This dissertation focuses on the thought of the American Orthodox theologian David Bentley Hart. Hart argues that the beauty of the infinite God is a persuasive truth which establishes a new order of being. This study shows how Hart constructs his theological argument within and against postmodern aspects of ontology, hermeneutics and aesthetics.

Hart’s theology is a unique endeavor in contemporary Orthodox scholarship. This study is one of the first attempts at a comprehensive analysis of his thought.
THE INTERRUPTION OF CHRIST – THE LANGUAGE, BEAUTY, AND THEOLOGICAL AESTHETICS OF DAVID BENTLEY HART
Ari Koponen

THE INTERRUPTION OF CHRIST – THE LANGUAGE, BEAUTY, AND THEOLOGICAL AESTHETICS OF DAVID BENTLEY HART

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on the thought of the American Orthodox theologian David Bentley Hart. Hart’s theology is deeply involved with philosophical discourse and also entails criticism of the latter. The focus of this study is, then, is on Hart’s thesis of the authentic rhetorical nature of Christian theology in dialogue with philosophical ideas that Hart envisions to be either in rival opposition to Christian thought or representing deteriorated aspects of it. A special interest of this study is Hart’s theological aesthetics; Hart seeks to argue for the primary value of beauty in Christian self-understanding. The study aims to show how Hart’s thought is indebted to Radical Orthodoxy – the movement’s criticism of modern and postmodern critique and, regarding theological aesthetics, to the legacy of Hans Urs von Balthasar.

The first section of the study concerns Hart’s thinking about the nature of theology. While exposing Hart’s central arguments, their background is pointed out, alongside the argumentative structure of these claims. The chosen method is an attempt to understand Hart’s argumentation in the way he proposes it himself. The methodological idea is that Hart’s arguments reach only a certain convincing coherence if surveyed as encompassing vision and not so much as particular instances of historical or ideal commentary.

First, the study presents an interpretation of the postmodern, which Hart himself formulates in the needs of his thought. After that, Hart’s intellectual place is located within the broader field of narrative theology. The purpose is to show the nature of Hart’s multiple divisions, sometimes even battlefronts, which he draws within intellectual history. The last part of the first section is dedicated to surveying Hart’s notions of metaphysical views on ontology and language, which are necessary in order to understand against whom Hart is aiming his own theological critique. These rivals are virtually the same ones as those against which the spokesman for the Radical Orthodoxy movement, John Milbank, argues. Radical Orthodoxy aims, as does Hart, to formulate an authentic theological way of understanding the world and to change it. As an alternative to modernism and secularism, Hart offers, in the spirit of Radical Orthodoxy, an ontology of peace, in which both the metaphysical models of Antiquity are surpassed and an anti-dialectic way of thinking is postulated.

According to Hart, Christian theology constitutes “an interruption”, a novel sidestep from the continuum of Hellenistic metaphysical legacy, while simultaneously not separating itself completely from its Platonic roots. This study attempts to show that, in Hart’s view, this historical interruption is not merely a historical assertion.
Via the construction of such interruption, theology can recover itself in constant re-narrations, and stay vigilant and vitalizing even in the postmodern milieu. Rather, Hart’s claim of the rhetorical nature of theology is taken seriously in this study, while pointing out the shortcomings of such an approach.

The second part of the study observes how Hart puts his claim for theology to creatively re-narrate itself into an act of response to philosophical nihilism or atheism. The section is divided according to Hart’s encounters with the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche, Emmanuel Lévinas, and Martin Heidegger. In addition, the thought of Jacques Derrida is brought into play in discussion with the theme of the philosophical notion of the gift, as a showcase example of how Hart uses his theological premises to encounter philosophical themes. Through these philosophers, the study draws a picture of Hart’s rhetorical argumentation and the paramount status of beauty acting as “a warrant” of the truthfulness of his discourse.

The third section of the study inspects the two major themes of Hart’s own theology: the infinity of God and beauty. These two topics have frequented the previous sections and can be seen to constitute cornerstones of Hart’s claim for an ontology of peace. The theme of God’s infinity is approached through Hart’s reading of the thought of St. Gregory of Nyssa. The final part of the third section is dedicated to an exposition of Hans Urs von Balthasar’s basic premises of his theological aesthetics. The section shows how Hart is both developing von Balthasar’s work and using the latter’s premises in his own critique of postmodernism.

**Keywords:** theological aesthetics, philosophy of religion, ontology of peace, Radical Orthodoxy, beauty, rhetoric, cultural criticism
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TIIVISTELMÄ


Tutkimuksen ensimmäinen kokonaisuus käsittelee Hartin ajatuksia teologian luonteesta. Hartin keskeisargumenttien esittelyssä on pyritty tuomaan esiille aatehis toriallinen tausta ja Hartin käyttämän argumentaation rakenteen. Valitun metodin taululla on pyrkymys ymmärtää Hartin argumentaation tarkoituksen hänen olettamistaan lähtökohdista. Ajatuksena on, että Hartin argumentit nousevat koherenttiin vain kokonaisvaltaisena, ei niinkään yksittäisten historiallisten ajattosten tai ideaalien kommentaarina.

postmodernissa ilmastossa. Tutkimus ottaa vakavasti Hartin haasteen ymmärtää teologia pohjimmiltaan retorisena toimintana ja pyrkii myös osoittamaan tämän lähestymistavan heikkoudet.


Avainsanat: teologinen estetiikka, uskonnonfilosofia, rauhan ontologia, radikaali ortodoksia, kauneus, retoriikka, kulttuurikriitikki
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My first contact with David Bentley Hart was through reading his 2003 book *The Beauty of the Infinite.* I had just finished my Master’s thesis and was pondering what to do next. Although I first read Hart’s book rather absent-mindedly, something about it immediately rang true. Beauty seemed, after a while, a theological topic worthy of pursuit.

My supervisor Dr. Serafim Seppälä spared no pains trying to convince me to let go of my early overambitious proposals for a research topic and instead to focus on a more delimited area of research. His insight and help have proven invaluable to this day and for that I owe him a special thank you. Professor Seppälä also helped with the most difficult part of this study: putting an end to it. With his help, I managed to discern the form of this study and to realize the necessity, at a certain point, of letting things be.

At the conclusion of these years of research and writing, I still think that exploring theological aesthetics is valuable. Yet I have discovered at the same time that every work of creation, even one as modest as the present study, reflects something of its creator. The shortcomings of this study are obvious, and the constant reviewing of one’s own work certainly keeps one humble. In the end, the main theological achievement is personal: it has helped me to achieve some clarity and even peace amidst non-theological matters as well. And as doing research is a lonely endeavor, sometimes beauty and peace can be found only in abandoning the solitude of the study through communion with family and friends.

Of course, this study would not have come to fruition if I had not received financial support. I would like to express my gratitude to the Fevronia Orfanos Fund (Valamo Foundation) for an initial grant, and to the Orthodox Church of Finland for providing two grants for completing my study. On the immaterial side, the brotherly presence of Dr. Pekka Metso has supported me in many ways – all of them good. I would also like to thank my alma mater, The University of Eastern Finland, for the opportunity to teach systematic theology for a few years and thus gain the most invaluable opportunity to learn by teaching. The spiritual and scholarly help of my colleagues and fellow researchers have steered the boat in the right direction whenever it was necessary. It is impossible to name all of those who have aided me; I hope that the future will give me the opportunity to express my gratitude to each of them personally.

I am most grateful to my wife Maura and my daughters, for both offering and denying the possibility of locking myself in my study. Without them, the glass “through which we see dimly” (I Cor. 13:12) would be dimmer still.

June 20, 2019
In Hämeenlinna, Finland
Ari Koponen
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

While our culture is one of many images, of multiple narratives and, at least on the surface, of a multitude of voices, an attempt to evaluate these multiplicities seems to be more a matter of personal opinion or private inclination. Whether one tries one’s hand at aesthetics or takes a swing at cultural criticism, in the background there seems to loom a painful awareness of a broken unity, a lost world of coherence, a vague memory of precedent integral memory that perhaps could once bring together personal conviction with metaphysical clarity, an edifice that was meant actually to be dwelt in and constructed upon, not merely dissected into components or interpreted to death with labyrinthine suspicion.

Theological currents are not isolated streams, either. Ironically, it seems that when the ponds of influence within theology multiply, more often they tend to view themselves as reflecting the whole sky. The age that proclaims the death of all grand narratives consists of narratives of how we should interpret or mourn the lost grand narratives. This applies to theology, as well. It seems, to continue with the metaphorical speech, that this situation either reduces itself regarding all the ponds holding basically the same water or vindicates some meta-theory of the water through which the accuracy of the reflection is measured or the quantity of water molecules in a specific pond is displayed. Narratives about narratives are more plentiful a resource than actual grand narratives, while the latter are often reduced to caricatures of other approaches to veiled interests.

Yet some voices have been raised to stress both the unique nature of Christian discourse and its relevance in the postmodern world. Whether these voices have operated on different projects of returning to the sources of Christian tradition or have been interested in making theology a distinguishable and veritable force either in academia or in a wider public arena, the unifying factor seems to be a vision that regards a secular worldview or thought either as reductive, aggressive, unfinished, or even harmful, or as just a specter of a very recent cultural dance of lights.

At the same time, the beautiful, or beauty, a long-neglected concept in theology, has re-emerged powerfully in Christian discourse; more and more curriculums include a course on theological aesthetics of some sort. Another great interpretative trend, narrativism or narratology or narratively constructed phenomena, dominates the discourses of more theoretically inclined disciplines, and even popular culture still puts a great weight on “a good story.” In both cases, it is the “goodness” (whatever it consists of in itself) of the story that will be the criterion when comparing different narratives, not necessarily the factual or historical accuracy, or the logical value of language in narrative, or its factual correspondences to “reality.” The move from epistemological dominance, in the fields of both aesthetics and narratives, into a more hermeneutic and discursive realm has certainly been one of the features of the postmodern milieu.

The Christian narrative, namely the Gospel and its continuation in tradition, theology, and thought, has naturally encountered these features. It has been widely agreed that the Christian narrative is by no means immune to cultural trends; and some
of these narrational features should in fact be welcomed. John Milbank has famously argued that once there was a time when “there was no secular” — in the manner recognizable from all children’s tales. Charles Taylor has surveyed the modern origins of the secular mind and society, and has observed that to the modern sensibility, it was natural to view itself as liberated from previous errors (whether theological, political, or philosophical) — a tendency that is reflected in many ways even in the postmodern era. Both of these narrative remarks show that in the world of narratives, narratives compete and out-narrate others, while re-narrating themselves in each age.

An American Orthodox theologian, David Bentley Hart (1965–) is one of the recent theologians who is interested in doing theology in the key of narrative and aesthetics, and in reflection with philosophical tradition. His main goal is to portray Christian theology as a discourse of ontological peace (here, he is borrowing the thesis of John Milbank and the “Radical Orthodoxy” movement), as an alternative to certain Western philosophies of nihilism and its offspring, which — in both Milbank’s and Hart’s readings — contribute to something called the ontology of violence. Both Milbank and Hart affirm that Christian theology, while historically constructed, has also been a major force in reforming history, culture, and values, and should continue being so, but only on its own terms. This emphasis on theology’s semi-independent status from, for example, philosophy is a node of their thought, binding together the premises of narrational theology and post-modern theological currents.

Hart argues that God’s covenant is a story that triumphs over “false and violent stories that sinful humanity tells of the world.” While his discourse is at times apologetical, Hart engages with the Christian story as one capable of creating, sustaining, and denying cultural forms while still managing to salvage its proclamatory, visionary, and eschatological message. More specifically, he wants to assert Christian discourse in competition with post-modern non-foundationalism and relativism. In this, Hart joins with the conservative theologians, first and foremost with the radical

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1 Milbank 2006, 9.
2 Taylor 2007, 169.
4 Narrative theology, as part of narrative analysis, can be seen as the offspring of post-war sensibility of disregard toward dominating discourses. Yet, precisely in theological form, Alister McGrath traces the narrational approach back to the thought of Richard Niebuhr and Karl Barth (2000, 500). More recent developments have been brought forth most notably by Hans Frei (for example, 1974) and the advocates of so-called postliberal theology (Hauerwas, Lindbeck). The postliberal emphasis on narratives has evoked criticism of being too exclusive, historically oriented, and particular to offer any coherent common theory of such notions as verity. In this, postmodernism can be seen to share many of the textual practices and suspicions of metaphysical stability or presence with the narrational approach. While the literature on postmodernism is uncontrollably large, common features seem to follow a few major premises put forth by major thinkers of the 19th and 20th Centuries: the dissolution of metaphysics (Nietzsche, Heidegger), hermeneutic awareness and linguistic analysis and deconstruction (Wittgenstein, Lyotard, Derrida), and finally discourse of this “space,” which is emancipated from both metaphysics and binary linguistic representative structure (Foucault, Habermas). All in all, it is the literary aspect that is augmented in theological interpretations of these developments. Postmodern theology will be surveyed in the first chapters of this study.
5 Hart 2003, 349.
ones such as Milbank, in pinpointing that the Christian Gospel is not merely a cultural phenomenon, but a supreme narrative of reality and its deliverance.

Furthermore, Hart argues that authentic Christian experience and thought already entail a positive aspect of “the postmodern” and already endorse “rhetoric” over “dialectics” in portraying the world, man, and God. Hart acknowledges that modernity “has foundered,” and man is embedded in language in an inescapable way. This inhabitation in language results in the condition that Richard Rorty has depicted as a shift from epistemology to hermeneutics, the shift from modern times to postmodern ones. In terms of Christian thought, David Bentley Hart thinks this is most welcome in the sense that there is no neutral ground or universal facts about Christianity, but rather only a historically constructed story that gets told and acted out in the community of believers. This emphasis reflects the shift that theological thought has also joined since the 1950s, namely the shifting of focus from analytical thought to more concrete varieties of particular theologies or communities.

However, this story does not remain within the boundaries of this community and is not merely one of a particular sub-narrative of limited understanding and an impulse or an expression of social cohesion. Rather, in Hart’s view, the Christian gospel and theology are a grand narrative that has through Christ, God the Father’s “supreme form of rhetoric,” “interrupted” the narrative of Antiquity and brought something novel and truly different into play. In addition, it is the beautiful that Hart wants to salvage from modernity’s disregard toward it; Hart wants to show that the beautiful is precisely interested, not “disinterested” or a sentimental category, nor a merely distracting pastime evading more serious notions of Good (ethics) or True, a veritable realm of approaching being and God. The division of aesthetics into the beautiful and the sublime, as worked out by Immanuel Kant in his Critique of Judgment, displays for Hart the “entire pathology” between modernity and postmodernity, the latter being an idea giving birth to postmodernity’s most distinguishable features.

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6 Hart 2003, 3.
8 See Cunningham 1991, 408.
9 Hart 2003, 51. By this, Hart puts Kant’s aesthetic division at work as a narrative component. He explains that for beauty in general, he lists the following features pertaining to it: 1) it is an undefinable concept (devoid of any analytical exhaustive definition); 2) beauty is objective in a theological sense since it “qualifies theology’s understanding of divine glory” (2003, 17); 3) beauty is a “grammar of distance”, that is, a specific feature of understanding Christian ontology; 4) beauty evokes desire (it displays the Christian alternative to neutral affects or relations to the Other or others); 5) beauty counters over-intellectualism (or “Gnosticism); and 6) beauty highlights the concrete creaturely being and reflects the divine trune persons and thus resists any reduction to the symbolic interpretation. It is worthwhile noting that, for Hart, Kant himself represents a moment of reductive history in which beauty is pushed into the background instead of epistemology and ethics. While the interested aesthetic viewpoint (or “desire” mentioned above) may be something that, for Kant, would be an impossibility, the overall estimation of Kant’s figure is debatable. The other aspect of Kantian aesthetics, his notion of the sublime, is also criticized by Hart as resulting in rationalism. Hart argues that the Kantian sublime, while disfigured from its original metaphysical clearness by postmodern interpreters, establishes a “certain pattern” (2003, 46), in which eventually the only truth of an aesthetic judgment is actually a judgment of the capacity for such a judgment, and thus it is in effect an exercise in solipsism. It is not here necessary to take a deeper look into this, but it may be asked if Hart’s and other postmodern theories of Kant do justice to Kant himself, especially when transposed from the Kantian system into metaphysical categories of their own.
The interest in theological aesthetics has surged since the groundbreaking work of Swiss Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988). David Bentley Hart develops the openings explored by von Balthasar: he acknowledges Balthasarian legacy as a necessary critical vehicle in theological discourse precisely as anti-modern, and develops it more in the direction of postmodern questions. Both von Balthasar and Hart view theological aesthetics as recovering the true transcendental unity of rationality, goodness, and beauty from modernist dissection of this unity and the postmodern or post-structuralist tendency toward anti-foundationalism. Hart is interested in whether “the beauty to whose persuasive power the Christian rhetoric of evangelism inevitably appeals, and upon which it depends, theologically defensible?” It is philosophical theology that poses the question; Hart seeks to answer it by rhetorical affirmation of the importance of aesthetics not only in the Christian experience but also in its truth.

Hence, it is the figures of John Milbank and Hans Urs von Balthasar (at least as references) that will occupy the pages of this study alongside Hart. From Milbank, Hart acquires an argumentative structure for his narrative (Christian peacefulness against the metaphysics of violence) while certainly adapting some of Milbank’s combative style; von Balthasar’s massive theological output acts as a guide and an impetus to Hart’s aesthetically motivated theological thought. Indeed, Hart himself remarks that his magnum opus could be read as “an extended marginalium” to von Balthasar’s works, and also makes note of John Milbank’s thesis of an ontology of peace as informing his “argument throughout.” This ontology of peace, the particular Christian view on being, is set against the alleged adversaries, gathered under the term “ontological violence”. Of this affiliation, Hart engages most deeply with the thought of Martin Heidegger and Friedrich Nietzsche.

Hart’s outtake on theological narrative is not simply a matter of academic specifics. He has on numerous occasions also engaged the public arena, discussing the challenges put forward by, among others, the “New Atheists”, such as Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett, to name the most notable. This engagement has earned Hart a name as a cultural critic of atheism.

10 Von Balthasar’s theological aesthetics, Glory of the Lord in 7 vols. [hereafter referred to, for the sake of convenience, as GOL] 1982–1991. For later developments in his thought, see Roberts 1987; Bychkov & Fodor 2008. Since von Balthasar, the modern literature precisely on theological aesthetics has grown. This literature can be roughly split into two, following von Balthasar’s distinction between theological aesthetics and aesthetic theology. The first group is interested in theological premises and applications of aesthetic phenomena, their ideas and ideals; see, for example, Brown 1989; Nichols 1980, 1998; Milbank 1997; Greene 1998; García-Rivera 1999; Viladesau 1999. For Orthodox scholars of this variety, see Berdyaev 1955; Evdokimov 1990; Soloviev 2003; Manoussakis 2007. The second group is a broader one: it discusses the relation between theology and the arts, and interprets theological substances aesthetically; for example, Begbie 2000; Viladesau 2000, Brown 2001. Other work covering both sides of this distinction, and philosophical and theological aesthetic theory in general: Kearney 1988; Bernstein 1992; Dyrness 2001. Collections: Apostolos-Cappadona (ed.) 1988; Milbank & Ward & Wyschogrod 2003; Thiessen (ed.) 2004; Treier & Husbands & Lundin (eds.) 2007.

11 Hart 2003, 1.

12 Hart 2003, 29.
1.2 THE AIM OF THE RESEARCH

This study seeks to elucidate the premises, content, and consequences of Hart’s thought on two levels. These levels are determined by the nature of the sources, though in Hart’s case, academic and popular levels of writing are organically intermingled. However, my primary interest lies in Hart’s core arguments, and thus the first level is a philosophical and theological one and will consume the major part of this study.

On this level, this study begins with the following question: what is meant by a narrational take on theology and how does Hart employ it? I seek to elucidate his mode of argumentation in its philosophic and apologetic sense, as well as to give an outline of what elements of narrative Hart sees as constructive to his own theological vision.

After outlining narrative theology, I will try to explore Hart’s usage of narrative theology and how he situates his use of narrative theology within a broader field, and more specifically, how he employs the core arguments made by Milbank and other representatives of Radical Orthodoxy. In addition, how does this specific take on narrative display itself as Christian discourse and as a critical counterpart to a secular or “nihilistic” narrative?

Given that Hart argues that a Christian narrative offers an alternative to “nihilistic narratives,” I will pursue those narratives that Hart seeks to counter with his own, that is, I will ask how those nihilistic narratives are treated by Hart and how Hart’s Christian narrative either differs from them or develops them. As a major motif of this treatment, theological aesthetics is taken here as a major guideline both in interpreting re-narrations of Christian tradition and in competing with nihilistic narratives.

Finally, I will take a look (in Chapter 4) into positive aspects of Hart’s narrative and ask how the key themes emerging from the previous questions function in and as theological discourse. Here, I will also try to analyze and summarize the answers Hart himself gives to his question regarding the possibility of Christian aesthetics and its purchase on truth. In this, I will try to pinpoint the debt to von Balthasar’s legacy and to what degree Hart’s discourse perhaps differs from it. Here, I also hope to show how it is precisely the transcendental concept of beauty that becomes paramount for Hart’s arguments in favor of theological aesthetics.

My second level of inquiry supplements the first by taking into account Hart’s output on a more popular level, meaning his discourse against New Atheism and other various, more “cultural” matters. This second level will be embedded in the study of the first and will appear in the text only when necessary for the questions listed above or to widen the connotations made on a theological level. Therefore, the sources used reveal this second layer, which is not usually explicated, as it concerns more the trajectories than the core of Hart’s thought.

1.3 METHODOLOGY, PREVIOUS STUDIES, AND SOURCES

For quite obvious reasons, there have been no monograph-length studies (to my knowledge) focusing solely on David Bentley Hart’s theology. Every attempt to study a living theologian comprehensively is, to a degree, a moot attempt, not only because their work is perhaps not finished, but also because they themselves may resist or feel awkward about closures forced too soon upon their thought. Thus, this study more
enters into current discussion of the topic as endorsed by Hart, rather than attempting to draw a conclusive picture of his theological output.

In the case of Hart, however, this resolution is not only dictated by modesty or arbitrary methodological limitations; by engaging in the discourse, I think that one can make the most of Hart’s case, in which the theological style is abundantly rich in both its vocabulary and tropes, even at times to the point of obnoxiousness, and which pursues a wholesome work of thought, not a detailed exposition of a few aspects of an age. More substantially, the more traditional systematic approach proved in my first attempts to be less fertile than openly rhetorical treatment of the subject here. I will, in the course of this study, on numerous occasions pinpoint the obvious deficits, both methodological and stylistic, that Hart’s rhetorical theology inevitably confronts, but as Hart aims for total vision of Orthodox theology, I will explore how this vision informs Hart’s main concepts. This study, then, seeks to elucidate Hart’s arguments in their context and then evaluate their efficiency regarding other narratives and, most of all, the narratives that Hart criticizes.

After publishing *The Beauty of the Infinite* in 2003, a re-worked *magnum opus* from his own dissertation, Hart established his position as a veritable Orthodox theological voice in the West. In the September 2007 issue, *New Blackfriars* dedicated the issue to critical appropriation of the work. Since then, single articles have appeared that either touch tangentially the topics Hart has written about or focus on comparative surveys between Orthodox and other denominations’ views on a single topic.

Given the nature of Hart’s thought, his rhetorical style, and the vast landscapes it seeks to cover, I have chosen to approach the texts with a systematic reading that seeks both to understand the discourse with which Hart engages and, simultaneously, critically to preserve the rhetorical nature of his theological thinking. To me, the latter aspect seems to be of crucial importance; for Hart, and for the attempts to understand him, the theological style is not to be separated from its content. I feel that a “stricter” systematic reading, systematically classifying Hart’s arguments or topics under subordinate critical repositories of argument or tendencies, would not serve here well. This, in fact, would run against his whole rhetorical endeavor and would rub the spirit out of the vessel, so to speak, by assuming that in his narrative, “a message” would be more important than the medium. Again, the matter is not a mere personal preference; as will become clear in the first part of the study, this dissection would run contrary to the logic that Hart himself uses in his primary sources and professes to display, and in this way, what perhaps would be gained in clarity or tidiness, would result in losing (quite a bit more, I believe) understanding of his intentions and models of argument.

With his critical assessments of a few critical philosophers for both modernity and postmodernity, namely Friedrich Nietzsche, Emmanuel Lévinas, and Martin Heidegger, Hart calls for a closer reading of those philosophers and how they reflect and deflect the Christian story. Hence, we are interested in Hart’s portrayal of these thinkers, although in the case of Nietzsche and Heidegger, the study tries to put them in a larger context, for this context also forms a necessary background and strata for the current discussion in which Hart engages.

The present dissertation is divided between the different themes explored via the questions outlined above. As already mentioned, the theological layer will always be

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of primary importance, and Hart’s involvement in the issues as a cultural critic will be carried alongside this primary interest.

First, I will survey narrative theology as a theological method and subject and will try to place Hart within that discussion. This theme will also explore the other areas of interest regarding Hart’s theology, theological aesthetics, and claim for an entity called the “ontology of peace”, respectively. This theme will also introduce the necessary praemambulae for later parts of this study: it will try to evaluate “the postmodern condition” of theology and to place Hart within the context of current Orthodox theology.

The second theme will delve into Hart’s narrative and its counter-narratives, meaning those he wishes to portray his own narrative against. Here, the narrative of ontological peace will appear in a more contrasted way alongside the discourse offered by the Radical Orthodoxy movement, and most of all by the movement’s foremost spokesman, John Milbank. This theme will explore how Christian discourse seeks to present itself as a veritable counterpart to alleged philosophies of nihilism and all its projects labeled with the haunting prefix “post-“.

It is to be emphasized, and will become more than clear in the course of this study, that no exhaustive critique of these major philosophical figures is carried out by Hart. This is not his intention; rather, engaging the “postmodern condition” only carries out what Hart sees as the task of theology: re-narrate the “great narrative” of Christianity in order to prevent it from lapsing into a narrative of totality. By totality, Hart admits adopting Emmanuel Lévinas’ terms totality and infinity, though simultaneously stating that he has no sympathies toward Lévinas’ thought in general. For Hart, totality means simply to think of everything in the name of something, to attribute events and beings under oneness or in the dialectical form of immanent and transcendent realities. In short, as Hart puts it, totality means “the science of the border”, where the “division between the transcendent and immanent is peremptorily drawn”. To avoid this, one must seek the infinite alternative to totality, most coherently found in the Christian tradition.

Creative re-narrations constitute the breath of tradition: they evoke apology in the same gasp as mystical, dogmatic, and, for example, ecclesiastical theology. Thus the “postmodern condition” is something that must be dealt with, for it presents the contemporary (or secular) current of thought (and, of course, also presents open challenges to theological tradition) and thus demands a different language, a different rationale, in order to be authentically confronted and discussed by theology. However, Hart insists that Christian theology has a venerable intellectual tradition, a fundamental theology that can be articulated in such terms (but perhaps not believed in) that it can be seen to include such a universalist view on truth and being that it can,

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14 The impetus against totalities is, of course, one of the distinguishing features of postmodern thought. It usually takes the form suggested by Jean-François Lyotard in his 1979 publication _La Condition postmoderne: Rapport sur le savoir_, in which he suggests that postmodern reality tends toward “incredulity towards metanarratives” (Lyotard 1984, xxiv). Lyotard has in mind the legitimization of knowledge, where a metanarrative offers and vocabularizes a narrative, or a philosophical account, for a “truth” to appear and to be recognizable within a certain discourse. Totality has then been identified with modernity by countless thinkers. For this study, the most important are the phenomenological readings upon totality: the ethical reading of totality by Emmanuel Lévinas and the metaphysical one represented by Martin Heidegger.

15 Hart 2003, 14; 75–92; Lévinas 1969.

16 Hart 2003, 14.
and indeed must, be proclaimed as a fundamental theology, not only an exclusivist or a highly particular fideistic narrative.\textsuperscript{17}

The third theme consists of evaluating Hart’s own theological input, which naturally has to be in part subtracted from the two preceding thematic surveys. The stylistic and rhetorical devices will not be deconstructed as such, for Hart aims for “the elaboration of a particular rhetoric idiom, an alternative style of address [...] [one which is] obedient to the evangelical essence of Christian dogma”.\textsuperscript{18} This theme also raises the question of Hart’s standing within Orthodox theology. As his project of theological aesthetics, utilizing the classical (based upon the Nicene and Chalcedonian formulations of faith) to both answer and out-narrate certain nihilist postmodern narratives, is, to my knowledge, unprecedented in Orthodox theology (though a few have trodden a similar path or at least set upon it), my intention is merely to show his affiliations or disengagement with modern Orthodox theology, as represented by some of its most notable authorities. In addition, I will point to what perhaps could constitute valuable directions for further studies.

The sources consist of books, academic articles, and short popular writings by Hart. In seeking answers to the given questions, the secondary literature used is very diverse, yet chosen for its relevance and, in some cases, convenience. Some of his articles have been compiled into the book \textit{In the Aftermath: Provocations and Laments}; others have been gathered from online resources. Many short columns have appeared in \textit{First Things} magazine, where Hart now acts as a contributing editor. Hart has also published a volume of prose, \textit{The Devil and Pierre Genet} (2012). The numerous lectures by David Bentley Hart, preserved in online form, usually treat the same subjects that he has written about, and they will be treated as supportive material. In 2017, two collections of Hart’s central essays appeared, consisting of his scholarly work and other writings. Whenever the original text has been available to me, it has been used; otherwise, the slightly amended articles in the collections have been utilized, although I have tried to compare the text to the original whenever possible.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17} I here use “fundamental theology” in the sense David Tracy has given it: “articulation of fundamental questions and answers which any attentive, intelligent, reasonable person can understand and judge in keeping with fully public criteria for argument.” 1981, 61.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Hart 2003, 31.
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2 THE POSTMODERN CONDITION AND NARRATIVE THEOLOGY

2.1 POSTMODERNISM – NON-NARRATION AS THE NEW NARRATIVE

Postmodernism can be defined in multiple ways, but one of the most cited is perhaps the notion Jean-François Lyotard has made: the postmodern as “incredulity towards metanarratives,” which seeks to denounce modernity for its alleged dominating discourses.\(^1\) In addition, the linguistic aspect of the postmodern has evolved into a growing awareness that all language is socially and culturally constructed, and is eventually an arbitrary system of signs that does not reflect a wholesome truth or “world” objectively or without biases.\(^2\)

David Bentley Hart acknowledges postmodernity as a multi-layered phenomenon, “a certain territory in current intellectual culture\(^3\),” but mainly wants to employ the term as the pinnacle of the modern tradition of thought, not simply as a reactionary movement. Moreover, this movement should not be equated with the demise of metaphysics because, as this study goes on to explain, for Hart, all the “end-philosophies” (end of modernity, end of history, end of theology) are simply new beginnings (or, more often, disguised returns to older forms of thought) and new replacements. Hart acknowledges the postmodern ethos to be an authentic desire to give voice to difference and denounce any totalitarian discourse – notions that Hart wants to show Christianity has already dealt with. In this sense, the Christian narrative emerges as both one of the narratives and, in itself, as the true narrative of the world – as Frederick Bauerschmidt acknowledges:

*If the claim to be living at the end of modernity means that modern confidence in human reason’s capacity to tell the world’s true story has come to an end, and that we are thus at the end of all master narratives, of all attempts to articulate the one true story of the world, or even of the attempt to construe the world as having a single story, then theology must say ‘yes’ and ‘no’ at the same time.*\(^4\)

For a small 70-page treatise, Jean-François Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* has been a highly influential reference point for works on emerging or current postmodernism. The text has been commented upon in attempts to identify some major trends and, at times, impose a useful unity where many

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1 Lyotard 1984, 7, 19–30.
2 See Vanhoozer 2003, 13. Most of theology somehow concerned with or at least aware of this situation has been inevitably in a situation in which one must choose between certain relativism (“all language ensues from a certain position”) and a certain particularity of theological (revelatory) thought. For example, Jean-Luc Marion has attested to this choice and tries to overcome it as basically false. See Marion 2017.
3 Hart 2003, 5.
4 Bauerschmidt 1999, 216.
cannot be naturally found. One useful notion in Lyotard’s essay is certainly how he depicts the transformation from modernism to postmodernism, as it happens at the level of narrative. This means, among other things, that modernity’s reliance on metanarratives in order to legitimize the truth-claims of its discourse has been displaced by the narratives themselves-- or the appearance of hermeneutics as a new hope after the demise of Western modernity’s scientific project, as portrayed by the philosopher Richard Rorty. This “hermeneutical” turn is sometimes depicted as “anti-foundationalism”, as it yields to no general fundamentum of knowledge or epistemology. Such a definition of narrative as a theoretical vehicle is assumed as a working thesis in this study, as it reflects the counterpart of David Bentley Hart’s own view of the positive sides of narrative and also resounds in the counter-arguments Hart may have.

