

PHILOSOPHY AND TRINITY

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I will argue that 'Continental Philosophy' is an Anglo-American invention. It is 'Pseudo-Continentalism,' no more than a highly selective rendering of Western European Philosophy. Borne out of opposition to the dominance of analytical philosophy in our universities, Pseudo-Continentalism in fact converges with analysis in remarkable ways. Both are advertised as revolutions in thought and both stand over against the tradition of speculative philosophy; both repeat each other's historical shibboleths about traditional speculative philosophy in respect of the completeness of reason and of reality, the priority of identity and totality, the predetermined fixity of teleology. What this amounts to is a common rejection of a chimera, which in Pseudo-Continental Philosophy is usually called onto-theology or the metaphysics of presence and in the analytic tradition is sometimes called speculative philosophy. Here, indeed, the analytic tradition is more radical: as I will show, it characteristically rejects any notion of a special kind of activity of actualisation as a feature of the real, whether this is understood as Being, mind, will, the élan vital, Difference, or the impotential. These are the vestiges of the tradition of speculative philosophy that are retained under the rubric of Continental Philosophy.

Introduction

What cannot be left out of any consideration of Schelling, in particular the later Schelling of the *Philosophy of Mythology* and the *Philosophy of Revelation*, is to be found in a most unlikely, even shocking place: the conception of triunity or trinity as the fundamental structure and principle of the actualisation of all things.

In this context, I will argue that 'Continental Philosophy' is an Anglo-American invention. It is 'Pseudo-Continentalism,' no more than a highly selective rendering of Western European Philosophy.

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phy; both repeat each other's historical shibboleths about traditional speculative philosophy in respect of the completeness of reason and of reality, the priority of identity and totality, the predetermined fixity of teleology. What this amounts to is a common rejection of a chimera, which in Pseudo-Continental Philosophy is usually called onto-theology or the metaphysics of presence and in the analytic tradition is sometimes called speculative philosophy. Here, indeed, the analytic tradition is more radical: as I will show, it characteristically rejects any notion of a special kind of activity of actualisation as a feature of the real, whether this is understood as Being, mind, will, the *élan vital*, Difference, or the impotential. These are the vestiges of the tradition of speculative philosophy that are retained under the rubric of Continental Philosophy.

To see what is happening here, I will concentrate on a key feature of Pseudo-Continental philosophy: its suppression of fundamental themes in the Western tradition of speculative philosophy. Nowhere is this more evident than in its obliteration of any explicit or critical recognition of the centrality of the philosophical doctrine of triunity or trinity in European Philosophy.

I will explain this claim in ten brief, if bizarre, theses. I shall assume the hypothesis of reality, namely, that reality is that which has a nature of its own in the sense that it is so independently of our minds or independently of whether or not we think it to be so. I shall also, and crucially, assume the hypothesis of the reality of universals. Nevertheless, some defense of both hypotheses will be advanced in what follows, which essentially addresses the questions: Why can students of continental philosophy not afford to ignore the conception of trinity? Or, to put it another way: what is the relation of the real and the constructed? I will approach these questions by way of a contrast between what I shall call 'naturalist' and 'speculative' philosophy, terms that I will attempt to define as we proceed.

A. Naturalist and Speculative Philosophy: Some Contrasts

1. My first thesis concerns the conception of 'actualisation.' It addresses the nature of existence, an issue that lies at the heart of philosophy and of our culture as a whole. My first thesis is that there are two basic theories of existence: the weak and the strong, the deflationary and the dynamical, the naturalist and the speculative.

In general, weak theorists follow Hume in treating existence as a given which is not further derivable or inexplicable. Thus, Kant maintains that '-exists' is not a real but a non-determining predicate: affirmations of existence do not add any determinate feature or content to the concept of an object, but posit an object corresponding to a concept.

Frege's elaboration of the Hume-Kant view of existence in terms of the binary structure of the function dominates analytical philosophy.¹ Thus, statements of the type 'horses exist' are interpreted as quantificational statements to the effect that 'for some x, x is a horse'. On this view, existence amounts to no more than the satisfaction or instantiation of a predicate, such as '... is a horse'. To exist is to answer a description. Whether one is talking about prime numbers, stones or people, existence statements are defined in the same way, as saying that something satisfies a description. The weak theory of existence as instantiation is thus not properly a theory of existence at all. Existence is simply removed from the realm of reflection and replaced by an account of the logical structure of language.²

By contrast, strong or speculative theories of existence hold that existence is much more than the silent, featureless pendant of logical-functional structure. Strong theories deny the primitivity of the function, at least as that is usually understood, and thus refuse to assimilate the 'is' of existence to the 'is' of mere instantiation. For strong theories take '-exists' to be a very general kind of predicate. It is not a real or determining predicate, for it does not add any determinate feature or content to the concept of an object. Rather, '-exists' is a non-determining predicate in the sense that it is taken to designate that activity which is the reason why things have any determining predicates at all. Existence is here understood as 'active' existence or 'actualisation.' This is why strong theories talk of 'being'. Being can refer to a determinate or ontic entity of

¹ For a geopolitical account of the rise to dominance of analytical philosophy in the Anglo-American world, placing it in the context of the Cold War, see Mirowski, Philip. 'The scientific dimensions of social knowledge and their distant echoes in 20th-century American philosophy of science', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, 35 (2004): 283-326, especially 298-311.

² I should stress that by no means all analytical philosophers or Fregeans are weak theorists. There is an analytic-speculative tradition that springs from McTaggart. See Note 8 below.

any kind (*to on, ens*). In its significant ontological usage, however, being is a gerund or verbal noun, which, like *sein* or *l'être*, translates the Greek *einai* and the Latin *esse* (to be) or *actus essendi* (act of being). These terms refer to that activity of actualisation which is held to be a constitutive condition of all things in that it provides the fundamental explanation of what makes things to be and makes them intelligible, i.e., bearers of predicates. Because active existence is the condition of predication, it is not naturalistically accessible or describable, in any usual sense of those terms. Its rationale and role in speculative, and specifically triune, philosophy will be elaborated in what follows.

