can it extend the meaningfulness of Aristotle's entelechy, if reality is not sourced in the transcendent – if there is not a fundamental connection, be it teleological or ontological, to the transcendent. The moral order that results from this model of reality and extends out to shape that society by shaping, as Taylor says, the daily expectations of the people of that society. Thus, we see Plato presenting a hierarchical model of government in his *Republic* and justifying that model because the philosopher king would be most capable of guiding society according to the Truth of Being itself. This same justification of government later shaped the organizational structure of the Catholic Church, led by the Pope, who is most capable of guiding the church according to divine truth and grace. The Pope stands closest to God in the hierarchical arrangement of the church and is therefore best positioned to mediate divine saving grace to the subsequent levels of the church. Ultimately, the laity at the bottom of the hierarchical church receive divine grace through the sacraments,

[30] Dupré, *Religion*, 6. Thomas Shannon echoes this Greek image of reality: "The dominant concept was that of a rationally ordered universe capable of being perceived by the human mind. Thus the normative factor in human action was conformity of the human to the rational order of the universe as comprehended by reason" (Shannon, *Ethical Theory*, 27).

themselves administered by the duly ordained priesthood according to an orthodox form. Those sacraments are neither merely symbolic nor memorials, but they are objectively effective due to the ontotheological synthesis that authorizes them.

Returning to Plato, we find his epistemology, anthropology, concept of justice, and so forth to be consistent with the participatory ontological hierarchy of his metaphysics. It was the underlying metaphysical model based on the ontotheological synthesis of reality that energized the compelling plausibility of Plato's insights. However, that synthesis was not to persist. As Dupré himself tells it, it would be the entrance of Judeo-Christian theology into mainstream Western society that would begin the disintegration of that synthesis. It was not secularism that ended this synthesis, as John Milbank might be read to argue. It was Christian theology.

2.3.1 Hierarchical Epistemology

For Plato and Aristotle, knowledge is eternally present to the knower through one's relation to being, but also because of the very nature of being. Returning to Dupré's statement: "It belongs to the nature of the real to appear and to do so in an orderly, intelligible way."[31] While we might associate an increasing level of disorder and unintelligibility with the lower levels of the hierarchy, neither Plato nor Aristotle seems to think these are insurmountable. Aristotle, for instance, is not troubled by the stick that looks bent in the water. For him, there are simply conditions that are proper to the functioning of the senses. It is the job of the knower to put herself in those proper conditions so that her senses deliver accurate feedback. For Plato, knowledge is already within us awaiting the proper questions or provocations to call it to mind.

[31] Dupré, *Religion*, 6.

As we return to the doctrine of revelation, this would occur as a form of illumination (Augustine) or recollection (Plato). Jesus would remove the scales from our eyes, giving us eyes to see or minds to receive.[32] Christian revelation would depend on the influence of an outside force, which could be characterized by or as grace. However, this outside influence need not be considered supernatural under this model. Knowledge itself is already conceived of as the result of an exogenous relation or influence. Because of its operation within the structure of the participatory ontological model, grace need not be conceived as supernatural any more than Plato or Aristotle's epistemology would be considered supernatural.

2.3.2 Smith's Concept of Revelation and Participatory Ontology

Smith's relation to Plato and participatory ontologies is troubled. On one hand, Smith is opposed to any notion that finite being is incomplete in itself. Therefore, regardless of whether natural or supernatural means are used, finitude cannot require completion or hierarchical elevation. Where and as it is, finite being is good. This reason is why Smith can state confidently that he is not replicating Platonism. Finite reality is not a shadow of something more real or more ontologically complete. There is no cave from which we are required to escape. On the other hand, it is the participatory ontology of this hierarchical model that establishes a passive, formal, or metaphysical *Anknüpfungspunkt*.

This formal connection to the divine establishes, for Smith, the inherent goodness of finite being through the reversal of the Platonic ontological participation. Rather than instances of Forms participating in the higher Forms, the divine condescends to participate in finitude. Rather than raising up finitude, the divine lowers itself. Smith sees this as the direction of the

[32] Acts 9:18.

incarnation.[33] God's condescension does not change the finite for Smith, but it does solve the problem of conceptual violence. Even in God's condescension, something about God remains absent and thereby immune to violence. God metaphysically protects Godself from conceptual victimization. The finite being can then speak properly of God through non-predicating, formally indicative 'concepts.'

Therefore, while Smith begins his project with a critique of Platonism and Neoplatonism, he has to innovate on the basic structures of Platonism for his own project to succeed. Regardless, I do not suggest that Smith's project is located entirely within this hierarchical metaphysical model. Smith begins with this model while attempting to operate economically, thereby confusing his models and his project.

2.3.3 Participatory Ontologies and Imperialism

Before we move beyond the model of participatory hierarchy, we need to unpack more of what this model means in regards to the larger concern of the current project, which is how we should understand the doctrine of revelation in light of Smith and our concerns for conceptual and political violence. While Smith seems content to find in Augustine the foundations of a non-violent 'concept,' Levinas is critical of the entire Western canon going back, at the very least, to Plato. Without getting into specifics, we can recall Plato's epistemological position from the *Meno*, an epistemology that is based on the recollection of the immortal, reincarnated soul. Knowledge is innate to the human soul and accessible based on the proper provocations, such as the right question. Knowledge being innate implies that human beings and human society

[33] We must again recognize that doctrinally, Smith has arguably truncated the incarnation at this point. When asked why God would become human, why God would condescend to us, Athanasius argued, "so that we might be made God." Athanasius, "On the Incarnation," *Christology of the Later Fathers*, Edward R. Hardy, ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954): 107. Doctrinally, can incarnation be separated from theosis as if they were isolated, discrete divine events?

recognize the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. Such epistemic *recognition* is in contrast to the later situation of epistemic *production* through the divine or human will.

Plato, in whom knowledge arises from the hegemony of reason, driving the soul's chariot upwards towards the Forms through the disciplined control of the spirit and the appetites. Plato, whose state is modelled after the structure of the soul, where people are allotted a role and justice ensues when they perform their roles with excellence and in harmony. Plato, in whom difference and freedom become a threat to justice, the justice of hierarchical harmony. And knowledge is the recollection of that perfect order of eternity. According to René Girard, it is for reasons such as these that mimesis terrifies Plato the way that it does.[34] Imitation becomes a threat to the social order as well as to human morality. It is a threat to the structures of reality that channel the Good through a participatory ontology.

While Aristotle's proto-natural science might seem to be a counter-example to the claims I am developing here, upon reflection they turn out not to be. While we can think of knowledge as a human product in Aristotle, to an extent, ultimately even Aristotle's epistemology derives from his metaphysics. It is the case that knowledge begins with sense perception, which is then operated on the mind for Aristotle. However, the mind, for Aristotle, is "the place where the forms that are in things become our ideas of them."[35] Mortimer Adler is clear that we are not putting our ideas into things when we develop knowledge. Instead, human knowledge is produced only when the mind perceives the forms that are in things. So, while we can talk meaningfully about the production of knowledge in Aristotle, we are still saying something

[34] See René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, Stephen Bann & Michael Metteer, trans. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978): 15.

[35] Mortimer J. Adler, *Aristotle for Everybody: Difficult Thought Made Easy* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1978): 134.

vastly different than when we talk about the production of knowledge in John Locke or Immanuel Kant. Later we will see that knowledge requires the investment of labor, which inflects knowledge with the form of property. Knowledge becomes a property of the knower. For Aristotle, knowledge may not be a form of recollection, but it remains a form of reception.

In any case, both Plato and Aristotle can affirm that knowledge is absolute. Plato makes this claim in the *Republic* through the analogy of the divided line. For Aristotle, knowledge is deductive. If it is absolute, if it is universal, then knowledge is one. It is established through discipline and control. Heteronomy or heterodoxy must be overcome. However, this is not the case for Smith. When God condescends to the finite, that condescension validates a plurality of interpretations. So long as there is no elevation or return of the finite back to God or into the eternal, then perhaps Smith has avoided the imperialism of participatory hierarchies and conceptual violence.

2.3.4 Realized Eschatology

While avoiding Platonic imperialism, Smith's logic of incarnation accomplished through a reversal of a Platonic participatory ontology appears to result theologically in a realized eschatology. There is nothing beyond or after the incarnation that is necessary for revelation because, for him, the finite has paramount value. There is no parousia, no second coming, and no apocalypse because those 'unconditioned' revelatory events are both unnecessary and potentially 'Gnostic.' Through the incarnation, the infinite has made itself present, established its enduring ousia, for the finite. While that presence is apperceived, in the sense that some of the divine presence is withheld, that is a voluntary rather than an essential withholding. The apperception is necessary to protect the divine from ontological violence.

However, a voluntary withholding has no place in a participatory ontology. The exercise of the will confuses the hierarchical model with an economic model. Herein we find the value of the use of models for the sake of clarity. Through these models, we locate an important source of confusion in Smith's project. Let us examine the entrance of the will into the Western social imaginary and the resultant metaphysical model.

2.4 Medieval Transitions

According to Dupré, the translation of the Hebrew scriptures into the Greek Septuagint that occurred in Alexandria was a clear moment of disruption for the classical ontotheological synthesis, a disruption that would result in radical innovations.[36] Those innovations would lead, over the course of many centuries, to the replacement of the ontological model with a different model. As Christian scholars attempted to reconcile the new faith with the rationality of Greek philosophy, those scholars could not reconcile the creator God who stood outside of creation with the all-inclusive Greek synthesis. The Judeo-Christian God's transcendence was so radical that the all-inclusive unity of *physis* – the divine, the physical, and the anthropic – was unsettled. While Christianity explained God's continual presence in the world through the Church, the Holy Spirit, the doctrine of providence, and sometimes even through the incarnation, there was no longer a formal, organic unity between God and the world, at least, not outside of small mystical traditions. The transition did not occur quickly.

As Judeo-Christian theology began to enter the mainstream of Western thought, the notion of freedom as 'unconstraint' began to enter disruptively into this hierarchical model. For

[36] Dupré, *Religion*, 6.

many Greek thinkers, the cosmos was assumed to be eternal.[37] It would have to be eternal for the strong onto-theological synthesis we find in Dupré's work to be valid. In Kuhn's language of scientific paradigms, we can think of this in his terms of 'normal science.' But with the strengthening influence of Judeo-Christian theology, Western society began to experience a transition from normal to extraordinary 'science' or, in this case, not science but metaphysics. The great Christian thinkers such as Augustine and later Duns Scotus began to develop a rationality based on liberty rather than the transcendence on which the participatory ontology of the classical model was established. Christian theology set God outside of the orderly and all-encompassing Greek cosmos as the sovereign Creator of that cosmos.[38] God's sovereign will becomes normative.

2.4.1 Augustine and the Will

In the hierarchical model of reality, human beings have the ability to perceive the order of the universe through the disciplined use of reason. As we do that, morality demands that we live in conformity to that order. In this way, the intellect had priority over the will, because anyone who truly *knew* the right thing to do could almost certainly not fail to do it.[39] Theologically we see this priority of the intellect over the will in Augustine's account of the cause of creation. God eternally knew that creation was good and so God created. Platonically, the only other

[37] Henry Chadwick, *Augustine: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001): 91.

[38] Dupré stresses Christian theological emphasis on *creatio ex nihilo* and the "free decision of God" to create (*Religion*, 30). On this basis, God becomes understood to transcend rather than to be immanent in nature, at least in ontological terms. Shannon states that "standing in critical contrast to the rational, ordered intelligible universe of the Greeks, was the Jewish view of creation, an essentially arbitrary intervention by God" (*Ethical Theory*, 30).

[39] I am generalizing here for the sake of scope. We find elements of a divided will in Plato and notions of a developmental view of the soul in Aristotle. Both perspectives would provide explanations of how a person would do something other than what they knew to be good. However, such explanations are connected to corruptions of the natural order of things.

explanation for a human action, other than the intellect, was that the person's soul was being unjustly ruled by the passions rather than driven by reason. When the soul is in harmony with itself, it will inerrantly pursue the good as it knows the good. Justice will result.

That Platonic origin story of evil became increasingly insufficient as Christian theology ascended in the Roman Empire. If God is not an organic part of the structured and ordered cosmos, if God stands outside of that cosmos as its creator, then there is a sense that reason alone is insufficient to account for the moral order of the cosmos and of human society. Aristotle had posited four causes to explain the causal ordering of the universe. By the time we arrive at Augustine, we find him including the human will in the set of causes.[40] But if our wills are part of the causal order of the cosmos, how can human beings be free? Augustine adopted a compatibilist position on this issue.[41] Taking up Cicero's question regarding divine foreknowledge, which Cicero posits as a binary choice between human liberty, on the one hand, and divine foreknowledge of events, on the other hand, Augustine answers that we still experience our wills *as wills* despite the actuality of divine foreknowledge.[42] We humans still do

[40] According to Michael Frede, "Plato and Aristotle do not have a notion of a will, since for them a willing, a desire of reason, is a direct result of one's cognitive state: once one sees something to be good, one wills it." Michael Frede, *A Free Will: Origins of the Notion in Ancient Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011): 93. But in Augustine: "Now if there is for God a fixed order of all causes, it does not follow that nothing depends on our free choice. Our wills themselves are in the order of causes, which is, for God, fixed, and is contained in his foreknowledge, since human acts of will are the cause of human activities." Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, Henry Bettenson, trans. (New York: Penguin Books, 2003): 192. Justo Gonzalez notes that creation results from "a free decision on the part of God." Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought: From Augustine to the Eve of the Reformation*, vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987): 39. In that sense, the divine will is responsible for the cosmos and the human being. Étienne Gilson takes the next step when he notes that the human will is "a fragment of the universal order" in Augustine. Étienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, L. E. M. Lynch, trans. (Providence: Cluny, 2020): 203. The human will is most notably visible in Augustine's hamartiology in which sin is understood to be a voluntary evil and becomes associated with the vitiation of the creation.

[41] We should note here the Stoic influence on Augustine's view of the will, particularly as the Stoic view was mediated by Cicero (Frede, *Free Will*, 91).

[42] Augustine, *The City of God*, Marcus Dods, trans. (New York: Random House, 1950): 157.

things because we actually *want* to do them. There are two important ramifications for this statement.

First, if human beings are doing things because we *want* to do them, then we are no longer doing things because we are driven by the intellect to do them. In this way, the human will seems to differ from the divine will. Even when we humans know what is right, we can choose something other.[43] Chadwick explains that by virtue of being created out of nothing, there is a formlessness at the heart of matter. As the soul is attached to the body, the soul experiences the conflict in its will for the good.[44] Of importance for this broader project and for our evaluation of the emerging modern model premised on liberty, Augustine asserts "the impotence of sinful man to rescue himself by effort of will."[45]On the basis of liberty or choice, the human person or the human society cannot 'rescue' itself; cannot 'escape,' as Emmanuel Levinas will later write.

Second, if we are doing what we will, even if it is what God has elected or predestined, then human beings remain free. This is his compatibilist solution.[46] So long as human choice stems from the interior movement of the will, then even if an outside force is acting upon that internal will, the human being remains at liberty.

The alternative to Augustine's position, which we find in Cicero, is problematic. If things happen solely due to a determined causal chain of events, then everything happens by necessity. There is no free will in this model. Augustine indicates that in such a circumstance, there would

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[43] Shannon, *Ethical Theory*, 35.

[44] Chadwick, *Augustine*, 41.

[45] *Ibid*.

[46] See Phillip Cary, "Augustinian Compatibilism and the Doctrine of Election," *Augustine and Philosophy*, Phillip Cary, et al., eds. (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010).

be no point in laws, because things would happen regardless of whether a law existed or not. There would be no point in praise or punishment. There could be no meaningful sense of justice. Free will is intimately and necessarily linked to any meaningful sense of morality. Without free will, there is no point in pretending to morality any longer. Notice the transition from reason being the source of morality in Plato to free will emerging as the source of morality in Augustine. Freedom did not play a meaningful role in Plato's anthropology nor in his political philosophy. The same cannot be said for Augustine, who was perhaps influenced by Stoicism on this point.[47] Importantly, the intellect has now come into competition with the will.

The intellect and the will would remain in tension for some centuries to come. Much would depend on how scholars understood the term *necessity*. For the compatibilist Augustine, necessity was not a limitation so much as an acknowledgement of a nature. Therefore, when we say that it is necessary for God *to be*, it is not as though God has been deprived of something. It is not as though we have imposed a limit on God by taking away God's ability not to be.[48] There are some things that lessen us rather than strengthen us. The ability to do these things makes us lesser rather than more. The ability 'not to be' would decrease God's power rather than increase it. And this leads us into the crux of what became Augustine's great challenge. For God to be able to do evil would not make God more God, but less God. It would make God less powerful, less perfect, and less divine.

[47] Augustine seems to accept the Stoic notion of 'fate' understood as "an inescapable order and connection between events." John Sellars, *Stoicism* (New York: Routledge, 2014): 100. Sellars notes that the Stoics also held a doctrine of providence, which became an important component of Augustine's own theology.

[48] Although Jean-Luc Marion will certainly contest this claim in his *God without Being*. John Zizioulas may have concerns as well. This divergence of interpretations may indicate the role of values and interpretations in the ascription of virtues to the transcendent.

Plato could account for evil without reference to wills or necessity. Evil could be understood as a product of ignorance or disharmony, which, in turn, was largely a function of distance from the eternal perfection of the Forms. How does Augustine account for evil if evil is prohibited to God? We know his answer. His origin story of evil centers on human free will. As a compatibilist, there is still a question of why God's grace was insufficient to keep the human will from straying. That issue is beyond the scope of the current project.

Most importantly, what we find in Augustine is the injection of human free will in a way that makes up for God's separation from the anthropo-cosmic synthesis that yet remains at the heart of the way Western thought imagines reality to fit together. God remains involved through the doctrine of providence, but the formal and organic connection with God is sundered. In its absence, human liberty arises to fill the vacuum. Augustine had introduced the notion of ordered love or ordered desire. The will, being associated with desire, gained a foothold relative to the intellect. That foothold would become a full-scale revolution during the Middle Ages.

2.4.2 Scotus on the Intellect and the Will

In some respect, Augustine had continued to maintain a view of the infused rationality and goodness of creation through his doctrine of providence. However, John Duns Scotus found in the incarnation a challenge to the Greek notion of form, to which Augustine tacitly continued to hold. According to Dupré, what was most essential about the incarnation was "the individuality of the person of Christ."[49] The primacy of Jesus's individuality led Scotus to assert a new form, the *forma individualis* as a legitimation of the 'historical Jesus.'[50] In conjunction

[49] Dupré, *Religion*, 7.

[50] *Ibid.*, 8.

with the emerging priority of the individual came Scotus's reversal of the Greek and Thomistic priority of the intellect over the will, based largely on Scotus's category of 'nature.'

Whereas Augustine's doctrine of free will had little direct impact on the synthesis of the human and the natural due to his doctrine of providence, Scotus's theological voluntarism would have a strong impact. In the Thomistic tradition, the will had followed the intellect, meaning that the intellect discerned the true good from malleable goods. The intellect then led the will to choose the true good. The intellect presented the truth to the will. Acting as a final cause, the truth motivates the will to choose the good.[51] This position is very conservative relative to the classical Hellenistic tradition. In contrast, Scotus, working within anthropological aspects of the Augustinian tradition, argued against Thomas that the will directs the intellect. The will has priority over the intellect. In this section I will explain how Scotus supports this claim and what its implication might be for how Western society models reality.

The ascendancy of the will in Scotus begins with the will's capacity for contingency, which separates the will from nature, placing the will outside of nature. For Scotus, there are three dimensions of human freedom, each associated with the will:

1. The will can choose contrary acts.
2. The will can choose contrary objects.
3. The will can choose opposite effects.[52]

What is important about each of these dimensions is the contingency of the will.[53] I could have chosen otherwise than I did in each case.

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[51] Shannon, *Ethical Theory*, 41.

[52] *Ibid.*, 47.

[53] "Given that this contingency cannot arise in the functioning of the intellect, Scotus reasons that it must instead arise in the functioning of the will. Following a suggestion made by Aristotle, Scotus posits a basic contrast between free powers and natural powers. Free powers have three features not shared with natural powers. The first of these features is being indetermined, being a power for opposites . . . The will's indeterminism entails its remaining two

In contrast to the contingent will, Scotus posits a determined and deterministic nature. He uses the example of heat, which he categorizes as a nature. Heat heats because it is its nature to heat. A nature cannot do otherwise because nature is determined. The human will is not part of the determined and deterministic cosmos because the will may make contingent, rather than determined, choices.[54] Nature becomes, in Scotus, a category, which he then associates with the intellect.

The contingency of the will is a central premise to Scotus's argument that the will has priority over the intellect. The intellect does not have contingency because it is a nature.[55] Just as heat heats because it is heat, so the intellect knows or understands because that is the nature of the intellect. When presented with something that is capable of being known, the intellect will know it. In contrast, Scotus categorizes the will as a rational potency, a term deriving from Aristotle. For Scotus, the intellect, as a nature, can and will recognize the good, but it cannot choose the good. It has no potency. The intellect is a "precondition for the act of a rational potency,"[56] or an "incomplete rational potency."[57] In one sense, the intellect shares similarities with Anselm's notion of the *affectio commodi*, the affection for advantages, which points to a eudaimonistic ethics. We gain advantage in doing the things that lead to our eudaimonia.

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features: that a free power is a self-mover, a sufficient cause of its own actions; and that a free power can refrain from acting even when all the conditions necessary for its acting obtain" (Cross, *Scotus*, 85).

[54] Shannon, *Ethical Theory*, 47.

[55] "And the intellect, so considered, counts as nature. For it is of itself determined to understanding, and it is not in the intellect's power to understand and not understand [simples] or, with regard to propositions, where it can have contrary acts—assent and dissent—those contrary acts are not in the intellect's power." John Duns Scotus, *John Duns Scotus: Selected Writings on Ethics*, Thomas Williams, trans., ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017): 6.

[56] Scotus, quoted in Shannon, *Ethical Theory*, 62.

[57] *Ibid.*, 63.

However, this is true for all of nature. Only in the *affectio justitiae* do human beings begin to transcend nature, for Anselm.[58] For our purposes, we do not have to delve into the concepts and implications of the *affectio commodi* and *affectio justitae*. This transcendence of nature is an important development for us to note. Additionally, the contingency or indeterminacy of the will leading to the concept of freedom as choice is important.

Within the genealogy that I am crafting, the important point is that by elevating the will over the intellect in this way, Scotus completes the dissolution of the ontotheological synthesis – the dissolution of a metaphysical model based on transcendence. The Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* had removed the theological dimension of that synthesis when it separated God from the cosmos. Scotus completed the separation of the anthropic from the cosmic when he elevated the will over nature. For Scotus, the capacity for contingency is the source of the possibility of human creativity. On what grounds was God placed outside of the cosmos? God was removed from the synthesis on the basis that God was the Creator of the cosmos. Now we are seeing the human capacity for creativity, located in our contingent wills, also removing humanity from the cosmos and placing us outside of the natural and cosmic moral order.[59]

One final point worth noting is how Scotus justifies his claims about the contingency of the will in the above three cases. He does so by appeal to *experience*: We experience ourselves to be free. We experience these contingencies in our choices. Consequently, our freedom is self-

[58] *Ibid.*, 56.

[59] "…for Scotus the will is 'transcendental,' understood to mean transcending the divide between divine and created being. Thus there is a simple notion of will, indifferent to its realizations in God and in human beings—i.e., in infinite or in finite being—and denoting the essential characteristic common to every will, whether human or divine. This essential characteristic is freedom…" Guido Alliney, "Landolfo Caracciolo, Peter Auriol, and John Duns Scotus on Freedom and Contingency," *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie Médiévales* 82, no. 2 (2015): 273.

evident to us. It is incontrovertible.[60] When we come to René Descartes, the human will has completed its ascension, attaining demigod status:

> Similarly, if I examine the faculties of memory or imagination, or any others, I discover that in my case each one of these faculties is weak and limited, while in the case of God it is immeasurable. It is only the will, or freedom of choice, which I experience within me to be so great that the idea of any greater faculty is beyond my grasp; so much so that it is above all in virtue of the will that I understand myself to bear in some way the image and likeness of God. For although God's will is incomparably greater than mine . . . nevertheless it does not seem any greater than mine when considered as will in the essential and strict sense.[61]

And while Descartes was in many respects a rationalist, we find in his position that, experience, albeit not sense experience, has established itself as epistemically basic. It is my experience of myself thinking, it is my experience of the infinity of my will that serves as the properly basic foundation of what follows. Certainly, the epistemic status of sense experience will be canonized in John Locke, but we find experience, more broadly conceived, already at work in Descartes.

2.4.3 Conclusion

In Augustine, God willed to create. God's will was united with the goodness of creation, but creation clearly emerged as an act of divine will.[62] However, "the very fact of being created out of nothing and therefore 'contingent'" became the source of the human soul's "instability" and immediate cause of sin.[63] Therefore, in making both the human and the cosmos 'contingent'

[60] Cross notes logical fallacies in Scotus's 'proof' of the freedom of the human will (Cross, *Scotus*, 86). However, for the purpose of my own project those fallacies are not material. What matters here is the way that the work of Scotus shaped the imagination of succeeding scholars. That is his legacy and the genealogy that we are following.

[61] Descartes, *Mediations* 40. In fact, Alliney argues that the freedom of the will is, in fact, the same regardless of being the divine or the human will (Alliney, "Freedom and Contingency," 273).

[62] Chadwick, *Augustine*, 91. "So the answer to our question 'Who?' is 'God.' To the question 'How?' the answer is, 'He said: "Let it be"; and it was created.' And to 'Why?' we get the reply, 'It was good'" (Augustine, *City of God*, XI, 21).

[63] *Chadwick, Augustine*, 40.

as an effect of *creatio ex nihilo,* Augustine effectively separated God from the participatory hierarchy. He tried to ensure God's continued union with creation through his doctrine of divine providence, thereby ensuring the meaningfulness and goodness of reality. Yet, we cannot escape the formal separation of God from creation that occurs in Augustine.

Scotus later insisted that the human will was not a nature due to the creative contingency of the will. Scotus wrote in the context of the emergence of theological voluntarism. If the good is good because God recognizes it to be good through God's intellect, then there is some standard to which God assents. In that case, God would no longer be sovereign.[64] Therefore, the good is good because God wills it. Rather than the good being accessible through the intellect – through the disciplined use of reason – the good becomes a product of the divine will and, therefore, potentially inscrutable. For Scotus, the will is contingent and, therefore, not determined in the way that a nature is determined.

The synthesis between (divine) transcendence, humanity, and nature became unsustainable once the ideas put into play by Augustine and Scotus (among others) reached fruition.[65] In the place of transcendence upon which the hierarchical model was founded, we find the free, unconstrained will of the human person. According to Dupré:

> This removal of transcendence fundamentally affected the conveyance of meaning. Whereas previously meaning had been established in the very act of creation by a wise God, it now fell upon the human mind to interpret a cosmos, the structure of which had ceased to be given as intelligible. Instead of being an integral part of the cosmos, the person became its source of meaning.[66]

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[64] Theologians had traditionally addressed this problem by appeal to God's eternal exemplars, archetypes or forms established eternally in the mind of God. Scotus sees even this solution as an unacceptable limitation of divine freedom. W. T. Jones, *The Medieval Mind, A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1969): 312.

[65] "…originally *kosmos* included theological and anthropic as well as physical meanings. The loss of the former two reflects the disintegration of the ontotheological synthesis" (Dupre, *Passage,* 18).

[66] *Ibid.,* 3.

It will eventually be 'we the people' who come to negotiate the good, the true, and the beautiful.

2.5 A Model of Economic Liberty

Dupré gives ontological status to the transition from premodernity to modernity: "It marks a new epoch in being."[67] Rather than a change in being itself, as Dupré may be read to suggest, I propose that we encounter a change in our model of being. It is this novel metaphysical model that marks the new epoch of modernity.

It was nearly impossible to be an atheist prior to early modernity, according to Taylor, because it was nearly impossible to unthink transcendence.[68] In the same way, in modernity and today, it is nearly impossible to unthink liberty, at least in Western societies. Liberty is the moral commitment that authorizes modern Western rationality. We saw its emergence in the medieval transition from the ontotheological synthesis to the priority of the human will. As will is a reflection of power and sovereignty, so liberty emerges as a mode of power. Liberty and choice become competitive. The Other is a limitation on my liberty, and so one person can gain more liberty only at the expense of another person's liberty. Consequently, this metaphysical model is inherently imperialistic, colonizing, and, ultimately, nihilistic. Simone Beauvoir puts it starkly:

> He sees in every other man and particularly in those whose existence is asserted with most brilliance, a limit, a condemnation of himself. 'Each consciousness,' said Hegel, 'seeks the death of the other.' And indeed at every moment others are stealing the whole world away from me.[69]

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[67] *Ibid*., 7.

[68] Taylor, *Secular Age*, 26.

[69] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Bernard Frechtman, trans. (New York: Open Road Media, 2018): 69.

Rather than establishing a basis of communion and morality, this rationality establishes a way of each against all where "the first movement is to hate them."[70]

But if liberty is the moral basis of our rationality, how is it possible even to imagine a novel starting point for thought or society other than liberty? How would escape be possible? Beauvoir denies the possibility of escape: "There is no way for a man to escape from this world."[71] This is the world of economy and immanence. Other philosophers, aghast at the dystopia of technical, calculative thinking or appalled at the imperialistic violence of the West will look beyond Beauvoir. The question of escape concerns thinkers like Martin Heidegger and Emmanuel Levinas. Before we get ahead of ourselves, let us first unpack the economic metaphysical model, which is based in liberty.

With the dissolution of the ontotheological synthesis that had previously functioned to allow "the real to appear and to do so in an orderly and intelligible way,"[72] Western thought needed a new basis of meaning as well as a new social order. In the Middle Ages, thinkers began to discover that new basis in theological voluntarism. With voluntarism, natural law co-emerged. Dupré stated that "natural law [came to derive] its authority from a divine decree" such that "the legal character of any law [came to reside] in the decision of the lawgiver."[73] Consequently, without human commonality with nature, the authority of law was moved out of nature and authorized by divine or, later, by human will. Metaphysically, liberty was operationalized as the basis of law and moral order.

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[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Dupré, *Enlightenment*, 6.

[73] Dupré, *Religion*, 156.

At the same time that this transition was occurring in the moral order, the experience of the subject was emerging as the basis of epistemic certainty. Descartes had already established the self as *the* epistemic foundation, but it was Locke's political philosophy that fully inaugurated that subjective, experiential foundation. Epistemic security required a robustly empowered subject, the foundation of which was already laid by Medieval voluntarism. Liberty, the ability of the subject to choose its own will without constraint, depends originally on the myth of equality found in the state of nature and the social contract. That is a layer that Locke, leveraging Thomas Hobbes, added to the Medieval foundation.[74] In this context, equality became a function of economy and power, which, in turn, depends on discipline and order. In Locke's views on private property, liberty emerges as a corollary of economy and by the time of Beauvoir it has become the source of the revelation of being. Liberty *is* rationality.

In this section, I will identify the components that contribute to the economic metaphysical model. Perhaps unsurprisingly those components are visible in the thinker often touted both as the Father of Empiricism and the Father of Liberalism: John Locke. His views on private property in *The Second Treatise of Government* illustrate the relevant basis of this model. In this model, liberty is secured through labor and ownership of one's individual identity. The origin story, here, is that people collectively began "in a state of perfect freedom" without any subordination among equals.[75] This myth of equality is required if we are (1) to maintain the absolute dignity of the individual, and (2) later to hold individuals responsible for what they

[74] Arguably, the layer of equality was being established through the Protestant Reformation before Locke's philosophical transition. As Zizioulas notes, "the concept of person" was being detached from theology and tied, instead, to "an autonomous morality." John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993): 27. Zizioulas was referring to a revolution in the concept of person in ancient and classical thought, but the same move recurs in modern philosophy.

[75] John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, C. B. Macpherson, ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980): II.4, II.6.

chose to do with their perfect liberty. After all, from at least Augustine on, freedom is always required for moral accountability.

The origin story of the state of perfect freedom is expanded in Locke's fifth chapter, "Of Property." Here we learn that human beings "have a right to their preservation," that God has "given [creation] to mankind in common," that every person "has a property in his own person" and this is "the labor of his body."[76] Finally, when a person mixes their labor with what is held in common by all, the addition of labor takes the thing out of the commonwealth such that it becomes the private property of the laborer.[77] Intuitively, we can recognize that the hungry person who takes the time to track and hunt and kill the rabbit, which had been within the commonwealth, should have the sole right to eat that rabbit or to distribute it as she chooses. No one else should be able to simply take what she has worked hard to obtain.[78] The important caveat is that no one has the right to take anything out of the commonwealth unless they can use it without it going to waste.[79]

Locke presumes that if all people follow these principles of taking into private possession only what they can use without spoilage that all people will eventually prosper and benefit. Here we find another important component of Locke's position that has come to pervade modern sensibilities. Land that is uncultivated produces only what nature is able to provide unaided. This provision is very low. However, when a person fences off a portion of land and invests their labor into cultivating the land, the land is able to provide far more abundantly. In this way, not

[76] *Ibid.*, V.25, V.27.

[77] *Ibid.*, V.27.

[78] *Ibid.*, V.30.

[79] *Ibid.*, V.31.

just labor, but also efficiency, comes to justify private property. After all, the lost provisions that accrue from the lack of cultivation could arguably be deemed *waste*: "…land that is left wholly to nature, that hath no improvement of pasturage, tillage, or planting, is called, as indeed it is, *waste*."[80] In this way, efficiency becomes concomitant to waste. We saw before that waste invalidates a person's claim to private property. Recall also that one's own body is the original private property owned by every individual. Locke uses this position to argue that the 'Indian' of America has invalidated her right to the land due to her insufficient cultivation of that land.[81] Efficient labor alone prevents waste, and production is the highest human activity.

The position that began originally with the equality and liberty of every human being has come to validate the colonialism, imperialism, and – in theory – enslavement of human beings based on inefficient use of their labor to be productive with what has been given to each of them: their land, their souls, or their bodies. This insight is precisely why an appeal to human dignity will never successfully contest capitalism or popularist movements. It does not matter that a capitalist economy and or populist fascism produce unequal distributions of wealth or undermine liberty, because efficiency is ultimately our North Star. It is the economy rather than a commitment to human flourishing that is the basis of modern Western society. That economic system entered society with the premise of equality and dignity. It used that premise to account for and to justify the "disproportionate and unequal possession of the earth" as it now stands.[82] Through one's own labor and wisdom, a person gains or loses. Responsible, efficient use of labor is the basis of security and of liberty.

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[80] *Ibid.*, V.42. Emphasis original.

[81] *Ibid.*, V.43.

[82] *Ibid.*, V.50.

The moral narrative is otherwise than this, dwelling on 'inalienable rights,' which somehow always turn out to be alienable. John Zizioulas states that "respect for man's 'personal identity' is perhaps the most important ideal of our time."[83] He sees in this ideal a humanistic movement to supplant Christianity. Yet, the progressive and liberal theologies have embraced this ideal, associating God's glory with human flourishing.[84] Of course, there is truth to this insight. The Christ came to save and to redeem the world, and Jesus' life often times affirmed God's intentions for human flourishing. After all, "the Sabbath was made for humanity, not humanity for the Sabbath."[85] Zizioulas is not contesting the theological and biblical value of humanity, however. His concern is the result of separating or "detaching the concept of the person from theology and uniting it with the idea of an autonomous morality or with an existential philosophy which is purely humanistic."[86] What if the situation is more severe than Zizioulas noted? What if the issue is not humanism but with a larger economic model of values and rationality that lays claim even to theology? Is there an escape from such an encompassing rationality? Neither humanism nor theology is any barrier to economy. Therefore, neither humanism nor theology can ensure human flourishing, human rights, or ecological flourishing. Such ideals are subject to economics, not the other way around.

As I have noted, the moral order of this new metaphysical model is based on the individual and their relations to other individuals within a larger economic network. More than

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[83] Zizioulas, *Communion*, 27.

[84] "Similarly, the glory of God is being manifest to the degree that creatures are most radically and fully themselves. Consequently, divine presence in the world should not be spoken about in terms of a suffocating, overwhelming shadow but rather as the ground of freedom itself." Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002): 229.

[85] Mark 2:27.

[86] Zizioulas, *Communion*, 27.

just the moral order (the Good), however, the economic relations of individuals within that network became the basis of the True and the Beautiful. Taylor says that the economy "came to be seen more and more as the dominant end of society."[87] Society *is* an economy:

> an interlocking set of activities of production, exchange, and consumption, which form a system with its own laws and its own dynamic . . . the economic now defines a way we are linked together, a sphere of coexistence that in principle could suffice to itself, if only disorder and conflict didn't threaten.[88]

Beauvoir seems to acknowledge this economy when she states that human beings confer value on things through their free choices.[89] Notice the way that Beauvoir economically frames morality. Our choices become the mode of negotiation regarding the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. We the people collectively decide.

2.5.1 Economic Epistemology

It is not yet clear that a theological basis of personhood, as Zizioulas offers, can yet offer anything more substantive than humanism because it is not yet clear that theology can escape the economic rationality of modernity. In a hierarchical model of transcendence, rationality emerged from a single, pervasive cosmic order to which even the gods were subject. There was an organic synthesis between God, humanity, and the cosmos. As Dupré notes, when "the mind became the spiritual substratum of all reality . . . reality split into two separate spheres: that of the mind, which contained all intellectual determination, and that of all other being, which received

[87] Taylor, *Imaginaries*, 72.

[88] *Ibid.*, 76.

[89] "Freedom must project itself toward its own reality through a content whose value it establishes" (Beauvoir, *Ethics*, 69).

them."[90] This was to become the transcendental phenomenology of Immanuel Kant going forward:

> Hitherto it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects. But all attempts to extend our knowledge of objects by establishing something in regard to them by means of concepts have, on this assumption, ended in failure. We must, therefore, make trial whether we may not have more success if we supposes that objects must conform to our knowledge.[91]

Here Kant may have been offering an approach more akin to the sciences. When he says that objects must conform to our knowledge, perhaps he has in mind the hypotheses in which scientific knowledge is conceived and the empirical experimentation in which that knowledge is then born. The condition of knowledge is that we human beings must take a stance toward the world. This stance is a stance of liberty.

The ideal of liberty provided a 'language' in which to talk about the legitimacy of knowledge. Taylor sees this epistemological innovation as a result of the overdetermination of liberty in modernity. He says, "Indeed, one of the reasons for the vigorous rejection of Aristotelian teleology was that it was seen, then as now, as potentially circumscribing our freedom to determine our own lives and build our own societies."[92] Arguably, Kant's transcendental revolution was provoked by David Hume's problem of induction, a problem that threatened the validity of the natural sciences themselves. Kant's solution to the problem of induction is the transcendental unity of apperception wherein experience becomes a function of human concepts, categories, or (later) intentions. There is something intuitive about this statement. There is little to experience in a spreadsheet of raw data. There is little meaning

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[90] Dupré, *Passage*, 3.

[91] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. Norman Kemp Smith, trans. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003): 22.

[92] Taylor, *Imaginaries*, 80.

available there – until a theory is applied and the data is organized. Does the recognition that raw data – whether raw empirical sense data or raw data on a spreadsheet – requires conceptual framing result in the overdetermination of liberty? Does it allow for the determination of our own lives and the construction of our own societies, as Taylor claims?

An element of the world gives itself to be perceived by one's senses. The mind of the perceiver applies categories or organizational schemas to those perceptions, thereby rendering perceptions as experiences. Those experiences can be analyzed or synthesized to create ideas. Complex ideas are simply the result of the combination of simple ideas mixed with other faculties of the mind such as reflection. So far, I have presented what I take to be standard empiricist dogma. It is the human mind that invests labor into the raw sense data that produces knowledge, much as when the farmer invests labor into the land to bring forth a productive and bountiful harvest. Contrast my simplistic account of Locke's epistemology with the innate ideas of Plato and others that he was attempting to sweep aside. Plato's recollections were not the result of labor, but the result of the participatory ontology to which he was committed. Locke's epistemology is the result of an economy rather than a participatory ontology. These intuitions and theories function as "a hermeneutic of legitimacy" out of which a sense of ethical prescription emerges.[93] If Locke's writings on private property came to justify imperialism, colonialism, and excessive economic differentials, what will his epistemology yield?