It has been pointed out that Lyotard’s definition is perhaps too general and consuming: if meta-narrative, though suspicious in itself, is the only viable option to criticize grand narratives of totality, would this not in turn make a particular metanarrative a new grand narrative and thereby eliminate its purpose in its completion? It is not the aim of this study to decide on this theoretical dilemma; it must be noted, however, that if the narrative itself should be what theorists call “an open narrative”, that is, one resembling a language game of Wittgenstein, it must allow a creative use of rules within its own rules. Otherwise, a narrative can be viewed as a closed entity, a textual identity, which lives only as it is re-enacted by a community or an individual. These closed narratives are usually called totalities, which the Lyotardian legacy of interpreting the postmodern seeks to combat.

In these senses, narrative (as a general approach to sciences and reflection and identity) stands out as a working thesis of the postmodern condition. As Punday puts it, narrative is no longer “a distinct genre of writing,” but rather part of the “functioning of discourse in general.” In addition, new narratives have emerged to supplement and challenge the place that no narratives allegedly inhabit anymore. Christian theology has employed both sides of this narrative situation: it can be viewed as a grand narrative or as a metanarrative, as the first-level discourse or as a second-level discourse, which in turn treats first-level discourses.

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6 For example, Vanhoozer 2003, 12.
7 Rorty 1979, 316–318; Westphal 2001, 48. The so-called linguistic turn was associated with postmodernism as it gained momentum already in the thought of Ludwig Wittgenstein and his theory of language games.
9 Punday 2003, 10.
One distinct theological and narrational theme, certainly important for this study, is the theme of the “death of God.”11 This major postmodern theme delineates much of both theological and a-theological, or secular (or post-Christian) thought. Gavin Hyman has suggested that theological responses to postmodernity can be roughly divided into two: the first is what Hyman calls the “nihilist textualist” position and the second is represented by the Radical Orthodoxy movement (though certainly not exhausted by them). The first position is perhaps mostly concerned (theoretically) with emphasizing the Lyotardian difference and deconstruction at the expense of the narrative itself. The second is the one that interests us here; it seeks an openly theological voice among the multiplicity of narratives, and it counters the so-called post-Christian era with a revitalized theological vision.12

Postmodernism and theology are, then, often united in an uneasy marriage: whether one follows radical theologians such as Mark C. Taylor13 or Carl Raschke14 (and their intellectual inheritors such as Vattimo and others), proclaiming the death of God as a new and evolving premise of theology, or whether one prefers the vantage offered by John Milbank and Hart, who use the theological narrative as a method of treating certain postmodern themes, it is clear that one must carefully distinguish, if only for the sake of the argument, between postmodern theologians and theologians who are conducting the perennial task of theology in a postmodern age. This study seeks, then, first to situate the theology of David Bentley Hart in this field and also evaluate his main theological arguments in terms of their narrative strategies.

11 Usually the trajectory begins what is formulated by Nietzsche (GS 125). One particular theological interpretation is left out of this study, namely the “radical” theologies such as the “Death of God” theology of Thomas Altizer et alia, for they seek to revitalize theology by injecting the postmodern pharmakon (a Derridean expression for both poison and medicine, utilized as a deconstructive apparatus in his Plato’s Pharmacy, in Derrida 1981) right in the middle of the classical theological core. To me, this appears a false move, for it simply replaces the key concepts with convenient and “radical” ones, and thus amounts to nothing much more than novelties that manage to ring the registers of cultural common and contemporary denominators. In addition, the work of Gianni Vattimo seems to fall into this category; his concept of weak religion (which maybe is nothing more than a religion that takes his Nietzsche a bit too seriously) and the inherent nihilism in theology, in which postmodern times can be understood as “Jesus Christ has freed us from the Truth”. (Caputo & Vattimo 2007, 47). For Hart’s discussion, see 2003, 416–420. On the other hand, this “injection” can also be, among other things, inserted methodologically (for example, in the theological writings of Jean-Luc Nancy and his deconstruction of Christianity), phenomenologically (Jean-Luc Marion par excellence), or aesthetically (I have the work of Richard Kearney in mind here). These injections operate on more solid ground, though they have also been rigorously contested. See, for example, Hagglund 2008 and Janicaud 2000. When it comes to theological endeavors, the introductory remarks of John Milbank in his Word Made Strange are useful: theology cannot contemporize itself authentically unless the ancient formulations, the Christian logos, is composed into a “new theoretical music”. Milbank 1997, 1–3. It is no coincidence that many theologians relevant to this study end up characterizing their enterprise in musical terms.

12 Hyman 2001, 44–52.

13 Taylor is perhaps best known for his suggested a-theological endeavor, see Taylor 1984.

14 Raschke finds Baudrillard’s thesis, that the death of God theme is essentially a cultural war, a war waged in the fields of semiotic meanings and deferrals rather than epistemic or fideistic areas, to be the right one. See Raschke 2000, x–xiv. Raschke correctly notes that it is indeed difficult to distinguish the demarcation between the spaces that the “death of God” opens up and where “the postmodern principle has triumphed” (xv). This demarcation is sometimes transcended. Richard Kearney’s “anatheism” represents such an attempt and maybe also John Manoussakis’ “a God without Being” – to quote an example from the Orthodox side.
Another useful aspect of the postmodern that Lyotard touches upon is a crisis of representation. He ends his treatise with an almost adolescent manifesto: “Let us wage a war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unrepresentable; let us activate the differences.” In the postmodern age, one cannot simply rely on a grand narrative or a naïve realistic commensurability between language, minds, and reality. Even identity and self as self-referring linguistic realities are not stable but are often portrayed as an event or a task, or merely an aleatory field of collapsing, emerging, and colliding forces. Thus, epistemology is under the most intense scrutiny; and many thinkers have seen postmodern times needing new transcendentals (or registers or events) under which thought could convey and orient itself. In addition, representation, meaning how things are “duplicated” between mind, world, language, and meaning, must also be put under scrutiny: the unrepresentable, the sublime, is something that David Bentley Hart also sees as a multidimensional feature of postmodern territory. Thought in postmodern times must offer itself as difference, for it needs a vantage free from combating totalities, “an extranarrative vantage.” Therefore, postmodernity in Lyotardian terms seems to suggest a position from which it can evaluate narratives without yielding to their representational lure – and this is a pathos that, according to Hart, can be said to be “the entire pathology of the modern and the postmodern.”

The sublime, in its variations, is the target that Hart aims to criticize. If modernity fails to supply us with reasonable and objective grounds for thinking, this same non-foundationalism is concurrent with the disintegration of isomorphic beliefs of the Cartesian legacy, in which one could at least assume that truth is somehow communicable and open to everybody in the same manner, even if it happened not to be so in practice. In addition, every discourse is now susceptible to hidden or plain forces of power, intentionality, and subtextuality, in which meaning may momentarily reside or visit but which it cannot inhabit eternally. Every truth is impregnated in some sense; the story is always “somebody’s story.” It can be said that postmodernism always entails some sort of recognition of priority of hermeneutic awareness.

Hart acknowledges this situation and accepts it insofar as it reminds us of the nature of reflection itself. For theology, the narrational quality of knowledge, identity, and experience is something that must be accounted for in theological terms. In addition, the aesthetic division between the beautiful and the sublime constitutes to Hart, as was seen, a division that has augmented metaphysical impacts on postmodern discourse. We shall explore these themes next.

15 Lyotard 1984, 81.
16 Lyotard 1984, 82.
17 Hart 2003, 47–49.
18 Hart 2003, 51.
19 In fact, Hart distinguished four different “sublimes”, namely differential, cosmological, ontological, and ethical. In all these accounts, Hart seeks to express that Christian theology possesses a more original difference, an analogical difference. 2003, 52–102.
20 In theology, this epistemological focus of modernity is reflected, for example, in the appearance of theological prolegomena, asking how theology is possible in the first place. See Murphy & Kallenberg 2003, 30–31.
2.2 DAVID BENTLEY HART AND THE POSTMODERN CONDITION

In the recent applications of narrative methodology, such as the one by John Milbank and David Bentley Hart, the theological narrative is seen as one possible narrative of many, yet one of crucial importance in order to understand related and opposite ones (such as atheism or secularism), and finally also as the narrative of the end of all narratives. John Milbank has argued that narrative form is itself primary a mode of grasping or pursuing truth. Because the status of metanarrative is inescapable, because a coherence cannot be found in purifying the first principles or foundations, the narrative must occupy the first hermeneutical position.

In his Theology and Social Theory, Milbank wishes to endorse this view as preferable to Alasdair McIntyre’s dialectical mode of inquiry (and perhaps dialectics in general). In fact, it is Milbank’s conviction that historical theology, in its “neo-Platonic and then Christian understanding of the logos” has oriented theological thought toward rhetoric and linked precisely rhetoric with transcendence – something that antiquity and secular narratives have not. Hart agrees: for him, Christian logos “is more spacious” than that of Platonism, covering both history and creation, while simultaneously allowing “the alogon.” Hart seems to suggest that the Christian story, with its particular logos as Logos, can accommodate, by introducing transcendental factors into play, an open-ended narrative that operates on “basic” revelatory truths of Christianity and can still claim a holistic view of being and not succumbing to a totalitarian (i.e. isomorphic or “eidetic” correspondence and representation) discourse.

Thus, the Christian narrative in both these thinkers seeks universal “coverage,” while acknowledging its historical nature and its force as “leaven” in culture and thought. However, it must be aware of its own biased nature and its status as narrative, and both Milbank and Hart view this awareness not as a hindrance or a plunge into relativism, but as something that should be cherished. In the end, it is the transcendental and eternal Logos that safeguards all the worldly logoi from lapsing into closed dialectical models competing in power or explaining themselves without constant reference to a transcendental source.

In all this, stressing the narrative quality can be seen as proper way for both Milbank and Hart to avoid the circular dialectics of classical metaphysics and to let theology to recover its unique nature as rhetoric. This does not mean to say that, rhetorically viewed, theology should be “post-metaphysical” or “anti-foundationalist”

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22 In his pivotal study, Theology and Social Theory, Milbank argues that faith follows a social “gaze” and thus forms a meta-narrative on its own. 2006, 251. But Milbank also argues that Christian praxis is also a re-narrating process sub cruce (1997, 30) and cannot be distinguished from the “theory” of such practice. In addition, narrative is also, for Milbank, a linguistic repository that precisely, while being itself open-ended and opposed to totality, combats the deconstructive and chaotic semiotics of meaning of, for example, Jacques Derrida (1997, 68–69). In this way, narrative can be employed as widely (and unfortunately also at times, vaguely) as cultural code, an enacting and evolving practice (performativity), and also as a textual making of sense.

23 Milbank 2006, 346–247. Here Milbank uses the term “clash of rhetorics” to portray, according to him, more accurately the development of thought (in this case in the synthesis between St. Augustine and St. Thomas). Hart argues that the Christian position presents itself as “a provocation” (Hart 2003, 415) to all wars between different persuasions and narratives.


by default. This is something that Hart explicitly rejects: he finds such an equation to be an unwanted asylum from the postmodern critique.\textsuperscript{26} To Hart, it is to betray the Christian view of its own message in the name of conforming to the second-level of postmodernist enthusiasm, such as the so-called linguistic turn and intertextuality. The non-foundationalism, for example, of Mark C. Taylor can be seen only as a new myth, replacing the narrative logos with another.\textsuperscript{27}

Hart represents here something that I would like to call a Christian creative correspondence theory or an attempt at speculative realism: his choice of narrative theology is no real choice between equal options at all, but a strategic reading, a theological maneuver to recover both the evangelical proclamatory nature in its historical acuteness and the meaningfulness of the core of Christian dogma at the same time. Christian thought is “made to interrupt”, not to fill ontological or logical gaps that classical or postmodern thought may problematize regarding transcendence, for example. As John Milbank claims, the theological “method” of his rejects “the correspondence between the intellect and extra-mental reality” and its aim “is not to represent […] externality but to join in its occurrence; not to know, but to intervene, originate.”\textsuperscript{28}

Correspondence means here the informative and revelatory relation between the classical notion of God and his appearance as meaning (via narrative) in Christ. Reality is to be joined, and its being shared in its Creator. Its “truth” is not commeasurable, of course, with its subject matter, the infinite Godhead, but is formally an analogy to Trinitarian \textit{taxis} itself and to God’s infinity. In addition, as I will try to show, Hart sees that the Christian narrative is one that can offer an alternative, not competing on the same level as nihilistic and secular “philosophemes”. Only as such, in a sort of twofold \textit{sympnoia} of classical theological thought and its affirmation as transformative narrative, can theology hope to stay true to its own method and content, both traditionally and contemporarily.\textsuperscript{29} Neither Milbank and Hart, then, take the path of “nihilist” textualists, but rather their narrative aims for a creative vision ensuing from the Christian Gospel and its unique nature, which cannot be reached fully by dialectical methods. By the term “Christian correspondence theory,” I mean that the Christian vision is as informative as it is transformative, and by the notions of ontology of peace and God’s infinity, the ‘correspondence’ with earthly forms can transform and in-form them. Moreover, this theory makes a purchase on rationality by making a claim that even in the form of human thinking, there is a transcendental aspect at work.

However, it must be said that such a position is open to a very simple, general-level criticism, which both Milbank and Hart are aware of themselves. First of all, is a certain reading of the Christian narrative also influenced by other, non-theological narratives?

\textsuperscript{26} Hart 2003, 31.

\textsuperscript{27} See Spitzer 2011, 132.

\textsuperscript{28} Milbank, “Postmodern Critical Augustiniasm”, quoted in Mulcahy 2011, 191. I realize the dangers of naming this method a correspondence theory; yet it seems to me that Hart’s narrative has a certain coherence outside traditional correspondences between mind and reality, or intellectualism and realism. The historical inaccuracy or selective reading of texts is acknowledged by some of the Radical Orthodoxy representatives themselves. See, for example, Horan 2014, 84.

\textsuperscript{29} One is obviously reminded of Austen’s famous performative speech acts here: narrative theology, to simplify Austen’s theory conveniently, can be said to form its “constitutive” acts or statements only by proclaiming them performatively. See Austen 1962.
This is the argument that Gavin Hyman makes.\textsuperscript{30} Hyman remarks that Milbank’s own view of the Christian narrative is itself a conditioned one, conditioned by certain philosophical preferences and tendencies. Secondly, one wonders if it is possible to really distinguish between correct and incorrect narratives merely at a rhetorical level. Is there not a dialectical moment to be allowed in evaluating certain tendencies within historical thought? Of course, neither Milbank nor Hart deny dialectics as such or totally; they only wish to stress the uniqueness of the Christian narrative and its vitality to be a relevant “interrupting” event in the postmodern milieu. The distaste for dialectical thought, in an emerging Hegelian sense in which a thesis is supplemented by its anti-thesis into creative synthesis, lies at the bottom of what I have called here Hart’s strategic reading. His Christian narrative, a novel view on ontology, is precisely one that cannot emerge merely from pre-Christian thought. This will be explored more in conjunction with rhetoric, but already one can see here simultaneously the deficit and the power of Hart’s argumentative form: it may not hold under stricter scrutiny, but it can establish rhetorical boundaries within a certain vision.

What, then, does Hart actually say about the postmodern condition and its meaning for theology? As mentioned above, he does not see a narrative solution as a plausible escape plan from the metaphysical critique presented by postmodern thought. Rather, he views the Christian narrative as it finds itself (and perhaps should be helped to recover itself) already within the postmodern:

\begin{quote}
Christian thought always already stands in what might be considered a ‘postmodern’ position: if one conveniently oversimplifies definition (or aspect) of the postmodern as the triumph of (in classical terms) rhetoric over dialectic, or at least the recognition that the dialectical is always essentially rhetorical, theology should welcome this as a word of comfort.\textsuperscript{31}
\end{quote}

Thus, we get the first and central feature of what Hart regards as crucial for theological discourse: the notion of rhetoric over dialectics. This means what Lyotard explained as the loss of metanarratives and their truth claims, but also, and more importantly, it means that the “West at long last awakes from the nightmare of philosophy.”\textsuperscript{32} By this notion, Hart means that the multiplication of particular narratives at the expense of losing the totalities of Enlightenment allows men to enjoy the particular narratives as they are, with no need to reduce them to the lowest cultural denominators or a transcendent value such as “truth.” For Hart, this condition is not to be lamented, for in a formal sense\textsuperscript{33}, it displays the logic of Incarnation, of God entering history and becoming a man. Christ is a historical God-man, and the narrative about him then

\textsuperscript{30} Hyman 2001, 89–91.
\textsuperscript{31} Hart 2003, 3.
\textsuperscript{32} Hart 2003, 5; 2005, 275. This resounds with remarks made by John Milbank (1999) and Schindler 2013, 54.
\textsuperscript{33} As we will see in the course of this study, the “formal” in Hart always coincides with “content” or the immediate surface of rhetorical beauty – even at a methodological level. Already at this point, Hart elucidated that for Christian thought, the historical facts about Jesus cannot be translated simply into universal truths; the Truth became “a truth” in the incarnation and thus broke apart the logic of identity. Incarnation is the warrant that denies this particular truth, God-Man, to be controvertible again back into a mere universal truth; it is the particular form that has universal “coverage”, rather than appearing independently from its particular setting.
must stay true to his form, which is not a development of earlier historical forms, but rather the consummation of the promises of the Old Testament.

This incarnational aspect leads us to the second element of Hart’s discourse regarding the status of theology in the context of postmodern times. In the incarnation, God became a particular man and the Gospel is essentially about “a particular Nazarene rabbi put to death under Pontius Pilate.”

This particular, historical man is the eternal Logos himself, and this is the basis of the radical claim of Christian rhetoric, a new rhetoric that interrupts the classical violent dialectics, as well as interrupting postmodern nihilistic narratives by refusing to let go of its transcendental aspects. It is also a transformation of the conception of history, breaking closed totality and the cyclical nature of sacrifice enforced by local and mere cosmic deities and raising “the principle of divine transcendence to new heights.”

Hart joins here with the claim of John Milbank, to whom Christ means a whole new poetic reality, not just a radical historical person or a mere ontological claim. To be more theologically precise, Hart argues that the post-Nicene theological tradition, by growing on and transforming the philosophical logos tradition of the Hellenistic period, encapsulated an unprecedented ontological moment, when the difference and relation between infinite being and created beings was formulated for the first time.

This process, albeit borrowing its concepts from contemporary philosophy, turned, according to Hart, gradually into understanding and language that was novel and that continues to be valid to this day. So, in a nutshell, Hart wishes only to affirm the certain postmodern difference insofar it is viewed as a peaceful interruption of philosophical dialecticism and is established on the ontological level, namely as the difference between the Creator and the created order.

The third element that Hart wants to bring into play is, as seen above, his defense of the classical theological notion of God. In particular, the concepts of divine apatheia and the simplicity of God play a crucial role when he is re-narrating the Christian tradition. This aspect is closely knitted to a certain reading of the patristic tradition, which heavily leans toward an “infinitist” reading of Gregory of Nyssa, philosophical outworking of Augustine, and ontological reading of Maximus the Confessor. This element also coincides with Hart’s work in the area of cultural criticism.

These aspects notwithstanding, it may be worthwhile to briefly note how these themes will situate Hart within the field of postmodern theology. It may be said that the first wave of authentically postmodern theologies is over. It is no longer adequate to simply state the end of modernity or to choose between conservative or liberal...
options on how to confront the end of modernity, secularism, or the postmodern critique. 40

Outside this choice, argues David Ray Griffin, is the third set of theologians, who “challenge the modern worldview in the name […] of a more fully rational understanding of reality.” 41 More specifically, Hart is involved in a pursuit of fundamental theology of a kind. The definition by David Tracy seems to be appropriate here:

In fundamental theologies […] arguments will be formulated in harmony with the rules of argument usually articulated in a particular philosophical approach. The theologian will employ those arguments first to explicate the truth-claims and then to adjudicate them. 42

Tracy adds that a fundamental theology will seek the warrants in the theological tradition itself and will try to explicate them in a “public way”, meaning that theological discourse cannot be all-exclusive, an elite, or a private language, for obvious reasons. Hart can be seen to write a particular kind of fundamental theology only if we acknowledge that to him, in conjunction with Tracy’s appropriation, Christian theology has both inherent and extrinsic reasons to be communicable in reasonable way. 43 It may be said that this double communicability, on one hand the aesthetic splendor and persuasion of God in Christ, and on the other, the rationale of creation and the classical notions of God, makes up perhaps the main argumentative core for Hart’s work.

At the same time, it must be noted, in the realm of narrative, Hart’s aim is not to provide a universal truth, but rather to show how a particular truth can be universal. 44 So the reasonability must be understood only in a conditioned sense: it makes sense in inherent correspondence to its poetic reality within the overarching narrative, yet it can be argued persuasively, by making it display its peacefulness and rationale of a shared sort. It is not merely apologetic by its outlook; the Christian discourse should still be able to “interrupt”.

In this, Hart covers much of the same ground as John Milbank and Radical Orthodoxy in general. For them, the Christian narrative is a supreme one, not just one among many, and the linguistic condition of the 20th Century is more than welcomed.

40 As Kevin Hart has observed, the non-metaphysical theologies, represented in group one in the above analysis, must pursue either a division between the God of faith and the God of metaphysics (thus lapsing into fideism) or an elaboration between the God of faith and metaphysics. Hart, 96–104, quoted in Ingraffia (endnote 17, 243). Both these options seem to be incompatible with Hart’s view: the first option is non-rational, even irrational; the other position is deconstructive and can never emerge as a position in the first place, for all thought is grounded upon some metaphysics to begin with.

41 Griffin 1989, 2.

42 Tracy 1981, 63.

43 It is rather meaningless if we call this conviction “fundamental theology,” as in the Catholic tradition, or “apologetics,” as in Protestant circles. These labels become especially arbitrary when Hart himself denounces the distinction between “philosophical” and “biblical” theology. It is the analogical vision of matters theological that looms in the background; as von Balthasar states: “[t]here is not even any tension between dogmatic and mystical theology. Each dogmatic decree, even the sharpest conciliar definition, must be seen in the light of the ever-greater unlikeness of God.” GOL II, 204.

44 Here perhaps a Kierkegaardian notion of Abrahamic transcendence of universal resounds, albeit in negative sense. See Kierkegaard 1983, 79–81.
in that regard. In this sense, Hart (and Milbank) differ from (neo)liberalist views, such as George Lindbeck’s, whose preferential interpretation of narratives was to affirm particular narratives enacted in a particular community, thus generating a foundation in which its truthfulness is valued (or stands as “valid”). Thus its “force” lies in its internal coherence, as McGrath has pointed out. John Milbank has addressed the shortcomings in Lindbeck regarding the narrative being too simple, regarding the narrative only as a compilation of a few basic “rules,” and while regarding theology’s narrative as privileged by faith; these rules render the narrative ahistorical, as a container of Christian ‘schematics’ in different culture contexts. A narrative cannot rely on general notions of narrative to be a “history-like” narrative that downplays actual history. Both Hart and Milbank wish to stress the Christian narrative as embodied and enlivened in the Church (Milbank) or as a most philosophically satisfying story, while waking philosophy from its bad dreams (Hart). The postliberal approach to narratives seems to be ontologically too weak for both of them. Hart himself states:

*I believe there is indeed the possibility of a consummation of all reason in a vision and a wisdom that cannot be reached without language, but is as much theoria as discourse; as such it is indeed “aesthetic” in the highest sense […] but is also “rational” in the highest sense, in that it can “see” where and understand how other narratives fail the great theme of being, are too impoverished to speak the truth of reality’s goodness, and simply lack the fullness and coherence that shows itself in the true.*

This means that the concept of fundamental theology applies to Hart only provisionally and in a modified sense: theoria eludes exact linguistic representation, yet it appears as a discourse that can enter into dialogue and criticism with another narrative. The unity of his narrative has transcendental ground; yet this ground is displayed in the particularities of a very real sense. This tension lies at the core of Hart’s theology. So, while narrative is an openly “biased” operation, the Christian Gospel cannot be anything else. A narrative is the proper form for its truth, since the truth without the narrative cannot be instantiated or illustrated (thinking otherwise has resulted in catastrophic consequences for theology, according to both Hart and Milbank). And this narrative must be “capacious” enough to accommodate “the great theme of

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45 Lindbeck tagged his model “cultural-linguistic”. Lindbeck 2009, 18–26; see 100–101. As Lindbeck himself recognizes, the communicability between communities is not absolute and if categories are mixes, the meaning in other community may end up as nonsense in another (35). In all fairness, a note must be made on Lindbeck’s original ecumenical intention in formulating the different models. See Wright (ed.) 2012, 70–71; Vanhoozer 2005, 10.

46 McGrath 1990, 26; quoted in Need 1996, 18.

47 Milbank 2006, 387. The primacy of rhetoric will become apparent if one ascribes to a view that most basic rational grounds of thinking are convictions and are not acquired by dialectical thinking. For discussion, see Trenery 2014, 127–128.


49 Though it must be said that for Lindbeck, it is precisely the Church that gives meaning to the Bible; but as Vanhoozer notes, Lindbeck fails to distinguish between textual meaning and habits of reading, between narrative’s meaning and use. Vanhoozer 2005, 96.


51 See remarks by Frei 1974, 280. Frei argues that a major “eclipse” regarding interpretation of the Biblical narrative occurred when the narrative world was distanced from “literal-realistic” narrative. 1974, 6.
being”, and thus cannot be only a description of a few ground rules of a particular community.

It must be noted, however, that this communicability is a diffusive concept in Hart’s thought: intra-theologically, its “warrant”\(^{52}\) lies mostly in the aesthetic dimension, while outside theological speech, Hart often defends and re-interprets traditional theological notions with more philosophical concepts. These aspects will be surveyed later, but it is important to note that the aesthetic moment is both the \(\text{élan vital}\) of Hart’s narrative of theology and its application, “proclaiming glory without ‘explaining’ it.”\(^{53}\) The aesthetic emphasis gives Hart’s narrative a poetic coherence\(^{54}\), thereby distinguishing it from simply being a particular linguistic setting, which Hart deems precisely to be inadequate model of narrative. By poetic coherence, I mean that the aforementioned peculiar correspondence theory will find its “verification” in the aspects of the beautiful while revealing its ontological setting.

The double communicability displays the diverse sides of Hart’s endeavor, but simultaneously appears as one major tension and maybe a problem in the light of his whole corpus. For if the aesthetic “warrant” of Christian discourse stems from a very particular narrative, and the persuasion of Christ appears conceptualized and is experienced within that narrative, how can it claim a universal rational basis for this “warrant”? The question may be misplaced, for at a general level, this tension is coded within the essence of Christian theology itself, namely the gospel in its proclamatory logic of a very particular person incarnating and revealing the eternal Truth in itself. But if this tension is inevitable, one might do well to keep it in mind, for it clearly shows the limits of such a discourse, the element to which Hart refers in the above passage as inevitably being in language but at the same time transcending it (thus, as explained in my notion of correspondence, corresponding to the analogical relation of God’s Being and the being of beings, not a correspondence according identity).

We have now sketched briefly the areas that will be explored in Hart. But after the first wave of postmodern theologies, answers and developments have appeared in what is a truly abundant literature on postmodernism and theology. Olli-Pekka Vainio has surveyed these emerging trends of postmodern theology.\(^{55}\) He suggests four general models or, more accurately, models of “gravitational pull” of different currents, with which postmodern theological emphasis and currents can be constructed.\(^{56}\) Vainio discerns the following gravitational areas:

1) Traditionalism, which seeks to safeguard identity by means of faithfulness to tradition and revelation

\(^{52}\)I use the term “warrant” perhaps in a strong way and certainly not in the strict sense given it by, for example, Alvin Plantinga. But I feel that the term is appropriate because Hart is not aiming for a notion that would portray Christian “evidence” as merely as subjective. Rather, the “warrant” is that Christian truth is not only persuasive but also “happens” in a world that is ontologically structured according to this persuasion, the Good.

\(^{53}\)Hart 2003, 25. Here also, Hart returns to the theme of musical arrangement of the Christian truth. In a sense, the experience, or phenomenological mood, informed by the Christian narrative could be characterized as always finished but never ready, for the beautiful in beings discloses the goodness of creation and its reflection of its Creator, and simultaneously displays the acuteness of the Gospel to the person experiencing it.

\(^{54}\)I borrow the term from Kemppainen 2016.

\(^{55}\)Vainio 2013.

\(^{56}\)Vainio 2013, 109.
2) Descriptionism, which aims for authentic description by means of adopting a neutral and objective distance to the subject matter, as far as possible
3) Revisionism, which claims the priority of social or individual welfare over facts or truths and seeks to re-evaluate tradition with that goal
4) Correlationism, which pursues universal communicable and argumentative language by means of correlation

These areas of theological gravitation also overlap with each other, form creative antitheses, and form repositories of concepts that can “carry over” to other areas, thus transforming both areas accordingly. What is of interest regarding this study is that Vainio situates most theologians that are relevant to this study in the area of “traditionalism.” Whether in the form of post-liberalism or post-conservatism (here, Hart and Milbank are named), traditionalism seemingly affirms the following basic modes of orientation:

1) Disbanding the claim of neutrality in theology
2) Critical assessment regarding natural theology
3) Human reasoning being heavily dependent upon the tradition within which it operates
4) Safeguarding Christian identity and self-understanding
5) Realizing the need for communication with other traditions without this need surpassing the thinker’s own identity and tradition

Regarding David Bentley Hart’s magnum opus, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, the remarks of Vainio concerning traditionalism seem to cover Hart’s position regarding all models of orientation except perhaps number two. Hart’s theology certainly adheres to points 1, 3, and 4, while perhaps being willing to sympathize with point number 5. Resolving Hart’s stance to number 5 is crucial in order to understand why he thinks Christian discourse is an “interruption” and simultaneously is not making its case through any type (rhetorical, ontological, sociological) of power.

Theology, for Hart, is the form of Christian “sense”; one cannot approach it without being somewhat drawn to it, because it entails a certain “form”:

*as a persuasion, a form evoking desire, and the whole force of the gospel depends upon the assumption that this persuasion is also peace: that the desire awakened by the shape of Christ and his Church is one truly reborn as agape, rather than merely the way in which a lesser force succumbs to a greater, as an episode in the endless epic of power. Christian rhetoric, then, is already a question to itself; for if theology cannot concede the intrinsic violence of rhetoric as such, neither can it avoid the task of framing an account of how its own rhetoric may be conceived as the peaceful offer of a peaceful evangel, and not as – of necessity – a practice of persuasion for persuasion’s sake, violence, coercion at its most enchanting. Such an account must inevitably make an appeal to beauty.*

Therefore, the crucial element of Hart’s thought, with the postmodern context in mind, is the beautiful; or rather, the effect of the beautiful, namely, the aesthetic “pull”

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57 Vainio 2013, 110.
58 Hart 2003, 3.
toward the agape that the Gospel’s peace evokes. The aesthetic dimension was already hinted at; as Hart’s work often considers aesthetic themes, the theme of theological aesthetics cannot be ignored. First, however, it must be asked what it means for theology to recover its nature as “rhetoric”. With a rhetorical aspect, Hart’s thought also displays one of its main tensions: how a peaceful and peace-evoking discourse can still appear as an “interruption” to the discourse of power.