2. My second thesis concerns what happens to the subject of cognition as a result of the generalization of the function. Whereas Kant held that the unity of judgment requires a cognitive activity of synthesis, after Bolzano and Frege it is held that the principle of the unity of judgments is meaning. You may object that in order to grasp relations of meaning, the cognitive subject needs to engage in an activity of synthesis. But the logical analyst readily grants that, and at the same time makes a rigorous distinction between the act and the content of judgements.³ Subjective cognitive activity there is. Indeed, a cognitive act is required to grasp even analytic propositions such as 'All bachelors are unmarried' (which is of course Kant's real point). But the *content* of these as well as of synthetic propositions has nothing to do with cognitive activity: it is decided by the given relations of meaning. No subjective activity of synthesis is required to unify meanings; all the subject has to do is to follow their given relations. Once it is held that to understand a meaning is to be able to operate with it, and that a meaning itself constitutes a rule in the sense of a decision-making procedure, there is no need to appeal to a principle of connection or synthesis over and above the meaning itself. Kant is here hoisted with his own petard: having restricted activity to the cognitive subject, in contrast to traditional metaphysics, it now emerges that the activity of the cognitive subject is strictly a psychological feature of minds and has nothing to do with the objective order of meanings.

³ Coffa, J.A. *The Semantic Tradition from Kant to Carnap* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), Chapter One.

The crucial point here is that rules are understood or interpreted as decision-making procedures, as automatic recipes or algorithms. Nowhere is this more evident than in the later Wittgenstein's enormously influential extension of the model of the function—specifically, the first-order function—beyond cognition to all forms of linguistic and social practice and action. Just as following the rules of a game is what constitutes a game, so by following the rules of a language or social practice we constitute our world and ourselves. The Fregean dissolution of the cognitive, synthesizing subject is here extended to the realm of discourse and action, and goes hand-in-hand with the dissolution of the logical subject as a mind-, language-, or practice-independent reality. In a remarkable convergence with 'Continental' structuralism and post-structuralism, both the world and human subjects or persons are thus nothing more than the effects of those functional structures that define their behavior. On this account, the possibility of any reflective relation to rules on the part of the cognitive subject is eliminated. Further, a radically nominalist account of rule-following is upheld: rules are simply a matter of "that's how we do it".⁴ As is well known, this has generated the enormous debate that swirls about rule-skepticism, something that is an issue only for nominalists.

By contrast, modern speculative philosophy maintains self-synthesis to be a real and universal feature of things,⁵ with the corollary that all things stand in a communicative relation to one another by way of their antecedent conditions and subsequent relations. In medieval speculative thought, the act of existence of a thing was not its principle of synthesis. Universals had that task. Since the German Idealists, however, speculative philosophy has maintained the activity of actualisation that is the real to be an activity of synthetic self-construction or self-organisation. Some of the implications of this

⁴ Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1978), 199.

⁵ For a constructivist ontology of the function, see Whitehead, A.N. *Process and Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929); on which my article is based: 'The Speculative Generalization of the Function: A Key to Whitehead', *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie*, vol. 64 (2002): 253-271. Reprinted in the online journal *Inflexions*, No. 2 (2009) www.inflexions.org

general shift in the meaning of the act of existence will emerge in my next two theses.

3. My third thesis concerns the massive influence of the algorithmic account of rules on our view of the nature of history. I refer to the early Thomas Kuhn's influential analysis of historical change in science, where 'paradigm shifts' from 'normal' to 'revolutionary' science are not rational or intelligible.⁶ The reason for this is that Kuhn defines 'normal science' in terms of functions or algorithms, and there is no algorithm for historical change. The algorithmic model of rules here imposes a specific historiography. In the context of naturalism, a larger point can be made: the naturalist must treat history as nothing other than contingency, and as having only anthropological significance. History may be a feature of reality, but it is no more than an intersubjective feature.

Over against such views, speculative philosophy characteristically upholds what R.J. Campbell calls the ontological theory of truth.⁷ On this theory, the standard linguistic view of truth is inadequate: truth is not primarily to be understood as an epistemic relation of correspondence between propositions or linguistic structures and states of affairs, which relation is subject to the disjunction 'true or false'. The ontological theory of the nature of truth—in which the term 'Truth' is often capitalised to mark the difference from linguistic accounts—is fundamental to metaphysics from Plato to Peirce and Heidegger. On the ontological theory, truth is a state or relation of the real. Whether articulated in a Platonic, scholastic, idealist or pragmatist framework, the real is understood to be an activity of disclosure or manifestation. The criteria of disclosure are coherence and comprehensiveness, and there is no absolute disjunction between the true and the false.

The central point here is that, after the rise of Christianity, the activity of disclosure or manifestation is held to occur in history and to be intrinsically a matter of the movement of history. This is, indeed, the

⁶ Kuhn, Thomas S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970).

⁷ Campbell, R.J. *Truth and Historicity* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1992), 56. This is an indispensable work.

distinctive feature of the Judaeo-Christian view of truth. Both on the Greek and the Judaeo-Christian view, truth is what endures and does not pass. Further, on both views the unity of truth guarantees the unity of experience. However, truth as Greek *aletheia* does not happen. Even though it is always connected to the relation of the speaker to the addressee, as in the Socratic dialogue form, truth is not something personal and is not an event. As Socrates always insists, he is a mere midwife, an impersonal conduit for that which is thoroughly impersonal, namely, that truth which is much more than an event because it is always identical with itself and is the reality that is hidden behind appearances, a reality that can be disclosed only by rational thought. In contrast, a key feature of the Judaeo-Christian view of truth is that truth is not a timeless state of affairs. It must occur, and it must be unfolded and realised again and again in new situations that shed fresh light on it. It is as such intrinsically connected to actions in time, as in Heidegger's conception of truth as *aletheia*. In consequence, truth is not a reality that lies behind appearances, but is something that emerges in history and is nothing other than its coming-to-be in the movement of history. On this account, because the real is to be found nowhere except in the movement of history, in the contingent materiality of socio-economic, institutional and cultural circumstances, the movement of history is itself the unfolding and construction of the real. As the movement of history itself, with all its potentialities, the real is more than any of its specific historical manifestations or formations. But the real is at least what the constructive movement of history has shown it to be, and it is nothing less than that.