Michel Foucault demonstrated to us the connection between power and knowledge. In the interview titled, "Truth and Power," Foucault argues that language and signs are not the source of meaning. Rather meaning occurs more in the mode of war and battle: "relations of power, not

[93] *Ibid.*, 7-8.

relations of meaning."[94] He refers to these relations of power, internal to a discipline, as *discursive régimes*. However, far from being isolated within disciplines, Foucault says:

> What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a *productive network* which runs through the whole social body . . .[95]

This productive network that Foucault gestures towards is an echo of what I am labeling the economic model of modernity. It is what I have connected to the work of John Locke, but clearly Locke was only catching glimpses of the power of labor to organize society. Despite his interests in knowledge, I do not think he grasped how deeply labor shapes knowledge as well as society. Truth arises from sets of discourses which themselves have the form of competitive economic negotiations.

As influential as Foucault and Kuhn's work has been, perhaps no other recent scholar has made the connection between knowledge and economics clearer than has the social anthropologist, Pierre Bourdieu. While Kuhn's work applied directly to scientific disciplines and Foucault's work expanded to cover knowledge across disciplines, Bourdieu helps to provide insight into the social mechanisms behind paradigms and discursive régimes. This social mechanism is the *habitus*:

> systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of

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[94] Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power," *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, Colin Gordon, ed., Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper, trans. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980): 114. Interestingly, Thomas Kuhn, writing contemporarily with Foucault, talks about paradigms as preparing "the student for membership in the particular scientific community with which he will later practice. Because he there joins men who learned the bases of their field from the same concrete models, his subsequent practice will seldom evoke overt disagreement over fundamentals" (Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 11). Notice that a paradigm appears to function as a type of orthodoxy that authorizes particular models and interpretations within those models. For more on the similarities between the work of Foucault and Kuhn, see Ian Hacking, *Historical Ontology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

[95] Foucault, "Truth and Power," 119. Emphasis added.

> practices and representations which can be objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without in any way being the product of obedience to rules . . . collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor.[96]

In his previous book, *Distinction*, Bourdieu had associated these *habitus* with class and economic status.[97] Thus, we learn how these *habitus* arise and originate within society. What both the *habitus* and Bourdieu's subsequent work, *Language and Symbolic Power*, do is show us how this social mechanism within concrete, particular societies leverages the inequality of power and capital to produce and to authorize meaning and knowledge.[98] Importantly, this mechanism being pre-reflective is also material and embodied, all of which can be seen in the above stated description of the *habitus*. For Bourdieu, there is a symbolic and linguistic *market* that authorizes and censors knowledge.[99]

While Bourdieu's work makes use of the metaphor of the marketplace and capital to explain the structures of meaning, there is a more empirical way to describe this structure. Taylor says that "reality [is understood] . . . as shaped by a normal form, which maintains itself within certain limits of distance from its proper shape, and beyond them spirals off to destruction, just as the healthy human body does."[100] I do not know that Taylor ever names this form, but it

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[96] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Richard Nice, trans. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 72. Emphasis original.

[97] See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Richard Nice, trans. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

[98] See Bourdieu, *Language*, 37-38.

[99] "Grammar defines meaning only very partially: it is in relation to a market that the complete determination of the signification of discourse occurs . . . Through these unavoidable effects, the market plays a part in shaping not only the symbolic value but also the meaning of discourse" (Bourdieu, *Language*, 38).

That said, analytic philosophy coming out of logical positivism and the Vienna Circle seems to have attempted to 'fix' the meaning of words and the grammar of language so as to make language more profitable – taking it out of the commonwealth of language, as it were, and making it the private property of philosophy.

[100] Taylor, *Imaginaries*, 78.

strikes me as the statistically normal curve with its standard deviations and outliers. Maintaining that normal curve is the condition for social and economic health. When the curve is denormalized, dysfunction results. But this statistical curve is also the basis of much scientific knowledge, both in the soft as well as the hard sciences. The bell curve, of course, requires outliers. There has to be a tail to the curve. Some are being left behind or are on the wrong side or the weak side. Others will be ahead of the curve and prospering dramatically as a result. In this regard, modern social order is every bit as much elitist as was Plato's republic. We have just not yet recognized that statistical regulation as the basis for society is not the result of the necessary order of things but rather a result of the way that we have pre-theoretically modeled reality.

From the origins of empiricism in Locke's epistemology, we find that the economic model pervades rationality, meaning, and knowledge itself. What of theological epistemology, theological authority, and doctrines of revelation? The Protestant Reformation set up the Bible as its theological authority: *sola scriptura* and *ad fontes*. However, the Bible sitting on a shelf is not authoritative. The Bible read and interpreted is authoritative, which is to say that theological authority is the result of mixing private labor (interpretation) with a raw resource, held in common by all, namely the Bible. When we mix the private intellectual or spiritual labor of reading and interpreting with the Bible, we gain a proposition or a belief about divine truth. This belief empowers us. By mixing labor with the scriptures, revelation becomes one's own property, one's sacred interpretation. We gain a *right* to believe as we will and to relate to God as we will. But there is still too much individualism at play here.

When we factor in the social context, the proposition that one derives from one's labor of interpreting the scriptures must enter into the theological marketplace to compete with other

interpreted propositions. Of course, the theological marketplace is itself structured by competing paradigms much like Kuhn's depiction of natural science. Albeit, the theological marketplace is messier than the scientific one. In theology, Kuhn's paradigms might be reflected in various orthodoxies: Reformed orthodoxy, Wesleyan orthodoxy, Catholic orthodoxy, feminist orthodoxy, Black orthodoxy, and so forth. There are also popularist, conservative, nationalist, and progressive forces at work across that spectrum of theological orthodoxies. In this way, what comes to be considered theological truth within a community of faith is a result of ongoing 'negotiations.' And we must not fail to recognize the competition between the orthodoxies.

If theology is not 'free' from economic rationality, then the accounts that theology gives about all of the central doctrines and all of the narratives of salvation and hope are formulated within the framework of economics. The theological language that emerges through our commitments to the moral order of inalienable rights and popular sovereignty that shapes our understanding of God's own being and purposes and will, that theological language is an economic language. Here we find more reasons to be concerned over Smith's notion of non-predicative, formally indicative 'concepts.' Even such 'concepts' point *from a place*, and that place is today the place of liberal economics. 'Concepts' indicate economically.

What interests me is that while pursuing an ontological reversal that has its basis in more classical Platonic thought, Smith seems to accede to the trajectory of modern Western epistemology in crediting knowledge to the knower – an economic or perhaps a classically liberal epistemology, if you will. Does he carefully evade the traps of a metaphysics of presence only to vault willfully into the pitfalls of economic epistemology? When he attempts to synthesize the intuitions of ancient or classical thought – the intelligible appearance of reality – with the private agency of modern thought – knowledge seems to become, for him, the product

of invested private labor – humble as that labor may be.[101] Perhaps this explains why God must reveal Godself in ways that we can understand God.

2.5.2 Community and the End of Communion

The origin story told by Hobbes, Locke, and John Rawls, among others, is that human beings are essentially individuals who tacitly or voluntarily make a free choice to enter into society in order to increase their security. However, one only gains security at the cost of some of one's liberty. In Levinas's words, "The State awakens the person to a freedom it immediately violates."[102] Government presents itself as a threat by virtue of its limitation of individual liberty. Additionally, because liberty is competitive, society as a whole and the Other in particular will always be a threat. This contextual fact of competitive liberty sets us within an imperialistic set of social relations. As Jürgen Moltmann describes it, the freedom at the heart of modernity is only a freedom for domination:

> Because the whole of history down to our own day can be seen as an on-going struggle for power, the only person who is called free is the victor in this struggle. The losers are subjugated and are therefore said 'not to be free.' The history of the word freedom shows that it derives from a slave-owning society. In a society of that kind, only the master is free.[103]

[101] In one of his later writings, Smith seems to concede some of this point when he said, "I still largely envisioned the 'interpreter' as a lone Protestant in her closet" (Smith, "Continuing the Conversation," 216). The image is of the lone Evangelical hard at work in private prayer, in her prayer closet, to use the vernacular. Smith recognized the problem of isolation, but perhaps not of invested labor.

[102] Levinas, *Totality*, 176.

[103] Jurgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, Translated by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001): 117.

A society based on this model of freedom, freedom as domination or liberty, can have no communion but, at best, community: a voluntary association of likeminded individuals.[104] Difference and diversity will always threaten to undo community. Therefore, community can only be homogeneous.

There appears to be a connection with the organization of society and reason. Taylor remarks that "Grotius derives the normative order underlying political society from the nature of its constitutive members."[105] Based on that derivative, Grotius concludes, "Human beings are rational, sociable agents who are meant to collaborate in peace to their mutual benefit."[106] Connecting society and reason is a tacit assumption about moral order whose ideal is embodied in peaceful, mutual collaboration. This ideal emerges out of the presumed rationality of humanity, an assumption near to the heart of both the hierarchical and the economic models – though expressed in very different ways. What is left unexamined and unrecognized is the necessary imperialism of that rationality. In the hierarchical model, Being is ultimately One, with all that entails. In the economic model, Being is the Same, with all that entails. Consequently, in both cases, ethics emerges from ontology, which is why war will always suspend morality.[107]

Levinas connects political theory with the "value of spontaneity," which is how he understands the freedom of liberty.[108] Government or society has to "[reconcile] my freedom

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[104] In contrast to community, I will posit a pneumatological and eschatological communion established visibly and concretely in history through the mechanism of reconciliation. See William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2002): 238-39.

[105] Taylor, *Imaginaries*, 3.

[106] *Ibid.*

[107] Levinas, *Totality*, 21.

[108] *Ibid.*, 83.

with the freedom of others."[109] This necessity of government is a result of the competitive nature of liberty which is optimized through domination and homogeneity. Interestingly, Levinas says that political theory optimizes my own spontaneity even while going about this project of reconciliation "by way of knowledge of the world."[110] In other words, knowledge functions in this context in the mode of social management. We can reflect on the nature of demographics, the social and behavioral sciences, along with the organizational sciences that flourish in the early twenty-first century. Knowledge serves human society as a means of control, order, and management (*oikonomos*). Knowledge is a mode of economics when connected with a community.

If knowledge is to function this way for a community, a community for whom difference is a threat, then knowledge must "[reduce] to the same what at first presented itself as other," because "[d]espite the infinite extension of needs it makes possible, economic existence remains within the same."[111] Here we get more of a sense of why community is homogenizing and why liberty is competitive. As both are economic functions within the modern metaphysical model, both must serve the Same – the self. Economy remains the law of the household – one's own household. "In such a rationalism, there is no longer any society, that is, no longer any relation whose terms absolve themselves from the relation," Levinas states.[112] Perhaps we find a clue here of the resilience of popularism in modern Western cultures despite the liberal values broadly celebrated within those same cultures. More fundamental than any value is economy.

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[109] *Ibid.*

[110] *Ibid.*

[111] *Ibid.*, 175.

[112] *Ibid.*, 208.

And now we come to the end of communion. Knowledge, itself an economic function, emerges from and supports the interests of the Same. The question of knowledge cannot be isolated from the question of communion. Economic knowledge, emerging from a rationalism that is unique, subverts all communion.

2.5.3 The End of Eschatology

A community originating out of the liberty of its members will necessarily remain 'for itself' and closed in upon itself. While both Augustine and Luther used this language of the *homo incurvatus in se* to describe sin, Elsa Tamez reminds us that even, or especially, as this inward curve, sin is not just something we do.[113] It is not just an offense against God, though it is surely that. Sin is also something done to us and to the Other. Sin is a violation of the Other, the vulnerable one, and sometimes it is we who are vulnerable.[114] A community for itself and closed in upon itself, as a sinful community, is sinful as it secures itself through colonialism and imperialism. Of course, colonialism is not just limited to the work of governments that colonize distant lands. Domestic or local communities engage in psychological and cultural colonialism against one another in their efforts to secure their members' liberties.[115] Such communities are communities of radical immanence, as are the individuals that make up these voluntary associations. Even their eschatology has become another means of imperialism – a triumphalist

[113] See Bernahard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, Roy A. Harrisville, trans. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999): 251.

[114] Elsa Tamez, *The Amnesty of Grace: Justification by Faith from a Latin American Perspective*, Sharon H. Ringe, trans. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993): 14.

[115] "…it need not be the case for colonialism to exist that a people's land must be invaded and held by an outside force . . . The essence of colonialism exists instead where a people's institutions are dominated and controlled by interests foreign to the well being of those people themselves." Brian K. Blount, *Go Preach! Mark's Kingdom Message and the Black Church Today* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998): 217.

eschatology that will vindicate the community while casting down all Others. It is an eschatology that precedes from the linear sequence of progressive secular time, a time without transcendence for a world without transcendence.

With no transcendent eschatology, it is ordinary life and ordinary time that must be sanctified. The telos of the economic is always domination – the domination of space and time. The future must be brought about through the work and intention of those who control the present. Eschatology collapses, therefore, into the labors of history such that the future ceases to surprise us in any meaningful way. When this happens, ordinary life becomes the "site for the highest forms of Christian life," which amounts to a Christianity consumed with disciplined personal advancement.[116] The sanctification of the ordinary, which can be traced back at least to the work of Martin Luther, amounts in later modernity to the secularization of eschatology, the collapse of the eschaton into history and ordinary time.[117]

Taylor claims that the 'affirmation' of ordinary life is one of the dimensions of the economic form of modern life. Relations and relationships are requisite for that economic form.[118] Consider again Beauvoir's notion that our individual choices are conferring value on the things we choose and, in some sense, making a choice for all humanity.[119] It is through human relations that economic value is conferred and negotiated. Of course, then, family life and close

[116] Taylor, *Imaginaries*, 74.

[117] A variety of movements in Luther's theology collectively amount to a sanctification of the ordinary. Luther re-imagines the *communion sanctorum* not as a heavenly communion but as an earthly one. Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, Robert C. Schultz, trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966): 298. The three estates or hierarchies of the priestly office, marriage, and politics are set on equal footing, with none given prominence (Lohse, *Luther's Theology*, 246).

[118] Taylor, *Imaginaries*, 74.

[119] Beauvoir, *Ethics*, 69.

ordinary relationships are going to emerge as deeply important and meaningful. In many ways, they become *the* form of modern society. In that case and from that perspective, to threaten this normal and normative form of society is to threaten the integrity, vitality, and goodness of society itself. The flourishing of individuals, the family, and other close relationships are the telos, the goal, and the purpose of modern society, a society without a transcendent eschatology.[120]

Without either a transcendent teleology or an apocalyptic eschatology, what guides society are the impersonal forces and processes "happening behind the backs of agents" whose invisible hands demonstrate "law-like systematicity."[121] Bourdieu speaks here of the transferable logic of the habitus,[122] but it amounts to this same economic or statistical form of society – a society "unhooked from 'polity.'"[123] The telos of humanity is statistical regularity, a telos found not in God or the gods, found not in nature or mystery, found not even in symbolic logic, but rather in the indubitable clarity and rationality of spreadsheets. Our future and the Good itself is secured through SPSS.[124]

[120] Of course, it would not be hard to imagine another form of society within a modern, economic model. We could, for instance, imagine a society composed of radically free individuals without regulated and regulative relations – a society without marriages or traditional nuclear or extended families. A society with flexible relationships and relational structures where marriages, if one chooses them, might be open or might be broadened beyond two persons or gender-agnostic. This society and these relations would, perhaps, more perfectly express the radical liberty of the economic model. There may be a dissolution of society as a collective action in this form. In this form, does anything necessitate collective action and obligation?

[121] Taylor, *Imaginaries*, 79.

[122] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 170.

[123] Taylor, *Imaginaries*, 79.

[124] SPSS, or the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, is a statistical analysis software developed by IBM and used widely by researchers.

For decades, prophetic theologians have been protesting capitalism to little avail. Gustavo Gutierrez, Theodore Jennings, Douglas Meeks, Jeorg Rieger, Susan Thisthlethwait, and many other distinguished scholars have been voices in the wilderness since roughly the 1970s. Centuries before, the voices of Basil the Great, Ambrose, John Chrysostom, and others warned of the dangers of riches and wealth.[125] Based on statistical word counts, Jesus spoke more about money than any other topic in the New Testament. He too warned us of this danger. Why have most churches and broader society ignored or attacked these prophets? They spoke of the gospel, the call of Jesus, the Church and its sacraments, and the rights and dignity of people made in God's image. These theological critiques of wealth, capitalism, and oppression continue to appeal to individual life, liberty, and sustenance – the very values upon which Locke established classical liberalism and the very values adopted by his friend, Adam Smith. Liberalism is quite capable of justifying colonialism and imperialism precisely through the language of rights and dignity. Consequently, theological critiques have found little purchase within many communities and churches. Can we overcome the great structural and systemic evils of modern life by appeal to human rights and dignity? Can we do so by appealing to something transcendent and apocalyptically eschatological? If modern society begins with the origin story of equality and equity, then any inequality today is a result of one's choices rather than the system itself. Individuals that fail to work within the system are the problem, not the system itself. These are the responses of liberal capitalism. In terms of our churches, is there a more liberal organization on the planet than what we find in Evangelical churches with their message of discipline, personal responsibility, personal moral accomplishment, and one's work ethic?

[125] See Charles Avila, *Ownership: Early Christian Teaching* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1983).

Liberalism and economy will, however, never explain martyrdom. They will never give us one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. They will breed anguish, anxiety, and despair. And churches in this model will call forth secularism, agnosticism, and atheism. After all, they offer nothing more, nothing transcendent, and nothing apocalyptically eschatological.

2.6 Smith, Revelation, and Formal Indications

Having sketched the dominant models of Western thought and their genealogies, I would now like to apply those models heuristically and analytically to Smith's position on the 'concept' and the logic of incarnation. I will evaluate his positions both from the perspective of participatory hierarchies and the perspective of liberal economies.

2.6.1 Smith and Hierarchy

Having sketched out the metaphysical model of the pre-modern age in contrast to the emergence of a liberal-economic model in the modern age, we can now return once more to Smith's project, the logic of incarnation, which is analogy through formal indication and non-predicative 'concepts.' Recall his assertion that the incarnation amounts to a reverse ontological participation, and one that conveys value upon the material body. While these divergences from Plato, in particular, are meaningful, the ancient metaphysical model is not to be reduced to Platonic philosophy. It is capable to rendering a wide variety of philosophies meaningful and rational. What is important is the requirement for transcendence and the concomitant ontological connection to that transcendence. The direction of ontological participation is irrelevant from the perspective of the model itself.

While we might be tempted to recognize in Smith's value of embodiment something more in common with the economic model and its sanctification of the ordinary, this would be

shortsighted. Smith values embodiment in a way similar to Aristotle, whose doctrine of entelechy teaches that each thing contains its own purpose within itself. Smith's work has consistently been committed to the refutation of Gnosticism, but it is not clear what role any actual body or material element plays in Smith's logic of incarnation, which largely amounts to Thomistic analogy. In Smith, the body is affirmed as the site or the vessel of transcendent reception. The body is capable of the divine, not entirely unlike Aristotle's acorn is capable of teleological purpose. Therefore, when Smith argues for the inherent capacity of the person to receive revelation, this claim is already at home in the hierarchical model without need of the incarnation. Smith's position may be an innovation on Plato, but it has not innovated the underlying model.

Smith might begin to strain the hierarchical model *if* he insisted that the *ordinary* individual, rather than an elite individual, might have the capacity to receive revelation.[126] Of course, Aristotle recognized that conditions have to be in place for anything – person or acorn – to achieve their purpose. In that regard, Aristotle could be read to suggest that even the most ordinary person has the formal, passive capacity to achieve their purpose. Likewise, Smith presumably universalizes the human capacity to receive revelation. Further, he places the onus on the transcendent to fulfill any conditions necessary to revelation. Structurally, God must accommodate humanity, a position that Smith justifies incarnationally.[127] Still, while this innovation might strain the traditional orthodoxies of the hierarchical model, Smith's claims certainly fit within that model.

[126] It is also the case that Smith is thinking of an individual and not a church, community, or some other corporate body (Smith, "Continuing the Conversation," 216).

[127] Arguably, the incarnation as a gracious act is quite different from the incarnation as a structural necessity.

Smith has acknowledged the problem of his individualism, but what I want to suggest is that there can be no Christian revelation without communion and without eschatology. Smith's position lacks both. He makes it clear that he values a plurality of hermeneutics, a plurality emerging from the competing perspectives of individuals. Yes, we could speak meaningfully about the competition between communities, but again, only if we embrace the community of modernity rather than the communion of God's eschatological kingdom in which difference is no barrier to fellowship.[128]

2.6.2 Smith and Economy

The formal indication in which we do not predicate anything of the divine but instead simply point, this is where Smith locates his hope. Of course, he does not mean that all we do is stand and point, surely not with our fingers and arms. We have to speak in order to formally indicate. God appears to us in a way we can receive God, and our reception of God is a formal indication of God. What do we receive when we receive God with our 'concept'? Without predicating anything of God, the 'concept' can convey nothing about God other than an invitation to others to see for themselves. Yet, that is surely not what Aquinas and Husserl meant by analogy. The logic of incarnation means that Jesus enters into our words and 'concepts' so that our speech indicates. The content of our speech, which does not predicate anything of God, points beyond itself to God. This seems to be a traditional apophatic theology. Our words cannot convey positive content – predicates – of God. They cannot tell us what God is. They can only indicate what God is not/like through negation.

[128] As I stated above, in *The Fall*, Smith embraces a realized eschatology. He cannot accept that the fullness of revelation would come anywhere other than in the finite ontology of the *now*. His commitment to rescuing creation from being deficient, therefore, results in the necessity of a realized eschatology. With his absolute rejection of what he views as 'original fallenness,' how could his eschatology be otherwise than realized?

However, in apophatic theology, God does not appear, and Smith is very committed to God showing up. In apophatic theology, we speak equivocally of God. God is good, yes, but God's goodness is different from how we understand and use the term, 'good.' Here we find Smith's semiology. Something is absent from our word, 'good.' That absence is God's transcendence. In this way, our word 'good,' is a sign and a formal indication rather than being predicative of God. Can this equivocation and non-predication escape the economic rationality of modernity? Can it escape the economic exchange? Bourdieu claims that "the relations of communication *par excellence*-linguistic exchanges- are also relations of symbolic power in which the power relations between speakers or their respective groups are actualized."[129] Does an indicative 'concept,' one that posits no predicate, escape symbolic or economic power relations? Surely there is no *necessity* of an indicative 'concept' escaping economic relations. A formal indication remains a speech act. For an indication to function, there must be a social-linguistic capacity in place that recognizes the indication. At that point, the point that an indication or a sign becomes meaningful, the formal indication has become economic.

What of interpretation? Smith is committed to a plurality of interpretation as a manifestation of God's good intentions for finite creation. Does pluralism escape economic relations? On this topic, Bourdieu suggests that "religion and politics achieve their most successful ideological effects by exploiting the possibilities contained in the polysemy inherent in the social ubiquity of the legitimate language."[130] Of course, language is equivocal and polysemous. But that is already part of the economy of language, allowing some users to accrue value while others are devalued. Bourdieu's point is that this polysemy is not extraordinary. It

[129] Bourdieu, *Language*, 37.

[130] *Ibid.*, 29.

does not rescue us from valuation or demands of legitimacy. Rather, it plays into those things. Pluralities of interpretation play into structures of economic use and exploitation. Even in the attempt to cast down all standards of legitimacy, we establish standards of legitimacy. When we sanctify the ordinary, the ordinary becomes *sacred.*

Bourdieu provides examples of how different interpretations and meanings come to reflect economic structures. He identifies the French term, *soigné,* which suggests conscientiousness, tidiness, or carefulness. Bourdieu notes that this became a term deeply approved of by the petit bourgeoisie. And precisely because of that economic association, it became a term "rejected by intellectuals for whom, precisely, it evokes everything that is petit-bourgeois, petty and mean-spirited."[131] Surely such a term is an exception. To dispel that potential critique, Bourdieu then turns to the language of mathematics and the term *group*. In order to maintain a univocal meaning for that term, mathematicians must control "the homogeneity of the group."[132] The need for regulation brings to mind the scientific paradigms of Kuhn. Paradigms ensure that scientists will think alike by "agreeing to the same rules and standards for practice."[133] Paradigms not only produce consensus, but they ensure ongoing consensus, not unlike the role of orthodoxy in theology. In other words, the marketplace of mathematics and science achieves something approaching univocity only through strict regulations and interventions.[134] They do so by rejecting the plurality of interpretations. Left to

[131] *Ibid.*, 40.

[132] *Ibid.*

[133] Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 476.

[134] "Recourse to a neutralized language is obligatory whenever it is a matter of establishing a practical consensus between agents or groups of agents having partially or totally different interests" (Bourdieu, *Language*, 40).

their own unregulated devices, the meaning of words will conform to economics, and even those that are highly regulated will experience revolutions.[135]

Left to itself, an unregulated society will expand the meaning of words. It takes a regulated, homogeneous group to fix the meaning of words. In other words, if Smith is worried about the truncation of concepts, perhaps he should be concerned with the expanding diversity of the community. In fact, that may be what he is concerned with when he seeks to impose regulations and limitations on the community through the 'concept.' Essentially, for Smith to correct the violence of the concept by establishing the 'concept,' he needs to purify the community – to make the community more homogeneous through the imposition of regulations (thereby leading to future revolutions). To maximize the plurality of interpretations of the divine, the 'concept' can be used only in certain legitimate ways. This approach is clearly the one he has taken tentative steps upon, though without recognizing the outcome of his approach.

Bourdieu refers to the position that Smith seems to have adopted as neo-Kantian, "which gives language and, more generally, representations a specifically symbolic efficacy in the construction of reality."[136] The 'concept' becomes a condition of speaking about God, which then avoids metaphysical violence. It avoids making God play roles in which God no longer recognizes Godself. It avoids truncating God. In so doing, 'concepts' limit transcendence by imposing a structure on reality, such as a reverse participatory ontology. Smith's position authorizes a way of seeing the world, which "helps to construct the reality of that world."[137]

[135] We must note that the cause of these revolutions in science is precisely a result of economic factors.

[136] *Ibid.,* 105

[137] *Ibid.,* 106.

Levinas, almost seeming to echo St. Paul, says, "In undertaking what I willed, I realized so many things I did not will."[138] Interpretation is a step beyond formal indication. Interpretation is necessarily predicating, and even if something of God remains absent in our equivocation and polysemy, something else becomes present. Interpretation is the occasion for the introduction of the invisible hand, the transferable logics, and the statistical regularities that structure economic epistemology. Levinas continues from above: "The worker does not hold in his hands all of the threads of his own action. . . . [Works] can be exchanged, that is, be maintained in the anonymity of money."[139] The question then becomes for us whether there is a return on our investment of speaking of God. Is there profit to be made here? In other words, the modern question is less about how words refer and more about their market value. Bourdieu states that it is "the intellectualist philosophy which treats language as an object of contemplation rather than as an instrument of action and power."[140] Signification is less about correlation and more about economics – *power!* This is an area Smith fails to address.

There have been those, like Auguste Comte, who offered a form of "linguistic communism,"[141] the idea that "language forms a kind of wealth, which all can make use of at once without causing any diminution of the store, and which thus admits a complete community of enjoyment."[142] We should notice right away the parallels between Comte's claims and those of Locke regarding private property and the commonwealth. The notion here is that there is no

[138] Levinas, *Totality*, 176. St. Paul: "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (Rom. 7:19).

[139] Levinas, *Totality*, 176.

[140] Bourdieu, *Language*, 37.

[141] *Ibid.*, 43-4.

[142] Auguste Comte, *System of Positive Polity*, 2 (New York: Burt Franklin, 1875): 213.

real cost to our words, perhaps meaning no ethical cost. No one is affected, benefited, or exploited through language. Smith would need a type of economically-neutral linguistic commonwealth for his position to hold. But if Locke's position leads to imperialism and colonialism, can Comte's do otherwise?

Whence revelation? What are we to say about revelation in this context? God condescends to appear, but in a way that the person can understand. Dupré states that "revelation must be reasonable."[143] But if reason is a product of history, then it has no eschatology, no surprise, and no transcendence. Today, the reason and rationality available to us is economics. Is that how God appears? Does God appear economically? What would such a revelation reveal? Is God's revelation "delivered over to the anonymous field of the economic life, in which I maintain myself . . . through labor and possession?"[144] We have already established that economic rationality leaves no space and no future for the Other. It has no apocalyptic eschatology; no future coming. Levinas describes precisely Smith's revelation: "The Other signals himself, but does not present himself. The works symbolize him . . . it reveals only in concealing. In this sense, the signs constitute and protect my privacy."[145] Smith had argued that God was protecting God's own privacy in God's refusal to appear, but what if Smith was, instead, protecting the private property of the receiver? The private property that is their own interpretation? The private property that is our right as interpreters? This reason and rationality place a fence around the pasture of revelation, ensuring that revelation become productive and efficient. This reason provides security and profit.

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[143] Dupré, *Enlightenment*, 246.

[144] Levinas, *Totality*, 176.

[145] *Ibid.*

Concepts are never private, but always social. The recipient of revelation does not receive a 'private' concept or 'concept' of God, which they then convey indirectly in a formally-indicative way. Kierkegaard's indirect communication is a mode of establishing a relationship rather than communicating content. Smith views the self/thinker/speaker as the origin of the 'concept' and fails to recognize that language is social. Because language is social, concepts or 'concepts' come from outside or beyond the self. Even when one is praising, praying, meditating, or reflecting, the concept is already economically formed. Signification is itself economic. Consequently, a semiological structure offers no escape from conceptual violence.

2.7 Conclusion

In his analysis of Radical Orthodoxy, Smith talks about how "the contemporary cultural milieu is very much the product of ontological shifts that have taken place in modernity."[146] There are times in his discussion where it seems as if these *ontological shifts* occur volitionally, as if philosophers, theologians, and others have voluntarily chosen to make these shifts. We hear some of that volitional spirit in his reference to Milbank: "Thus, if we are to counter secular modernity's politics and epistemology, we must begin with a *counter*-ontology (TST, 422-32)."[147] Arguably, this volitional spirit is characteristic of the entire Radical Orthodox movement and, therefore, broader than just Smith's own views. The implication is that scholars and theorists are able to select the ontology out of which they work, that ontology is subject to negotiation among stakeholders or the unrestrained freedom of choice of those who utilize it.

[146] Smith, *Radical Orthodoxy*, 186.

[147] *Ibid.*

However, the very idea that ontology or metaphysics can be volitionally selected or negotiated is itself an idea that can arise only in the economic context of modernity. That is not to say that Plato and Aristotle did not have different ontologies and that scholars across the classical and medieval period did not make intentional selections about whose metaphysical system to follow. I need to explain further. The flattened ontology and the 'autonomous metaphysics' that Smith disparages are not the ontologies or metaphysics of particular thinkers. Rather, what he describes is the shape of all modern ontologies and metaphysics, to the extent that they can be called modern. Of course, we can debate between Jean-Paul Sartre's ontology and René Descartes' ontology, even mixing and matching between them. But we can do this because they derive from the same overall liberal-economic paradigm. What we cannot do is select from Plato's ontology and Sartre's because they derive from different paradigms – different metaphysical models. To retreat backwards results in the ghettoization of our work. This is not a pejorative claim, but merely accounts for the fact that we would no longer be participating in the contemporary discourse. In this context, nostalgia comes at the cost of significance.

Assuming that mainstream Western thought is not today working within a model of participatory ontology but in an economic model, something like a networked marketplace of inter-related nodal points, would Smith's project remain viable? Smith's argument is that incarnational logic and iconic concepts point beyond themselves. This methodology would presumably fit well within a participatory ontology. However, in an economic network of inter-related nodal points, which is structured horizontally rather than hierarchically, there is no essential ontological structure such as we would find in Plato. The economic structure shifts

based upon capital, value, or influence.[148] Importantly, in a way similar to how the securing of private property became part of the origin story of modern political philosophy – moving out of a state of nature into a social contract – so private property, including private intellectual property, remains the gameboard of Smith's phenomenology. Outside of Smith, language is arguably economical in nature, a mode of symbolic power more so than a semiology.[149] Postmodernity is the tacit recognition of this socio-economic structure standing behind our knowledge and language.

In a Platonic model of participatory ontology, presumably the structure is objective. It may not be equitable, but it is objective in the sense that Kant recognized – in a participatory ontology, we seek to conform knowledge to *objects*.[150] Smith's divine condescension disrupts the model only nominally because it ultimately re-affirms the objective structure of a participatory hierarchy. Iconic concepts can point beyond themselves to what is objectively transcendent only because of this necessary metaphysical structure. The notion of incarnation as the simultaneous presence/absence of God fits the ontology of this model.

In contrast, in an economic model, relations are accidental in the sense that they could conceivably be otherwise. Rather than being objective, they are driven by the fluctuating values of a marketplace. The forces structuring the marketplace are based on a certain commitment to liberty exercised in, by, and through each nodal point. In that structure, there is influence and influencers rather than semiological indicators. For a concept to 'point beyond itself' in that economic structure now becomes a conference of value on the thing to which it 'points.' The

[148] Think again of Beauvoir's notion that each of us confers value through our choices (Beauvoir, *Ethics*, 71).

[149] Bourdieu, *Language*, 66-67.

[150] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B xvi.

metaphor of pointing no longer even functions. We are really talking about endorsements now. Only those who have already accrued sufficient social, symbolic, intellectual, economic, theological, or some other mode of capital can provide endorsements. Does it make sense to consider an indicative function within this economic ontological structure?

We must also reconsider what it would mean for finite beings to be complete or good within an economic ontology as opposed to a participatory ontology. Endorsements require unequal distributions of capital. Only those who sufficiently accrued capital can provide endorsements. On what grounds will we justify unequal distributions of capital such that finitude could be considered complete or good? Does Gnosticism even apply in an economically structured metaphysics? It is not the nature of being anymore (ontology) but the ontic relations themselves that is now called into question.

Perhaps this is why James Cone can argue that Black theology emerges out of the context of Black lived-experience.[151] Theological concepts *and* 'concepts' come with the baggage of their racially positioned speakers. Notice that Cone does not try to claim an ontological origin of Black theology, but he rather indicates the local context that gives depth and meaning to Black theology.[152] Black theology does not try to conform to an ontological structure but rather it

[151] "Black Theology must uncover the structures and forms of the black experience, because the categories of interpretation must arise out of the thought forms of the black experience itself." James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2019): 17.

"Theology is always identified with a particular community. It is either identified with those who inflict oppression or with those who are its victims . . . This is one aspect which distinguishes theology from philosophy of religion. Philosophy of religion is not committed to a community . . . Christian theology cannot afford to be an abstract, dispassionate discourse on the nature of God in relation to humankind; such an analysis has no ethical implications for the contemporary forms of oppression in our society . . . And because black theology is a product of that experience, it must talk about God in light of it." James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1998): 6, 8, 17, 24.

[152] Cone does use ontological language, but he positions it in an ethical context and in a manner so as to universalize particular modes of vulnerability and oppression: ". . . blackness is an ontological symbol and a visible reality which best describes what oppression means in America" (Cone, *Liberation*, 7).

ethically *reveals* an ontological structure. If it conformed, then Smith's indicative 'concept' may serve Cone's purposes. Of course, the notion that Black theology could thrive in a participatory ontology, which is necessarily hierarchical, is simply scandalous. There is no innocent language and there are no innocent concepts or 'concepts.'[153] Each emerges from an economically structured position. Any *formale Anzeige* would function from within that position, corrupting its indication with the baggage of that position. This is not a problem of Gnosticism but of economics. There is no transcendence within economics or an economic ontology. There is only power.[154]

I agree with Smith's and with Radical Orthodoxy's overall critique of modern ontology and metaphysics. I agree with the need for transcendence. I agree that "the ontology of immanence" separates God, humanity, and nature resulting in a nihilistic, dystopian war of each-against-all.[155] I agree that a participatory model is needed. Heidegger recognized the need for transcendence as did Levinas and Marion and others. Karl Barth recognized this need. These thinkers provide a very different solution than what Smith and Radical Orthodoxy offer. To differentiate itself from political parties, theology does not get to simply bully its way back into meaningfulness by insisting on the liturgical character of the world through a stomp of its foot. Instead of a brute assertion or retreating backwards, Heidegger, Levinas, Marion, Barth, and others sought a move forward.

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[153] "But if the society is racist and also uses God-language as an instrument to further the cause of human humiliation, then the task of authentic theological speech is even more dangerous and difficult" (*Ibid*., 55). Does an indicative, nonpredicating 'concept' escape societal racism? Intuitively, it seems unlikely.

[154] Nietzsche was entirely right on this point.

[155] Smith, *Radical Orthodoxy*, 188.

Further, if we are not clear about our metaphysical models then we risk confusing elements of those paradigms, which Smith does when he injects volitionality – a component of modern economics – back into the participatory ontology of Plato. Volition emerges into mainstream Western thought as the will begins to gain priority over the intellect during the Middle Ages. Will evolves into liberty as unrestrained choice and becomes the cornerstone of modern, economic metaphysics. We cannot use the cornerstone of modernity in order to establish a premodern position.

2.7.1 Towards a Participatory Eschatological Model

While I am critical of the model of economic liberty, I recognize the role that this model has played in extending the human lifespan, improving the quality of some human life, and bringing about a great deal of social liberation for women and minorities in particular contexts. A great deal of liberation remains to be accomplished. We find cries for freedom and democracy in the political and liberation theologies of scholars such as C.S. Song who defiantly insists that China's dictatorial rule has to contend with these forces of freedom and democracy. It seems unlikely that the oppressed can be freed without the twin anthems of freedom and democracy urging them to revolution as they "rise up to assert their rights."[156] Does that intuition imply that we have come to the end of history? Is democracy with its economic corollary in capitalism the end of history? If we side with the oppressed, do we side with liberal, capitalistic, democracy?

Without retreating to a model of hierarchical, ontological participation and without stagnating in a model of economic liberalism, I suggest that the twentieth-century thinkers I mentioned above have begun imagining a model of eschatological participation. This model does

[156] C.S. Song, *Jesus and the Reign of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993): 41.

not take us backwards, but forward. It does not rely on liberty but responsibility, thus overcoming nihilism while continuing to stand with and to empower the oppressed. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas uses the term *eschatology* only within the "Preface," but the entire text should be read as an account of a participatory eschatology that emerges out of a commitment to ethical responsibility.[157] It is through the Other that the infinite confronts the Same with its call to holiness. Sartre told the story of the infinite liberty of the human person, whose existence precedes their essence. In contrast, Levinas tells a story of the infinite responsibility of the human person, who is called to holiness by the Other. I posit that Levinas's ethical responsibility provokes the thought of a new rationality and basis for thought.

In his work on eschatology, Donald Bloesch suggests that social analysis subordinated to theological reflection and "done through the eyes of faith" can be an important element of *fides quaerens intellectum*.[158] In the first millennium, philosophy often served in this supporting role as theologians sought to systematically articulate the mysteries of the trinity and of christology. Philosophy continues to be a vital supporting discipline for theology, but contemporary theology requires the aid of sociology and its related fields. Bloesch's intuitions about the role of sociology in theological work are useful and perhaps even urgent for us.

As we conclude this chapter, looking forward to signs and indications of a new model, Taylor's words might be beneficial for us. He asks how a theory might begin to transform a social imaginary. He says that this transformation often begins with new practices that "are made

[157] See Robert Bernasconi, "Different Styles of Eschatology: Derrida's Take on Levinas' Political Messianism," *Research in Phenomenology* 28 (1998): 3-19.

[158] Donald Bloesch, *The Last Things: Resurrection, Judgement, Glory* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004): 18.

sense of by the new outlook, the one first articulated in a theory."[159] The practices allow a novel opportunity for meaning. In particular, it offers a new moral order, a new morality, an "imperative prescription."[160] Perhaps it is not accidental that Levinas's work centers on the infinite demand of a transcendent ethics. Dupré says that "a genuinely new synthesis, if ever to come, will have to rest on newly established principles."[161] Let us hope, perhaps prayerfully, to spot such principles in the work ahead.

[159] Taylor, *Imaginaries*, 29.

[160] *Ibid.*, 7.

[161] Dupré, *Passage*, 7.

CHAPTER 3

Towards a Participatory Eschatological Model: Revelation in Emmanuel Levinas

There is no philosophy that is not to some extent also theology.[1]

...could we not envision something of an 'ethical' concept –
a concept of the concept which does justice to the incommensurable?[2]

"*Then the Lord spoke to you . . . You heard the sound of words but*
saw no form; there was only a voice."[3]

3.1 Introduction

One of James K. A. Smith's concerns was the problem of conceptual violence. Adriaan Peperzak describes Emmanuel Levinas's project in *Totality and Infinity* (TI) this way: "It is the question of how the violence that seems inherent to all politics (and thus also to history) can be overcome by true peace."[4] While conceptual violence and the violence of politics/history are not the same violence, they are also not entirely different violences. Political and historical violence often depends on a prior conceptual violence. In fact, we can see that Levinas's project unfolds as a critique of conceptual or ontological violence. Ontological violence unfolds through the "interposition of a middle and neutral term that ensures the comprehension of being."[5] Violence

[1] Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963): 3.