2.2.1 Rhetoric over dialectics

Rhetoric has, since ancient Greek times, enjoyed a twofold status. In Aristotle, the rhetorical is the counterpart of dialectics. Rhetoric can bring about positive effects, convince, and persuade; and, of course, speech can be delusive, untruthful, misleading, and deceitful. In Plato, the dialectical method was the pre-eminent manner of enquiry into matters in a way that it should be as free as possible from individual biases and agendas. Before Plato, in the gradual transition from mythos to logos, as some historians of ideas would have it, the presocratic philosophers sought a certain logos, by means of archai, that would explain the nature of reality by finding an underlying principle. However, this philosophical endeavor could be interpreted, as von Balthasar did, in “theological” terms: “The world of myth was fundamentally dialogical: glory streamed forth from the personally divine on the mankind who dared to interpret his temporal existence in this light. All artistic creation has its origin in this setting.” The progress from the mythical toward the philosophical may prove to be artificial or, as a thesis, somewhat pushed, but nevertheless, since Plato, there has been a division between modes of thought interpreting this primordial “dialogue”.

In our day, Michael Leff has categorized a few distinctions between dialectics and rhetoric.

- dialectics deals with general, abstract issues; rhetoric with specific, circumstantial issues
- dialectics considers the relationship of propositions to one another and follows norms of logical rationality, while rhetorical argumentation considers the relationship between propositions and situations and follows norms that refer to appropriate social relationships

59 Rhet. 1354a1.

60 Modern scholarship has somewhat re-assessed the earlier view in which Plato was seen to endorse dialectical thought, whereas Aristotle viewed it simply as a second-grade methodological and logical tool. See Fink (ed.), 2012. As Holmberg (1977, 266) argued, rhetoric in the Greek polis could be viewed as a liberating vehicle from the dialectical dominance. Holmberg’s reading is openly Heideggerian: for him, rhetoric “opens up” being and succeeds the dialectic dominance of grasping the truth (241). For a more traditional view, a particular rhetoric depends upon certain epistemological and metaphysical convictions and thus does not necessarily end up increasing knowledge, but seeks to persuade. For example, see McAdon 2011, who argues that in Aristotle, the mode of discourse (dialectic or rhetoric) depends upon the situation and the goals one wants to achieve.

61 For example, Lincoln 2000. It is important to note that, in itself, this transition is a form of philosophical apparatus, as naturally there was no simple or only conscious development of thought into fixed forms. Some philosophers, such as Karl Popper, have emphasized the early Greek developments as signs of separating philosophy from religion and mythical traditions. See Popper 2000, 240-241.

62 GOL IV, 155.
• dialectics proceeds through question and answer, and the interlocutors seek to
persuade one another; rhetoric proceeds through uninterrupted discourse, and
speakers seek to persuade the audience
• dialectics employs unadorned, technical language, whereas rhetoric
accommodates and embellishes language for persuasive purposes.63

Leff uses his model for discourse studies and argumentative analysis. For David
Bentley Hart, the rhetorical preference over dialectics is neither merely a stylistic
choice nor a concern for circumstantial matters. Neither is it Hart’s idea to follow
what has been suggested by David Cunningham as central features of a “rhetorical
turn of theology,” which emphasizes more commitment to action than analysis; Hart’s
endeavor is highly theoretical.64 Hart’s portrayal of rhetoric and dialectics as two
alternatives in approaching Western thought is an adaptation of early Greek forms
of thought and discourse, in order to discern the metaphysical possibilities of such
approaches and how Christian rhetoric will differ from them.65

Hart argues that an openly persuasive rhetoric is possible without a hidden deposit
of power (without sophistic or polemic acts of leading astray) and, as such, the Christian
narrative can only be understood properly in rhetorical terms. So, in this sense, Leff’s
traditional remarks concerning the nature of dialectical and rhetorical discourse apply
to Hart insofar as the rhetorical dimension is understood in a very wide sense. It is God
who speaks, and creation is only one of his “speech acts”. It is noteworthy that Hart
openly stresses the absolute unity of the rhetorical message and its style: the peaceful
Gospel is true because it is beautiful, and vice versa. This sense concerns the possibility
of language itself (which has come to be viewed with suspicion after post-structuralist
critique and the rise of hermeneutics in the 20th Century) and recovering the truth of
the Christian vision from the critique of the nature of truth itself by philosophy.

To Hart, to apply this in practice, the rhetorical nature of Christian truth itself is a
radical new hermeneutical and substantial reading of the “text of the world,”66 whose
keynote is not hermeneutical violence67, but Christian love, agape. This charitable
reading of the world demands a Christological tropes: the world can be read as a place
of divine kenosis but simultaneously as its own exaltation, the lifting of the finite into
the infinite. It is also a rhetoric that can account for a true difference, a true multiplicity
of voices, but also an ontology:

The Christian tradition is nothing if not an evang of peace offered in the present
moment, as the true form of difference and the style of its transmission; the evang,
that is, of the crucified as the Lord of the history, in the perpetual power of the Spirit.
[…] T]heology cannot avoid considering the aesthetics of its rhetoric, and whether its
rhetoric can truly reflect the being of the world. For if, of course, distance is an original
discord, if the event of difference is both singular and total, then the space between any

63 Leff 2000, 247.
64 Cunningham 1991, 418.
65 Cf. Van’t Land 2010.
66 Hart 2003, 122.
67 By hermeneutical violence, Hart means a certain contemporary philosophical post-metaphysical attempt
to replace alleged earlier metaphysical violence with something new (2003, 417). According to Hart, the
non-foundationalist triumphalism of this sort of argument brings one dangerously close to nihilism.
two beings, despoiled of all analogical light, is a desert, and every embassy of peace that
crosses the distance is accompanied by rumors of war; every preference is arbitrary,
and so all rhetoric an aggression; the gospel then a lie. So that “place between” must be
narrated as, first and foremost, light and peace, a distance of mediation, dissemination,
writing, and rhetoric that is for just that reason a distance of gift, freedom, and beauty
primordially (however disfigured by sin). […] [Theology] must, in short, recover an
adequate sense of a certain “Christian interruption”.

Christian discourse must be rhetorical, since its revolutionary status would be
stripped if it were just a mundane or inner-worldly narrative, obeying the logic of
supreme and lesser power, which, according to Hart, is inevitable if one assumes a
certain reading of postmodern difference as one’s ontological view. If Difference, with
a capital letter, is itself elevated to primary ontological status, or if it never yields to
any scrutiny, if it resides only in the differential sublimes, for Hart, it must entail an
element of violence, since it cannot enjoy being a “gift, freedom, beauty.” And the
Christian account of reality actually does recognize the need for difference, although
placing it in a surprising guise: “Beauty is the true form of distance.” This view is
augmented by the fact that, for Hart, no discourse is free from metaphysics, not even
(and especially not) one claiming to disband metaphysics once and for all. In all this,
Hart seems to suggest a realism of a sort: there is a reality in the world’s text, but
neither is it behind it nor can it be found by reference, but it is perceived precisely as
difference, as a distance, but simultaneously as a very concrete phenomenon. Being is
reality, and in beings, both the reality and their distance can be seen. Thus, Christian
metaphysics has a purchase on truth insofar as the place (the creation) in which it
can be thought, experienced, or lived is perceived itself as a persuasion. In fact, Hart
seems, at times, to equate metaphysics (without ontology, that is, without a discourse
of being, only as securing “grounds” for thinking) with dialectics. How is this so?

Across his work, Hart explains that a proper Christian version of being entails a
notion of God as an infinitely greater and transcendent Being. The classical apophatic
way of portraying God is supplemented by (or more accurately, grounded upon) the
notion of analogical language (analogia entis will be treated in a later chapter) in which
the human mind tries to put the transcendent Godhead into words. For Hart, this is the
crucial distinction: the metaphysical notions of Aristotle’s Prime Mover or Plotinus’
the One are simply inadequate, for they express an ontological “continuum” between
cause and effect, or creator and created. This continuum resolves too much: it decides
the ontological status of particular beings, their difference, and identity, without
giving credit to their particularity or value to their contingency (their relevancy in
their utter lack of necessity) from the primal cause.

On the other hand, the dialectic approach always “assumes” more than it sees,
and the aesthetic moment can appear in such a theoretical position only as something
secondary, derivative, or whimsical. The paradoxes that dialectic processing of, for
example, the doctrine of God-Man brings to the surface should not be regarded as one of the “paradoxes of faith”, but as the salvific narrative that lays its metaphysics “at the foot of the cross.”

The seemingly puzzling aporias of the Gospel narratives and their subsequent dogmatic narrations are not given as obstacles to our faith-seeking understanding, but rather as clarifying the biblical narrative of salvation.

However, this begs the question of whether such a polarization is tenable. Should we just “accept” the conclusions that Hart draws from the foot of the cross, that is, the vision ensuing from the “interruption”? Or does his vision require a certain preliminary preference for a particular ontological view before the whole interruption makes sense? Furthermore, if being is properly viewed as rhetoric, how can this view evade solipsism (thus disbanding realism) or relativism (thus disbanding the universality of its truth)?

Hart seems to stress that we cannot separate the two: the ontology Christ brings about and the narrative of his particular being. The particular being, in the Christian narrative supremely in the form of Christ, is the only locus for true beauty, yet it displays precisely the distance between creature and creator, not as untravelable chasm but as a peaceful donation. In Christ, the “distance” is displayed as Trinitarian life, where every distance appears only as already overcome in the perichoresis of divine persons. Again, Hart’s argument relies on a healthy dose of transcendence, the doctrine of Trinitarian life, which ultimately safeguards against interpretations of Christ that try to either dialectically wrest an ultimate meaning from Christ according to some other principle or to apply a post-liberal account for his particular meaning in a given setting. The Christian interruption is God’s revelation, the revelation of true distance, distance with infinity, yet it is so only because it can be perceived as analogical beauty, as a true and good rationale of the beautiful.

The self-referential status between narrative and ontology also appears in Hart as a critical apparatus in treating the alleged metaphysical continuum. Without analogical ontology to balance it out, this continuum has resulted in theological distortions of univocity (a theme much criticized by the representatives of Radical Orthodoxy) and in reducing God to a supreme being among beings or as totally Other—both impossible options for pursuing the unknown Father revealed in Christ and sought in the Spirit. Only in an analogical way, both the transcendence of God is preserved as “hidden and manifest” (as the title of one of Hart’s essays goes) and the worth of particular beings is emphasized while acknowledging that creation is a needless rhetorical utterance of love, a gap which is not an alienation, but already traveled in the form of Christ. Then rhetoric is ultimately a proclamation of the Christ-form in history, for it both displays the difference between God and creation, and simultaneously displays this difference as already overcome and thus rendered into a charitable gift.

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71 Hart 2003, 356; 441.
72 As Hart himself explains in his foreword to the volume of articles The Encounter between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy, there seems to be little at the outset to regard as common between the Orthodox and their Radical namesakes, except perhaps their “shared tendency to combativeness” [2009, [2017, 324]. Throughout his work, Hart has not spared his distaste toward the polemical stance separating the one grand Catholic tradition into eastern and western camps (most notably in Hart 2008). Although this notion is not central to this study, it may be worthwhile to note that Hart remarks that the possible affinity between the two Orthodoxies can be found in the Eastern “innocence” of certain western developments, most of all deistic and univocal reasoning, and their Radical counterparts, the “abhorrence” of these developments.
73 Hart 1996; 2003, 18–20; 314.
Hart also seems to have in mind the “dialectical theology” of Karl Barth, which in its most basic form means “a method which calls for every theological statement to be placed over against a counter-statement, without allowing the dialectical tension between the two to be resolved in a higher synthesis.”\textsuperscript{74} Hart shares distaste of dialectics with John Milbank, who in turn (like Hart) is heavily influenced by the thought of Barth’s contemporary and critic, Erich Przywara. With Przywara leading the way, all three theologians dismiss the dialectical approach to theology, but their main motivation lies in preserving the authentic relation between God and the world in balance, or in “rhythm”, as Przywara would have it.\textsuperscript{75} No “purist” form of thought can interrupt the narrative that God has initiated; yet Hart views, as has been mentioned, the novelty of Christian thought as consisting of an interruption of both classical metaphysics and the ideas of unity and multiplicity.

The concept of rhetoric over dialectics raises serious questions, however. First of all, does this turn to the “rhetorical and narrative” realm mean that one should distance oneself from “modernity” (if it is understood as vehicle of representing a dialectical portrayal of truth) and go back, perhaps, to a near mythological mode of speech, where language is not so much concerned about taxonomies and laws, but where persuasive and aesthetic significance is primary? Is it something that Merlin Donald placed at the beginning of Western thought, in separation between “philosophers” and “sophists”, and thus belongs to another register of signification than philosophy itself?\textsuperscript{76} In addition, as I see it, if Hart is not seeking a return to mythological speech (as he himself outright denies), it is clear that only using the “right” rhetorical model is not enough; it must also entail an ontological view capable of sustaining such a discourse, although such an ontology can perhaps “appear” only after we are persuaded of its peace and beauty. Without metaphysics, ontological rhetoric is doomed to be mythology; without ontology, metaphysical rhetoric is doomed to either evolve into a dialectical grid or a system, or lapse into idealism.

This is, in effect, a hermeneutical circle, but on the other hand, if one accepts formally that discourse gains its “availability” in rhetoric, not dialectics, then perhaps this is inevitable and should not represent an obstacle. Perhaps it should be affirmed, with Paul Ricouer, that every act of transcendent thought must offer a question and an answer simultaneously, for the answer tends to make the question possible in the first place.\textsuperscript{77} But what it means is that the narrative must be a very particular one—a fact that Hart affirms. Furthermore, circular thought as a form should not present a problem to a theologian who sees beauty almost as a guarantee of classical notions of Trinitarian life.

Thus, Hart’s project is not simply “re-mythologizing the Gospel,” echoing the reversal of the de-mythologizing projects usually attached to the theological thought of Rudolph Bultmann. As Hart observed, Bultmann, in a sense, represents an intensified project of liberal Protestantism in pursuing some universal content from

\textsuperscript{74}McCormack 1997, 11. An aspect or an example of such a dialectical position in Barth can be found, for example, in Jüngel 2001, 92–93.

\textsuperscript{75}See Johnson 2009, 12–13; GOL V, 76.

\textsuperscript{76}Donald 1991, 274–275, quoted in Taylor 2016, 75. Donald’s thesis is that “scientific” discourse has its origin in the third-stage evolution of abstractive, memorial, and symbolic forms of thought as proceeding from the presocratic onwards.

\textsuperscript{77}Ricouer (quoting Strawson) 1992, 33.
the mythologized and traditionalized Christian “data.” This tendency Hart identifies as modern Gnosticism: in effect, it is a subjective myth in itself. Whether this is accurate or not, it is clear that, for Hart, there is no mythology without particular historicity, and if one tries to devalue one, the other suffers too. So, the rhetorical model is not something that Hart seeks to recover as a past “take” on matters, but rather he seeks to show that the interruption of Christ will become apparent only if Christian speech about itself is taken to be the field in which its core meanings will be evaluated. It is God who speaks first, and Christian discourse is grounded upon how God reveals himself in both revelation and creation. In this, Hart shares unexpected ground with Karl Barth, for whom it was paramount that God would be given the first step, yet they differ and also oppose each other in how they see the ontology and concept of faith follow from this narrational premise. Hart is certainly not a Neo-Orthodox thinker, but he wants to show the natural–supernatural dichotomy to be wanting, and this is usually missing from Orthodox accounts. However, if God’s own narrative is what is fundamental, then the truth of Christianity cannot be studied (in a strict sense, that is, by reducing it to a precedent model of thought), but it must be contacted, seen, and appropriated. Yet the question is not merely of illumination, but more of engaging the particular narrative with its ontological tradition.

For the sake of clarity, it must be explored what Hart means by a Christian interruption of a kind that has a need for such a radical view of the Being. Hart sets out to read the Christian narrative in a way that portrays Western philosophy as a discourse in which two fundamental ontologies appear, two narratives of how to see and know Being and beings, namely those of Heraclitus and Parmenides. In effect, in antiquity, these were the metaphysical options clarifying the relation between one and the many. The Christian narrative offered a third way, “a way out,” for in an ultimate sense, claims Hart, the alternatives between Heraclitus’s ontology of becoming and the Parmenidean ontology of monism do not allow any real alternative, but rather represent a choice between intra-worldly ontologies. The presocratic alternatives simply viewed Being from both sides without opening it up.

A Christian interruption must employ Christian “mythology”, meaning its language, positively: it must speak of a created world, a world that has no necessity to exist, but does so by call and gift of a loving Creator; the world is, to put it in philosophical terms, contingent, and its being is grounded in participation in what is transcendent of being. Here, the dialectic between one and many is surpassed by a supreme rhetorical act. Historically, Hart sees this need as having developed during the first centuries of Christendom, in early Trinitarian thought, which implemented “a

78 Hart 2003, 22.
79 Hart discusses Bultmann’s theology only briefly and mainly regarding the latter’s view on the beautiful. 2003, 21–24.
80 See Vanhoozer 2010, 302. Yet note Vanhoozer’s reservation of speaking about God’s speech in nature, perhaps staying true to his Reformed tradition (475, n.18).
81 See Norrie 2009, who, employing an earlier critique of Bhaskar, identifies the Presocratic problem as being one of between “one and other” (being and becoming), whereas the other great philosophical dilemma of dialectics is between “one and many”, as exemplified in the thought of Plato and Aristotle. Norrie and Bhaskar both remark that the postmodern post-structuralist tendency to appreciate difference over identity is itself still anti-Platonic and held captive by a Neo-Nietzschean reading of the matter. It must be noted that the scheme “one and many” still haunts even high postmodernist readings of the matter. See Milbank 2010, 211–238; Przywara 2014, 206–207.
new metaphysics, one that was – perhaps for the first time in Western history – fully ‘ontological’,82 And it was only later on that philosophy turned this contingency into necessity83, thereby obliterating the nature of the creation as gift, and positioned it in relation and exploration to categories of will, product, and causality.

Why does this matter? It matters to Hart because, for him, the pagan choice is something that inevitably lingers within every pagan and secular philosophy. Hart presents two instances. First, it is a matter of ontology without any proper tertium quid, a dialectical position, out of which the prevailing option emerges only by power, violence, or synthesis. This is the second feature of Hart’s adversary, the ontology of violence.

In this sense, Hart can name Hegel “the most ambitious metaphysician of all,”84 for Hart sees Hegel as embodying these alternatives in their logical consequences: Hegel includes the realm of becoming into monism by his notion of a universal spirit.

Secondly, the difference between Being and beings cannot properly be considered, for it must always alternate between Parmenidean monism and Heracleitan becoming.85 In addition, both of these features, the inability of Western thought to find a resting place between being and becoming, or between one and many, have resurfaced in modern times in the form of nihilism. In this thesis, Hart joins paths with Radical Orthodoxy.

One of Radical Orthodoxy’s central claims is that a precisely univocal understanding of being has impoverished Christian theology and surrogated much of what now constitutes a secular or scientific view of reality. Regarding being, a univocal ontology, that is an ontology that presents all beings, including the Supreme one, under the same category of “being”, is something that ensues dialectical thought almost inevitably, for in univocal ontology there cannot be true or positive difference, but differentiation between particulars must be made by comparison, measurement, and identities. Paradoxically, such a univocity seems to presuppose one or many mediators between

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82 Hart 2008, 225. Hart means that Christianity offered the first “genuine discourse of transcendence” (2005, 275), something essentially different from Neoplatonic emanationism or idealism. See Hart 2009, 201–204. Von Balthasar stresses that in the doctrine of the Trinity, “the final underlying guarantee of Western, transcendental philosophy” was reached. GOL IV, 376. As Nichols explains, the idea is that by introducing the Trinity, it was possible to say simultaneously that creation is not God, while being “utterly God-dependent” and still real. Nichols 1998, 143.

83 Hart 2005a, 275.

84 Hart 2003, 38. Hart finds traces of Hegelianism, of “eidetic” thought, which polarizes relatively stable identities even in Heidegger’s work. See Hart 2005, 261–262 and chapter 3.3. and 3.3.1. in this study. Elsewhere, Hart argues that Christianity separated history and nature, which coincided in the ancient mind, by asserting the grand story of creation, fall, and redemption alongside its transcendent narrator (2009, 201).

85 Hart is an apt reader of Heidegger and perhaps allusion to these thinkers resounds in the remark that Heidegger made in his 1942/43 lectures on Parmenides, namely that Parmenides and Heraclitus (and Anaximander) represent “primordial thinkers” in Western thought, beholders of the experience and conception of truth, which will simultaneously govern and fall into oblivion in further historical development. But in all fairness, Heidegger himself in this work warns us against seeing the Parmenidean and Heraclitan ways of thought, in a modern dialectical sense, as basic options or oppositions regarding truth. See Heidegger 1992, 1–13; 19. Yet John Betz is convinced that guidelines set by these “primordial thinkers” still continue to surface in the postmodern analysis of modernity and its self-representation. More interestingly, Betz links this analysis to the polemic between the sublime and the beautiful; see Betz 2005, 371.
One and Many, or to scale the gap between infinite and finite, as Hart sees appearing in the pagan metaphysical thought of Neoplatonist legacy.\textsuperscript{86}

The univocity of being is one of the central aspects of thought criticized by Radical Orthodoxy, and Hart joins in the fight: univocality must be dismissed and supplemented by analogical understanding of being.\textsuperscript{87} Thus, rhetoric must surpass dialectics, for without a Christian interruption, meaning its narrative, argues Hart, human thought seems incapable of any true transcendental moment. In addition, without this interruption, all “end philosophies” mentioned in the previous chapter would actually be right and all metaphysics and transcendental thought would only be attempting to capture reality within our own concepts.\textsuperscript{88}

In Hegel, the Western univocal tendency to choose between being and becoming reaches its ultimate crucible: in his theory of negating negativity (\textit{das Nichtende Nichts}), through which the absolute spirit realizes itself, the dialectical movement is something that can assume the other in itself and thus elevate (\textit{Aufhebung}) itself into something new that still encompasses the previous stages. At the end of his \textit{Phänomenologie des Geistes}, Hegel asserts that time and history are the visible and thinkable process of the Universal Spirit.\textsuperscript{89} In addition, although Christian religion represented for Hegel a crucible of revealed religion, Walter Kaspar has noted that in the end, Trinitarian terms are \textit{in effectu} humanly saturated conceptualized moments of self-consciousness.\textsuperscript{90} John Betz adds that, in postmodernity, the univocity of being is extended in the notions of otherness and alterity, which in turn are only “specular fiction of the \textit{potentia pura} of the creature itself.”\textsuperscript{91} So, within a dialectical model there is simply no escape from dichotomies of modernity, and neither can the cage be demolished with a postmodern (secular) ethos. As a theological example of Hart’s anti-dialecticism, the doctrine of creation \textit{ex nihilo} serves well (being also an integral part of the Christian vision of being): the creation out of nothing is not God’s feat to create something against nothing, but rather goes forth into all beings and returns in them to himself.\textsuperscript{92}

In this way, it is Hegel who exemplifies for Hart the ultimate point of metaphysical violence, for a system is always a violent attempt to govern “innocent” becoming and an attempt to subject the historical under the sway of an Idea. Hegel’s system is, in a sense, an “exhausted” one, for its dynamics are always in a state of progression, while

\textsuperscript{86} Hart 2011, 402–403.
\textsuperscript{87} The matter has been analyzed by numerous theorists in the Radical Orthodox movement; see Hemming 1999; Ward 2000; and also Gillespie 2008.
\textsuperscript{88} See Betz 2015, 489–499.
\textsuperscript{89} Hegel 1986, 589–591. Or in the words of Jean-Luc Nancy: “It [the Spirit] names the restlessness and awakening of the world, itself as well as outside itself; space and time, already, as the ex-position of every position.” [2002, 19]. And Heidegger describes: “The process, character of thinking is determined by the dialectic of Being. For Hegel, the matter of thinking is: Being, as thinking thinking itself; and thinking comes to itself only in the process of its speculative development, thus running through stages of the variously developed, and hence of necessity previously undeveloped, forms.” Heidegger 1969, 45. This idealism is also untenable in Hart’s view because it strings salvation history as a process between concrete and ultimate ideality. This a tendency that has also been present, according to Hart, in theology at least since Philo of Alexandria, and has been adopted in different variations by early Christian theologians. See Hart 2003, 403–405.
\textsuperscript{90} Kaspar 1986, 267; quoted in Vanhoozer 2010, 473 n. 24.
\textsuperscript{91} Betz 2015, 395.
\textsuperscript{92} Hart 2015*, 4–5.
yet it governs everything in this “dynamic stability”. In effect, with this dialectical posture, Hegel also exemplifies the two different portrayals of infinity in Western thought, while still remaining idealistic and not able to govern the real difference that theology posits between the Creator and the created: in Hegel’s system, there is a “bad infinite,” which is merely an “endless and meaningless particularity,” and a “good infinite,” which is precisely the dialectical sublation of positive and negative opposites into a further synthesis. This is something that should also be creatively recalled in Christian thought, which should present the option of divine infinity, Hart argues.

In Hart’s view, the problematic ontological version of the postmodern condition seems to be a strict follow-up to Hegelian metaphysics, because when the postmodern idiom removes the Idea from the process, there remains only the chaotic Difference, where violence is at its most plain, for there can be no Aufhebung nor a dialectical mediatorial stillness within a pure Dionysian rage of being. Nietzsche emerges here as a counter-Hegel, denying the Hegelian Negative and adopting the stance of pure Affirmation. Therefore, the Christian interruption must occur outside the battle between Heraclitus and Parmenides. Hegel, in this sense, represents the paramount eclipse in Western metaphysics, an attempt historically to neglect the Christian interruption and intellectually domesticate it into a moment, however penultimate, of the Spirit’s self-realizing. These metaphysical options, whether ancient or modern, Hart seeks to interrupt or modify with the rhetorical good news.

It seems that for Hart, who claims “not having a dialectical bone in his body,” a dialectical position always ensues from a totality, because in order for a particular dialectic to “work,” it must suppose a certain univocal sense or vision of being as such. If one then proceeds with thesis and antithesis, does this not inevitably lead to a gradation of being within one possible overarching totality? It may be so, but certainly dialectics (even a Barthian one) needs “a master narrative” in order to explicate a particular narrative, even in the case when a particular narrative is criticizing the master narrative. All the variations of totality are modalities in a closed system, which contains, for Hart, the competing narratives between Parmenides and Heraclitus, the

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95 Hart correctly adds that this picture of Nietzsche as a pure affirmativist is actually a Neo-Nietzschean postmodern depiction of him, endorsed especially in the genealogical work of Gilles Deleuze. Hart 2003, 40, n. 4; Hart 2017, 93.
96 Hart 2007, 612.
“wresting of abstract principles from intractable facts.” In short, the Christian version of reality cannot treat particular beings as potentialities capable of “more being”, nor should they be regarded as an example of some higher unity (Parmenides) or, as happenstance, crystallized ruptures of Becoming (Heraclitus/Nietzsche). Rather, metaphysics alone seems, in Hart’s mind, to simply appreciate the particular being and the divine infinity that it shows forth analogically.

Therefore, it is precisely a particular being with their particular features or the silent beauty of nature that Hart sees vindicated in the Christian discourse. Because every singular being is in effect created, participating in the Creator, and because, as mentioned, their difference appears as analogical beauty, there is simply no way to go with the dialectical method. Dialectics connects the dots, but as rhetoric, Christian discourse offers an incommensurable view of being and rationale, whose very “logic” cannot be found by removing the lines between the dots, but from the wholesome picture that emerges from them. Because of this, the narrative form is only one possibility in the end, since the narrative is about a particular God-man in history. The emphasis laid on the particularity and on dismissing dialectics seems to be, for Hart, the first step toward affirming the primacy of the beautiful, and escaping the need for a difference to presuppose a sublimity instead of beauty.

Although they hold often similar general views, Hart differs from John Milbank in his quite absolute disregard for dialectical positions. For Milbank is also critical of Hegel, and gives priority to narrative (rhetoric) and sees postmodern narrative as nihilism and the conclusion of modernity, but is ready to accept dialectical thought to
a degree, proceeding from given positions and evolving via erring, while questioning Alasdair McIntyre’s way of ‘flirting’ with theological aspects of metaphysics.101

Thus, the choice between Heraclitus and Parmenides must be seen as depicting a false picture, a false *theoria*, a suspicious gaze upon Being and beings, a choice that has become obsolete, but which has resurfaced in both univocal understanding of being and nihilism in its postmodern form. In the end, the question of Being is, within this discursive reason, reduced to philosophy and seeing is subjugated to thinking. The theoretical struggle is not what eventually matters, for it is one that ensues from a narrative of being, not the other way around. Again, for Hart, and most of narrative theology, the main area where distinctions can be made is one of narrative, and especially in consideration of the aesthetics and rhetorical beauty of this narrative.

The position described above is essential in understanding Hart’s own concept of rhetoric. He explicitly denounces any neutral rationale as inadequate in describing or proclaiming Christian truth. In addition, given the radical nature of certain postmodern theorists, Hart sees that postmodernity as a critical counter-phenomenon to modernity is simply false, because postmodernism depicted this way succeeds only in becoming “yet another attempt to extract thought from the quagmires of narrative.”102 Metaphysical errors tend to recur and clothe themselves in new guises without the Christian interruption. At times, Hart seems to suggest that, if there is any meaning in postmodern critique, it must be stabilized enough to offer a discourse that is, in turn, abstracted or “thought out” of narrative. But this seems to be such a general remark that it comes close to being vacuous; and maybe it should be taken only as a narrative reminder that anti-foundationalist thought is not in itself as “pure” from suspicion as it would sometimes present itself. In the end, the argument that narrative must be told before it can be understood goes both ways. To my mind, Hart’s general theory is as theoretically vulnerable as his opponent’s; but this is naturally what one gets if one welcomes openly the rhetorical nature of revelation itself. The same re-narrational force that has given birth to Christian culture, for example, is the same “hole” that osmotically renders the narrative under influence of alien elements.

It has become clear that, for Hart, the critical project of postmodernity is usually welcomed, but only if the loss of metanarratives is not allowed to be another master-narrative on its own or if its disregard for metaphysics or foundationalism is not absolute. For if the narrative itself becomes worthy of theoretical idolatry, it ends up becoming tangled in the nets of modernity, which is not “post-enough.”103 Only as rhetoric can Christianity make any truth-claims, because there simply are no plausible alternatives available. Here lies the traditional approach that Hart masterfully employs in his own rhetoric: it is precisely the classical theological formulae that offer a radically new view on being and reality. Furthermore, as I pointed out earlier, a narrational form of such a view is an inevitability, for in it the truth of the narrative must remain open (thus not forming a totality) and not solidify into rigid concepts offering a place for dialectical proceedings. In theological terms, the narrative of the “concrete person

101 Milbank 2006, 262; for discussion, see Kerr 1992.
102 Hart 2003, 7.
103 Hart 2003, 6. This view is very similar to that of John Milbank’s, who views the “participatory” model of theology, employed in the positively postmodern sense, as one that eludes both the usual liberal and conservative positions of our times. See Milbank 1999, 4.
and history of Jesus,” which opens and reconciles the narrative of this world and its being, remains open since its “plot” is constructed eschatologically, and its scene is the resplendent presence and gift of its Creator.

