The Thomistic Telescope: Truth and Identity

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1. Truth and Identity

The question of truth is deeply related to the question of identity and stability. If we think of truth as saying `what is the case', as in `it's true that there's a cat perched on the windowsill', then the cat has to stay still long enough for one to be able to verify this. And there has to be something distinctly recognizable as a cat. Too fast a flash of mere fur would undo everything.

However, we don't necessarily have to have anything to do with cats, who may be too elusive for the cause of truth. We can invent something stable for ourselves by making it sufficiently

rigid and treating it always the same way (more or less), like a table that we eat on. Then it seems that we can be sure of saying some true things about the table. Still we may wonder if the table is really as it appears to us to be, securely shaped and coloured, and some people may use it to sit on, thereby re-defining it. A more radical recourse is to invent something more abstract like the number 1. This seems more certain and controllable -- until we realize that we can only define it in relation to 2, but 1 as twice exemplified in 2 does not seem to be the pure 1 that cannot be multiplied or divided. It quickly appears that the most fundamental self-identical thing is elusive and inaccessible: it would have to be immune to participation and multiplication, but the 1's we know about can be divided and so multiplied into two halves and so forth. Then we resort to a further abstraction: turning from arithmetic to algebra and logic: whatever 1, the self-identical is, we do at least know that it cannot be *as* 1 also zero -- even if, as 1 it can also be 2, 3, 4 and so forth. This gives us the law of excluded middle or of non-contradiction: 1 cannot be at the same time zero, and *no* 1, no single thing, can be and not be what it is at the same time and in the same respect. If this *were* possible, then even tautologies would not be true, but we do at least know that a standing tree is a standing tree is a standing tree, recursively, *ad infinitum*.

Since the ancient Greeks, just this law has been seen as the foundation of all logic, and so of all truthful discourses. Here at least one has a *formal* truth: modern thought, starting long ago with certain medieval currents, has often hoped to build on this formality towards a secure epistemology and even an ontology. But here a doubt must always persist as to whether one can cross the chasm between logical possibility and given actuality. Is anything more than a thin formal truth available to us?

For the ancients and much of the Middle Ages, things stood otherwise. The law of excluded middle only ruled actuality because there were real stable identities out there in the world. Ralph Cudworth, the 17th C English philosopher and theologian noted that in Plato's *Theaetetus,* Socrates' sceptical interlocutor, Protagoras, by arguing that reality is only material particles in random flux, entailing that our knowledge of them is only the contingent *event* of our interaction with them, renders the law of non-contradiction inoperable.[1] For Socrates points out that if reality and knowledge consist only in sequences of events, then a affecting b must presuppose a_1 affecting b_1 and so on *ad infinitum*. Every item at the same time

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1.   Ralph Cudworth, *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality* ed. Sarah Hutton (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1996), Book I, Chap. II, p. 17; Book II, Chap. II, 1, p. 33.

and in the same respect would already be *not* this item, and our knowledge of something could only be knowledge of this knowledge and so on recursively, such that either we could never stay still long enough to be subjectively aware, or else our staying still must be an illusion -- the illusion of being a subject. Likewise, Aristotle in his *Metaphysics* said that without stable substance the law of non-contradiction cannot hold.[2] One can at least read this assertion to mean that, without stable essences, stable formed matters or *eide* out there in the world, the law of excluded middle cannot be applied to a deprived reality which would then be, like Protagoras's reality, somehow `really contradictory'. However, I suspect that Aristotle's doctrine of the priority of act over possibility, means that, more radically, he thinks that only the actuality of ontological substance makes it true in the realm of logic, which ponders possibilities, that the law of non-contradiction really does hold.

At the very least though, one can see that if this law applies only in the realm of logic, this gives us but a meagre doctrine of truth. It certainly will not allow that things in so far as they `are' are somehow also `true', but also it will not allow us to make truthful statements about things as they are, or even as they appear to us to be. So can we be assured that there

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2.   Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1007a-1035b.

are real, actual self-identical items in the world? Plato, it seems, was half-in-agreement with sceptics like Protagoras: the material world was in itself a temporal flux; if it nonetheless exhibited relative stabilities we could rely on, this was because it participated in eternal and immutable archetypes of everything: trees in the *eidos* of tree, just acts in the *eidos* of justice and so on. Aristotle, by contrast, thought that the *eide* were perfectly stable within the material, temporal world, without participation in transcendence. These two views of the forms or *eide* were then synthesized in different ways by later commentators on Aristotle, by the neoplatonists and then by Islamic, Jewish and Christian thinkers. To say that the world contained *eide* and participation in those supreme *eide* that were divine ideas, was to say that even if the world does not itself think (and most people affirmed even this in the case of the celestial realm, beyond the lunar orbit) it is nonetheless composed of thoughts or the reflection of thoughts, which are meanings. Beings themselves are also truths, because they only exist as manifesting themselves in ordered patterns related to ends they seek and the ordered proportions and relations they enter into with other beings.

This view also implies that there is an ordained proportion between things as they exist and our knowledge of things. As knowers we are not like visitors to this solar system from an

altogether strange galaxy, making observations and taking notes that reality never intended us to be capable of taking. Instead, for the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition, forms in things exist in order that they may finally be known. For this reason knowledge is not a mirroring of things, a `representation' of them, but rather it is the process by which forms themselves migrate from matter to a higher mode of being that is intellectual existence. Thus an act of thinking, for Aristotle, was identical with the realization of an objective *eidos* as a thought.[3] But inversely, to have a thought and realize an *eidos* also further fulfilled and unfolded the active capacity of thinking itself. The transition from passive reception to active formation by mind was often debated: did the passively received form really become the active form, or did it rather occasion the sympathetic emergence of the latter? Respectively, these positions can be seen as more Aristotelian and more Platonic. There were many sub-variants, and yet they all rang changes on the same shared theme. Thought, for this model was possible, not on account of the accident of mirroring, based on the example of the eye mirroring light, but rather on account of an arcane ontological proportion, or ordering, or `convenience' between things as existing and things

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3.   Aristotle, *On the Soul* 429b20-30, 430a5-10.

as known.[4]

2. Realism and Nominalism

Already in the Middle Ages however, beginning as far back as the 12th C with people like Roger Bacon and Gilbert Porreta, this started to seem unsatisfactory.[5] On the traditional model it appears that one can only teach someone to know by sage advice to attend to one's inner light which intuits and judges by nature and without other reason. One could not, under this jurisdiction, teach a fundamental *method*, which says `accept only the transparently clear and what can be measured and proved and shown to work in a repeated fashion'. So in a long process culminating in the 17th C, various thinkers suggested that knowledge was not a kind of communion with being and realization of being, but instead was logical certainty, representational measure and technological experiment.

Often these recommendations were accompanied by a theology which said in effect: `God has laid down the world with an order

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4.	See John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 1-60.

5.	See Oliver Boulnois, *Être et Représentation: Une généalogie de la métaphysique moderne à l'époque de Duns Scot* (xiiie-xive siècle) (Paris: PUF,

that is radically contingent, according to the decrees of his freely-willed charity: this order does not necessarily reflect the divine ideas, and embodies no relative necessities of essence. For this reason, our minds do not operate by gathering the ways in which the world symbolises and participates in God, nor by abstracting out and unfolding pure essences. Instead we are to observe God's gift of Creation in a detached manner (indeed like investigators from another galaxy), and to respond to the divine freedom with free usage of the world for pragmatic ends that we invent and contract with others to observe'.

What was seen as especially mysterious and unnecessarily obscure in the older view was the idea of universal essence: surely besides trees, one does not need to suppose that there is a real *eidos* of tree, even if this only exists *qua* universal in our minds? Isn't our idea of a tree just a generalization from trees, which then functions as a cognitive *sign* for trees? This getting rid of universal essences is usually known as `nominalism' or `terminism': universals are just conventional names or terms, not natural subsisting realities.

However, we have already seen that the *eide* were traditionally seen as the guarantors of truth, and of the operativity or even reality of the law of excluded middle. How

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1999), 17-107.

could one now have truth without them? Well, first of all, the entire Platonic-Aristotelian tradition had always hesitated between -- or tried to include both -- the idea that stable substance resides in a general *eidos* or the one hand, or in an individual substance on the other, be this material or angelic (God was taken to be beyond the contrast of individuality and generality). The nominalists chose exclusively the latter fork: arguing that the sameness of an individual tree (for example) belonging to a particular species, grown bent in a particular way and so forth, was much more secure than some vague essence of `treeness'.  In the second place, however, they tended to declare (William of Ockham is the best instance) that actually universal essence as much as flux violates the principle of non-contradiction.  For the traditional `realist' (meaning here the opposite of nominalist) view, the tree *as* individual tree always shows something universal, not in an aspect but *in toto*, and not in terms of a parcelled-out share, because there is (at least for Aquinas and even to a degree for Scotus) no self-standing essence out there in the world apart from individual trees. Concomitantly the universal form `tree' in my mind as universal also *is* the fulfilled-as-comprehended individual trees. In either case `universal' and its opposite, `individual' seem to coincide. Nominalism was in part a strategy for a purged Aristotelianism fully following through on the law of excluded middle.

Ockham and others also suggested that notions of participation and analogy of attribution likewise violated this law: something cannot be at once like and unlike a higher thing, not simply in some isolatable aspect -- for then one could parcel out analogy between univocity and equivocity -- but truly *as* its whole self. Something similar applied for the nominalists to ideas of real relation: something cannot be *intrinsically* and not just externally and accidentally related to something else without it being itself as not itself.[6] One can notice here how close real relation and universal are to each other as concepts: a real relation implies something in common shared between two things, rendering them what they are. Inversely, if trees embody a universal form of treeness, even though this form does not stand like a totem in the middle of the forest (like a mutant golden fir, as occurs very occasionally in North American evergreen forests), then it means something like the hidden relational community between them. Likewise, the really universal tree in the mind only exists as the really relational (real for the mind's relation to the thing known) intention of all particular trees.