[2] Smith, *Speech*, 8.

[3] Deut. 4:12.

[4] Adriaan Peperzak, *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1993): 122.

[5] Levinas, *Totality*, 43.

arises, here, as the third term "reduces the other to the same" resulting in the promotion of the freedom of the Same.[6] That is the pathway from conceptual to political violence.

We should pause here to inquire about the application of Levinas's critique to Smith's logic of incarnation. If Smith's 'concept' is only an incomplete sign, pointing beyond itself – iconically – toward what lies beyond, as a Kierkegaardian invitation to relation, then it is hard to identify an ontological comprehension or conceptual reduction. The Same is not set free, but called or invited. However, when we consider *der Anknüpfungspunkt*, the semiological structure applied to the incarnation, and the reverse participatory ontology, then the freedom of the Same begins to shine through in Smith's logic of incarnation. The Same is empowered and centered. Nothing alienates the Same or calls the Same beyond its limited horizons. Instead, we find in Smith, a renunciation of exteriority through Smith's insistence on the completion of finitude. Nothing else is needed. No exteriority is required or permitted. Eschatology has been fully realized.

These are the axes on which Levinas's work in TI revolves: freedom (totality) and eschatology (infinity). TI is a sustained critique of the spontaneous freedom of the Same, which in Levinas's view structures all of Western philosophy as an egolatry. At the same time, TI clothes eschatology in the garments of metaphysical desire and exteriority. Within these and similar terms, eschatology becomes the possibility and the hope of the true peace that overcomes violence in all of its conceptual, political, and historical modes. Levinas's eschatology is a time-out-of-time. It does not emerge as a linear, sequential progression into the future, which could be understood as a teleology. It emerges as unexpected surprise, a time that never becomes present. It is the radical exteriority of eschatology that places it outside of ontology and outside of history

[6] *Ibid.*, 42.

that gives rise to the hope of peace. It is also for these reasons that it also gives rise to the hope of a new metaphysical model beyond hierarchical ontologies and liberal economies. Can we find, in Levinas, the structures of a third model, one that might allow us to move forward beyond modernity without having to retreat backwards into Hellenism? Is that not the holy grail of so much of twentieth-century thought? Let us pre-emptively call this potential third model a participatory eschatology.[7]

Tracing the surprising appearance of a third metaphysical model is already an important undertaking for a chapter, but the focus of the current project is revelation. What are the implications for revelation in such a model? What conditions are required and provided by our model that generate the possibility of revelation within that model? Revelation emerges through the structures of what Levinas calls, *discourse*, which itself is made possible through the *eschatological relation* between the Same and the Other. I suggest that an eschatological participation will displace the liberal economic structure of the modern model, which itself displaced the hierarchical structure of the classical model. Whereas the classical model began with metaphysical questions and the modern model began with epistemological questions, the eschatological model begins with ethical questions. Peperzak states that "the thesis defended by Levinas says that 'truth' is not possible unless preceded and supported by 'justice.'"[8] Justice, or

[7] Throughout the project, I have tacitly recognized that all models are just that, models. They represent true reality in entirely incomplete ways. Any embrace of a model is, therefore, an embrace of error. Whereas we can evaluate scientific models through empirical observation, there seems to be no way to evaluate models of reality. It is only through these models of reality that any standard or condition of justification or reasonableness would emerge. Deductive science was reasonable in a hierarchical model of transcendence. Inductive science is reasonable in a model of economic liberty. What will count as reasonable in a model of eschatological participation? I suggest it will be communion – the ability to fully welcome and include not just all human others, but all others. It will be an ecological science. Sustainability will be the criteria of rationality.

[8] More fully: "If 'truth' stands for a thought that moves within the parameters of the Same, 'justice' summarizes here the adequate response to the revelation of the transcendent Other. The thesis defended by Levinas says that 'truth' is not possible unless preceded and supported by 'justice.' The metaphysical relation is the first 'condition of the possibility' of truth"" (Peperzak, *Other*, 145).

ethics, becomes the condition for truth, or knowledge. Here we might recall that Socrates taught knowledge connects us with the Good.[9] What if, instead, it is the Good that connects us with knowledge? Importantly, to affirm the priority or the primitivity of ethics is not to deny metaphysics, ontology, epistemology, or the other branches of philosophy. Rather, it is to recognize the derivative or qualified nature of these branches. Being becomes relational or intersubjective as ethical being. All of philosophy is qualified ethically. Rationality itself is ethical in nature and essence. Therefore, when Levinas says that ethics if first philosophy, he is arguably trying to establish a new starting point for all of Western thought. It is not wrong to suggest that he is giving us a new (non-ontological) metaphysics. What, then, are the conditions of the possibility of revelation?

In this new metaphysics, whose foundation is ethics, the relation of the Same to the Other becomes the ultimate horizon of meaning. Levinas reintroduces transcendence through this relation. However, transcendence is no longer realizable through a disciplined use of reason as it was for Plato and Aristotle. It is realized through an infinite ethical obligation, which comes to the Same as from 'on high.' Through the face of the Other, the Same experiences the relation to the Other as a movement of transcendence.[10] It is a transcendence of the totality of the Same, the horizons of the Same, and, perhaps, the economically conditioning structures of history itself. The conditioning structures of history – Dasein's thrownness, if you will – cannot become an alibi that excuses us from responsibility. Through the eschatological demand, the demand from the exteriority of history, history becomes the possibility of responsibility.

[9] Plato, *Protagoras,* Stanley Lombardo, trans. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992): 352c.

[10] Levinas, *Totality*, 132.

What keeps Levinas's model from reverting to an economic model of dominating liberty is the asymmetrical height of the Other, which renders the relation to the Other unequal. Because of this asymmetry, the ethical relation becomes irreversible. The Same cannot command the Other, cannot render the Other responsible or guilty. The Same cannot judge the Other. It is only I, the Same, who can be obligated, responsible, and guilty. I find myself always already obligated by the Other. The asymmetrical relation prevents the movement that we found in Locke, who used inalienable human rights in order to strip the inalienable rights of the Other through the Other's presumed failure to be productive with the resources given to them, thereby generating waste, which alone turned out to be unforgivable.[11] Levinas's model forbids the colonization, oppression, or exploitation of the Other, which is truly made thinkable only in the liberal economic model. However, Levinas's model does not revert back to the reciprocal obligations and 'placements' that we found in the classical models. In Plato's *Republic*, justice and harmony arise from fulfilling the obligations of one's place or location in society and doing so with *aretē*. One's obligations stemmed from one's place, and those obligations were largely immutable. In Levinas, the obligation comes from beyond, infinity, or, in other words, the eschaton. There are no reciprocal obligations. There is only *my* obligation. By laying claim to history, it can never be set aside for the purposes of politics or war.

3.2 Eschatology as a Condition of Revelation

Levinas's argument that undergirds TI and of which I have provided contours above is that pure immanence, the totality of the Same, is imperialistic, violent, and inescapable without

[11] A critical reading of Locke's "On Property" alongside W.K. Clifford's *Ethics of Belief* has shaped a great deal of my interpretation of Levinas's position.

external intervention. My own position is that pure immanence is also unsustainable and destructive of hope – nihilistic.[12] Pure immanence, the totality of the Same, leaves human beings in a state of mutual competition, and of course, not human beings only. It leaves human beings in competition with the world around us and in competition with God, the God who, James Arminius showed us, must respect our freedom. It frames epistemology within a context of power and symbolic capital.[13]

In the "Preface" to TI, Levinas made surprising use of the term, 'eschatology.' While eschatology never becomes a focused theme on its own in the main text of TI, its emphasis in the "Preface" suggests that eschatology is heuristically important for this text.[14] And while Levinas does not repeat the word 'eschatology' in a meaningful way, he re-appropriates the idea of metaphysics and metaphysical desire so that they signify eschatologically. First, though, there is the question of what Levinas means by the term 'eschatology' in the "Preface." Peperzak sees it as a contrast with the 'originary peace' of the Same.[15] As Peperzak describes this 'originary peace,' he does so by repeating Thomas Hobbes's and John Locke's origin stories of human society. We primitive human beings originally found truth and reason by realizing our psychical

[12] Bultmann addressed the problem of history, in part, by framing the human being not as "an individual who passes through history, who experiences history, who meets with history. No, man is nothing but history, for he is, so to speak, not an active being but someone to whom things happen. Man is only a process without 'true existence'. The end, it seems, is *nihilism*." Rudolf Bultmann, *History and Eschatology: The Presence of Eternity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957): 11. Emphasis original. He goes on later to state: "Man has to be free from himself or to become free from himself. But man cannot get such freedom by his own will and strength, for in such effort he would remain 'the old man'; he can only receive this freedom as a gift" (*Ibid.*, 150).

[13] Foucault awakened us to the role of power in knowledge. Pierre Bourdieu revealed the economic dimensions of knowledge.

[14] Bernasconi argued that the first question of the preface, whether or not we are duped by morality, which is itself never taken up directly in the main text, is actually the main theme of the text. See Bernasconi, "Different Styles of Eschatology," 4. In light of Bernasconi's argument and in light of his own work on eschatology in the above article, I find justification for the role that I am assigning to eschatology in this project.

[15] Peperzak, *Other*, 127f.

and corporeal wills. We then banded together in social institutions that rationally treated "all individuals with justice as individuals having equal rights."[16] It is with this notion of originary peace that Levinas's eschatology contrasts. Eschatological peace will be "prepolitical," meaning that it will "not result from the calculations of a rational or reasonable compromise, destroyed as soon as the balance of power is shaken."[17] An alternative peace must come from beyond history itself. Eschatology has messianic overtones for Peperzak that he associates with biblical, prophetic justice.

Robert Bernasconi finds a variety of senses of eschatology across Levinas's philosophical and confessional writings. Interestingly, Bernasconi argues that the biblical heritage of eschatology found in Levinas's confessional writings "also clearly forms the basis of the conception of messianic eschatology found in *Totality and Infinity*: if it causes war, it is not eschatology."[18] Both Peperzak and Bernasconi associate Levinas's concept of eschatology with the messianic eschatology of prophetic justice that stands against idolatry, against the exploitation of the vulnerable, and against the "peace of empires."[19] Bernasconi emphasizes that this is not a doctrine of last things, as we might find in a Christian systematic theology. But it is, in an important sense, a doctrine of judgment. It is also apocalyptic, in the sense that eschatology is the interruption of history.[20]

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Bernasconi, "Styles of Eschatology," 5. Bernasconi goes on to critique Levinas's eventual conflation of Zionism and eschatology later in Levinas's life. The relation of history and eschatology is nuanced and dangerous.

[19] Levinas, *Totality,* 22.

[20] Bernasconi, "Styles of Eschatology," 7.

This apocalyptic, inbreaking sense of eschatology is carried over into Levinasian themes of exteriority, metaphysics, and metaphysical desire throughout TI. How is it that eschatology becomes a metaphysical category in the sense that I have in mind? Peperzak begins to offer an explanation by contrasting Levinas's "metaphysical relation" between the Same and the Other with Edmund Husserl's "principle of principles" and Martin Heidegger's "being-in-the-world." The difference between Levinas, on the one hand, and Husserl and Heidegger on the other is that "[Husserl's] intentionality and [Heidegger's] 'being-in-the-world' reduce transcendence to the immanence of an all-embracing unity, [whereas] the metaphysical relation is a real transcendence."[21] For Levinas, once the distance between the Same and the Other is collapsed into a unity or a totality, then the relation disappears and transcendence is reduced to immanence. There is no longer a metaphysical relation. Ultimate reality is an irreducible relation marked by untraversable distance. The philosophers and theologians of the twentieth century, and sometimes before, have prognosticated this metaphysical relation under terms of an infinite, qualitative difference and a holy and wholly Other. For Levinas, these commitments are reflected in his language of an absolute exteriority:

> This absolute exteriority of the metaphysical term, the irreducibility of movement to an inward play, to a simple presence of self to self, is, if not demonstrated, claimed by the word transcendent . . . The transcendence with which the metaphysician designates it is distinctive in that the distance it expresses, unlike all distances, enters into the *way of existing* of the exterior being. Its formal characteristic, to be other, makes up its content. Thus the metaphysician and the other cannot be totalized. The metaphysician is absolutely separated.[22]

It is this absolute separation, transcendence, irreducibility, exteriority, and distance that I am associating with eschatology. The language used here is that of space, but Levinas talks also of

[21] Peperzak, *Other*, 149.

[22] Levinas, *Totality*, 35.

time and a time. Time, in its traditional philosophical sense, is connected with ontology, allowing Being to unfold "as a present totality" in which "the past and the future are presented as secondary forms of the present."[23] However, before the Other and in my responsibility to the Other, "before any free choice can be made and before any possibility of a contract or any acceptance of an obligation, I have – 'always already' – been chosen."[24] I lose any beginning other than my responsibility, any possibility of having established myself before through my achievements, actions, or choices in a linear, sequential time. I lose any origin in myself, any beginning or genesis in my own subjective freedom. Any conceivable time before this responsibility is a time out of mind, and immemorable time because my responsibility bears no connection with what has come before. There are no causal relations here.

Space and time should not be conceived independently. Therefore, eschatology is as much a spatial claim as a temporal one. We might conceive of the fullness of eschatological space/time as holiness.

In theological terms, we already see a contrast between the realized eschatology of Smith and the 'future' eschatology of Levinas.[25] This difference is important not only because of the way that it maps onto traditional theological positions, but more so because of the way that it allows us to re-evaluate those theological positions in terms of transcendence and the overcoming of nihilism. It is striking to me that Smith, who sometimes appears to align himself (for a time) with Radical Orthodoxy, a movement that defines itself in its rejection of modern

[23] Peperzak, *Other*, 33.

[24] *Ibid.*

[25] Levinas's eschatology might be considered supra-temporal more than future. What Levinas wants to emphasize more than anything else is the disconnection with the present wherein surprise ensues. I do not believe that Levinas's position is entirely unreconcilable with a proleptic eschatology, given some caveats, namely that the future which happens ahead of time cannot come under human management.

and post-modern nihilism, ends up being located within a realized eschatology that arguably fails to escape nihilism. My point is that the contrast between the eschatological positions of Smith and Levinas gives us a meaningful way to evaluate the sustainability (and, thus, the orthodoxy) of eschatological positions within nineteenth- and twentieth-century theologies.[26] My own position is that any realized eschatology leaves humanity subject to the whims of history, thereby losing its soteriological capacity.

Levinas's 'Other,' is both a particular, embodied Other while simultaneously being the mode of the appearance of infinity or the divine. Levinas resists placing too much theological weight on the Other, insisting that, at best, we only experience traces of the God who has already passed by, much as Moses witnessed only the back of the God who had passed by. Even that divine encounter was enough to leave Moses unable to reveal his face, having to keep it veiled. For our purposes, the Other is historical in the sense that it is a particular, empirical Other while also conveying what is beyond history and not merely an element or a production of history. This apocalyptic capacity to convey what is infinite and meta-historical, beyond historical or other-than-historical, is the eschatological modality of the Other. In Peperzak's words:

> As coming from afar and from 'on high,' the Other breaks through the network of phenomena, relations, forms, and figures that can be conceived as composing parts of a universe. The Other cannot be possessed or overpowered, not even by the most spiritual thought or imagination that gives him a place or function in a conceptual or representational whole.[27]

[26] I have in mind the seminal works of Albrecht Ritschl, Johannes Weiss, Albert Schweitzer, Marcus Borg, Rudolf Bultmann, and others. While it is beyond the scope of the present project to evaluate these positions from the current framework, further work in that area would be illuminating.

[27] Peperzak, *Other*, 143.

Should the Other be possessed, overpowered, conceptualized, or represented, then the Other would become part of the totality of the Same, "and the absolute distance that separates them filled in."[28] The Other would cease to be eschatological.

The irreducible distance between the Same and the Other is the basis of what Levinas calls the metaphysical relation.[29] Levinas insists that this distance or this relation or the otherness of the Other is not a purely formal claim, as if it signified an archetypical other I, an other who is not-I, or an other subject. If the difference were formal, in this sense, then Levinas claims this distance would only be the result of the other's "resistance to the same," the opposition of power with power.[30] Such a relation would be essentially competitive. And while Levinas has his own reasons for why this framework fails, I would associate this framework with the liberal economic model in which otherness is always already a threat. In this economic framework, the Other does not escape the imperialism of the Same. What sets the Other free from this imperialism in Levinas is that:

> [The Other] is other with an alterity constitutive of the very content of the other. Other with an alterity that does not limit the same, for in limiting the same the other would not be rigorously other: by virtue of the common frontier the other, within the system, would yet be the same.[31]

We recall that Smith's insistence on the passive and formal *Anknüpfungspunkt*, which creates a common frontier with God. Therefore, the issue is not whether this point-of-contact is active or passive. The issue here is the sheer Otherness of God, which must be more Other than the human

[28] Levinas, *Totality*, 36.

[29] *Ibid.*, 38.

[30] *Ibid.*

[31] *Ibid.*, 38-9.

Other. The issue is the holiness of God. The issue, ultimately, is one of eschatology, which would be annulled into the system of history by virtue of a common frontier.

The metaphysical relation has an implication for revelation as well. Levinas uses the term 'need' to signify something that can be satisfied through possession of the Other. With that in mind, the metaphysical relation is not based on a need that can be satisfied but on a desire that is fed and nourished in the irreducible gap between the Same and the Other. As the erotic desire for what is Other intensifies, the Same is called beyond its own bounded horizons of meaning and intentionality. It is called to holiness by the Stranger.[32] In contrast to Smith, who insists that finite being can require nothing from beyond itself lest we succumb to 'Gnosticism,' Levinas's metaphysical relation reverberates with themes of the biblical *nephesh*, this constitutional opening that is the human being, an opening that is nourished through the very *ruach*, or breath, of God. Shall we say, the call of God? The discourse of God? Therefore, in contrast to Smith, what it means to be a creature is *precisely* to be vulnerable, to desire the Other. To be a creature is to constitutionally, metaphysically, require the relation to the Other. There is perhaps a perichoretic note that sounds forth here, an essentially social note that reverberates with the perichoretic energies of the trinity itself.

What, then, is revealed in this eschatological, metaphysical relation is not the power of modern, inductive knowledge, nor is it the interests of the stronger party that, despite Plato's misgivings, structure *realpolitik*. What is revealed in the metaphysical relationship of desire for the Other is precisely the call of holiness, which comes, in part, as the call to substitute ourselves, as did the Christ, for our sister and our brother. Perhaps even for God's good creation. This revelation of the call of holiness is apocalyptic in that it frees the Same from the horizon of

[32] *Ibid.*, 39.

its own totality, without collapsing the distance between the Same and the Other, and without any sublation. We did not find an eschatology of this sort in Smith's work, a call from beyond, perhaps because of Smith's bracketing of christology.

As Ernst Käsemann claimed that "apocalyptic was the mother of all Christian theology," I will argue from here on out in this project that there is no revelation outside of eschatology.[33] That assertion would have broad implications for theological prolegomena if it turns out to be plausible. A revelation without eschatology would be disclosure, where power, imperialism, and the freedom of domination strip the Other of its otherness by laying claim to it, dominating it, comprehending it, and reducing it to the totality of the Same. Disclosure cannot save because it reifies the basis of humanity's competitive injustice. For disclosure, knowledge is power. Power becomes the source of freedom, which is domination. Domination is the opposite of revelation.

Dupré illustrates this when, speaking of Francis Bacon, he says that "to understand nature no longer meant to describe its outward appearance, but to penetrate its inner secrets."[34] Bacon's work focused on observing and cataloguing facts. Based on observation, Bacon recognized that one could use induction to identify axioms or laws of nature. In this way, Bacon showed us the path to power, domination, and the control of nature. In the lineage of Bacon, knowing amounts to conquering, which is an imperialism. It is not at all accidental that "the theme of power constantly returns in Bacon's writings."[35] The 'non-revelation' of power is disclosure, and the difference is eschatology.

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[33] Ernst Käsemann, *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969): 102.

[34] Dupré, *Passage*, 66.

[35] Dupré, *Passage*, 71. Bacon was hardly unique in his imperialistic views. When Descartes speculated on the nature of a ball of wax in the Second Meditation, he said, "But when I distinguish the wax from its outward forms – take the clothes off, as it were, and consider it naked – then although my judgment may still contain errors, at least my perception now requires a human mind" (Descartes, *Meditations*, 22). The origins of modern science and philosophy

3.2.1 Eschatology is not Negation

It might appear intuitive that negative theology could provide a solution to conceptual violence and attempts to comprehend God. For many readers, it is therefore surprising to find Levinas insisting on the inadequacy of negation. Infinity is not the negation of the finite, he claims. Perfection is not the negation of the imperfect. Why is negation insufficient? Levinas argues that "negativity is incapable of transcendence."[36] This argument is consistent with Levinas's rejection of an imperialistic epistemology. If negativity were capable of transcendence, then a point-of-contact would be established. A beachhead would be attained, and a common frontier identified. Transcendence and eternity would be open to colonization because a pathway would lead from politics and history to the transcendent and eternal. Levinas says:

> Negativity presupposes a being established, placed in a site where he is at home; it is an economic fact, in the etymological sense of this adjective. Labor transforms the world but is sustained by the world it transforms. The labor that matter resists puts to profit the resistance of materials; the resistance is still within the same. The negator and the negated are posited together, form a system, that is, a totality.[37]

In this quotation, Levinas discloses the liberal economic structure of negativity, which results in an ongoing negotiation between economic beings as the basis of meaning. Yet, because of the totality of the Same, meaning is a zero-sum economy. Through labor, I achieve self-justification or self-righteousness, which comes at the expense of the Other. Consequently, negation is insufficient precisely because it remains trapped within imperialism as a mode of the economic.

From a Levinasian perspective, what would be the consequences of affirming that eschatology is the negation of history? Eschatologically speaking, a negation or refusal of the

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are rooted an almost sexualized violence – in a lust turned towards nature and the Other, which had to be dominated and stripped naked.

[36] Levinas, *Totality*, 41.

[37] *Ibid.*, 40-41.

finite and historical would result in a future or eternity still bound to the here and the now through the point of negation. The eschatological would be thematized based on the history that is refused, which is to say that it would be an eschatology of the Same, an alterity "of the fatherland which welcomes and protects."[38] Even a negation through superlatives, which is a negation of imperfections, remains a negation all the same. If, as Peperzak says, "the whole of *Totality and Infinity* can be read as one long refutation of the attempt to understand the difference between the Same and the Other as an opposition within the unique horizon of a totality,"[39] can we do the same for the understanding of the difference between history and eschatology?

If not a negation, how are we to understand eschatology? If we do not arrive at eschatology simply by negating history, how do we arrive at eschatology. In a typical Levinasian fashion, eschatology would be an excess, as opposed to negation. The concept of eschatology itself would no longer find its meaning in its binary relationship to history or the finite. It would exceed history and the finite as it attained distance from history. Only in such an excess is the point-of-contact left behind, and imperialism with it.

3.2.2 Signification and Escape

If escape from the pure immanence of the totality of the Same is to come, then it must come from outside. This claim is fundamental to Levinas's position. The Same cannot escape itself. How can one escape oneself? Where would it go? It cannot rescue itself, liberate itself, or otherwise save itself from its need to bring all things into its own totality. Why is this? Because it is the totality of the Same that provides the basis of understanding and practical engagement with

[38] *Ibid.*, 41.

[39] Peperzak, *Other*, 138.

Being. The totality of the Same is *pragmatically* the totality of Being, the self's preservation within Being. How can we escape our own preservation within Being? Our persistence in Being, our preservation, is what saves us from death. And that persistence in Being is part of what makes the Other into a competitor. It is what reduces freedom to the imperialistic domination that is liberty. Could any of us give up our own freedom? And if we did, would that free us from pure immanence or would it merely exchange one master for another while leaving us within the totality of the Same? Must we embrace our own death in order to be perfectly free?

In this context, there cannot be revelation but merely the disclosure resulting from my epistemological labor in making sense of the Other within the totality of my own experience and the horizon of the Same. Therefore, if there is to be revelation beyond disclosure, a revelation of the Other, of transcendence, that is not reduced to the Same, then that revelation will have to be apocalyptic. It will have to come from outside in a way that provides egress from the totality of the Same. The Other must be savior and liberator. The Other, not the Same, would be the condition of revelation and, perhaps too, of knowledge.

When the Same is the condition of revelation, then the Other must show up in a way that the Same can understand. When the Other is the condition of revelation, then the Other provides its own mode of signification. "[I]t is not the mediation of the sign that forms signification, but signification (whose primordial event is the face-to-face) that makes the sign function possible," says Levinas.[40] Levinas seems to be rejecting the very functionality of the sign that makes Smith's logic of incarnation or analogy possible. The face of the Other is not a sign that

[40] Levinas, *Totality*, 206.

mediates. Rather, the signification of infinity is what makes the sign and the face possible.[41] For Levinas, signification appears to come prior to the sign. This is the result of ethics taking priority over ontology as first philosophy. We might, therefore, claim that the signification of infinity is eschatology.

For Levinas, the face of the vulnerable Other is the metaphor *du jour*, but we must never forget this is a metaphor.[42] Levinas, perhaps, chooses this metaphor because it is a relatable phenomenon. Who could imagine looking into the face of a starving, destitute child and not feeling the infinite demand of responsibility? So, the metaphorical face is the *mode* of the infinite demand, which is signification. The infinite demand comes through the face. In this sense, the Other that confronts us is only modally the human Other. What confronts us in the face as Other is the infinite. What confronts us transcends us because it refuses to be contained by us and, through signification, it apocalyptically puts the Same into question.

At this point, nothing has clearly and formally differentiated Levinas's Other from the competitor of economic liberalism. In economic liberalism, if I am to avoid destitution myself, of course I must push that destitution off onto others. It takes a lot of money and resources to die of old age. And I would expect other humans to oppose me with their own efforts to persevere in Being. That is the great game of capitalism, with high stakes indeed.

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[41] Christologically, it would not, then, be the Incarnation that signifies God, as Smith has portrayed. Rather, the divine signification would make the Incarnation possible. From Levinas's perspective, this may be the reason that the Incarnation is mystery, why every attempt to collapse the Incarnation into a logical theory has resulted in heresy. The Incarnation is salvific not because it can or should be understood, which is to say, that it would present itself "to the constitutive freedom of transcendental consciousness" (Levinas, *Totality*, 206). Rather, it is salvific as it provokes faithfulness by "putting into question, in an ethical relation, constitutive freedom itself" (*ibid.*).

[42] Consider that the body as a whole or in part might function as a 'face.' A group of people might present itself as a face. An animal too might present itself to us as a 'face.'

The 'relative others' of liberalism have particular identifiable qualities of differentiation – perhaps race, gender, political affiliation, economic status and so forth. These differentiating qualities are points of contact with the Same and they allow the Same to distinguish itself from the Other, perhaps through negation. This distinction nullifies absolute alterity. If the Other is to be absolutely Other, then the Same and the Other cannot share a genus.[43] This is important because if there was a point of contact, if we did share a genus, if the difference were merely relative, then there would be no escape from the totality of the Same. Liberation could not come from outside. For this reason, I stated above that the human Other is but the mode of the infinite. The Other must be infinitely Other.

Likewise, Levinas says that the face as the mode of infinity "is neither seen nor touched—for in visual and tactile sensation, the identity of the I envelops the alterity of the object, which becomes precisely a content."[44] Levinas is rejecting the reduction of knowledge to sense perception, though not quite for the reasons that Descartes or George Berkeley might. Rather, sense perception is still within immanence. Levinas is not arguing that knowledge cannot come from immanence or from sense perception. He is not rejecting empiricism as such. He is, however, arguing that the knowledge of immanence remains imperialistic. Any experience of the Other that would nullify its absolute alterity by subjecting it to an empiricist understanding – or rationalist understanding, for that matter – is a destruction of the Other, a destruction of transcendence. In contrast, the face is experienced and known not thematically or conceptually. It is experienced and known *ethically* when the Same is gripped by its obligation to the Other,

[43] Levinas, *Totality*, 194. We saw in the previous chapter how Smith insisted on a point of contact between humanity and God, thereby reducing the absolute otherness of the divine. The passive point of contact he argued for is formally no different from an active point of contact in its effect on alterity.

[44] *Ibid.* Content is no longer Other because it no longer speaks. Content, therefore, while necessary for the Same, does not escape imperialism or totality. Content requires an Other to continue to speak.

which is the condition, Levinas says, of peace.[45] There is an ethical mode of knowledge. This ethical mode comes as a crisis. It comes as an exogeneous command. This ethical mode of knowledge is eschatological.

Ethical or eschatological knowledge comes in the apocalyptic crisis that judges our fidelity to the Infinite ethical demand. The infinite, like a Stranger:

> disturbs the being at home with oneself. But the Stranger also means the free one. Over him I have no power. He escapes my grasp by an essential dimension . . . He is not wholly in my site.[46]

Disturbing my being at home with myself, I am judged precisely through my response to the call of responsibility that comes from time-out-of-mind. This call to responsibility echoes out from the Other who is also the Stranger, the one I cannot know except as the origin of responsibility. In my responsibility, I know not the Other, but the infinite. I know the infinite by virtue of my fidelity to the call of responsibility.

3.2.3 Language and Revelation

The question, now, is whether revelation, and by extension knowledge, can be eschatological. Infinity will play a role in that answer. At one point, Levinas says that even if we begin with formal or logical definitions, infinity cannot be defined. We have already seen that the reason for this is not because of analogy or negative theology, but because infinity exceeds every possible definition. Formally, infinity is the thought thinking more than it can think, but this is not yet a definition of infinity. Levinas is not trying to be cute or poetic when he makes this claim. This statement reflects intuitions from the ontological argument of Anselm and the

[45] *Ibid.*, 203.

[46] *Ibid.*, 39.

more originary grounding of Descartes' ego, even prior to the cogito. And when infinity exceeds definition, Levinas says, "it accordingly refers to a 'knowledge' of a new structure."[47] In Levinas, this new structure is ethical, and the face, even or precisely as metaphor, plays a cornerstone role in that structure. Seeking evidence as a foundation for this belief in the ethical structure of the face, Levinas insists that the face itself "is the evidence that makes evidence possible."[48] Consequently, the face does not need to be grounded in prior evidence. Instead, the metaphorical face is the foundation of ethical knowledge, and ethics is the basis of the resultant rationality. Levinas is arguably a foundationalist, though an ethical foundationalist.

From the face and ethics, we move to language. Arguably, language is Smith's fundamental concern. *Comment ne pas parler?* How do we convey through language what is exterior to language? That was Smith's underlying question in *Speech and Theology*. Because Smith seems to conceptualize language as representational, the non-predicative 'concept' was his answer. He claims that the 'concept' resists the normal function of language to re-present, having overlooked his *conception* of language *as* representational. Rather, the 'concept' expressively indicates. Happily, the 'concept' is non-violent, for Smith, because it does not reduce transcendence to predicates, which would cause the (transcendent) phenomenon to play a role in which it no longer recognized itself. As we can see here, Smith's violence is primarily linguistic and ontological in nature. But Smith's approach left intact what Levinas calls the egological structure of language, thereby disincarnating it from the actual, which is to say ethical, relation of persons. Egological language is a function of the Same, a language which I have the capacity to *choose* to exercise non-predicatively. I would do this because I recognize and respect the rights

[47] *Ibid.*, 204.

[48] *Ibid.*

of the Other, and Other who is like me, and thus dialectically resists my own liberty. But this language, egological language, has no essential or ethical connection to the Other. Its structure proceeds egologically from the Same.

In contrast, Levinas posits an incarnate language whose origin is in the face-to-face relation, what I will call *ethical language*. It is the structure of language, always and necessarily originating from the face-to-face, that allows the Other to reverberate within and through language, invading my very consciousness of the Other. This reverberation and invasion are the possibility of revelation. That revelation can have this apocalyptic form again suggests its eschatological nature. My representations of the Other, my concepts of the Other, are continually shaken in this ethical language of the incarnate Other who attends and comes to its own aid in its expression. Should language become detached from the Other, it would fail to remain incarnate. It would cease to be ethical. The Other would disappear from language. Therefore, it is this proximity of the Other in language that renders it ethical.

In light of the above, Peperzak says that "'language' must be understood here as speaking as such, which does not coincide with its content."[49] Here we begin to see epistemological implications. Content – what might traditionally be called concepts or knowledge or datum – is within the totality of the Same because content does not convey the Other or transcendence. In content, the reverberation of the Other in language has been stilled. While content remains necessary for aspects of knowledge, the eschatological nature of discourse remains necessary to prevent content from devolving into the imperialism of knowledge.

Smith seems to sense the threat of stagnate content as witnessed in his efforts to avoid the objectification of predicative concepts. He wants his 'concepts' to stand and point in an iconic

[49] Peperzak, *Other*, 111.

manner. As much as this solution represents a critical creativity on Smith's part, formal indication does not yet convey the Other. Smith's 'conceptual,' indicative content becomes, as for Climacus, the historical occasion for the Same to make the leap of faith: "the *I think* in the *I can*."[50] In that case, it might *indicate* 'the god,' but it could not *convey* 'the god.'[51] Because 'the god' has no proximity, no parousia or presence, in the 'concept,' we find no escape here from the egolatry of language. Without 'the god' reverberating in language, coming to its own aid, we find no escape from pure immanence. Like Moses, we can gaze upon the promised land, indicating it to ourselves and others, but we can never enter it.

However, that is only a small concern. The bigger crisis, entirely ignored by Smith, is the following:

> Disincarnate thought, thinking speech before speaking it . . . adding a world of speech to the world antecedently . . . [is] a myth. Already thought constitutes a system of signs, in the particular tongue of a people . . . receiving signification from this very operation.[52]

Here we find that the origin of conceptual violence has less to do with predicates and much more to do with the economy of language. We saw an example of this previously when we recognized that Smith's 'concept' was based on his representational concept of language. Smith is trying to add a world of speech to the ontic world antecedently through a revision of the 'concept.' The 'concept,' laboring to make a home for itself in thought, did not, therefore, itself evade conceptualization. This economy is the reason, not Gnosticism, for the violence of the concept and for the fall of interpretation. It is not finitude that is the traitor in our midst, but the linguistic

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[50] Levinas, *Totality*, 205.

[51] I will show later that Levinas makes use of metaphors in ways that seem to 'formally indicate' without conveying. Therefore, the face as a metaphor indicates a mode of the infinite without conveying the infinite. Therefore, I do not want to suggest that what Smith has accomplished is unhelpful. It is just not yet sufficient.

[52] *Ibid.*, 205-6.

economy. We see in Smith's work a persistent 'I can' that labors within language. The 'concept' labors to indicate. This operation labors before expression to constitute the self and the incarnation. The body of incarnation is represented to itself in thought. Thus, formal indication receives its signification from its intentional object.

What I am referring to as a linguistic economy, following in the tradition of Bourdieu, Levinas may refer to as "the structure of constitutive consciousness."[53] What is potentially damning to Smith's ambitions is Levinas's subsequent assertion that "the structure of constitutive consciousness recovers all its rights after the mediation of the body that speaks or writes."[54] So, the divine is incarnate in the person of Jesus, whose mediation re-establishes the rights of the finite speaker. God affirms finite immanence in Smith's incarnation. This is precisely how Smith opposes Gnosticism, through his assertion of the divine affirmation of immanence. His project, for the very outset in *The Fall*, is the affirmation of the finite. We have returned "to a transcendental consciousness constituting objects."[55] Incarnation has become the transcendental ground of finite signification. However, in Smith's work, *the incarnation* is made to play a role in which it no longer recognizes itself. The incarnation receives its signification from the 'concept.' There is no revelation and no eschatology here, unless that eschatology be one fully realized in the 'concept.'

The argument that I want to make in the conclusion of this section is that what Levinas considers 'ethical' can also be viewed formally as eschatological – a surprising, unanticipatable demand coming from outside intentionality and economic rationality. Already the presence

[53] *Ibid.*, 206.

[54] *Ibid.*

[55] *Ibid.*

(*parousia*) of the Other that comes to its own aid requires a penetration of the totality of the Same, invading the Same's atheism that had cut it off from participation in being.

Ethical or *eschatological* language, in contrast to economic language, understands truth as a function of speech. In speech the Other who remains absolutely Other, with no metaphysical point of contact to the Same, becomes proximate (*parousia*) in its command.[56] Truth, then, is "a modality of the relation between the Same and the Other."[57] Truth is the faithfulness of that relation, a relation born both of distance and paradoxical, disruptive presence. If truth were a function of content, then truth would be representational fidelity. It would faithfully represent what is far off or not present. When truth is an ethical function, it is faithfulness to the Other who is present in its demand. Presence is ethical proximity, the proximity of the obligation, which is the call of holiness. And language becomes the formal ground of truth, as the Other comes to its own assistance in discourse through the ethical obligation that is revealed in discourse.[58] Therefore, language, and by extension knowledge and truth, originates in the face-to-face relation. They are intersubjective and ethical, in this regard. Their surprising and infinite nature implies their eschatological origins.

3.2.4 Ethics and Freedom

Freedom plays an important structural role in Levinas's thought. On one hand, the freedom that I will henceforth refer to as liberty is identified with power in the philosophical

[56] *Ibid.,* 62

[57] *Ibid.,* 64.

[58] Unlike the 'face,' which is a metaphor, discourse should be understood as a mechanism or perhaps a structure.

thought that Levinas opposes.[59] On the other hand, when the Other calls me to goodness, the Other establishes my freedom in quite a different formal manner. Power corrupts any mode of freedom, rendering it purely as liberty. Liberty places the Same into a dialectically competitive and imperialistic relationship with the Other. It is when the totality of the Same is called into question by the Other that the Same finds the basis of its freedom in its responsibility, or what we might consider its fidelity. For Levinas, freedom, liberty, and truth are constitutionally related.

It is important, then, that the Other not oppose me with another power like my own power, another liberty. The Other can have no point of contact with the Same, including that of power or rights or subjectivity. If it had such a point of contact, it would become another element or institution: "a country, a realm, a church."[60] These are things that demand preservation in Being, just as I do. For the Other to oppose me with a power like my own would be to oppose force with violence, liberty with rights. Instead, the Other opposes the Same with a "weakness that *forbids* me to continue my project of universal domination."[61] That is to say, the Other opposes my power with the ethical demand, "Do not kill me." This demand, weak, easily brushed aside in my lust for violence yet formally "puts the spontaneous freedom within us into question."[62] The question and the demand do not come from another subjectivity, but from

[59] "The ethical relation, opposed to first philosophy, which identifies freedom and power, is not opposed to truth, it goes towards being in its absolute exteriority and accomplishes the same intention which animates the march to truth." « Le rapport éthique, oppose a la philosophie première de l'identification de la liberté et du pouvoir, n'est pas contre la vérité, il va vers l'être dans son extériorité absolue et accomplit l'intention même qui anime la marche à la vérité. » Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalité et Infini : Essai sur l'Extériorité* (Paris : Livre de Poche, 1990) : 39.

[60] Peperzak, *Other*, 64.

[61] *Ibid.*

[62] Levinas, *Totality*, 51.

beyond that Other, from the infinite that encounters me in the face of the Other. The question breaks into my self-contained atheism and calls me to the truth of responsibility.

Truth does not begin with representation, as if Being were the highest justification, but with responsibility. This is why the pursuit of knowledge for the sake of power is unsustainable. It betrays its responsibility and renders violence where peace should reign. Violence occurs when we use Being as our standard of epistemic justification rather than goodness. Goodness does not come as the empowerment of the Same, but as the demand upon the Same. The Same cannot choose goodness out of its liberty, for doing so would subordinate the Good and the Other to the Same. The Same can but welcome the Other in faithfulness to its obligation. In this sense, the other founds my freedom from Being, from atheism, from the totality of the Same, from my lust for domination – the Other calls me to freedom by calling me to responsibility.

The call to freedom begins with infinity, which judges my liberty as "arbitrary, guilty, and timid."[63] My liberty, established arbitrarily in its quest for persistence rather than called to goodness, had limited the Same to itself. It had trapped the Same in its terrestrial colonialism. It had rendered the Same contingent in its quest for self-justification. The pursuit of self-justification cannot but end in skepticism and nihilism. But in judging my liberty as guilty, the infinite "introduces me to what was not in me," to what has come from outside.[64] And in providing a non-arbitrary justification in the call to responsibility, Levinas says that a new rationality is born. In the tradition of Levinas, I will call it the rationality of holiness.