So, the “metaphysical” cannot be evicted from Christianity, because every age needs its own metaphysical idioms, baptized or borrowed, in order to explicate the Gospel as a peaceful narrative, understandable and simultaneously transcending the intellectual or religious milieu it inhabits. But mere metaphysics must be supplemented by the right, or rightfully beautiful, story of being itself. It is the beauty of such a mixture of explicated Gospel that is ultimately decisive, not “structuralist taxonomies” or victorious conceptual clarities. In Western thought, theology acts as a haunting leaven, even in the discourses that seem to be openly anti-theological; yet it is clear that for Hart it is the continental philosophy that shows most kinship with authentic theology. It is not surprising that Hart does not find such kinship with the analytic tradition.

In any case, most of the philosophical tradition that Hart appreciates or evaluates concerns itself with some form of nihilism, in “secularized theology” that acts as if the Christian revolution has never happened or has been domesticated into servitude. As will be explored in Chapter 3, the philosophers with whom Hart engages have also offered an account of nihilism: Nietzsche, Lévinas, and Heidegger. In addition, as James K. A. Smith has observed, Hart seeks to wage his peaceful war on “two fronts”: by both tackling the postmodern violence of hermeneutics and ontologies of violence and seeking out a rhetoric that is not out for conquest or problem-solving, Hart tries to portray the Christian Gospel as persuasive (certainly not as an epistemological proceeding only with natural theology) witnessing the peacefulness that is really the radical Other, yet present in the world; the one that postmodern attempts have failed to formulate.

Even more importantly, Hart views the rhetoric vantage not only as openly “committed,” but also as important in the course of its operation. In short, Christian truth must operate on rhetorical grounds because all dialectics is inherently violent, while acknowledging that the rhetorical model of thought can also easily slip into a

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105 Hart 2003, 396. Hart is very careful not to introduce any dramatical elements into his narrative for it may, at least in a rhetorical sense, hinder the understanding of the peaceful nature of Christian narrative; yet the eschatological emphasis is, in my mind, fertile ground for dramatical interpretations, though, of course, Hart would not deny that history is tumultuous and full of inadequacies and false desires for the kingdom. See Vanhoozer 2005, 111.

106 Hart 2003, 11. It is a different question how the particularity and historical nature of Christianity can evolve and emerge always victorious; Hart seems to waver a little at this point, admitting that Christianity’s borrowed vocabulary sometimes arrives “belatedly” at the point it is shown to be superior or more than the ingredients it had clothed its contents with. Yet this begs the question whether this demands a very specific reading of historical theology, where narrative always manages to reach the beautiful synthesis before or after its possible distortion by power, philosophy, or dialectics. In nuce, Hart’s view of the cultural value of Christianity tends toward an elitist Gnostic emphasis, where the right interpreters of theological tradition must be, eventually, self-ordained professors of beauty. However, this point should perhaps not to be pushed too far.

107 Hart 2003, 11.


“game of conquest.” Rhetoric, according to Hart, is not a matter of ending up in strife between competing discourses, but offers a distinct peaceful alternative to this competition. This is not a mere assertion but is supported by a specific reading of Christian metaphysics, as we will see. Here, it suffices to note that Hart makes it clear numerous times that there cannot simply be a discourse (or a narrative) completely free from metaphysical elements, and this is why theology cannot retreat to pure transcendentalism or become a niched discourse, audible and intelligible only within its own walls.

These general remarks set the background for Hart’s exposition of Christian theology as a particular and supreme narrative of peace, of analogical beauty, and the truth in the language of the gift. This background allows him to dismiss, perhaps too hastily, all dialectic sensibility and also the various forms of the “death of metaphysics”, neither of which, in Hart’s view, concern or should concern Christian theology at large or represent any formidable criticism of it.

2.2.2 Radical Orthodoxy and ontological peace

As I set out in this chapter to pursue a general overview of Hart’s thought, it is important to make a note of his affinities. The idea of the Christian Gospel as an ontological and unique message of peace is a concept advocated in different ways by the Radical Orthodoxy movement.

The movement itself, sometimes referred to as more of an inclination than a structured movement (or even a performance), is centered around the Anglican theologian John Milbank (1952–) and crosses lines of denomination by pursuing a more engaging and transformative theological discourse while being open to postmodern sensibility (though not agreeing with most of its purely philosophical conclusions), thus also gathering criticism of its methods and statements from the more traditional corners of academia.111

Hart’s thesis converges, at least as a convenient rhetorical model, to a degree with views held by the Radical Orthodoxy Movement and par excellence by its spokesman, John Milbank. At a general level, Hart thinks that Orthodox theology and Radical Orthodoxy share some affinities, although they are historically somewhat differently constituted.112 More to the point, Hart views the Milbankian claim, made in the influential *Theology and Social Theory* (first appearing in 1990), with some critical suspicion, while considering it “perhaps right” and agreeing with the fact that “ontologies of violence” ontologically speaking cannot escape metaphysics but simply situate themselves firmly on the other side of Occidental metaphysical thought, namely the Heracleitan side, in favor of the Parmenidean one.113 This genealogy is a daring one; it basically claims that only Christianity has broken the bipolar metaphysical vicious circle of dialectical thought (choosing sides between univocal and equivocal metaphysics), and offered a radically alternative view on Being: one that demands no suffocation or conquering of the other and, on the other hand, does not dissolve

112 Hart 2009b, xiii.
otherness and multiplicity into monism. The anti-dialectical impetus coheres with Milbank’s formal statement that narratives do not simply succeed one another or emerge victorious (dialectics always suggest a certain traceability in the narrative), but an element of “poetic” intrusion also plays a role in great cultural shifts of narrative.  

For Milbank, Christian radicalism is displayed on a sociological level, on the birth of modern political theory and also via the manifesto exposed in Radical Orthodoxy – A New Theology, which represents an endeavor in “reconfiguring theological truth.” This reconfiguration, which is pre-modern and anti-modern and post-modern simultaneously, consists of leaving behind the totalities of humanistic reason or sentiment and its rationality (by avoiding any reducing element in its processing) while embracing the postmodern condition of indeterminacy of universal truths, but importantly doing so by representing this indeterminacy not as “chaos” but as an “infinite interpersonal harmonious order.” This is, of course, very convenient, since by definition, the narrative of an infinite God cannot be thematized dialectically or chaotically. God may appear in Radical Orthodoxy in the theoretical space where its adversaries may promote Difference or a form of a metaphysical sublime.

Milbank is obviously suggesting that the Nietzschean version of reality is not the only one possible; in fact, the Nietzschean legacy in postmodern times misconceived the nature of truth in considering it primordially an anarchic flux that only organizes itself or is organized by “will to power,” the strongest impulse available, which in turn promotes violence on the grounds of being. What is, is simply because it has succumbed to other ways to be or other beings: being is a phantasmagoric expression of differentiation of power. Christian peace, the alternative of Hart and Milbank, denounces power in all its forms, while Hart is aware that historically this has not always been the case. Yet this claim is more important than any retreat into some neutrality or succumbing to anything other than the Gospel’s proclamation of the kingdom and the new, restored reality in Christ.

Basically, the core thesis of Radical Orthodoxy means that one is choosing sides, not only in ideas in history in general, but also within Christian tradition, and as its legacy, also within philosophical tradition. The preferred lineage is the Platonic-Augustinian (perhaps Thomistic) view of being, in which analogia entis is the proper Christian way to address the question of Being and beings. This stance represents the ontology of “peace,” whereas the other options, including historical ones like Scotist realism

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114 Milbank 2006, 348; Milbank 1997, 124–125 Milbank takes this poetic element from Alasdair McIntyre’s work and applies it to von Balthasar’s analysis of man’s poetic existence.

115 Milbank 2006, 73.

116 Milbank 2006, 147.

117 Milbank & Ward & Pickstock, 1.

118 Milbank & Ward & Pickstock, 1–2. Of this narrative and genealogy, it is common to emphasize a sort of rupture that happens in the late Middle Ages, in the birth of modernity via the emergence of Nominalism (although the uneasy case of Scotus is simply and gradually leading to a waning of the former Platonic-Augustinian cosmic vision. Milbank & Ward & Pickstock 1999, 3.; see i.e. Gillespie 2008; Pabst 2014. For a critique, see Horan 2014.


120 The meaning of St. Thomas Aquinas is openly stressed by Milbank; see, for example, Milbank 1997, 11–12. Hans Urs von Balthasar argues that in modernity (via Reformation), the lineage connecting philosophy and theology was broken as internal illumination, and “the distinction” became “a division”. Thus, afterwards, “[n]atural theology may be possible ‘in itself’, but it no longer has any existential force.” GOL III, 106–107.
and Spinozist univocity and contemporaneous ones like the Deleuzan univocity of Difference, are seen as the dismemberment of an analogous and participatory structure of Being.  

Both Milbank and Hart suggest that Christianity represents both a break and continuity (determined precisely by this break) in the course of Western thought. Moreover, the break for both thinkers is of a radical nature, whereas continuity represents more areas of cultivation, revitalization, and transfiguration of ancient philosophy (and Judaism). For Hart, the radical nature, the interruption of Christ, resides in its anti-dialectical and anti-idealistic form of rhetorical metaphysics. For Milbank, “the central theological framework of Radical Orthodoxy is ‘participation’ as developed by Plato and reworked by Christianity;” for him, any other version of reality, to simplify matters, is necessarily constructed as false, for without participation, there is always either a neutral element between creation and God (which is heretical) or the realms of the divine and the mundane are separated, which amounts to nihilism.

The radical element is basically the same for both thinkers. Hart and Milbank see reality en Khristo in a very real sense: Christianity is a view that succumbs neither to materialism nor spiritualism, for there is always a divine presence in beings, not only in their formal aspects, but in their very particularity as well; being is not enclosed, but everything is only because its being has the aspect of transcending itself. Again, the true form of transcendence emerges as central. In an opening chapter introducing Radical Orthodoxy, John Milbank writes with Graham Ward and Catherine Pickstock: “This is to say that all there is only because it is more than it is.” In this, Milbank follows his teacher Henri de Lubac, for whom creatures have “an unstable ontological constitution,” and their being is not situated exhaustively and independently in themselves. It is then clear at a larger scale that, when reality is thoroughly theological, there is simply no “secular” or “neutral” area in thought or history that is not under theological scrutiny, and neither can such a thing precede “the theological”.

In addition, any authentic novelty, or interruption, in thought manifests itself in narrative means, as Milbank argues:

\[\text{What triumphs is simply the persuasive power of a new narrative, which gives an important position to some themes and characters in the old plot, while abandoning others that were once equally important.}\]

While Hart seems to me to be the slightly more tolerant of the two, allowing different figures in his theological canon, it cannot be denied that even if one allows the Christian “true story” to be reflected outside the Christian view on being and culture, it is necessary to be suspicious of the history of theology and philosophy in

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121 Milbank 2006, 262; see also the critique of this grand narrative in Kotsko 2009, 115–124. Of Medieval “disfigurement” of participatory model ontology, see Pabst 2014, 12, note 16. Hart himself employs Aquinas as an example of his portrayal of classical theological thought of a Supreme being, but sees also that medieval proceedings of patristic developments have also, if taken as primary source, contributed negatively in breaking the grand Catholic tradition into harmful and polemical Eastern and Western camps.


124 The phrase is Paul Ricoeur’s; De Lubac 2015, 113.

125 Milbank 2006, 348.
order to salvage the ramifications set beforehand as primary. This sort of historical picking is the other side of the argument that I mentioned previously, namely that Christianity is a particular narrative and a supreme one. This is also a major point that separates both Hart and Milbank from post-liberalist sensibilities. The Christian narrative is about the Christian God and Christ, not primarily about human interest, consciousness, or moral edification in general, although the latter can be argued and informed through the former. This is a generalization, of course; postliberal theology is much more diverse than George Lindbeck’s short analysis on the nature of the doctrine; but it may be said that both Hart and Milbank have little patience for merely asserting that every narrative must have a conceptual background. Their project must be seen more as suited for rhetorical purposes: the real point for the two theologians is not whether such a theology is realist or anti-realist, but its transformative power (or non-power) of acting as an alternative and corrective to other discourses.

Milbank’s thesis is, in nuce, a widespread critique of nihilistic metaphysics (which largely, but not exhaustively, also covers “the metaphysics of no metaphysics”, or the variations of onto-theological criticism). For Milbank, as Loughlin notes, there are only benign and malevolent varieties of metaphysics. More specifically, and more to interests of this study, Milbank argues that the Christian narrative offers a story of difference and ontological peace, which offers an alternative to nihilistic discourses that seek mastery, solutions via power, and succumbing to the other.

But as has already been asked, does this not inevitably set the supremacy of the Christian narrative as a new grand narrative? The competing narratives are displayed by genealogical presentation, or as Morwenna Ludlow remarks, as series of thinkers, as “dramatis personae” through whom Milbank creates a proper history of Christians, semi-Christians, pseudo-Christians, and apostates of that tradition, both conscious and unconscious ones:

not only theological heroes but also genealogies of villains, which are connected by some fundamental theological or philosophical loyalty […]. An additional function of such genealogies is to give a structure to Christian history, to delineate the contours of the development of Christian doctrine: they often presuppose a period of decline in Christian theology beyond which one has to stretch to reach a better age. Consequently, it is often difficult to know whether the early heroes are used as such because they carry authority in representing an era before the fall, or because of their own particular theological ideas.

In addition, as noted by Steven Shakespeare, Radical Orthodoxy’s claim that all other narratives tend toward secularism and nihilism (Milbank regards the modern idea of

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126 This is probably the greatest difference between narrative theologians of conservative and liberal varieties. For Yale-School narrativists seem to cling to the idea of narrational anti-foundationalism, which Hart rejects straightforwardly (2003, 31), where narrative itself is the structure of human experience and identity. For Yale-school sentiments, see Frei 1974 and Lindbeck. For Hart and Milbank, the supremacy of the Christian story is worked out differently in its outcomes, but the basic premise remains the same. See Chapter 2.2.2.

127 For recent views on Yale-School views, see DeHart 2006 and Cathey 2009.


secular, of independent reality from God, as itself a misbegotten idea\textsuperscript{131}) comes close to an elitist view of Christian truth and perhaps even limiting of God himself as working “outside” of his own.\textsuperscript{132} Daniel Horan has suggested, following the interpretation of Richard Cross, that there is an element of “doxography” in Radical Orthodoxy’s historical constructs in place of historiography.\textsuperscript{133} Issues have also been raised about the distance between, for example, Biblical understanding and the speculative tendency of Radical Orthodoxy—an issue displaying painstakingly clearly the fact that this distance is always rhetorical on its own.

Although this question is worthy of a study of its own, it can be said here that in such a narrative as Hart’s or Milbank’s, historical analysis gives way to the purposes of narrative that consists of both villains and recovering the “representative age of theology,” though it would be more correct to speak of the representative mood of theology. Again, it is also more a matter of personal inclination whether one views this view as a piece of masterfully masqueraded conservative nostalgia or an attempt to revitalize the modern conceptual barrenness with an organic source of living theological tradition. While both are plausible alternatives, the matter displays the infuriating flaw of narrative theology of this scope: it cannot be criticized factually, not to mention analytically, but must be met on genealogical grounds, which, as Nietzsche realized, is in a way a most proper display of power, not facts or truths. In short, both its appeal and its weakness lie in its nature of outspoken rhetorical nature, which Milbank himself regards as “an exercise of sceptic relativism.”\textsuperscript{134} It is plainly taking sides, and by stressing the radical contingency (though not certainly arbitrariness) of its claims (of all socially or linguistically constructed claims), it renders itself immune to most traditional criticism. But as Radical Orthodoxy still tries to express its own view of reality, it must have arguments against something; ironically, in order for its claims to appear in the first place, it needs a certain dialectical position itself.

The neo-Nietzschean legacy, which both Milbank and Hart identify as the main contemporaneous adversary to their discourse, as it displays a grand disregard for what they think is the radical nature of Christian thought, is not the only aspect that situates Hart within, or at least bordering on, the milieu of Radical Orthodoxy. Hart also endorses “Christian Platonism,” as metaphysically articulated in the Patristic era, and rehabilitated in movements such as Nouvelle Théologie and Radical Orthodoxy. As Gerhard Loughlin asserts, this affiliation consists of “naming God as being rather a being beyond being; the necessity of analogy for thinking the difference between being (creator) and beings (creatures); the possibility of the gift; the primordiality of peace and the contingency of conflict.”\textsuperscript{135} These are all argumentative trends that both Hart and the representatives of Radical Orthodoxy adhere to, and it seems that Hart’s initial disregard for dialectics is derived from, or at least coincides with, the Milbankian view in which Christian discourse represents “a mediatory structure

\textsuperscript{131} Milbank, 2006.
\textsuperscript{132} Shakespeare 2007, 1–40.
\textsuperscript{133} Horan 2014, 105.
\textsuperscript{134} Milbank 2006, 1.
\textsuperscript{135} Loughlin 2007, 601. For Hart, the exemplar of converting Platonic thought into Christian is St. Gregory of Nyssa. See Hart 2003, 403.
which is not dialectical.” Hence, the dialectical seems to represent the shadowy side of Western ontology, the track it has taken without or despite Christian Platonism, which highlights, according to Hart and Milbank, the participatory nature of being, mediated by Christ and expressed in analogical terms.

It must be noted that Hart does not try to conceal the problems presented at a general level by Milbank’s project, but in fact recognizes them as a problem. In any case, Hart views Milbank’s basic premise as ”probably true.” However, Hart modifies this thesis as not being merely one between mundane dialectics and the infinity of God, but furthermore of competing aesthetic theories of being, namely between a narrative of beauty and a narrative of the sublime. In fact, he asserts that the concept of the sublime is the progeny of the uneasy marriage between modernism and postmodernism. This is something that John Betz also affirms: he argues that “in the beautiful understanding makes room for imagination, in the sublime the imagination makes room for reason.” Betz means that in the Enlightenment, and via the thought of Immanuel Kant, the beautiful was separated from its transcendent status and lost the participatory model of its appearance; it was replaced by the sublime, which aims precisely at reason through imagination and surpassing it. So, by clinging to the sublime, postmodernism is in Betz’s view merely continuing the modern project of securing not reason’s stability as in modernism, but securing its stability as difference, precisely by choosing a different transcendent (even though naming it as non-transcendental). In this reading, the postmodern anguish about representation is seen only as a culmination of modernity’s project. As Betz puts it, insofar as the modern sense of beauty terminated in the subject as reason, in the postmodern times, this terminating point is simply exploded, thus leaving all representation and presence (and also analogy) under suspicion.

Though many thinkers acknowledge, as we have seen, the aesthetic dimension in the postmodern era as important, it is perhaps Hart who gives it the most captivating interpretation within Radical Orthodoxy’s premises.

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136 Milbank 2009, 145. Hart writes that the Christian concept of being is that being itself is mediatory, and is so before any reduction, in its immediacy and transcendence. 2003, 56.

137 Loughlin 2007, 601. See also Milbank 1997, 10–11 about this. It must be noted that while Hart is an Orthodox scholar, he is not in agreement with certain modern Orthodox voices regarding the onto-genesis of Western dialectic or paradoxical thought. Milbank regards it, for example, in his discussion with Slavoj Žižek, Vladimir Lossky’s reading of Western Trinitarian logic and Žižek’s usage of it, as incomplete. See Žižek & Milbank 2009, 184. Rather, the “logic” of Trinitarian thought should be, according to Milbank, sought in its paradoxical “resolve” of the one as three. Hart’s anti-dialectical stance derives much from the same source: the Cappadocian Trinitarianism and Augustine’s view of the triune God. This reading is a one-way passageway to allow a postmodern discourse to enter Christian theology; and both Hart and Milbank see it as of utmost importance for Christian theology, while setting different discourses in comparison.


139 Betz 2005, 386.

140 Betz 2005, 388.
For Hart, there is always an aesthetic moment in truth in itself; as he puts it, if one is clinging to the Kantian transcendentalapperceptive model of knowledge\textsuperscript{141}, there is simply nothing much to be said intelligibly; and if one is treating the Beautiful only as a secondary or as a rational subliminal concept, one dooms discourse either to subjective preference or to postmodern textual open-endedness. This accusation is not aimed at Kant himself, but rests upon, as we shall see, a very particular reading of a modernistic construct of the history of ideas. For Hart, the question is precisely about recovering the sense of the Beautiful that Hans Urs von Balthasar speaks about\textsuperscript{142}, the classical Transcendental instead being just a sentiment of the beautiful or a fleeting impression caught in subjectivity. Hart’s concept of beauty will be explored more fully in Chapter 4.2.

2.2.3 Christ as narrative

If, then, the Christian narrative is the supreme one, which can both tackle other discourses and dismantle them according to its peaceful ontological nature, it must be asked how this supremacy is achieved, how it can be recognized as such, and how it can criticize other discourses. The first two aspects will be surveyed here because they are interconnected, and the third will be explored in the next chapter.

As mentioned above, Hart and Milbank are both thinkers according to whom the Christian narrative is not simply a narrative among many, nor only a meaningful theoretical setting that could be harvested and re-enacted simply as the dramatic meaningful act of a community or a shared story of wandering identities\textsuperscript{143}. It is important to stress that by no means do they try to conceive their narratives as closed ones; it would contradict the very content and form of their narrative. For them, the Christian narrative is about the infinite distance between God and his creatures, evaluated and appreciated as a positive distance and an analogous possibility made flesh in Jesus Christ. Thus, the Christian narrative must remain open-ended for two obvious theological reasons: first, the infinity of God cannot be exhausted in the created realm, in its responses and reflections in reaction to God’s giving and participatory presence in the world. Secondly, the Christian message always entails the \textit{eschaton}, a moment that is present and that differentiates history without entering and being subsumed under it. So, while being thoroughly historical, the narrative cannot be

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\textsuperscript{141} Exposed in the first of Kant’s three critiques. In the third part, \textit{Kritik der Urteilskraft}, Kant argues that aesthetic thought can be divided into “beautiful” and into “sublime”. The division of these primarily aesthetic categories has risen in postmodern thought, and in Hart’s, to explain metaphysical differences, as well. For Hart, the sublime represents precisely the “bad difference” that exists only to cover its nihilistic structure. It is noteworthy, however, that for Kant himself, the aesthetic appropriation was a bridge between discursive objective knowledge and subjective knowledge.

\textsuperscript{142} The concept of the beautiful in von Balthasar will be explored more fully in Chapter 4, but a useful summary of his own can be found in the first volume of the third part of his great trilogy. von Balthasar 2000, 7–23.

\textsuperscript{143} Narrative and narrational identity is a great theme in social and humanistic studies in the latter part of 20\textsuperscript{th} Century thought. Precisely because it has been utilized by such a variety of thinkers, it can be hard to situate where the line is for ‘narrative theology’ and ‘theology made by narrative means’. See Lucie-Smith, 2007. For the psychological aspect in narrative as a means of structuring identity, see McAdams & Jossleson & Lieblich (eds.), 2006.
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closed: the narrative of Christ has “already happened” in history, is already visible in creation, and yet it lives as passed on and as out-narrating other narratives.

Hart is careful to distinguish between Christian theology and postmodernism in the sense stated above. In short, Hart wishes to simultaneously point out that while Christianity is a story most of all, not all stories have to have oppressive qualities or totalizing visions. In addition, to Hart, the story is more valuable the more it can offer a glimpse of the totality of being (for this, he applauds Heidegger, for example); the story must be “grand” in order to be believable in the first place. To be believable, it must also be thinkable, and it should also be illuminating to the thinker. The narrative’s attractive (or repulsive) power heightens to the degree that it claims universality (though not necessarily comprehensive in the epistemic or moral sense). This universal, or rational aspect, is what differentiates theology from mythology, a story from a fable. If a narrative fails the “grand theme of being,” it remains just a story. In this sense, modern philosophy, inaugurated by Descartes and Kant, has also failed in this task; all this leads to a statement that ties Hart’s theological narrative and its aesthetics together:

...Indeed, if all legitimate language of meaning must obey the logic of dialectical communicability (and assuming dialectic is not itself an arbitrary marshalling of metaphors), and if “knowledge” is only that which may be presented to a transcendental subjectivity, through the apparatus of empirical perception or appresentation, then there is much that is impossible to say intelligibly. But this is finally a tautology: if one adopts the position of a certain account of how being, knowledge, and language are related, that is one’s position – ultimately because one finds the particular depiction of the world it affords especially compelling, even inevitable, for reasons that are finally aesthetic. Nor does the postmodern soupçon of metanarratives take thought further than this.

This can be seen as correlative to what Susanna Lee has suggested: to her, postmodern secularism resides “in the space between pleasure and distrust in narrative, between

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144 This is something that Mark C. Taylor wants, although holding a quite general view on the discourse of theology, to affirm: he also seeks a comprehensive discourse that is still not totalizing. See Taylor 1993; Spitzer 2011, 126. It may be noted that Taylor seems to be, at least to a degree, captivated by the Heideggerian view of the alleged onto-theology of the Western tradition, which in turn makes his postmodern theology unacceptable for theologians like Hart. For this, see Betz 2015.

145 In a short column, Hart makes the difference between a belief in fairies and in God to hang upon whether the belief is capable of asking the question of being. The former, and the belief in multiple gods, remain always within some “taxonomy”, some economy of a shared being, rather than being capable of displaying a form of coherent metaphysics or a true transcendence. Hart 2013, 71–72.

146 Hart 2003, 9; see GOL III, 172, where von Balthasar depicts the Cartesian position as a point of origin of “modern schizophrenia between exact sciences and imageless inwardness.” As a historical note, see Gillespie 2008, 40–41.
a vision of narrative as legitimating and narrative as manipulative and retrograde.” Hart seems, then, to suggest that, with Christianity, we should “take it” rather than deconstruct it or demythologize it. A narrative cannot thus be “told” or “proclaimed” if it is subjected to preliminary criticism resorting to concepts alien to the narrative itself. Otherwise, the narrative is dependent upon “purely metaphysical fideisms,” as Hart depicts the much disputed project of Heidegger to Destrukt the Western onto-theological tradition. Narrative precedes metaphysics, and in theology, it does so both historically (the biblical narrative) and as the “order of things,” to borrow Foucault’s title. Yet it is the “capability” of narrative to offer a holistic view of being that guarantees the narrative’s potentiality. The logic is circular, as noted, but for Hart, the circle is not vicious but rather a beautiful one.

So, while repudiating the end of metaphysics as a false narrative by its own premises, Hart treats the arbitrariness of general postmodern attitudes toward narratives as symptomatic of a philosophical approach to narratology. In short, the critical attitude can itself transform into a totalizing act of gathering every counterargument under its shadow. It also smoothly and conveniently passes over the particularities of every story in the name of superior or ulterior motives, and thus the “power” of narrative is extinguished right off the bat. Hart offers Christianity as a true alternative to this textual dilemma: to him, Christian theology is, precisely by its historical particularity, by its uniqueness and strictly “named” characters and events, a narrative that has always been open to metaphysical loans of idioms proper to every age, but at the same time, at core, highly resistant to succumbing to the domination of those idioms. Here, the depiction acquires much Milbankian flavor: this inherent resistance to mundane dialectics and economies happens simultaneously as an act of renunciation.

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147 Lee 2006, 13. It is also interesting to note the gloomy Stimmung utilized by postmodernist theorists when tackling the structures of metaphysics (and what Mark Currie (2007) names aptly in the case of Derrida as his “hauntology”). It seems that the ghost of Nietzsche is present in all of “end of metaphysics” narratives, for Nietzsche most of all was able to genealogically and aesthetically evaluate the horror vacui of the world containing the dead God, and his phantom presence in grammar, thought, and morality. From this viewpoint, in hindsight, it seems almost natural that theology has, after Nietzsche, been growingly interested both in the phenomenological content of faith and also in recovering the beautiful of Christianity, the call (kaleo) and beauty (kalos) left behind by the suggested death of God.

148 See the remarks made by Ricoeur, who sees narrative identity as a possibility for both describing and prescribing reality (its nature and ethics) only if the narrative is capable of including the prescriptive elements in the “very structure of the narrating” itself. 1992, 115–117.

149 Hart 2003, 9.

150 See Ricoeur 1985, 213–214. It can be argued that if narrative is needed in the construction of a community’s or individual’s identity, this identity is thereby only an outward expression of the power of the narrator. But the narrative is never totally finished; it is in a constant state of telling, and therefore identities can emerge new in repeating the narrative. This is also the function of, for example, the Old Testament narratives: not to offer any exhaustive spiritual or personal modes of experiences, but rather to open them up in a meaningful way to the participants in the same historical narrative. For experience as a primordial narrative event, see Crites 1997, 84f. As a side note, it can be said that narrative coherence also ultimately governs tradition and its development. Hart implies, for example, that Arian controversies showed that each dissident party could quote sources of theology quite evenly, and thus as a singular issue either one could have been vindicated. But it was the narrative compatibility (faith that was already practiced, sung, and understood for centuries) with dogmatic theses that resolved the matter in favour of the Nicene party. See Hart 2009, 205–207.

151 Milbank argues on similar lines that the “Greek” way of thinking is surpassed by the “infinitization” of the absolute by the Neoplatonism that Christianity worked upon. Milbank also remarks that this process is not finished, not even today. Milbank 2006, 296–297.

152 Hart 2003, 11.
and evasion, peacefully. The theologian does not pick up the hammer in order to philosophize; they remain in awe of the possibility of the hammer itself and all the possible noises it can ring out, even from the pettiest philosophemes.

For Hart, then, the Christian claim to its particular story rests upon two decisive moments: its beauty (God’s beauty, and the participatory and the given experience of it in the Christian realm) and its peace, as its beauty appears in history and thought. In short, Hart sets out to expound a modified narrative theology, which (as he blames the Yale-School for doing153) does not seek an “antifoundationalist shelter in its linguistic ghetto.”154 As I pointed out in the previous chapter, there is an element of realism in his thought, but it always remains systematically unexplained, since it offers an open system of rhetoric with a consummative view on Being (thus being explicable outwards as kerygma and also argued for by rational means). In addition, this rhetoric is one of beauty, resulting in a Christian philosophy that is a “hinge-concept’, as Wittgenstein would have it155, simultaneously acting as a rationale and as a theoria.156 As Vanhoozer has pointed out, the necessary question for any cultural-linguistic theology is to ask whether the “genuine Christian identity is received through apostolic witness […] or whether it is produced in and by the community’s performance, a social construction.”157 Hart would argue that the latter option is only a projection of contemporaneous ideology.

This being said, I think that Hart may be seen as a “post-conservative” theologian, differing from a Lindbeckian view in that Hart does not pursue so much the construction of a “model” of theology as the opening of a holistic aesthetic view on theology itself, and taking this view to be both descriptive and meaningful in explaining the theological “content” opened up with such a view. The definition of Hart as a “conservative theologian” can be a valid one, if one simply denotes that theology, to Hart, is something that gets explicated from its classical core, without “the injection of postmodernism” into this core itself; in short, theology is a meaningful discourse in its own right and should not yield its previous formulations to the needs of postmodernism. However, the prefix “post” is, for Hart, an attempt and a conviction that theology should address those needs and can do so plausibly only

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153 The whole concept of Yale-School is at best vague, as indicated by George Hunsinger (2003, 42), who suggests that two main trends may be discerned in the theology of the disciples of Frei and Lindbeck: “neo-confessionalist” and “neo-secularist”. Perhaps Hart’s conscious distancing of himself from the “Yale-School” in general has to do with his general distaste for non-foundationalism as a primary methodological standpoint. For Hart, if there is a non-foundation, it is always grounded in something “given,” ultimately in the differential unity of being of the Trinitarian God. Hunsinger, for his part, treats Lindbeck more as a “neo-liberalist” than as a proper postliberal like Frei. Sometimes, however, Hart’s separatism from the Yale-School seem a bit exaggerated and calculating, appearing in the context in which the particularity of Jesus’ narrative is in question. Is it not that the Yale-School sought a narrative that is obedient precisely to the events itself, not any higher moment nor the narrative itself?