Universal, analogical participation, real relation. These were the three essential components of the realist idea that the

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6.   William of Ockham, *Quodlibetal Questions* 4.12; 5.11; 5.12; 6.9; 6.12; 6.13; 6.14; *Summa Logicae* 1.16.

world holds together as a kind of arcane harmony ordained by God.
In God, the source of this harmony, order was at once actuality
and knowledge; the Creation echoed this by a reciprocal interplay
between being and knowing. Being urged towards knowing; knowing
could be distilled from being, but knowing always had to return
to the surplus of harmony and potential knowledge that finite
being contained and that could be encompassed only by God's
infinite awareness. Such an outlook in effect claimed that, as
Balthasar today puts it (building upon, but improving Descartes),
that only the awareness that we participate in the divine
understanding which always understands more of his Creation than
we do, ensures that we do not think of our thoughts of things as
merely solipsistic elaborations of our own being.[7]

As we have seen, this scheme of cosmic harmony was once seen
as guaranteeing the operation of the law of non-contradiction,
and so the presence of identity, and therefore the presence of
truth. Now the nominalists in effect declared that this was,
after all, half pagan myth of mysterious and ungraspable
fluxions: far from guaranteeing truth, it actually violated the
law of excluded middle itself. They proclaimed a disenchantment
in the name of logic, or evidence, or experiment, or human

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7.   Hans urs von Balthasar, *La Theologique I: Vérité du monde*, trans. Camille
        Dumont S.J. (Namur: Culture et Vérité, 1994), 54. In some ways Descartes is a
        transitional figure; the `modern view' of knowledge is more emphatically
        elaborated by Locke.

political freedom, but also in the name of the divine freedom and
the priority of the divine will, which as self-giving was the
will to charity.

So if two accounts of truth were at stake here, so also were
two accounts of Christianity -- so different that they almost
seem like different religions. For the old realistic account, in
actuality there is no *bare* being; actual being is accompanied
always by value -- it shows itself as meaningful truth, just as
it communicates itself as goodness. As Hans Urs von Balthasar
almost says (but see later) in his *Theologik Volume 1*, for
Aquinas and others truth was more than just representation of
being, because it was also being manifesting itself as beauty;
likewise the good was more than fulfillment of selfish desire,
because it was an aiming for the Beautiful that is objectively
loveable in itself.[8] Balthasar (now followed by Gilbert
Narcissse) thus rightly draws out the crucial yet latent
aesthetic character of the older vision: beauty as `taking care
of herself' (as the English Catholic artist Eric Gill famously
put it) was little mentioned, just because it was so
fundamentally presupposed and was the real link between being,
truth and goodness.[9] Thus in the realist vision, being as value

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8.   Balthasar, *La Thélogique I: Verité du Monde*, 229-34.

9.   Gilbert Narcisse, *Les Raisons de Dieu: Arguments de Convenance et
       Esthétique Théologique selon St. Thomas d'Aquin et Hans urs von Balthasar*

was a free gift, but also a gift of reciprocal exchange of gifts between being and knowing, knowing and willing.

For the new nominalist account, by contrast, the only being one can securely and entirely know is *represented* being, which is the bare fact of an individual possession of being as self-identical: `one is one and all alone and ever more shall be so'. A finite thing can now be considered in logical abstraction from its createdness, simply as existing. Already, beginning with Scotus and later extended by Ockham, this bare logical minimal consideration of being nevertheless informed a new minimalist ontology: each thing as existing fully possesses its own being. If it did not, if as existing it only borrowed its existence from a supreme *esse* whom it resembled (as for Aquinas) then *as being* it would also not be, and as *being* finite its actual existence that it possessed would also be infinite. Already Scotus declared that analogy and participation violated non-contradiction.[10] The result was that, for Scotus, while God, as infinite, created finite beings in respect of their particularity and caused occurrence, he did not (as for Aquinas) as *esse* create general abstracted being (in the mode of finite *ens commune)* as such. So being was no longer regarded as intrinsically and

(Fribourg: Editions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse, 1997).

10. Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* I d3 q2 a2.26; I d8 q3.121; *Collatio* 24.24. See also William of Ockham, *Quodlibetal Questions* 4:12

ineluctably a gift, and being as finite being no longer reflected
the divine infinite harmony which ensured that it was always
really an exchange of reciprocities.

However, this did not mean that gift was abandoned. Modern
Franciscan theologians characteristically argue that this rather
allowed the gift itself to be de-ontologised.[11] Since being is
not the gift, *finite* being is pure free gift beyond any supposed
existential necessities. Reciprocity is lost, but this is not to
be regretted: instead the divine gift to us is purely gratuitous
and does not `return' to God (even though God as replete does not
really `receive' anything for Thomistic theologians either) by
way of a created reflection of the divine order.[12] Likewise,
since the created return is in no way naturally elicited, humans
make an entirely free response from within a freedom more
ontologically outside divine determination than it was for
Aquinas. Meanwhile, within the created order, reciprocity and
teleology is replaced (already with Scotus) by formal contract
and a moral law valuing primarily free personhood.[13]

So now we can see that the debate about truth, which

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11.   See Orlando Todisco OFM , `L'Univocità Scotista dell'Ente e la Svolta Moderna'
       in *Antonianum* LXXVI Jan.-March 2001 fasc. 1 79-110; Isiduro Manzano OFM,
       `Individuo y Sociedad en Duns Escoto' in the same issue 43-78.

12.   See also Jean-Luc Marion, *Étant Donée: Essai d'une Phénoménologie de la
       donation* (Paris: PUF, 1997).

13.   See Manzano, op. cit.

concerns the question as to whether identity resides in the
individual only, or also in the essence, is also the debate about
the gift. Does the gift arise as free and unilateral beyond
being, or does being without the gift lose the reciprocal
dimension of the gift, the dimension of gift-exchange which
complements free unilaterality, just as essence for Aristotle and
Aquinas *complements* the self-standing individual? The debate
about truth then, is simultaneously the debate about the nature
of goodness and of charity. Those who find essences, analogy and
real relations to be contradictory, will most likely find the
idea of a free gift that expects or hopes for a return to be also
contradictory -- as likewise violating the law of excluded
middle.

3. Names against Nominalism

So which side is right? And perhaps this is the most
fundamental debate within western culture. We can call the
Scotist and nominalist way `Modern Christianity' and suggest that
it is in large part responsible for modernity as such (its legacy
eventually merging, in Hobbes and Spinoza, with the neo-pagan
legacy of Machiavelli). However, `Modern Christianity' and
modernity (the child it has half-parented) has increasingly run

into conceptual problems. These are primarily problems with
nominalism itself. All its key strategies eventually turned
sour. Let me try to summarize this in three instances.

First of all, the idea that a universal is a sign. As John
N. Deely's researches have shown, building on the labours of
Jacques Maritain in this regard, the Iberian Thomists in the
Baroque Era, especially those of the school of Coimbra in
Portugal, and supremely the Portuguese theologian Jean Poinsot
(John of St. Thomas) produced an effective counter-riposte.[14]
Not only is a universal a sign, but a thought as such in its
character as an inner word (as Aquinas already taught), is itself
a kind of sign. A first encounter with one's first tree would
already think it under the sign `tree' without explicit reference
to other trees; one would only see it as an individual tree
through the inchoate recognition that there might be other trees
of different shapes and sizes that were still trees. Because we
only grasp the individual tree via sign of tree in general, the
relation of tree to sign of tree must be a *real relation:* we
cannot think of a tree without its sign and merely bring the two
together *ad placitum*. No, since the tree is only invoked through
the sign, the sign must be really and not accidentally related to

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14.   See John N. Deely, *New Beginnings: Early Modern Philosophy and Postmodern
       Thought* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), esp. 53-86.

the tree.[15]

     This circumstance does not then apply only to our *concept* of the tree; it applies also to our percept and mental image of the tree. Hence whereas the nominalists said that 'a concept is only a sign', the Coimbrists declared that even a percept and a mental image is a sign. It followed for them that if the rawest material of all thinking still involves a sign-relation, then it can never be a question of 'only' a sign, nor of a merely stipulated relation. If a percept or image is itself a sign, it is in a sense already a faint adumbration of a concept; in consequence a concept as a more abstract and reflexive sign is also indispensable for a more fully developed knowledge even of individuals and is therefore never a 'mere' sign only.

     Moreover, for Poinsot we negotiate the actual world in terms of natural signs: the sight of a track and a break in the trees suggests a way through the forest and so forth. Without these natural signs we would be lost, doomed to pure sylvan errancies, since we cannot recognize the path as path in treading it, unless we first grasp it as sign of a continuous way. These natural signs are therefore instances of cognitive real relations latent in nature herself.

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15.   Jean Poinsot (John of St. Thomas), *Cursus Philosophicus*, I qq 1-6, 646a 9-41 - 693a31. [John Deely ed *Tractatus de Signis; the Semiotic of John Poinsot* (Berkeley Cal: University of California Press, 1985) pp 116-219]

There is also an important further point: while mind is less substantive, as less self-standing, than a physical reality like a tree, its relations to things via concepts which are signs is as real as the tree's relation to the ground on which it depends. This applies *both* to conventional `stipulated' signs (like the `King's Head' on an inn-signboard) which are said by Poinsot to be `materially transcendental'(conventional) *and* to natural signs: both types are `formally' speaking ontological rather than merely `transcendental' relations, because in both cases the sign-relation is indispensable for thought. Poinsot noted that being and knowledge coincided in God precisely in the mode of relation, as the doctrine of the Trinity finally explicates.[16]

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16.   On the real relation of stipulated signs, see *Cursus Philosphicus* I.q2 6 58617-659633 [*Tractatus de Signis* 141-2]. For the reference to the Trinity, see *Cursus Philosophicus* q. 17 a 1, 575a19-b28 [*Tractatus de Signis*, p. 83]: `in God relations are not extrinsic denominations but intrinsic forms'; a 3 585a1 – 588b11 [*Tractatus* pp. 103-108]. Here, amongst other arguments, Poinsot denies, against Scotus, that a categorial relation, in the case of the Trinity and elsewhere, can be founded on another categorial relation -- this would compromise the radically constitutive character of the relation for the being of its poles, and in effect reduce an ontological relation to a grounding substance that nonetheless never appears, because one enters into an endless regress of relations; or else reduce an ontological relation to a transcendental one, making it the accidental effect of prior relational circumstances which would be themselves transcendental and so on, again in a regress. See also Deely, *New Beginnings*, 67-8. The Peircean infinite regress from signifier to signified that becomes in turn a signifier is certainly not envisaged by Poinsot; nevertheless it is not really a `Scotist' regress (although Derrida's variant is) because each sign-relation for Peirce is a real relation, that reveals a partial *aspect* of essential truth. By comparison, the Scotist chains of relation undo any real relationality. Clearly, however, the Trinitarian relations exceed even this mode of regress

Nominalism's very names therefore are names on its

tombstone: we cannot after all obtain proper descriptions before

attaching names of a general type.

4. The Elusive Individual

 Let us look in the second place at problems which have

emerged with the idea of individual substance.

William of Ockham thought that he had reduced the list of

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since they are infinite.