The eschatological flavor of Levinas's words and phrases is bold. The call to responsibility to the Other comes from beyond the Same or the Other. It breaks into the world,

[63] *Ibid.*, 203.

[64] *Ibid.*, 204.

structured economically through language and power, with vulnerability and nakedness. It opposes power with weakness, willing to die in the hopes that others might find freedom and true life. Prophetic, Pauline, and messianic flavors linger in the passing of these words.

For Augustine, the creation of humanity occurs at the beginning of time with sovereign, all-powerful liberty – God's free act freely creates the free human being, who is first a *libero arbitrio*. For John Duns Scotus, only a completely unlimited being can be a perfectly free being. Scotus rejects Aquinas's use of *exemplars* because he sees them as a limitation of the divine freedom.[65] Nature, including the intellect, lacks the continency of creative liberty, but humanity possesses it in its free will. In Christian theology, liberty stands at the beginning as the beginning. Liberty motivates and directs even the divine will. It is the Good even for God. Prophetically, even messianically, Levinas suggests that the call to responsibility is the call to a freedom that "is not its own beginning. Its redemption lies in its association to others. . . . The word of the Other is the origin of truth."[66] Levinas's freedom does not stand at the beginning directing the labor of God and pitting humanity against nature from the outset. This ethical, eschatological freedom instead calls the Same out of itself into relation to the Other, into holiness.

3.2.5 Eschatology and Holiness

Eschatology provides the rationality of holiness, which is fidelity to the ethical obligation to the Other. Eschatology can be formalized in temporal terms as futurity, understood as an apocalyptic temporality. The apocalyptic nature of eschatology, the breaking into the present

[65] Jones, *Medieval Mind*, 312.

[66] Peperzak, *Other*, 147.

from beyond or from the non-linear future, ensures that time is not reducible "to the time of (constituting) consciousness."[67] The Same cannot voluntarily gain access to the time of the infinite demand so as to anticipate, optimize, or manage it. Rather, when confronted by the infinite in the face of the Other, the Same finds itself already to have been guilty, always to have been called to responsibility, and always already passive. This call is not a new event in the sequence of linear time, which would be one more point of contact. Rather, it is eternal and incommensurable in the sense that it is beyond the time of the Same. Because the eternal time of the infinite is incommensurable, it has no point of contact with the Same. The Same experiences the time of the infinite as a surprising inbreaking into the totality that is history.

One might get the sense that the inbreaking of eschatological time would come from the future of linear time, as if we could just wait a little while longer and perhaps catch up to the time of the infinite. That notion would place the time of the infinite withing the same sequence and order of linear, finite time. While in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas does seem to associate eschatological time with the future, in *Otherwise than Being* he more often emphasizes the immemorial past – a time out of mind.[68] The time of the infinite would, then, be better understood as being of a different temporal order, which I am calling the eschatological order. What marks the eschatological order as different from linear, sequenced time is *surprise*. Eschatology surprises the Same. It is unanticipatable because it is not linear and thereby not accessible to progress, benchmarking, or management (economics). There are no sequences of

[67] Neal DeRoo, *Futurity in Phenomenology: Promise and Method in Husserl, Levinas, and Derrida* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2013): 81.

[68] "The immemorial is not an effect of a weakness of memory, an incapacity to cross large intervals of time, to resuscitate pasts too deep . . . Behind being and its monstrations, there is now already heard the resonance of other significations forgotten in ontology." Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Alphonso Lingis, trans. (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2002): 38.

causal relations that must be followed and that could be mapped to create predictive systems. If there is a relation at all in eschatological time, it is the ethical relation between the Same and the Other that marks this temporal order. That is to say, eschatological time follows ethical relations rather than causal ones. To alleviate Moltmann's concern, this claim does not eliminate the future as the time of hope.[69] It simply establishes time ethically rather than ontologically through space-time. This innovation is not dissimilar to Moltmann's own uses of the terms *Novum* and *Adventus* as theological modes of the future.[70]

The temporal ethical relation bears on the Same such that "when I seek my final reality, I find that my existence as a 'thing in itself' begins with the presence in me of the idea of Infinity. But his relation already consists in serving the Other."[71] The primitive intersubjectivity, more primitive than egolatry, is experienced as desire rather than need. Levinas differentiates these two terms as the neediness that emerges from a fundamental lack, which might possibly be satisfied if the need were fulfilled, and the desire born of unquenchable hunger. Here we might seem to find some connection with Smith whose concern for 'Gnosticism' potentially maps with Levinas's rejection of need based on the issue of lack. Of course, the two thinkers are pursuing very different ambitions. For Smith, lack cannot be constitutional to finitude. For Levinas, the Other cannot just fill a lack, thereby satisfying a need in the Same. From this perspective, we discern that while there are accidental similarities, ultimately the two projects do not map at all.

Returning to Levinas, the insurmountable distance of the Other is the source of desire, a desire nourished by its own hunger for the Other. In desire, we experience eschatological time as

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[69] Jurgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, Margaret Kohl, trans. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996): 22.

[70] *Ibid.*, 25-29.

[71] Levinas, *Totality*, 178-79.

the absence of the Other, but an absence marked by anticipation. Marion will develop this idea into his concept of erotic time.[72] Levinas says it is the absence that is time.[73] We should note that 'absence' is not reducible to 'separation.' Through anticipation and desire, we remain connected to the Other even in the Other's absence.

Linear time is marked by the labor of the Same, establishing itself in being. The future is born of this labor and the past is (re)claimed through the labor of recollection. In fact, the past can be revised through labor, because facts no longer speak. Of this time, Levinas can say that "now is the fact that I am master."[74] Neal DeRoo summarizes the character of linear time: "The present is the very establishment of the existent, of its sovereignty, its self-possession in identity."[75] In contrast, whether the future or the immemorial past, eschatological time is the time of "absolute surprise."[76] Eschatological time is beyond the grasp of the Same.

If eschatological time is one of absolute surprise emerging from the ethical relation of the Same and the Other, what about the rationality of holiness that began to emerge at the end of the previous section? Holiness is the metaphor that Levinas uses to indicate the new dimension of the ungraspable, insurmountable resistance to the Same, which is the ethical demand of the Other.[77] The dimension that is holiness:

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[72] Marion, *Erotic Phenomenon*, 32-37.

[73] Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, Richard A. Cohen, trans. (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987): 90.

[74] Levinas, *Time*, 72.

[75] DeRoo, *Futurity*, 73.

[76] Levinas, *Time*, 76.

[77] It should not be lost on us that Levinas's ubiquitous use of metaphors appears to be the application of formal indication, a resistance to the use of clear, delineated concepts. It is partially for this reason that I asserted in the first chapter that Levinas could help Smith better fulfill Smith's own goals.

> opens in the sensible appearance of the face . . . The face, at the limit of holiness and caricature, is thus still in a sense exposed to powers. In a sense only: the depth that opens in this sensibility modifies the very nature of power.[78]

Because of this modification of power, this new dimension accomplishes an alternative spirituality. It is not a spirituality based on labor, the spirituality of busy activity, domination, or even submission. Neither is it the a-spiritulaity based on separation, which is atheism. For Levinas, this spirituality is, instead, based on desire. Eschatology ruptures these broken spiritualities of labor and separation. Desire for the Other that is manifest as an infinite ethical obligation, modifying the very nature of power, establishes my freedom by calling me to holiness.

It is important that we differentiate between holiness and life at this point. Liberal theologies emphasize life, human flourishing, and human dignity. By doing so, they emphasize their continuity with the Same. The other is another like me. Consequently, due to this similarity, he or she or it deserves the same opportunities and rights and privileges as the Same. The nature of power is conserved rather than altered. William Cavanaugh has shown that tyrannical governments will never be troubled by the rights of their victims, because those governments obtain their political authority from groups of citizens who already have rights and political capital.[79] Citizens or aliens without rights have nothing that liberal governments need. It is only when those without rights begin to obtain power or political-economic authority that liberal governments begin to recognize their rights as citizens or as humans. It is only through power relations and economics that the disenfranchised attain human rights, trading in the power of the

[78] Levinas, *Totality*, 198.

[79] "One of the reasons that rights language can be ineffectual, therefore, is that it is founded in the same atomization of the body politic from which the state derives its power. Rights as they have developed in the West transfer power from particular social groups to the universal state and build a protective wall around the individual" (Cavanaugh, *Torture*, 4).

state. In Cavanaugh, we find an example of why holiness must be a new dimension of ethical obligation, separate from spiritualities of life or rights.

If holiness is a new ethical dimension, a surprising dimension, then holiness must also shape how we understand revelation. It is to that topic that we now turn. What is revealed in divine revelation *is* holiness as the egress of the Same through fidelity to the apocalyptic ethical obligation. The eschatological call is revelation. What is revealed is the obligation. Faithfulness to that obligation is holiness. Faithfulness involves the movement out of the Same, echoing Abram's egress from Ur, an egress motivated by God's call and promise.

Does God, then, show up in a way we can understand God? In a sense, yes. God shows up in the command to love the neighbor and to welcome the weak and to consider others ahead of oneself. This is the call of holiness found in Matthew's account of the Beatitudes, which concludes with the command to "be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."[80] Humanity is no stranger to ethics. However, what is surprising is the scope of this obligation. "Do not murder." That is easily understood. "But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgement."[81] "Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also."[82] Such commands are unexpected and surprising. Can we even understand such commands? Can we receive them? Jesus says that these commands are the fulfillment of the law and the prophets.[83] His teaching on this topic ends with the command to be perfect, which John Wesley took to be the command to be holy.

[80] Matt. 5:48.

[81] Matt. 5:22.

[82] Matt. 5:39.

[83] Matt. 5:17.

These teachings of Jesus have been rarely received even by those within the holiness traditions. In those traditions, the teachings have often been transformed from literal commands into metaphors, even while the poetry of Genesis or the apocalyptic writing of Revelation has been received concretely and literally. Why? Because a literal reading of seven-day creation creates a position of power against science. A literal reading of apocalyptic literature gives power over history. But a literal reading of Jesus' holiness commands is disempowering. It is self-emptying. It places others on high over us. Therefore, to avoid disempowerment, when Jesus said to turn the cheek, it must really have been to show how powerful we are: "You think that hurt? Hit me again on this other cheek! I am powerful enough to take your best shot." Can we receive the disempowering revelation of holiness? The disempowering revelation of God? It is troubling how difficult it is to receive the revelation of God's holiness.

Holiness reshapes revelation by revising what it means to know God. Peperzak says that so long as we attempt to receive others from within a horizon, and he seems to have Heidegger in mind here, that understanding will be violent. The Other will lose its ability to "[refute] my egocentrism."[84] Smith insisted precisely that God show up within the human horizon. In this case, what it means to know God is what it means to know anything. In the modern and contemporary West, the mode of knowledge is economic. What I am arguing is that rather than being a function of ontology, the unanticipatable, eschatological demand of holiness makes truth a function of ethics. What is true is holiness.

[84] Peperzak, *Other*, 139.

3.3 The Relation as a Condition of Revelation

Whereas for Smith, the formal point-of-contact between God and humanity was a necessary condition for the possibility of revelation, for Levinas, the asymmetrical relationship between the Same and the Other is a necessary condition. The relationship, here, is the structural possibility of the Same being opened to something beyond itself and its atheistic totality. The Other, in some meaningful sense, must be able to appear to the Same outside of a complete reduction to the horizon of the ego. The relationship establishes a structure in which the reduction to the totality of the Same can be resisted. Through this structure, the Same can be opened outward to something surprising – something eschatological.

The role of the relationship in opening the Same outward to the eschatological also helps to explain the limitations of negation. Negation cannot establish revelation in an eschatological sense because it does not open the Same out beyond the horizon of its own totality.

3.3.1 Atheism: Groundwork of the Home

Levinas says that "it is necessary to begin with the concrete relationship between an I and a world."[85] He then provocatively uses the metaphor of atheism to depict the original separation of the Same that is the origin of the relationship. Negatively, for Levinas, atheism is the self's refusal of participation in what is exterior to its own totality. Positively, it is the self's establishment of its own inner life by virtue of its own self-assertion – what Levinas refers to as a 'psychism.' By asserting one's own inner life, one establishes oneself by oneself without any participation in external being. The atheist miraculously maintains oneself, at home with itself, in

[85] Levinas, *Totality*, 37.

existence without any other powers coming to its aid.[86] Consequently, atheism is the origin of the Same.

It is tempting to read Levinas's project in TI as the overcoming of the Same, but that overcoming would place the Same in the competitive dialectical relationship of conflict with the Other, which Levinas explicitly rejected. The Other does not oppose the Same. Levinas goes out of his way to reiterate this every time he returns to the theme that the Other does not oppose me with another power. Instead, the Other questions the Same by calling the Same to goodness. This non-competitive relationship is important. The Other does not compete with me. If it did, then the Other would oppose my power with another power. It would be just another being that I could kill and maybe should kill in order to persist in being. For Levinas, the Other is the sole being I *cannot* kill. Though, of course, I can murder the Other. Levinas's point is that the Other is not something that the Same need overcome precisely because the Other does not oppose me but rather calls me to goodness, and this is the reason he uses the term 'murder' to refer to the killing of the Other. Importantly, the atheistic separation of the Same is actually positive and necessary in order to maintain the relationship between the Same and the Other so that the two do not collapse into a new synthesis. Atheism is proof against that synthesis.

Recall that in Smith's project, the separation between the one who receives divine revelation and the divine is accomplished by the divine's apperception. The divine never gives itself entirely even in its reverse ontological participation. The divine, who created the finite, freely participates in the finite by virtue of the divine's *power* to do so. The finite does not have

[86] Levinas makes a throwaway comment in discussing the separation of the atheist from being: ". . . capable, eventually, of adhering to [Being] by belief." *« . . . capable éventuellement d'y adhérer par la croyance »* (Levinas, *Totalité*, 52). In terms of the evolution of Western spiritualities, is not belief the capacity to adhere to God within one's own separation from God? Within one's own atheism? What a fascinating question.

the *power* to limit its creator. Yet, while the divine is free to participate in the finite, and indeed does condescend to participate in the finite, the divine exercises its *right* not to give itself fully. This voluntary withholding of itself, when it could have done otherwise, maintains its divine transcendence. Smith's position is one of theological voluntarism. In turn, the one who receives revelation can only formally indicate the divine. Yet, the receiver is also supposed to be able to understand the partially-given divine in this revelation. Therefore, one understands the divine analogously, and the 'concept' formally indicates that analogous understanding. The Same is fully affirmed through Smith's doctrine of revelation. Even God respects and must respect the integrity of the Same.

In both projects, the role of separation emerges as a condition of revelation. For Smith, divine withholding accomplishes separation between the divine and the finite. It is hard for modern persons not to perceive this withholding as a challenge, a temptation, or possibly even a seduction. What could more powerfully provoke my lust for domination than a power that exceeds my power withholding some knowledge of itself from me? This is the same modern epistemological context that provokes Bacon and Descartes to strip nature bare in their domination of her. This modern spirituality is consistently reflected from Bacon and Descartes through Smith, even if Smith has insisted on celibacy. We cannot consummate our desire, but can only indicate it. We have to hold back by disciplining ourselves. Smith's stance is painfully Evangelical.

In contrast, for Levinas, separation is not due to a divine striptease but rather is accomplished by the egoism of the Same. The Same resists participation in Being because it has

no need of Being. It has no need because the Same has established itself as its own *causa sui*.[87] If it did not do this, then the Same would be an extension of a concept. There is something Kantian in how Levinas develops his metaphor of atheism as the Same seems to serve a regulating function, establishing the unity or totality of ideas.[88]

For Levinas, the Same is the source of concepts rather than being the extension of one. If, in contrast, the Same or the self were its own concept, then unity would be achieved through the Same's conceptual participation in Being.[89] It would require the Same to locate its ontological place. In this case, then revelation would be the vertical epistemological movement within the ontological hierarchy. We know this from Plato. Smith simply reverses that direction. The top of the hierarchy descends to where we are. When truth descends and makes its home at lower levels of the hierarchy and does not re-ascend, what salvific quality does that truth possess? Where is the Way and the Life here? How does that truth set us free from our imperialistic and colonizing endeavors? Where is the hope for the victim of our endeavors?

Therefore, in this curious way, the metaphor of atheism serves to account for the Same's separation from Being. It is not because the Other resists me, as marking the limitation of my freedom that we are separate. Levinas says that through the psychism in which the Same establishes its inner life:

> One can call atheism this separation so complete that the separated being maintains itself in existence all by itself, without participating in the Being from which it is separated—

[87] Levinas, *Totality*, 58-9. Interestingly, the Same's being its own *causa sui*, Levinas says, comes *after the fact* (*Ibid.*, 54). Its effect determines its cause, thus reversing the logical order and flow of time. The past is reshaped by virtue of the Same's hermeneutical power in the present, which is an example of the atheism of the Same.

[88] See Udo Thiel, "The Critique of Rational Psychology," in *A Companion to Kant*, Graham Bird, ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2006): 207-221.

[89] *Ibid.*, 59.

> eventually capable of adhering to it by belief. The break with participation is implied in this capability. One lives outside of God, at home with oneself; one is an I, an egoism.[90]

There is a form of peace that arises from this break with Being and this break with God. This peace arises from establishing one's own home and coming to be at home in the world. All of this is accomplished through the power, labor, and capacity of the Same such that the establishment of the home is equivalent to the establishment of freedom.

> In a sense everything is in the site, in the last analysis everything is at my disposal, even the stars, if I but reckon them, calculate the intermediaries or the means. The site, a medium, affords means.[91]

This is the power of economy, the management or the law of the home. The home and its economy is power over even the stars, or perhaps a power over God. And all that it takes to establish this dwelling is putting down one's roots along with a little bit of calculative thinking. A little bit of belief. Perhaps a bit of analogy in which the Other is made like me. When the Other is made like me, alterity slips away, and the economy is complete.

While Levinas is clearly quite critical of the atheism of the Same, which is the seat of the Same's egolatry and imperialism, Peperzak notes that it is "a condition for the possibility of transcendence and dedication to the nonego that is the Other."[92] That is to say, the relationship, which itself requires separation, is this condition.

I will note in the conclusion of this section that Levinas identifies atheism as the origin of the relation through a model of radical individuality rather than through a model of original sociality. This original individualism is a limitation of Levinas's project.

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[90] Levinas, *Totality*, 58.

[91] *Ibid.*, 37.

[92] Peperzak, *Other*, 136.

3.3.2 Desire

Beyond the metaphor of atheism as a metaphor to describe the separation that is the necessary basis of the relationship, Levinas introduces the relational structure of desire. This structure is important. Peperzak argues that in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas is committed to developing a "post-Heideggerian and, therefore, also post-(neo-)Platonic metaphysics."[93] Desire, as a relational structure, is therefore a mechanism of transcendence in this new metaphysics. We should note that just because Levinas is committed to ethics as first philosophy does not imply that he has abandoned metaphysics. It is merely to position metaphysics properly as a function of the prior philosophy of ethics. The question of Being is replaced with the question of transcendence.[94] Desire for the Other is what calls the Same beyond itself. Desire calls the Same to leave its home, its seat of power.

We get a glimpse of why Levinas must differentiate between desire and need at this point. Whereas desire calls us beyond, need leaves us at home. Peperzak notes that "the satisfaction of needs stands for the whole economy of the Western way of life and thought."[95] We might argue that Western economies do a more-than-adequate job of leveraging desire in ways that make desire feel like a need. We might argue that desire for the Other has a tendency of objectifying the Other and turning the Other into an object for exploitation. Therefore, we cannot push the common uses of these terms too far. We must emphasize the technical uses to which Levinas puts the terms.

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[93] *Ibid.*, 131

[94] *Ibid.*

[95] *Ibid.*, 133.

Levinas declares need to be "the time of labor."[96] Consequently, Levinas remains clearly committed to an economic context for his concept of need. I need something that I do not have, something from which I am separated, and also something from which I live.[97] There is a poverty or privation implied in need. However, I have made for myself a home in the world. By 'home' we do not imply a real-estate property but we do mean a property. The metaphor of the home implies the property of being the source of one's own power. As stated above in the context of atheism, the self maintains itself in its own separation. Separation creates needs, which fortunately are in my power to attain. Because I have the power to attain these needs, I am not dependent on the Other. I am dependent only on myself, my labor, my belief, and my time. These things become the basis of my attaining and possessing what I need.

In contrast, Levinas states that desire is for what we do not lack.[98] What Levinas means by this is that we do not live by desire the way we live by need. I attain what I need through my labor. I subsist on these things that I need, and they become the basis for my ongoing freedom and labor. They fill me and sustain me – the bread I eat and the land on which I dwell. "Their alterity is thereby reabsorbed into my own identity as . . . a possessor."[99] Therefore, as Levinas talks about desire for a land not of our birth, and other such metaphors, he is moving towards the assertion that "metaphysical desire . . . desires beyond everything that can simply complete it."[100] Here we find the important difference between need and desire. Needs remain part of the

[96] Levinas, *Totality*, 116.

[97] *Ibid.*, 111.

[98] *Ibid.*, 117.

[99] *Ibid.*, 33.

[100] *Ibid.*, 34.

economy. Desire exceeds the economy because desire does not bring about satisfaction or completion. Rather, it brings about an intensification.

To understand this intensification, we can return to Levinas's claim that "the other, metaphysically desired, is not 'other' like the bread I eat."[101] I acquire the bread through the labors of my own body, and I take the bread into my body. The bread sustains my body and provides energy for additional labor. This is the economy of acquisition and empowerment. In the economy, separation is annulled and alterity is subsumed. My desire for the other is not like my need for bread. How so? I desire precisely what is not and cannot be taken into me. What I desire does not fulfill me. Instead, what I desire intensifies my desire. Desire, Levinas says, "nourishes itself . . . with its hunger."[102]

Insatiable desire is not economy because it does not return me to my home because the Desired is beyond my capacity to attain. Because of its distance, the Desired calls to me. It calls me beyond my home and beyond the economy. It is not something that empowers the Same or re-established the Same. It calls me to leave my home and travel into an unknown land. In desire, I do not seek to return, but to go forth. The untraversable relation is the basis of desire, which does not collapse into unity.

If we accept Levinas's technical distinctions between need and desire, then a question arises whether Smith's doctrine of revelation, which he established through his refusal of any Gnostic lack, might, after all, be based on a metaphysical lack. In Smith's project, do we feed on our interpretations? Do they nourish us and return us to our homes? Do our interpretations satisfy us? And would such satisfaction suggest a prior lack on our part? A *need* to interpret. A *lack* of

[101] *Ibid.*, 33.

[102] *Ibid.*, 34.

interpretation. Is a hermeneutical lack different from a metaphysical lack, such that a hermeneutical Gnosticism would not bear the offense of an ontological Gnosticism?

It seems as if Smith's project is provoked by the knowledge that "freedom is in peril."[103] The threat of Gnosticism, in Smith's work, reflects a threat to liberty. There may be something that I cannot attain through my own economic labor, through the labor of my own body, on the basis of my own freedom. We must never lack freedom. The God who is invisible and beyond and Other cannot save us by making us radically free. Only the disclosed god is able to make humanity radically free. For the one who is free in this way, the Other will always be a competitor and a threat. The One I must murder.

3.3.3 Excess as Revelation in Relation, or Why Levinas Rejects Negative Theology

As we consider the structures and form of revelation in Levinas's thought, much of our understanding hinges on his contrast between the ideas of *totality* and of *infinity*. It is because of this contrast that infinity cannot be merely a negation of the finite, which would leave the Same as the epistemological agent.[104] Nor can the relation between totality and infinity be one of a liberal dialectic, which is really just another mode of negation. In a liberal dialectic, one atomic or tribal structure exists in competitive tension with another atomic or tribal structure, productively bringing forth a new sublation. In this case, *knowledge is competitive because*

[103] *Ibid.*, 35.

[104] Levinas states that "resistance is still within the same" (*Totality*, 41). What we negate leaves theology and God within the realm of egolotrous epistemology: a knowledge structured by the self or the Same. Consequently, the transcendent is still within the 'here below.' Therefore, for the transcendent to transcend egolatry, it must be an excess rather than a negation. The structures of analogy fall into this same critique of a knowledge structured by the Same. The excess of transcendence moves epistemological agency from the Same to the Other.

knowledge is power, a power that is as a zero-sum dynamic.[105] Smith's concept of revelation works within this dynamic because it renders the 'concept' analogical. Consequently, his concept of 'concept' leaves the human epistemological agent as the atomic structure in tension with the divine atomic structure of revelation. This dialectical tension is resolved in the analogical sublation of the divine precisely because revelation is disclosure for Smith.

Levinas pushes back against any concept of revelation that would render knowledge through the sublation of the Other. First, because of the separation maintained through atheism, there is no sublation.[106] Second, at the point to which we now come, Levinas rejects all negative theology in favor of excess. Rather than negating thought, the infinite overflows thought. This Cartesian, or perhaps Anselmian, concept of infinity as an excess that exceeds our capacity to think allows Levinas to speak of transcendence nonviolently. There is no tension between infinity and its idea because thinking infinity is not a capacity that finite beings possess. Instead, it is an idea that comes from outside as a welcoming, a call, or a conversation.[107] The result of this call or conversation is that dialectical structures are replaced with discursive structures.

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[105] Consider the modern dialectical epistemological structure that is the tension between knowledge and doubt. The other, that is doubt, is threatening but also productive when properly harnessed. In harnessing doubt, however, it is sublimated in such a manner that skepticism becomes structurally necessary to modern epistemology. When knowledge is power, as Bacon and Descartes taught us, then knowledge is competitive, which is to say, imperialistic.

[106] Levinas says, "One can call atheism this separation so complete the at the separated being maintains itself in existence all by itself, without participating in the Being from which it is separated—eventually capable of adhering to it by belief . . . One lives outside of God, at home with oneself; one is an I, an egoism" (*Totality*, 58). The individuation of atheism bears structural similarities to the radical individualism sometimes found within modernity and liberalism.

Tactically, this connection with liberalism is important. To move beyond, it is strategically useful to step from within. Levinas's concept of atheism may allow us, who largely stand within liberalism, to take the step with him towards a new typology beyond the liberal economic.

[107] While Levinas credits Descartes' Third Meditation with this concept of infinity, we must recognize how far beyond Descartes Levinas has taken the notion.

There are important ramifications both for how we conceive of theological authority and how we might understand revelation. As we recall, one of Smith's concerns was *comment ne pas parler* – How not to speak. He was concerned with the capacity of language to convey what is beyond language. For Smith, language is conceptualized as representing the divine through signs. We could consider it as a semiological deduction. In contrast, Levinas alters the relation of signs, referents, and signification by emphasizing *le dire* (the saying) over *le dit* (the said). With this emphasis, signification comes prior to the sign as speaking becomes a mode of welcoming the Other in such a way that the Other puts the Same into question.

Once more, there is something of a Kantian flavor to Levinas's method. For Kant, if the empirical deduction is insufficient to account for causation or the self, perhaps we need to look beyond that method to a transcendental deduction. Cause-effect relations and the self are not objects in the world like any other object. If we think of causal relations the same way that we think of horses or oranges or carburetors, then of course we will fail to find empirical evidence for causal relations. Therefore, if most reasonable, well-intentioned people find the premise of causal relations to be compelling, then perhaps the problem is in our assumption that they are the same kind of object as other objects in the world. Perhaps we need to take a transcendental approach rather than an empirical one.

Now, in our case, if a semiological approach to language cannot account for speaking about that which exceeds the capacity of language, then perhaps an ethical or an eschatological approach would be more fruitful. Smith claims that the very possibility of theology is at stake here, and I agree with him. Of course, there is more at stake, such as the capacity to speak of the human Other. The altering of the relation between signs, referents, and significations bears some

similarity to Kant's altering of the position of the self and of causation, making them structurally requisite for experience and knowledge. Significance becomes structurally requisite for Levinas.

For Levinas, signification comes prior to the sign because speaking becomes a mode of welcoming the Other in such a way that the Other puts the Same into question. That 'putting into question' is the ethical component of language, which prioritizes ethical signification. Rather than receiving God on the basis of our understanding, the welcome of God puts us into question.[108] This welcoming of the Other in speaking is what Levinas calls 'discourse.' That is what I mean by the discursive structure of revelation. By opening the Same beyond itself, the Other calls the Same to goodness. This is the structure of discursive ethics that is the basis of Levinas's concept of revelation.

In terms of speech and language, rather than speaking about God, in which case the standard relation of signs, referents, and significations would apply, we are now speaking with the God who addresses us. Therefore, what is at stake is not linguistic or semiological indication. What is at stake is the ongoing opening of oneself to God or the human Other in welcome. Language takes on the mode of prayer as welcoming desire for the Other. This relation of prayer, this discourse of prayer, reveals God through the transformation or sanctification of the Same. God is not revealed by doctrine, but by justice.

[108] In this sense, Levinas appears to be saying something similar to Barth in his *Romerbrief*. "In announcing the limitation of the known world by another than is unknown, the Gospel does not enter into competition with the many attempts to disclose within the known where some more or less unknown in the higher form of existence and to make it accessible to men. The Gospel is not a truth among other truths. Rather it sets a question-mark against all truths." Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Edwyn C. Hoskyns, trans. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968): 35.

3.3.4 The Magnificat of Freedom

In atheism, the Same finds its existence in itself and not in participation.[109] The self-establishment of the Same comes through labor and is, consequently, self-justifying. One's own labor has established oneself. The Same thereby justifies its ongoing laborious expansion, which is to say, its imperialism through its right to assert itself or to preserve itself, which are effectively the same thing. On the basis of its imperialistic self-establishment, the Same is free – spontaneously free. Such spontaneous freedom becomes the supreme good; the moral cornerstone of rationality, which is to say, certitude. The Same can be certain and, indeed, must be certain, only of its own radical and holy freedom, which is truth.[110] It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.[111] Truth.

What then, of the Other? Of that which is not in myself and in which I cannot participate? Nature? The other person, other culture, other race, or other gender? God?

Because the Same is self-established, its being rests on the authorization of its own power: "Ontology as first philosophy is a philosophy of power."[112] However, that power is vulnerable to what is beyond. It is limited by the Other because the Other is not the Same. Thus, "possession is preeminently the form in which the Other becomes the Same, by becoming mine."[113] The only thing that is required to justify this possession and displacement of the Other is the Same's perseverance in freedom, a freedom of unrestricted spontaneity. By possessing

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[109] Levinas, *Totality*, 90.

[110] Levinas asks: "Is truth not correlative with a freedom that is this side of justice, since it is the freedom of a being that is alone?" (*Totality*, 90). In this question, he is establishing the foil to his own position.

[111] Gal. 5:1.

[112] Levinas, *Totality*, 46.

[113] *Ibid.*

more and more, particularly more and more of the Other, I increase the Same's capacity for spontaneity. The Same becomes freer as the Other is more fully possessed – epistemologically, psychologically, legally, economically, culturally. The means of possession are legion. We can call this possession that increases the freedom of the Same, colonialism.

Colonialism, as the path of spontaneous freedom, justifies injustice. Bernasconi argues that Levinas's expressed concern in the Preface, about whether war suspends morality, is too easily set aside as not being central to Levinas's core project in TI.[114] Only a morality based on subjectivism could be set aside in this way.[115] Morality is subverted by politics, says Levinas and Bernasconi. And what is politics? It is "the art of foreseeing war and of winning it by every means."[116] On what basis would we anticipate war? On the basis of a threat against the spontaneous freedom of the Same – the Same subjectivity, nation, culture, race, gender, God, et. al. On the authority of politics, which amounts to colonialism, injustice – the possession of the Other – becomes justice – the establishment of the Same. This justified injustice is primitively grounded on the spontaneous freedom the Same, which is the Good. Nothing could be more intuitive and totally obvious to atheists, those who establish themselves on the basis of themselves, cut off from any added participation, a participation which might almost be understood as socialism.

3.3.5 Knowledge

In Western society, knowledge is a mode of liberty, the liberty to think for oneself and the liberty to hold one's own set of beliefs, determining what sufficient evidence is required for

[114] Bernasconi, "Styles of Eschatology," 3.

[115] *Ibid.*

[116] Levinas, *Totality*, 21.

oneself.[117] As a vicious circle, the knowledge of potency upholds liberty by dominating nature or, perhaps, by insisting that God appear in a way that we can understand God. Like atheism, knowledge is thus self-authorized by establishment of individual and tribal liberty. Knowledge is authorized by the power, the "I can-ness," that it makes available.[118] Whereas Levinas was critical of ontology based on its tripartite mediation – its use of a horizon or a third term to comprehend existents[119] – I would suggest that since the time of Descartes and Locke, if not going back to medieval voluntarism, that economic structures have ascended over ontological ones. Heidegger's attempt to retrieve Being can be read as an opposition to the technological forces of productive, calculative thought, which is to say, economic thought. Heidegger must make space for Being to appear amidst the ontic thrownness, some of which is *technē*.[120] In other words, Heidegger retreats from modern economic liberalism to the ancient question of Being. Smith, who aligns himself with the young Heidegger of pre-*Being and Time*, leverages Heidegger to arrive at what Smith calls a reverse ontological participation. Rather than following reason upwards to God, God descends to where we are and appears in a way that we can understand God. In other words, God empowers our liberty by establishing our knowledge. We are the universal center where divinity unfolds itself against the horizon of our experience –

[117] Nathan Hatch provides a detailed account of the relation of authority, knowledge, and liberty in his book, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

[118] Anecdotally this is evidenced by the popular acclaim of professional university studies and the skepticism that is levied towards the humanities in neoliberal early twenty-first century American culture. Parents who are paying for their children's college educations want them to choose 'practical' majors, i.e., majors that allow their children to make money through professional skills.

[119] See Peperzak, *Other,* 138.

[120] "Heidegger's thought of Being is a very important version of ontology. Indeed, according to him, *Dasein* understands phenomena in the light of Being and in the space opened up by it. The horizon of Being has taken over the mediating function of the classical concept or idea" (Peperzak, *Other,* 138).

experience, which always requires mediation.[121] We can now have theological interpretations. We can now indicate God by virtue of analogy; by virtue of our own understanding, which God liberally empowers. It is as if God came from the ego, as if theology were anthropology.

Levinas uses metaphors of vision, light, or illumination to speak of the intelligibility of ontological comprehension.[122] Smith does not use these metaphors, despite his frequent reliance on Augustine, but he acknowledges that he stands squarely in Husserlian phenomenology with its Kantian origins in the transcendental unity of apperception.[123] It is tempting to speculate on the similarities between a Platonic epistemology of recollection and Kant's transcendental deduction, in which knowledge becomes possible through the organizing and unifying labors of the self. Levinas's critique is penetrating:

> This primacy of the same was Socrates's teaching: to receive nothing of the Other but what is in me, as though from all eternity I was in possession of what comes to me from the outside—to receive nothing or to be free. Freedom does not resemble the capricious spontaneity of free will; its ultimate meaning lies in this permanence in the same, which is reason. Cognition is the deployment of this identity; it is freedom. That reason, in the last analysis, would be the manifestation of a freedom, neutralizing the other and encompassing him, can come as no surprise once it was laid down that sovereign reason knows only itself, that nothing other limits it. The neutralization of the other who becomes a theme or an object—appearing, that is, taking its place in the light—is precisely his reduction to the same.[124]

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[121] Smith wants to mediate experience through *praxis* rather than *theoria* (*Speech*, 78). I will argue that *praxis* no more escapes economic structures than *theoria* escapes ontological ones. Smith also struggles to avoid a populist anti-intellectualism grounded on individual religious experience (*Ibid.*, 113, fn. 116).

[122] For example, "The light that permits encountering something other than the self, makes it encountered as if this thing came from the ego. The light, brightness, is intelligibility itself; making everything come from me . . ." (Levinas, *Time*, 68).

[123] "This book locates itself within the phenomenological tradition of Husserl, and operates on the basis of this assumption" (Smith, *Speech,* 13 fn. 8,). See Anastasia Kozyreva, "Synthetic Unity of Consciousness in the Phenomenology of Edmund Husserl," *Phenomenological Studies, 2* (2018): 217-247.

[124] Levinas, *Totality*, 43.

Knowledge is power, and the epistemological metaphors of vision, light, or illumination, metaphors of what knowledge makes available, these metaphors re-inscribe this epistemic and imperialistic power onto the Same.

Once again, what is at stake is the method of philosophy/theology and its starting point. Knowledge as violent imperialistic power is inseparable from the prioritization of ontology over ethics. When God must show up in ways that the Same can understand, we have prioritized ontology. The Same is the singular horizon of meaning, the universal horizon of meaning, the permanence of meaning. This seems to be Levinas's point when he speaks above of sovereign reason knowing only itself. Because it knows only itself, reason comes to dominate the Other. Consequently, formally indicative concepts cannot convey knowledge. They can only become occasions. But occasions, trapped in the overall system of sovereign reason give way to analogy.

However, when we prioritize ethics over ontology, the epistemic relation with the Other takes on the structure of desire. The Same welcomes the Other in a way that does not lay claim or take possession of the Other. Welcoming the Other means to allow the Other to call me into question.[125] In this way "ethics . . . accomplishes the critical essence of knowledge,"[126] which is the surpassing of unicity.[127] This critical essence of knowledge, surpassing unicity, is discourse, to which we now turn.

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[125] It would be interesting to investigate how Levinas's ethical discourse connects with aspects of virtue epistemology.

[126] Levinas, *Totality*, 43.

[127] DeRoo claims that Levinas's eschatology, what DeRoo generalizes as futurity, "is of a different order than knowledge" (DeRoo, *Futurity*, 74). What DeRoo means by a different order than knowledge is the order of ethics. It remains to be seen whether this can be the case. What would knowledge in the order of ethics entail? Regardless, it does seem that a different semantic order arises in Levinas's eschatology, and perhaps a different mode or model of knowledge.

3.4 Discourse as a Mechanism of Revelation

The primary question of this dissertation regards the mode and structures of revelation. If revelation does not come in a way that the receiver can understand it, which is to say that it does not come as disclosure, if revelation is not fundamentally a matter of content, then what are we even talking about? What does revelation indicate? For Levinas, language provides the structure of revelation: "Absolute difference, inconceivable in terms of formal logic, is established only by language."[128] Language accomplishes the absolute difference by breaking the continuity of the Same. It does so in discourse, where that which remains transcendent relates to the Same. This is the case because the presence of the transcendent is not reabsorbed "as a theme" even if the Other had presented itself thematically.[129] As we saw above, in discourse, the Other continues to come to its own aid. Therefore, the mode and structure of revelation is discourse. If revelation is structured discursively, what is revealed in revelation? My answer to that question is, a call. Revelation is a call to leave one's home and journey forth into an unknown land.

Smith has a very different concept of discourse than does Levinas. I argue that 'concepts' are never just formally indicative. Even the 'concept' relies on prior concepts as well as economic emplacement. Smith asks:

> How could any discourse concerning the Wholly Other – even about its being 'beyond being' – ever be generated? And more importantly, how could any *relation* with the Wholly Other be possible, apart from its appearing *in some manner*?[130]

Smith's concept of discourse does not involve speaking amongst human beings. It is the speaking of the Same *about* the Wholly Other, *concerning* the Wholly Other. For Levinas,

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[128] Levinas, *Totality*, 195.

[129] *Ibid.*

[130] Smith, *Speech*, 158.

discourse is *with* the Other. However, Smith still has a point. Even in a discourse with the Other, what does it mean to talk about revelation without talking about *what* is revealed and how that revelation, that content, is received? "Must not a revelation take place in terms that the ego can understand?[131] Do we have to understand something for it to mean something to us? That is a semantic question rather than an epistemological one. Is understanding a condition of meaning? If the 'concept' is truly to be a Kierkegaardian occasion, for what is it an occasion? Is it not an occasion for the leap of faith? The leap of trust? The leap of obedience? Do we have to understand before leaping? Before obeying?

In one of his Talmudic essays, Levinas claims that the temptation of knowledge is the temptation of temptation.[132] He describes knowledge as simultaneously engaged and disengaged.[133] The self engages with its object and then returns to its separated, disengaged, non-compromised self. This is the journey of knowledge, which is a journey of calculation rather than freedom and generosity. In Levinas's words, "from this stems the inability to recognize the other person as other person, as outside all calculation, as neighbor, as first come."[134] Knowledge, in the sense of this paragraph, is an economic calculus, an economic decision or investment.

In contrast, Levinas reflects on the Talmudic writing of Rav Abdimi bar Hama bar Hasa regarding the Hebrew people receiving the Torah at the foot of the mountain. Levinas's reflections lead him to recognized a non-freedom, beyond-freedom, that is manifest in the

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[131] Smith, *Speech*, 159.