154 Hart 2003, 31; Hart admits, facing critique, that he may have “somewhat simplified” the Yale-School narrative theological premises. Hart 2007, 611; the expression “linguistic ghetto”, which ensues from resorting to a sort of overly-Wittgensteinian reform of theology, is a borrowed expression from Jenson, who regards such an act as “a crime”, see Vainio 2013, 112.


156 Hart 2003, 31; GOL IV, 195. It may be said that Hart’s theology is not “aesthetic” theology, for it acknowledges that revelation, in creation and in Christ, is also an act, not a mere category of beauty to appear. See Schindler 2013, 53, who quotes Hart in this regard.

within the given classical core. As Hart constantly affirms through his works, only the “classical” depiction of God is in fact the only possible one, if one seeks both to understand being in general and the beauty of Christianity in particular.

This means, among other things, that one cannot understand the narrative only in the sense of data or a given text. A more active approach is needed, in which interpretation is extended beyond the narrative evidence, and narrative is seen as a particular orientation toward reality and truth, as well as one constituting reality and truth in the process. This means that narrative is seen as embodied in a tradition wider than itself: not merely an expression of an abstract identity, but rather something performed, acted out; narrative is as prescriptive as it is descriptive. In short, its historicity is to be affirmed, although its “content” is eternal. Yet it must be said that Hart never wishes to say that Christianity in practice somehow affirms its theoria; rather, those historical forms and images it has assumed must be taken as veritable accounts of portraying the infinite. The same narrative has also given birth to false interpretations and, as a historical narrative, the Christian narrative is not without its shortcomings. The narrative of Christ and the narrative of Christendom are not the same.

The “truthfulness” of the narrative is by no means evaluated by how it has succeeded in upholding its vision. One is reminded here of Paul Ricouer, who has spoken of “interpretative narratives,” in which there is no interpretative action from the side of the author or the reader, but rather the very structure of narrative itself interprets itself. In short, while narrative must be constantly re-narrated, it must not yield to the “pluralism” of hermeneutic suspicion, but must always recover itself as “kerygmatic suasion […] and so engage in the practice of a persuasion that is also a practice of the peace it proclaims.”

These divisions in viewing the nature of narrative are widely recognized and differently worded, and come close to being a truism; although the role that different thinkers taking interest in narrative give to the community of passing forth and living the narrative, almost none seem to dismiss it completely. Narrative activity endorses constant re-narrations, and while thus constituting relatively stable identities in the bodies acting the narrative, remains simultaneously open-ended—in a Christian sense, to simplify it slightly, it is the eschatological connotation of its narrative that refuses the lockdown or merely a “logo-centric” presence to be evoked—as famously criticized by Derrida in his Of Grammatology. The open-ended form of narratives that are so communally constructed is also the focus of those narrative theories that seek to construct identities via narratives. But in my reading, Hart stresses that the narrative cannot act from downwards, as a seemingly neutral phenomenon of cultural identity, but it proceeds from upwards, as a creative re-narration of a peaceful rhetorical act of God.

158 In addition, Hart points out that liberal sentiments underlie much of the postmodern (sometimes self-declared) radicalism; through an example of an analysis of John Caputo’s radical hermeneutics, Hart is keen to observe that, through ethical rigor, Caputo aims at certainty but results in pluralistic abstraction. Hart 2003, 324; 423–428.
159 Hart 2003, 342–344.
161 Hart 2003, 440.
162 Derrida 1997, 199.
This active version of narrative is seen by some as constitutive of modern consciousness, that is, how identities, selves, and communities are constructed and viewed by themselves, and how they are historically evolved. The work of Charles Taylor is of particular importance here: Taylor argues that modern emergent identity is constituted via certain repositories of “constitutive goods,” types of root-truths that are disseminated through culture and thought. Hart’s evangelical peace and beauty may be considered such goods, should one approach his thought asking for his premises from either a theoretical or practical perspective. What is of interest here is that Taylor sees this dissemination taking place in a narrative sense; this trend of thought is obviously indebted to the Wittgensteinian idiom of linguistic communities and Austin’s theory of linguistic acts. All in all, the question of identities, of hermeneutical communities, constitutes a venerable trend in thought, to which Hart also joins to a degree, in which narrative is seen as an indispensable theoretical and practical vehicle of interpretation and explaining phenomena, whether cultural, intellectual, or theological.

More specifically, for Hart, the truth of Christianity is a narrative, not simply “a narrated truth.” Narration is not simply a formalistic vessel in which truth is explicated or through which it is conveyed. The Christian narrative cannot seek theoretical support for its central concepts outside itself (while being aware that expressions and ideas are historically constructed). Therefore, Hart views his narrative as being more than a hermeneutic skeleton key; narrative is not an “option” but in a very real sense, it is what it proclaims. It does not “fit” in any other narrative as such (and vice versa), but as praeratio evangelica, it can act as leaven. While Hart views his version of narrative as supreme, he does not deny the possibility of deformatio evangelica, that other cultural elements can and will also affect and distort the kerygmatic narrative either formally or by content, as is seen by his joining in with Radical Orthodoxy’s genealogies.

Another model for distinguishing between narrative theologies, which could be of use here, is proposed by Michael Goldberg in his Theology and Narrative. To Goldberg, narrative theologies fall into two groups: those that see narrative as a form meaningful in interpreting reality or approaching truth, and those that regard choosing (in a very wide sense of the word) one narrative as an important and, to a degree, inevitable way of approaching reality and truth. Hart can be seen to fall into both categories, but only if the first of these organically follows the second.

First of all, for Hart, a theological narrative is simply the proper way of approaching the Gospel, for a narrative also entails the “seeing” (not merely passive “appearing”) aspect of its truth, not only the “knowing” mode of it. Narrativity is not merely an “option” of doing theology, it is essentially the mode of theology itself, narrated in the Gospel and constantly re-narrated by the Church and theologians, as well as Christians. In addition, Hart is in agreement with Lindbeck in that there is simply no

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163 In history, argues Taylor, these constitutive goods are represented and grounded first by theism, then by the “disengaged reason” of Enlightenment, and finally by Romantic expressionism. Taylor 1989, 495.

164 See Milbank 2006, 88.

165 Hart 2003, 428.

166 Goldberg 2001, 181.
neutral ground on which to evaluate the “truth” of the narrative. But to Hart, this situation does not establish a hermeneutic neutral space between horizons. There are also narratives that are wrong or false; although some narratives may be integrally coherent, they may still represent a wrong *theoria* of being, for example. There is always an element of counter-narrative in his narrative theology, presumably following Milbank’s ethos, and this counter-narration actually informs his argumentation explicitly and, at times, implicitly. Thus, Hart’s position gravitates more toward the second option offered by Goldberg: The Christian narrative is the supreme narrative. As Kemppainen has pointed out, it would require further study to clarify the relation between Hart’s usage of narrative and his realism: if a narrative is coherent, even beautiful, where can we evaluate its shortcomings?

It is, however, the formal aspects of narrative (not narrative as a formalistic method) that interest Hart in his discourse. Although his *opus major*, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, assumes a story-like form in itself, Hart seeks his own version of narrative theology. He wants to distinguish this version from the Yale-School narrativists such as Hans Frei and George Lindbeck by asserting that the latter’s view of narrative encapsulates theology either in a linguistically isolated community or in a twilight zone of linguistic relativism, or as Hart puts it, it appears “as an ‘antifoundationalist’ shelter against critique and against ontological and epistemological questions that theology must address,” as mentioned previously. For Hart, the Christian narrative is not simply a linguistic unit among other, because it seeks a complete view of the world in speaking in, about, and in answer to Divine Logos himself. The rhetoric of God is continued in the rhetoric of creation, not simply as a dialectical process, but in an infinite way corresponding to the very nature of the Godhead himself. Thus, for Hart, Christian discourse seeks a “totality,” but it is the manner (or ontology; for questions of style and ontology seem to coincide in Hart’s theological writing) of this seeking that makes Christian rhetoric stand apart from its violent counterparts that seek rhetorical dominance. But does this not precisely mean that Hart is seeking the same place that he accuses the postmodern hermeneutics of, a certain rhetorical ground outside rhetoric? This question lingers throughout his work, and while he acknowledges it, it at least shows a deficiency in a project that simultaneously seeks both supremacy and kenotic peace.

This supremacy must be understood not only as a preferable narrative, but in the sense that the Christian story is not simply a “saga” or the content of the Christian Gospel or its presupposed “message,” but is a whole, true story of being, and thus something that must address questions that are metaphysical and epistemological, as well as ethical and practical. In addition, the Christian story must not be understood as a watered-down version of Wittgensteinian communally constructed language games, but as a discourse that resonates even in other languages, non-Christian ones and anti-Christian ones, as the truth about Jesus of Nazareth. Here we can see Hart’s position

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167 See Lindbeck 2009, 35. Whereas Lindbeck’s famous cultural-linguistic approach to theology allows relatively incommensurability of truth (the religious statements are true when applied in the right setting and milieu), Hart’s conservative view treats truth as incommensurate to falsehood, meaning that there may be no dialectic (although dialogue is possible) between truth and falsehood, rather that the truth of the Christian narrative can be encapsuled, glimpsed, and yearned for implicitly in other, lacking, narratives.

168 Kemppainen 2016, 72–73.


emerging more clearly: his narrative differs from postliberal accounts in that Hart sees the other narratives as severely lacking the full account of being, although the Christian truth may address, inform, and influence these other accounts. It is not something that is merely open for discussion; it presents itself as superior. This is something that Hart admits at the outset of his major opus. For Hart, the justification of his narrative lies in the rhetorical effectiveness, or the story’s phenomenological openings, being comprehensive and true to the “great theme of being,” not in that which is outside the narrative (agreeing here in a sense with Derrida) nor in the correspondence between truth statements and the world or reality, which is something that Hart dismisses as the “totalizing tendency of modernity.”

So far it has become clear that the “text” of Hart’s rhetoric has an ontological nature. In a way, he takes a step further than some of the theologians that also depict Christian truth in the form of narrative and speech acts: his vision of the beauty of the infinite is itself a form of ontological rhetoric, not just a narrative that can engage theological topics rhetorically. This is one of Hart’s main theses, and it will be explored in depth later. But here it suffices to say that, for Hart, there is a thing called Christian metaphysics, because there simply has to be one; he simultaneously believes that there is a real linguistic possibility of offering a plausible narrative in a logical manner. This logical necessity that the truth of the narrative suggests, transcends purely confessional limits; rather, a certain narrative, a certain truthful vision of the world, ensues from all great (theistic) traditions. This affiliation with “classical” theology is something that constructs much of Hart’s depiction of the compelling nature of the truth of the Christian narrative. Obviously, the aforementioned stance also begs the question: what makes the Christian narrative particular amid other great theological traditions?

This question cannot be answered at the level of comparative religion for reasons explicated above. However, it must be remarked that on the level of competing narratives, Hart’s thesis stands against rival ones and is thoroughly constructed and reflected against these rival ontologies of violence. As noted in the case of Radical Orthodoxy, the competitiveness of the Christian narrative seems to require something to criticize in order to discover its true nature as re-narration. Hence it can be said that, at the formal level, Hart’s vision of theological narrative consists of a constant demand for re-narration (as the living life-force of theology, the vigor of the “evangelical essence of Christian dogma”) as well as counter-narration, because every rhetorical act of proclaiming the Gospel is also an apologetic gesture, gaining and claiming ground.

171 Hart 2003, 6. It is not easy to see whether such a militant view of rhetoric is actually a more suitable way of interpreting Christian theological and intellectual heritage, at least in part, peacefully. As Paul Ricouer has noted, rhetoric and truth (although Ricouer refers here to “philosophy” in general) are both the oldest allies and enemies. Of course, this tension is older than Plato’s condemnation of sophistry. See Ricouer 1977, 10–11.

172 For example, Robert Jenson wrote that theology has “forgotten” that Logos is not a concept of God, but his utterance, which means that while the narrative of the Gospel is a vehicle for identifying the Christian God as a particular God of Israel, God has commanded the world to be, not simply “thought” of it. Hence the very structure of reality must be met as a covenantal experience; see Jenson 1999, 8, 15–16. But he also sees that the world is a dramatic place where “irrationality” can happen (23–24 and offers thus a view that Hart cannot agree with, since to him, sin and evil cannot be included in the peacefulness of the Christian God or in his “plan”). See Hart’s appreciative, yet highly critical account of Jenson in Hart 2005.

173 Hart 2013, 14–15. Hart does not here exclude Eastern religions. His point is rather to simply explain that there is necessarily a logical element to theological truths (most effectively when it comes defining God), which is not simply a matter of relativistic and contextually defined logic but also a matter of coherence of thought in general.
This counter-narration, the need for adversaries in order to depict one tradition, is one of the main problems that such a view of Christian truth inevitably evokes, especially if one, as Hart does, is keen to emphasize the inherent peacefulness of one’s narrative. This problem will also be approached in the next chapter more fully.

So, Hart’s narrative is as openly anti-modern as it is postmodern. These two things are not the same: anti-modernism criticizes the reducing (totalizing) tendencies of thought (usually by recovering a previous position or narrating this more authentic vision in a relevant way), whereas postmodernism seeks both to surpass modern correspondences between phenomena and facts and truths and to open a more conscious, a more hermeneutic way of interpretation. In this sense, the view that Hart falls roughly into the post-conservative camp, as depicted by Vainio, seems to strengthen.

The anti-modern vein in Hart is very similar to that of Hans Urs von Balthasar. The anti-modern element is, according to von Balthasar, inherent in Christian theology as a whole: “The presence of the Word of God gives polarity to history.” A living God means a totality under which history cannot run without contradicting elements, nor can it, by the very fact of incarnated Lord, consolidate these elements to form a monolithic gaze upon it. Here, and basically everywhere in his great theological trilogy, von Balthasar argues that the modern age has been intolerant or insensitive to the particular nature of the Christian narrative (as Hart constantly seems to imply) and has instead treated it in a reductive manner. This theological critique of modernity also coincides with the Catholic Ressourcement movement and the so-called Neo-patristic synthesis espoused by Orthodox scholars, and of course with the motives of narrative theology itself. Although diverse, both movements sought to retain the classical and traditional core of Christianity in order for it to be meaningful and creative to contemporary Christians, too.

Now we place Hart’s endeavor in a wider context. If the narrative of Christian truth is to be both particular and universal, it must assume accountability and reasoning for both of these moments. Historically, it must both organically inhabit historical reality (borrowing useful contemporary idioms and denouncing obsolete or inappropriate ones) and stand in contrast to nihilistic or secularized versions of itself.

Anti-modernism in narrative theology can also be viewed in contrast to certain theologians who flirt with postmodern nihilism. One thinks here especially of the thought of Mark C. Taylor and Don Cupitt. Gerard Loughlin names them aptly as “textualist” theologians; in language I used before, Taylor and Cupitt can be seen as placing the postmodern impetus right at the beginning: both Taylor and Cupitt assume the Derridean heritage of deconstruction as a creative venturing point into theology, albeit in different forms. For Hart, this approach betrays the essence of the Christian proclamation: the metaphysics that begins from Golgotha must illuminate, not be captured by, a postmodern condition whatever it stands for. In Hart’s terms, the work of distinctively “postmodern” theologians seems to forget that, in order for theology to be narrational and rhetorical, it must be allowed to tell its story in its own

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175 Loughlin 1996, 16ff.
176 These theologians are also picked out by Milbank as representative of the type of postmodern theology that seeks to “anti-platonize” Christianity but ends up only positing that the ultimate difference is the place of God and is thus open to any re-naming whatsoever. Milbank 2006, 296.
terms, not harvested as a source of “ideas” or “moral orientations” (although some of the narrative theologians following the Niebuhrian model lean toward the latter) seeking their postmodern expressions. In addition, the more textually postmodernist a theologian is, the weaker the realism he seems to advocate, and the less unified the concept of Christianity is that seems to emerge from his thought, as Sue Patterson has noted.177

For Loughlin, narrative form of the sort that, for example, Cupitt proposes is merely a “religious fiction;” material for post-Christian endeavor to navigate in a realm that is openly fictional itself.178 The narrative structure is elevated to ontological status itself, reducing God and other theological topics to mere signs, linguistic units, and events, which finally refer to nothing other than signs, and thus are human constructs at the end of the day. Loughlin correctly sees that theologians with a different narrational approach, such as Milbank and Lindbeck (and Hart, as well), whom Loughlin terms “narrative theologians” proper, accept the view of language as proposed as a so-called linguistic turn, but instead of promoting the constructed nature of language, such as a grand narrative, suggest that a particular story must be told and made one’s own before we can discuss its purchases on truth or validity. Furthermore, as Patterson argues, this “narrative theological proper” account will point to realism more than a textual or post-liberal account would allow.

Such an over-arching aim immediately evokes a certain postmodern suspicion against totalities. However, it must be remembered that Hart seeks not a domination of a narrative mode of truth as such, but a particular narrative that, in the phrase of Paul Ricoeur, more “manifests” truth than acts as any sort of adequate correspondence between facts and reality, for example.179 Here we again meet the idea that the Christian narrative entails a certain theoria, as well as a rationale supporting and ensuing from this vision. The truth of narrative is not found in “matching narrative against reality” but in “matching reality-stories against the truth: Jesus Christ.”180 A narrative is a method that refers not to the truth, but to the world where this truth manifests itself, and finds its logic; it also presents a hermeneutical task to the reader to enter into this world, thus disseminating meanings that, in a sense, “overflow” its own narrative structure. Ricouer argues, considering the case of Biblical hermeneutics, that hermeneutics is only possible when the narrative is first allowed to unfold and open a world of its own (not dismissing the “real” world in the process). The theological implications here are considerable: the first task of hermeneutics is not to decide on behalf of the reader, but to allow the world of being to appear, which in the biblical language is called a new world, a new covenant, the kingdom of God, a new birth. “These are the realities unfolded before the text, which are certainly for us, but which begin from the text. […] Is not the force of this projected world a force of rupture and of opening?”181

177 Patterson 2002, 8.
180 Loughlin 1996, 23.
181 Ricoeur 1995, 44–45. For Hart, the hermeneutical vision is in the foreground; without it, theology succumbs to disastrous distinctions between biblical and philosophical theology, Hellenistic and Judaic elements of faith, or speculative and analytical theology. Hart 2003, 32.
In addition, Hart makes it quite clear that critique of Western onto-theology, as articulated by Heidegger and alia, is in fact another narrative that both effaces the trace of its narrational structure and lumps all metaphysical thought together, in a monolithic endeavor within Western thought. It seems, then, that for Hart, historical developments must be allowed a multiplicity, yet one must choose the right ingredients or representatives from it. This argument may be simplified, but it shows Hart’s opinion that it is impossible to do without a narrative in the first place: there is always a “fictional” element to every truth, not least because truth needs to be articulated and articulation, but also because every attempt to “purify” or “deconstruct” a narrative ensues ultimately from yet another narrative. Therefore, choosing a narrative is not an option, but choosing between narratives is what Hart is after. And if choosing is always an act of preferring, it rests on aesthetic, not primarily on fideistic or epistemological grounds (while these moments certainly help to narrow down the possible alternatives).

However, a critique proposed by Kevin Vanhoozer is more proportionate a task than merely an assertion of “incredulity towards metanarratives”: Vanhoozer sees that narrative theology is only one of the many literary-based approaches to theology, not necessarily the primary one. Vanhoozer himself sets forth his own modification of narrative theology, the dramatic approach, in which the story is not only told, but also acted out in “analogia dramatis.” Vanhoozer’s critique strikes home if one reduces narrative theology to a “text” (as Cupitt and Taylor seem to do) or stresses its “narrating” aspect at the expense of the moral and the living realm, “the acting.” But to me this distinction is somewhat arbitrarily pressed; for at least in the case of Hart, he certainly does not wish to offer his thesis and his emphasis of theoria as the solitary means of doing theological narration or narrative theology, but rather wants to show that an account of classical theological narration can, in fact, resound meaningfully both as narration and as “truth”. Again, Hart is more interested in the Barthian approach, in which God himself is the narrator (although in a very different sense than in Barth) and the matter is not so much what humans should do, identify, with or act upon, even if such a model can surely inform the Niebuhrian need to explain human phenomena via a theological narrative.

The difference of these remarks from Hart’s narrative is that he does not seek the necessity of narrative from a moral realm or “in order to have a meaning in the first place,” but the necessity for him is a luminous one: the narrative of Christ is something that is able to explain (both depicting and giving meaning) what the truth of being must be. In this, the nature of his narrative differs distinctly from that of Loughlin’s “textualist theologians.” Hence it can be said that Hart’s approach to narrative is an “essentialist” and “orthodox” one (as is Milbank’s): there must be a real difference between different differences (although this difference cannot be viewed from outside

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183 Hart 2000, 182; see Milbank 2006, 300.
185 Vanhoozer 2005, 38: “the ‘principle’ of theology should be nothing other than divine revelation itself – what God was doing in Christ.”
or by resorting to a third, supposedly neutral concept of difference, otherwise one is left with a non-foundationalist story that either hides its own narrational structure or seeks to “solve” the disparities of Western metaphysics by inserting a tertium quid that is itself unrepresentable as such (i.e. such terms as differance, otherness, sublime, which populate much of the postmodern idiom). To put it yet another way, for Hart, the Christian story must be precisely Christian; it cannot be modernized or paganized. This narrative appears in the world as peaceful rhetoric, and it should simultaneously act as “master-narrative of non-mastery,” as Milbank puts it. To this latter effect, Hart argues that separation between theological thought and theological narrative is always “a calamity,” for this can result in diversity that actually impoverishes both the doctrinal content and the narrational event of theology.

In summary, narrative is, for Hart, the only proper means for Christian theology to be itself. The theologian’s task is to explicate the vision of theology, which is not to be separated from the Trinitarian “model of speech” itself. In addition, as constant re-narrations, as well as counter-narrations, theology must uphold its theoria against and amidst its very own historical applications. In the end, the concept of narrative may be too restrictive here, as Hart himself notes:

“It would be best simply to say that I assume that theology, even in its most properly evangelical moments, is most properly a practice of inner witness and anamnesis, a submission of language to the form of Christ revealed in the Scripture and in the unfolding tradition, but also one that seeks to find therein the true home of every “natural light”. [This means] dogmatic discourse that is also an opening out to what is beyond obeys a kind of trinitarian logic: just as the eternal “discourse” of God, the circumincession of the Person in the infinite articulation of the divine utterance (Logos), opens “outward” to creation according to its own eternal motion, expressed economically, so this dogmatic diastole and systole around the story of Christ has a power to include what is other within itself, through mediation of the Holy Spirit who makes all words open to the Word that embraces every created difference.”

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186 It can be said that if truth is primarily a manifesting, a heavily laden pre-laden experiential event, rather than a correspondence, then narrative is simply a way to find other narratives inadequate, not necessarily untrue completely or false in good faith. This is, in my opinion, something Hart stresses, notwithstanding his often polemical tone: the truth of Christianity is not captured wholly by Christian theology, but it “leaks” over its conceptual limits, being a fertile principle, yet simultaneously retaining its own nature as the only adequate (or complete enough) narrative of truth. Thus, its fullness consists precisely of this overflowing character: it suggests, basically, that all-illuminating Christian truth can glimmer in places where it should not or from where it is consciously excommunicated. This supplementing vision is a grand one, whether one believes it or not; its own genealogy runs from ancient Alexandrian logos spermatikos theology, through von Balthasar’s idea of “Christ-form” in culture and the Catholic “Denk-form,” all the way to the Derridean supplementary event of cultural writing. See Schindler 2013, Derrida 1978, 281.


188 Milbank 1989, 189ff.

189 Hart 2003, 156. Hart sees that Karl Rahner’s maxim that the economic Trinity is the immanent trinity, and vice versa, as essential to any coherent Christian thought. 2005. For this maxim reflects the position in which Trinitarian dogma informs and is informed by the actual narration and “seeing” the salvation in incarnated and resurrected Jesus Christ. As an example, he takes the Cappadocian fathers and mentions how the Trinitarian formulations were absolutely necessary in order to be able to express and interpret the salvation correctly. Hart presses this link, yet he does not elucidate it further. It should be read in the light of his general notions of narration and of his own theology.

190 Hart 2003, 32.
In Figure 1, I have gathered together the narrative elements surveyed in this chapter.

The boldest arrow represents the particular narrative of a particular person, God-man Jesus Christ, developing and living in history. The narrative is outworked as Tradition, as a respiratory act of the Holy Spirit (remembering the Trinitarian *taxis* in the Christ-event, as the supreme rhetorical act of the Father) and is “gathered” or “thought” communally, in the Father and beyond. From this narrative ensue theological notions (the relation of God and the world, ‘metaphysics’ and ‘creed’—elucidations of the biblical narrative) resulting in the theologically conditioned philosophical concept of particular beings. Their particular forms are also hammered into being against rival narratives. Yet this historical process echoes and replicates the Trinitarian infinite life, in which the “text” of the world is “spoken” and “called” into being by the Father through the Logos with the Holy Spirit. The narrative stretches out, only to be also found in unusual forms and places as “already there.”
The descending arrow is not to be understood in a chronological sense, but more in a diachronic sense, meaning in a traditional sense, in which Christ borrows the form of Trinitarian discourse, and that narrative can not only entail and lighten mundane metaphysics but can also give rational and “natural” sense to faith and its vision. The narrative cannot be “unfolded” or traced back to its ingredients (though it seemingly can be evaluated by is representatives), for the logic of tradition corresponds formally to immanent Trinitarian capability and eternal circumlocution (in the literal sense of the word) of the “other within itself”. The narrative of Hart is about this world, not of it. It has a certain definitive and speculative tendency, just because its main power source is eternal and historical at the same time. This unitary impetus is reflected in creedal and philosophical developments in history (on the right side, below the arrow). These developments are to be checked with the “eternal” (the left side); they are to re-narrated in order to reflect the “grand theme of being” originating from the Triune life. And Hart is keen to show that speculative elements are not in any way indifferent or secondary to the elemental core of the Gospel narrative; more to the point, they are inevitable, because otherwise the narrative would be a dead one, purely a myth, incapable of nourishing or criticizing other discourses. In short, it is always important to remind oneself that rhetoric is not simply a viable hermeneutical way of understanding Christianity; it is the very form of it.

2.2.4 The nature of Christian discourse: analogia entis

We have seen, so far, how narrative is seemingly the only possibility to revoke and evoke an authentic Christian vision of being. What does this vision consist of?

In his reading of the Christian narrative, Hart accepts much of the main genealogies presented by Radical Orthodoxy. John Milbank has suggested that precisely dialectical theology is in affiliation with Reformation theology with its troubled and distorted ontological view, and a rhetorical model offers a more authentic reading of the Christian mode of being by allowing the participatory model of being.191 In vindication of this tradition, Milbank also lists a few central points through which Christian discourse may recover itself from both its own distortions and postmodern nihilism. Lauri Kemppainen has, in a recent study, explored these more fully192, but I will pick out only the themes of poignant relevance to Hart’s thought. According to Milbank,
much of the postmodern condition ensues from the theological errors culminating in the theology of the Franciscan Duns Scotus (1266–1308).\textsuperscript{193} Such errors amount to:

1) Loss of analogical understanding of being  
2) Loss of the view of participatory ontology  
3) Loss of the inherent connection between faith and reason, between will and intellect, and between the identity of a being and its transcendental source\textsuperscript{194}

These general remarks are not merely, and perhaps not at all, historical by nature. Rather, they are pathways in the ideas of history, which should be, according to Milbank, interpreted in the light of authentic tradition and the need for its radical recovery. Thus, such broad suggestions are not to be taken merely as exercises in historical theology, but as openly biased narrational structures, as was noted already in the previous chapters. As a comprehensive view of Christian truth, it has been pointed out, it perhaps is too selective and biased a reading of primary sources.\textsuperscript{195} What these points clarify is the main thesis put out by Milbank: the Christian narrative offers an ontology of peace, as an authentic alternative to nihilistic postmodern theories.

The first point, the analogical understanding of being, is something that Hart greatly emphasizes. It is possible to say that a certain notion of \textit{analogia entis} has always been inherent in theology.\textsuperscript{196} In its simplest form, analogy means a non-direct commensurability between two things, identifying them with different but relational meanings. In theological discourse, analogy is usually meant in the sense that St. Thomas Aquinas has given it.\textsuperscript{197} For example, a creature may have wisdom, but God’s wisdom is united in his essence. Thus, wisdom is an analogical concept, whose perfection is to be found in God and is the cause of a particular “happening” of wisdom. Analogy differs from univocal speech, in which wisdom would be exactly the same concept whether it is used to describe God or creatures. Equivocity, on the other hand, would claim that speaking about creaturely wisdom is something completely different from talking about divine wisdom. \textit{Analogia entis} suggests that being is an analogical concept. In this form, \textit{analogia entis} is the basic question underlying the possibility of doing natural theology, that is, the possibility of gaining knowledge of God via natural human capacities and experiences.

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\textsuperscript{193} Milbank 1999, 23; Betz 2015, 390. For the link between the participatory model and analogy, see Ricoeur 1977, 274.

\textsuperscript{194} Kemppainen bases this list, which I have modified, on a list made by Milbank (2009, 379). However, this list could be compiled from numerous works by Milbank. See, for example, Milbank 2001. For a critique of these basic points, see Hyman 2001, 66–94; Michalson 2004.

\textsuperscript{195} For example, McGrath 2017, 133. For a wider literature review of the historical (in)accuracies of Radical Orthodoxy, see Terezakis 2011, n.1.

\textsuperscript{196} That is, God must be different from the world, yet he cannot be a totally unknowable Other. There must be something “in the world” that can be said, at least, to be reminiscent of or refer to God, while such notions are simultaneously acknowledged to be inadequate or partial. Like modern debate, \textit{analogia entis} is situated within the demise of of modernity and as an answer to Kant’s dualism between mind and the world, argues Davis 2009.

\textsuperscript{197} ST Ia.13.5.
Milbank argues that the division between revelatory and natural knowledge of God is itself a “secular” reading of previous theological tradition.\(^{198}\) This is what Hart affirms, as well: “What we call ‘nature’ is merely one mode of the disclosure of the ‘supernatural’ and natural reason merely one mode of revelation and philosophy merely one [...] mode of reason’s ascent into the light of God.”\(^{199}\) An authentic theological vision, therefore, seems to entail an integralist element, and in such a view analogy serves as a theoretical vehicle of differentiating between areas that are divided and separated in secular and in secularized theological readings.

At least, the classical notion of the ineffability of God must yield to some preliminary analogical understanding of relations between human words or ideas and God. However, it can be said that as doctrine, or as a defined theologoumenon, *analogia entis* is a modern concept, a tendency formulated into a quasi-doctrinal status in need of its renunciation or its defense. More specifically, the issue of *analogia entis* was raised to a new conceptual and ecumenical level of importance by a discussion conducted between the Catholic theologian Erich Przywara and the Reformed theologian Karl Barth from 1932 onwards. In addition, as John Betz argues, in order to argue for the aesthetic importance of *analogia entis*, as Hart does, it is crucial to know the rudiments of the discussion mentioned above and to “acknowledge that no theological doctrine of the twentieth-century has been more feverishly contested—and less understood—than this one.”\(^{200}\)

Both theologians, Barth and Przywara, sought to express the nature of Christian thought in contrast to modern sensibility, which both saw as reductionist or as alien to proper Christian revelation and tradition. Thomas Joseph White summarizes:

> At stake in this dispute is the basic question of whether or in what way a ressourcement of classical metaphysics is required within modern theology, as a dimension of one’s response to secular modernity.\(^{201}\)

The discussion between Przywara and Barth concerning *analogia entis* is one that sets the scene for later developments, too, such as Radical Orthodoxy. As White notes, this scene is relevant to the postmodern concerns for legitimacy. If the postmodern condition is understood in the way that Lyotard does (in Chapter 2.1.), and if narrative is the preferred formal “solution” to the loss of grand narratives (in Chapter 2.2.1 and 2.2.2), one must ask in what sense, for example, Christology or Trinitarian thought can be seen as a veritable answer to secular notions of being and truth.