     Scotus in this respect tends to think of real relations as more 'free floating' in relation to their polar extremities than does Aquinas. Hence for Scotus there is a more actual or 'formal' distinction in God between the personal relations and the divine essence than there is for the Angelic doctor. In fact, the relatively free-floating character of the Scotistic relations compromises their substantive character as founded utterly in the really natures of their extreme poles -- ensuring that the relation is essential to the being of these poles. It is here significant that for Scotus the personal relations in the Trinity are not really constitutive of the Persons, but are secondarily derived from different modes of procession from the Father (respectively by nature and by will), again in contrast with Thomas. Deely cites a passage where Poinsot declares that these extremely technical considerations constitute *the* point of difference between the Thomist and Scotist schools, yet he fails to observe both that Scotus's account of real relations is weaker than that of Aquinas and that it should be signifcant that Poinsot builds his radical semiotic upon a Thomistic not Scotist account of relationality. Moreover, despite Poinsot's criticism of the opening of the Scotist relation to a regress that would reduce every ontological relation to a transcendental one, Deely *does* compare the Scotist regress to a Peircean one, which appears clearly incompatible with Poinsot's reading of the subtle doctor. See John of St Thomas, *Cursus Philosphicus,* q 17 a2 579b35 – 580a28 and John Deely, *Four Ages of Understanding* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 382-5

categories to substance and quality.[17] However, if there only

exist individuals, the notion of qualities `attaching' to

individuals, and the often accompanying idea that we only

perceive individuals in terms of these qualities, seems

problematic. Just what is this mysterious `attachment'? It

seems just as occultly sympathetic as essence, real relation and

analogy. Qualities ought simply to *be* the individual substance,

or else other individual substances accidentally attaching to it,

like limpets to a rock. One can read aspects of Leibniz's work

as trying to rectify this situation: if a thing and its

qualities are the same, then they can be substituted for each

other *salva veritate*.[18]

The full reductionist programme however awaited the 20th C.

Then Frege and Russell attempted to reduce every `is' of

predication to the `is' of pure identity:  `x is y' as in 'this

apple is red', is then only comprehensible as x = y where

`equals' spells identity. There must be no obscure and

impenetrable attachments. However, as the American Catholic

philosopher and religious solitary (educated partly in France)

Claire Ortiz Hill has recently well shown, this radical programme

17.   William of Ockham *Quodlibetal Questions*, 7.2 resp: `qualities of the third
       species differ in reality from substance' (unlike relation, action and passion,
       position, etc., etc.).

18.   See Hidé Ishiguro, *Leibniz's Philosophy of Logic and Language* (Cambridge:
       Cambridge UP, 1990), 17-43.

is unsustainable.[19] One cannot reduce all the qualitative

aspects under which individual things appear to us simply to the

things themselves in their bare extensional existence. The tree

comes to us sighing, creaking, resistant, concealing, growing and

so forth. If we tried to identify all these things we would soon

produce nonsense. And why? Because the referent, the tree, is

only available to us under an infinite multitude of senses or

aspects, which in attending to, we also *intend*. For this reason,

the collapse of the attempt to reduce quality to equality with

individual substance entails also the problematisation of

individual substance as such.

So just as that seeming ally of nominalism, the sign, led

back to universal and real relation, so also, as phenomenology

has realized, its other seeming ally, the individual substance,

proves intrinsically multiple and self-concealing (like the back

of the tree that always remains however many times we run round

it). Instead of it being the case that there are only atomic

things, it turns out that (as George Berkeley already taught)

there are only multiple qualities (in fact multiple shared

essences) since the tree has no monopoly on sighing. Just how it

is that we perceive through all this annual flurry but one tree,

is the real mysterious thing: what else can one say but that the

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19.   Claire Ortiz Hill, *Rethinking Identity and Metaphysics: On the Foundations of Analytic Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1997).

mind constructs a kind of analogous holding together that enables it intentionally to reach the real tree? Once nominalism self deconstructs, it seems that analogy lies not only between things but within things as before them, so allowing them to be. Another way of putting this would be to say that there can be no access to ontology without a complex phenomenological detour.

The problem of aspects (as first opened up by Husserl and later considered by both Heidegger and Wittgenstein) seems therefore to ruin individual substance and to disclose the analogical infinity of the particular thing in a way that even older realism had not seen. I hope that we are beginning to realise then, how the collapse of nominalism does not simply *take us back* to the older realism. It is actually the same with signs: Poinsot already saw that if thoughts are signs, then the signs of culture are lived thoughts and real relations. Beyond Thomas, as Maritain suggested, he started to see human historical culture as essential to the unfolding of our thought and participation in the divine *logos*.[20] (Poinsot's thoughts on intellectual being and signs can supplement attention to the Thomist metaphysics of *esse*, even though – dissenting from Deely here -- one can agree with Gilson against Maritain that Poinsot like most of the Baroque Thomists misunderstood this

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20.   Jacques Maritain, *Distinguish to Unite or the Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. Gerald B. Phelan (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame UP, 1995), 75-145.

metaphysics). Deely has plausibly argued that C.S. Peirce linked

signs and real universals in a fashion like that of Poinsot, and

to a degree indicates that his claimed kinship with Scotus rather

than Aquinas was mistaken.[21] But Peirce added to the counter-

nominalist reaction the point that if a universal as real is

still a sign, then indeed it is only partial and so *aspectual,*

and must always be interpreted by a formally `third' position

which `abducts' to an absent indicated thing. Although Aquinas

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21.   Deely, *New Beginnings,* 39-109, 183-245; *Four Ages of Understanding* , 385. In the latter place, Deely acutely notes that the foundation for the Coimbrist idea that percept and image, equally with concept, involve the instance of sign, lies in the Thomist version of the *verbum mentis,* and that this point is *not* found in Scotus. I submit that this shows that a radical and realist semiotics has more kinship with Aquinas than with Scotus, yet Deely attributes to the latter a discovery of the formal role of the interpretant (the 'third' position in the semiotic process which is present even if no actual third subject is present) without much textual warrant. Equally he attributes to Scotus a discovery of the place of the signified in the same process (whereas this is already there in Augustine and Aquinas) and with more justification of the idea of the semiotic web, as Scotus speaks of signs being signs of other signs (see *Four Ages*, 376-85).

It should also be noted that already Roger Bacon and later William of Ockham allowed that a verbal sign can directly signify a thing without the mediation of the mental concept. In both cases, however, this revised scheme points less to the necessity of language for thought than to a downgrading of the role of the formal essence as *species* in the act of understanding, and the beginning of the idea of thought as the direct imaging or 'representation' of an external thing. See *Four Ages,* 365-75; 385-91

See in addition C.S. Peirce, *Reasoning and the Logic of Things* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1992), esp. 14, 46-65; *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. Justus Buchler (New York: Dover, 1955), esp. 74-120, 150-7, 251-90. It is true that Peirce claims to follow Scotus in basing his metaphysics on formal logic and Scotus indeed sought to do this. However, Peirce's semiotic exceeds formal logic -- it is really an onto-logic and is not independent of the given character of our mind and our animality, and our relation to the cosmos.

also knew that one cannot ever `survey' the interval between thought and thing, Peirce adds again a more temporal dimension: not only does the *eidos* arrive in the mind like an event, it must always be further interpreted, in a hermeneutical process that runs to infinity. What guides this interpretation? It can only be for Peirce the will towards more realisations of the Good in the world, which yet assumes that this unfolds further a *real ontological bond* between the sign-universal and the absent original which it conveys to us. In a comparable fashion, Balthasar rightly suggested that already for Aquinas truth was not just Greek *aletheia*, the disclosedness of being, but also Hebrew *emet,*[22] truth as bond or fidelity, or *troth* as one could so nicely say in Old English. One helps to reveal truth in plighting one's troth to being. But the semiotic perspective accentuates this plighting as a renewal through variation of ontological vows in the course of historical time. Truth as event echoes onwards and never quite, in time, fully occurs.

So signs and aspects have started to undo nominalism, and to insinuate a reborn and extended realism: a kind of Thomistic Telescope -- the same *organon,* but drawn out and allowing us to see further and more clearly.

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22.   Balthasar, 39.

5. Sets or Essences

Now I want to suggest a third new lens for the telescope and
this has to do with the question of numbers and sets. As Claire
Ortiz Hill reminds us, Frege sought a way out of his reduction of
predication to equality via Cantor's mathematical set-theory.[23]
Thing and quality could be identified in so far as a qualified
thing is one example of a single set of kinds of things: the red
apple is identical with the apple since the red apple falls
within the set of all apples. One can say that in order to
handle qualities, nominalism must turn to sets instead of
essences; more suspiciously, one might say that sets are the
minimum obeisance that nominalism is forced to render to
essences. Already though, it had emerged with Cantor himself
that sets are afflicted by paradoxes not entirely remote from the
third man argument that supposedly undermined the Platonic theory
of forms. This is doubly significant, because set-theory not
only deals with numbers which are, as we saw, the most primitive
paradigms of identity, but also, by treating even natural numbers
as primarily sets and instances of sets, seeks to logicize

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23.   Claire Ortiz Hill, 2-3, 57-73, 111-6.

arithmetic and not mystify it as necessarily a revelation of `real' numbers. Although Cantor in fact made realist affirmations regarding number, he did not consider these to be essential for his formalist account of mathematics. In this account numbers are sufficiently defined by their distinctness and insertion into a linear series; as such they are 'intersubjective' for Cantor. While he also considered numbers (outside the bounds of pure arithmetic) as 'transubjectively' imaging physical reality, he nonetheless thought that they only enjoyed a fully real status in themselves in so far as they existed in the mind of God. (Here he cited Augustine; yet for Augustine as for other genuinely Platonizing thinkers, our numbers can only be analogically akin to the divine ideas in their eminently 'quantitative' aspects.)

Thus if nominalism began by saying that universal essences violate the law of excluded middle, now it is threatened by the vaunted discovery (in the paradoxes of set-theory) that so do *individuals* in their most paradigmatic arithmetical and logical instances.

Already in the Middle Ages, Robert Grosseteste and later Gregory of Rimini and others noted the existence of what we today call transfinites. 1 + 1 + 1 is an infinite series, and so is 2 + 4 + 8 + 16, yet the latter seems infinitely to grow bigger than the former. Or again, the series of all even integers seems paradoxically to be the same size as the series of all even and

odd integers, when both are extended to infinity, even though the
continuum of the latter series must from another perspective be
considered greater. Cantor, however, argued that this kind of
example does not show radically incommensurable transfinite
infinities, since the drawing of endless lines across the two
infinite series between each respective member establishes the
same infinite cardinality which he named aleph-zero.[24] Here he
appeared arbitrarily to ignore the increase factor in the
medieval examples, or the 'escaping' factor of every next even
integer in the modern one (2 is more than 1, 4 than 3 etc), and
he did so because he rejected the idea that the equality or else
inequality of two or more series could be a matter of pure
choice. The increase factor was thus inconsistently relegated by
Cantor to the realm of pure indefinite possibility, even though
this factor alone constituted the difference between the two sets
which allows one to talk of two 'different' cardinalities that
are then deemed to be 'equal'. This opposition to choice in the
field of pure arithmetic was also exhibited in his equally
dubious rejection of Guiseppe Veronese's claim for the reality of
actual infinitesimals.