[132] Emmanuel Levinas, "The Temptation of Temptation," *Nine Talmudic Readings*, Annette Aronowicz, trans. (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994): 33.

[133] *Ibid.*, 34.

[134] *Ibid.*, 35.

meaning of being. That non-freedom is "to realize the Torah."[135] This obligation is over all of creation and played out in the reception of the Torah at the foot of the mountain. Importantly, neither God nor Moses nor anyone else lays out or explains the Torah to the Hebrew people. Neither the meaning of being nor the law of God is something that one calculates before choosing. In these cases, acceptance comes prior to knowledge. In fact, Levinas quotes Martin Buber in order to argue that understanding comes through the doing of the law. The meaning of the law is revealed in its performance. We know without the examination of calculation.[136] Consequently, "the reception of Revelation . . . can only be the relation with a person, with another. The Torah is given in the Light of a face . . . Revelation is ethical behavior."[137] I suggest that in light of Levinas's arguments that the reason of revelation, the sufficient evidence of revealed knowledge, is ethics.

Let us return to the earlier question: Do we have to understand something in order for it to mean something to us? The answer is Yes, but that answer is qualified in the sense that understanding itself is contextual. Smith and Levinas are coming from different contexts. Do we have to understand in the sense that Smith implies? Does God have to show up in a way that conforms to Husserlian phenomenology, which is a large part of what Smith seems to be claiming?[138] Then the answer becomes No.

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[135] *Ibid.,* 41.

[136] *Ibid.,* 43.

[137] *Ibid.,* 47.

[138] Remember that Smith insinuates that the "worldly God" of Husserl is all that we have and all that we can expect. In other words, the only God we have is the one who appears within the phenomenological scope of empiricism: "this one whom we have seen with our eyes, whom our hands have touched and our ears have heard (1 John 1:1-3)" (Smith, *Speech,* 55).

Marion's investigation of the relation between faith and reason is pertinent here. He identifies two limitations of reason. Its first limitation is the reduction of "experience to objectifiable phenomena."[139] We see this limitation displayed across Smith's argument. We cannot experience, and therefore truncate, that which exceeds phenomenological objectification. Second, by ignoring the role of our own flesh in the knowledge creation process – our sensing our flesh sensing other bodies in the world – we again find ourselves truncating any knowledge or meaning or value not directly produced by our own flesh. We can characterize what Marion is describing here as the reason of the flesh. Within the context of the flesh and its reason, yes, we have to understand in order for something to have meaning.

That said, we can imagine another context in which we do not have to understand in order for something to have meaning. We can feel an obligation to a stranger, to a child we do not know, to a laborer on a jobsite, to a student in a classroom, to a hungry dog in an alley, to a refugee escaping a war. We can feel an obligation that we cannot put into words, an obligation that we do not fully understand. We do not understand why *this* person rather than another. We do not understand the source of this feeling of obligation, given the needs of my own community and my own family. It does not make sense to feel obliged by *this* Other. But I feel captured. Marion says, "love has its reason."[140] The obligation that we feel to the Other, that we do not understand, is an ethical obligation, which is to say an obligation of love. The reason of love is not the reason of the flesh. Further, the reason of love calls us forth by placing us under an obligation. This calling forth is the revelation of God.

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[139] Jean-Luc Marion, "Faith and Reason," *Believing in Order to See: On the Rationality of Revelation and the Irrationality of Some Believers*, Christina M. Gschwandtner, trans. (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2017): 9.

[140] *Ibid.*, 10.

If revelation calls us forth and out – out of the land of Egypt, out of the land of enslavement, out of this body of death – then revelation cannot be received according to the reason of the flesh. If that were to happen, then the reception of revelation would amount to the annulment of revelation back into the horizon of egolatry. It is the ongoing presence of the Other that maintains the call such that we can receive the call in love only through fidelity to that call.

Levinas uses the term 'discourse' in order to conceptualize the revelation that occurs in the relation between the Same and the Other. Language is the mechanism of this revelation, because language is a mode of relation, which does not reduce to the capacity to understand the Other. Rather language conveys the Other beyond understanding because in discourse the Other can critique and surpass the understanding of the Same. The distance between the Same and the Other in the relation of language, which is conversation, prevents the Same from reconstituting its totality, collapsing the Other into the horizon of the Same. Conversation with the Other brings us outside of ourselves and into a relationship in which "thought consists in speaking."[141] This is an important statement because it implies that meaning, reason, and perhaps knowledge become functions of discourse rather than rationalism, empiricism, transcendental deductions, or other epistemological functions. The speaking Levinas mentions could be interpreted to mean the words leaving my own mouth, but the context implies it is conversation or discourse – a speaking *with* one another. Thought occurs not within the Same, the cogito, but in discourse with the Other.

[141] Levinas, *Totality*, 40.

3.4.1 Ethics and the Content of Revelation

Let us ask the question again: "What does revelation reveal?" What is the content of revelation? Perhaps in an unexpected manner, Levinas claims that the Other is revealed. However, and here is where nuance enters into his response, this revelation of the other is a "relation irreducible to the subject-object relation," a relation instituted by language.[142] In this revelation, Levinas clarifies that the other is not represented or given as a particular being opened to generalization. Instead, the Other remains transcendent, the Stranger, the Foreigner, in this relation of language. He goes so far as to describe this revelation as "a *traumatism of astonishment*."[143] Levinas suggests that, perhaps under current conditions, only other human beings can be sufficiently foreign to inflict this trauma. In other words, in the twenty-first century, human beings do not sufficiently experience this transcendence in nature or religion, but we occasionally recognize this transcendence in the other person.

When we now return to the question of what does revelation reveal, the answer emerges: "The strangeness of the Other, his very freedom!"[144] Charles Taylor noted that a new social imaginary, or metaphysical model, "comes essentially through a retrospective interpretation."[145] A connection to the old helps to justify and to legitimize in the popular mindset the transition into the new. Emerging out of a model of economic liberalism, the other free person is the step from the old to the new. In the freedom of the Other, we recognize a Stranger and transcendence that we do not, in the old model, recognize in nature, for instance. Therefore, the revelation of

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[142] Levinas, *Totality*, 73.

[143] *Ibid.* Emphasis original. We could note how many right-wing politicians in the United States in 2022 is seeking to criminalize some types of traumatism of astonishment as it relates to past cultural, societal, or racial guilt.

[144] *Ibid.*

[145] Taylor, *Social Imaginaries*, 112.

the Other's strangeness and freedom should be highly plausible, even within a model of economic liberalism.

Levinas notes the tendency of modern industrialism to reduce things to their purpose so that things "disappear beneath their form."[146] He then begins to differentiate between disclosure and revelation by arguing that disclosure clarifies the thing in terms of its form: "to find for it a place in the whole by apperceiving its function or its beauty."[147] But language dissociates the thing from its form. The thing-in-itself, the *kath auto,* the Face of the Other, signifies prior to being represented in the light of the totality of the Same. This primal signification is the traumatic astonishment that strikes us from out of nowhere. Therefore, the face does not derive its meaning from me, from the Same. Nor does this meaning arise from a network of negotiation. Because of this surprising, exogeneous origin, the face is a mode of transcendence. Due to this exogeneous origin, it also calls into question my possession of the world. It calls into question the network of economic liberalism.

The calling into question of my possession of the world, my own spontaneous freedom, my rights and property, is simultaneously a call to welcome the Other. It is a call of sanctification, of holiness. This holiness is what is revealed in revelation.

3.4.2 The Call of Justice as Revelation

As I write in the light of the January 6, 2021 storming of the U.S. Capital Building by right-wing insurrectionists, the following claim by Peperzak is more poignant than ever:

> The secret of Western ontology is its basic sympathy with political oppression and tyranny . . . A society based on ontology cannot be just, although it might try to create a balance out of the *polemos* to which the liberties of its monads inevitably lead. Originary

[146] *Ibid.*, 74.

[147] *Ibid.*

> respect, metaphysic as critique of spontaneously violent autonomy, is the only possibility of a just society.[148]

Epistemology, justice, ethics, and metaphysics are systematically and pragmatically related. The esoteric doctrines of epistemology and metaphysics bear upon justice and government. They bear upon how we do life together. When truth is something to be uncovered and disclosed, when knowledge is subject to the whims of liberty, then political injustice and tyranny are inevitable. How we model revelation bears on justice and justification.

When ontology is first philosophy, love does not win. What does it mean to love one's neighbor or one's enemy in the context of Being? Perhaps it implies that we, the Same, know what is best for our neighbor and our enemy. To love another when we, not they, know what is best for them may require 'tough love,' imperialistic love. To love America may require storming her 'temple of democracy' and even seeking to hang the traitors in our midst. Love may require violence, when ontology is first philosophy.[149]

For Levinas, the truth of revelation is a moral summons that issues first from the command, "Do not kill me." The truth of revelation, which is the call of sanctification, arouses my goodness. This arousal proceeds only from the face, which in its destitution and vulnerability oppose my power not with another power – a quantitative difference – but contests my very ability for liberty.[150] In the subversion of my liberty, the liberty that had previously grounded truth as the basis of knowledge, I encounter a foundation for truth and knowledge that guarantees

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[148] Peperzak, *Other*, 139.

[149] It would be tempting to imagine Levinas's position to be beyond temptation. However, Bernasconi notes that later in his life, Levinas began to support the notion of an historically realized Zionism relative to the Jewish state (Bernasconi, "Different Styles," 14-15). Politics is a challenge for Levinas's position, as it is a challenge for Christian ecclesiology.

[150] Levinas, *Totality*, 196.

itself, which is the face.[151] The self-justifying face is not possible when starting from ontology or epistemology, but only within ethics. We arrive now at Levinas's own goal in TI:

> For the sense of our whole effort is to contest the ineradicable conviction of every philosophy that objective knowledge is the ultimate relation of transcendence, that the Other must be known objectivity, even if his freedom should deceive this nostalgia for knowledge. The sense of our whole effort lies in affirming not that the Other forever escapes knowing, but that there is no meaning in speaking here of knowledge or ignorance, *for justice, the preeminent transcendence and the condition for knowing, is nowise, as one would like, a noesis correlating to a noema*.[152]

Levinas has provided us an ethical epistemology, one not based on the invested labor of the knower, but on the arousal of my goodness. What could it mean to talk about a knowledge sourced in justice; justified by justice? How could it be thematized or conceptualized? How would it profit us? These questions become nonsensical when contextualized ethically. Consequently, they reveal the injustice of the economic epistemology of liberty.

An ethical epistemology is a fundamental re-orientation of the telos and the very meaning of knowledge. When Bacon affirmed that knowledge was power, he was merely displaying his sensitivity to the epistemological commitments of Western reason. The notion that knowledge occurs as empowerment is what Levinas rejected when he accused Western thought of imperialism. Therefore, when he locates knowledge in justice, he is rejecting the possibility that knowledge could ever be power. Instead, knowledge is the call of holiness: a radical, infinite, and sacrificial responsibility. This is the call of holiness. It is the obligation to give up one's own life for the sake of the Other. This is the obligation that I know with certainty.

In twenty-first century North America, the notion of an ethical epistemology is as untenable as it is unthinkable. Perhaps it is even irrational. After all, any notion that we would

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[151] *Ibid.*, 202.

[152] *Ibid.*, 89-90. Emphasis added.

need liberation from the imperialistic knowledge of liberty would have to appear as unthinkably irrational. Otherwise, the call of holiness would simply be sublated back into the knowledge of power. Irrationally, Levinas claims that prior to cognition, analysis, categorization, or application is justice. Ethical knowledge is received as a gift by faithfulness. Knowledge that is saving cannot be by works.

3.5 Summary and Conclusion

Jay Wood suggests that how we arrive at knowledge matters and that ethics should guide our epistemology.[153] Wood's claims emerge out of his assessment of the skeptical challenges of contemporary epistemology, but also epistemology's role in the brutality of twentieth-century fascism. The conceptual violence that worries Smith turns out to be just a small piece of this larger epistemological crisis. Smith's myopic view produced creative analysis and some helpful constructive proposals, but they are still insufficient on their own. Smith's rejection of Levinas (and Marion) does not seem to be warranted, upon further examination. In fact, it would seem based upon the analysis of this chapter that Levinas actually helps to achieve the goals that Smith seeks, 'Gnosticism' excepted.

In different ways, we have seen that both Smith and Levinas connect language with revelation. For Smith, a properly regulated concept of 'concept' is necessary to do justice to revelation, or, at least, to limit any metaphysical violence. For Levinas, a critical discourse in which the Other continues to call the same beyond the imperialism of knowledge and into ethical holiness is necessary. However, both Smith and Levinas seem to assume that the recipient of revelation is an individual. For Levinas, he specifically argues for the atheism of the Same.

[153] Jay Wood, *Epistemology: Becoming Intellectually Virtuous* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998): 40.

Further, revelation itself is conceived of as operating in an individualistic model. In Levinas, the Other is as much of an individual as the Same. Therefore, the actors in Levinas's ethical drama are numerically singular. Smith too has noted the absence of the church or even an interpretive community in his early works of FoI and ST.[154] Recall Smith's confession that he had in mind the isolated Protestant, alone in her prayer closet during these early works.[155] Smith's acknowledgements of these shortcomings suggest that the function of revelation requires community. I would press further and state that language, knowledge, and revelation require communion.[156]

In his work on the grammatical origins of meaning, Bourdieu argues that "the most rigorously rationalized law is never anything more than an act of social magic which works."[157] Bourdieu's point is that meaning is a function of a social economy and never strictly just the rules of grammar or dictionary definitions, no matter how far back one travels in the etymologies. The meaning of words is authorized by communities. The more tightly one wishes to define a term, the more homogenously regulated the community must become. Bourdieu uses the example of the term 'group,' which in mathematics has a very narrow meaning, much narrower than that same term has in the general populace.[158] That narrow meaning is possible only because of the high bar that regulates how one may join the community of mathematicians.

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[154] Smith, *Fall*, 8. Smith, "Continuing the Conversation," 216.

[155] *Ibid.*

[156] Given that modern community, defined here as a voluntary association of likeminded individuals, is itself based in a prior commitment to the individual, I use the term 'communion' to denote a fundamental commitment to relationality instead.

[157] Bourdieu, *Language*, 42.

[158] *Ibid.*, 40.

Arguably, Smith's project in ST is to tightly regulate the use of 'concept.' If Bourdieu is right, then Smith's project could succeed only in a small, highly regulated community. Of course, philosophers and theologians rarely aggregate into likeminded groups. Regulation happens here more at levels of commitment (e.g., to the poor; to divine sovereignty) rather than definitional ones. It is hard to imagine a scenario in which Smith's concept of the 'concept' becomes the only legitimate one, carrying with it a set of norms that regulate spiritual, religious, and theological practices. Yet, this is what Smith seems to think must happen if theology and philosophy are to avoid the type of violence he eschews.

Recall that Smith's larger project was to examine the conditions of the possibility of philosophy and theology. Levinas's bold project was arguably the establishment of a new starting point for philosophy and a new *foundation* for epistemology.[159] There is something prior to or before knowledge, which is the relationship of our being encountered by the Other. This relationship reveals a transcendent obligation that we have described as holiness. Rather than knowledge then emerging out of my will or my liberty or the Cartesian assertion of my self, a mode of epistemological voluntarism in which I decide for myself what the good or the true is for me,[160] rather than that basis of knowledge, the call of holiness becomes the basis for knowledge. This call of holiness demands my faithfulness, my sanctification. Peperzak noted

[159] ". . . transcendence, when taken seriously . . . cannot be respected unless by a thought that overcomes the totality of *physis*, and, in this sense, is metaphysical" (Peperzak, *Other,* 131). In this metaphysics, which might be considered novel in the history of Western philosophy, it is the relation of the Other to the Same that is the mode of transcendence. This relation becomes the primal horizon of meaning. It is important, for this horizon of meaning, that the Other be in a position of height, indicating a non-reciprocal, irreversible relation of inequality. I cannot command the Other, who always already commands me.

[160] "To affirm the priority of Being over existents is to already decide the essence of philosophy; it is to subordinate the relation with someone, who is an existent, (the ethical relation) to a relation with the Being of existents, which, impersonal, permits the apprehension, the domination of existents (a relationship of knowing), subordinates justice to freedom" (Levinas, *Totality*, 45).

that this is not a novel idea. We find a similar notion in Nicholas Malebranche, who argued that "all knowledge of finite things is in reference to the idea of the infinite, which serves as their foundation, and that this 'ultimate knowledge' is of a different structure and quality."[161] The metaphysics from which Levinas is working is based on a 'logic' or structure of eschatology. It is to that topic that we now turn.

[161] Peperzak, *Other*, 66.

CHAPTER 4

The Daughter of Time?

"If experience changes in the course of time, then knowledge is a daughter of time."[1]

"Jesus, whose body is to be broken and whose blood is to be shed,
is not just a sign. He is more than a sign."[2]

4.1 Introduction

Eschatology raises questions of time, but time tends to be ontologically connected with space, being, and presence. In other words, to speak ontologically of time involves speaking spatially. We find examples of this in Jurgen Moltmann's, *The Coming of God*. In speaking of the time of creation, Moltmann offers two models, both of which are spatial in nature.[3] When time is understood ontologically, then the past and the future become "mediated forms of Being. Only present can be experienced as immediate existence."[4]

The same ontological commitment structures James K. A. Smith's work that we have been analyzing throughout the previous chapters. Consequently, for Smith, hermeneutics and truth are functions of presence.[5] Smith's Derridean commitments allow him to acknowledge that

[1] Bultmann, *History and Eschatology,* 9.

[2] C.S. Song, *Jesus, the Crucified People* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996): 213.

[3] "For this there are two models: (1) The idea of God's *creative resolve*. Before God created the world, and with the world time, he resolved to be the Creator of a world different from his Being . . . (2) The idea of God's *primordial self-restriction*. In his omnipresence God makes a place for his creation, by withdrawing his presence from this primordial space . . . Both ideas really say the same thing" (Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 281-82).

[4] *Ibid*., 285.

[5] In this sense Smith's doctrine of revelation is insufficiently eschatological for eschatology is not primarily ontological, as I shall argue in this chapter

even in the present, there is never full presence. For this reason, there is no immediate truth, for truth is the content of presence or the presence of content, but is truth reducible to either presence or the present? Is truth ontological? Without an immediate presence, Smith takes up the challenge of the justification of the plurality of interpretation, but that is a distraction from the greater challenge.[6] The mediation of presence causes us to be faced with what Michel Foucault might call the discursive regimes of *epistemē*, the technologies of power.[7] The plurality of interpretation is itself a subset of the theological problem of power as a competition between various readings of the text. In a liberal-economic model, there is no inherent or implicit check on the synergistic twins: knowledge and power. They both become just additional modes of private property, which can be accrued infinitely just as Locke argued. Herein is the greater problem: Left to itself, ontology reduces to pure immanence and to the truth of self-preservation through self-empowerment. No theology, philosophy, or sacred text can resist the seductive power of ontological truth, and that is why it is a theological problem. A rebellion against ontological truth will require an alternative to ontology.

Emmanuel Levinas provided us with an alternative to ontology when he argued that ethics is first philosophy. In this chapter, I will argue that our rebellion against the ontological truth of self-preservation at all costs involves a recognition of the ethical nature of eschatology.[8]

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[6] Recall that Smith's project has been an apology for pluralism, among other things.

[7] The mediation of presence reduces presence to the immanence of language, knowledge, truth, and power, which Foucault has shown to be subject to discursive regimes. "Here I believe one's point of reference should not be to the great model of language (*langue*) and signs, but to that of war and battle. The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning" (Foucault, "Truth and Power," 114). Levinas's "Preface" and his claim that war suspends morality stands out in stark urgency against the background of Foucault.

[8] I do not conflate metaphysics with ontology, as if the nature of reality is self-evidently ontological. In fact, I will be working under the assumption that the nature of reality is ethical. For this reason, I am comfortable talking about the metaphysical 'nature' of eschatology. Additionally, under the assumption of an ethical metaphysic, being becomes social rather than monadistic.

The alternative to the ontology of space-time is the ethics of relation-time. In space-time, time is a function of the change of being, which occurs through an ordered succession. This concept of time is what Aristotle discovered.[9] That concept has rarely been challenged since. In his analysis of the eschatology of the nineteenth century, Moltmann characterizes it as "drawing on the notion of the infinite temporal line and the history which 'will continue to run its course.'"[10] Time can, therefore, be viewed as a mode of presence due to the succession of changes in being. It can be expressed mathematically in the formula for velocity ($v = \frac{\Delta x}{\Delta t}$). Moltmann sees this concept of time as a stark contrast with the "eschatology of Jesus and the early Christians," which Moltmann argues "is a transformation of time itself."[11] I will return to Moltmann later.

In contrast to space-time, in relation-time, time is a function of communion rather than a function of a change in being, and it cannot be expressed mathematically. It is the time that emerges from the joy of one another. We measure space-time, but we lose track of time amidst the joy of friendship and love. We do not even feel the time passing. On one hand, in fellowship with those we love, time loses meaning. On the other hand, when that fellowship is broken, when someone is missing, when we are away from our home and feel homesick or apart from our beloved, it often feels as if time is not passing at all, as if time is stretching out forever, as we

[9] "It is clear, then, that time is number of movement in respect of the before and after, and is continuous since it is an attribute of what is continuous." Aristotle, *Physics*, *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, Jonathan Barnes, ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984): IV.11 220a. 25-26, 373.

[10] Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 10.

[11] *Ibid*.

wait.[12] In other words, time here is a function of relations.[13] Phenomenologically, nothing changes as I wait for my beloved, and when we are together, we lose track of time in our joyful fellowship.[14]

In this case of relation-time, when we talk about eschatology we are talking about that future fullness of time when all of creation is reconciled together into the fellowship of the Triune God. While we wait for the parousia, nothing happens. The kingdom of God does not arrive. The Christ does not return. What we wait for, the kingdom, is the fulfillment of Jesus' prayer that we would be in the Father and the Son.[15] According to the *Apocalypse of John*, in the kingdom, the time of the fellowship of the Triune God, *χρόνος* (time or delay) will be no more and "the mystery of God will be fulfilled."[16] The argument I will make in this chapter is that eschatologically, truth is the perichoresis of the trinity extended out to all of creation. Therefore, truth is the inclusion of all of creation in the trinitarian perichoresis.[17] Because of this

[12] Interestingly, Aristotle speaks to this phenomenon as well: "But neither does time exist without change; for when the state of our minds does not change at all, or we have not noticed its changing, we do not think that time has elapsed" (Aristotle, IV.11, 218.22-24, 371).

[13] Jean-Luc Marion developed this idea as an erotic reduction of time, making time a function of desire or love. In his words, "While I am waiting, still nothing happens" (*Erotic Phenomenon*, 33).

[14] There is, of course, a sense of presence in relation-time. It is our presence together that is the source of our joy and the lack of presence that creates our longing. The nature of presence has changed, however. Presence is no longer the primary factor in truth, as it is in space-time because in relation-time the sense of measurement and order that was central to Aristotle's concept of time is removed. In relation-time, we either lose track of time or it ceases to pass altogether. Either way, time is no longer a mode of measurement and order.

[15] Jn. 17:21.

[16] Rev. 10:6, 7.

[17] We face a challenge in figuring out how to model the relationship between God, humanity, and nature. Dupré was correct to see the dissolution of the ontotheological synthesis as a serious crisis for Western thought, but Christian theology is also correct in recognizing God's transcendence over nature. What I suggest is that we model this relationship between God, humanity, and nature eschatologically. In the eschaton, there is perfect union.

perichoretic future, the authority that Jesus gives to the Church in the time of waiting is the authority of reconciliation. It is the authority to reconcile, which is fidelity to the call of holiness.

The time that we have now is the time of reconciliation, the time in which we gather together, like the disciples waiting in the upper room or like the bridal attendants waiting for the bridegroom, as we wait expectantly for what is to come. Perhaps this is why Jesus declared that "if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."[18] Perhaps when our time runs out, there will be no more time of reconciliation. Perhaps when we pass beyond the time of chronos we pass into the time of fellowship. Will there be an end to the time of reconciliation? Perhaps. This is speculation, but I do not believe it can be easily dismissed. It creates a sense of urgency for the work of the Church, but urgency alone is not a sufficient reason.

In this chapter, I will emphasize the need for a different model of time that does not emerge from ontology. I will make the case for a model of time based on eschatological or trinitarian communion. Finally, we are ultimately interested in the question of revelation. To the extent that revelation is a revelation of truth, the question of truth must be addressed. I will develop the model of truth based upon eschatological communion. As noted, truth has always been a function of our model of time because we have always connected time with spatial presence. Eschatologically, however, truth is a function of relationship, which is to say, of holiness.

[18] Jn. 20:23.

4.2 Being and Time

In this section, I will support my claim that we require a model of time not based on ontology. While the title of this section calls to mind Heidegger's *magnum opus*, I do not actually intend to engage with that text. My initial question is how being and time inform our model of revelation. Our answer to that question starts with Aristotle's conception of time as the change in being. That conception of time is revised by Jean-Luc Marion, who states that time is the succession of "the order of beings in space: they must be replaced in the same place, passing form one instant to another and exchanging their instants."[19] Moltmann refers to this concept of time as chronos, and we are reminded of the mythology associated with that titan.

Chronos, in a modern context, is the power of transience, the quantification of time. It is the time of the calendar; the time that has to be managed. Chronos is humanity's most precious and non-renewable resource because, once spent, we can never get time back. Can our doctrine of eschatology be mapped onto linear, sequential time and still be eschatology? When we map eschatology to linear, sequential time, it seems like we have situations in which "Jesus expected the imminent coming of the kingdom and was subsequently deceived."[20] In fact, all of Christianity seems to suffer this deception and, it might behoove Christianity to drop its immanent expectation of the parousia. Chronos is empirical time, and the Christian revelation does not seem to thrive within chronos very well at all.

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[19] Marion, *Erotic Phenomenon*, 32.

[20] Hans Schwarz, *Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000): 118. In context, Schwarz is referencing Marcus Borg's claim that conservative scholars have never accepted such a claim. Arguably, more progressive scholars have reached such conclusions: "Soon after that comes Jesus, and in the knowledge that He is the coming Son of Man lays hold of the wheel of the world to set it moving on that last revolution which is to bring all ordinary history to a close. It refuses to turn, and He throws Himself upon it. Then it does turn; and crushes Him." Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998): 370-71.

Based upon the views of time above, particularly Marion's formulation of it, we can note that time is the basis of spatial integrity as it keeps two beings from occupying the same space. Two beings pass through the same space but at different times, and it is only the delta of time that preserves the integrity of those beings. Movement or velocity, the change in the direction of distance divided by the change in time, mathematically unifies being and time. In this model, time keeps being individuated and separated in its integrity. Being thus becomes beings. The individuation and separation of Being into beings transforms holiness into purity. This time, space-time, requires the ontological difference.

4.2.1 The Ontological Difference

The ontological difference functions as the conditions of the possibility of Being. How else can Being appear, reveal itself, or become manifest other than through the existence of beings? The ontological difference also results in ontological and theological imperialism, the theological problem addressed at the beginning of this chapter. As Marion notes, "Beingness thus transforms the question of Being as well into a question of the *ens supremum*, itself understood and posited from the requirement, decisive for being, of the foundation."[21] The ontological difference necessitates a starting point, a foundation, which is to say, a space. This space becomes the source of ontological and epistemic authority, the Supreme Being, prior to ethics or justice and thus justifying justice. But justice reduces, in Western political philosophy, to a defense of private property – private space – so what is justified is privacy or separation. What becomes most important of all is the inner space of the mind, the heart, and the soul. Here, in my own private space, I am supreme, the *ens supremum*. What happens within me, in my

[21] Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being: Hors-Texte*, Thomas A. Carlson, trans. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991): 34.

space, cannot be impinged on from without except through injustice. But even injustice as deep as the Holocaust itself, inflicted upon me as the victim, cannot take away my choice, so long as I do not surrender it.[22] It is my sanctum, my holy place. Here, I am supreme. The opinions I hold in this space are justly independent of anything exterior. The beliefs I hold here are my own. Here is where I connect with God. The manner in which I connect with God, the way that God appears to me here in my private space, my heart, the way that I experience God within me – that is my own truth of God and the only truth that needs concern me. The ontological difference requires Being to appear only through beings. It requires that God appear only within and through the individual, normally as a private experience.

Not only does the ontological difference sanctify the private – whether private experience or private property – but it ensures the integrity of time. Private property is the font of justice, and it is "the present [that] ensures an objective possession of what which *is* (in the) present."[23] Within the ontological difference, objectivity becomes the mechanism ensuring the integrity of time. Objectivity requires a forgetting of any past that might challenge the present. Past acts of oppression, regardless of how heinous they might be, must not impinge on the sanctity of the present, particularly if such past acts were perpetrated by other beings. The sins of the ancestor beings cannot be allowed to intrude to trouble the present beings. They will be forgotten, ignored, and written out of history, thus ensuring the integrity of the present through the exclusion of the past. Chronos ensures that the past is not and cannot be present. Two beings cannot occupy the same space, so the sins of ancestors cannot become my sins. To this end, time must be kept strictly sequential and ordered for such order is the basis of objectivity. If we were

[22] See Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Ilse Lasch, trans. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006).

[23] Marion, *God Without Being*, 170.

to confess our past sins, or the sins of our ancestors, such confession might change (*metanoia*) the present. It would imply no longer being in possession or control of the present. But objectivity requires strict control even to the point of historical imperialism. The integrity, meaning the control, of the present must be maintained. We must be disciples of chronos.

Likewise, objectivity requires the management of the future through careful goal setting, benchmark analysis, and status evaluations. The present is the foothold of the future. It is our base of future operations, and those who fail to plan should plan to fail. Only those who hope to control the future have any hope of success. The present is the time of management for the sake of future conquest, which means that the present becomes our most valuable, non-renewable resource. While we can always make more money, we never get back the time that we have spent or that we have squandered. The integrity of the present is maintained because it can never be saved or stored up, like manna from heaven. It can only be managed so that your future self with thank you.

In this model, time has no inherent meaning. As the great Delta, the great change of being or distance or space, time has no inherent meaning. It passes. It slips away, though it also has no end. Without a clear origin, one that is not out of mind, and without a clear end, there is no fixed point or center or North Star to time because time is merely a function of being. Its meaning resides only in its significance through its service to being. Even the present has only a transitory meaning as the present slips away into the past. In his discussion of Franz Rosenzweig, Moltmann speaks of the 'index' of time: "The pointer or time index moves from past to future, and future is the progression of the past."[24] But through the anticipation of the future, for which Rosenzweig advocates, that time index is reversed. Would a reversal of the time index lend

[24] Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 35.

meaning and significance to time? Would it suggest a truth of time, tantamount to Heidegger's truth of Being?

According to Charles Taylor, Augustine breaks with Aristotle's Now (*nun*) and the objective time of processes. For Augustine, time:

> is the gathering together of past into present to project a future. The past, which 'objectively' exists no more, is here in my present; it shapes this moment in which I turn to a future, which 'objectively' is not yet, but which is here qua project.[25]

In Augustine's view of time, history retains its meaning, but it does so in a way that gives it priority over the future. Applying Rosenzweig's framework, the index of time continues to point from the past, through the present, and into the future. For Augustine, time remains sequential, which means that it remains chronos, something to be measured and managed, perhaps as a resource. Augustine has not actually moved beyond the '*nun*,' the Now, of Aristotle, which ensures that time will be incremental and sequential. Augustine remains a disciple of chronos, and God becomes the '*nunc stans*,' the one who contains all time.

4.2.2 Revelation

If we understand time as a function of being, how does that inform our model of revelation? Two possibilities emerge. First, if we imagine a participatory ontological hierarchy, then the perfection of being is located in being's immutability, which is to say, the perfection of being occurs in an eternity beyond time where change or corruption is no more.[26] Aristotle's concept of chronos requires this: "For time is by its nature the cause rather of decay, since it is

[25] Taylor, *Secular Age*, 56.

[26] "Why are higher times higher? The answer is easy for the eternity which Europe inherits from Plato and Greek philosophy. The really real, full being is outside of time, unchanging. Time is a moving image of eternity. It is imperfect, or tends to imperfection" (Taylor, *Secular Age*, 55).

the number of change, and change removes what is."[27] Moltmann critiques the Karl Barth of the *Römerbrief* on this point. He indicates that for Barth the eternal transcends time, which results in the meaninglessness of history except as a parable of the eternal.[28] The eternal is a different quality rather than a different quantity in regard to time and history.[29] There is a Platonic flavor to such a view. For Plato it is reason that gives us access to the unchanging and eternal reality of the Forms. For Aristotle, a synthesis of the human senses together with deductive reason allows access to absolute knowledge.[30]

For Barth, it is christology that allows access to absolute knowledge. Barth follows early Christian thought, in which it is faith (as belief or adherence) in the special revelation of Christ, the scriptures, and the Church that aligns humanity with the truth. In all cases, truth is a different quality and located in a qualitatively different temporal reality. True eternity is beyond, outside of, or extra-temporal. Importantly, the early Christian theologians tended to view faith as

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[27] Aristotle, *Physics*, 374. Taylor notes that this commitment to immutability took two forms in the Middle Ages: "what we might call Plato eternity, that of perfect immobility, impassivity, which we aspire to by rising out of time; and God's eternity, which doesn't abolish time, but gathers it into an instant. This we can only have access to by participating in God's life" (Taylor, *Secular Age*, 57). Regardless of how we might conceptualize the mode of eternity, the commitment to immutability guides both. Taylor also notes the globally ubiquitous folk traditions of a time of origins in which perfection is located in the deep past, the time of the old ones and the elder gods, which is accessible through pagan ritual practices, which return us to the origin. Even here, the time of origins remains a different quality of time, this time accessed through magic or ritual rather than reason. Interestingly, it is not clear how the time of origins relates to being or whether it requires an ontological context at all. The time of origins may reflect a process metaphysic more than a substance metaphysic.

[28] "Thus what happens in time is less real than the timeless" (Taylor, *Secular Age*, 56). I note Taylor's statement to lend support to my association of Barth's position with the ontological hierarchy of Plato and Aristotle. Barth seems to work within a similar ontological model. He just adds a break between time and eternity; God and creation. The model remains fundamentally the same. We might argue that Barth's view of the *totus Christus* is an example of his application of this model. While Jesus is the *totus Christus*, himself and the Church of which he is the head, the Church itself is always in danger and always will be in danger because the community is part of the world. The Christ is the Form of the Church, but the Church is an imperfect reflection of the Christ (Barth, *Dogmatics* IV.2, 661).

[29] Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 14-15.

[30] "For Aristotle . . . nothing here can be counted on to be quite totally conformed to its nature. But there were some processes which reflected eternity without flaw: for instance, the stars in their circular courses, without beginning nor end" (Taylor, *Secular Age*, 55).

reasonable, even if it required the grace of God operating within the human person to attain faith.[31] Marion argues that the division between faith and reason was itself an accidental outcome of the structure of European university faculties.[32] On that basis, faith might be viewed as a type of reason allowing humanity to ascend towards the higher truths of eternity, even when eternity is infinitely, qualitatively different. It just requires a leap.

In this model, truth is beyond change, which means it must be beyond time conceived in an Aristotelian manner, the manner of chronos. There is also a spatial implication in this ontological hierarchy. Truth is located at the top of the hierarchical model.[33] That implies those who are more proximate to eternity have greater access to revelation. The monarch, being the pinnacle of the political hierarchy stands in closer proximity to God's eternity and is better able to mediate moral order to society. The Pope, being the pinnacle of the Western ecclesiastical hierarchy stands in greater proximity to God's eternity and is better able to mediate saving grace to the people. The king or queen and the Pope are authorized in ways that commoners and laity are not, due to their proximity to God.[34] Proximity to eternity, which authorizes revelation, is

[31] In contrast, faith has increasingly become irrational in popular modes of modern Christian piety, a commitment to belief in the absence of evidence or even in the face of evidence to the contrary.

[32] Marion, "Faith and Reason," 6.

[33] It might seem like an alternative would be to locate truth in the time of origins. In this model, we are connected to truth through ritual. Taylor notes the influence of this popular model on the Church: "Meanwhile the Church, in its liturgical year, remembers and re-enacts what happened in illo tempore when Christ was on earth. Which is why this year's Good Friday can be closer to the Crucifixion than last year's mid-summer day" (Taylor, *Secular Age*, 58). Despite the fact that roughly 2,000 years of sequential time separate this Good Friday from the Crucifixion, we are ritually/liturgically closer to it than we are to last year's Fourth of July, particularly when we celebrate the Eucharist. However, this concept of time continues to function hierarchically. The repetition of the ritual elevates the present moment, putting it into greater proximity to the time of origins. Like eternity, the time of origins does not change. Further, the time of origins is connected to place through ritual events such as pilgrimages. What Christian would not feel closer to God if they were in Bethlehem on Christmas Eve or while at Golgotha on Good Friday? The timing of the pilgrimage, another mode of ritual, places us in closer proximity to God.

[34] "There was thus a certain verticality of society, which depended on a grounding in higher time and which has disappeared in modern society. Seen from another angle, this was also a society of mediated access. In an *ancien*

another way of insisting on presence such that truth is a function of presence. This is another reason that I argue Smith's position is a return to Platonism, regardless of his insistence that he has reversed the direction of Platonism and therefore cannot be a Platonist.[35] Regardless of the direction, Smith is working within the same metaphysical model as Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and so many of the ancients. It is space-time that mediates revelation.

Second, if we imagine an economic network, then the perfection of being is in its immortality. As Locke argued, once we come into being we have a right to our persistence in being.[36] This claim is echoed pejoratively by Levinas who argues that persistence in being is the origin of sin and evil themselves, but who also recognizes this commitment as foundational to Western society.[37] The perfect being is the one preserved from death – immortal. It costs a lot of money to die of old age. Quite an extensive infrastructure goes into the provision of dying old.

In this model, there are two great sins, which I would like to mention. One of the great sins has been any voluntary acceptance or complicity with one's own death, be that suicide or euthanasia. It is a great virtue to fight for one's life against all odds. It is a vice to distance oneself from life through alcohol, drugs, or various modes of escapism. Self-defense and self-preservation justify the murder or annexation of others. Self-preservation, therefore, becomes the North Star that guides society. Yet, because society cannot save everyone, this model is

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régime kingdom, such as France, the subjects are only held together within an order that coheres through its apex, in the person of the king, through whom this order connects to higher time and the order of things. We are members of this order through our relation to the king" (Taylor, *Imaginaries,* 158).

[35] Smith, *Speech,* 170.

[36] Locke, *Second Treatise*, 18.

[37] Levinas argues that humanity has a tendency to turn the right to persevere in Being into a right to violence and to the seizure of Being. He connects this trajectory to the explanation of evil. Emmanuel Levinas, "Levinas: The Right to Be," YouTube, June 22, 2011, video, 4:51, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mC0-E67XyG4.

vulnerable to populism, racism, sexism, and all other modes of minority exclusion. Only the powerful have the means to ensure their survival, and justice becomes what Thrasymachus claimed: the interests of the stronger party.[38]

A second great sin is waste. The sin of waste became Locke's rationale for infinite private property and for the colonization of indigenous populations.[39] However, this sin also becomes the impetus for the (in)famous Protestant work ethic, which itself grows out of German pietism, French Calvinism, and English Methodism.[40] While it is beyond the scope of this project to investigate these topics, they do touch on a certain concept of truth. The spiritual disciplines require truth and honesty about oneself, one's sin and need for grace. Having recognized this fundamental spiritual and soteriological truth, we turn to a question raised by Foucault: "What relationship does the subject have to himself when this relationship can or must pass through the promised or imposed discovery of truth about himself?"[41] Here we might return to the etymological root of religion: to bind together (that which otherwise might fall apart). Foucault

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[38] Plato, *The Republic,* Desmond Lee, trans. (New York: Penguin Books, 1987): 19.

[39] Locke argued that we have the right to invest our labor into what is held in common by all (i.e., nature). Through labor we gain a right to ownership. The limitation is that we cannot make into private property more than we can use without wasting it. Locke then argues that land which is subject to industrious use produces more value than land left to the wiles of nature alone. Leaving the land to nature becomes an opportunity cost, which means, it becomes waste: "land that is left wholly to nature, that hath no improvement of pasturage, tillage, or planting, is called, as indeed it is, *waste*" (Locke, *Second Treatise*, 26. Emphasis original). Locke has already decreed that we have no right to what we waste. He then contrasts the industrious use of land found among the English with the wasteful use of the land found among Native Americans. He then reiterates that labor "gave a right of property" (*Ibid.*, 27). There is an implied argument that because the indigenous populations are 'wasting' the land that they have forfeited the rights to that land.