For the purposes of this study, it is not possible to lay out the Przywara–Barth debate here in all its fullness, especially as the discussion is still lively amongst

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\(^{198}\) Milbank 1999, 24; 2006, 306–309. Hart is in general agreement with Milbank as well, for he sees that the division between the biblical and the philosophical is, in an ultimate sense, meaningless within the encompassing *theoria* of theology. Hart 2003. Adrian Pabst describes this alternative history of modernity as a deterioration from a fuller account of being in three moments: 1) in Avicenna, the essence would be placed as primary over existence, 2) in Dun Scotus, the transition from *analogia entis* to univocity of being, 3) the work of Jesuit Francisco Suárez, which established metaphysics as a science over theology and in effect divided “pure nature” from “supernatural”. Pabst 2012, 386. His reading of Suarez’s importance corresponds to those offered by *nouvelle theologie*’s main representative, Henri de Lubac. See Milbank 2015.

\(^{199}\) Hart 2013.\(^{3}\).

\(^{200}\) Betz 2006, 3. See his notes for further literature on the subject.

\(^{201}\) White 2011, 10.
scholars. However, as White calls David Bentley Hart “perhaps the most well-known contemporary interpreter and defender of Erich Przywara,” the background of the debate is directly relevant to understanding Hart’s theological intentions.

In 1932, Karl Barth wrote famously in his Church Dogmatics, in order to establish an authentic Christian basis of knowledge of God and to counter both Catholic views and mainline liberal Protestant views of the matter, that analogia entis is “the invention of Antichrist.” For Barth in this period, all suggestions that there is a human capacity to gain any knowledge of God, beside the Revelation of God in Christ, seemed suspicious. Rather, Barth saw that for authentic Christian discourse, the only possible way to know God is the way of the Crucified and Resurrected Lord. The knowledge of God is “identical” to his revelation of Himself; “God is not only Himself. He is also his self-revelation.” It was not creation but revelation that made any analogous sense, and for that, analogia entis was a mere human philosophical vehicle. Therefore, it was from the very nature of God, and from the state of human lost capacity resulting from the Fall, that Bart argues that the only proper analogatum between man and God was analogia fidei, the analogy of faith, which cannot operate outside the revelation and has no correlative outside it.

Przywara’s position also tried to navigate a new way for theology in the aftermath of the First Vatican Council (1869–1870), which ensued from a conscious effort by the Catholic Church to encounter it in its theological language and premises of secular modernity. To Przywara, analogia entis was not only one metaphysical view on being among many, but it was, at a very fundamental level, the form of Catholic thought in general. His view of analogia entis both concerns the notion of God as a transcendent Being, yet as very immanent to his creation, and enframes the form of human experience of God. Przywara saw the dialectical, Protestant demise of theological

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202 For an introduction and a survey of recent developments (usually amicable toward analogia entis) on this debate, as well a selected bibliography, see White 2011 (ed.). Other useful English resources are articles by John Betz (2005;2006) and an issue of Princeton Theological Review addressing the subject (2009).

203 White 2011, 30.

204 Betz 2011, 37.

205 In an English translation of Kirchliche Dogmatik by Bromiley, Barth 1975, xii. I will use the English translation in what follows. Barth revising his initial anathematic statement about analogia entis is still a matter of debate. Betz (2011, 71) shows that Barth actually may have not read Przywara’s mature work Analogia entis (1932) and thus may have based his evaluation on earlier material produced by Przywara. Betz also makes note (2011, 57, n. 74) of an article by Kenneth Oakes, in which Oakes argues that later, Barth somewhat moderates his radical vision of God’s omnipotence regarding creatures and actually, albeit indirectly, makes room for a more analogical understanding of theological reality. Hans Urs von Balthasar, the later main Catholic interpreter of the debate, has also implied that Barth includes implicit formal suggestions about nature that may be read in a Przywarian sense (see the same note by Betz above and Johnson 2010, 193–201). On the other hand, Bruce McCormack (2011, 88–144) has identified Barth’s version of analogia entis as precisely his own, as an outspoken repudiation of Catholic thought on the matter on a larger scale. Keith L. Johnson, who criticizes the von Balthasarian interpretation of Barth and the legacy of this critical approach in more than one senses, argues that in mature Barth, the analogia entis of Przywara is not misinterpreted by Barth, but rather a coherent strain of his thought in which he ultimately says no to Catholic doctrinal formulations. McCormack argues with this latter statement.

206 White 2011, 9; Barth 1975, I/I, 297; Johnson 2010, 115–177, 155.

207 Barth 1975, I/I, 298. For the development of his thought, see Palakeel 1995, 12ff, 44–51.

208 Palakeel 1995, 22.

mystery when it designated God as purely Other and thus denied any real possibility to account for God analogically in his creation.210 Although Barth recognized the need for analogy in the treatment of creature-divine relations, it could not operate on the level of being nor through inherent creaturely capacities. That kind of religion “is essentially eschatology, and therefore essentially the opposite of the Church.”211 The argument refers to the concept of the utterly hopeless situation of the creature in Barth; by disapproving of any potentia oboedientalis, the concept that a creature stands in a radical position of ex nihilo and supreme God, such theology actually collapses the very thing it seeks to preserve.212

David Bentley Hart clearly uses this debate, and its trajectories, in grounding his own theological view. As I will show, he does so in the manner it is used by Radical Orthodoxy, as well. Hart himself says he is using the term analogia entis “as shorthand for tradition of Christian metaphysics that […] succeeded in uniting a metaphysics of participation to the biblical doctrine of creation, within the framework of Trinitarian dogma, and in so doing made it possible for the first time in Western thought to contemplate both the utter difference of being from beings and the nature of the true transcendence.”213 In this concise formulation, Hart seems to unite the main elements of the list by Milbank under analogia entis. If analogy is a proper way of thinking of reality as proposed by theology (not only revelation214), then it must also account for questions such as what it is for a being to be, and push onwards to offer an account of the true relation between immanence and transcendence.

Hart himself joins the interpretative tradition, in which Barth simply misunderstood Przywara and mistook the latter’s analogia entis for a concept of natural theology.215 This is an assumption that lingers on the surface of the Barth–Przywara debate, and reading Przywara superficially it may seem to the point. As John R. Betz has shown, there is in Przywara the acknowledgment that “some form of theologia naturalis is immanent to the concept of metaphysics as such.”216 However, for Hart and his reading of Przywara, it is always important to remember that theology is ultimately about mystery and thus stands at the limit of philosophy, whether its teleological character is grasped philosophically or not. Furthermore, Hart affirms the notion

214 It may be noted that Bruce McCormack has shown that Barth did not extend his dialectical method to revelation itself, for it remained the basic form of human cognition. For McCormack’s account of Barth’s development in his dialectical thought, see McCormack 1997.
215 Hart 2003, 241. This is an argument that is true if its premise is true: if Barth did confuse analogia entis for the general notion of natural theology, then he is quite plainly wrong. For Przywara, analogia entis was not same thing as natural theology. See Betz 2011, Hart 2003, 242 and 2011.
216 Betz 2011, 64, 71. This is something that Eberhard Jüngel also affirms that Barth acknowledged, yet interpreted it so that it is revelation that must dictate the language of theology, otherwise God “cannot enter language as God,” but merely as nominatives. Yet Jüngel notes that, in theological language, analogy is indispensable, but Barth stresses the fact that revelation must be only “interpreted,” not “illustrated” by language. See Jüngel 2001, esp. 20–27.
made by Przywara: if Barth later made any concessions toward *analogia entis*217, they serve only to illustrate the falsity of his basic views in terms that follow from the false narrative and thus, a proper ontological grammar.218 In addition, Hart elaborates that if there is no possibility of any analogical encounter, there can simply be no revelation, either. For without analogy, God can reveal himself only negatively, in absence or as a grand flight from the world.219 This is not merely a statement of human capacity to “know,” but a basic Christian conviction that is dependent upon the doctrine of the Trinity. As Hans Urs von Balthasar has noted, the concept of revelation demands a God who could be identity and difference simultaneously, and thus evade the metaphysical dualism that Hart sees as the alternative history without a Christian interruption. For von Balthasar, *analogia entis* is the definitive doctrine concerning Christian seeing: for the God incarnated in Christ is precisely the incomprehensibility of God manifested; and in the realm of aesthetics, this means that we actually see that “God is forever greater.”220 Hart wants specifically to stress that the analogy in *analogia entis* falls precisely not on shared concepts between the human and the divine, but on their difference. In a sense, seeing God is to see him as nothing, as we see other things. Traditionally, this seeing has been named “mystery,” and it is what de Lubac sees as “the inviolable rule,” which is not only the teaching of mystics, but the visible Church “who addresses herself to all.”221

This highlights the fact that, for Hart as for Przywara and his other successors, analogical understanding is not merely a theologoumenon, but

> [...] in fact a principle uniquely Christian, one that follows from the entire Christian story of creation, incarnation, and salvation; as such, it describes a vision of being that is not merely an option for Christian thought but an ineluctable destiny.222

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217 Hart is referring to the concept of *analogia relationis*, which is the term Barth uses to distinguish his own analogical understanding (which Hart calls the “dramatic one” 2003, 241) from the Catholic *analogia entis*. Whereas *analogia entis* supposes that there is an inherent and created relation to God in creatures (as *imago Dei*), Barth’s *analogia relationis* refers to a concrete capacity of the “elected” to enter into dynamic relations modeled after Trinitarian relations.


220 GOL I, 186. It is hard to distinguish, in some cases, where *analogia entis* differs distinctively from the classical apophaticism of Christian language; it seems sometimes that the “descriptive” nature of *analogia entis* is employed in statements, thus modifying them into “prescriptive” ones. At a hermeneutical level, they can be said to be transformed into “perspective” ones. In this, von Balthasar can be seen as a more traditional representative, whereas Hart and Radical Orthodoxy’s affiliates can be seen more rhetorically prone to more polemical approaches, given the nature of their “out-narrating” purposes. See also GOL II, 294. Yet it is highly important to note that von Balthasar elsewhere (2004, 81–84; 94–95) regards Przywara’s analogical construct as insufficient and overly philosophical, to give due credit to Christology and the concreteness of salvation. In fact, apophatic theology for von Balthasar only gains its organic limits when connected to the “biblical realm.”

221 De Lubac 1984, 65. De Lubac’s stress on the ecclesiological mediation of divine life flickers everywhere in this work, see esp. 110–111, and is the “only concrete way” to define the relation between natural and supernatural. See 122. But this relation is consummated and fulfilled in the relation between nature and grace (157).

222 Hart 2011, 402.
Although Barth may have misinterpreted *analogia entis* as merely a philosophical tool for natural theology, it cannot be denied that the concept of *analogia entis*, in its 20th Century discussion, is closely connected to the possibility of doing natural theology. The basic difference between natural theology and Przywarian *analogia entis* can be characterized as follows: natural theology affirms that there are similarities, or at least “ways” or capacities for similarities, between God and creation. Hart dismisses such notions as “naïve” and “essentialist” analogical thought:

*the analogy of being does not analogize God and creatures under the more general category of being, but is the analogization of being in the difference between God and creatures; it is as subversive of the notion of a general and univocal category of being as of the equally ‘totalizing’ notion of ontological equivocity.*

As explained above, the univocal meaning of being assumes, in its simplest form, that there is a general concept of being that includes both creatures and God. Equivocal being is the opposite: the notion that there is no natural or conceptual affinity whatsoever between the two. As a philosophical term, James Anderson writes that analogy means “ontological equivocity along with conceptual univocity.” Natural theology can thus be seen as an attempt at “ontological bridge-building,” which indeed Przywara’s account of *analogia entis* was falsely (in Hart’s and Betz’s view) accused of. In his usual manner, Hart turns the tables on Barth by saying that if *analogia entis* constituted the main reason for being a Protestant, this in the end is the “most compelling reason for not becoming a Protestant.”

The important qualification by which *analogia entis* differs from “naïve” natural theology is that it acknowledges that, first of all, for natural theology without revelation, there is always a danger of lapsing into idolatry or solipsism. Proper *analogia entis* “holds open” the gap between the Creator and creation: Przywara used one of his connective German terms to depict God as “in-and-above” (*in-über*) the world. That is, God appears in the world, but can only be seen appropriately in the world if also seen as above it. Analogy considers the difference between God and creation. This is to simplify Przywara’s account greatly, but the main accent of *analogia entis* falls on divine transcendence, not immanence. Following the Lateran council (1215) formulation, *Quia inter creatorem et creaturam non potest [tanta] similitudo notari, quin inter eos maior sit dissimilitudo notanda* (“For between the Creator and the creature there can be noted no similarity so great that a greater dissimilarity cannot

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224 For example, Thomas Aquinas thought that perfections can be said of God only analogically, not in a univocal or equivocal sense. ST Ia.13. See also Betz 2011, 52. n. 56, where he points out that Aquinas also made a distinction between formal and material knowledge of God, meaning that God can be known without necessarily “recognizing” him as God.


227 See Oakes 2011, 164.

228 The formulation was intended against the teachings of Joachim of Fiore (1135–1202). Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 806.
be seen between them”), Przywara always stressed the term “greater.” Knowledge of God is always analogical to begin with; Przywara actually says that “Being” (Sein), which all philosophical systems tend to regard as the supreme question and one adhering to all other accounts of thought, is itself analogical, and the thought of it is analogical, and therefore analogical dynamics cannot be separated from thought in general, and neither can analogy properly be found “afterwards” as the question of Being is settled. The emphasis on the “greater dissimilarity” is one followed by von Balthasar and eventually also by Hart. Michael Hanby correctly notes that this reading of analogy by David Bentley Hart is a necessary interpretative model in order to understand his thesis of Christian interruption, and Hanby is also correct when he states that this, in turn, means a certain reading of doctrine ex nihilo as revealing something of paramount importance about the being of God.

So, it becomes important that, as analogy is the proper way of thinking of the difference between God and creatures, it is also the proper way of experiencing God. Thus, analogical understanding is also crucial in aesthetic terms. This is something that Milbank also notes (though while considering finite beings):

[In the case of analogy amongst finite beings, every temporal ontological arrangement would have to grasped in aesthetic terms: x and y may be different, yet they belong together in their difference in a specific ‘exemplary’ ordering, and this ‘belonging

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229 Przywara 2014, 233–234; Betz 2011, 53. It is to be noted that Przywara was earlier writing against the 19th Century tendency to reflect God from an immanent viewpoint. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), whose Der Christliche Lehre (2nd edition in 1830–1) and especially Über die Religion: Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern (1st ed. 1799) were highly influential in interpreting the Enlightenment and Romantic theological mindset, showed, in the latter work, that in order to understand Christianity, one must start from the actual religion (1996, 11), not from any abstract principles. Hence, he is a forerunner of narrative theology in the sense that he believed rhetoric was the only way in which religion is communicated (1996, 22). But Schleiermacher’s thoughts ended up equating religious truth with individual feeling and intuition and imagination (1996, 53), and as such, religion was just the “Universe” expressing itself in the particular (1996, 22; 25–36). Yet Schleiermacher thinks that this feeling was a feeling of “Infinity”; though Schleiermacher cannot be ontologically set in terms of Hart, the grammar of experience of God (Religion) is notably similar. For the implications of Schleiermacher for theological aesthetics, see Shields 1979. Hans Frei has argued that Schleiermacher belongs to the group of theologians who see hermeneutics and theology as close allies, and this tendency to “harmonize” between biblical narratives and human modes of logic and intuition dominated (at least Biblical interpretation) Western theology up until the 1950s. Frei 1974, 128. Nearly Schleiermacher’s contemporary, Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872) attacked Christianity in his materialistic appropriation of the matter, Das Wesen des Christentums (1841). Feuerbach argues that Christianity is an anthropomorphic projection of human attributes onto the divine (1989, 21). Interestingly, Feuerbach takes as an example the Lateran council’s formation of ana logia entis and disregards it as depreciating inherent human value (1989, 25 and n.1). This misinterpretation is notable, for it displays the most common evaluation against ana logia entis, namely the implicit univocal understanding of difference between God and creature. In addition, this form of thought seems to place analogy of attributes in the foreground at the cost of the second type of analogy, ana logia proportionalis, in which Przywara’s ana logia breathes (without dispensing the ana logia attributionis completely). See Betz 2016, 17. This type of thought has not understood analogy as lying between univocity and equivocality (Aquinas, STI, q. 13, a. 5.; quoted in Betz 2011, 69.n.114; see also Hart 2013, 303 and Przywara 2014, §8 (234). For elaboration on this theme in Hart, see Chapter 4.

230 Przywara 2014, 314. This notion of analogy as “Ur-Struktur” has connotations that Hart seems to place against the theory of Jacques Derrida, who analyzed Western thought on Being as one of precisely structural play between Dionysios and Apollo. To early Derrida, the choice must be made between them, the choice “between dance and writing [i.e. the structural notion of being]”. See Hart 2013, 56; Derrida 1978, 29.

231 For example, GOL II, 139.

232 Hanby 2011, 342; Hart 20155.
together’ means a certain sort of convergence, a certain commonality. (Such a belonging

together is only a ‘kind of’ likeness; in the notion of analogy, the meaning of alike is
itself analogically stretched almost to a breaking point, just like the meaning of ‘part’
in Platonic ‘participation’.)

In a dictionary entry for the term analogy, Hart writes that

*in the context of religious language, analogy is that liminal interval mediating the
transition from cataphatic to apophatic language: a moment of conceptual conversion,
in which a sign’s meaning is at once preserved and superseded, as thought and language
strive towards a fullness greater than either.*

And here lies the “Christian interruption”: to be able to, “perhaps for the first time
in Western history,” really think of the difference between Being and beings in the
Nicene transformation of Hellenic concepts, precisely as “seeing.” This “seeing with
the human eyes of Christ,” although perfectly impossible and reachable coherently
only by saints, constitutes the phenomenological side of *analogia entis* for Hart. This
“seeing” must be joined with Hart’s concept of beauty, and it will be explored in
Chapter 4.

So, experiencing God in an analogous manner seems to mean experiencing his
infinite difference, as was noted already in the concept of narrative. The difference
in Hart’s narrative is not merely a difference among many in postmodern thought; it
is benign and, through the salvific work of Christ, a difference made visible. In fact,
the notion of experiencing this difference will emerge very often in Hart’s works. The
*analogia entis* is not simply a metaphysical setting, but also an epistemological model:
the way anything is rendered knowledgeable in the first place (theoretically). It also
serves as an alternative difference to postmodern differentials and paves the way
into postmodern territory, enabling Hart to engage with other significant discourses.

Understood in this way, the “destiny” of theological analogy is not a mere rhetorical
vehicle of metaphysical preference, but Hart is also greatly indebted to Przywara in
that he sees analogicality as the only way in which being can appear as a gift. To
previously professed metaphysical impasses of totality and the inescapable position
between Parmenides and Heraclitus (pure univocal identity and pure equivocal
difference), the analogy of being offers a third alternative, which can safeguard a
true transcendence of being. Therefore, after these preliminary remarks, it is safe
to assert that in the concept of analogy, Hart ties together the facts that actually
make up his “Christian interruption.” It is only by this radicalness that Christian
discourse can offer “a peaceful” alternative, for in the analogical realm, there are
no opposites, no dialectical negativity; or as Hart puts it, it is staying faithful to the
whole tradition resting upon Genesis 1:1 and Acts 17: 28, “For in him we live and
move and have our being.” Therefore, in creating, God expresses himself, for he is not
determined in any way by creation.

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233 Milbank 2006, 307; see Davis 2009, 25.


235 Hart 2013b.


237 Hart 2015a, 5.
uses to make a theologically conjecturing entrance to the realm of post-Christian and postmodern metaphysics in the discussion of the gift. This finally leads to the very basis of Hart’s thought: if being and experience are analogical, and creation appears as gift and rhetoric, it is ultimately the beauty of the phenomenological appearance of such notions that make up the “truthfulness” of the Christian story. Of course, this analysis is also theoretical in the classical sense that Hart gives to it, and not a specific version of phenomenology itself.

All in all, this is more a matter of proclamation than argumentation. At this point, it is safe to say, considering the nature of narrative and the emphasis on analogy, that within Radical Orthodoxy, Hart’s argument is mostly concerned with being, that is, the philosophical issue, against which his theological vision is portrayed.

2.2.5 Analogia entis and Orthodox theology

As a short excursus, it may be worthwhile trying briefly to situate David Bentley within contemporary Orthodox theology. As his theology is highly philosophically motivated and openly reads Catholic sources, too, Hart may seem something of an ‘odd man out.’ However, he may seem so in theological terms as well, as for many Orthodox theologians, the notion of a natural and supernatural basis of theology has been regarded as non-existent and, sometimes in a polemical disguise, a discussion pertaining specifically to Western developments of theology in an Augustinian-Thomistic-Protestant fashion. The Barth-Przywara debate may be geographically and intellectually Western, but in my view, it concerns the very core of Christian thought and tradition: the unknowability of God’s essence, the apophatic side of theology and its relation to the kataphatic, positive realm of revelation, and God’s works and the capacity of the human mind and soul to recognize and participate in them. Hart affirms this himself; it is more a matter of linguistic convenience whether one speaks of a Palamite difference between essence and energies of God, or a Thomistic distinction between divine essence and existence. As such, Hart’s discussion of them, which will be surveyed in Chapter 4, is more “pan-Christian” than specifically denominational. Again, it is the poetic coherence that seems to conquer categories of stated truths (or rather, the latter are so because of the splendor of their truthful beauty). Hart himself describes his intention as philokalic, while his sources are mainly (apart from patristic authors) Western.

238 For example, modern Orthodox thinkers, such as Dumitru Staniloae (2000), usually regard the distinction of natural theology as not necessary and perhaps a harmful addition to what Orthodox tradition regards as the basic form of God in and above the world: His essence and his energies. There have been more polemic voices, such as John Romanides, who regards analogia entis as a heresy, although from a very different (and simplified) view from Barth. See a short article on the contemporary Orthodox reception of analogia entis by Davydov 2017, in which he sees Hart as “diametrically opposed” to the other Orthodox theologians he covers (while himself treating Hart positively). That may be so, but I think a clearer picture of the matter could perhaps be reached if one, in the following Hart, chooses to leave the polemic between East and West to vanish and regards the dimensions of analogia entis outside this rhetorical vehicle. I feel that a closer look into analogia entis could also provide fruitful approaches to the Orthodox discussion of apophaticism and philosophical theology, and ultimately to growing mutual awareness in ecumenical discussions.

239 A corollary attempt to consider (in aesthetic terms) the supposed difference between Eastern and Western theologies, see Manoussakis 2010.

The rising interest in natural theology is partly due to the Catholic ressourcement movement, whose chief representatives, Henri de Lubac, Yves Congar, and Jean Danielou, have greatly contributed to the discussions widened and transformed by representatives of Radical Orthodoxy. Michael Murphy summarizes the ressourcement movement as aiming to “rein in errant epistemologies by reengaging thoughtfully with historic sources.”

Hans Urs von Balthasar also belonged to the circle of theologians who sought to revitalize and recover an authentic Christian equivalent and replacement for modern epistemologies in order to bring ancient sources to relevance. Adrian Pabst has traced the historical tradition of analogical difference in the “plural tradition,” which in modernity also includes Russian sophiology. Pabst also makes note of the nouvelle theologie movement in the contemporary West as a recent influence on theological attempts at “revivified theological metaphysics”.

Christos Yannaras is one of the newer Greek theologians who has engaged Western thought in his works. For Yannaras, analogy is an experimental fact, for to think of such things as infinity and God, one cannot resort to empirical facts or linguistic correspondence to the world. Certain mental concepts require analogy and metaphysics, otherwise they are not possible at all. But regarding analogia entis, Yannaras makes no serious case. Rather, conforming with many Orthodox thinkers, he sees the doctrine as some particular Westernized type of theology, crystallized in St. Thomas Aquinas and developed by Cajetan. This tendency shows in Yannaras’ remark that outside the divine essence, there can be no similarity to it and hence analogia entis is impossible. However, it is precisely in this crude sense that Przywara and Hart also wished to deem analogia entis impossible; it is not a matter of defining human capacity to know the divine essence (which is, of course, impossible), but the illuminating aspect of being itself to the human capacity to know God, while in the form of ever-greater dissimilitudo.

Another contemporary Orthodox thinker, John Zizioulas, has also addressed analogy of being in a tangential sense. Zizioulas shares the view of Radical

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241 Murphy 2008, 16.
244 Yannaras is out to explain the difference in the specific nature of postmodern metaphysics, which he explores via developments in, for example, quantum physics, which tends to shake modern Newtonian physical models. Moreover, he assembles evidence for a more relational and personal level of understanding of knowledge, as possible via these developments. In short, Yannaras, while highly critical of Western modernity, sees metaphysics as a fact evolving with history, which cannot be assimilated with Hart’s discourse because of the simple fact that for Hart, classical metaphysics of Christianity is meant only to be told ensuing from a vision, not to seek common ground with other scientific theories.
245 Yannaras 2004, 141. Yannaras is not speaking about analogia entis as such, but only about psychological facts of the mind; Yannaras actually argues that the infinite is a “manner” of speaking about the finite, that is, a metaphysical sense of the physical.
246 As Andrew Louth points out in his introduction to Yannaras’ work on Heidegger and Dionysos Areopagite. See Yannaras, 2007, esp. 23–24, where Yannaras sees analogia entis in relation between greater and lesser images. But this is over-psychologizing the ontological aspect of analogia entis in the sense used in this study. As Louth notes, Yannaras’ view on analogia entis actually comes close to Barth’s analogia fidei. See also Louth 2015, Chap. 16 on Yannaras. For Yannaras’ narrative of the “Western error,” see Yannaras 2006, 51–58. For general appropriation of Yannaras’ construction of the West as the locus of “religionalyzed” religion and promoting a natural religion contra “ecclesial existence,” see Petrà 2013, 177–178.
247 Yannaras 2007, 178.
Orthodoxy and Hart in regarding Christian thought as a tremor in the houses of classical thought. For him, the ontological gap between beings and God is mediated in Logos, and this enables an analogy of communion between persons in relation to the communion of the Trinitarian Godhead. This tendency is something that is called, in contemporary theology, the “social Trinity,” in which the communal aspect of intra-trinitarian relations is constitutive of personhood and reflected upon also in relations between human beings and God, usually with a leaning toward a strong Eucharistic ecclesiology. It is at the level of the person that Zizioulas makes his analogical space appear between divine persons (constituted via communion in oneness and otherwise in communion) and an individual man, and a “para-eucharistic” mode of being in the Church.

Perhaps the most influential, in a sense, Orthodox figure looming in Hart’s theology is Russian father Sergii Bulgakov (1871–1944). Bulgakov tackled many of the same basic problems in his sophiology that are in question in the Barth–Przywara debate. Bulgakov noted that viewing creation only from the point of view of causality resulted in “age-old misunderstanding, which must be eradicated from both philosophy and theology”. Causal seriality, impoverished from notions of personal creation, results only in bad infinity. It is noteworthy that Bulgakov attests to the fact that creation can be analogically conceived, although “through a glass, murkily,” from a creaturely creative act, which yields to no causality but creative freedom. Although the “golden age of Russian theology” recognized the problem of the relation between beings and being, it seems generally to treat it precisely under the notions of freedom and necessity (i.e. the freedom of the creative act and God’s presence in his creation).

Bulgakov tries to express the question of being is his concepts of Divine and Creaturely Sophia, which in this sense could be conceived as the “hypostatizedness” of God and turning its face toward the world. Divine Sophia was the non-hypostatic living Divine essence. Bulgakov has argued that the thoughts of Bulgakov offer fruitful approaches to Radical Orthodoxy and its “radicalness.” To Milbank, Bulgakov’s thesis of sophianicity releases theological thinking from essentialism, that is, from too stiff a Chalcedonian reading of Christ God-man and his two natures.

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249 Zizioulas 1985, 58; 2006, 262. While it does not fall within the scope of this study, it would be interesting to explore such analogical relationality to Karl Barth’s *analogia relationis*; it seems that there is a difference between talking about God and creation in *analogical manner* and holding an stricter ontological *analogia entis*.
250 Bulgakov 2002, 34. To be fair, most of the criticism here goes also the Thomistic adaptation of Aristotelian categories at the heart of Christian thought about the relation of the created to the Creator.
251 Bulgakov 2002, 37.
253 At least Nikolai Berdyayev, the existentialist philosopher of the age, treated freedom and spirit’s freedom as the differing aspect from both natural and the merely causal objectification of beings.
254 This notion has set Bulgakov in dubious light at large in the Orthodox world, either in fear of instituting a fourth persona into the Godhead or injecting the world as a (semi-)divine being in its own right.
255 Milbank 2009, 45–85.
The mediation of Christ between God and man acts as a paradigm for “theandric, metaxulogical” being.\footnote{256 Milbank 2009, 85. The same emphasis von Balthasar finds in the writings of Vladimir Soloviev, see GOL III, 279–352, esp. 324, 341–345; Nichols 1998, 158. In Christ, the infinite and finite unite, and the kenotic and salvific work of Christ can be seen as ideas that, in Christianity, are persons (not personified ideas). This emphasis connects Russian thought with Hart, although Hart might have been suspicious of using the vocabulary of ‘eternal ideas’: “The Plenitude of the Idea requires that the greatest unity in the whole to be realized in the greatest independence and freedom in the partial and particular elements in them themselves and through and for them”. Quoted in GOL III, 344.}

Moreover, Rowan Williams creatively reads the Orthodox tendency to emphasize Gregory Palamas’ distinction between divine essence and divine energies as follows:

*The idea of the name as ‘energy’ in a Palamite sense is a fruitful one. It allows us to say that the name is not an essence or the emanation of an essence or the exhaustive presence of an essence; essences, in the sense of definitive encapsulations of identity, do not belong in language. Naming allows the subject (avoiding for a moment the freighted word ‘essence’) to be apprehended as mobile, plural, engaged, constituted as an active subject in its complex relations (though this is not the same as saying that it is constituted by the agency of others). It asserts a kind of indeterminacy – not an empty potentiality, but a range of possible identities-in-the-other. In relation to the Palamite doctrine of the relations between God and creation, it is a way of saying that God truly ‘becomes’ the God of Israel and of believers in Jesus, without thereby saying that God is incompletely God without creation. It is a conceptual tightrope, which western as well as Eastern theology has had to negotiate.*\footnote{257 Williams 2009, 42. It is perhaps to be noted here that the notion that a name signifies an essence is precisely what the Cappadocian fathers rejected in the Eunomian controversy. For Eunomios, it seems, the essence and the name are tied together and may not “slide” [meaning transferring any divine properties of the Son] into other names. See Eunomius 1987, 1.11. [47].}

This tightrope is an opening up to analogical difference, as a sort of linguistic portrayal of difference in theological terms. This is a fact that Hart agrees with: to him, too, the essential language of God fails to do justice to this tightrope (and Palamas).\footnote{258 Hart 2003, 236–237. For Conor Cunningham, analogical speech is often mistreated when applied only for epistemic purposes. Cunningham suggests that the proper context of analogy is actually cosmological. Cunningham 2002, 181. See also Manoussakis 2010.}

All in all, it is a matter for a different study to investigate the proper role of analogia entis in Orthodox theology. But it is clear that such a study should neither proceed on polemical lines nor simply portray and downplay a “Westernized” type of theology. As Hart remarks, both the Orthodox and Catholic share at least a common enemy: a secular reason that seeks to portray God as obsolete and analogy as reducible to moments of essential and willful language, instead of participation and mystical beauty. As Hart remarks in his preface to a collection of articles seeking fertile connections between Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy (2009), perhaps it is time for Orthodox theology to admit that theology cannot be orthodox only as a liturgical or mystical Neo-Palamite synthesis, but it must also address philosophical and sociological issues.\footnote{259 Hart 2009b, xxiii–xiv. For his disregard of polemical stances adopted by a few modern Orthodox scholars, see Hart 2003b; 2008a and Plested 2012, 217–218.}
2.3 LANGUAGE AND METAPHYSICS

As early as 2000, Hart remarked that only as rhetoric, theology can answer “the question”:

The question, at its most elementary, is that of a text’s author, and of its reader: in what way, if at all, is the author a living and articulate presence, delivered over to another living and intelligent presence in the economy of the text? Or in what degree, if any, is the text a fixed and stable structure of communication, determinable as to its meaning and intelligibility, mediating between two equally fixed and stable subjectivities? But behind this somewhat fashionable concern lurks a deeper—and philosophically perennial—question: the question (most acutely posed by Hegel, most obsessively posed in many of the discourses of the “postmodern”) of identity as such, of “self” and “other”, the inescapable dialectics of exteriority, and the labor of negativity. Is there any inside apart from the outside? What meaning is there except by way of dissemination, what identity apart from difference, what knowledge but through opposition, what presence without deferral, what life without death? And which terms, in these oppositions, are to be accorded some sort of logical priority? And behind this, then, lurks the still deeper question that haunts the entire history of metaphysics, from its birth through its dissolution: what is the economy of being? Is it violence? Is being a necessary struggle between interior and exterior, form and chaos, presence and absence, light and darkness, the limit and the infinite? Can being emerge into its own truth save by way of history’s most tragic probations? For theology, these questions are pressing simply because the fate of theology has, for two centuries, been wedded by its critics to the fate of “metaphysics”; it requires little effort to discern behind the figures of author, text, and reader the more eminent forms of God, the world, and the soul. Is God, for theology, the “cause” of the world, its foundation, and the source of its authorial “intention”? And is the world then a closed text, an intelligible index of divine truths, a hierarchy of forms and substances, allowing deft interpreters to discover its one authoritative and intrinsic rationality? And is the soul a discrete substance, a pure and irreducible interiority that receives the world under the regime of representation, and governs it properly according to the logic of instrumental reason? In brief, is theology merely the violence of metaphysics, “onto-theo-logy”, a discourse of totality, “Platonism” … or does it tell another story altogether?