24.	Robert Grosseteste, *De Luce, passim;* Georg Cantor, *Contributions to the Founding of the Theory of Transfinite Numbers* (New York: Dover, 1955). See in addition for most of the details regarding Cantor in this paper, J.W. Dauben, *Georg Cantor: His Mathematics and Philosophy of the Infinite* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard UP 1979) 108, 122, 128-31, 143-8, 233-5, 296

The Cantorian set-theoretical paradox emerges from his
treatment of the problem of the transfinites. His own example of
transfinitude depends upon multiplying or subdividing whole
digits with different finite quantities to produce different
series. A posited increasing or decreasing difference of an
individual digit (by fractal multiplication or division) is alone
what allows `diagonalization'. The latter concept indicates the
fact that, however far one infinitely subdivides in turn the
infinitely subdivided units of a numerical interval, one can
still construct diagonal lines across the vertical lines of the
subdivisions to produce an infinite sum of the subdivided units
higher than the total infinite sum of all these subdivisions,
since any diagonal line drawn across a set of verticals will be
longer than any single vertical line. In the situation of
infinitely continuous division, this is the case because the
diagonal is always one unit ahead of the previous position on the
vertical that it has just crossed. This ensures that even the
infinite diagonal is always longer than an infinite series of
verticals that it has actually traversed. To the seemingly
exhaustive sum of the infinite, the infinite diagonal therefore
endlessly adds `one more'.

This diagonal, usually termed C, is said to diagonalize out
of a set which might appear to contain it: C is in this way
somehow greater than aleph-zero. Such a set thereby becomes 'non-

denumerable'.

It should be noted here that, since aleph-zero denotes a cardinal sum, it indicates an actual and not merely potential infinite; hence the contrast between aleph-zero and C cannot be approximated to that between a finite potential infinite and the real actual infinite in Aquinas's thought. Cantor's relationship to scholastic mathematics was in fact highly ironic: against Aristotelianism he affirmed actual mathematical infinites, and against materialistic determinism he rejoiced in the indeterminism of transfinites. Yet in common with scholastic tradition, he, as a devout Catholic, feared any validation of an immanent, material eternity. Thus Cantor vigorously and incoherently denied that transfinites confirm the existence of infinitesimals, on the basis of the Archimedean principle that a number is a number if a finite or infinite group of them can be added together to produce yet another linear magnitude. Cantor claimed that this principle was demonstrable, thereby denying its traditional status as a pure axiom, which it clearly is, since it aims to define the concept of ordinary number as such and cannot therefore itself be proven within such a linear system.

Cantor sincerely believed that transfinites could once and for all banish such spectres as the infinitesimals. Thus even though they were a form of mathematical actual infinity, he still hoped that they would *take over* the older metaphysically

restrictive function of the mathematical potential infinite. By

showing the measurable order of actual infinity in the immmanent

world, they would rule out of play an infinitely divisable

continuum, real infinite magnitudes and real numbers smaller than

any arbitrarily small real numbers yet more than zero

(infinitesimals). He hoped thereby to confine the immanent actual

infinite to the cardinality of aleph-zero and the linearity of

increasing or decreasing transfinite cardinal sets. Yet as we

have seen, he evades the situation where an advancing or

diminishing series simultaneously constitutes and disturbs

cardinality, in such a way that one can regard a set equally in

terms of a relatively cardinal or a relatively ordinal aspect.

Infinitely large or infinitely small numbers are then in the same

undecidable case as the transfinites: one can think of the

greatest of the infinitesimals simply as having an infinite

cardinality, or alternatively one can think of it as linearly

advancing to the number 1 in terms of multiplying itself by the

imagined smallest of the transfinites (the cardinality of the

lowest 'diagonal') which stands in linear contrast to multiplying

itself by the next smallest of the transfinites and so forth.

But a similar consideration applies to diagonalisation

itself. Cantor thought that he had insinuated a kind of order

into disorder, since C is the infinite plus 1. However, Kurt

Godel later rightly declared that it was undecidable whether C

was greater than aleph-zero by a kind of leap, or whether there
were an infinity of mediating diagonals between them -- that is
to say, between the diagonal and the set of all the verticals.[25]
This ensures that C is both greater *and* not greater than aleph-
zero -- that a set contains and does not contain itself --
violating the law of non-contradiction. The same can in fact be
said for Grosseteste's paradox: 2 + 4 + 8 etc. is and is not
bigger than 1 + 1 + 1, etc. Furthermore since, in the case of a
numerical set, the set is defined by a numerical series and
contains such series, there is recursion here of much the same
kind as afflicts Bertrand Russell's famous set of all sets that
do not contain themselves. For Russell the set of all apples is
clearly not itself an apple -- else it could not be claimed to
contain all apples -- in a way that is less clear for the
Platonic form of an apple. And the set of all sets of fruits is
likewise not itself a set of fruits. However, the set of all sets
of this kind (sets not containing themselves as members) appears
to lapse back into the condition of a Platonic form after all. It
would seem that, once again, the set of all sets not containing
themselves is not itself an example of what it contains, else it
could not be exhaustive and fulfil the very condition for being a
set. But on the other hand, if it is not contained by what it

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25.   See Brian Rotman, *Mathematics as Sign: Writing, Imagining, Counting*
       (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford UP, 2000), 73-4.

contains, it follows that it *is* itself an example of a set not
containing itself as a member. An ineluctable but contradictory
conclusion then ensues: this set includes itself as an example of
itself precisely *because* it does not do so.

These paradoxes only intrude when one invokes the infinite:
`all sets' and `all sub-sets' etc. Graham Priest plausibly
argues that diagonalization has always lurked, whenever it has
been seen that the finite can be infinitesimally fractalized --
whenever one thinks of a finite thing as actually containing
infinite divisions within itself.[26] Hence the infinite presumed
set of divisions inside a grain of sand exceeds the grain; more
subtly the inside of a tree is an organic series with infinite
potential that could exceed the whole tree like a cancer.
Likewise, we cannot say which hybrid of the infinite sub-sets of
types of apples will ultimately mutate into another kind of fruit
altogether. Much more profoundly, for Aquinas the `accident' of
participated infinite *esse* exceeds the finite essence of a
creature.[27] One might say here that Being `diagonalises out' of
createdness. Or again, Kant resumed and complexified an ancient
conundrum -- if one imagines a totality, one can immediately

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26.   Graham Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP,
       1995).See Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 34; Marion, *Étant Donné*,
       `Adveniens extra', 17-21.

27.   See Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 34; Marion, *Étant Donné*,
       `Adveniens extra', 17-21.

imagine the breaching of that totality. Hegel pressed this point

against him: all categorial limits can only be established

insofar as they are transgressed.[28] Critique based upon the

bounds of an available set can always be trumped by a

metacritique which points out that the bounds are violated in

their very establishment. It is the same it seems with every

law, theoretical or practical; it is itself within the law, yet

must be above it in order to establish it. It must be implicitly

the exception to its own rules, and so its anarchy keeps pace

with and ceaselessly crosses out its own legitimating measure.[29]

Attempts have been made to evade these paradoxes. They all

involve an attempt to escape recursion and vicious circularity by

treating sets as qualitatively different to what they contain.

Russell suggested that aporetic master sets are somehow of a

higher *type* than the straightforward set, and that the first

horizontal numerical series in Cantor's proof of transfinitude is

of a different `type' from the enclosed vertical sub-series.[30]

Claire Ortiz Hill today suggests that sets are more like

phenomenological aspects or ontological essences.[31] But this

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28.   See Priest, *Beyond the Limits*, 79-123.

29.   See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans.
       Daniel Heller-Roozen (Stanford, Cal: Stanford UP, 1998).

30.   Claire Ortiz Hill, 91-111.

31.   Claire Ortiz Hill, 136-53. On aspects in phenemonology, see Robert Sokolowski,

move in Hill's version in effect tends to `re-platonize'
mathematics and logic in the sense that it bends sets back into
essences, into kinds of things-in-themselves existing in a sphere
of pure noetic constitution without any necessary reference to
actuality (even if it seeks to evade the Platonism involved in
recursion and the problems of the third man argument).

6. Thomism, Psychologism and Phenomenology

But should we not simply rejoice -- is this not nominalism's
self-dissolution and our return to the ancient world of real
numbers and real logical essences and so forth? But to rejoice
would be to accept the unstable truce of much 20th C mathematics,
logic and philosophy.[32] In this truce, philosophy has its own
proper field of possible logical or phenomenological items to
investigate, without having to venture upon philosophical
speculation about transcendent being outside eidetic appearances,
or else outside the consequences of propositional logic. At the
same time, the `Platonic sphere' of Fregean logical items or

Introduction to Phenomenology (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 17-22. For a fine demonstration that Wittgenstein was also centrally concerned with the question of aspects see Stephen Mulhall, *On Being in the World: Wittgenstein and Heidegger on Seeing Aspects* (London: Routledge, 1993).

32.   See Rotman, *Mathematics as Sign, passim*.

Husserlian pure phenomena supposedly gives philosophy a task beyond naturalistic science, whose investigations of the brain might otherwise be taken as displacing the need for philosophy altogether.