Regarding unlimited private property, that argument hinges on the imperishable nature of money. Because money does not perish, it cannot be wasted, no matter how much we accrue (*Ibid.*, 29).

[40] Arguably, Locke himself was only responding to the reasonableness of his own Protestant tradition with his abhorrence of waste.

[41] Michel Foucault, *Subjectivity and Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France 1980-1981*, Graham Burchell, trans., Frédéric Gros, ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017): 32.

discusses the ways that we are bound to this truth about ourselves, which then produces certain experiences of ourselves. It transforms the experiences we have of ourselves. In a certain sense, the line that Smith likes to repeat from Levinas about "making them play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves," fits not just a discourse of colonialism, but perhaps a discourse of conversion. In his investigation of 'truth and subjectivity,' Foucault recognizes that "truth is essentially conceived as a system of obligations."[42] Theologically, we embody the truth of divine revelation through spiritual disciplines and practical holiness, which themselves promote Christian perfection.[43]

The perfection of being is immortality and time must stretch on unendingly. That will happen only if we make wise use of the time allotted to us. Squander it and we squander our own lives. Whatever else revelation may be in this model, it is fundamentally empowerment through the discharge of our spiritual obligations. What empowers [a select subset of] humanity is true. The Bible becomes the primary theological authority because it becomes democratized, through the technological innovation of the printing press and the social policy of public education. The Bible becomes available to all, and its purpose, within the populist revival movements in particular, is always human empowerment. Morally, the Bible disciplines the individual in ways that promote physical, fiscal, and societal health. But this also creates vulnerabilities. For the Bible to ensure empowerment, it alone must provide access to truth. Science and history become threats as they offer alternative access to empowerment.

[42] *Ibid.*, 34.

[43] John Wesley used the term 'perfection' as a synonym for holiness and sanctification throughout his sermons and writings.

In terms of revelation, within the holiness and revival movements and then into Evangelicalism, Foucault puts it bluntly when he says that "the subject must produce [truth] himself."[44] To what extent does this claim differ from Smith's position? Smith does not speak of the production of truth, but when God must show up in ways the ego can understand, is the ego not still the locus and bounds of truth? Does God not have to produce revelation, which is to say, truth, within the bounds of the ego? For Foucault, the subject is the agent while, for Smith, God is the agent. But in both cases, truth is bounded by the subject/ego. However, the ego, which is the site and scope of divine revelation, remains an historical being as Foucault recognizes. How will Smith's ego deploy divine revelation except within the scope of historical economies?

4.3 Time as Communion

Just as the previous section called to mind Martin Heidegger, John Zizioulas's work, *Being as Communion*, perhaps flickers in the background of this section. For Zizoulas, the eschatological aspect of the eucharist called forth the being of the Church. While there is a theological and a mystical, sacramental, or liturgical aspect to this calling forth of the Church, what does this claim imply about the nature or the model of time itself? How does the eucharist call forth and create a communion of people? Does time have agency to call something forth or to establish something? What is the time of communion – relation-time?

Marion, perhaps echoing aspects of Rosenzweig, begins his reflections on erotic time with something he calls "the event from elsewhere."[45] He continues to describe this event:

> Now it is proper to the event not to be foreseeable, or to be produced or even less to be reproduced at will. The event thus compels me to await it, subject to its initiative. I can

[44] Foucault, *Subjectivity*, 34.

[45] Marion, *Erotic Phenomenon*, 33.

> decide to continue to love and to make myself loved, but I cannot decide the moment in which I will begin one or the other . . .[46]

This statement is pregnant with implication. It has implications for how we might answer the question of when God chose to create the world, or what God was doing before God decided to create the world.[47] It has implications for the relation of neuroscience to the question of free will.[48] It likewise has implications for eschatology. Eschatologically, the 'event from elsewhere' would be an event that does not arise from the succession of Aristotelian time – from chronos. It is not predictable based upon the sequence of events from the past. The eschaton is not a function of human will. In fact, the implication in Marion's statement is that this 'event from elsewhere' compels me: "Elsewhere, as event, compels me to the posture of expectation."[49] In this experience of expectation and waiting, Marion notes, that it seems as if time does not pass. We feel like time goes on forever. The watched pot never boils. In fact, not only do we experience time as if it were not passing, truly nothing does happen because that for which we wait does not come. Without change in the arrival of that for which we wait, time does not pass. Time is otherwise in expectation and waiting, which we are compelled to do by the event from

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[46] *Ibid*.

[47] "Its temporality is itself the true promise of its eternity, for eternity is the fulness of time, not timelessness. If the beginning of creation is also the beginning of time, then time begins with the future out of which the present comes into being . . . It is for this reason that all things have been created. This consummation of what is temporal in the eternal creation includes the redemption from sin, death and annihilation . . ." (Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 264-65). We can read Marion and Moltmann to suggest that, in a certain sense, God was doing nothing before the creation of the world.

[48] In 2007, an experiment was conducted using "functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to reveal brain activity in real time as the volunteers chose to use their right or left hands . . . The conscious decision to push the button was made about a second before the actual act, but the team discovered that a pattern of brain activity seemed to preduce that decision by as many as seven seconds. Long before the subjects were even aware of making a choice, it seems their brains had already decided." Kerri Smith, "Neuroscience vs Philosophy: Taking Aim at Free Will," *Nature* 477, no. 7362 (2011): 23-24.

[49] Marion, *Erotic Phenomenon*, 33.

elsewhere. Of course, many other things change, and time goes by in other regards, but not in regard to our waiting.[50]

Yet, is it true that nothing happens as we wait? Is it true that nothing changes in this time of expectation, as we await our beloved? We do not know when the bridegroom will arrive, so we wait with expectation. But does nothing happen?

Eschatologically, is not the time of expectation also the time of prayer? Is it not also the time of reconciliation? In Marion's *Erotic Phenomenon*, he plays with the image of two lovers. He has in mind two particular people impatiently awaiting one another with expectant, eager, and perhaps lustful desire. Yet, as we extend his metaphor beyond the two lovers to the theological context of eschatology, Marion's metaphor becomes less sufficient even though many of his insights remain compelling. While the metaphor of erotic desire may still be applicable as we, the Pauline bride, await our bridegroom, we are reminded that it is still a metaphor. We await the *parousia* and the coming perichoretic communion, but the Church has been given a calling, it has been given a ministry, it has been given tasks to perform as it waits. Historically, the Church has understood these tasks in different ways, including understanding them as producing or bringing about the *parousia*. In this way, the Church has sometimes understood the tasks chrono(s)logically as the checking off of a list: e.g., preaching the gospel throughout all of Israel and to the ends of the earth, attaining certain moral standards personally, socially, and politically, administering sacraments, and so forth. As checkmarks on a list, these tasks become idolatrous as they occlude the Triune God. As checkmarks on a list, they serve Chronos rather than Jesus.

[50] Marion's erotic temporality is not entirely unlike a contemporary scientific understanding of time in which time is relative to select reference points. From one reference point, time may seem to pass faster or slower than from a different reference point, depending on relative velocity. In fact, objects objectively will age faster or slower relative to other objects. In the absence of an absolute reference point, the nature of time is relative, or relational.

They are tasks that human beings complete; works that we undertake. But the tasks of Jesus must be those that function iconically, to further reveal the God who stands beyond. The time of waiting is the time of reconciliation because reconciliation was the work of God in Jesus, it is the ministry given to the Church by God (2 Cor. 5:18), and it can be done only with, through, and in the Triune Deity.

Perhaps Marion accounts for this though. He continues: "In the time in which I wait for something to happen, and in which nothing happens, a whole host of things nevertheless happen—even if they are only the activities I undertake to pass the time during which nothing happens."[51] Marion's point is that none of these activities produce that for which I wait. They do not bring my lover to me any sooner. They do not hasten the day of the Christ's return or the perichoretic communion. Even the Church's work of reconciliation and its prayer do not bring the parousia closer. Therefore, despite all the activity of the Church, nothing happens. Nothing happens because time has now acquired the meaning of a transcendent referent point, an event from nowhere, an iconic quality, and no change in distance is perceptible relative to that eschatological point. The time is not passing because the distance is not changing.

Eschatological discussions of time often speculate as to the nature of God's eternity. Is God in time or outside of time, in some sense of those questions? Perhaps there is reason to ask after the nature of the time between the times – the time between the Christ's coming and the Christ's parousia. Is that time, the between times, a time to be taken for granted, as if it is self-evident what this time is? What is the nature of this time between the times? The eschatological time is the time of communion, perichoretic communion, but today is not yet the time of communion. It is, instead, the time of prayer and reconciliation. It is not the time of chronos the

[51] *Ibid.*, 33.

time to be managed, the sequential time in which the activities of the present bring about the future, as if prayer and reconciliation would bring about the eschatological communion. It is not that time. It is, instead, the time of expectation, the time in which nothing happens in respect of that for which we wait. In this time of expectation, our frantic activity of 'ridding' up the house, throwing ourselves into tasks we have put off for too long and which now seem utterly urgent, and other jittery activity become evidence of our eager expectation. However, these "activities I undertake to pass the time during which nothing happens" are not arbitrary and random.[52] Some of these activities may be simply ways to deal with the physical strain and stress of waiting, but they originate from the anticipation. When I am waiting for my love to arrive at my home, then frantic tidying prepares me to welcome my beloved, though it does not bring them nearer. The activity is guided by my anticipation, even if only a way to deal with the anxious energy of that anticipation.

The metaphor of awaiting the beloved needs to be translated into the context of the Church. The Church awaits the perfection of its koinonia, the perichoretic union of its fellowship. None of its activities bring that perfection closer because that perfection is eschatological. Yet the Church's anticipation of that perfection along with the ministry that God has placed upon the Church drives the Church to welcome the Other ahead of time as a mode of faithfulness to what the Church anticipates. If we were awaiting our beloved, we would not act as if they were not coming! We would act in ways consistent with our anticipation of their arrival. Any other activity in this time between the times would be an apostasy, an abandonment of that for which the Church waits, as if it were instead devoted to some other lover.

[52] *Ibid.*

Truly the time between the times is a time of changelessness. Nothing changes. There already is no more chronos. Each generation is living in the exact same time, the end times. Each generation is equally close to the *parousia*, because each generation recognizes the lateness of the hour. Each generation expects the *parousia*, but not all generations have kept the oil in their lamps burning.[53] Time now takes on meaning relative to this elsewhere event, this eschatological point, this arrival for which we have no fixed frame of reference. We expect it, but we cannot foresee or predict it. No cause precedes this effect.

Eschatology gives meaning to time, a relative meaning that was not present previously. Time no longer subsists in itself as a mere change in being. The present is given in its expectation of the eschatological event. Consequently, the present becomes a saturated phenomenon, in which the meaning of the present "overflows presence."[54] The present means so much more than 'now' and so much more than a claim on the future or a determined outcome of the past. The hope of the future is given in the present, and that hope is hope for the perichoretic communion of the Christ. The meaning of history is more than the ontic accidental changes of being and more than my intentions, representations, concepts, and categories. It is more than the ontic thrownness of Dasein, the accidental happenstances of existence and existents – these accidents that are essential to Being itself. Rather, the meaning of this time between the times is fidelity in our anticipation of the Christ's communion. It is the faithfulness of the separated lovers. It is the Church's faithfulness in its prayerful expectation and givenness to its calling of reconciliation and holiness. These things mean something to lovers, partners, and friends. The meaning is given in the relationship that is affirmed, reinforced, and intensified.

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[53] Matt. 25:8.

[54] Marion, *Erotic Phenomenon*, 34.

In terms of revelation, it too takes on both a proleptic as well as an anticipatory character. In this way, revelation does not serve the empowerment of the present, but the calling of the present to faithfulness. Faithfulness is not found in some moral attainment, doctrinal purity, liturgical aesthetic, or anything else that would allow those in the present to boast in their status, achievements, or results. Nothing associated with the kingdom of God allows the Church to become boastful, prideful, or arrogant in relation to what it perceives as the Other. Attempts to elevate ourselves over others amounts to spiritual adultery in relation to the Christ. We have gone after other lovers and other loves. There is no boasting in the eschaton, so we who are anticipating the eschaton must exclude boasting in the present. This is what is revealed through the coming communion of Jesus. What is revealed is our obligation to the Other.

Something more is revealed. Do we need Jesus to be obliged to the Other? Would not evolutionary ethics suggest this obligation as part of the biological survival of our species? Christian spirituality must always be done iconically rather than idolatrously. As the icon reveals the God who is beyond, Christian spirituality must also reveal the eschatological God. Our obligations to the Other can certainly become one more checkbox. It can become one more mark of accomplishment; another means of separation of ourselves from others, from which evolutionary ethics could not save us. Alternatively, it can become a means of losing ourselves in our being exploited by others. There is no reconciliation in exploitation. The Other is wounded in their exploitation of us, and we cannot use our service to others as an excuse to allow ourselves to be exploited – not when the agency is available for us to reject it.

The above claim raises questions about the nature of the coming communion of the Christ. Arguably, communion can be accomplished hierarchically. It can also be accomplished in an egalitarian manner. Both of these modes of communion are a result of our metaphysical

models. Our reconciliation with one another need not stem from a hierarchy nor from the dignity of individuals. Rather, if we are to move beyond the limitations of modern secular nihilism without retreating to a participatory hierarchy then neither of those models can inform our concept of reconciliation. It is for this reason that I have included the 'perichoretic' modifier in order to bring to mind the commitments of trinitarian orthodoxy.[55]

At this point, we must acknowledge the limitations of finitude and our reliance on God's grace. Any way that we choose to conceptualize reconciliation will necessarily be held loosely, with palms uplifted to God in worship and supplication. The claims that we make on reconciliation must always be challenged through our openness to and anticipation of the Christ's coming communion. That intellectual humility and faithful openness to correction is the posture in which we receive God's revelation. It is the mode in which our faithfulness remains iconic rather than idolatrous.

4.4 Truth and Reconciliation

In this section, we address the question of how time as communion informs our model of revelation. In the Creeds, what must be true is the *ousia*, *hypostatis*, and persona of the divine. What must be true is the being of Jesus of Nazareth and the persons of the Trinity. In the Scriptures, what must be true is their inerrancy in some mode and manner, even if only in the autographs or the Holy Spirit who normally encounters humans in its pages. From these truths,

[55] Catherine Lacugna was instrumental in reintroducing the term 'perichoresis' back into mainstream theological discourse. She notes that the term was used by John Damascene in the eighth century "to highlight the dynamic and vital character of each divine person, as well as the coinherence and immanence of each divine person in the other two." Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 1973): 270. "Perichoresis," she says, "means being-in-one-another, permeation without confusion. No person exists by him/herself or is referred to him/herself; this would produce number and therefore division within God. Rather, to be a divine person is to be *by nature* in relation to other persons" (*Ibid.,* 271). Jesus himself prays, "As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us" (Jn. 17:21).

theological authority derives. God reveals Godself through Jesus and in the Scriptures, and this revelation becomes authoritative through its truth worked out ontologically and economically. It is the truth of these modes of revelation that allow God's presence to draw near to the receivers, that allow the receiver to trust God's revelation in these modes. That 'drawing near' is the beginning of reconciliation. The process moves from revelation to verification of truth to trust in the revelation and, finally, to reconciliation. It is a process that makes revelation something that the receiver can understand. Perhaps it is a mode of domestication.[56] My claim is that God does *not* reveal Godself in a way that we can understand. Rather, theology and biblical studies translates revelation into something understandable and, therefore, articulatable. Theology is speech. It must also be prayer.

While such translation is undoubtedly necessary, it is also a moment in which things go wrong. It is a moment when the feral truth of Jesus is a little tamed by culture. Instead of the truth and reconciliation of God's revelation remaining delayed, something for which we (im)patiently, faithfully, and expectantly await, we make to receive it now. Now, *modo*, is the essence of modernity after all. We make it so that we can receive it. Now. *Modo*. And once we receive it, since the time of Descartes and Locke (of the *Second Treatise*), and maybe even prior going back to Martin Luther's theology of the cross,[57] "Jesus becomes the private property of

[56] See William C. Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking about God Went Wrong* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996).

[57] In the context of Luther's theology of the cross, Althaus states that "the Christian can only overcome [the empirical reality of human existence in the world] constantly by holding fast to the word in faith. The Christian is always tempted to allow his impression of reality to make him doubt the truth of God and view it as a lie" (Althaus, *Theology of Martin Luther*, 33). While Althaus sees faith not as "a position on which one takes a stand but a constantly new movement" (*ibid.*), if the Christian can only overcome 'the world,' let us say, by "holding fast to the word in faith" and by not giving into the temptation (*die Anfechtung*) or the challenge of doubt. We must overcome this challenge by holding fast and defending against doubt. The faith becomes ours in this way.

Christian believers."[58] Once the truth of God's revelation in Jesus becomes private property, it becomes something that must be defended and must become profitable lest it be wasted. We must make something of Jesus or, following Locke's economic logic of waste and profitability, we would lose the right to Jesus.[59] While Locke never made such a claim directly, it is hard not

[58] Song, *Reign of God,* 18. Future studies might consider the relation between Luther's theology of the cross as a precursor to Descartes, Locke, and the Enlightenment. Does a theology of the cross turn us from our eschatological awaitings to a focus on the present and God's commitment to the individual through Jesus? Does it move divine truth to the present? Is the God who is revealed in God's hiddenness a precursor to the spirit of Francis Bacon and Descartes? We are reminded of Descartes' musings on a ball of wax: "But when I distinguish the wax from its outward forms -- take the clothes off, as it were, and consider it naked -- then although my judgment may still contain errors, at least my perception now requires a human mind" (Descartes, *Meditations*, 22). In modernity, the hidden quality of revelation arouses a sexualized spirit of domination. Dupré notes that "the theme of power constantly returns in Bacon's writings" (Dupré, *Passage*, 71). While power can be used positively, just as Locke argued for unlimited private property, so Bacon called for "unlimited control over nature" (*Ibid.*, 72). Going further, Val Dusek notes that "Bacon often analogized the relationship of the inquirer to nature as that of a man to woman and used metaphors of seduction, unveiling, and force to describe the process of inquiry" (Dusek, *Philosophy of Technology*, 42). Humanity's response to the hiddenness of revelation has been sexual assault, and this approach follows consistently on our relationship with all objects of our dominance. Such dominance is the only possible outcome of a reality based on liberty understood as a lack of limitations.

[59] Kim Parker notes that Locke's *Reasonableness of Christianity* associated Locke with the latitudinarians, who sometimes blurred the lines with Socinianism. She traces the progression of Locke's thought and acquaintances, which lead him closer to Socinianism and to the Remonstrants. Importantly, "rather than finding salvation offered to the elect through God's grace, Socinians shifted moral responsibility clearly onto human shoulders." Kim Ian Parker, *The Biblical Politics of John Locke* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2004): 17.The Remonstrants were "committed to morality, toleration, rational theology, and a minimalist creed, and they left matters of faith to one's own reading of scripture" (*Ibid*., 25).

It is noteworthy that Locke's personal library contained more theological books than any other category, and those theological texts accounted for a quarter of the 3,641 books in that personal library (*Ibid.*, 1). According to Parker, Locke's exegesis of Genesis and his theological interpretation of Adam provide justification for much of Locke's work in both of his treatises of government. Locke's exegesis emerged in the context of Locke's rejection of premodern patriarchal government in his arguments with Sir Robert Filmer. Parker notes that Locke's reading of Genesis differed dramatically from the norm of his time by rejecting the pessimism of original sin in favor of a more optimistic liberal reading of the text (*Ibid*., 6).

We see the privatization of Christianity in some Locke's idea of "pacific Christians": "No men or society of men, having any authority to impose their opinions or interpretations on any other, the meanest Christian. Since, in matters of religion, every man must know, and believe, and give an account for himself." Peter King, *The Life and Letters of John Locke, with Extracts from his Journals and Common-Place Books* (New York, NY: Burt Franklin, 1972): 276. From the privatization of religion, we proceed to the moral and social achievement of religion: ". . . We profess the only business of our public assemblies to be to exhort thereunto, laying aside all controversy and speculative questions, instruct and encourage one another in the duties of a good life, which is acknowledged to be the great business of true religion, and to pray God for the assistance of his Spirit for the enlightening our understanding and subduing our corruptions, that so we may return unto him a reasonable and acceptable service, and show our faith by our works . . ." (*Ibid.*, 277).

to see this 'accomplishment spirituality' as an organic extension of Locke's views in the *Second Treatise*. Is it accidental that Locke, the Puritan from Somerset, would see waste as the unpardonable sin? Salvation requires investment, labor, and profitability. In short, the truth of God and God's salvation are conceptualized economically, which renders justice as a function of the securing of private property.

C. S. Song claims that "what Jesus has to face is a crisis of culture."[60] Song had been analyzing the slave culture as a culture of survival that turns the victims and the powerless into aggressors. Perhaps the small, scattered groups of persecuted disciples throughout the first three centuries have indeed become the aggressors. Terrified of losing 'religious liberties,' contemporary North American Christians follow the rules of slave culture, lording it over the less powerful. We can only maintain our liberties at the expense of the liberties of others. We have no choice but to become the aggressors.

Once salvation is understood in the Lockean logic of waste and profitability, no longer is the feral truth and revelation of Jesus slightly tamed by culture. It is now wholly replaced by culture. The truth of Jesus is lost to the injustice, domination, and sin of lordship. Only the lord can be free, says Moltmann.[61] As North American Christians begin to awaken to this tragedy, to their own betrayal of Jesus of Nazareth through the evil of their oppression of Africans and their genocide of indigenous populations, we fear to face this truth.[62] We fear we are unable to bear the weight of our own guilt. So, we consider and pass laws making it illegal to make ourselves

[60] Song, *Reign of God*, 119.

[61] Moltmann, *Spirit of Life*, 117.

[62] The present rise of Christian nationalism in the United States is setting the stage for yet another future confession.

feel guilty for the crimes of our society and our past.[63] We make it illegal to call ourselves to confession and repentance.

Confession would take what is private, what is the liberal source of our property and our rights, and make it public. Confession would strip us of our rights and our property by requiring us to tell the truth of our sin, betrayal, and evil doings. It would reframe morality, moving it out of the economic logic of waste and profit, and it would place morality within the frame of ethical responsibility to the Other. The terrifying radicality of confession is not apparent until we fully appreciate the way that our entire basis of selfhood, morality, justice, law, society, economy, and religion has come to be based on privacy. Of course, our churches practice confession and penance less and less, most not at all. Of course, our relationship with God is often based on our individual and private interpretations of the Bible or our private religious experiences or our private opinions about God, which Locke himself endorsed and advocated. Truth is private property. And just like J. R. R. Tolkien's Golem and his precious ring, it turns us into something isolated and monstrous, perhaps not unlike Truth Social.

My intention in this section is to draw attention to something prior to our systematic theologies, which in fact shapes our systematic theologies. Our metaphysical models that are the source of meaning, rationality, and identity, become the means of translating God's revelation into a culturally understandable and receivable message, as Smith insisted must happen. Contrary to Smith, this process does not render revelation, but instead domesticates it to the point of banality. Revelation becomes, in modernity, just another resource to be exploited in the pursuit of profitability, which is our only good (waste being the only true evil).

[63] See Connor Perrett, "A New Oklahoma Law Bans K-12 Schools from Teaching Topics that Cause 'Guilt' Because of Race or Sex," *Business Insider* (May 8, 2021). https://www.businessinsider.com/oklahoma-law-bans-lessons-critical-race-theory-2021-5.

I am not optimistic that we can get outside of a metaphysical model, but I do believe that our models can be replaced with other models through a shared social awakening of the need to do so. It is not my intent to elucidate on the larger process involved in such an awakening.[64] While we exist within time and history, we will see through a glass darkly,[65] which can be read to imply that we necessarily live out of metaphysical models. If anything, the Christian revelation should draw attention to that fact. The Christian revelation should cause us to hold onto our current cultural, philosophical, theological, economic, and legal commitments quite loosely. Perhaps the Christian revelation should call us not to hold onto these things at all but rather, with palms uplifted, offer them back to God in self-emptying worship. Perhaps that is all that worship is, offering our limitations back to God in the hopes that God would graciously save us from the body of death that mark our limitations. The worst thing imaginable would be that we would do the opposite, that we would begin to boast in our labors as if those works had brought about our salvation rather than damning us instead.

In the eschatological model that I am suggesting, which admittedly is another model that must itself be offered back to God lest it damn us in turn,[66] the truth of revelation begins with the confession of our Western legacy of domination, oppression, and marginalization.[67] This is a

[64] Charles Taylor's work, *A Secular Age*, is an excellent account of the process of moving from the hierarchical metaphysical model to the economic model that currently dominates Western culture. Louis Dupré's work, *Passage to Modernity*, gives further account of this process.

[65] 1 Cor. 13:12.

[66] Immediately, it is obvious that this model can be used to further oppress groups of people who have already heard the generational message that 'their place,' as a member of a particular group, is to give of themselves for others and to keep no sense of self for themselves. The model I am proposing works only when it does not begin from a particularized kenotic demand, but only from a universalized one in which there are no exceptions. Of course, those groups who have been exploited must be the first groups that we turn to in confession. They must hear that they have been exploited and that such exploitation has left them wounded.

[67] My emphasis on Western sins should not be read to exclude the need for others to confess their own legacies of sin. The East is not innocent. Nor is the global South.

truth based not on empirical evidence, the elimination of skeptical doubt, or ontological structures. It is a truth based on a confessional response to the ethical demand, which is to say, the truth of communion.

4.5 Knowing God

Paul says many surprising things in his Epistle to the Romans, but one of those statements is that we suppress the truth by injustice (Rom. 1:18).[68] In this passage, Paul also states that what can be known about God is plain because God has manifested what can be known among the Gentiles (v. 19).[69] Paul notes that God's invisible power and divine nature is understood through what God has made (v. 20). He then talks about several ways in which everything went wrong, in which humanity "exchanged the truth of God for a lie" (v. 25). How did it all go so wrong? Again, Paul says something surprising. He says that "though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks go him" (v. 21). In the Greek, Paul more directly says, "having known God not as God." Perhaps there is a way to know God as God, which involves both justice and thanksgiving (εὐχαριστία). Because this is the way to know God, even the Gentiles who do not have the law can do by nature (φυσις) the things required by the law, becoming a law unto themselves (Rom. 2:14).

One of the mechanisms of injustice in Western society is the way that we economize knowledge. Knowledge empowers the knower through greater control of things in the world,

[68] The Greek, αδικία, is frequently translated as 'unrighteousness.' The NRSV translates it as 'wickedness.' The root of the verb, δικ-, is the root for 'justice,' and would, therefore, be better translated as 'injustice.'

[69] Paul is likely making an argument here that would be received by the Gentiles in Rome. Therefore, this argument relies on a more natural wisdom rather than scriptural authority. We see the transition to an argument crafted with the Jews of Rome in mind in Rom. 2:17 where Paul transitions: "But if you call yourself a Jew…" At that point, he begins referencing Hebrew scripture in order to support his argument.

including themselves and other people. This knowledge, extended to God, is the ultimate hegemony. Justice and thanksgiving are replaced with power, injustice, and empire. The truth of God is exchanged for the lie of power. We cannot give thanks while we are extending our own powerbase. That is not to say that we do not put on a good show of things. Arguably, the great American holiday of Thanksgiving is closely linked with European colonization and genocide against the indigenous populations. Such mockeries of thanksgiving become their own lie. Thanksgiving is not the words that we say but the relationship in which we live. It is a life of openness and kenosis to God. To give thanks is to give of oneself, without self-regard.

What has this to do with knowledge? The economization of knowledge emerges out of the association of knowledge with being. That association renders truth. When our beliefs are sufficiently justified in that they reflect being, then they are true. At that point, we have knowledge. All three of these components of knowledge are required, and of course, they cannot come about by sheer luck, as Edmund Gettier has infamously pointed out. Knowledge becomes a function of being. It is ontologically situated such that truth is the truth of being.

It is certainly possible to read Romans 1 as if Paul was claiming that the truth of God is located in the truth of being. After all, Paul says that what can be known about God – God's eternal power and divinity – have been manifest through the things that God has made (v. 20) – the entities or the beings that God has made. The mind conditioned to think ontologically would easily interpret that statement to mean that the truth of God's being is understood through created being(s), and this would reinstitute the ontological difference. But then why would the truth of God be suppressed by injustice? How can injustice suppress the truth of being? How can it all go wrong simply by forgetting to say, "Thank you"? There is a way to know God, and knowing God as God ontologically is not that way. Knowing God ontologically allows us to know about God

and to speak about God. As Plato exemplified, we learn that God is one, omnipresent, omniscient, immutable, impassible, sovereign, and so forth. This is how the ontological God *must* be, and consequently, this God cannot say anything that we do not already know. This God of ontology who confirms what we already know has justified the injustice of Western society. We cannot give thanks to the ontological God, because this God commands us toward insatiable consumption.

If we are not to know about God, but instead to know God, what is the way of knowing God that allows for that? If it cannot be ontological, can it be ethical? If ethical, whence knowledge?

If ontological epistemology begins with belief, then ethical epistemology begins with faithfulness. Ontologically, if we cannot know that the moon is made of blue cheese if we do not believe the moon is made of blue cheese, then ethically, we cannot know God when we are living in ways that betray God's holiness. Knowing God begins with obedience to God; fidelity to God. Just as ontological epistemology struggles with justifying belief, ethical belief struggles with a purifying separation. Thanksgiving is the practice of remembering God's faithfulness to us when we were unfaithful. It is a reminder that to set ourselves apart for God means to be found where God is found, which is among the impure, the powerless, and sinners. Thanksgiving means to hold our faithfulness in open hands uplifted to God, giving back to God what God has so graciously given to us.

What is the truth of ethical epistemology? Theologically it would be correct to indicate the Christ as the truth of ethical epistemology. Barth's theology originates from his commitment to Jesus as the truth of God. Perhaps Smith was not wrong, however, to suggest something incomplete about the incarnation. This incompletion, however, is not ontological, as Smith

suggested – something about God's being that is voluntarily withheld. Instead, we recall that Jesus called disciples who were to continue his work. Through the Christ, God gives us a ministry of reconciliation, Paul tells us.[70] In the prior verse, Paul tells us what reconciliation entails: New creation. We also recall the message of the Historical Jesus movement, which is that the Christ's life and message was thoroughly eschatological (Schweitzer). The incompletion of the incarnation is, therefore, not ontological but relational. Its purpose is to reconcile the creation back to the Creator so that we become one with God and united with one another.[71] The truth of ethical epistemology is eschatological. It is the coming perichoretic communion of the Christ. We know God when we live in faithfulness and out of loyalty to that eschatological communion.

The Church is the evidence, the witness, and the testimony of this coming communion. It is called forth proleptically in this way.

[70] 2 Cor. 5:18.

[71] Jn. 17:21.

CHAPTER 5

Corpus Precarius

". . . prayer is not in time but time in prayer . . ."[1]

"What is at work here is the longing for that rightness which, in religious or philosophical vision, is experienced as revelation or idea, and which of its very nature cannot be realized in the individual, but only in human community."[2]

5.1 Introduction

Emmanuel Levinas was writing to the history of Western thought in all of its imperialistic glory. It is one thing to talk about an infinite ethical obligation to the vulnerable when our audience is the powerful. It is one thing to talk about this incalculable obligation when faced with just one Other. It is another thing when we ourselves are the exploited and vulnerable. To whom are the exploited obligated? The housewife convinced as a young girl that her religious obligation in life was to submit to and to see to the needs of her husband, who has given everything of herself for her children and her demanding husband, who is weary and heavy burdened by her religious obligation. To whom is she obligated? What are we to do with Jesus' invitation: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest"?[3] Additionally, Levinas's infinite obligation is another thing when confronted not just with one Other, but with multiple Others, and our resources are limited. With little to give and confronted by many in need, to whom to give? We cannot help every Other, so which shall we

[1] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, Walter Kaufmann, trans. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996): 59.

[2] Martin Buber, *Paths in Utopia* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996): 7.

[3] Matt. 11:28.

help? Emmanuel Levinas's ethics was presented within a context of an established individual being faced by another vulnerable individual. This model of one enriched individual facing another vulnerable individual is therefore not generalizable.

What we find eschatologically is that human beings are not ultimately individuals, but members of one another.[4] Consequently, Christian eschatology calls forth, not individuals, but the Church. In the Church, every person and every personality are members of the body, and members of one another, interpenetrating identities dancing perichoretically. Further, it is this perichoresis, this proleptic perichoresis to which the Holy Spirit calls us and for which the Spirit gifts us. Every person is obligated in, to, and through the Church, the Church that originates ahead of time as a faithful resonance from the communion of the Christ. Here, the model of isolated individuals no longer holds, but that does not mean that the question of the exploited dissipates like dew in the noonday sun. Rather, the exploited are those the Church must tenderly draw into her restful embrace. Those whose identities have been shaped solely in service to others must receive service. Kenosis is not the only ecclesial virtue. The Church must also provide rest and restoration. And those who have dedicated their lives to the enrichment of their own power as well as those who have dedicated their lives to the dissolution of themselves in others must be born again in the Church.

Likewise, while no one individual can do all the good that they know they should do, what it means to be the Church is to share one another's burdens. When I make known the impossible demands of justice that face me, the burdens that the call of holiness has placed upon me, I do not shoulder those burdens alone. The idea that I should shoulder my burdens alone is

[4] John Zizioulas, in reference to St. Basil, speaks of koinonia as an ontological category and a replacement for the Aristotelian notion of substance. I would prefer to use koinonia as a metaphysical category aligned with ethics rather than ontology (*Being as Communion*, 134).

an error and a heresy stemming from liberal Protestantism. The Church stands with me, and I stand in the Church. What this does not mean is that the Church attains an infinite capacity to fulfill all of the demands of justice or of holiness. The fulfillment of justice is an eschatological state, not a temporal one. The Church witnesses and testifies to that state ahead of time in its response to the eschatological call of the Spirit. That faithful openness to the Spirit's call is the Church's perfection. It will fulfill the call imperfectly, like a child practicing handwriting. The perfect child is not the one who can make their letters without error, but the one who remains humble, open, and teachable – the one who remains capable of perfection. This is the Church's holiness, its openness.[5] This perfect eschatological and pneumatological openness of the Church is its witness and testimony to the coming communion of the Christ. Only when the Church closes itself and loses its capability of further perfection does it fail its calling and cease to be the Church. To what is the Church open? The Church is open to God. That is another way of saying that the Church is essentially and eschatologically prayer.[6]

This openness that is prayer is the rightness of the Church. As Martin Buber suggests, in this rightness of prayer, this discourse, is the revelation of God and of God's eschatological communion. It is the revelation and the rightness that "cannot be realized in the individual," but only in communion.[7] What is the nature of this communion?

[5] This concept of holiness and Christian perfection is distinctly – though not uniquely – Wesleyan. While John Wesley has been rightly critiqued for overlooking the role of the Church in his theology, perhaps a Wesleyan ecclesiology would emerge from a Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification.

[6] While I am using the language of metaphysics, which suggests a truth about the church, the essence of the 'true church,' I must also acknowledge that my language remains that of models and metaphors. We see through dark mirrors and not face-to-face. Metaphysical language is the language of models.

[7] Buber, *Paths*, 7.

5.2 Nature of the Church

To ask about the nature, the *physis*, of the Church or the nature of communion is to make a metaphysical inquiry. Yet, metaphysics need not reduce to ontology nor to empowerment.[8] That is to say, the nature of the Church may be something other than simply its being or even its process. Levinas praised Plato for recognizing that the Good is beyond being, thereby allowing Levinas to render ethics as first philosophy.[9] This too is a metaphysical claim without being an ontological claim. Sadly, in a neoliberal society, even the Good seems to be calculated and economized as it is benchmarked, measured, and reported in annual evaluations. Perhaps for reasons such as this, to avoid calculating economies, the nature of Levinas's ethics is eschatological. Our eschatological model displaces our economic model, and so when we are investigating the nature of the Church, we are working within an eschatological metaphysics. To make this claim is to recognize a mystery at the heart of the Good, at the heart of ethics. It is the infinite that overflows thought. It is the saturated phenomenon. It is the eucharist. We can use a variety of metaphors for this mystery, but a mystery it is. What are we saying when we introduce the concept of mystery into a discussion of metaphysics? Avery Dulles declared that "the Church is a mystery. It is a reality imbued with the hidden presence of God. It lies, therefore, within the very nature of the Church to be always open to new and ever greater exploration."[10] Such a claim is hard to unpack, but we will be making that attempt in the pages ahead.

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[8] Avery Dulles reminds us that seeking objective, clear, precise definitions of the church would be to seek definitions that empower the knower. In contrast, the Bible gives us images and metaphors of the church. See Dulles, *Models*, 7-11.

[9] Levinas, *Totality*, 103.

[10] Dulles, *Models*, 16. Is the 'presence of God' just another metaphor? Is 'God' a metaphor? While such a suggestion may be uncomfortable, we must consider that if we are to avoid creating images of God, our minds must be faithful as much as our hands, tools, and crafts. Perhaps this is the question that Sally McFague invites us to consider when she states, "The deconstruction and reconstruction of models by which we understand the

5.2.1 Escape from an Existential Ecclesiology

First, let me recognize that *mystery* and *eschatology* contain the capacity for surprise, for intuition to exceed intention. For the nature of the Church to be divine in origin, in calling, or in purpose, we would expect this eschatological quality. While I have leveraged Levinas's work on the infinite ethical demand as a formal modality of eschatology, we can trace the fundamental intuitions at work back to Anselm's claim that God is that than which nothing greater can be thought. Descartes revised this intuition to suggest the idea of the infinity exceeds my capacity to think. Therefore, the idea of infinity must come from beyond myself. Levinas inherited and further extended this Anselmian-Cartesian legacy. Therefore, to claim that the Church is a mystery or to identify its eschatological nature is to recognize that the origin of the Church exceeds human or economic capacities. This statement has to be further qualified.

It is all too easy to assert that the empirical, historical church is far from eschatological. It is deeply economic and deeply human in its origins and capacities. One need not be a sociologist to recognize the veracity of these claims. Traditionally, theologians have asserted a dialectical tension between the empirical and the eschatological churches, as if the Church were two rather than one. I want to suggest there is a theological parallel between ecclesiology and soteriology on this point. Luther famously asserted that the Christian is *simul justus et peccator*, simultaneously righteous and a sinner. Paul Althaus claims that "neither reason nor legalistic thinking can understand the contradiction involved in the fact that one and the same man is at one and the same time both a righteous man and a sinner."[11] The reason of the law is a reason of

relationship between God and the world is, in my opinion, one of the most serious tasks facing contemporary theology." Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982): x.

[11] Althaus, *Theology of Martin Luther*, 243.

calculation. The law is the standard against which a person's motivations and behaviors, as a moral agent, are calculated and, therefore, judged. Or perhaps there is an economic calculation of merit, weighing and balancing the scales. It seems to me that Luther's insight that God is a God of mercy and grace must necessarily refute a God of calculation, law, or economy. Calculative reason cannot grasp the nature or the reality of Christian revelation.

That said, as a student of Wesleyan theology, I was early on predisposed to reject Luther's claim, dependent as it is on the notion of an imputed alien righteousness. As an undergraduate student, it seemed to me that Luther did not think God had very good eyesight or that God was not very clever. How could God look upon sinful human beings and be hoodwinked to see the Christ while believing that God was seeing us? It is as if God were in the position of old, legally blind Isaac as Jacob steals Esau's birthright with some B-grade movie props. There is a certain existential commitment to authenticity that rebels against this pretense that we might formally or theologically be something other than what we 'really' and observably are. Perhaps Wesleyan theology is, after all, an existentialism.

Over time, I began to consider that perhaps I had things backwards. What if God is not deceived when God looks upon us and sees Christ? What if it is we who were deceived when we looked upon ourselves and see our sinfulness?[12] Is our vision more penetrating and more discerning than God's? Perhaps it is truly my arrogance that allows me to think that I see more clearly and understand more shrewdly than does God. If so, then Althaus would be correct. In my commitment to calculative, economic, legalistic reason, God appears to be deceived, but my reason is not God's reason. Perhaps, when God looks upon us through the Christ and sees saints,

[12] Chad A. Maxson, "Sanctifying Vision: Towards a Wesleyan Integration of Imputed Righteousness," *Renovating Holiness*, Josh Broward and Thomas Jay Oord, eds. (Nampa: SacraSage Press, 2015): 250.

that is true. When we see sinners, that is not true. This is an eschatological perspective, one of the mysteries of the faith, and something that overflows thought.