Hart is commenting on the questions raised by the “linguistic turn” (as named by Richard Rorty) of 20th Century philosophy, more especially the so-called post-structuralist critique of structuralist linguistics inaugurated by Ferdinand de Saussure’s publication of *Cours de linguistique générale*. It is the field of language that also dominates the metaphysical criticism of continental philosophers, and therefore it is necessary to survey the issue to understand why Hart opposes these developments and instances of ontological and differential sublimes (in Hart’s wording). In addition, Hart asks for a view on being that neither remains within intra-worldly tragic

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metaphysics nor yields to non-metaphysical liberation, which, as has been noted, results ultimately in nihilistic difference.

As was hinted upon earlier, especially in the continental tradition and in the work of Jacques Derrida, the linguistic analysis coheres with the metaphysical critique directed toward classical metaphysics. On theological side, the critique of Martin Heidegger, and his disregard toward a theorem dubbed “onto-theology,” has been highly influential in these discourses. Hart suggests, in the essay quoted above, and as a concurring argument throughout his works, that maybe the fate of “historical metaphysics” should be gently separated from the fate of theology. Nevertheless, the linguistic turn, however it is interpreted, has certainly resulted in much of the core terminology of postmodern theology, as well.

Saussure’s basic idea was simple. He showed that in linguistics, the link between the sign and what it signified was completely arbitrary. This means that “a linguistic entity” is conceivable only as a link to other entities of language, and so every linguistic unit receives its meaning through other units. So, the meaning of a linguistic entity lies in its difference from other entities of the same kind, meaning there is no stable or universal status of meaning attached to these entities.

The notion of primacy of difference was a major theme for the philosopher Jacques Derrida, who criticized “Platonism” (standing for whole of Western philosophy) for its equation of logos with truth and being, thus forming an eidetic representational structure in which meaning is gathered or “called out” by a speaking subject as present from its transcendental hideout. Thus, in order to liberate or deconstruct this structure, argues Derrida, we need to think of meaning as an “infinite implication, the indefinite referral of signifier to signifier.” It is precisely the difference between writing and speech that lets Derrida develop his concept of archе-writing, by which he means an acknowledgment of and engagement with the fact that speech (i.e. making present) is not necessarily a primary phenomenon in relation to writing and does not precede it. Arche-writing is an attempt to think of meaning as such as surpassing structural and binary positions, which the theological setting of metaphysics, according to Derrida, seems to presuppose. It is the constantly repetitive and infinite series “behind” speech and writing that possibilize them in the first place as language. Derrida marks this series with different names, by the non-word of differance, trace and supplement. I quote a passage displaying the use of trace:

The trace is not a presence but is rather the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates, displaces, and refers beyond itself. The trace has, properly speaking, no place, for effacement belongs to the very structure of the trace. Effacement must always be

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263 Hart 2000.
265 Derrida 1978, 11, where Derrida explicitly uses a theological scheme to describe logos as the logos of the Father, meaning a fixed presence that can be irreducibly evoked at any time; Derrida 1981, 191.
267 In an essay reflecting on Artaud’s theatrical doctrine, Derrida claims: “The stage is theological for as long as it is dominated by speech, by a will to speech, by the layout of the primary logos […] it is theological as long as its structure, following the entirety of tradition, comports the following elements: an author-creator who, absent and afar, is armed with the text and keeps watch over, assembles, regulates the time or the meaning of representation, letting this latter represent him as concerns what is called the content of his thoughts, his intentions, his ideas.” Derrida 1978, 235.
able to overtake the trace; otherwise it would not be a trace but an indestructible and monumental substance. In addition, and from the start, effacement constitutes it as a trace—effacement establishes the trace in a change of place and makes it disappear in its appearing, makes it issue forth from itself in its very position. The effacing of this early trace (die frihe Spur) of difference is therefore “the same” as its tracing within the text of metaphysics. This metaphysical text must have retained a mark of what it lost or put in reserve, set aside. In the language of metaphysics, the paradox of such a structure is the inversion of the metaphysical concept which produces the following effect: the present becomes the sign of signs, the trace of traces. It is no longer what every reference refers to in the last instance; it becomes a function in a generalized referential structure. It is a trace, and a trace of the effacement of a trace.

Thus, at least in early Derrida, we see him as simultaneously distancing himself from de Saussure’s structuralism and equating the traditional reading of religious truths with logo-centric nostalgia for a paradise lost. For Derrida, language is forever “haunted” by difference, otherwise it would just solidify as substances and representations of them. In this way, Derrida addresses the problem laid out by Lyotard in a previous chapter: since representation can never be exhaustive or closed, there must a sublime element in every discourse, otherwise the closed system will always capture and determine its outside, the area left out of it (thus repeating the metaphysical dream of Hegel of Logos thinking un-Logos). There is simply no exact correspondence between the text and its meaning. In addition, the “metaphysical” interpretation of phenomenology is also inadequate to the task: “In order to describe traces, in order to read the traces of ‘unconscious’ traces (there are no ‘conscious’ traces), the language of presence and absence, the metaphysical discourse of phenomenology, is inadequate.”

In addition, as early Derrida writes in his analysis of Husserl, meaning traditionally evokes a presence:

_The history of being as presence, as self-presence in absolute knowledge, as consciousness of self in the infinity of parousia—this history is closed. The history of presence is closed, for “history” has never meant anything but the presentation (Gegenwartigung) of Being, the production and recollection of beings in presence, as knowledge and mastery._

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268 Derrida 1973, 156. The same motif of non-fixed meaning, the infinity of the text, is encapsulated perhaps in the most quoted phrase of Derrida, that “there is nothing outside the text”. Derrida, of course, does not mean that there is not anything outside the text, but rather, if we step out of it, the text’s meaning is structured and gathered upon a logos that does not belong to the text. The same motif appears in Derrida’s treatment of art, in his _Truth in Painting_, in which he explains that if we ask the truth of a painting, we arrest by answering the abyss that this truth might open.

269 Derrida 1976, 3; starting in the 1980s, Derrida started to address religious ideas more closely, but it seems that he never wavered in his original position, where the God of the Christianity, for example, could not enter into history in any manner other than an eschatological one. But he indeed has allowed a closer look into the actual content of Christianity, and has not stayed on the level of linguistic abstractions. See Sherwood & Hart (eds.), 2004, esp. 36ff.

270 Although Milbank argues, correctly in my opinion, that his ontological choice defines much of the outcome of his deconstruction; in addition, in order for meaning to be postponed constantly, it needs to summon at least entities with some imaginary stability, “illusions of presence”. Milbank 2006, 310–311.


Since absolute self-presence in consciousness is the infinite vocation of full presence, the achievement of absolute knowledge is the end of the infinite, which could only be the unity of the concept, logos, and consciousness in a voice without difference. The history of metaphysics therefore can be expressed as the unfolding of the structure or schema of an absolute will-to-hear-oneself-speak. This history is closed when this infinite absolute appears to itself as its own death. A voice without difference a voice without writing, is at once absolutely alive and absolutely dead.273

Now we can see the basic positions that Hart referred to in the article quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Hart wants to say that Christian discourse precisely both avoids the Derridean accusation of logo-centricism while simultaneously affirming the Logos-centricity, that is Christo-centricity, in its language. The Christocentric view of meaning eludes the simplified equation between meaning and presence, and doubly so. First of all, it is the Trinitarian logic that subverts the dialectical attempt to thematize the unstable meanings; secondly, it is the analogical view of the ontology that keeps certainly deferring the meaning as a positive enrichment because its “source” is infinite. In theological terms, Hans Urs von Balthasar says that theological language is in one sense sacramental: it signifies something other while this other is wholly present.274 Theological language is an invocation, and for Hart, as the world is primarily a rhetorical overture of God, the ontological status of the world rings in the vocative instead of the accusative.

In this view, the Derridean position appears but a variation of the Kantian transcendental project, in which the self and the other are posited in tension, yet remain precisely as text unpresentable, sublime.275 However, Hart acknowledges that there is a fertile dimension in Derrida’s analysis of Western disregard for written language, referring to Derrida’s Plato’s Pharmacy276; while Derrida suggests that we should avoid the Platonic anamnesis or recollection as the basis of our conceptual and epistemological verifications, Hart suggests that theology could employ the other side of Platonic thought, the supereminent, the epekeina tes ousias of the Good:

Having thanked Derrida for his reading, however, theology must move beyond it. Surely, for theology, the desire for an anamnesis of eternal verities is an empty longing, while the only inwardness that Christian theology can speak of coherently must open out onto radical, indeed infinite, exteriority: a creature has no recollection of an eternal identity, it does not emanate from an eternal ground, but receives its identity always, in every moment, as the repeated gift of an infinite God, who gives all to those who are by nature nothing at all. However brightly the spolia Aegyptorum shone in the precincts of the Church, once the vessels were purged of their pagan uses, the one essential difference between Platonism and Christianity is absolute: the difference, that is, between the mysteries of the city and the councils of the philosopher’s daimon, on the one hand, and the sacraments of the church and the pilgrimage of scripture, on the other; or, otherwise stated, the difference between the backward glance that seeks a path of retreat out of the

274 See COL IV, 106 and 150: “In the twilight area between symbol and reality here is an adumbration of Golgotha.”
275 Hart 2000, 187.
alien distance of a chaotic exterior and the forward gaze, saturated by the light of the Kingdom’s distant dawn, that surveys the graciously exterior distance of the gift. The Word theology hears and responds to is profoundly—infinitely—written, it must come to the surface—where it is impressed—in an act of reading, and so the true depth of the “self” that hears and responds to this Word is an ever greater exteriority: may my inward self, then, be as one with this outward text, may I be written again and again by grace.

The Platonic “gaze” backwards into the interiority of the subject is here radicalized by Christendom’s affirmation of answering to “written” Logos, by seeing the opening between exterior and interior things as a gift, not a chaotic surface where the text is haunted. Hart “thanks” Derrida for bringing about more clearly the radical nature of Christian logoscentrism, that is, the one that appears in creation as God’s utterance. It is creation, and the analogical meaning on display in the created beings, that safeguards theology from the binary opposites of meaning and discourse, in which one is constituting simply between signifier and signified. The “text” of creation is, on one hand, a playful dissemination of being and is, on the other, “grounded” upon the infinity of the Creator, thus forming no “essence” or stable identity from which any anamnesis could gather its material. Metaphysics does not call for an absolute or a “dead” presence (whatever that should in the end mean), but only manifests the presence that is already there in the very groundlessness of being as it is called from nothingness. Ultimately, it is the correct distance, the correct rhetorical interpretation and exposition of difference (between the mind and the world, between the world and God, between I and the other), that emerges as crucial: Hart goes so far as to equate textual nihilism with death, that is, procedures that rely on either stable idealistic forms or on the chaotic night of difference, for both are sides of the same coin.

For Hart, Derrida is a captive of his own reading, and as such, Derrida seems to dismiss the content of particular narratives for his theoretical and structural reading. In short, in deconstructing, Derrida himself puts up binary readings, which compass totalities made of straw, that is, they do not take into account the theological variant of difference itself. This is a major part of Hart’s thesis: “the sheer intractable particularity” of Christian truth is itself, being a narrative and not merely mythical metaphysics, something that informs metaphysics itself (as is evident in the process of “Hellenization” of Christianity during the first four centuries and onwards). Thus, in Hart’s argument, it is precisely the narrative that informs the language of metaphysics, not the other way around.

Regarding the mode of Hart’s argument, it seems plausible to say that this “turning of the tables” is a rhetorical device that Hart employs widely. As was the case with the Lyotardian “death of meta-narratives,” which Hart regards merely as one more narrative in itself, Derrida is also treated with his own medicine (not to say,)

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278 Cf. GOL II, 72.
279 Hart 2003, 297. This is what Milbank also suggests, 1997, 62–63. Derrida himself can be seen disagreeing with the equation between deconstruction and nihilism. He also sees Christianity as the most diffusive or osmotic for deconstructive purposes. See Sherwood&Hart 2005, 11–36
280 Hart 2003, 11–12.
pharmakon). 281 To be fair, Hart applauds Derrida for having at least tried to glimpse the “whole totality of being”, yet Derrida seems to be strangely jealous of his own device of interpretation of thought. For, as Hart remarks, the Derridean position is, at the same time, precisely “a device” that can be employed almost arbitrarily; its rhetoric covers simultaneously too much and too little. In his search of suppression of arché-écriture, or the primary difference that governs and precedes all forms of ideality and presence, Derrida shows little interest in the actual narratives. For Hart, Derrida is interested only in the limits of a particular discourse, not its “content" or its “openings.”

Theology, argues Hart, pursues a different form of distance, “one peculiar to the scriptural narrative.” 282 This distance appears primarily as a gift, as a presence of an omnipresent God in his transcendental superabundance: “God is the distance of all that differs.” 283 And as we saw in the previous chapter, this distance is precisely analogical, not a scale of deteriorating series or a closed, dualistic totality of equivocity.

Moreover, this “distance” is in the Trinitarian motion of giving and receiving, of surrendering and exalting. This distance as discourse of God at an ontological level appears on a human level as unnecessary and “excess” being; creation appears as text, whose content is on its surface, in its particular beings and analogical openings, which contribute toward the God they participate in. This appearing, the “manifestation of the unmanifested,” 284 must be regarded as beautiful. In an analysis offered by Graham Ward, Hart wants us to read the “text” not in the sense of Derrida, as meaning constructed by our language, but in a “hermeneutic way,” meaning that the original “text” of the creative God can be accessed, but not governed, via the language of the world. 285

Although this seems an ontological dodging of Derrida’s bullet, Hart wishes to employ Derrida only insofar as it suits him in order to bring the thesis of rhetorical primacy over dialectics into a brighter light. 286 For theology, transcendence is always mediated somehow. 287 And as language reflects the metaphysics it calls forth, engaging Christianity in linguistic terms has to choose between two “practices” of describing God: either one does so by “naming God”, that is, giving the transcendental source of

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281 This is also true of his account of Lévinas, as well as the argumentative structure of Catherine Pickstock. See Pickstock 1998, 1–118, especially 26 and 166.

282 Hart 2000, 196.

283 Hart 2000, 197.

284 GOLII, 164; GOL III, 228.

285 Ward 2000a, 10. As von Balthasar puts it, a spirit seeking signs of meaning in both the supernatural and natural realms will ultimately fail if it seeks their unity in the purely natural realm (GOL I, 175).

286 In a sense, rhetoric can reclaim something lost in the “de-ontologization” of language in the modern age, as argued by Michel Certeau (cited in Montag 1999, 51). If language is indeed detached from “things,” then every description in a sense is a rhetorical act. In addition, if this indeed is the case, then Christian discourse cannot but notice itself as a discourse within a discourse, a reflective and responsive discourse to the primary discourse of God, the Word.

287 See Cunningham 1999; GOL II, 76: “The world is capax gloriae Patris,” meaning that in an artistic sense, the world can be regarded as a finite work and as a ‘plastic’ entity capable of glory. Therefore, a theological reading cannot start exclusively from the abstraction of God or from the concrete natural realm, but must attend to mediatory primacy before treating immanence or transcendence; traditionally this has been achieved by stressing the role of Christ as the supreme mediator. But this mediatory role is precisely an act of divine rhetoric to Hart. Hart 2003, 327.
Being every perfection possible, or one ends up “enumerating the deity’s properties,” which results inevitably (according to Hart) in a univocal ontology, where attributes are hung upon an empty and unilinear being.\textsuperscript{288} This thesis is reinforced by Radical Orthodox affiliates, who argue that modern realism, following medieval nominalism, ensued from a difference between names and things: “a new notion of meaning.”\textsuperscript{289} As one of Radical Orthodoxy’s main claims goes, the legacy of nominalism also affected how the relation between God and creation was perceived; creation was no longer a contingent participatory act of divine creative \textit{fiat} through Logos, but a separate realm brought into being by God’s volition. As Conor Cunningham puts it:

\textit{This conception of God in voluntarist terms (however slight) marks, one might say, the first moment in an intellectually re-enacted fall. This world without intermediary causes becomes ‘emptied’, despite the fact that this ontological abandonment is carried out under the misguided aspiration of protecting God’s freedom and with it the discipline of theology. The world is emptied of God precisely because it becomes subject to his absolute sway (any ordained powers methodologically deferring to absolute power).}\textsuperscript{68}

\textit{For if the world is absolutely contingent and no more, it cannot show God or point to him and is thus effectively independent of him. It becomes possible to treat the world as a given apart from God.}\textsuperscript{290}

So, without the “linguistic” mediation of the creative Word, the world remains either pantheistic or purely materialistic, without a real capacity or potentiality to display the analogical interval. John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock argue that the Christian realistic view on Eucharist is the paramount way to understand how all reality and thought is already “interpreted”: what is present is already mediated and thereby “signified.”\textsuperscript{291} And if this mediation is not itself analogical, argues Hart, we are left with either univocal or equivocal categories of describing and thus knowing God. It is either one of the above two options that Hart sees philosophy taking when it is trying to steer itself free from the analogical interruption of Christ.\textsuperscript{292} Modernity is indeed such an attempt in Hart’s genealogy: it secured its own discourse without divine transcendence by affirming a new subjective verification within the “citadel of subjective certitude,” that is, the disenchanted reason.\textsuperscript{293}

Milbank also welcomes the “postmodern” condition as much as it simply evades the question about language as something that corresponds to reality as such. For

\textsuperscript{288} Hart 2003, 301; Hart 2005, 255–256. See Bradshaw 2004, 245, who argues that it was Aquinas who turned Areopagitan thought about ascendency to God and transformed it into a clarification of theological language about God. Yet it must be noted that these things perhaps should not be set as opposites (which I do not claim that Bradshaw intends to do), but rather as reflecting the existential in linguistic form, the deepening ineffability drawing closer to God.

\textsuperscript{289} Montag 1999, 51.

\textsuperscript{290} Cunningham 1999, 82. Hart would perhaps add that although the world is purely contingent, it is still “more” than a product; it is created in the “vocative” rather than in the “accusative”. Hans Urs von Balthasar argues that the nominalist legacy is congruent with the Reformation and Kantian revolutions, which all criticize “all means and ways to God that are not those of ‘pure faith’.” GOL III, 128.

\textsuperscript{291} Milbank & Pickstock 2005, 77–79.

\textsuperscript{292} Hart 2005, 277.

\textsuperscript{293} Hart 2005, 278.
Milbank, language is not a “layer” between mind and world, but an analogous enterprise, a sort of vocal transcendence of human createdness:

In this case language itself in its expressive relation to beings belongs to the analogatum. Language is also ‘like God’, and our linguistic expression mirrors the divine creative act which is immanently contained in the Ars Patris that is the Logos.

Language is mimetic; not of the “real” but rather in participation “in divine originative-expressive capacity.” Language itself reflects the “being-in-the-world,” for it participates in, not represents, something that is unrepresentable, the infinite God. In Hart, this theme is transposed again in aesthetic terms. For Hart, creation itself is part of God’s speech, or rather, creation has language of its own, analogous to the divine utterances and semiotic openness to God’s infinity.

Hence this language of creation, with its transcendence of mere representationalism and closed dialectical totalities of signifiers and signifieds, can offer a new ontological index, in which the main “mood” is that of the glory of God. It breaks free from the pagan monism, “identism,” or eidetic forms of thought and ontologically is in the sense that creation “speaks” in its fluidity as the divine Logos contains the whole creation. Thus, the concept of rhetoric over dialectics gains here linguistic momentum, which is convenient for Hart, who is constantly criss-crossing between postmodern arguments and classical Logos-themes in theology. Furthermore, because Logos is God’s word, eternally spoken and begotten, creation manifests a re-articulation of that utterance, analogously repeating endlessly the infinite theme of which God, by being infinite, is simultaneously mediation and immediacy.

294 Milbank 1997, 29.
296 Milbank 1997, 44–45; this is an important notion for the grand counter-narrative upheld by Radical Orthodoxy. For Catherine Pickstock, for example, the representational interpretation of a linguistic act is basically secular, for it seeks to “spatialize” knowledge. See Pickstock 1998.
298 Milbank 1997, 29.
299 Milbank 1997, 44–45; this is an important notion for the grand counter-narrative upheld by Radical Orthodoxy. For Catherine Pickstock, for example, the representational interpretation of a linguistic act is basically secular, for it seeks to “spatialize” knowledge. See Pickstock 1998. On a mere theoretical linguistic level, Paul Ricour has suggested that the Aristotelian form of mimesis is free from any metaphysical correspondence theories attributed to the Platonic legacy, being “without the burdensome ontological concern of fitting the appearance to the real,” and thus reality is in Aristotelian poetics something that is only referred to but not restricted by that very reality. Ricouer, 2002, 42. The Ricouerian model is especially happy when applied to Hart’s thought: only the poetic “saying” really brings out the nature of things, beings in the world; for without poetic saying, there are only givens, only data, not gifts, dona.
In summary, Hart sees that while Derridean critique aims for a holistic view, he agrees at a general level with Milbank and Pickstock that Derridean difference amounts ultimately to nihilism, since it “never arrives.” Without a proper ontological shift, without analogy of being, such difference remains one more mythos. And Hart agrees with Milbank, who says that while God’s infinity safeguards from the dialectical patterns, the “true human text” is only recoverable in Christ.299

The very concreteness of the Christological “event” in language is something that Hart adheres to. Christ is not merely “a sign,” but Logos of creation and creator Logos, “the whole discourse,” which “calls forth” creation’s relatively stable substances, which themselves are signs of divine and excessive love.300 Again, this is first and foremost an aesthetic view of language: instead of splitting reality into signs and things, says Hart, it may be worthwhile for theology to adapt a habit of talking about creation in terms of “substantial signs” or of “semeiotic substances.”301 There is no need for different metaphysics than what “seems”; for every signs, meaning every being, is an analogical expression of an ontological difference that is peace, which allows variations of signs not simply by being difference as such, but as free and unnecessary and abundant as “how God is God.”302 Hart is not saying that God’s essence is displayed in nature or creation or in the peace the differential aesthetic play discloses, but that the novelty of Christianity is precisely that it can speak of infinity positively, as a form, not setting it against finitude but, on the contrary, showing itself as participating in God’s infinity analogically. Thus, Christian language (in the widest sense of the word) speaks of an ontology that does not situate conflict between images and archetypes, between approximation and identification, between copy or original, but identifies being as like “music.” Only in Christ is this “accomplished” completely, but already creation gives “analogical expression” to God’s transcendence.303

2.4 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 2

In this chapter, I have explored Hart’s model of theological narrative and its main orientative lines. I first set out to elucidate some premises of narrative theology and how Hart employs them.

By narrative theology, it was assumed that the so-called postmodern condition is heavily seated in a narrative form of discourse. Hart’s own narrative assumed this basic position, too; and the picture of his thought in general springs forth from this fact. It can be said that Hart both welcomes such a narrative outlook on things, yet simultaneously he paves the way into his more specific arguments. I pointed out that Hart’s usage of narrative is closely linked to Radical Orthodoxy’s view of narrative. Hart wants to show that rhetoric concerning the nature of theology is not only an option, but precisely its truest nature. The persuasive character of theology is not about finding supremacy through reason or faith, but disclosing theology itself as a

299 Milbank 1997, 136–137.
300 Hart 2003, 207–208.
301 Hart 2003, 208.
302 Hart 2003, 207; 2015 a 3. Here the similarities with Bulgakov, as pointed out by Arjakovsky 2009, are apparent.
persuasion, a narrative capable of a holistic alternative vision. That being said, the narrative of theology is to be distinguished from other rhetorical approaches in at least three senses.

Firstly, it must give an account of an ontology, and not stay merely on the level of persuasive talk of God. Secondly, it must do so in a manner that upholds an alternative vision of peace amid worldly rhetoric of power and dominance. Thirdly, it accomplishes this by making the Beautiful the primary decisive point of interpretation, yet grounding it in other great transcendentals in the Godhead, meaning that while its vision is aesthetic, it must also be rationally coherent. Because the Beautiful cannot be treated “from below,” its unity with the Good and the True is affirmed.

In this, Hart’s argumentation was found to be as post-modern as it was anti-modern, and the latter position was revealed, in turn, to be heavily influenced by Hans Urs von Balthasar’s theological aesthetics. Moreover, Hart wishes to distinguish his post-modern position precisely through this anti-modern rhetoric: he embraces a holistic vision of narrative, the universal capacity of it, yet he upholds a realistic view of beings as they are rhetorically spoken into existence by God himself.

To each one of these points, though coherent in their inter-relational status, was attached a series of questions. Given the nature of Hart’s narrative as a wholesome theoria on being, it was asked how it can both maintain the claim of peaceful dominance and simultaneously uphold a grand narrative. It was noted that this tension sets Hart’s concept of narrative apart from liberal accounts of narrative, which tend to emphasize the “event” of truth in particular communities rather than make a case for a “grand theme of being,” which for Hart is a crucible element for narrative should it try to be something more than a myth.

However, Hart claims that with only the three aspects withstanding, theological narrative can be competitive instead of combative. Within the broad field of narrative theology, I have tried to situate Hart’s place in a current that Olli-Pekka Vainio has deemed “post-conservative,” yet I wanted to highlight that Vainio’s distinctions are to be taken broadly, and in the case of Hart, also with certain conditions.

More accurately, the ontological side of the narrative is to be found, in theological terms, in the theologoumenon analogia entis. Only as analogy can theology both address the difference and relation between the creature and divine realms. Only as analogy, argues Hart, can ontology be constructed in rhetoric, not in dialectic terms. As metaphysics is the inevitable result of any narrative (while not necessarily articulated or even acknowledged), theology can be considered as a unique alternative to worldly metaphysics; in effect, theology has “interrupted” philosophical metaphysics in its doctrinal emergence during the patristic age. The novelty of Christian thought, expressed in the analogical sense as ontology, is what constitutes, for Hart, a necessary correlative to Western metaphysics, bringing about a concept of transcendence while confronting it as the real, perceivable, and knowable in the transient.

So, Hart’s mode of argumentation is apologetic in a philosophical sense. His historically constructed narrative of Christ, as a particular God-man opening a true sense of transcendence, is to be read as an attempt to re-narrate classical Christian dogma and do so in order to be able to out-narrate other narratives. Here, I explored the second part of my initial question and showed how Hart’s method is closely linked to those of John Milbank and other Radical Orthodoxy representatives. Their joint argument for “an ontology of peace” as an authentic view of Christian tradition
appears historically selective but simultaneously an autonomous undertaking: theology should not adopt its inner criteria or ethos from outside, but rather should constantly consciously disrupt secular narratives and unconsciously fertilize them via culture. However, it was pointed out that in this combative setting, the claim of peaceful rhetoric and an ontology of peace does seem problematic.

The need for re-narration as out-narration applies to theology’s own take on the so-called postmodern condition, in which meaning cannot be secured in frozen taxonomies of signs. Hart argues that theology, in the recovered sense mentioned above, already contains a notion of this instability of particular meanings and beings within itself, but does so in a manner that makes the particularity and difference shine forth as beautiful in a creation that appears primarily in terms of a gift. Accordingly, the language of theology is capable of speaking about God, not governing him. Just because the analogy of being falls on the difference between the created and the Creator, theology can wrest itself free from closed systems of philosophy, and “re-narrate” itself in order to criticize other narratives, without having first to yield to their primary premises. This, in the linguistic sense, is achieved, as I have shown, by locating the postmodern notion of difference within the theological Logos-tradition and viewing creation as a text that is capable of asking the question of being and also accommodating the Trinitarian difference in its own moments of particularity. Therefore, I have described Hart’s theology as being as antimodern as it is postmodern.

To repeat my criticism at a general level, it has been pointed out in a wider respect regarding Radical Orthodoxy that a certain selective reading of historical and philosophical literature is needed in order to maintain such a visionary position. However, I feel that this point, while in need of attention, is not so acute with Hart; he aims for a narrative that finds its coherence not in correspondences or the synthesis of different historical features of Christian theology, but in what I have called a Christian correspondence theory. This theory is derived from the conception of God, both in his immanent and economic being. At a rhetorical level, such a strategic reading of tradition is laid out openly, without needing to hide its biases, and as such its purpose is to be meaningful precisely in its re-narrations, not in repeated narrations of the same or ideal content. By this notion, it will be surveyed in the next chapter how such re-narrations work.

The second larger question I raised, but that is left unanswered in full, was Hart’s place in Orthodox theology and its relation especially to analogia entis. I noted that this relation is, at mildest, mixed and easily contains a certain polemic tendency. I feel that there is a need for another whole study to view analogia entis in Orthodox writings, whether patristic or modern; and this endeavor would be interesting to do in two ways. Either it could be done in a “Hartian” sense, as narrative tactics to pinpoint more currents than curves, or as a more systematic historical and comparative approach to the texts.
3 THE ONTOLOGY OF VIOLENCE

It is the work of Friedrich Nietzsche that has stimulated, or at least affected, many of the philosophical movements of the 20th Century. Consciously or subconsciously, postmodernism must delve into endless and difficult histories, genealogies, and ultimately destruct these lifelines to every tradition in order to authentically emerge as post-something.1 It is no coincidence that, after the “linguistic turn,” the analyses of thought have taken a hermeneutic stance: the spoiled language must refer to a spoiled reality, and if this link is destructed, somehow the world can also be redeemed from onto-theological oppressive constructions. If the theory of Rorty is true, that hermeneutics is the “hope” after the demise of epistemology in Western thought, meaning that a hermeneutical stance is something that can prevent non-foundationalist thought from lapsing into relativism2, this means that, in the case of Nietzsche, we have to be ready to understand what he is actually saying and let the narrative first run its course in full in order to “see” the whole structure appear.