Such a prospect was indeed often proposed before the advent of Frege and Husserl, and is again often proposed today. Yet we forget that a non-naturalistic psychologism was entertained by the originally Catholic Aristotelian Brentano, as by the early Husserl himself.[33] For Aristotle as for Aquinas' actualism, logic is a property of actual thoughts, of the *psyche*, if not of the mere material brain as for J.S. Mill. Thomism therefore has no stake in simplistic anti-psychologism, nor in possibilistic and supposedly timeless universal essences that are extra-mental -- indeed this mode of immanent Platonism (as found in Frege, Husserl and even in Peirce) is really more Scotist in flavour and long-term inspiration. For Aquinas, by contrast, essences are present as universals only in the *psyche*, and for this reason do not escape the materially grounded *temporality* of the specifically human *psyche* – a temporality that is accentuated when we realize that the noetic essence is also sign, aspect and aporetic set. (And indeed for Platonism and neoplatonism numbers are but conjectured shadows, in a way that is actually *compatible*

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33.   See Martin Kusch, *Psychologism: A Case Study in the Sociology of Philosophical Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1995).

with non-Euclidean geometries etc: it was in fact Proclus who first stressed the constructed, contingently 'problematic' character of Euclid's geometry).34

Just for this reason, a telescopically extended Thomism outmanoeuvres pure phenomenology (phenomenology claiming to be the whole of philosophy) by showing that even its most radical effort at reduction is, as Eric Alliez puts it, 'impossible'.35 For the temporality of the given phenomenological event ensures that there can be no immanent gnoseological security. No manner of appearing to a consciousness can be permanent or final, since, as Protagoras says in Plato's *Theaetetus*, it cannot escape the way in which our knowing, which is expressive of a unique situated perspective and selective response, has always already altered what appears to it. This applies also to the case of all categorial arch-phenomena postulated as general conditions of possibility for appearing in general – like the ontological difference (Heidegger), the saturated adonation of the subject or the aesthetic object (Marion) or auto-affection (Henry). These overarching frameworks also only appear to awareness in the course of time and if they present to us something that is, indeed, always unavoidable, then at the same time they present us with something that is inherently problematic and irreducibly

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34   Proclus, *A Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's Elements* trans. E.R. Morrow (Princeton NJ: Princeton UP 1970)

subject to radically different interpretations.

So when phenomenology claims to be able to present such transcendental phenomena as reductively given to analysis, it can only do so by virtue of a dogmatic treatment of the bounds of finitude, which ignores the fact that the boundary between the finite and the infinite is not itself a clear and given border within finitude. Thus being is seen as the authentic nullity that lies within and beyond mere finite beings; the saturation of the gift within beings is understood as the non-appearing 'call' of the invisible to an equally radically concealed subjectivity, and the auto-affection of the subject is understood as an immediate presence of self to self in the very act of awareness which involves no detour via corporeal sensing or reflexive imagining. Essentially, phenomenology's dubious claim to displace metaphysics is here itself rooted in hidden assumptions derived from a Scotistic metaphysics by way of the Kantian legacy: within the field of being taken as univocal one can posit a clear boundary between finite and infinite, such that the finite is fully comprehensible within its own terms.

Thomism however, or an 'extended' Thomism, still offers in the face of this 'modernism' an alternative hermeneutics of being and knowing in general that is at once 'pre' and 'post' modern.

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35   Eric Alliez, *De l'impossibilité de la phenomenologie: sur la philosophie française contemporaine* (Paris: J.Vrin 1995)

The grammar of 'finite' suggests that it can only be known in conjunction with the infinite; the phenomenology of finitude suggests that (as for Aquinas) it is at once radically 'finished' and yet also 'incomplete' insofar as it limits both actuality and possibility; a speculative apprehension of finitude (after Eckhart, Cusa, Bruno and Pascal) suggests that the finite is always hollowed out by infinitude, just as a grain of sand is endlessly divisible, and moreover that a limited thing is only definable by its relations to what lies outside itself – relations which are themselves potentially infinite in scope. Accordingly, one possible interpretative response to the grammar, phenomenology and logic of the finite is to argue, after Aquinas, that since, according to our human *modus cognoscendi* it is always the finite instances of being, truth, goodness beauty or spirit that makes most sense, and since, nonetheless, it is also clear that these instances do not furnish any exhaustive experience of the transcendentals or the quasi-transcendentals (spirit, knowing, desiring etc which coincide with being truth etc in God but not in all finite things) that we always experience a partial apprehension of realities whose true home is in the infinite. This hermeneutic ontology remains truer, one might argue, to the irreducibly murky character of the boundary between finite and infinite by not allowing that the finite is comprehensible simply in its own terms, or that one can distinguish infinite from

finite merely in terms of an infinite quasi-quantity or else by a hypostasized negation of all bounds (as with Heidegger). Instead, this ontology seeks to safeguard the judgement that we consistently experience or in some sense 'see' a *mediation* between the visible and the invisible. Such a judgement and such an experience remains ineffable: yet the dogmatic claim for such an ineffability can only be ruled out by the counter-dogmatism of the Scotist-Kantian legacy within whose horizon pure phenomenology still stands.

This counter-dogmatism which arbitrarily shelters the finite from the infinite (or vice-versa in the case of Levinas and Marion) grounds pure phenomenology as a 'rigorous science'. Once this dogmatism is exposed as such therefore, one can see that such a project is in reality impossible. And given this impossibility, a radical scepticism seems to open to view. The very reasons that render phenomenology impossible, also ensure that its critical bracketing of transcendence is metacritically abolished: since no stable *noemata* appear within the realm of noetic appearing, bracketing loses its alibi and *raison d'etre* in terms of any secure, isolatable, self-appearing categorical framework. Without the alibi, the investigative assumption must be that bracketing can never have been where it claims to be according to the witness of a supposed reductive clarity, and instead that our intentions, via signs, directly reach but

modify, objective worldly realities.

And this presumption, despite its proximity to a hyper-skepticism (because of the presumed modification involved in all knowing), may re-open the path to a genuine security for knowledge grounded in eternal realities, as opposed to the immanent security that is illusorily offered by the foundationalism of most 20th C philosophy -- a security that, after all, secures only a 'human' knowledge that could be nothing more than perspectival illusion.[36]

7. Number and the Dynamic Universal

We have seen that the logical and phenomenological `essences' that re-appeared in 20th C thought were actually at once too static and at the same time too little psychic, since they were but whimsically placed beyond the limited naturalness and subjectivity of the human mind. Yet just because this

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36   This was grasped by Derrida for phenomenology and by Rorty for analytic philosophy: both writers though lapse into a scepticism that pays negative tribute to what they comprehensively deconstruct. This is because they fail to see that that they have deconstructed the 'metaphysical' (or onto-theological) barrier against 'metaphysics' if one takes this term (anachronistically) to mean the tradition of analogical ontology which referred being to God and not God to being (the Cappadocians, Dionysius, Augustine, Bonaventure, Aquinas, Eckhart, Cusa, Pico, Bérulle etc)

presumed psychologism was suppressed, a 'third realm' of logical beings and *noemata* could be substituted for the assumption that such essences are ontological real, which follows (one could persuasively argue) from the natural intentional bent of the human mind. Essences could be newly deployed as a barrier against the need for any metaphysics evoking transcendence only because they themselves were the prime counters within a dogmatic metaphysics of immanence.

One can argue that Clare Ortiz Hill is therefore wrong in her Husserlian desire to substitute this sort of essence for the notion of a set. One needs instead something like a new sort of hybrid 'set-essence'. The notion of 'essence' would return because that of 'set' turns out to be aporetic, yet 'essence' remains 'set' because the notion of 'essence' alone does not successfully banish every *aporia.*

For at this point we need to acknowledge what was *valid* in the nominalist critique of essence, as also of analogy and real relation. Surely they *do* tend to violate the principle of non-contradiction, and we can reconstrue this in terms of the way these concepts involve numeration and the interference of the infinite in the finite. In fact, Aristotle already declared in the *Metaphysics* that the basic paradigm of generic essence is number -- which is metaphorically akin to the *stoicheion* of geometry which is an ultimate part of matter (that which remains

formally the same however further subdivided).[37] To this degree

western philosophy remained Pythagorean. Even if the universal

of a tree is not a tree, even if it is only in the mind, is a

sign, conveys an unfolding series of aspects and manifests the

event of the arrival of *eidos* in constantly renewed

interpretation, it still, in all these modes, sustains a

dimension of numeration and inclusion. Whatever else we are

doing in thinking, we are always doing mathematics:

distinguishing, dividing, uniting, including, excluding,

denumerating, subnumerating, and so forth. The set conceived as

type or essence is supposed to evade the breaking of the law of

identity thrown up by set-theory, but the nominalists already

showed that the notion of essence appears also to violate this

law, and in any case the notion of essence has never been free of

the notion of number and number entails the idea of a set.

So one should not say that the (paradoxically) recursive set

must be replaced by pre-modern essence, but rather that the

recursive set is revealed in its contradictoriness as once again

essence, which *in turn* we must now reconceive in terms of number

and recursive set, as earlier we reconceived it in terms of sign

and aspect. Since essence is newly grasped as dynamic, as

appearing only in a series of infinite aspects that must always

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37.   Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1014a26-1014b15

be interpreted as signs of further aspects, essence now possesses

in its constitutive multiplicity and eventfulness, an inescapable

numerical aspect (in terms of both natural integers and

transfinite sets and other actual infinites).

Already, in the 17th Century, Ralph Cudworth had somewhat

re-numerized the notion of essence. He sought to reintegrate the

new mathematicized physics into Platonic-Aristotelian tradition

by introducing a new non-negative fundamental quasi-matter

consisting in mathematical and geometric basic elements whose

essence lay in pure logical form, not mere material extension.

Higher forms of active power (exhibited in the motions of

magnetism, planets, plants and animals) beyond this basic level

displayed the presence of other ontological realities besides the

mathematical *ogkoi* or `bulks'. These higher forms Cudworth named

dynameis or `active principles'.[38] And yet these were for him

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38.   Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe, Vol. II* (Bristol:
       Thoemmes, 1995), pp. 390-4; Vol. II, p. 619: here nature bestows 'a kind of life'
       in everything; *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*, Book III,
       chap. I, 3-4, p. 51; Chap. II, 4, p. 57; Chap. III, I, p. 57; Book IV, Chap. 7, 1, p.
       73-74 and in particular 5. In the latter place, Cudworth mentions the analogy
       between the active `anticipatory' power of mind and the `spermatic or plastic
       power' in animals that unfolds a virtuality. Later he speaks of the `vital active
       principle' in all of nature which produces the `pipes of Pan, Nature's intellectual
       music and harmony', which only the active human mind, not the passive senses,
       can partially re-constitute: Book IV, chap. II, 15, p. 9999-101. For Cudworth's
       `Mosaic Atomism' see Book II, chap. vi, pp. 39-40. In his version of the *Prisca
       Theologia*, Cudworth believed that Moses himself was the first atomist
       philosopher: this revealed philosophy however –- unlike that of the later
       debased materialist atomists – grasped that if abstract numbers and extensions
       are fundamental, then even material reality is intellectual: Cartesianism is

manifest primarily in the harmonious and self-sustaining

aesthetic patternings of the static `bulky' mathematical

elements. These patternings for Cudworth constituted *real*

relations that he termed *scheses*.[39] When we understand the

truth, our mind reproduces or sometimes artificially originates

such *scheses*. Here a new acknowledgment of the mathematical

building blocks of reality goes along with a more flexible and

still more relational understanding of the categorial

organisation *common* to mind and the world, as compared with

Medieval scholasticism.