B. Speculative Philosophy and Its Defence

4. My fourth thesis deals with that I believe to be the historical and conceptual core of speculative philosophy, namely, that speculative philosophy and its history, in particular, its concern with actualisation, are unintelligible without reference to the hypothesis or postulate of the principle of reason and its implications. This is the principle that 'Nothing is with-

out a reason', or 'Everything that is the case must have a reason why it is the case'.⁸

Positively, the principle of reason invites unrestricted commitment to the search for explanation. No appeal is made here to an *a priori* rule.⁹ We have only the experimental or hypothetical application of the principle of reason to the fact that we live in a puzzling world.¹⁰ And when unrestrictedly applied, the principle of reason requires that we go beyond even the most basic laws and operations of logic, mathematics and physics, for these do not account, nor do they attempt to account, for why there are laws or operations at all. This is why, under the rubric of the principle of reason, a speculative theory of reality is necessarily a theory of the actualisation of the real, a theory of the activity of actualisation; that is, it attempts to provide an explanation of why, among other

⁸ For this latter formulation, see Pruss, Alexander R. *The Principle of Sufficient Reason: A Reassessment*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 3. I use the term 'principle of reason', and not 'sufficient reason', in order to disassociate the concept from the usual necessitarian interpretations, both of it and of Leibniz. In my view, the principle of reason is tacitly at work in a recent and unusual analytic-speculative defense of strong theory; see Vallicella, William. *A Paradigm Theory of Existence: Onto-Theology Vindicated*. (Boston: Kluwer, 2002). Most analytic-speculative defenses of strong theory concentrate on the logical analysis of the 'is' of existence: see Geach, Peter. "Form and Existence," in *God and the Soul*. (London: Routledge, 1969), 42-64 (replied to by Williams, C.J.F. *What Is Existence?*. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1981), and by Dummett, Michael. 'Existence', in *The Seas of Language*, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1993), 277-307; also, Miller, Barry. *The Fullness of Being: A New Paradigm for Existence*. (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002).

⁹ The principle of reason is not an analytic, necessary or innate truth, so it is an experientially defeasible rule that is open or gives no knowledge in advance as to what will satisfy it. The present paper will provide grounds for rejecting any notion that we should knowingly hoodwink ourselves by treating the principle as a pseudo-Kantian *als ob*.

¹⁰ This is the principle of reason as Wiggins' 'methodological rule', which he thinks removes its speculative-philosophical implications, a view which will be challenged in this paper. See Wiggins, David. "Sufficient Reason: a principle in diverse guises both ancient and modern." *Acta Philosophica Fennica* 61 (1996): 117-32.

things, there is order or ordination at all. Moreover, when unrestrictedly applied, the principle of reason requires that such a theory provide an ultimate principle of explanation that is self-justifying or self-explanatory in respect of its activity of actualisation, for this alone avoids an infinite regress of explanations. Whatever is held to be the ultimate or self-explanatory principle of actualisation has to meet the stringent requirement that it must possess in its own nature, or provide out of its own nature, all the reasons needed to explain its existence or activity.¹¹

Of any self-explanatory principle, the question 'Why?' can of course always be asked. The self-explanatory is not the self-evident. Indeed, the question as to what constitutes an adequate self-explanatory theory of actualisation is hotly debated between the different speculative schools that seek the self-explanatory. In this speculative 'explanatorist' tradition (as I shall call it) from Plato onwards, the principle of reason is best understood as operating in the way that Peirce defines as 'abduction'. In his words: "The surprising fact *C* is observed/ But if *A* were true, *C* would be a matter of course/ Hence, there is reason to suppose that *A* is true" (*CP* 6.528). This is inference to the best possible explanation, usually by way of analogical generalisation.¹² The procedure is fallibilist: repeated application of abductive inference may lead to continued revision of the analogical hypothesis in the light of new discoveries and observations, as has always been the case with explanatorist theories of actualisation. On this account, the self-explanatory is neither the self-evident, nor is it based on any appeal to intuition (as, say, in Schelling). There is only the hypothetico-deductive method, in which a hypothetical model (in this case, to take one example, the unconditioned, infinite or inexhaustible unity of essence and

¹¹ See Walker, Ralph. "Sufficient Reason." *Proc. Arist. Soc.* 97 (1997): 109-23, on regress and the self-explanatory. This paper is a response to his cautious strictures on the latter.

¹² See Whitehead, A.N. *Process and Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929), Chapter One, 'Speculative Philosophy', Section II. For his critique of the school of language-analytical philosophy he helped to found, see his comments on Broad, C.D., 'Critical and Speculative Philosophy' (*Contemporary British Philosophy*, Ed. Muirhead, J.H. London: Allen & Unwin (1924) 75-100), in *Modes of Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), Chapter IX, 'The Aim of Philosophy'.

existence) is proposed by way of remotion or regress back up a series of conditions.¹³ The model is then tested by the deduction of consequences from the hypothesis, which is usually a matter of its analogical application in the form of ostensive description.