What I do not intend to imply is that human beings are not sinners. What I do intend to imply is that this is not what is most true about human beings. Empirically and historically, we sin. When we sin, we corrupt ourselves, our societies, our relationships, and God's purposes for all of creation. Nothing I am saying should be read to suggest that sin is not serious, insidious, and utterly abominable. What makes sin so immoral is precisely that it perverts the truth that we are God's beloved saints, united together in the Christ. Phenomenologically perhaps we could state that while we intend ourselves as sinners, God's intuition says we are saints. To align empirical history with the truth of God, we must reject calculative, economic reason to embrace the surprise of the eschatological. That alignment with the eschatological is not the alignment with the teleological, as if there was a path of progression from history to eternity. That alignment, instead, is the testimony of ethics. It is the witness of the kenotic welcome of the Other.

If we can say these things about particular Christian, can we not also say them about the Church? According to the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, the Church is One, which means that it is theologically improper to speak about two churches, the empirical and the eschatological. Rosemary Radford Ruether, speaking of the tension between the church as a historical institution and the church as spirit-filled community suggests that we need to "come to terms with the ongoing unredeemed human history."[13] We do indeed need to come to terms with this unredeemed history, but how are we to do that? Richard Neuhaus states that "it is a great

[13] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women-Church: Theology and Practice of Feminist Liturgical Communities* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985): 23.

error . . . to think that only what now exists is real. To view the Church in terms of possibility and promise is not to depart from reality but to encompass a great reality."[14] Neuhaus is gesturing towards the formal eschatology that I have been outlining, the eschatology that we have discovered at the heart of Levinas's ethics. There is a reality that exceeds 'what now is' just as there is a thought that thinks more than it can think. This reality that exceeds this unredeemed history is eschatological as the excessive thought is infinity. Yet, to accept an eschatological reality seems abundantly absurd in light of the brute facts of the present. Perhaps this absurdity is part of the offense of the gospel.

What choice do we have? Shall we continue to embrace the authenticity and reality and truth of the empirical present? There is no path from that present to the eschatological. There is no path from history to eternity or from the church to the kingdom. If there were, then there would be cause for boasting, to recall St. Paul's language. We could calculate a pathway from here to there, and then walk it. We could save ourselves. Boasting would then be entirely appropriate. We would not require grace or even mercy. Sacrifice, discipline, and responsibility would be sufficient. This is the myth of progress, the siren call of modernity. We know where that fantasy ends, and it is no place good.

Therefore, we have no choice, if we seek escape as did Levinas. We have no choice if we seek salvation. We must abandon the lie of authenticity and the lie of the unredeemed present. We must recognize that the present, historical, empirical Church, which is so broken and corrupted that we might be forgiven for identifying it with the whore of Babylon from Revelation, this prostituted Church is the One Church and the only Church and the True Church.

[14] Richard John Neuhaus, *Freedom for Ministry: A Critical Affirmation of the Church and Its Mission* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979): 12.

The prophet Hosea took for himself the prostitute, Gomer, as his wife and then proclaimed the faithlessness of Israel, which resulted in the privation of the knowledge of God.[15] So the prostitution of the empirical Church to the world does not negate its status as the Bride of Christ. It only occludes the knowledge of God.

The Church is the witness to the coming communion of the Christ in the kingdom of God. In faithfulness and fidelity and loyalty, the Church proclaims and preaches and testifies to that eschatological truth. In so doing, what can be known about God is made plain. With apologies for traditional misogynistic metaphors, God's eternal power and divine nature are revealed as the Whore of Babylon is recognized to be the spotless Bride of the Christ. The historical, empirical Church is recognized as the eschatological Church. This recognition occurs through faith(fulness), because just as salvation is by grace through faith(fulness), so too is revelation. In this way, "the Church is a mystery. It is a reality imbued with the hidden presence of God. It lies, therefore, within the very nature of the Church to be always open to new and ever greater exploration."[16]

5.2.2 Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus Est

The first thing I said about the Dulles quotation related to the hidden presence of God as mystery. The second thing to say about that quotation relates to the Church's openness. From a particular perspective, Cyprian rightly stated, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus est* (outside the Church there is no salvation). How then is the Church open when outside of it, what is excluded from it, is damnation?

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[15] Hosea 4:1.

[16] Dulles, *Models,* 16. Is the 'presence of God' just another metaphor? Is 'God' a metaphor? If so, for what? God is more than just mystery, so God cannot simply be a metaphor for mystery, though God always is mystery. Theologically, we cannot claim that God is a metaphor.

William Cavanaugh's *Torture and Eucharist* can be read as a treatise on this topic. The Church is tempted to locate salvation in politics, economics, policy, alliances, education, and many similar places.[17] We might read some of the prophetic accounts of Israel as a metaphor for this very point. When facing the existential and military threat from Assyria, Israel turned to Egypt for salvation. Isaiah's response is to proclaim that "the protection of Pharaoh shall become your shame, and the shelter in the shadow of Egypt your humiliation."[18] Cavanaugh's work makes clear that the Catholic Church's attempt to resolve the threat of Pinochet, Hitler, Mussolini, and others through political and economic means resulted only in greater turmoil, suffering, and humiliation.[19]

Both Zizioulas and Dulles speak into this context. The Church, says Dulles, cannot be a mere means.[20] Extrapolating from that declaration, we might state that as good as economic justice or sexual justice are, the Church cannot be a means of economic justice, sexual justice, or any other finite good. Dulles has a different point in mind when he declares that the Church cannot be a means. For him, the point returns to Cyprian. When people enter into the Church, they already begin to fulfill their purpose, he says.[21] They begin to become what they were created to be. They enter God's salvation. Yet, my own point parallels this insight. We cannot find our created purpose or reach God's salvation in politics, economics, education, or other good ends. Zizioulas gives us a further explanation: "The Church ends by being completely

[17] This temptation mimics the temptation of Jesus to worship the devil in exchange for all of the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. See Mt. 4:8-10; Lk 4:5-8.

[18] Isaiah 30:3.

[19] Cavanaugh, *Torture*, 124-137.

[20] Dulles, *Models*, 54.

[21] *Ibid.*

'historicized'; it eases to be the manifestation of the *eschata* and becomes the image of this world and of historical realities."[22] The Church is essentially eschatological. This eschatological reality is the reason that the Church provides salvation. When the Church turns from the *eschata* to historical goods, it ceases to be the Church and becomes a sociological, political, or economic entity. We have already discovered that these things cannot source salvation. Back to Cavanaugh, in Chile, it was when the Church returned to itself in the liturgy and the discipline of the eucharist that it was able to gather the people in ways that salvifically witnessed to the eschatological communion of the Christ.[23]

Therefore, when Ruether speaks of women-church, she is calling the Church to be more open to the coming communion by casting off the exclusivity of its patriarchal baggage, perhaps to excommunicate patriarchy. The Church is unfaithful to itself as the eschatological communion of the Christ when it does not witness to that coming communion presently in its institutional forms and liturgies. There is a distinction between remaining open to the coming communion and seeking salvation outside the Church. One of these is a mode of fidelity and the other of idolatry.

5.2.3 Eschatological Welcome

The *via salutis* that God provides is through the Church, but that is only because the Church must be faithful in and through its kenotic welcome of the Other. Here too is the Church's openness. The Church is not in competition with the State, the economy, or with Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and so forth. To be in competition would be to set itself against

[22] Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 20.

[23] Cavanaugh, *Torture*, 253-264.

these other institutions or bodies. The Church is not against the State. It is not against capitalism or socialism or feudalism. It is not against Islam or paganism or atheism. It is for all of them because the Church is the proleptic eschatological communion. Just as Karl Barth's God is for humanity, so too must the Church be for humanity. This is the way of salvation that is the Church in its fidelity to the Christ. To be for these Others is not the same as controlling these Others. The Church does not have to control public policy in order to be for the State. Neither does it have to evangelize Muslims in order to be for Muslims. Neither does the Church have to conform itself and therefore lose itself to the State or to Islam in order to be for these things. The Church's own fidelity to the Christ is the source of its openness to the State and Islam. To be open as Christ is open is to empty oneself in welcome of the Other, knowing that it is not ours to judge. It is ours only to welcome and to do so without judgment because judgment implies calculation and boasting. Judgment implies a calculative knowledge of the Good, which the Church does not possess. Christians are not competing with atheists or Buddhists about who is theologically correct because the Christ does not call us to be theologically correct but to empty ourselves in the hope of reconciliation. We claim all people as our sisters and brothers as we open our communal arms in welcome. This open welcome of the communion is its witness and fidelity to its own eschatological reality. This is our confession of the Christ. This is the rest for the weary and the call of conversion to the oppressors. Thus, there is no salvation outside of the Church despite the Church's own many attempts to push salvation outside of itself into the State, the economy, various ideologies, or even to the religions. To make this claim is simply to recognize that a person cannot serve two masters. We can serve either Jesus or an economic ideology.[24]

[24] My position parallels Barth's response to Brunner. See Green, *Barth*, 151-167.

I have argued that the nature (physis) of the Church is in its eschatological reality as the communion of the Christ. The Church is itself in both its present corruption and in its eschatological truth.[25] Yet the Church might lose itself by becoming a means of history rather than a witness to the eschaton. The Church witnesses to the eschaton in its welcome of the Other as the Other is in its present existence. I would like to say a little more about the relation of particular persons to that communion as well as the add more nuance to the concept of welcome. I will do so be describing the Church in the mode of prayer, but first we must take up the problem of socialization.

5.3 The Church and Socialization

In his essay, "What Could It Mean for the Church to Be Christ's Body," Stanley Hauerwas suggested that perhaps the Church should become more like Sneem. Sneem is a village in Ireland where, on his honeymoon of all times, Hauerwas encountered a polis completely given over to the Church. He recounts that at 11:00 A.M. on a Thursday, the shops closed. The village filled with "little boys and girls . . . fitted with white suits and white dresses." The whole village turned out for the feast of the Ascension and the first communion of these young Christians. Hauerwas built on that encounter to argue this must partly be what it means for

[25] Theologically, it has been traditional to talk about the visible and the invisible church. In the context of revelation, knowledge, or epistemology, we might have reason to argue that the Church is not and cannot be directly visible. The temptation of visibility may derive from what Zizioulas considers a unity, a closed ontological circle "formed by the logos and the nous" (Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 70). This closed ontological model seems to occur individualistically. What can I see and know for myself or from the perspective of calculative reason? Visibility, here, implies a level of confidence or of certainty. Yet, such confidence may not derive individualistically. The visibility of the Church may not be observable by the individual sitting in one's own armchair on a winter's day. The visibility of the Church may require the Other.

the church not to be overly spiritualized. The Church, as Christ's Body, has authority over bodies as well as souls.[26] Our lives and communities must be as shaped by Christ as is Sneem.

In a similar way, George Lindbeck, perhaps writing out of a Wittgensteinianism, re-imagining the Church in a cultural-linguistic model.[27] Understood fully, "no world is more real than the ones" created in this cultural-linguistic fashion: "A scriptural world is thus able to absorb the universe. It supplies the interpretive framework within which believers seek to live their lives and understand reality."[28]

Reflecting on such sources, do we not have to raise the question whether the Church is a product of socialization? If not the product, do we not have to ask about the relationship between the Church and socialization? Is the Church, with its instruments of liturgy and discipleship, an institution of socialization? Is that what salvation entails? Socialization into the Church?

That is one set of questions, but Pierre Bourdieu raises more questions when he argues that "authority comes to language from outside."[29] In his essay, "Authorized Language," he refers to the work of R. P. Lelong, *Le Dossier Noir de la Communion Solennelle*, which lists failures of the eucharist. For example:

> I must admit that we are utterly dismayed by the encouragement being given to desert the churches in favour of celebrating the Eucharist in small communities, at home, or in

[26] Stanley Hauerwas, "What Could It Mean for the Church to Be Christ's Body? A Question Without a Clear Answer," *In Good Company: The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995): 19-25.

[27] "Meaning is constituted by the uses of a specific language rather than being distinguishable from it. Thus the proper way to determine what 'God' signifies, for example, is by examining how the word operates within a religion and thereby shapes reality and experience rather than by first establishing its propositional or experiential meaning and reinterpreting or reformulating its uses accordingly. It is in this sense that theological description in the cultural-linguistic mode is intrasemiotic or intratextual." George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984): 114.

[28] *Ibid.*, 117.

[29] Bourdieu, *Language*, 109.

> chapels where one helps oneself to the communion wafer served on trays by lay people, in order to take communion wherever one finds oneself, etc.[30]

What it means that authority comes to language from outside is illustrated in the ways that congregants perceive the eucharist to fail. It fails when the person presiding over the sacrament or the location of the sacrament are not perceived to be 'authorized.' Consequently, confidence in the sacrament is lowered. In a postliberal context, this raises extensive questions about whether it is truly the scriptures that absorb the universe or whether the community absorbs the scriptures. More extensively, Bourdieu's sociological analysis of the eucharist in the context of his linguistic marketplace set up a strong case that religion, in general, and Christianity, in particularly, reduce to socialization. Is this true?

5.3.1 The Problem of Socialization

As I have considered the perspective of narrative, liberal, and postliberal theologies around the relation of persons to ecclesial communion, it seems to me that it is hard not to acknowledge the socialization aspect of the Church as its soteriological mechanism. This conflation of socialization with soteriology is my concern. Neal DeRoo, in a critique of Smith's reading of Derrida, says that "by emphasizing the communal 'giving' of my very capacity for receiving revelation, Derrida provides a theory…of the fundamental way in which each of us is shaped by the community in which we are raised and in which we live."[31] If anything, I see this insight as the obstacle to eschatological fidelity. It is the *fact* of my having been shaped by the intersectional communities that inhabit me that closes me, as a particular person, to the coming

[30] *Ibid.*, 108.

[31] Neal DeRoo, "Determined to Reveal," *The Logic of Incarnation: James K. A. Smith's Critique of Postmodern Religion*, Neal DeRoo and Brian Lightbody, eds. (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2009): 53.

communion of the Christ, placing me, instead, back into an economic network. It is the socialization and inculturation of my identity that turns the Other into a competitor. In what way can the Church be our Mother, again to use a traditional metaphor, without merely socializing persons into the community? It strikes me that this set of questions and concerns is the theological version of Levinas's search for escape.

In his book, *Jesus and the Reign of God*, C.S. Song included a Christmas carol, written by a Muslim, that subtly gestures to the problem of socialization:

> Kindness, chivalry guidance and humility were born
> The day Jesus was born.
> His coming brightened the world,
> His light illuminated it.
> Like the light of dawn flowing through the universe,
> So did the sign of Jesus flow.
> He filled the world with light,
> Making the earth shine with its brightness.
> No threat, no tyranny, no revenge, no sword, no raids,
> No bloodshed did he use in his call to the new faith.
> A king he lived on earth,
> But wearying of his state,
> He substituted heaven for it.
> To his faith wise persons were attracted,
> Humble, submissive and weak before him.
> Their submission was followed by the submission
> of kings, common folk and sages.
> His faith found roots on every land
> And anchors on every shore.[32]

Could a Christian, a good churchman or churchwoman, or a holiness preacher have written such a hymn about Muhammad? If they could, and I imagine that some few probably have, what would it take to do so? One cannot write this way of a competitor, but only of a friend or sibling, someone they love and admire. It is exceedingly rare to find Christians who love particular

[32] Quoted in Song, *Reign of God*, 66-67. For the original source, see Kenneth Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslims: An Exploration* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985): 41.

Muslims, Islam, or Muhammad. In fact, it is hard to find Christians who truly respect, admire, and welcome fellow Christians who are from different theological, denominational, or political persuasions. This is the problem of socialization born out of a spirit of tribal competition. Can we hope to escape it?

When Song states that "what Jesus has to face is a crisis of culture," perhaps the socialization of our churches is an extension of what he had in mind.[33] Western culture has historically and philosophically been a culture of domination and imperialism. With modernity, it becomes a culture of colonialism. The socialization process of *this* culture, this culture of domination, has shaped our churches. Perhaps it is this process that causes Western Christians to seek salvation outside of the Church. If only we could fix the problems of capitalism or moral laxity or structural modes of oppression, then . . . then what? Would that bring about the kingdom of God? Would that bring about the communion of the Christ? Would we all be saved and sanctified? Would the creation finally be fit for its Creator? Would God be proud that our justice had been imposed on others?

The process of socialization breeds indoctrination or brainwashing more than discipleship.[34] To borrow from Simone de Beauvoir's iconic language, one is not born, but becomes a Christian. Our contexts and perspectives condition our Christianity not unlike the way

[33] Song, *Reign of God,* 119. Song had been speaking of the slave culture and the concomitant culture of survival that it engenders. I am extrapolating beyond that original context in my application of the quotation.

[34] As I read Thomas Kuhn, I find in his account of scientific paradigms a similar socialization process. He says that a paradigm "is what mainly prepares the student for membership in the particular scientific community with which he will later practice" (Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 11). It is hard not to see similarities between Kuhn's paradigms and theological orthodoxy. Michel Foucault provides further extensions of the same intuitions that Kuhn has identified. Foucault speaks of "what *governs* statements, and the way in which they *govern* each other so as to constitute a set of propositions which are scientifically acceptable . . . What constitutes, as it were, their internal regime of power," (Foucault, "Truth and Power," 112). I see the socialization of the Church as following these same patterns identified by Kuhn and Foucault. It is *from* these regimes of power that we require salvation. It is because of these regimes of power that we cannot save ourselves and that salvation must be by God's grace.

our societies condition us to be women or to be men or to be nonbinary, but always we are being conditioned. Is salvation as simple as merely taking control over our gender or our discipleship through our choices? Shall we assert our autonomy against the forces of socialization, indoctrination, or brainwashing? Is our philosophy that of Sartre: Existence precedes essence! Arguably, much of popular, North American Christianity, including its Evangelical and holiness strains, follows just such a liberal, existentialist philosophy. By rejecting denominations and institutions, and by reading the Bible for oneself, many Christians expect to cast off false religious fetters and enter into authentic, faithful Christianity.[35] Empirically, what seems to happen is that such attempts more often reproduce the cultural norms of each local context, thereby further indoctrinating adherents and further separating one from others. The assertion of autonomy places us in competition with the Other. Such competition is the failure of liberalism. This competitive approach creates division rather than communion. Is there hope for an escape? Is the best for which we can hope to give up the value of the individual and submit ourselves to the authority of the community? That would amount to voluntary submission to socialization. There is no salvation in socialization.

5.3.2 The Hope of Hypocrisy

What I think is important, and what DeRoo may have been indicating in his above critique, is that the Church, as an eschatological reality, creates the possibility of our hypocrisy. For Levinas, we are called to an infinite ethical responsibility. In Christ, we are called to the eschatological communion of the kingdom. Yet, hypocritically, we end up competing with the Other whom we are called to welcome. The recognition of our hypocrisy is possible strangely

[35] I am writing from my own anecdotal experience growing up in a holiness church, but I hardly believe my experience is exceptional.

only because of the Church. The Church makes it possible for Christians to be hypocrites because through the Church the Holy Spirit calls us to something beyond socialization, indoctrination, and brainwashing. It calls us to something beyond political loyalties and individual biblical interpretations. It calls us beyond competition. Without the eschatological call that is manifest as the essence of the Church, that hypocrisy would be invisible and unrecognized. So, when DeRoo states that the Church makes it possible to receive revelation, I would suggest that it is the ethical, eschatological constitution and structure both of the Church and also of the human person that makes his statement accurate.

In her book, *To Pray and to Love,* Roberta Bondi referenced an image created by Dorotheos of Gaza. Let us imagine taking a compass, inserting the point of that compass, and drawing a circle using the compass. The center point is equidistant from every point on the circumference of the circle. Let us imagine that the center is God, and the circumference is the world. As human beings in the world move closer to God, we can draw lines from the circumference to the center. With this image in mind, every human being who is moving closer to God is simultaneously moving closer to every other person moving closer to God. One of the implications of this image, this analogy, is that we cannot grow closer to God without growing closer to others who are growing closer to God.[36] While the analogy has limitations, it helpfully portrays some of the truth of the eschatological communion. What it means to be a person is itself eschatological. Consequently, we find revelation in the Church, even and especially the revelation of our own hypocrisy, because of both the Church's and our own anthropological

[36] Roberta C. Bondi, *To Pray and to Love: Conversations on Prayer with the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991): 14f.

eschatological constitution. In this way, the authority of the Church is not in its polity or some understanding of its apostolicity, but in its eschatological fidelity.[37]

Of course, the Church fails in the actualization of this eschatological fidelity. I have insisted on that from the beginning of this section. Revelation occurs within that failure as the contrast between the truth of the eschaton and the infidelity of the present. Yet the Church remains One and not two. Smith erroneously reads this situation generally as a problem of finitude and thus 'Gnosticism,' which he set out to correct. For this reason, I suggested that Smith's position was insufficiently eschatological. To assert an eschatological metaphysic is not to assert the sinfulness of finitude. It is to assert the truth of God and the lie that is sin. The empirical Church is always already the eschatological Church because there is only One Church. We are tempted to see this otherwise, because the empirical Church, with its abuses and dysfunctions and infidelity is surely *not* the Church for which we hope. Herein we are reminded of Luther's insight that our righteousness is not our own, but comes as an alien righteousness. We are reminded that even in our sinfulness, we are saints. Such a claim does not validate sin. It does not justify the abuses and dysfunctions of the Church. If anything, it reveals those abuses and dysfunctions in such a way that allows us to repent of them. This is the call of holiness. That call of holiness is the truth. The Church more or less faithfully witnesses to the truth, such that

[37] My own position can certainly be read against a Platonic ontological hierarchy or quasi-dualism. For Plato, there was one true reality of which the physical reality was a shadowy imitation. That sounds a lot like what I am saying when I say things like the empirical, historical Church is also the eternal, unblemished Church. In fact, I could sound like I am suggesting that we participate in the truth of the Church, the Form of the Church, through our faithful witness to that Church. The difference would be this eschatological, surprising, unanticipatable nature of the eschaton, which can never be accomplished as dogmatic truth. There is no path of progression from here to there. So, Plato could have Socrates use metaphors of divided lines to help us see levels of connection or progression between opinion and knowledge, falsity and truth. Levinas and myself are using language of an ethical call. The communion of the Christ calls us to an ethical responsibility, to holiness. Contra Levinas, this is not a call to particular persons, but a call to the Church. Fidelity to this call does not elevate me, but empties me. Even what we think of as knowledge has to be revised in the context of that call. However we might want to parse and nuance the metaphysical models, what seems important is the priority that we give to God and the formal connections that we recognize between God, creation, and humanity.

even in its failings it continues to witness. Sometimes that witness is called hypocrisy, which is the result of the recognition of the Church's infidelity.

Smith rejects the view of 'Gnosticism,' which would condemn us as finite, epistemological agents who would bear moral culpability for erroneous finite perspectives. His solution is to sanctify finitude as finitude. Period. It is for this reason that I asked about the metaphysics of the Church and that I connected the Church with anthropology. It is for this reason that I rejected the division between the present empirical church and the eternal, spiritual church. There is one greater, eschatological reality. That is the metaphysics that stands behind my position, but not behind Smith's. Smith provides a revised dualism, in which finitude attempts to colonize eternity. God condescends to where we are. God *must* do this. And while Smith tries to introduce a principle of analogy in which God voluntarily withholds a portion of Godself, thereby preserving Godself from ontological violence, the entire metaphysical structure that Smith assumes is what creates this problem to begin with. Consequently, Smith's metaphysics leaves us in a constant and necessary ontological competition where God must protect Godself from ontological and conceptual violence. Therefore, I contest that it is not an accident that the Church does not appear in Smith's project. The only Church that could be possible is one of radical pluralism that leaves us in a state of ongoing tension with the Other.

5.3.3 Eschatological Escape

Eschatologically, the pneumatological call to the communion of the Christ, the call of holiness, forms the Church. Its call removes us from the individualism of modern liberalism

because it reminds us that we are not our own.[38] That said, the eschatological call comes to us through and within particular historical and socialized contexts, what Heidegger might refer to as our ontic thrownness. We stand and we respond within those particular contexts. Consequently, the Church, as our corporate witness to the coming communion of the kingdom, is not universal in its form or content. The particular contexts of the eschatological call and the empirical and historical response themselves create limitations, structures, and possibilities for the call and for the response. We hear the call within the contexts of our various language games and our socio-economic embeddedness. We hear this call in the intersectionality of our lives. In a very real way, it is our particular embeddedness that necessitates the fragility, brokenness, dysfunction, and sometimes even abusiveness of the historical, empirical Church.[39] It is also the fact that this call comes from beyond our particular intersectionality and embeddedness, coupled with the fact that this call comes to a people rather than to a person, that creates the possibility of grace, redemption, and reconciliation.[40]

Because of the embodiment and historicity of the Church, there is a spatial component to our reception of and witness to the eschatological communion. Hauerwas says that "truth is

[38] "We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living" (Rom. 14:7-9).

[39] This claim does not result in the condemnation of finitude, precisely because "there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). The point of christology, the person and the work of Jesus Christ, is to set us free from the law of sin and death. However, Jesus enters into the structures of abuse, victimization, brokenness, and death. Something about the refusal of condemnation is part of Jesus' overcoming of those structures, as if condemnation itself is a mechanism that perpetuates violence and oppression. It is as if condemnation would be the mechanism that allowed Christianity to begin condemning other religions, heretics, those who hold other political persuasions, and the like. Therefore, there must now be no condemnation. That is not the same as enabling ongoing abuse. Instead, the abuser must be called and invited and reconciled. We must love our enemies, even when they deserve and have earned condemnation. I would call this the logic of atonement.

[40] When only one group of people is authorized to interpret this call and to formulate a response, the Church falls into heresy. Yet, orthodoxy also requires limitations on said interpretation and formulation. The ongoing openness of discourse is requisite.

determined by a 'place.'"[41] He also recognizes that place, location, or, we might say, geography necessitates difference. Our proximity to other people shapes us together and differentiates the resultant 'us' from those further from us. There is a gravity to space that draws us together, but this is the mechanism of tribalism, not the Church. While explicating John Howard Yoder, Hauerwas goes on to say that catholicity "is itself a process of a people committed to being in communion with one another through the work of the Holy Spirit."[42] That commitment cannot be voluntary but must be eschatological. We do not choose to be in communion with those near us or those distantly located. Eschatologically, we recognize that it will have always been the case that we are in communion with them regardless of what we wish or choose. To be the Church is to witness to this communion in our unity and catholicity. Our witness is our openness to this eschatological call of communion which frees us for the possibility of healing and redemption and reconciliation. The Church is, therefore, the communal response to the Spirit's eschatological, apocalyptic, in-breaking call of holiness.[43]

5.4 Difference and Revelation

In society, what makes the Other other is emotion, not logic. It is fear, desire, rage, jealousy, insecurity. Such things breed tribalism, which results in competition and imperialism. Arguably, fear of the Other is a mechanism of the production of human society.[44] Once again we

[41] Stanley Hauerwas, *Approaching the End: Eschatological Reflections on Church, Politics, and Life* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2013): 110.

[42] Hauerwas, *Approaching the End*, 110.

[43] Can we think of the Spirit as this call? Does that formalize the Spirit too much and thus depersonalize the Spirit? Yet the call comes through bodies, and in that sense this call would incarnate the Spirit.

[44] George Herbert Mead suggests that society's "individual members would not possess minds and selves if these had not arisen within or emerged out of the human social process in its lower stages of development." George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*, Charles W. Morris, ed.

are reminded of C.S. Song's insight that "what Jesus has to face is a crisis of culture," or maybe, a crisis of society.[45] Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be like your Father in Heaven.[46] Who can do that? Who does that? No one does that.

Christianity is a source of hope because it is the requirement to embrace that which is Other through the love of the Holy Spirit in the kenosis of the Christ for the glory of God the Father. Communion is, therefore, trinitarian in its spirit. As suggested, communion is partially modeled on the christic movement of kenosis. The self-emptying of the Christ is, further, the basis of the pneumatic union, which is the building of the church as a *sign* of the coming kingdom of God. In communion, difference and diversity cannot threaten, but neither can they become another mode of liberal, atomizing individualism. Difference and diversity are not an end in themselves, something to be celebrated for their own sake. Doing so would only further separate, isolate, and generate competition. Instead, the eschatological communion calls the Same to a humble submission. This model of submission would become unsustainable and oppressive if only one group of people was called to submit while another group was excluded

(Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962): 227. He continues: "Indeed, any psychological or philosophical treatment of human nature involves the assumption that the human individual belongs to an organized social community, and derives his human nature from his social interactions and relations with that community as a whole and with other individual members of it" (*Ibid.*, 229). Importantly, Mead's theory contests the modern origin story of political philosophy. We are not first rational individuals who then decide to give up some of our freedom to gain the security of society, thereby rendering society as an essential threat to freedom. In contrast, Mead suggests that we become particular persons in and through our communities. The parallels to the notion of the Church as our Mother seem clear. Yet, we may ask further, how did the Church originate? Here Mead gives a disturbing response: "Paul organized the church of his time against the world of heathens; and 'Revelation' represents the community over against the world of darkness. The idea of Satan has been as essential to the organization of the church as politics has been to the organization of democracy. There has to be something to fight against because the self is most easily able to express itself in joining a definite group" (*Ibid*., 220-21). The idea here is that the Church becomes a definite group in contrast to the great Enemy. Sociologically, this insight seems self-evident. Theologically, is this the best for which we can hope? Does this origin of the Church lead to the Gospel of Jesus Christ or does it put us back into the body of death from which we require salvation? How do we escape?

[45] Song, *Reign of God,* 119.

[46] Matt. 5:44-45.

from the demand of submission. Such an occasion would be a great hypocrisy, even heresy, as it would mark the end of the communion and the possibility of belief. Such heresy has been the case within the models of hierarchical ontology and of economic liberalism.

How can difference become an antecedent to communion? I would suggest that we can find inspiration for an answer in the mundane methodologies of research. Identifying and eliminating our own biases is the heart of scholarly endeavors.[47] Heidi Maibom, writing from the perspective of phenomenology and psychology argues that we can only move past prejudices when we begin to consider and to imagine the perspective of others.[48] So long as we persist in our own being, closed off to others, we are constrained by our own biases and prejudices. We can interpret these sources to support a Levinasian model in which the Same must kenotically leave itself in response to the call of the Other. What gets a person beyond their biases then is not reason, but ethics.[49] It is not the fully rational person who is free, but the fully ethical person, if such a person exists. In this sense, difference and the Other become the possibility of communion and the possibility of moving beyond an economic liberalism without abandoning the value and the importance of particular others. In Kierkegaard's sentiment, we do not go forth

[47] The American Psychological Association contains eight guidelines for the reduction of bias in scientific writing. See American Psychological Association, *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 6th ed. (Washington DC: American Psychological Association, 2010): 70-77.

[48] Heidi Maibom, "Through the Eyes of Another," *Aeon* (July 12, 2022): retrieved from https://aeon.co/essays/real-objectivity-rests-on-identifying-with-others. Maibom is professor of philosophy at the University of Cincinnati and the editor of *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Empathy*.

[49] Marshall argues, from a Lockean perspective, that objectivity requires the object to set the standard. In our context, the Other sets the standard and calls us beyond ourselves to that standard. See Colin Marshall, *Compassionate Moral Realism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018): 188.

to love an abstract, universal Other, but rather the particular others that we see when we leave our own doors.[50] It is not difference, but independence, that annuls communion.

What can be said of theological norms if difference becomes a theological norm? Is Arianism just as theologically valid as Athanasius's orthodoxy? Do doctrines matter? Interestingly, much of doctrinal orthodoxy preserves the union of difference – the union of full God and full humanity in Jesus, for instance, or the union of the Three Triune Persons who remain their own persons without being divided and without being subsumed into one another. The mystery of the Holy Trinity is the mystery of persons in communion. That is the saving mystery into which God calls humanity and in which the Spirit works to establish the Church as the Body of the Christ.

Arguably, Arianism can be modeled as a rejection of communion in the context of identity. It can be read as modeling identity discretely within the Same such that the Son cannot reasonably be *homoousiov tō patri*. In his review of trinitarian persons, Craig Keen argues:

> A Trinitarian Person is a real relation. . . . In trinitarian discourse a person is thus not a self-identical subject; it is not a substance that *has* relations. Rather it *is* as such a relation, it is a reality *only as* a relation. A person is a face that is what it is only as it meets other faces.[51]

His account of trinitarian persons is a rejection of Aristotelian substance metaphysics in favor of something like a social metaphysics. Through the Trinity, we can discern a relational model of reality such that identity is not based in competition with the Other nor in tribalism and

[50] "Christianity speaks about being the perfect person who limitlessly loves the person he sees. We men want to look upward in order to look for the perfect object, but in Christ perfection looked down to earth and love the person it saw." Soren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love: Some Christian Reflections in the Form of Discourses*, Howard and Edna Hong, trans. (New York: Harper & Row, 1962): 170.

[51] Craig Keen, "The Human Person as Intercessory Prayer," *Embodied Holiness*, Samuel M. Powell and Michael E. Lodahl, eds. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999): 56.

imperialism, but rather, in a strange way, my identity as a particular 'me' is given in and through my relation to 'you.' This does not appear to be what we find in Arianism.

It is not hard to hear in Keen's work themes from Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue. Themes like, philosophy breeds alienation when we reduce the world around us to things to be known and things to be used. Such an approach, an approach at home, shall we say, with Francis Bacon for whom the value of nature is purely in its utility for human purposes, cuts us off from the spiritual vitality and relationships around us. Cutting ourselves off from such spirituality and relationships is the cause of alienation. Relations and relationships are at the heart of spirituality: Connecting with God, other people, with creation, and maybe even with ourselves. However, when we reduce human relations to rational, economic, or transactional ways of relating, we squash and suppress our spirituality, bringing about spiritual death and decay. For Buber, the 'I' occurs always in relation such that our selves become open-ended relationships, "a living pattern, that defies sense, logic, and proportion."[52]

Since the time of Thales, Western thought has been largely monistic, with a few notable exceptions.[53] When Thales asked about the one unifying thing out of which everything else arises, he set Western philosophy on a monistic track in which revelation becomes a mode of presence. For Buber, the *encounter* is revelation and what is revealed is the You that exceeds objectification or reduction. Contrast Buber's famous encounter with a tree to John Locke or Immanuel Kant's epistemology, in which the experience of something renders that thing a property of the knower. Contrast Buber's encounter with a tree to the standard account of

[52] Michael Zank, "Martin Buber," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Jul 28, 2020): para 16. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/buber/

[53] We find some exceptions in Christian mysticism, such as with Nicholas of Cusa and his doctrine of the coincidence of opposites.

knowledge as justified, true belief. For Buber, the meaning of the You is not found in its use or even in the context of a language game. That would be to reduce the You to an It. This raises the question of whether we find the truth of revelation in what can be observed and said about things.

Smith's project began with the sustainability of philosophy and theology themselves in light of the question, how can we speak of what is outside of language?[54] Is the sustainability of theology reducible to our ability to speak of a revelation beyond language or even knowledge? Is theology first about speech?

One might respond sardonically by noting 'speech' is literally in the word theology itself: logos. Certainly, many theologians have understood theology to be speech about God, speech of God or God's speech. It is true that theology results in speech, but does that imply theology is fundamentally and first about speech?

I suggest that theology is in the same position as metaphysics. We have to model reality in terms of ontological hierarchies or liberal economies or participatory eschatologies because reality is too complex to be understood directly. Theology, understood in some sense as a discipline concerned with God and the things of God could be no less complex than metaphysics. Doctrines and systematic theology become models of divine revelation, but we need not, on that account, fret over the very possibility of theology. That said, I am striving to give an account of revelation within a participatory eschatology. In so doing, we are discovering that philosophy and theology have been laying the groundwork for such a transition for some time. For Buber, revelation might be something that graciously encounters us through a You. If theology is concerned with divine revelation, then theology must stop attempting to be a science and become

[54] Smith, *Speech*, 4.

a mode of existence.[55] There is an existentialism here, but not one that emerges out of a discrete self. This is an existentialism that emerges out of the relation or the dialogue, we might even say, out of prayer.

5.5 The Church and Intercessory Prayer

I suggest that this theology, mentioned above, which emerges out of a mode of existence, should be understood as an ecclesial theology. This section began with the question of the nature (*physis*) of the Church. As we have investigated the constitution of the Church in the context of persons and difference, we find that the Church has the structure of prayer. Particularly, the Church has the structure of *intercessory* prayer. The collective prayer of the congregation to God on behalf of God's creation and those whom God loves is the concrete activity of the Church's ministry of reconciliation. This prayer unites humanity with God and God's creation.

Intercessory prayer has the flavor of substitution to it, bringing to mind substitutionary atonement as well as Martin Luther's account of the freedom of a Christian.[56] In prayer to God, the self moves outside of its own boundaries and begins to identify with the one for whom it prays.[57] Asking not after its own needs, the self instead petitions for the needs of the Other. In

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[55] "Basic words," Buber notes, "do not state something that might exist outside them; by being spoken they establish a mode of existence," (Buber, *I and Thou*, 53).

[56] "See, according to this rule the good things we have from God should flow from one to the other and be common to all, so that everyone should 'put on' his neighbor and so conduct himself toward him as if he himself were in the other's place . . . From us they flow on to those who have need of them so that I should lay before God my faith and my righteousness that they may cover and intercede for the sins of my neighbor which I take upon myself and so labor and serve in them as if they were my very own . . . He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbor." Martin Luther, *Christian Liberty* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1957): 34.

[57] ". . . as we learn to pray in friendship with God, we find that we begin to deeply desire and ask God for the well-being not only of people we know or have some obvious connection with but for people on the other side of the world—people very different from us, from very different cultures. On the other hand, we also find our 'close vision' improving as we become able to see people under our noses who before were invisible to us. As we begin to

this structure of prayer, the self recognizes its responsibility in love and in the Spirit's calling on behalf of and through the Other. In its petition to God, the self stands with the Other, perhaps even to the point of substitution: "I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh."[58] I am identifying this intercessory structure, even to the point of substitution, with the form and nature of the Church. In such prayer, the Church's witness aligns with the eschatological communion of the Christ. In such prayer, theology speaks the Word of God. This is the call of faith and the call to faithfulness. The doctrines and polity and policies of the Church must then conform to this calling of the Word echoing forth in the prayers of the Church on behalf of the vulnerable.

Intercessory prayer arises from vulnerability, but the prayers of the vulnerable are what call upon the Church also to pray. In the prayers of the vulnerable, the gap between sign and referent is abolished. The vulnerable body becomes the prayed sign. The vulnerable face of the Other is the incarnation of the infinite ethical demand. In vulnerability, the command of God occurs: "Do not kill me. Love me. Lay down your life for me. Save me." This is the prayer of the prophets and the Psalmist, in which the Holy Spirit and Jesus himself pray:

> My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
> Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?
> O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
> And by night, but find no rest.[59]

In these words, the sign (the call for God to be God) and the referent (God who is God) are one. Between them is no space and no gap, for it is not a prayer of words alone, in verbal language. It

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pray for the people we meet every day in the grocery store and on the street, we enter imaginatively into their world" (Bondi, *To Pray*, 131).

[58] Rom. 9:3

[59] Psalm 22:1-2

is a prayer of the whole being, of spirit and body and mind and words – an openness for God capable of being filled only by God. This is the prayer of the single mother and the widower. This is the prayer of the poor and the person of color and the immigrant and the victim of war. It is the prayer of the exploited and indebted. It is the cry of the sick. It is the cry of the earth as it begs for mercy from greenhouse gasses and forever chemicals. This cry calls for God to be God, and it calls the Church to be the Church. This cry is the theological authority for our time and place, the cry that carries transcendence in its hypostasized rhythms and echoing reverberations. In this cry we find the Christ, the brother of all of the hopeless and godforsaken. This cry is Christ. It is Christ's cry. It cries to the Church. Intercession is the Church's response, as it was Moses's response.

In response to this cry of the vulnerable is stunned silence. How could this *be*? This is not a theodicy that needs a logical fix. Nor can we give an answer that would make all of the experienced evil and injustice into something good and understandable. The only response following stunned silence can be confession and repentance. Any other response would be idolatry of the worst sort – the idolatry of Molech to whom our living children must be sacrificed in fire. Any response to the prayer of the vulnerable and the needy that justifies their conditions amounts to the worship of Molech. When the churches of God justify the exploitation of the needy and the earth itself, it is the greatest of all blasphemies – the taking of God's name in vain. Applying the name of God to the practices of Molech.