Cartesian dualism is thereby, one might argue, benignly

plundered by Cudworth. There are two basic kinds of finite

being: the bulks and the active principles. However, even the

inert and mutually external bulks are the deposits of vital

activity, and this activity has hierarchical degrees culminating

in human understanding. The latter (foreshadowing Peirce) does

not just fully elaborate forms under the guiding lure of the Good

(which for Cudworth is identical with the Divine Father as single

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thought by Cudworth partially to recover this Mosaic perspective. By contrast, for Cudworth even Plato was weak at this point -- if secondary qualities are not the upshot of a play of atoms, then the way is supposedly open to the action of pure blind material reality and to `hylozoist' atheism.

39.   Cudworth, *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality, Book IV*, chap. II, 4-13, 86-96; chap. III, 11, 111.

source of the multiple `comprehension' of the Son-*Logos*),[40] but

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40.   Cudworth, *A Treatise*, Book I, chap. III, 8, pp. 26-27: `Moreover, it was the opinion of the wisest philosophers ... that there is also in the scale of being a nature of goodness superior to wisdom, which therefore measures and determines the wisdom of God, as his wisdom measures and determines his will, and which the ancient cabalists were wont to call `Crown', as being the top of crown of the Deity. Wherefore although some novelists [innovators] make a contracted idea of God consisting in nothing else but will and power, yet his nature is better expressed by some in this mystical or enigmatical representation of an infinite circle, whose inmost centre is simple goodness, the radii or rays and expanded area (plat) thereof all-comprehending and immutable wisdom, the exterior periphery or interminable circumference omnipotent will or activity by which every thing without God is brought forth into existence ... the will and power of God having no command inwardly ... either upon the wisdom and knowledge of God, or upon the ethical and moral disposition of his nature which is essential goodness'. (But against Cudworth one must say that this picturesque view is of course too hierarchical to apply to the simplicity of God. In general Cudworth favoured a far too subordinationist-tending view of the Greek patristic *monarchia*, without nevertheless, ever lapsing into Arianism.)

    For the notion of *prolepsis*, see *A Treatise*, Book III, chap. III, 1, Chap. 57; Book IV, chap. I, 1, pp. 73-74. Often Cudworth is read here as anticipating the Kantian *a priori*, and indeed he sometimes speaks, as in the latter passage, explicitly of an *a priori*, as if there were a kind of categorial blueprint latent in the mind which (it would seem to follow) one could then critically consider independently of any questions of participation or divine illumination, after the fashion of Locke and Kant. However, one should not consider the idea of `anticipation' in Cudworth as merely a weakly adumbrated idea of the categorial *a priori;* instead his more usual way of speaking of its suggests that it is more a notion of an open creative power, such that the *whole* of mind has a fundamentally imaginative, inventive capacity for Cudworth in a way that it did not for Kant. (The same notion is found in other Cambridge Platonists, in particular Nathaniel Culverwell).   At the same time, this more radically creative character does not at all denote the `construction' of sensations, reducing the material realm to the merely phenomenal; to the contrary, the mind's inventive power resonates with and thereby grasps the divine creative forces at work in the universe, which are the deepest guarantees of its objectivity and materiality. This is clearly shown in Cudworth's comparison of `anticipation' to reading the alphabet of nature: without prolepsis this script would be meaningless scribble, just as alphabetic writing would be senseless without 'certain inward anticipations that such characters signify the elements of certain sounds and those sounds in turn certain notions or cogitations of the mind' (Book IV, Chapter II, 16, pp, 99-100). In this way Cudworth is at once more proto-romantic and yet more

anticipates the discovery and invention of new forms. For
Cudworth as later for Balthasar, the more the mind is self-
elaborative, all the more is it receptive.[41]

A modern integration of mathematicized physics, and grasp of
the numerical dimension of essence is important, since it reminds
us that the most 'bulky', seemingly `material' level is in fact
the level most clearly subject to fractal vanishing: the point
and the triangle are simply not materially `there'. It also
allows us to realize how higher forms arise through dynamically
active and harmonious re-arrangement of things. Thereby it
renders *eide* both in nature and in us more innovative and
productive -- nearer in character to forms that are always

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metaphysically realist then Kant, and this combination is only possible because
of his Platonism: the mind can anticipate the real with a radical inventiveness,
and also introduce new artificial forms into the real with their own valid essences,
because it is involved in a real recollection of forms and is truly guided by the
same divine creative light that shaped (and shapes) the universe.

If, nevertheless, Cudworth sounds at times more proto-Kantian than this,
then one can suggest that this is directly related to the absence in his work of
any real awareness of a distinction between Plotinian and theurgic neoplatonism;
the `proto-Kantian' passages seem to develop a Plotinian stress on the
autonomous unfolding of the *Logos* within the soul; the more radically open
notion of `anticipation' can by contrast be related to a more Proclean (and
originally Platonic) concern with participation, recollection and disclosure of the
divine in the cosmos, as many passages indicate.

It may further be remarked that the later English romantic interest in Plato
centring round the 'neo-pagan' Thomas Taylor pursued much more explicitly the
theurgic reading. Perhaps this is one crucial reason why the outlook of Shelley,
Blake and Coleridge diverges from that of German romanticism; but all this, to
my knowledge, has scarcely been researched at all.

41.   Balthasar, 48.

forming or thinking than just abiding or being thought. That same integration also allows us to see that supposed `secondary qualities' like colours, although they are as truly there as quantities (we should here modify Cudworth, who was proto-Lockean in this respect) nonetheless arise as `events' in the relatively stable habits of our interaction with reality.

Quantities arise in the same way, but unlike colours they involve, as Aristotle realized, our `common sensing', since no single sense directly grasps quantity.  Cudworth insisted that the new atomistic and mechanical physics did not favour either Hobbesian materialism or Cartesian dualism, because both the quantitative and the relational (`schetic') most basic aspects of reality can only be grasped by the mind, not immediately by the senses. Only the mind grasps the *scheses* of thing to thing, part to whole and vice versa, and the ineluctably relational notions of cause and effect, equality and inequality, sign and thing signified, besides the more aesthetic realities of order and proportion which are judged to exist by our minds under the ultimate lure of the good. In consequence, these realities are ultimately intellectual in character -- yet while Cudworth rendered the *eide* in the world closer in character to a kind of eidetic thinking process as compared with scholasticism (although this was still only the trace of transcendent divine thought, and he refused the notion of an *anima mundi)* this did not at all mean

that he verged towards an idealist subjectivism, even of a
Kantian variety. The `intellectual' character of numerical
quantities and real relations was not for him a sign that we
ourselves construct apparently given reality, but rather a sign
that the universe is `an intellectual system', since it is
created. The understanding of this system more by active mind
than by passive sensing does not then point to a pre-organised *a
priori* of mental structure, but rather to the `anticipatory'
power of the mind both with respect to the discovery of nature
and the invention of culture. The mind actively grasps the given
cosmos, because the obscure signs arising in sensory events
provoke a renewed participation in the light of the divine *Logos*
that expresses the Paternal goodness and is the creative source
of both the cosmos and our finite minds. (see note 38 above)

   So to see essence as also number can dialectically reinforce
one's sense of the dynamic character of *eide* and the closeness of
the activity of thought to the changeful character of the cosmos.
However, I have said that with number comes also recursive set.
This destroys the principle of non-contradiction. So now it
seems that realism has failed to secure identity and thereby
truth, but nominalism has failed just as dismally. Neither
essences *nor* individuals submit to the law of excluded middle.
So must we be sceptics? Yet if so, how is it that there appears
to be relative identity? As Plato indicated in the *Theaetetus*,

the idea that there is only flux and appearance must *also* appear

within the flux, and seems thereby to identify a contradictory

stable flux and true appearing of this flux to knowledge.[42] As

today with supposed `redundancy' theories of truth, one cannot

really cross out truth, or deny the interval between being and

truth which being itself opens up, in favour of a reduction of

knowledge to one more ontic `event'. Indeed as Balthasar pointed

out (like Adorno), we are only immediately in contact with being

because of simultaneous mediation (as in the situation of

physical touch). We *know* something is there only to the measure

that it resists our knowledge and we also know that there is more

to be known, like the back of the tree.[43] We can only speak of

being because it shows itself or gives itself as true, and yet in

this showing also presents a certain palpable reserve. Thereby,

in giving truth it also gives that gap between truth and being

which is the never closed future horizon of understanding.

Either, then, the relatively stable identities of *eide* are true

realities, or else the one paradoxically stable form and truth is

the form and truth of formless flux – which finally lacks

identity because what it both shows and reserves is an ironic

lack of reserve, a concealed as unconcealed nullity. But in

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42.   Plato, *Theaetetus*, 161d1-e5.

43.   Balthasar, 122-3. On redundancy theories see Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 1-6; on touch, see *Truth in Aquinas*, 60-88.

neither instance can we any longer appeal to the absolute sway of
the law of non-contradiction.

8. Identity beyond Non-contradiction

It seems then, that the Thomistic telescope must incorporate
the perspectives of Nicholas of Cusa. Cusa sought to salvage the
Proclean/Dionysian tradition especially associated with the
Dominican order, by *admitting* that universals, real relations and
participation violate non-contradiction. He also tended to see
universals as signs opening up endless perspectives or aspects.
Likewise, finite truth was for him (like Cudworth and Peirce)
also a continuous task for human artisanal construction, since he
also effectively stole from the nominalists the theme of human
sub-creation. Whereas, for Ockham, finite spirits, like God, can
at least in principle cause finite being,[44] since being is a bare
univocal existential that can be posited outside divine creation,
in Cusa's writings for humans to create is also to receive
something and to surprise themselves, since they only *share* to a
limited degree in the divine capacity absolutely to originate.[45]

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44.   William of Ockham, *Quodlibetal Questions*, 1:1; 2:1; 2:9; *Reportatio* 2:6

45.   Nicholas of Cusa, *Idiota: De Mente* in *Opera*, ed. P. Wilpert (Berlin: De Gruyter,

And while we can for Nicholas create triangles or spoons, we
nonetheless can only create these as essences: for we must
thereafter observe the infinitely unfolding constraints and
possibilities of triangles and spoons, which as our own
fabricated offspring endlessly take us by surprise and cannot be
lawlessly manipulated at our pleasure, just as when we divide or
modify things in nature we cannot really change essences -- we
can cut down trees and genetically modify them; we cannot get rid
of the idea of tree that has appeared to us only through real
trees growing. The point that even artificial things exhibit
essences is elaborated more specifically by Cudworth, who notes
that an invented thing like a *horologe* or watch contains certain
regular *scheses*, and has a certain regular nature because it is a
contrivance of mind – even if the mind that has contrived it
cannot at once fathom all the implications of its regularity.
(Inversely, for Cudworth, relational regularity in the natural
world betrays a certain artificial 'intellectuality', precisely
because he has dynamised essence as formation rather than simply
form.) [46] This is in fact another disproof of nominalism: the

1967), pp. 236-42.