The standard objection to such a view of the principle of reason is of course that the explanatorist use of the principle of reason conflates reasons and causes. But that is to assume that causality is nothing more than physical efficient causality. It is to ignore that fact that 'cause' is an analogical concept, and thus to overlook the distinction between 'principle' or 'ground' and cause. The concept of cause is a specific variety of the genus 'principle' (*principium*; the Latin translation of the Greek *arche*, origin or beginning) or the genus 'ground' (*Grund*), for 'cause' implies a greater degree of dependence on the part of the effect than do the concepts of 'principle'¹⁴ or 'ground'. Further, the assumption of nominalism lies behind the reason/cause distinction here. However causality is defined, it is taken for granted that rules are secondary constructs of the mind, at least in the sense that their power is exhausted by any given instance of their embodiment in individuals. The concrete individual is unquestioningly held to be prior to the rule, so that there are no supra-individual realities with an efficacy of their own correlative to that of individual interactions. Individuals are absolute and are positivistically defined as primarily physical entities.

Secondly, there is the larger objection from contingency, the claim that there is no need for an ultimate principle of actualisation at all. For what is wrong with contingency as the ultimate principle? Why is contingency not enough?

From the Greeks onward, many speculative philosophers have made contingency an essential element in their theory of the self-

¹³ It will be clear from what has been said about abduction that I take remotion not to be reducible to reverse deduction or to conduction, though it may contain elements of both. See Peirce, C.S., "A Neglected Argument for the Existence of God." *Collected Papers*. Edited by Hartshorne, Charles, and Weiss, Paul. Cambridge: Harvard University Press (1932-35). 452-93, especially 458-65. Henceforth *CP*.

¹⁴ See Aquinas, Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, I i, Q. 33, Art. 1, ad 1; also, Collingwood, R.G. *An Essay on Metaphysics* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1940), 329.

explanatory nature of reality. Yet, it cannot be the only element, for the question 'Why not just contingency?' answers itself. The contingent is that which may and also may not be. So it is not self-explanatory: to be contingent is to be in relation to something to else, such as the laws of logic or physics. The contingent is always relative and so cannot *by itself* be a self-explanatory principle.

Perhaps what is really meant here is 'chance'? Yet, if that is the case, chance is something more than an event whose cause is unknown to us, and it is more than the concurrence of two independent causal chains. As definitions of chance, both these notions simply mean: 'an order whose operations cannot be predicted by us'—and so we are not talking of chance in any realist or ontologically significant sense.

The notion of 'chaos' cannot help either. In the first place, there can be no such thing as 'pure chaos'. Chaos is always relative chaos because, even if there is chaos of some kind, there must be determinate entities (*ens*) that have some sort of unity (*unum*)—that is, irreducibility—about them in order for them to be chaotically related, or related at all. And if there are distinct entities, not only must they stand to one another in relations of difference (*aliquid*), no matter how minimal, but they must also persist, or display certain characters, or behave in a specific way (*res*), no matter how fleeting. To be in chaos, that is, they must possess individual identities or internal order, no matter how simple. The notion of chaos also seems to depend upon that of sequence—a sequence of events—which again entails order of some kind. It hardly needs adding that so-called 'chaos theory' is not only thoroughly deterministic but assumes that order is a given, introduced, so to speak, in one dose in the 'initial conditions'.

What contingency and chance might mean in the context of a self-explanatory theory of actualisation will be considered later.¹⁵ I now turn to a third objection, which is based on the claim that the logic of the function renders redundant any theories of active existence, speculative or otherwise.

To the speculative appeal to activity the weak theorist has a ready reply: that the concept of a mathematical function is a concept of

¹⁵ This should help clear up what is properly meant by 'full' explanation. See Wiggins, David, *op. cit.*, pp. 118-20.

the intrinsic connectivity of relations in virtue of the very nature of a functional rule. Functional rules or modern predicates are intrinsically relational in that they connect an object to a property or class. In consequence, strong questions, such as 'What is the relation that holds between a particular and a universal?', 'What is the bond that unites a particular to its various properties?', or 'How do relations relate?', become redundant. To ask such questions is mistakenly to view the concept of a relation as the concept of an abstract object or third term over and above its relata, which is the way traditional logic treats the copula 'is'. Defined in terms of functional rules or modern predicates, however, relations are structurally incomplete, partial objects that cannot occur without relata to complete them. They are, as such, intrinsically connective. Once relations are defined as functional or incomplete objects, there is no need to invoke any other principle as a glue to hold together relations and relata, functions and values. That it is the very nature of a function to have values is expressed by its variables.¹⁶

This objection from relations, however, completely misses its target. Because the term 'relation', like other such words in English ('composition', 'construction', 'configuration'), is ambiguous as between the process of relating and the product that is the relation, there is nothing about the intrinsic connectivity which characterizes relationality that rules out of court the speculative concern with activity as the actualisation of relations. Moreover, the concept of the intrinsic connectivity of relations obviously does not decide between, for example, a logical-realist nor some kind of constructivist account of the nature of connectivity. So little of philosophical interest is decided by the given fact that there are relations or partial, incomplete, intrinsically connective objects. Speculative philosophy does not deny, nor need it deny, that relations relate. Nor (as will emerge) need speculative philosophy deny that there is something ultimate and irreducible about unity as connectivity. What the speculative philosopher asks in this context is another version of the strong question of existence: 'Why are there instantiations of relations or connectivity?', 'What are the conditions that make relations possible?' The speculative philosopher's interest is in the fact that there are rela-

¹⁶ See Dummett, Michael, *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, 2nd edition (London: Duckworth, 1981), 174-77.

tions, and whether or not any account can be given of them over and above the fact that they are partial, incomplete, intrinsically connective objects. In asking 'What makes relational order possible?', speculative philosophers are not overlooking the intrinsic connectivity of relations. Rather, they are inquiring into the possibility of a self-explanatory account of connectivity in terms of actualizing activity. Hence, the strong question speculative philosophy puts to relations remains open and is perfectly intelligible.