"To pray to God," says Keen, "is never a lonely act . . . It is always the one who is destined to be eschatological love, the one whose self is to be her neighbor, the one who is as she points to each and to all—it is this one who prays."[60] In this statement, Keen draws attention to

[60] Keen, "Intercessory Prayer," 61.

the nature of the trinitarian persons and trinitarian implications for the Church. From Descartes through Hegel and beyond, the self is simple (not complex) as "the invisible owner of its properties."[61] Even when, for a brief time, the self is made complex in Hegel's dialectic, its destiny is to return to simplicity through sublation. In contrast, the trinitarian person is no modern self. In his study of Tertullian, Keen notes that the Latin *persona* conveyed the sense of 'mask' or 'face.' The Greek *prosōpon*, too, conveyed this sense of 'face.' After additional review of the etymologies and meanings of the terms *hypostatis* and *ousia*, Keen concludes: "Whereas the Latin says emphatically that the Father and the Son and the Spirit are the *faces* of God, the Greek says emphatically that those faces are *real*."[62] What it means to be a person in this trinitarian context is to be a relation. That relation is what is real. What I am arguing is that what it means to be a human being is not formally different from what it means to be a trinitarian person. Without losing the particularity of our identities, without being confused with one another, we are who we are only as members together of the Christ's Church. Prayer, is therefore, the essence of the human being. "To be a human person is to be by God's gift a passionate act of social prayer that says in one voice, 'Here I am.'"[63] We are *homo precarius*.

5.6 Formation in Vulnerability

I prefer the language of trinitarian persons to the philosophical language that we find in Levinas. For Levinas, the self is always infinitely responsible to the Other. While Levinas's position is an urgent and an important check on liberalism, we find a conceptual vulnerability

[61] *Ibid*., 49.

[62] *Ibid*., 54.

[63] *Ibid*., 61.

arising from Levinas's approach to the individual, atheistic Same. The infinite ethical demand comes to this isolated individual, to the Same. How should a woman, an immigrant, a transgendered person, or a person of color read Levinas? Would reading Levinas from such a position not double the structures of oppression of vulnerable groups?

Let us consider a particular, anecdotal situation. I am familiar with a delightful woman who grew up in a patriarchal, conservative, immigrant Christian home in Southern California. She was taught and modelled to that a Christian woman is to be entirely submissive to and given to her husband. This woman married a man who suffered from a pornography addiction and demanded that his Christian wife perform the types of sexual services he had witnessed and come to desire through his addiction. She found them revolting, but she submitted. Later, this woman was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. As her health declined to the point where she often could not even walk, she continued to bear the entirety of the household work on her own shoulders. She does not ask and he does not offer to help around the house. It is the responsibility of a Christian woman to do these things, she believes, and God will not ask of her more than she can bear. Therefore, she must bear it.

This woman visited my wife and I one weekend. She was to fly back to her home early Sunday morning. She asked to sleep downstairs in our living room on Saturday night. We discovered that she stayed up all night sitting on the couch. She has thick, long hair that takes a great deal of time to dry after being washed. She wanted to wash and style her hair the night before so what it was perfect when she went straight to church after having flown in that morning. We asked whether people at the church would not understand that she had just flown in, and was that not already heroic to go straight to church after such a long flight? She answered

that her husband would notice if her hair was mussed, and she did not want that to happen.[64] How should this woman read Levinas? Can she find in Levinas anything that she is not already doing? Is she not already giving fully of herself for another? Is her self-giving a model and example for the rest of us to follow? Is this what Levinas had in mind?

I suggest that Levinas's position is flawed at the level of subjectivity. If we are isolated individuals, then Levinas's position is applicable only to those in positions of power. However, if we complexify our subjectivity, perhaps Levinas's argument could be expanded. From my Christian perspective, it seems to me as if the trinitarian and ecclesial language of Christian theology can be beneficial to this aim. To be a human being, a *nephesh*, a living being created by God is to be a thirst, a need, a vulnerability. According to Hans Wolff, the Hebrew *nephesh* can be used to mean a throat, "the organ that takes in food and satisfies hunger."[65] It connotes neediness and desire, often for the sustenance and preservation of one's life. This is not a fault, as if, as Smith fears, to be finite is to sin. It is, rather, as Catherine LaCugna has postulated, the basis for an ontology of relation.[66] Neediness and imperfection are not the marks of sin, but of *nephesh*, of a created being.

When we adjust our anthropology so that we are not isolated individuals but beings-in-relation, called to be ecclesial beings, then the eschatological call comes not to us singularly, but to us corporately. And while the corporate body cannot witness and testify to the eschatological communion without the agency and actions of particular, embodied persons, the eschatological call ultimately comes to the Church. Should we perceive the call as being a call ultimately to

[64] This woman has since said, "I think I will someday soon realize that I have been abused by my husband."

[65] Wolff, *Anthropology*, 11.

[66] See LaCugna, *God for Us*, 243f.

particular persons, then we risk a spirituality of moral accomplishment, which breeds competition, judgment, and boasting.

The Church is called to intervene on behalf of my conservative friend from Southern California. The Church must call her husband, her parents and in-laws, her siblings, and her children to a life of service to this sacrificial woman with multiple sclerosis. Out of love for her, they must learn to say No to her sacrifice. The Church must also call my sacrificial friend to recognize the idolatry of orienting her life so fully upon her husband rather than on God.[67] The Church must seek healing on her behalf. The Church must give her rest, not more burdens. Such is the witness of the eschatological communion.

The Church is formed in vulnerability, called by vulnerability, and perfected in its intercession on behalf of the vulnerable. Because of these rhythms of vulnerability, sacrifice is not the last word of Christianity. Resurrection is the last word. Some persons need to sacrifice, but others have sacrificed and need to be resurrected. This structure of sacrifice and resurrection out of intercession to the vulnerable is the Church's witness and fidelity to the Gospel. The Church is not a perfect political, economic, or social body. It is not meant to instantiate such a perfect body. The Church is a testimony. It testifies to the eschatological communion. Only in that *eschatological* communion do we anticipate and hope for a perfect politic and economy, because that communion is a result of the kingdom of God. The Church is not called to establish a counter-politics, a counter-society, a counter-culture, or a counter-economy. Those things

[67] Anytime we place our eyes on a mutable good, be it spouses, economic liberation, political liberation, and all of the other good things that are of concern for the Church, we have lost our witness to the transcendent God and the coming communion. My point is not to devalue these goods, but to recognize that when we devote ourselves to them, we necessarily find ourselves navigating competing interests and liberties. We have entered into the liberal economy where our participation in the life of God comes through our labor, investments, and production. Competition breeds condemnation.

belong to the kingdom. The Church is called to expose the illusion of such things as saviors for us within history.

If we were to assume that the Church was meant to establish a counter-politics, that would locate salvation in politics, in the State. We would call the State to become a theocracy. A counter-economy would locate salvation in economics. As impactful as politics, society, and economics are to the preservation of our life as well as our quality of life, our salvation comes only in the surrender of our life to God. Our salvation comes in our surrender of our need to persist in being as we give ourselves to the call of holiness that comes from the Spirit. This call of holiness is itself eschatological. It is a call to holiness because it is the call to life in God. Recalling Dorotheus of Gaza, we grow closer to God as we grow closer to all of those Others who are growing closer to God. By serving my neighbor, by serving the Other, by serving the enemy, that responsibility draws me to God in faithfulness. The inability to serve the Other due to my rejection of the Other means that I am further separated from God. I am further separated from salvation.

Anytime we attempt to instantiate or to locate salvation in the state, the economy, or in a societal structure, we mask violence. Jacques Derrida was correct to say that the law relies upon force.[68] The call of holiness calls us beyond force and beyond the law. As such, it founds justice. In the call of holiness, we are called into the justification of reconciliation. We do not return to our*selves*. We return to *our*selves. We find ourselves in the Church, which is our homeless home, our home to come, our impossible home. We are at home in the Church while on pilgrimage

[68] "The word 'enforceability' reminds us that there is no such thing as law that doesn't imply *in itself, a priori, in the analytic structure of its* concept, the possibility of being 'enforced,' applied by force." Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld, and David Gray Carlson, eds. (New York: Routledge, 1992): 6. Emphasis original.

because we are united with all of those Others who are moving closer to God through kenotic service to every Other.[69] We are moving closer to God in this way because this is the call of God, the call of the Holy God, to which we respond in our service. Where there is vulnerability, where injustice calls out for justice, there is God's call. It is always and ever this Holy God. In our giving and sacrifice and submission and restoration we become the Church, the people of God and the body of the Christ.

5.7 The Church and Revelation

In his essay, "The Will to Believe," William James declares that he is bringing to us "something like a sermon on justification by faith."[70] His arguments were not theological, but pragmatic. Of course we take things like 'democracy' on faith until those things start to break down, at which point they require additional justification. James spent a good portion of the essay arguing against William Clifford's insistence on epistemic responsibility. Clifford's arguments were also pragmatic, and they were based on a prior commitment to empiricism and science.[71] Do we need to justify our confidence in the scientific method? No, because it is working just fine. "It is only," James says, "our already dead hypotheses that our willing nature is unable to bring to life again."[72] James then lists a series of things that everyone in the lecture

[69] I am trying to call the powerful and established to kenosis while recognizing that the vulnerable and oppressed require rest and recovery. Theology cannot offer naïve calls to kenosis as if many people have not already had their selves colonized and victimized. Holiness is not always sacrifice. Sometimes it is therapy and recovery: *Fides quaerens salutem*.

[70] William James, "The Will to Believe," *Essays in Pragmatism*, Alburey Castell, ed. (New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1948): 88.

[71] Pragmatically, Clifford argues that the act of believing on insufficient evidence "will result in society's sinking back into savagery." William K. Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief," *The Ethics of Belief and Other Essays* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1999): 76.

[72] James, "Will to Believe," 93.

hall he was speaking in believes, things like molecules, Newtonian laws, democracy, and so forth. We do not have reasons to believe in these things, not in the way that Clifford had demanded. James's point in this 'sermon on justification by faith,' is that "our faith is faith in someone else's faith, and in the greatest matters this is most the case."[73] James unpacks the passional commitments and will that are at the heart of belief, leveraging Pascal for support: "*Le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît pas*" ("The heart has its reasons of which the mind is unaware").[74] Smith demands that God reveal Godself in a way that we can understand, that our minds can understand. What does such a demand reveal about Smith's heart and his will?

This project began with the question of revelation, and we must return to that question before we conclude. In an economic model, revelation is not independent of value. Following from Bacon, knowledge must be practical. The Good must be profitable.[75] In other words, I need a reason to receive revelation, a pragmatic reason. Certainty, confidence, profit, and happiness are each valid reasons to receive revelation. I will accept the Bible as God's revelation if I can be certain that it aligns accurately with history and science, thereby providing me with an empowering sense of certainty. I will believe God if following God improves my life, thereby profiting me.

Contrast the revelation of economic profit with Levinas's Talmudic reflections on the giving of the Law and philosophy. Israel agreed to follow the law, Levinas notes, before they knew what the law entailed. The demand comes before knowledge, but "the temptation of

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[73] *Ibid*., 94.

[74] *Ibid*., 102.

[75] Wes Cantrell and James Lucas make a compelling argument that a loose Ten Commandments model of ethics produces highly profitable businesses. In other words, ethics is justified economically. See Wes Cantrell and James R. Lucas, *High-Performance Ethics: 10 Timeless Principles for Next-Generation Leadership* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Publishing, 2007).

temptation is philosophy."[76] The commitment to obedience engages the self but philosophy allows the self to step back from itself through disengagement. Obedience requires vulnerability while knowledge gives power. Perhaps, with enough knowledge, with enough reasons to believe, we will make the informed choice to believe and then to obey. Levinas connects this posture with economic calculation. I will calculate what is in my best interests and decide, but I must know before I can calculate. Knowledge, which empowers, has priority. It comes first. But the Torah, Levinas insists, cannot be the result of human choice.[77]

What are we to say of revelation in light of these reflections on belief, knowledge, and obedience? Is revelation a function of choice and, thereby, economic in nature? What would it mean for God to appear in a way that we can understand? Speaking of the appearance of the kingdom of God, Karl Barth notes that "the Pharisees see it and yet to not perceive it."[78] In this context, the 'kingdom of God' meant Jesus of Nazareth. God's kingdom appeared in Jesus, but they did not perceive it. How should we interpret this scenario in light of Smith's constraints on revelation? Should God's kingdom have appeared in line with the expectations of the Pharisees? Should Jesus have arrived in a way that the Pharisees could understand? Should Jesus have set up a political kingdom on earth, waging war against the Romans and so forth so that people would clearly understand he was the Messiah? Or how should we understand the doctrine of the Trinity in the context of Smith's constraints on revelation? Should the mysteries of the Trinity be subject to the constraints of quantum physics and mathematics? Are trinitarian persons modes of

[76] Levinas, "Temptation of Temptation," 34.

[77] *Ibid*., 37.

[78] Barth, *Dogmatics* IV.2, 657.

quantum entanglement after all? What about when Paul says that "the kingdom of God is not food and drink but justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit"?[79]

Revelation comes to a humanity always already contextualized within epistemic and sociological regimes. The content of the revelation matters, but just as the Pharisees were unable to perceive the kingdom before them, according to Barth, so too we cannot depend on our personal or tribal capacity to penetrate the veils of our regimes to recognize the content of revelation for what it is. Our temptation is to make sense of revelation, but sense is economically or sociologically or politically contextualized. It is pragmatic and dependent upon our wills, the reasons of our hearts, and our choices. Is the content of Chalcedonian orthodoxy important? Quite so, and it is important largely because of the mystery inherent in the content. Chalcedon does not fit into human reason and understanding. It is precisely not something that can be made sense of.

What this does not mean is that faith amounts to belief without evidence. What it does mean is that faith involves an eschatological fidelity mediated ecclesiologically. The Montanists offered extensive prophetic revelation that called for fidelity. The politicized churches of North America, be they conservative or progressive, align revelation with political fidelity. It is important that the eschatological communion of the Christ is neither conservative nor progressive, that it does not align with one's abortion stance or views on gendered sexuality. Revelation is what it is precisely because it does not come in ways that we can understand. It comes as a mystery, which is why it resists dogmatic content. It does not empower us to be right, but calls us to be welcoming. The absence of dogmatic content means that we have no basis to judge the Other. Rather, because each of us is responsible only to the Christ, our only proper

[79] Rom. 14:17

response to revelation is to welcome the one for whom Christ died. If we are caught up on this lacuna of content and judgment, we may console ourselves that if any judging needs to happen, it is the Christ who will do it. We can also be assured that usurping the Christ's role and position would presumably result in our own judgment.

In this way, revelation does not empower but it does bring with it a kind of certainty or confidence. We can be certain of the eschatological demand to welcome the Other and to love the Other without judgment. The productive result of revelation is the Church.

Are there constraints on who can be welcomed into and by the Church? The topic of church discipline is extensive, and I do not wish to attempt to summarize positions here. Allow me to suggest that the Eucharist plays a role at this point. The practice of the Eucharist is fundamentally a reminder of the Church's unity as the Body of Christ, such that those who participate in the Eucharist without recognizing the unity of that Body bring damnation on themselves. The practice of the Eucharist should be a practice in welcoming the Other and a reminder of the restriction on judgment. That said, Cavanaugh's work demonstrates extreme, outlier situations in which the integrity of the Eucharist requires those who are actively working against the unity of the Body of Christ, those who are rejecting reconciliation, to be excommunicated.[80] His point seems correct so long as we maintain the distinction between normal situations and outliers along with the ethical rather than dogmatic context.

Should oppressors be allowed into the same fellowship as their victims? Local churches must become agents of reconciliation. They must perfect the work of reconciliation so that they are able to guide their congregants through this eschatological work.

[80] Cavanaugh, *Torture*, 262-63.

Should unrepentant and practicing oppressors be allowed into the same fellowship as their victims? At some point, excommunication becomes its own means of grace on the journey of reconciliation. Here, too, we have the opportunity to receive God's revelation. Yet, all church discipline should be undertaken with fear and trembling and with heaviness of soul.

Paul says that without love any spiritual or epistemic act is just a distracting noise.[81] This is particularly true of revelation. Even the pretense that we know a person to be oppressing another has the potential to lead to boasting, which is a slippery slope to imperialism. Perhaps a member of our church is a politician who votes against abortion rights due to their beliefs in the sanctity of unborn life. Is that person oppressing women or protecting the most vulnerable from oppression? The answer is debatable. Certainly, there is great pressure on churches to take a stance one way or the other. Such a stance assumes a particular content of revelation that is not given. We could argue that to love the unborn we must do such-and-such or to love the women in our communities we must do such-and-such. We have two groups whose rights and freedoms have come into competition with one another. Does reconciliation require us to resort to calculative reason, weighing and measuring and negotiating a resolution that will side with one group against the other? Perhaps the path to reconciliation begins with recognizing precisely that no single dogmatic position is adequate to address each particular situation. Perhaps the role of the Church is to provide a space to prayerfully seek faithful solutions in particular contexts. I did not say that the Church is to provide faithful solutions, but only the space to prayerfully seek them. It is not the Church's role to determine history but to witness to the eschaton.

When I argued that the Church takes on the form of intercessory prayer, that image must become determinative for the Church. Our intercession for the pregnant woman and for the

[81] 1 Cor. 13:1-3.

unborn baby must take us out of ourselves and into the lives of those others. Barth offers a poetic articulation of what I am suggesting:

> Where the wind is short, and the light necessary to the life of man flickers and fades, and the ground is uncertain under his feet, it is finally because he tries to live otherwise than in self-giving; because he is not ready to be free for God and the brother and therefore himself; because he wants always to be free for himself.[82]

Revelation comes in our being for God, the Other, and, we must add, the Creation. If we were to make a decision regarding any particular ethical, political, or economic position, we would be seeking our own liberty. We would be reverting to a liberal economy. The footing of the Church would be lost, as it arguably has been lost in the contemporary North American context. The light necessary to life flickers and fades because our vision has dimmed so that all we can see is our allies and our enemies. Our neighbor becomes a competitor, and then, before long, our enemy. War and death have become our hermeneutical horizon. Who can love their enemy?

Intercessory prayer does not result in negotiations and calculation and law. It results in substitution. Emptying ourselves does not result in our rights and profit. It does not result in the certainty of dogmatic ethics. It results in our homelessness, long-suffering, and impoverishment. We have less to say particularly. We have less of a position to claim and to stand upon. And this is our salvation. Our neighbor does not have to be a threat or a limitation. We can find ourselves in our neighbor. Our neighbor can become the mode of God's revelation to us.

[82] Barth, *Dogmatics* IV.2, 832-33.

CONCLUSION

Corpus Verum

Throughout *Speech and Theology,* Smith returns to his concern that in revelation, God must show up in a way that "a finite perceiver or sensible perception can understand," and this without any violence done to the transcendent.[83] "How can there be a manifestation of the transcendent apart from any finite reception?" he asks. The logic of analogy, following the concrete path of incarnation, resolves the doctrine of revelation for Smith. That is to say, analogy resolves the problem of how language can speak of what is beyond language and how the transcendent can manifest in a way that finite creatures can understand the transcendent, and all of it without violence done to the transcendent. Of course, Smith notes, there will be dissimulation between raw, pure transcendence and the perception of transcendence. Thus, his embrace of analogy. Importantly, this analogical dissimulation is not the annulment of transcendence just as the Christ's incarnation was not the annulment of his divinity.

Smith's position contains an inherent christological problem that allows him to gloss over his concern of violence. In analogy, dissimulation is expected by definition. Christologically, however, the incarnation is *not* a mode of analogy precisely in that the divinity of the incarnate Son is in no way dissimilar to the divinity of the immanent Son.[84] To suggest otherwise would position one in a form of Arianism. In that case, not only have we stepped outside of orthodoxy,

[83] Smith, *Speech,* 126, 127.

[84] As I suggested previously, the particular content of revelation in the Christ, codified in the creeds and the scriptures, matters, but it matters precisely because it preserves mystery.

but it raises the question of whether, in Smith's case, he is still dealing with transcendence at all. Further, it is not clear that the logic of analogy, that he conflates with incarnation, addresses the problem of violence. The requirement of dissimulation means that something of transcendence is truncated, which sounds quite a lot like "reducing the phenomenon to the measure of the concept."[85] The incarnation is voluntary, but it is accomplished without dissimulation. Analogy is not the same, and it does not resolve the problem of the truncation of transcendence.[86] The reason that analogy does not provide the resolution that Smith seeks is because the position of the perceiver remains unchanged in Smith's project. Christologically, the incarnation effects displacement of the subject, but not for Smith's a-christological incarnation.

It seems to me that Smith's primary question is not about transcendence but about experience. How can the perceiver *experience* transcendence? What are the conditions necessary for the perceiver to receive revelation? Is this not the Kantian question of transcendentals? Ultimately, Smith's question is about the possibility of the *experience* of revelation. The logic of analogy and the logic of incarnation in Smith's work are meant to address the problem of violence. Once the problem of violence is set aside, then the way is cleared for the perceiver to experience revelation. If we were to ask what is revealed in Smith's revelation, would the answer not be, 'the perceiver'? After all, he is unapologetic about his Husserlian commitment to experience as the basis of philosophy (as well as theology?).[87] It seems to me that Smith is

[85] Smith, *Speech*, 5.

[86] The whole issue of 'the concept' seems to be just another layer of the greater problem of the truncation of transcendence through finite experience or language. It seems to me that nothing is added when we introduce a resolution to 'the concept' in terms of a Heideggerian formal indication, which itself seems to be another way of talking about the sign and the icon. The problem of signification remains.

[87] After positing that "the very topic of philosophy is *experience*" (emphasis original), Smith states in the proximate footnote that "this book locates itself within the phenomenological tradition of Husserl, and operates on the basis of this assumption" (*Speech*, 4, fn. 8; 13).

unable to account for a revelation that might exceed the perceiver, that might call the perceiver to leave its homeland to venture into the land of promise, that might call the perceiver out of its atheism. There is no longer a mystery to the faith, because a mystery would exceed the capacity of the perceiver. Whatever is revealed in revelation confirms the Same.[88]

In this case, Smith's logic of analogy follows the liberal tradition of assuming revelation to be our privilege, perhaps even our right. Perhaps we have the right for God to appear in a way that we can receive God. The mediation of transcendence serves to establish the perceiver. But if this were the mode of Christian revelation, then might we not have expected Jesus to teach the doctrine of atonement rather than leaving us with such the mystery of his crucifixion and resurrection? Might we not have expected him to teach the precise nature of the Trinity, so as to eliminate the troubling ambiguity of that doctrine? Perhaps most importantly, should Jesus not have explained how or why a good, loving, and powerful God allows the innocent to suffer in such inscrutable ways? Alvin Plantinga's position of moral modesty would be unnecessary, would it not, under the logical conclusion of Smith's position?

Perhaps the difference goes back to Levinas's insistence that negation cannot be the mode of transcendence. Rather, transcendence must be excess. Smith's concern on behalf of the perceiver perhaps requires a mode of analogical negation, which results in unsustainable christological positions. In contrast, a transcendence of excess would preserve the mystery inherent to Christian doctrine and faith. Smith might object that a formal indication would also preserve mystery, but here we run into the problem that Smith's project has become disjointed.

[88] Alternatively, revelation might reveal the limitations of Husserl's phenomenology, limitations or boundaries that Husserl himself might already have recognized. Recall that Husserl specifically bracketed God as a phenomenon like other phenomenon. Smith had to argue against Husserl on this point. This situation leads us to ask, does the incarnation as a phenomenon, assuming such a thing is possible, contain within itself the structures of the 'things themselves'? I have already asked this question when I asked whether the incarnation is a phenomenon like any other phenomenon.

He is running separate projects to address separate problems without ever unifying his energies. There is no sustained effort to connect formal indication and analogy or incarnation in Smith's project.

Beyond Smith, when we examine the incarnation further, what is revealed in the incarnation is not precisely content. What is revealed in the incarnation is the excess of mystery. In the person of Jesus, we find the perfection or fullness of the human being united with the perfection or fullness of God. We have the history and event of the human being united with the history and event of God. We have the freedom of the human being who is given fully to God and the freedom of God who becomes what is not-God and goes where God cannot go. As a substance, process, or something else, Jesus is 100% God and 100% human. Stating it that way as a doctrine, or as content, does not eliminate the impossibility or the paradox of the revelation. Instead, we preserve the impossible paradox of revelation. We have not turned the revelation of the incarnation into content that can be received or understood. It remains excessive. What is more, all attempts to eliminate the excessive mystery of the incarnation within Christian thought have resulted in unsustainable heresies.

Arguably, what is revealed in the incarnation and then confirmed by the resurrection in the face of the crucifixion is that those who do the will of God are known by God. In fact, we find some of the most straightforward, propositional assertions in Jesus' ethical statements. We are not to judge. Put propositionally, it is sinful to judge others. He stated clearly that those who love him will keep his commandments. What did he command? To love your enemy. To do good to those who are violent to you. Be united. Sacrifice of yourself for others. Those who do these things are known by God. So many of his other teachings about the kingdom of God or the nature of God or of what we now call salvation were in parables and metaphors.

It seems to me that what Smith wants out of revelation is a way to justify true belief. It seems to me that he wants God to appear in ways that empower theologians. After all, his project has to do with the very possibility of theology (and philosophy). He wants to know how Levinas thinks we can have revelation if God does not appear in God's revelation. Levinas might simply remind Smith that none of us can see God and live. What we get in revelation is a trace of the God who has already passed by. Levinas might reply by reminding Smith that Levinas's project in *Totality and Infinity* is to found a new metaphysics, one in which ethics is first philosophy. Arguably, Plato had already established that metaphysics when he placed the Good beyond being. What separates Levinas from a mere retrieval of Plato is Levinas's replacement of a Plato's cosmic hierarchy with the asymmetrical Other.

With a new metaphysics comes a new truth, at least, so long as we understand truth to be a function of the relation of ethics (or being) to knowledge. When ethics stands as first philosophy, then being itself and knowledge of being takes on an ethical quality. Ethics, for Levinas, plays out most often in either the infinite ethical demand that comes to us mystically through the face of the Other, or it comes from discourse, in which the Other questions and critiques what I think I know about the Other. In other words, truth, for Levinas, is "a modality of the relation between the same and the Other."[89] We find an epistemology not entirely unlike Augustinian illumination. In this case, knowledge is illumined by the ethical demand of the Other. In this way, the Truth is shown to be a Way and a Life. The Truth is the way in which our life conforms to the Good through its service to the Other.

There is knowledge that empowers and offers certainty by building foundations. Upon these foundations we might construct a great edifice of knowledge, one capable of reaching the

[89] Levinas, *Totality*, 64.

heavens themselves. Through the careful definition of words and the clarification of grammar, through sufficient verification and thoroughgoing justification, through stringent exegesis of the scriptures, through verbose out-narration of the secularists, through all of these disciplined efforts our epistemological tower will rise. This knowledge, if achieved, would provide the security necessary for us to preserve ourselves in being, in the present. Through the present, we will construct our preferred future and secure that as well.

The revelation that we receive through the Church is not that kind of knowledge. It is not a revelation that empowers, provides certainty, or establishes foundations. This kind of knowledge is the temptation that would fragment the communion. There was a reason that the Tree of Knowledge was forbidden.

More primitive than being and the need to persevere in being, there is an ethical demand, a call of holiness. That call of holiness establishes its own truth. Through this call, the truth of God, the truth of humanity, and the truth of creation is revealed to us. It is God who makes this truth known as it is the Holy Spirit's own call. This is the call of the Spirit that builds up the Church. The truth of this call is the truth of our eschatological communion with God, others, and all of creation. More than that is revealed in this call. The call of holiness reveals the untruth, the lie, of power and security. There is never so much power that one is secured against all threats and all danger. The call of holiness reveals the untruth of certainty. There are never such unshakable foundations and such indubitable brute facts that our tower to the heavens will not crumble. The pursuit of a lie brings only more and more corruption.

The call of holiness is not a call to holiness. A call to holiness would be a call to the present and to present productivity and progress. It would presume that with enough discipline and good choices, we might gain some level of moral accomplishment. This accomplishment

would place us over others, which would beget boasting and judgment. It would attempt to build the eschatological communion on foundations in the present. There is no path to the future that holiness would call us to walk, not even a narrow one. The call of holiness is a call from the future. It is a call of promise, but not of reward. It does not covenant with us that if we accomplish certain moral benchmarks in a particular timeframe, such as before death, that we will attain the reward. Instead, the call of holiness makes possible a proleptic communion, which witnesses in its reconciling, self-giving love to one another of the eschatological truth. The Good is not subject to verification or justification. It is itself the source of justification. The call of holiness displaces epistemology with ethics. Only in mercy and compassion can the scriptures be exegeted and can God be known.

Here we arrive at the crux of the matter. Let us pause for a moment to inquire into the hope often put forward by the faithful. On what is the Church built? What are its foundations? Is the Church founded on right exegesis of the scriptures? Is it founded on the sacraments of baptism and eucharist? Is this foundation discovered through praise and worship of God? I suggest that each of these answers take the form of variables. They are placeholders that require a prior context of meaning. Charles Taylor's social imaginaries teach us this much. His imaginaries are pre-theoretical, they generate meaning, and they are competitive with other imaginaries. 'Pre-theoretical' means that without careful analysis and examination, they are invisible. Consequently, human culture is dependent on these invisible things that produce meaning, and these invisible things are in competition with other invisible things to provide meaning. What meaning we discover through the prayerful exegesis of scripture, in the practice of the sacraments, and through praise and worship is always already conditioned by the dominant social imaginaries or metaphysical models in our current context. Primarily we are dealing with

either ontological hierarchies (e.g., patriarchy or the magisterium) or liberal economies (e.g., the priesthood of all believers or capitalism). These models are then duplicated in our exegesis, sacraments, and worship as they give meaning to those endeavors. For this reason, our North American churches cannot escape capitalism no matter how we articulate the mysteries of the sacraments and so forth. When Barth said that we find answers in the scriptures to the questions that we bring to the scriptures, I argue that this is why.[90] The scriptures, sacraments, and even worship itself are second order activities that derive meaning from prior, pre-theoretical commitments.

Perhaps this variable structure of meaning is an example of what Michel Henry intends when he says that "a language is not simply a means of communication separate from whatever it aims to communicate . . . [but rather] language is the vehicle of the practical and cognitive schemas that define a culture."[91] We are returning to the origin of this project and Smith's question about the very possibility of theology itself: *Comment ne pas parler?* For the type of reason that Henry provides, theology has no native language. If it had a native language, that language would have to transcend human culture.[92] Hence, when we speak theologically, we find

[90] Karl Barth, "The Strange New World Within the Bible," *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, Douglas Horton, trans. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1928): 32.

[91] Michel Henry, *I am the Truth: Toward a Philosophy of Christianity*, Susan Emanuel, trans. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003): 2.

[92] Theodore Jennings once made this statement in a class. I cannot even remember what the topic of the class was, but the statement has stuck with me. Jennings addressed the issue of language tangentially but in a way that gets at the foreignness of theological language in the first chapter of *Transforming Atonement*. He claims that part of the challenge of cross language is that the language is all worn out. The great expositors of the cross, such as Anselm or Athanasius or Aulén, each "borrowed from contexts that are themselves no longer intelligible to us" (Jennings, *Transforming Atonement*, 3. Behind Jennings's insights is Wittgenstein's recognition that language obtains its meaning and significance from particular contexts. As those contexts change, so too does the meaning conveyed in language. Karl Barth states that theology is the "language bound to the *theos*" (*Evangelical Theology*, 16). That is the true meaning of theological language, but it cannot speak from that strange and alien context. The fact that theological language impossibly attempts to convey a transcendent meaning within the bounds of historical and finite and transitory contexts is why theology speaks in tongues. Smith's attempt to address the impossibility of

ourselves speaking in tongues, with all of the necessity of interpretation that speaking in tongues entails. The interpretive requirement is necessary because interpretation can help to make visible the cultural schemas of the non-native language of theology. The alternative would be a Feuerbachian anthropotheology, whose native language is precisely the schemas of culture.

On one level, language, thought, and revelation are bound up with the materially and economically contextualized system of signs. The operation of thought within these systems of signs – whether local, regional, or global – becomes an important source of signification. This is Levinas's reading of Merleau-Ponty's position.[93] Arguably, this is close to the view of Pierre Bourdieu as well. We have greatly exceeded Smith's Augustinian view of signs as formal expressions because signs are contextual. Merleau-Ponty's signs have gotten dirty with the muck and the grit of materiality and economics. There is certainly a level of incarnation here that we did not see in Smith's account. Linguistic bodies that have odor and texture. We find similar levels of sensitivity to economic and socio-political contexts at work in many of the important theologies and some of the philosophies of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. We find this sensitivity in James Cone and Gustavo Gutierrez and Elsa Tamez and Judith Butler and Pierre Bourdieu. Signification emerges out of the socio-economic networks of local communities. This view is precisely that of the liberal economic model. As such, it is still short of the view of signification and language that we seek.

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theology by reconstructing the concept does not seem to recognize the contextual essence of meaning. In a very real sense, of course Smith is right. All we can ever do is stand in our contexts and point to God. But surely something else is going on within theology than just pointing from our side of things (from the human side of things). Surely, as Theodore Runyon stated, any knowledge that is theological must be transformative of the knower (*New Creation*, 78). This is not virtue epistemology so much as it is eschatological epistemology.

[93] See Levinas, *Totality*, 205-6.

Theologically, Peter Beer notes the way certain evidences or data appear to be construed in such a way so as to already suggest a predetermined meaning or intelligibility. His creative reading of Alfred Hitchcock's *Dial M for Murder* provides plausible examples of human agency creating such construals of evidence.[94] It is not difficult to extrapolate to ways in which the human agent reads natural or sociological 'evidence' or 'data' to arrive at almost 'predetermined' understandings. In many respects, Beer's insights align well with my narrative of metaphysical models, which function to 'arrange the evidence,' so to speak. For Beer, when we cease bringing questions to the evidence, closing off further inquiry, we close off the future. We kill the subject of understanding because it is no longer able to speak to us. Levinas has made this point as well. Only the dead, he says, are confined to history. The living continue to speak.[95] What we are arriving at is the claim that 'truth' is a living, which is to say, eschatological discourse.[96]

Herein Levinas's earliest question arises: Is there an escape? Are we trapped in these socio-economic networks of signification? If so, then does all of signification amount to the demagoguery of democratic politics? This phantasmagorical possibility is the terror that haunts modern society. Levinas has set out to address this challenge, and so he must move past Merleau-Ponty's level of signification, which itself has already moved past Smith's.

For networked modes of signification, we struggle against the economic and political significations imposed upon groups of people within local, regional, national, and global

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[94] Peter Beer, *An Introduction to Bernard Lonergan* (Victoria: Sid Harta Publishers, 2020): 17ff.

[95] "The historical is not defined by the past; both the historical and the past are defined as themes of which one can speak. They are thematized precisely because they no longer speak" (Levinas, *Totality*, 65).

[96] The truth is a discourse of "persistent questioning" (Beer, *Longergan*, 17).

contexts. Signification is an outcome of ongoing negotiation. Negotiation is always a mode of power. The "things in themselves" become pons of power. Perception remains reality.

Levinas's solution is to offer a new mode in which it is no longer "the sign that forms signification, but signification that makes the sign function possible."[97] If this is true, then we can address Smith's own concern about ontological and conceptual violence at this point, "for significations do not present themselves to theory."[98] So, how does signification escape theory and how does it make the sign function possible? Levinas says:

> *The being of signification consists in putting into question an ethical relation constitutive of freedom itself.* Meaning is the face of the Other, and all recourse to words takes place already within the primordial face-to-face of language.[99]

As Levinas has declared throughout his text, the infinite ethical responsibility contests my freedom to establish meaning phenomenologically or transcendentally through my own comprehension of the Other – the Other's 'showing up in a way that I can receive them.' Liberty, the basis of the transcendental ego, is displaced with ethical responsibility. It is no longer through spontaneous freedom that I lay claim to my world, my rights, or my property. Instead, I discover meaning – significance – through the obligation that puts my own spontaneity or liberty into question. Meaning arises not from comprehension but from the goodness mediated by the face-to-face, which puts the economy as well as the hierarchy of meaning into question. Signification requires the real presence of the Other. It requires a *corpus verum*, a true body.[100]

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[97] Levinas, *Totality*, 206.

[98] *Ibid.*

[99] *Ibid*. Emphasis original.

[100] It is beyond the scope of this project to address the theological deployment of the *corpus verum* and *corpus mysticum* as applied to either the Church or the Eucharist. For more, see Cavanaugh, *Torture*, 207-221.

In a Levinasian context, what makes a *corpus verum* is its excess of signification beyond my own signifying of that body. The *corpus verum* renders my consciousness "needy and hungry for the being it lacks," due to the overflowing and excess of the body's phenomenological intuition.[101] The Same can no longer source meaning within its own structures of consciousness, its own intentions. Does this phenomenological inability render philosophy and theology impossible? It does so if we continue to work within an economic model, because this inability leaves philosophy and theology utterly impoverished and disenfranchised. The Same no longer has the capacity to negotiate meaning. If the Same no longer participates in the negotiation of meaning, then we may no longer understand revelation against the backdrop of an individual (economic) or the backdrop of an ontological order (hierarchy).

At this point we should recall that in Judaism, God's name is not to be pronounced. Stephen Webb argues that "the tetragrammaton protects Judaism from ever claiming to be able to know or represent the divine. Instead, God is known through . . . the ethical sphere."[102] No images are to be formed of this God. We could certainly understand such prohibitions from the perspective of idolatry, but we can also understand these prohibitions from the perspective of revelation. One implication that we could draw from such prohibitions is that revelation is not static. Revelation does not occur in the form of unchanging Greek perfection. If revelation were static and unchanging then it could be given to epistemology. But revelation is not given. Here is my argument, the response to my thesis, that a Christianity captured by a metaphysical model might hopefully find liberation in a new model. Revelation is not given. It gives. Revelation

[101] Levinas, *Totality*, 207. Note that this reading of Levinas would locate the *corpus verum* in the Other.

[102] Stephen H. Webb, "The Rhetoric of Ethics as Excess: A Christian Theological Response to Emmanuel Levinas," *Modern Theology*, 15, no. 1 (January 1999): 2.

gives the Church, and, as such, knowledge comes by grace through faithfulness every bit as much as does salvation. The knowledge that comes by grace is the knowledge of the eschatological communion of the Christ. From this future of God's kingdom, the Holy Spirit calls the Church to and through faithful witness and testimony.

The historical communion that is our dysfunctional, empirical churches testifies to and is a witness to the coming eschatological communion. In that testimony and witness and through the eschatological call of holiness we corporately receive God's ongoing revelation. It does not come in a way that any individual could receive it, but rather through the communion. However, when we talk of revelation, does that imply some mode of content? If so, what is the content of revelation?

Revelation necessarily includes some level of content, even when we want to emphasize the *how* over the *what* of revelation. Herein is the challenge of the icon – that its indicative image would itself come to function idolatrously and that God's name would be pronounced. This is no less a challenge of painted or sculpted images than it is of the Bible as an icon, proudly proclaiming God's will for the world. If this is the challenge of the icon, then it is the challenge of Smith's 'concept' as well precisely because his 'concept' follows the mode of the icon. The icon invites the Same to gaze beyond, but the Same remains the moral, epistemological, and theological agent. The icon functionally invites, but the icon has no agency with which to engage the Same. But is that the case with revelation? Does revelation lack agency? When we focus on the *how* (iconic, formal indication) or the *what* (content) of revelation, we are not yet aware of the disruptive and transformative potential of revelation to call the Same out beyond itself – to challenge the Same and to put the Same into question.

Levinas says that "language conditions thought—not language in its physical materiality, but language as an attitude of the Same with regard to the Other irreducible to the representation of the Other."[103] Where does the attitude of the Same with regard to the Other originate? How is this attitude irreducible to the [Same's] representation of the Other? And how does this become the language that conditions thought? For Levinas, the answers to these questions revolve around his concept of 'discourse.' Discourse is the mode in which the Other challenges the Same's representation of the Other, puts the Same's concepts and theories into question, and calls the Same to goodness. My argument is that this discursive structure of language is what we find theologically in revelation. Revelation, not static, is a living word – a discourse.[104] In this way, revelation gives. In this way, the discursive mode of revelation is a corollary of intercessory prayer. What allows language for Levinas, or revelation in the present argument, to be a living and discursive word is the presence of the Other in discourse. This is not the ontological presence that concerns Smith and Derrida – an impossible presence. This is the ethical presence of relationship.

Do we find hope here? That is my prayer.

[103] Levinas, *Totality*, 204.

[104] Of course, it is the case that revelation can be a dead word, transformed into the signification of the Same. It is the case that we can say No to the infinite ethical demand that comes to us through the Other. All it takes is murder. If that is true when confronted materially with the vulnerable face of the Other, it will certainly be true when confronted spiritually by the Divine. All it takes is the murder of God. Theocide is depressingly easy.

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