46.   Nicholas of Cusa, `On the Summit of Contemplation' (*De Apice Theoriae*) in
       Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings, trans. H. Lawrence Bond (New
       York: Paulist Press, 1997), p. 302. Cudworth, *A Treatise*, Book I, Chap. III, 4, p.
       25; Book IV, Chap. II, 4, pp. 85-6. for the *horologe* example. He goes on to
       adumbrate one of the earliest examples of a `design argument' on the watch
       analogy: since nature is regular and ordered like a watch, it must have a creator.

idea that there can be a `pure construction' entirely within our

control from entirely discrete brutal elements. No, the most

basic element, the geometric point, contains the direst mysteries

and most inescapable ambuscades.

In sign, aspect (late medieval or renaissance 'perspective')

number and *poesis,* Cusa, like Pascal later, recognized the

impinging of the infinite at the heart of the finite. (By

However, in two crucial respects Cudworth's argument is subtler than that of later writers like Paley: first of all, he argues that since only the mind, not the senses, recognizes *scheses* of part to part and part to whole -- including `ideas of cause, effect, means, and priority and posteriority, equality and inequality, order and proportion, symmetry and asymmetry, aptitude and inaptitude, sign and thing signified, whole and part' (p. 86) -- it follows that these realities are inherently intellectual in character. So whereas, for Paley etc., order is *evidence* of the work of ordered mind, for Cudworth order *immediately* is for us the presence of ordered mind. This contention is powerfully upheld by a usage of Plato's arguments in *Theaetetus* concerning synaesthesia; since certain things are perceived as common to `sound and colour' (Book III, Chap. 3, 6, p. 61) such as essence and non-essence, identity, diversity, unity, duality, etc. (note again the link between essence and number here) there are real metaphysical realities perceived by a psychic power beyond the merely sensory.

In a second but related respect also, Cudworth is far more profound than Paley. Along with other thinkers at this period, Cudworth does not see vitalism and mechanism always as opposites. To the contrary, he sees a machine as an automaton, as something `self-running' and so approaching to perpetual motion. As an automaton, a machine possesses a kind of artificial vitalism, comparable to the active principles of nature and the activity of mind itself.  Thus the *horloge* or watch is said *itself* to comprehend `the logical system ... of those relative ideas' and not only to be `measured' by time but itself actively `to measure' time, by its `apt and proportionable disposition of certain quantities ... contemporated together'. In short, Cudworth already takes the paradigmatic machine to be the *computer*. So whereas Paley is saying that the world runs like a machine and therefore we must infer a designer who has imposed this order upon it, Cudworth is saying that the world is like an automatic mind (whose components are eidetic *scheses*) whose mental contribution must intrinsically proceed from an absolute self-subsistent and self-generating thinking principle.

contrast, Aquinas did not acknowledge an actual as opposed to a
possible – or else privated, actual but negatively valued --
infinite as truly but contradictorily involved in the finite
itself.) Truth, for him, as for the tradition, is the identical,
the *non aliud.* But only the finitely identical is subject to
non-contradiction, since as bounded it cannot violate its own
bounds. In the infinite this does not apply: here the minimum
is also the maximum, the hottest the coldest, etc.[47] Here, since
the infinite God is all things, including all opposites and yet
simple as well as infinite, he must be at the same moment and in
the same respects these opposites -- notice that Cusa needs to
affirm in the strongest possible terms, like Aquinas (and unlike
Scotus), God's simpleness as well as infinity in order to arrive
at the *coincidentia oppositorum.*

However, since the finite is itself invaded and upheld by
the presence of the infinite (both in logic and within our
phenomenological experience) contradiction collapses identity
here also: the point is the circumference of the circle and its

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47   Nicholas of Cusa, *On Learned Ignorance (De Docta Ignorantia)* in *Nicholas of Cusa:*
      Selected Spiritual Writings, trans. H. Lawrence Bond (New York: Paulist Press,
      1997), Book One, chaps. thirteen to twenty-two, pp. 102-120 and *passim*. On the
      infinite see also Antoine Côté, 'Infinité' in *Dictionnaire Critique de Théologie* ed J-Y
      Lacoste (Paris: PUF 1998) 572-5. (It should also be said that the infinite for
      Nicholas, unlike Scotus or Descartes, is not something positively thinkable by us,
      even though it indicates, as for Gregory of Nyssa, a positive and non-relative
      unboundedness in God himself. Nor can one for Nicholas think God 's infinity
      without or prior to his other perfections such as goodness, as one can for Scotus.

centre; the tendency to the infinitely small is also the tendency

to the infinitely great and so on.[48]   For this reason our

mathematics, in contrast to the later view of Galileo, cannot

really attain to the real components of the divine *mathesis*:

perhaps one can suggest, supplementing Cusa and following

Grosseteste, that transfinites (besides other actual infinites

and irrational numbers) hint at the successive propagation of the

actually finite from the true actual simple and qualitative

infinite.[49]

As for the Catholic Platonico-Aristotelian tradition in

general, so for Cusa, finitude is in flux, and can only borrow

relative stabilities of essence and individual substance from the

infinite divine ideas, uttered in the *Logos*. However, he adds to

this that participation in perfect identity is also participation

in perfect non-identity, for the ultimate ontological scenario

can always be envisaged the other way round. Only when apparent

finite identities collapse in the unbounded is there a stable

reality. And then these two metaphysical schemes paradoxically

combine: only when the One is itself other to the One and so is

Many is it also the One returning to itself as origin.

Trinitarian theology allows Cusa to put this in more dynamic

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48.   *Ibid.* and Book Two, Chaper Twelve, pp. 160-66.

49.   See Grosseteste, *De Luce.*

terms. The actively possible One is the generation of the actual

Many: the Spirit displays this reciprocal bond where absolute

becoming and absolute unchanging being are further coinciding

opposites.[50] But only in the infinite is there perfect

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50.   Nicholas of Cusa, *On Actualised Possibility (De Possest)*, trans. Jasper Hopkins in *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa* (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1978), pp. 65-9, 93, 121. Here the Holy Spirit combines the *posse* of the Father and *actualitas* of the Son as *possest*. Later Cusa spoke not of *possest* but of *posse,* meaning absolute originating power or capacity, which is `incomprehensible'. This is not however pure will, nor a purely virtual, logical possibility as for the Avicennian tradition. It transcends both the capacity of self-impulsion that is life and the power to comprehend that is understanding. As the power to be it coincides with the actuality of being, just as it coincides with the actuality of living and of understanding. If *posse* is now the `highest' attribute, then this is in order to secure ontological equality between the existential, vivifying and intellectual. God's actuality as *esse* is not prior to his self-movement or thought, so the power shown in being is not exhausted by being: indeed life more fully expresses God (and so being as such) than does unqualified being, and intelligence images God still more precisely. Yet intelligence does not give rise to being -- as it would if this were a possibilistic ontology; nor does life give rise to being as it would were this a voluntaristic one. Instead these three aspects hint at a greater, ungraspable, powerful unity. In the temporal world it is our mind that most discloses the mysterious trinity of power: in choosing and selecting, the *posse* to be, to live and to understand is `unfolded'; the mind in understanding `makes' and this elaborates the `*posse* to become of the makeable' [knowledge] and `the *posse* of the connection of both' [life]. One can infer from this that knowledge as making is neither simply in the power of the maker, nor something ineluctably imposed by the makeable. Rather, `the connection of both' must be something like aesthetic necessity that elaborates a specifically intellectual mode of life according to a free but specifically patterned motion. Since mind as unfolding most images the divine *posse*, and understanding most corresponds to the Second Person (to follow Biblical convention) life to the Third (likewise) and so being to the First, it can be concluded that the spiritual *nexus* of life continues here, as in *De Possest*, to synthesize actuality of being and the possibility of knowledge, even though the term *posse* is now preferred for its greater denotation of simplicity and suggestion of an equalisation of the existential dimension with the vivifying and cognitive. See *On the Summit of Contemplation (De Apice Theoriae)* in *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*, 293-303.

coincidence, including of the limited and unlimited; between this true infinite and the created explicated finite infinite there is *no* coincidence, as later there is for Hegel. The latter hypostasises a contradiction that remains contradictory, so that in a way finite and infinite ceaselessly cancel each other out, rendering each a void, and one has (as Hegel admits) a mode of nihilism: Cusa instead invokes a mystery of contradiction which is at the same time its own incomprehensible resolution, and so after all an infinite identity.

It may nonetheless seem troubling that for Cusa the finite, 'explicated', non-simple infinite is still an actual and not merely possible infinite; as such, despite the term *explicatio,* it possesses a cardinality. At this point, the shadow of materialism, monism and pantheism that had hovered over a positive actual infinity ever since Greek antiquity (most of its advocates prior to Plotinus were materialists) seems to re-intrude. However, for Nicholas, every immanent actual infinity is (a) only aspectual, abstracting out some quantitative or else virtual dimension of reality and (b) is always complex and never simple. Nevertheless, it must be recognised that the infinitesimally small and the immeasurably large, together with undecidable factors in sets and diagonals, do indeed 'instantly fade' towards absolute simple infinity, without of themselves in their own peculiar aporetic nature truly encompassing it. In

consequence they can be read, or even for a certain insight

demand to be read, not as the traces of pantheism, but rather as

signs of the creature's created nothingness in itself, and of

Augustine's closeness of God to us that is closer than that of

ourselves to ourselves.

On this understanding therefore, finitude reveals itself as

a contradictory mystery. Only two rival truths are now possible,

even if they can appear alarmingly akin to each other. There is

first of all the truth of non-truth of nihilism that will require

a mode of faith in nothingness if it is to evade the recursivity

of the truth of non-truth. Secondly, as an alternative, there is

the at once conjectured and experienced truth of transcendent

metaphysics or theology: this alone now offers us the truth of

truth, of a fully ontological truth. For the latter position,

every creature exists by diagonalizing out of its finitude

through participation in being; humanity is the site of conscious

awareness of this exit. A human being can be the living self-

aware diagonal, or else can perversely choose to suppress this

contradictory reality. Like Cantor's C, humanity is the infinite

plus 1, beyond yet not beyond even the infinite aleph-zero

extension of the universe. One can try futilely to construe this

plus 1 in functional terms as useful to an animal -- yet mere

assertion of non-functionality (as Jean-Luc Marion has often

indicated) frustrates any such demonstration and sustains the

diagonal excess, while the constant creative eccentricity of the diagonal means that totalizing functional explanation must forever struggle to keep pace with its innovations.