One final point. Explanatorist theories of existence have sometimes been accused of committing certain mistakes that some critics have read into the most general of the strong questions of existence. These are questions like 'Why is there anything at all?', or 'Why is there something rather than nothing?'. Such questions, it has been said, depend not just upon the debatable claim that absolute nothingness or vacuity is conceivable, but upon the false claim that absolute nothingness or vacuity in some sense prior to the fact that there is something, so the fact that there is something is held to need a special kind of explanation.¹⁷ Yet, speculative inquiry need not, and usually does not, deny the priority of the actual in respect of the possible, and as the starting point of all inquiry.¹⁸ Rather, speculative inquiry is an attempt to see just how far reflection can go in the analysis of the actual. When disentangled from any historical connection to a doctrine of creation that already provides the answer, the question 'Why not nothing at all?' merely articulates a way of looking at actuality so as to discover what actuality requires in

¹⁷ For the view that absolute nothingness is inconceivable, see Bergson, Henri, *Creative Evolution* (1907), trans. Mitchell A., London: Macmillan (1911) Chapter Four. For the view that absolute nothing is conceived by speculative philosophers to be prior to anything, see for example Nozick, Robert, *Philosophical Explanations*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (1981) Chapter Two. For an excellent critique of Nozick and Van Inwagen's sophisticated but largely irrelevant 'possible worlds' arguments against the explanatorist use of the principle of reason, see Witherall, Arthur, *The Problem of Existence*, (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2002), Chapter One.

¹⁸ The reason why the possible should be grounded in the actual resides in my view in the principle of reason, or the strong question of existence, as put to any kind of entity; compare Walker, Ralph, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-18.

order to satisfy the principle of reason. It is to the nature of such inquiries that I now turn.

5. My fifth thesis is essentially a point of clarification, namely, that a distinction has to be made among various speculative philosophies in relation to the principle of reason. On one side, there is what I shall call the speculative ‘explanatorists’, who are unrestrictedly committed to the principle of reason and the conception of a self-explanatory principle. On the other side, there are what I shall call the speculative ‘descriptivists’, figures such as Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Bergson, Whitehead and Deleuze. Understood as a position self-consciously opposed as much to explanatorism as to naturalism, speculative descriptivism is a relatively modern phenomenon that starts with Schopenhauer. Like explanatorism, descriptivism offers a variety of theories of the activity of actualisation, but it abandons the concern with the self-explanatory. This has the peculiar consequence that descriptivist accounts of the activity of actualisation are ambivalent: they can either be negative and tragic, as in the case of Schopenhauer, or positive and celebratory, as with Nietzsche’s will to power, Bergson’s *élan vital*, Whitehead’s creativity, or Deleuze’s *différence*. Such celebratory doctrines involve a tacit and unexplained appeal to some conception of the goodness of being or existence, a conception that (I will show) is not ignored by the explanatorists, from Plato to Peirce and Heidegger.

6. My sixth thesis is this: There are of course various types of principles of actualisation, explanatorist and descriptivist—monadic (Judaism, Islam, Nietzsche), dyadic (Empedocles, Democritus, Alexander), triadic (Neo-Platonism, Spinoza, Deleuze) and tetradic (Plato, Whitehead). Yet, there can be no question that the tradition which dominates the history of Western speculative thought is that which holds the principle of actualisation to be a triunity of three distinct, irreducible, inseparable and co-equal elements and maintains all entities to be in some sense composed of these three elements. This tradition stretches from Plato’s *syntrisi* or three-in-one,¹⁹ through the medieval period, to the idealism of Hegel and

¹⁹ Plato, *Philebus*, 64-65; on which, Gadamer, H.-G. *The Idea of the Good in the Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*. Trans. Smith, P. Christopher (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1986), 115-116.

Schelling. It is not so often noticed, however, that it has been a significant feature of modern speculative developments over the last one hundred and fifty years. I refer primarily to Peirce's triune ontology of firstness, secondness and thirdness (these terms are more or less translations of Schelling's description of the Trinity); to the later Heidegger's *das Ereignis* ('the Event'), with its triunity of *Es gibt* ('It gives'), *die Sendung* (Latin, *missio*; 'the sending'), and *die Gabe* (Latin, *donum*; 'the gift'; all these terms are the translations of the 'names' of the medieval persons); and to Collingwood's treatment of the Trinity in his *Essay on Metaphysics* (1940) as the fundamental 'absolute presupposition' of natural science and Western culture in general.²⁰

Two comments may help to dispel any puzzlement there may be at the persistence of the notion of triunity in modern philosophy.

First, because the triune theories mentioned are explanatorist, they are elaborated so as to address three basic questions. These are the questions of the nature of origin, difference and order. For, in the first place an explanatorist theory of the activity of actualisation requires a theory of the unitary origin of difference and order. That is, it requires an account of that activity, which is in some sense prior to difference and order because it is the condition of difference and order. In the second place, an explanatorist theory requires an account of the actualisation of difference or individuality, of the nature of differentiation. And in the third place, such a theory requires an account of the actualisation of order. The primacy attached to these issues is of course characteristic of the triune tradition itself. But they have a certain obviousness about them that helps to indicate the rationale of the general position.

²⁰ See Heidegger, Martin. *On Time and Being*. Trans Stambaugh, Joan (New York: Harper Books, 1972); and Collingwood, R.G. *An Essay on Metaphysics* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1940), especially Chapter XX1. On Heidegger, see the indispensable article by Harris, Peter. "Patterns of Triunity in *Time and Being*: Contexts for Interpreting the Later Heidegger." *Analecta Hermeneutica* 3 (2011). www.mun.ca/analecta, forthcoming. On Collingwood, see my "A Key to Collingwood's *Essay on Metaphysics*: the Logic of Creedal Rules," in (eds.), *Handbook on Collingwood*, edited by Kobayashi, C., Marion, M. and Skodo, A. Leiden: Brill, forthcoming (2012). Peirce will be further discussed below.

Secondly, there is a set of considerations connected with the development of mathematics and the rise of natural science. In the medieval period, the doctrine of the triune God, with its 'subsistent relations' or 'persons' (*persona* or active functions) of Father, Son, and Spirit, is expounded as a supernatural or revealed mystery of faith. This is not to deny that the triune God is employed to provide a self-explanatory account of the activity of actualisation. In Aquinas, for example, all things have their *esse*, or act of being, which is derived from the Father; their individual nature (species), which is given by the Son or Logos; and their relation to other things which is given by the Spirit, the principle or gift of love or community (*S.T.* 1i, Q. 45, art. 7, Resp.). Nevertheless, the concept of essentially relational being cuts across the Aristotelian view that finite substances exist independently and that relations are accidents. Hence, it is difficult in this context to develop a trinitarian account of all the features of the created world. By contrast, once mathematics and natural science had established the intrinsic relationality of the natural world, the relational model could unproblematically be transposed, under the rubric of triunity, not only to the analysis of the constitution of the finite subject (as with Kant's plethora of triunities²¹), but also to the whole of reality, defined as an Absolute Subject with three essential modes or operations (Hegel and Schelling).²² In a relational world, there is no longer anything exceptional or puzzling about a relational principle,

²¹ Hegel says of Kant: "the conception of the Trinity has, through the influence of the Kantian philosophy, been brought into notice again in an outward [read: purely formal] way as a type, and, as it were, a ground plan of thought, and this in very definite forms of thought." Hegel, G.W.F. *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. Trans Speirs, E.B. & Sanderson, J.B. (New York: Humanities Press, 1974) 3, 32-33.

²² As Collingwood puts it: "The doctrine of the Trinity, taught as a revelation by early Christianity ... becomes in Kant and his successors a demonstrable and almost alarmingly fertile logical principle." Collingwood, R.G. "Reason Is Faith Cultivating Itself" (1927), in *Faith and Reason*, ed. Rubinoff, Lionel (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968), 119-20.

which thus becomes an intrinsically immanent principle of actualisation.²³

In order to indicate the sea-change a modern philosopher like Peirce works in the theory of triunity, transforming the medieval theory of subsistent relations or persons and the German Idealist theory of the subject into an immanentist logic of events and communication, my seventh thesis extends the analysis of the principles of actualisation so far offered.

7. My seventh thesis is that there are three basic theories of origin or firstness in the explanatorist wing of the triune tradition. There are the supra-rationalists, who hold that the unitary origin is not only beyond specific determination but is for that reason beyond intelligibility (Pseudo-Dionysius, Scotus Eriugena, perhaps Heidegger sometimes). There are the rationalists, who describe the threefold on the psychological analogy of mind (Augustine, Aquinas, Hegel, Lonergan). And there are the 'explicabilists', as I shall call them, who hold that all things are intelligible but do not identify the intelligible with mind or rationality. Here the intelligible is the nonconceptual, for the first principle of the threefold is held to be nothing more than activity. This activity is unconditioned because it is original. So it is free or spontaneous in that it is sole cause of its own activity. But it is activity, so it is essentially relational and teleological; for it is necessarily ekstasic or communicative in the sense that, whatever else it may be, activity is nothing less than ablativ or abductive movement, movement out from itself.

The conception of the first principle of the threefold as this kind of unity of the ecstatic and the unconditioned, of necessity and freedom, is the sort of position defended by voluntarists like Duns Scotus and Schelling (who use the psychological analogy of will rather than mind to define origin²⁴) and by pragmatists like Peirce (who reinterprets will as

²³ The anti-Thomist claim that the triune principle is essentially and eternally creative is a characteristic feature of philosophical trinitarianism from Schelling, Hegel and Peirce onwards. For Peirce, see *CP* 6. 506.

²⁴ Schelling is responsible for reintroducing the voluntarist tradition into the then predominantly rationalist philosophical culture of the European mainland. This helps to clarify the subsequent rise of speculative descriptivism: Schopenhauer seizes his chance, and pries Schellingian Will loose from its trinitarian framework. The result is that it becomes the inexplicable, irrational origin of the

action). They insist on the priority of activity to mind or thought, in particular to the laws of logic, and they maintain that spontaneous activity is a perfectly knowable, nonconceptual feature of experience. Because it is ecstatic, spontaneity or firstness is held by Peirce to generate differentiation (secondness), and both are held to give rise to ordination (thirdness).²⁵

8. My eighth thesis is that a theory of active or dynamical and inexhaustible infinity is an essential and often philosophically transformative component of explanatorist theories of actualisation. I will take Peirce's theory of origin or firstness as a touchstone.

Peirce's infinity is not the potential infinite of Aristotle and the intuitionists, where however many parts it is divided into, it is possible for there to be more. Nor is it the real categoric infinite of set theory, involving a non-denumerable infinite multiplicity of sets in which the parts or components are really there and their number is greater than any given. Rather, Peirce's firstness is in my view a particular kind of syncategorematic infinite. That is, it is a potential syncategorematic infinite, for its absolute indeterminacy means that "it contains no definite parts" (*CP* 6. 168); it is a continuum of potential parts only (*CP* 6. 185, *NEM* 4: 343). Peirce's infinite is a syncategorematic infinite of real or dynamical potentiality that is always greater than any determination whatsoever.

world. Nietzsche sees the weakness in the notion of sheer irrational will as a creative, ordering origin, and so redefines it as the will to power. But the ball has started rolling, and other descriptivist theories of dynamical origin are not long in coming: there is Bergson's *élan vital*, Whitehead's creativity, and various contemporary forms of what can only be called irruptionism, such as those of Deleuze and Badiou.