Truth then requires identity. But this is only found in incomprehensible infinite non-identity in which this world incomprehensibly participates. This infinite non-identity is itself the Trinitarian play between the infinite *peras* of the One and the equally infinite *apeiron* of the 'complicated' and so simple and ordered Many expressed in the *Logos*. This play spins off from both as their arising unity without surpassing them, in the form of the Holy Spirit which is at once the bond of desire and the freedom of charity. Truth in the Creation reflects this infinite exchange, and is to a degree present in the constitutive relational interplay between individuals and universals, and between being as substantial and being as intellectual. This interplay runs also, as we can now see, thanks to the Thomistic telescope, along a temporal axis between nature and culture, and between essence and event, sign and number, substance and aspect.

9. Truth as the Bond of Being

Balthasar, rather like Cudworth in this respect, affirms

that such interplay concerns the Good and the Beautiful as well

as the True. To be more precise though, he actually says that

the True is not mere representation, because it is communication

of the Good, while the Good is not mere fulfillment of desire

because it is the expression of self-giving Being.[51] The

Beautiful is supposed for him to be involved in both these

excesses. Yet it is hard in a way to see where it finds a place

in this scheme. In the end, Balthasar's aesthetic and his

presentation of Aquinas's *De Veritate* gives way before a

lingering Bonaventuran stress on the priority of the will and the

Good. Indeed perhaps because he bases his aesthetics too much

upon subjective phenomenological intuition, and too little upon

speculative judgment of an ontology, the excess of the invisible

in the visible which constitutes for him the lure of beauty is in

danger of reducing the notion of visible beauty to a mere sign of

an infinite otherness and gratuity. Then indeed it will seem

that the True is the manifestation of Being beyond the mere

mirroring of Being, because it also communicates the Good, while

goodness is no mere fulfillment of need because it receives the

infinite sacrificial one-way gift of Being, which is pure

gratuity. One can appreciate how, like Augustine and Cudworth,

Balthasar preserves the Platonic notion of a primal Good that

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51.   Balthasar, 229-34.

sustains even judgements of the True, rendering them in the end

precipitations of true desire. However, he at times allows this

to mean that the will outruns the ordered distributions of

judgements. He ends *Theologik* Part I by saying that while we

cannot comprehend divine truth, truth remains our element,

whereas before divine love our cognitive and willing efforts must

fall silent and we must simply adore. Love,he says, is more

ultimate in God than truth.[52] But are they not co-equal? And is

not *theoria* fulfilled in liturgy rather than abandoned by it?

 A love beyond even our inkling as to the nature of love

sounds like a pure imparticipable manifestation of will.

Similarly, Balthasar says that love makes mercy outrun the

justice of truth. However, for Aquinas infinite justice as

justice was mercy, and mercy remained the infinite just placing

or distribution of the reconciled in peace.

By contrast, a lingering Scotist and Kantian conception of

mercy as mere subjective gesture persists in Balthasar here. And

the same set of positions means that finally for him the one-way

unilateral gift triumphs: beyond even the exchange of Father and

Verbum in the truth, the *Donum* is the excess of free offering in

God and to us. It is significant that Balthasar declares that

Being is communication of the Good *before relation* -- that is to

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52.   Balthasar, 285.

say, before a kind of binding (or *troth)* of Being to this

manifestation that would obligate Being in its very freedom.[53]

Instead he wants Being to be radically free. But how can this be

consistent with the Trinitarian giving of the Truth and the Good,

of *Verbum* and *Donum* by the Father who is *esse,* since this *is* a

relational communication that is free always as bound in truth?

Here one wonders about the status of Balthasar's

metaphysical prolegomena -- for in this case starting with the

metaphysical transcendentals seems to engender a conflict with

the perspective of the theological Trinitarian transcendentals

which are `word' and `gift'. Balthasar rightly says that what is

necessary participation from our point of view is free

`revelation' from God's point of view,[54] and one can add that one

should be able to say this of revelation *tout court,* since even

the revelation in Christ and the Church heightens human

participation, and this is necessary to us beyond necessity, in

terms of our real supernatural end. He also rightly notes that

Aquinas says that every human cognition is an obscure cognition

of God -- yet by this, as von Balthasar knows, Aquinas also means

that every human cognition is an obscure anticipation of the

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53.   Balthasar, 39.

54.   Balthasar, 238-255.

beatific vision only re-offered to us by redeeming grace.[55]

Therefore, for Aquinas, all participated knowledge occurs

remotely by virtue of such grace. This would suggest that

metaphysical prolegomena are at best ambivalent, except as

conscious anticipations of a Trinitarian ontology. It is clear

that *in reality* Balthasar's metaphysics would not in general have

the shape it does were it not exactly such an anticipation. Yet

in this specific instance it seems that the metaphysics of the

transcendentals whereby Being gives before relations *governs* the

theological ontology of *verbum* and *donum*, such that something in

the Holy Spirit is in excess of its substantive relation to the

relation of Father to Son. This excess is still the modern `free

gesture' of will, whose background is a Being that is otherwise

reduced to a gift-less existential inertia.

However, one can repair Balthasar. He is not consistent in

this tendency and at times refuses a Bonaventuran pneumatology.[56]

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55.   See Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 19-60.

56.   Balthasar, *La Théologique II: Vérité de Dieu*, 177-179. III: *L'Esprit de Vérite*,
        152-54. In the latter place, Balthasar refuses the Franciscan distinction of the
        persons as proceeding respectively `by nature' (the Son) and `by liberality' (the
        Spirit). In the former place though, he seems to endorse a more sophisticated
        Bonaventuran version of this scheme which distinguishes between exemplarity
        and liberality. However, exemplarity and *per naturam* are probably equivalent,
        and the `surplus' of the Spirit cannot be (as it is for Balthasar) a surplus of love
        over understanding without making the understanding less than loving. It must
        rather be something to do with the ecstasy also of understanding beyond the
        merely dyadic situation (the Peircean need for interpretation by a `third' outside
        the closure of the tautologous, or the apodeictic, for example). Also Balthasar in

Rightly he stresses, unlike Jean-Luc Marion, that the *Donum* is

both the manifestation of the prior reciprocity in truth of

Father and Son *and* that this reciprocity is in itself a passing

beyond itself.[57] Without this passing beyond (one can elaborate),

the reciprocity between Father and Son might appear to involve a

mere symmetry, since the Father *is* engendering and the Son *is*

being engendered, according to the logic of substantive relation.

Yet since the latter properly implies mutual ecstatic being and

not a mutually reflexive self-confirmation through the mirror of

the other (a 'doubling' inconsistent with the divine simplicity),

the passage of Father to Son and of Son to Father is not just an

immediate return in either case, but also a sustained exceeding

of any return and so of any merely complicit mutuality. This

exceeding of one towards the other therefore is immediately also

the exceeding of both by both which gives rise in actuality to

the Holy Spirit as the space of possibility for an infinite

sharing by infinite others of their mutual love. In this way, the

purely relational dyad is only constituted by a constant escaping

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a Franciscan line sees the Son as freely generated by the Father, and refuses
the idea that this generation has equally an *intellectual* ground: he denies that
the Father can in principle only know himself (and all *esse*), through the Son. If
this view is, as Balthasar says `Hegelian' (but it isn't) then Aquinas -- and
Gregory of Nyssa, Cyril and Augustine -- were all Hegelians.

57.   Balthasar, *La Theologique I, Vérité du Monde*, 46, 78-9; III: *L'Espirit de Vérité*,
216-29; *Theo-Drama Vol. V The Last Act,* trans. Graham Harrison (San
Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 105-109.

of the dyad and the symmetry of the Father/Son relation is endlessly renewed by the asymmetry of the third. The third continuously interrupts the circularity of two and yet this circularity nonetheless entirely pivots about this interruption.

Hence although the Father only gives to the Son what the Son returns to the Father, the Son forever receives something new by the excess of the Spirit's spiration in which the Word is breathed out from the Father's mouth. Similarly, although the Father only receives from the Son what he has given to him, he endlessly receives back something newly inspired by the Spirit's mediation. This constantly renewed asymmetry within the reciprocal relation of Father and Son therefore constitutes the `moment' of unilaterality that renders the *Donum* truly *Donum* and not just formally equivalent exchange, and at the same time a *Donum* (as Augustine declared) receivable by us as the 'extra' and yet necessary (if we are to realize our supernatural end) gift of deifying grace – just as the Spirit within the Trinity is at once superfluous and yet fundamental.[58] This unilateral moment corresponds, as we saw in the realm of knowledge, to the moment of valid individuality and individual identity that is not exhausted by universal essence.

To sustain this balance regarding the *Donum* however, one

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58.   Augustine, *De Trinitate*, Book XV, Chap. 5, 27-39.

needs to say more emphatically than Balthasar that what exceeds
mere representation in the truth is the Beautiful, as this
retains the character of truth as measure and yet ensures that
truth *as* truth, not as communicated will, exceeds mere copying.
Likewise one needs to say that what exceeds satisfaction of
desire in the case of the Good is also the Beautiful, because
then one can allow that the Good exceeds satisfaction in itself
in so far as it is the realised mutual co-dwelling of human or
angelic persons, and not merely as the passive receiving of a
gift from the excessive source of Being. This ensures that the
moment of unilateral giving does not surpass but rather allows
mutual reciprocity through asymmetry, since such asymmetrical
reciprocity is fundamentally beautiful. In turn, the aesthetic
so conceived (here following Balthasar) as balancing a measured
manifestness (classicism) and the lure of desire beyond
appearance (romanticism) cannot reduce beauty to a mere sign of
the sublime beyond of the supreme other. Instead, as Balthasar
often seems to indicate (when he transcends mere personalism) the
invisible here truly is *in* the visible, by another coincidence of
opposites (although they only perfectly coincide in the infinite,
where the *Logos* is a boundless image).

Repaired in this way, Balthasar's understanding of how truth
is aesthetically established in the desire for goodness – the
desire to give -- blends very well with the Thomistic telescope

that newly stresses how truth as realised *eidos* is also truth as anticipation, truth as made, truth as continued event, truth as interpreting signs, truth as receptivity of new aspects.

Together these perspectives suggest that truth is that which opens us to contemplation of the infinite just in so far as it is also that which prepares us for a more harmonious human and cosmic future. Beyond contradiction and non-contradiction, truth only begins to disclose to us an infinite integral identity in so far as it also begins to realise in our finitude the measured exchanges of hope and love which ceaselessly and incomprehensibly blend the same with the different. Truth as disclosure is also troth, the bond of being.