²⁵ For theories of triunity indebted to Peirce, see Royce, Josiah *The Problem of Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1913), especially vol. 2; and the naturalist triunity (existence, relation, meaning) of Dewey, John. *Experience and Nature* (Chicago: Open Court, 1929). Besides Hegel (Mind, Object, Community) and above all Schelling (*Einheit, Zweiheit, Dreiheit*), Peirce himself was deeply influenced by the triunity (*Stofftrieb, Formtrieb, Spieltrieb*) of Schiller, Friedrich. *On the Aesthetic Education of Man In a Series of Letters*. Translated by Wilkinson, Elizabeth M. and Willoughby, L.A. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1967).

Peirce describes free or indeterminate firstness as a no-thing (*CP* 6. 214ff.). That is, firstness is nothing, not as all-containing plenitude (*per excellentiam nihil*), nor as vacuity (*omnino nihil*), nor as negation (*nihil privativum*), but only as infinite free indeterminacy (*nihil per infinitatem*).²⁶ Peirce's firstness is not a unicity in any other sense; rather, it is the univocal concept of a dynamical free indeterminacy that as such has no specific nature of its own, and, in communicating itself to all things, is necessarily never the same. Moreover, because it communicates itself to all things, it follows that all difference or individuals, and all specific structures or laws, carry free or inexhaustible indeterminacy in their nature. That is, all individuals and all laws are essentially vague: they are inexhaustibly determinable determinations. In consequence, structures are always more than any of their individual instances, and there are no complete or completable wholes: as Peirce insists (*CP* 5. 532), for any given whole or continuity (e.g., 'All men are mortal'), the universal quantifier is to be interpreted distributively ('For each...') not collectively ('For all...'). Wholes are infinite in the distributive, not the collective, mode; and they are distributive wholes because they are intrinsically vague or infinitely indeterminate. The theory of vagueness constitutes in my view one of the great revolutions in the theory both of individuals and of forms or universals: even form or structure is now subject to freedom and genuine ('never before') novelty.

9. My next and ninth thesis leads me to the core issue. My ninth thesis is that the theory of dynamical, inexhaustible infinity provides a basis for the unity of realism and constructivism characteristic of speculative philosophy. The shortest way to indicate this is to consider Peirce's semiotics, which is intended to replace both the *Aufhebungsdialektik* of

²⁶ These distinctions should help serve as a warning to those tempted by Carnap and Ayer's mockery of speculative conceptions of the 'nothing'. See Carnap, Rudolf. "The Elimination of Metaphysics Through the Logical Analysis of Language", 1932, Section 5, and Ayer, A. J. *Language Truth and Logic*. 2nd. Ed., (London: Gollancz, 1946) 43-44.

Hegel and the *Erzeugungsdialektik* of Schelling, though owing a great deal to the latter.²⁷

Peirce holds all communication, natural or physical and human or discursive, to be a threefold movement of sign, object and interpretant.²⁸ All three elements are held in his semiotics to be interdependent, coequal elements or conditions of communicative actualisation, which means that each guides and constrains the other. Please note also that the same entity (e.g. an action) can play the role of sign, object or interpretant, depending on context.

Whatever in a given context plays the role of sign functions as the relation of interpretant and object. The sign is the medium through which the interpretant apprehends the object. The sign is a dynamical power: it is vague in that offers potentialities for the determination of the object by the interpretant. Because it has its own potentialities, the sign can be reduced neither to the object, nor to the interpretant. Signs or universals are of course material as well as conceptual, involving such things as levels of wealth in a society, technological know-how, and institutional structures, all of which can shape or mediate the relation of the interpretant to the object.

Whatever in a given context occupies the role of the object is an identifiable, determinate or definable entity with a nature of its own which is mind-independent. It is not, however, an absolute particular or completely determinate, for the object also is dynamical: it is vague in that it has infinite potentialities, which are brought out or made manifest to the interpretant by the medium of the sign. These potentialities, so far as they have been actualized in the historical interrelations of object, sign and interpretant, are properties of the object that are mind independent.

²⁷ For an excellent comparison of Hegel and Schelling, see Beach, Edward Allen. *The Potencies of the God(s): Schelling's Philosophy of Mythology* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), 83-91, 113-16.

²⁸ Within Peirce's general metaphysics, semiotics is a theory of 'thirdness', the realm of the actualisation of order or structure. Because all things are threefold relations, however, within the realm of semiotics signs have the role of firstness for they are the ground of the semiotic relation; objects have the role of secondness, for they are the differences that are to be determined; and interpretants have the role of thirds, for they are ordering principles.

But no matter what its determinate and historically saturated nature, the object is always vague; it is a determinate determinable.

Whatever in a given context plays the role of interpretant is the ordering principle of discourse, for the interpretant attempts to work out the relation of the sign and object under the guidance and constraint provided by the insistent specificities of both. The interpretant is thus a vague potentiality also, for the interpretant determines itself (as well as its object and sign, so far as possible) by its ordering or structuring work. The results of such work constitute a new object/sign for further interpretants, and so *ad infinitum* in iterative historical succession. Object, sign and interpretant are thus all three historically saturated and historically variable entities.

The upshot is that, if the movement of semiotic construction is the universal constitution of the real, then all interpretation makes a difference to its object. How much difference depends upon the point at which, in a given series of semiotic events, the interpretant intervenes.

Here, in relation to human discursive interpretation, there are, I suggest, two kinds of indeterminacy to consider: epistemological and ontological. First, although all things are ontologically indeterminate or possess infinite potentiality, scientific discoveries about physical nature are best considered to be discoveries about entities that, until discovered, are epistemologically indeterminate. That is, they are discoveries about potentialities which those discoveries themselves indicate to be actual and operative prior to our discovery of them. Such potentialities could be called *prevenient* potentialities: they are potentialities that are actual antecedent to human action or cognition.

It is, of course, equally the case, secondly, that human interpretation can and often does unfold and actualise new, hitherto indeterminate, potentialities in objects, as, for instance, with the discovery of plastic. In this respect, ontological indeterminacy refers not only to the condition of all things as infinite potentialities, but also to those potentialities that are indeterminate prior to their actualisation as potentialities in intersubjective and constructive historical activity. Such would be the case, for example, not only with the discovery of plastic, but also with the unfolding over the last two millennia of the notion of *agape* as a potentiality of human relations. Potentialities of this kind can be termed *supervenient* potentialities, for they emerge out of, or are supervenient upon, the intersubjective activity of human construction.

Yet, they are as such real potentialities. The speculative unity of realism and constructivism is based upon the claim that reality itself is semiotically constructive nature, and that human constructive activity is part of, or an instance of, the unfolding or actualisation of that larger structure.

Even this brief summary is, I think, enough to indicate the sweep of a trinitarian semiotics. The full ontological and socio-cultural significance of Peirce's evolutionary semiotics as a universal theory of being or actualisation as revelation is the subject of my tenth thesis.

10. Consider: Being or activity is not here primarily analysed as substance or as subject but as communication, the unconditional communication of freedom by the triune principle of actualisation. Unconditional communication is thus the actualising condition of substance and of subjectivity, of all determination. At this point we cannot avoid the question: just what is unconditional communication?

There is only one answer, and this is my tenth and final thesis: being as communication is love as unconditional giving or donation, unconditional concern (*agape*). Only in this way can the spontaneity and individuality of things and, in particular, the contingent evolution of physical nature, be properly secured. And the reason is that unconditional concern is open to what it does not control or determine. It does not stand in opposition to contingency, nor does it treat contingency as a lower moment of some absolute completeness, for unconditional concern *surrenders* itself to contingency. We see this in parental love, in all genuine love. As Peirce says in his essay on 'Evolutionary Love', "The movement of love is circular, at one and the same impulse projecting things into independency and drawing them into harmony" (*CP* 6. 288).

The significance of this analysis of the triune principle of actualisation should now be apparent. For the ancient Greeks as well as for a philosopher like Iris Murdoch, love, as *eros*, is the *medium* by which we come properly to apprehend and to participate in the ultimate reality. In contrast, the claim here is that the ultimate reality *is* love as infinite or inexhaustible *agape* or self-donation. This is the infinity that characterises the three principles of actualisation in their unity of co-realisation. And it is this infinite love which is the active condition of order in the universe, the ground of the complications that wherever possible accompany ordination. All specific complications or communities—not just the

human mind, but mathematical order, time and space, possibly even extensity—*are* contingent. Yet ordination itself, as complication or inclusive community, is not. For these reasons, the real is not only the true; the real is essentially good.²⁹

In the context of the history of our philosophy and culture, there is nothing original or mysterious about this claim. This is an ancient claim, and I have tried to indicate that not only is it a conceptually clear and powerful claim, but it is an immensely productive claim, the arena in which the hugely important, even globally transformative, notions of relations, persons, historicity, events, and agapeic love as the basis of existence and of justice, have been elaborated. And here is a further rationale: it is a claim that in fact tacitly informs all our attitudes, a claim by which in fact we tacitly measure all our actions. Put it like this: do you value or have high regard for that principle? If so, note that it cannot be derived from any lesser principle; it is irreducible. And its irreducibility constitutes an ethical clue to the ultimate nature of reality.

To show this, let me ask a simple question: how should we go about analysing the proposition 'Jane loves John'? A triune-semiotic analysis of 'Jane loves John' goes like this. We mean there is intense, spontaneous feeling toward another and in that respect Jane is what Peirce calls an "emotional interpretant." We mean also that there are actions and effort involved, and in this respect Jane is an "energetic interpretant." And we mean further that there is an adopted rule, habit of behavior, or ideal, in which respect Jane is an ideal or "logical interpretant" (CP 5. 473-76). It is the *unity* of all three that is meant by 'loves'. The interpretive and disclosing power of triune analysis is I think well demonstrated here.

Yet, could we not leave it at that? In other words, why not settle for some kind of descriptivist or even naturalist theory of the triune event, as do so many of those influenced by Peirce? Does an explanator-

²⁹ Only by neglecting these considerations, and the whole trinitarian philosophical tradition that lies behind them, does Wiggins find it so difficult to understand in respect of ontological goodness "*what* it is that we are straining to understand"; see Wiggins, David. *op. cit.* 129-31. It has been a disaster for Anglo-American culture that the 'God of the philosophers' discussed in most philosophical histories and textbooks is a distorting abstraction from the conception of God most of those philosophers actually employ, develop and defend.

ist theory of reality have any role here? Just what does it add to the description?

However, experience demands that we go beyond descriptivism and naturalism. For one of our historically-saturated intuitions is that the hallmark of all genuine love is some element of unconditional concern. This is not a feeling or a disposition, for we can and should show unconditional concern to those we may be disposed to dislike, even hate. We have here an alignment of feeling and action with an ideal, where feeling is no longer erotic, nor merely an affective sentiment of sympathy, but a matter of self-surrender.

How else can this be understood except as a spiritual act, in the sense of a total orientation of our natures that transcends natural impulse? It is something more than just 'mind', something more than ordinary 'feeling', and usually involves extraordinary action. What has to be said is that where there is such love—and we can find it manifest in artworks as well as people—we have a glimpse of the *perfect* unity of feeling, exertion and rule. *Either* this is a perfection, an ideal, that is utterly without reason, is indeed quite absurd and is even self-destructive (as Nietzsche claimed, holding 'life' to be the *summum bonum*); *or* this is a perfection that has its reason—its only reason—in the ultimate order of things.

With this, I rest my case for speculative philosophy.

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