Friedrich Nietzsche’s antipathy towards Christianity has been the theme of countless studies. His critique, whether it is bound within a cultural critique of the deterioration of noble paganism or the interiorization of the impulses and “natural drives” that, according to Nietzsche, are inherent to (and made inherent, in part, by) Christianity and its veiled power-nodes, has also been treated as a necessary correlative to theology itself and as a helpful aid in recovering something affirmative in the Christian story that may have been displaced or effaced during theology’s wandering through history. In addition, Nietzsche’s two key concepts “will to power” and “eternal recurrence” are analyzed, utilized, and developed as the central elements of the “postmodern condition,” and it is no wonder that most of the prominent thinkers of the 20th Century have produced a study or at least commented extensively upon Nietzsche, producing influential works in the postmodern philosophical corpus (Heidegger, Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault).3

This is something that Hart allows as well: according to him, theology cannot be “so flattered as to forget to respond to his critique and do so ‘genealogically’.4 So, the genealogical method is to be applied to Nietzschean thought itself in order for it to be both hermeneutically meaningful and enlightening in the way his re-evaluation took place and should take place.

The work of Martin Heidegger focuses, most notably for this study, on his famous critique of Western “onto-theology,” which is something that in effect makes Being forgettable and in oblivion, and thereby in an unthinkable state and a question already

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1 This is the deficit that I personally find thrives in all the “post-secular” or “post-Christian” theologies: they find Nietzschean taste so alluring that they feel that they must go along with Nietzsche all the way, to follow him in spirit into labyrinthine textual gestures that yield to no single hermeneutical key (or such things will always be detected as a structure of power, as in Foucault) nor admit any positive, at least narrational, possibility of the traditional ways of thinking.

2 Rorty, 1979, 316–318.

3 For an excellent but almost thirty-year-old introduction to Nietzsche’s postmodern Wirkungsgeschichte, see Krell & Wood (eds.) 1988. See also Robinson 1999; Woodward (ed.), 2011.

4 Hart 2003, 94.
answered in Western metaphysics. In order to see how Hart’s out-narrating actually works, one must seek to understand the challenge of Nietzsche and Heidegger. Nietzsche and Heidegger thus represent, in their own fashion, a philosophy that seeks to destruct something in order to liberate, create, and be thoughtful in a meaningful sense once again, while distancing themselves from metaphysical accounts. Both thinkers are therefore deeply involved with the history of philosophy; in addition, to theology, as John Milbank notes, their legacy in postmodern circles represents a new challenge to theology as much as it “must arise from metanarrative, or a fundamental ontology which fixes its gaze on difference as a condition of possibility for thought and action.” Here, of course, lie both the strengths and weaknesses of both narrative parties: their grasp on the “whole Western tradition,” whether viewed from “the nihilist” side or “the Christian side,” is such an endeavor that it cannot amount to anything short of a mass of historical inaccuracies and biased readings. Again, rhetoric is put in the forefront. In Hart’s argument, both Nietzsche and Heidegger criticize the notion of positive knowledge or the possibility of such; their project is aimed at liberating Western thought from its alleged positivistic certainty over its epistemological or ontological endeavors, and by doing so, metaphysics, as it were, was bound to collapse and vanish. Theology stands in both thinkers’ way, and Hart wants to show that this happens for a reason, resulting from a different view of being that neither one of the nihilistic thinkers claims it does.

Much of this destruction (one can call it “forgetfulness” or “deconstruction”) thus takes at the beginning the form of recognizing the logos of past narratives, yet it will move against them with a new narration, the critical light shed on the past structures is also a manufactured light (a new light always brings about a new metaphysics, inevitably). This process is what is meant by narrative violence, which is schematized as the postmodern condition by such critics as Milbank and Hart. This destruction, as Hart observes, assumes a quite traditional output, for every dismantling of metaphysics must be done by instituting a different metaphysics, even a transitory one or one of difference. So, for Hart, the choice always remains one of metaphysics, not with it or without it.

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5 Onto-theology appears in several works by Heidegger. The onto-theological nature of metaphysics hides the difference between Being and beings; to think this “unthought” is to sever it from its “destiny,” namely to remain in the hiddenness. See Heidegger 1969, 54–55; Stambaugh 1991, 138.

6 Here it is sufficient to treat only Nietzsche and Heidegger; for example, the corollary project of John Milbank treats a wider range of “Neo-Nietzscheans.”

7 For example, see Habermas 1987, 51ff. In Habermas’s view, Nietzsche concluded the project of Hegel in the sense that he completely equates reason as veiling the will to power, and the ensuing continental philosophical tradition is nothing but descendants of this unveiling of subjective reason.

8 Milbank 2006, 260.

9 The notion by Paul Ricouer concerning Heidegger’s project seems very apt here. One must always bear in mind that these vast readings may eventually represent nothing but “vindication of [one’s] own thought.” Ricouer 1977, 311 (quotation adapted).


11 See Derrida 1992, 100.

12 As remarked by David Deane, Milbank and Hart agree upon the premises of their critique of Nietzsche, yet they differ in the conclusions they draw. See Deane 2006, 78–79.
As Hart puts it:

Modern Continental philosophy is very much the misbegotten child of theology, indeed a kind of secularized theology [...] Theology is always already involved in the Continental tradition – its longings and nostalgias, its rebellions and haunting memories, its interminable flight from the Christian rationality that gave it life – and so is responsible for and before it. [...] This is the problem on consanguinity: theology cannot disown its history – or its children.\textsuperscript{13}

3.1 \textit{NIETZSCHE’S NARRATIVE}

To Hart, Nietzsche represents, with Celsus, the only notable pagan critic of Christianity. Moreover, Hart sees that Nietzsche’s rhetorical attack on the Gospel is to be taken seriously for two reasons: first, Nietzsche correctly sees that the way Christianity narrates itself, namely, the Gospels, is a narrative claim \textit{per se} and thus can be effectively encountered rhetorically. Secondly, and more importantly, the rhetorical nature of the Christian proclamation challenges theologians to what should be their task anyway: it calls for “a capacity for comprehensive and creative re-narrations.”\textsuperscript{14} It is the recognition of these facts that makes Nietzsche such a formidable enemy: “he understood that Christian truth depends first upon a story.”\textsuperscript{15}

This view of Nietzsche actually corresponds to much of the analysis found on postmodernist theorists: the “choosing” of the right narrative, or “willing” it as Nietzsche would have had it, is clearly an application of the perspectivist epistemological stance of Nietzsche and his call to artistically create new values.\textsuperscript{16} Here, one must proceed carefully: this call for new values is not merely a call for heroic or existential atheism. Rather, it resounds with an exhortation to act instead of observing, it means replacing the created order with creating order\textsuperscript{17}, not merely as subjective tasks of “expressing oneself,” but giving up the notion of ultimate teleological meaning and accepting the fact that world is “incapable of being,”\textsuperscript{18} that is, a realm of becoming and repetition, meaning eternal recurrence. Thus, in the Hartian narrative, it takes place on the Heraclitan side of Western metaphysics (while re-narrating it). It is saying yes to \textit{amor fati} rather than saying amen. For Hart, Nietzsche’s affirmation of life means that being cannot be regarded as created, as freely given by God. Christian affirmation cannot

\textsuperscript{13} Hart 2003, 30. Strangely, Hart and Nietzsche here agree with another, for Nietzsche himself finds it necessary to point out the theological elements of the German philosophical tradition, one “corrupted by theologian blood.”

\textsuperscript{14} Hart 2003, 94.

\textsuperscript{15} Hart 2003, 95.

\textsuperscript{16} This portrayal of Nietzsche is fiercely criticized by Richard Wolin as being suited “for academic and bourgeois theorists”. Wolin 2006, 33. This may be true, but one is reminded of the remark made by Michel Foucault: I am tired of people studying [Nietzsche] only to produce the same kind of commentaries that are written of Hegel and Mallarme. [...] The only valid tribute to thought such as Nietzsche’s is precisely to use it, to deform it, to make it groan and protest.” Foucault, \textit{Power/Knowledge} 53–54, quoted in Hovey 2008, 12.

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Will to Power} (hereafter WP) §1066. (1968, 548). Yet in aesthetic terms, Nietzsche’s concept of \textit{Übermensch}, of man who creates his own values, is also a portrayal of eternal loneliness, without the need or even possibility for any kind of communion or community.

\textsuperscript{18} WP §1061–1062 (1968, 546).
but resort to beauty and nihilistic affirmation, but only succeeds in participating in nothingness and “reflects nothing.” In short, Nietzsche evaluates the aesthetic surface of being differently. The surface is the topos where being “happens”; it is the natural ground for rhetoric.

Hart sees that answering Nietzsche in his own genealogical manner consists of showing how Christianity has already encountered his critique in the past and how the Nietzschean project is, ironically, a competent model for theology, a challenge that requires “capacity for comprehensive and creative renarrations [of the Gospel].” As such, Nietzsche brings the best and the worst out of theology.

What, then, is Nietzsche’s story? To David Bentley Hart, Nietzsche was the first to break the spell of Hegel’s idealism by instituting the competition between Dionysius and Apollo, the immanent and the despondent, between the wastelands and the organized city. Here, the polis stands for a reduced, organized, nominalized, and rationalized type of being, whereas “the wilderness” portrays not only the “natural man” and the romanticism surrounding him, but also an active and affirmative way of being, something that Nietzsche calls “saying Yes to the world,” and resisting the temptation to distance itself from the world of senses and being faithful to Nietzsche’s concept of “will to power.” Nietzsche is thus a radical naturalist, to whom “truths are illusions” and there are no facts, only interpretations. This means simply no romantic naturalism or relativism, but being itself is the will to power, a play of forces that “lacks intelligence,” meaning that it operates without resorting to any stable metaphysical notion such as Self, Truth, or God. The will to power is the world; it is its being and happening and happening as being.

First, Nietzsche is a metaphysical anti-realist. He does not believe that there are any independently existent realities, such as the world or a subject “as itself.” This move is aimed at the Enlightenment thinkers seeking to secure grounds for rationality. Immanuel Kant had argued in his *Critique of Pure Reason* that human knowledge can know things as they appear to us, not as they are in themselves (the *noumena*). For Kant, knowledge was guaranteed by the apperceptive unity of the rational mind treating the manifold sensory phenomena. Kant is usually seen, with Descartes, as the modern creator of subjective empiricism. John Milbank sees the whole Kantian philosophy as “sublime aesthetics” in which the boundary of reason yields a positive value, as the boundary itself, the idea of infinity and so on, is the precise ground for any inner moral life. Conor Cunningham sees Kant in this same sense, albeit negatively and from the viewpoint of nihilism:

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19 Hart 2003, 72.
22 WP §372 (1968, 200).
23 See the discussion by Sebold on how it is possible to think that Nietzsche is metaphysically anti-realist but an ontological realist. 2014, esp. 148–194.
24 Kant 2003, 21.
25 Kant 2003, 66–67, 86, 205. It is noteworthy that Kant stresses the unity of our cognitive capacity and compares it to the unity of a story or a play (2003, 67).
For Kant, therefore, any cognitive undertaking points to nothingness, and on two accounts. First, it informs us that what we know is merely appearance. Second, in presenting us with the phenomenal realm it points us towards the noumenal realm as the supersensible substrate. The noumenal is no-thing, in the sense that it lies outside every cognitive or epistemic category. When it comes to judgments of taste, the subject is able to experience this nothingness and so comprehend the nothingness: its phenomenal appearance betrays dis-appearance, for it is beyond every concept yet remains before us, quickening our cognitive faculties. We are, in a sense, able to see noumenality of appearance: to see nothing. In so doing, we participate in our own noumenality while dealing with the phenomenal. This allows us to combine the practical and the theoretical.26

Hart also attributes to the legacy of Kant the “pathology of the modern and postmodern,” meaning that beauty is suspended from its connection with truth, because especially in the sublime sense, the unrepresentable undermines the beautiful as it concretely appears in the beings of the world.27 More generally, it is the “agnosticism” of Kant that provides the notion of the noumenal (although not inserting any positive content to them), which actually makes possible all the regulative, practical orders of human life and thought.28 Thus, in a Milbankian reading, Kant’s whole project was dependent upon an aesthetic guarantee, but could not appear as “beautiful,” but only as sublime, the liminal concept of something unrepresentable in thought or language. Paul Janz has criticized this portrayal of Kant, regarding it as a deliberate misreading of Kant’s original intentions. Janz emphasizes that Kant was not after a method of “pure reason” but precisely criticized it.29 Regarding this study, the matter should, I think, be read in the broader light of Radical Orthodoxy’s tendency to read historical sources strategically.

To Nietzsche, the transcendental reason, as such, is as a construct actually only the extremity of historical deterioration that has been present in Western thought right from the beginning, and was especially fueled by Christianity.30 Such concepts as objective reality and scientific naturalism are, in fact, corrupted notions, which serve only to distance man from the world by explicating either a noumenal or transcendent world beyond it, or an interior world of man himself in moral terms. Thus, for Nietzsche, the realism that either science or Christianity offers is in effect nihilistic:

[In Christianity exists] [c]ompletely imaginary causes (‘God’, ‘soul’, ‘I’, ‘spirit’, ‘free will’ or even an ‘unfree’ one); completely imaginary effects (‘sin’, ‘redemption’, ‘grace’, ‘punishment’, ‘forgiveness of sins’). Contact between imaginary entities (‘God’, ‘spirits’, ‘souls’); an imaginary natural science (anthropocentric; total absence of any concept of natural cause); an imaginary psychology (complete failure to understand oneself,

26 Cunningham 2002, 88.
27 Hart 2003, 51; Hart also attaches to the Cartesian notion of subjectivity a sense of despair, to which the Western gaze succumbed when a former, that is Christian, view of the world as a mirror started to retreat. Hart 2000, 184–185.
28 Milbank 1997, 10–12.
29 Janz 2004, 373ff. Janz also notes that Kant, as a figure in the ideas of history, is often distanced from his actual writings.
30 For Nietzsche’s transcultural influence, see Figl, 2007.
interpretations of pleasant or unpleasant general sensations - for instance, the states of nervus sympatheticus - using the sign language of religious-moral idiosyncrasy, - 'repentance', 'the pangs of conscience', 'temptation by the devil', 'the presence of God'); an imaginary teleology ('the kingdom of God', 'the Last Judgment', 'eternal life'). - This entirely fictitious world can be distinguished from the world of dreams (to the detriment of the former) in that dreams reflect reality while Christianity falsifies, devalues, and negates reality. Once the concept of 'nature' had been invented as a counter to the idea of 'God', 'natural' had to mean 'reprehensible', - that whole fictitious world is rooted in a hatred of the natural (- of reality! -), it is the expression of a profound sense of unease concerning reality ... But this explains everything. Who are the only people motivated to lie their way out of reality? People who suffer from it. But to suffer from reality means that you are a piece of reality that has gone wrong ... The preponderance of feelings of displeasure over feelings of pleasure is the cause of that fictitious morality and religion: but a preponderance like this provides the formula for decadence...

In a sense, the Western history of ideas is, for Nietzsche, a slow process of interiorization, something he himself regards as nihilism, a belief of and about nothing, the non-existent. In the notebooks from his late life, of which some are collected under the title Will to Power, an opus with an unfortunate editorial history32, Nietzsche simply depicts nihilism as a combination of the German terms sinnlos and Werthlos, meaning in general that our age is such that both meaning and value have disappeared. This disappearance is not merely a neutral (or neural) proceeding, but an embargo on higher motifs and values introduced by Christianity. This worthless situation, instantiated by a nihilism that makes an illusionary purchase on the world and man,33 and was inaugurated supremely by Judeo-Christian tradition and “priests,”34 Nietzsche contrasts with the concept of “nature,” meaning something that is the ultimate criterion for any set of values. As Sorgner has pointed out, Nietzsche’s nihilism is itself a construct that can be used positively and negatively, and as an intermediary step, it can lead thinking into creative or deteriorating results.35

Nietzsche expresses his “method” in Beyond Good and Evil: only a genealogical survey of values can evaluate values.36 In Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Nietzsche illustrates his famous concept of “over-man,” a prophecy of a man who can create his own values:

You creators, you higher men! One is pregnant only with one’s own child. Do not let yourselves be misled and spoon-fed! Who after all is your neighbor? And even if you act “for your neighbor” – still you don’t create for him! Unlearn this “for,” you creators; your virtue itself wants that you do nothing “for” and “in order” and “because.”

31 Anti-Christ 15 (hereafter AC, numbers refer to the divisions, page numbers to translations used) (2005,13).
32 See Kaufmann 1968, xiii–xxcvi.
33 Reginster, 2006.
34 AC 43 (2005, 39–40), in which Nietzsche tells us that nihilism is precisely removing life from the center of life; that is, positing something beyond it as supporting, verifying, or corresponding to life.
36 Beyond Good and Evil (hereafter BGE) I (2002, 2); see, for example, AC 16 (2005, 13–14). Yet it is the work of Michel Foucault that actually develops the Nietzschean “method” of reading historical constructs as power-structures. See Foucault 1977, 142–143.
You should plug your ears against these false little words. “For your neighbor” is the virtue of only small people; there they say “birds of a feather” and “one hand washes the other” – they have neither the right nor the strength to your self-interest. In your self-interest, you creators, are the precaution and providence of the pregnant! What no one yet has laid eyes on, the fruit: your whole love shelters and spares and nourishes it. Where your whole love is, with your children, there too your whole virtue is! Your work, your will is your “neighbor” – do not let yourself be spoon-fed any false values!

In *Gay Science*, Nietzsche calls for a “second innocence,” meaning a desirable state in which guilt manufactured by priests and *causa sui* manufactured by philosophers vanishes to the same degree that man is both naturalized and transcended.\(^{38}\) In *Will to Power*, Nietzsche argues that the origin of religion lies itself in the event of power, which is personified as a cause outside the person because of the weakness of the person experiencing it.\(^{39}\) This results in a “bad conscience,” since at the moment there is a metaphysical weakness, which turns into value and starts to control men by interiorizing morally the previously exteriorized event of power. The solution is precisely the “second innocence,” to admit that there are no final causes or teleological meanings, but only Becoming.\(^{40}\)

As Hart remarks, one must here take a step back from Nietzsche’s rhetoric and ask what exactly is meant by nature. Postmodern readings of Nietzsche tend to stress the fact that Nietzsche means primarily a perspective on being that does not yield any stabilized value or center and should be regarded as an example of an “agonistic” worldview, in which strife and combat are the only relevant forces that lurk behind truths, moralities, and facts.\(^{41}\) Especially influential in this regard has been Gilles Deleuze’s reading of Nietzsche, as Hart also acknowledges.\(^{42}\) Significant here is the Deleuzian reading of *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, in which Nietzsche analyzes the *ressentiment*\(^{43}\) as the power that can be turned backwards into a creative one. Deleuze emphasizes Nietzsche’s idea that Christianity has constructed a nihilistic dialectic view of the world, by interiorizing suffering and projecting it onto a god, suppressed hatred by love, and offered all this in a crucified God; “this is truly Christian mania, a


\(^{38}\) *Gay Science* (hereafter GS) preface, 4 (2001, 7). Living according to nature” is for Nietzsche a Stoic illusion, in which naturlality is defined anew (by man, by his morality etc.) Rather, true naturlality seems to be something that cannot be grasped with will to truth, for in that it gets distorted (by setting up *causa prima* and do on. BGE I (2002,9). Nietzsche’s ascetism is always extreme purification, of any previous recollections, as in Zarathustra, always for the future, always for the recurrence of dice-throwing. Will to truth is a pseudo-divine ability in which world is made to its maker’s image (2002,11); hence the purification of man (or, in Zarathustra’s phrase, “surpassing man”) always consists paradoxically of the hyper-innocence (so empty of the will to truth that it even cannon identify itself as innocent) and transparent exclusion of will to power.


\(^{41}\) Hart 2003, 99–100.

\(^{42}\) Deleuze 1986.

\(^{43}\) Nietzsche uses this term to note all the world- and life-hating drives he assumes have taken over and built civilization as we know it. GM I, 10 (2006a, 20). Also, it is precisely the life-hating impulse controlled by “priests,” by holding the “only knowledge of divinity,” that truth as such exists in the first place (“a holy lie”), and thus priests are needed to mediate truth to lower orders of men. WP 139–140 (1967, 88–89).
mania which is already wholly dialectical.\textsuperscript{44} Dionysian power is somewhat opposed to such dialectics; Dionysian power does not refrain from suffering, affirms life in every form, and does not recoil to some subjectivity or a god from the tragic fate and “play” of life.\textsuperscript{45} In the end, Hart notes, Christianity is the most “vulgar and debased” will to power, for it denies power as a default.\textsuperscript{46}

So far, both Nietzsche and Hart seem to read dialecticism as something to be avoided—by power in Nietzsche, and by peace in Hart. Here, Sorgner’s thesis is validated: Hart’s can affirm that the Christian concept of peace might as well be as Nietzsche portrays it; for its purpose is not to overcome its counterpart (whatever that may be) but to surpass dialectics. To put it differently, both accounts in some sense deny the tragic aspect of ultimate truth: Nietzsche affirms it and embraces it, while Hart wishes to distance himself from all perspectives that try to “explain” the tragedy of existence as necessary for God’s goodness to appear, for example.\textsuperscript{47}

Nietzsche’s “second innocence” does not mean that man simply enters or steps back into a natural state (in the sense of Rousseau, for example). As Hart notes, correctly, in the late work of Nietzsche, the world is portrayed as nothing “other than the will to power, a cosmic ‘pathos’ constituted from innumerable quanta of force existing in ‘relations of tension.’”\textsuperscript{48} Hart comments that, in this vision, we have the most basic form of the term “ontology of violence.” Hart also adds that, as such, Nietzsche’s antimetaphysical metaphysics on its own\textsuperscript{49} has evolved into something that Nietzsche’s postmodern disciples have taken perhaps “a too literal reading”\textsuperscript{50} of. Hart argues that the case can be interpreted only as a new (or a very old) metaphysics, or an ironical and fictional characterizations of impasses implicit in Western thought itself. For Hart, the quintessence of Nietzsche’s critique toward Christianity lies in the aesthetic appeal of his narrative, which Hart considers to be as “possible” as the Christian one:

\begin{quote}
Nietzsche’s post-Christian counternarrative […] cannot be denied its power and its appeal, but it should be recognized not simply as critique but as always already another kerygma. Between Nietzsche’s vision of life as an agon and the Christian vision of life as creation – as primordial “gift” and “grace” – there is nothing […] that makes either perspective self-evidently more correct than the other.\textsuperscript{51}
\end{quote}

Hart regards Nietzsche as a veritable nemesis in the “battle of tastes,” and thus he views Nietzsche’s work, at a persuasive level, as matching his own. In fact, as already seen, Hart’s own vision of narrative coincides in many ways with Nietzsche. As he argues, Christianity has accounted for and surpassed Nietzsche’s criticism on the level that matters: by telling a supreme narrative.

\textsuperscript{44} Deleuze 1986, 15; GM 1, 8 (2006\textsuperscript{e}, 18–19).
\textsuperscript{45} Deleuze 1986, 13–14, 25.
\textsuperscript{46} Hart 2003, 102.
\textsuperscript{47} Hart 2005.
\textsuperscript{48} Hart 2003, 101; see, for example, WP 634–635 (1967, 337–339).
\textsuperscript{49} Sorgner 2007.
\textsuperscript{50} Hart 2003, 103.
\textsuperscript{51} Hart 2003, 103, 124.
These differing kerygmas inevitably also have different aesthetic implications. For Nietzsche, everything “profound” or “deep” betrayed an alien impulse from life itself, a thrust made by the weak in order to establish inner values in phenomena and consciousness, to push back the eventuality of the present into logo-centrism and the phenomena of the world into background forms or ideas. Nietzschean anthropology breathes only at the surface, freeing itself from causality or causae primeae, as art that is the antidote for both slave-morality (freedom from guilt and the concept of Self) and will to truth (freedom from the objective ideal of knowledge and thus metaphysics). In this, Hart actually agrees with Nietzsche: the Christian narrative is such that in it, truth, appears “on the surface,” yet it is not a “mere” surface, but it appears always as a creation, as being reveals its analogical distance from the creator and appears therefore as a gift. However, deciding between the aesthetic power of brute force and Christian peace is ultimately a matter of taste; as Hart concludes sardonically: “Nietzsche had atrocious taste.”

Nietzsche’s thought will be explored more later, but at the level of narrative, it represents a veritable counterpart to theology in Hart’s view. Hart sees that “theology owes Nietzsche a debt,” for it is against Nietzsche that theology can recover its own true nature and be reminded of its inherent “strangeness.” Nietzsche helps theology to be theology again, not a subnote in philosophical history or a mere specific form of metaphysics. Hart observes that Nietzschean critique is so accurate and piercing for two reasons: first of all, the Christian “temper” or “mood” is apt to suspect its own principles and place them under scrutiny due its humility. Secondly, he reveals the very historical nature of Christian discourse, with its shortcomings and grandeurs, and the “dogmatical burden” if one is to make equal account of its whole tradition, whether morally or metaphysically. All in all, it is beauty that thus returns to the center of the Christian “warrant” or “evidence” for its truth; and its grammar allows speaking in a manner that offers an alternative to necessitas, necessity, which is the predominant and inescapable feature of purely immanent philosophical models. The idea of necessity of being is tragic, “a myth of cosmos,” for it must resolve beings’ sustainability and birth, life, and death, in the economy of a closed system. Hart writes:

Being, in its totality, is a tragic economy, in some sense a structure of sacrifice in which beings suffer incompleteness and destruction in order that beings may ‘be’. The world and its principles assure one another only through the reciprocal founding of a fulfillment in negation, the completion of finitude in the ultimate mystery of the absolute, and the

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53 Hart 2003, 125.
54 Hart 2003, 126.
55 Hart 2003, 126.
56 Hart 2003, 98. Hart admits that in Nietzsche, this humility is actually the very height of its power, and thus rhetorical appeal can always work both ways.
58 Hart 2003a.
In this condensed passage, Hart ties up his view in which he sees the Christian interruption as being here to “interrupt” or to be an alternative to the idea of a “mere world.” Without a true transcendent moment, the event of the world indeed seems to be left only to chaotic powers obeying only sacrifice, subjugation, and conquest. And as a sacrificial economy, a totality is “a tautology, a practice that justifies itself through further practice.” As we saw in previous chapters, Hart sees dialectics as resulting necessarily from thought that tries to capture Being without a true transcendent analogate and difference. This is what Nietzsche tells him: without such a revelation, Being can only be and appear only as negative, and the absolute can appear only as bad metaphysics, of infinite distance from which there can be only alienation, deferral, and lapsing.

This is a corollary to the view held by Radical Orthodoxy representatives such as John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock. For the former, without a theological analogical correlative and thus a correct concept of infinity, Being is (in modernity) confined only to itself, and an authentic Christian “reading” of Being allows it to be perceived as “fulfillment and preservation of beings in the Being through as an infinitely actual source and realization of all essential possibility.” In Hartian language, this means that “the difference between created beauty and the divine beauty is located ‘in the analogy between the determinate particularities of the world and that always greater, supereminent determinacy in whose splendor they participate.’”

Pickstock argues that modern times have introduced a “spatialized” view of being, and without a proper “vertical” dimension of participation, this ends up in a univocal ontology and thus violence. Both of them argue that the supposed neutrality of modern scientific language (which Nietzsche analyzed as the last abstracted step of Christianity, the abstraction of God into concepts) is in fact a lapsed theology, which has been ripped from its analogous force and the world has now been “desymbolized.” Also, both affirm that Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thought already are “nihilistic” in the sense that the objective ideal of thinking can be regarded as a solipsistic dream of consciousness, and such thinking demands a concept of nothingness in order to control the knowledge act and suppress the object to be “controllable.”

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59 Hart 2003, 129; see 2003, 373.
60 Hart 2003, 394.
61 Milbank 1997, 42.
63 Pickstock 1998, 47–118.
64 Pickstock 1998, 124. Pickstock draws from the common thesis of Radical Orthodoxy that sets Duns Scotus’s claimed univocity of being against Thomistic analogia entis. Horan argues that it is Pickstock who has developed and defended Milbank’s “Scotus Story” as an axiomatic reading that extends to a very particular reading of such major modern figures as Kant and Descartes. Horan 2014, 47, 57, 101.
65 For the whole argument, see Milbank 1999, 32; Pickstock 1998, 101–166.
As Nietzsche observed, as belief in the Christian God waned, that morality and conscience took its place as an authority.\(^{66}\) He adds that authority of reason can also step up to replace the personal authority of God. However, the same grammar remains; even without God there remain the same basic values and language for those values, meaning the whole metaphysical “conceptual fiction” of God without God.\(^{67}\) This results in a new situation in which after God, the guarantee of all meaning has vanished and is replaced by its “extreme” opposite: a belief in nothing, nihilism.\(^{68}\) Therefore, in Nietzsche, post-Enlightenment thought is a rung on the same ladder that introduced Christianity to the ancient world, re-valuing its values while remaining captive to some of the old grammars and meanings.\(^{69}\) In this way, Nietzsche is portrayed by Hart as the seer of transformation, while himself remaining captive to the “battle cry of two clashing paganisms,” taking sides with Heraclitus (while renouncing his dialecticism).\(^{70}\) In the end, the will to power represents, for Hart, a useful reminder, but eventually a false picture of will, of “idiotic will,”\(^{71}\) and at the same time he acknowledges that this does not, in effectu, constitute a counter-argument to Nietzsche, but only points to a completely different mentality of peace in Christ. It is Nietzsche that reminds Christianity to expect violence at the very core of every mundane discourse.

The Nietzschean genealogy mentioned above finds common ethos in the Hartian narrative and those affiliated with Radical Orthodoxy. Their content is surely different, but the logic is the same: modern thinking represents a certain lapse (or rather, a culmination of a longer process). In Nietzsche, the lapse is evident already in Socrates and Plato, but radically propelled by Christianity. In Hart and Milbank, the lapse happens within the theological vision itself, engendering reductionist rationalism, which disables the view of beings as first gifted and creation as a whole as a gift. As John Montag puts it:

The problem for the modern thinker arises in two ways: first, in the lack of appreciation for the relation between God and creation as one of radical giftedness, in which no autonomous stance before God is possible; and, second, in the confusion between nature as inert matter and nature as a proper kind. One thus tends to think of the ‘supernatural’ as ‘unnatural’ in the material sense: as something, opposed to and apart from the self-enclosed manipulable world of matter in which one lives. ‘Supernature’

\(^{66}\) WP 20 (1967, 47). In fact, Nietzsche sees that moralities and religions are the “primary means” to mold human being by molding his values; all this is accomplishable if one has only active and sufficient creative will over a sufficiently long time. WP 144, (1967, 93). Christianity succeeded because it managed to address the “herd,” that is, the lower and submissive majority.

\(^{67}\) GM III, 12 (2006, 121). Nietzsche is arguing that there always remains “a deposit” of the unseen, thus reducing seeing itself to irrationality. This is the folklore of the Self for Nietzsche: there are great passive forces that, through resentment, have valued the spirit and set it as orientating force of the strong impulses (Christian “pity” etc.). These forces, in turn, demand for their upholding such concepts, such “changelings” as subjects or atoms, that guarantee these values. Hence, Christian values are embedded into culture and thought in a way that can detach itself from its transcendental claims and yet remain even more powerful. GM 1, 13 (2006, 44–46).

\(^{68}\) WP, 55, (1967, 35).

\(^{69}\) BGE III,46 (2002, 44–45.)

\(^{70}\) Hart 2003, 39.

\(^{71}\) Hart 2003, 102.
The discussion of the concepts supernatural and natural naturally belongs to theme that was paramount in the work of Henri de Lubac, a representative of the nouvelle théologie movement and the teacher of John Milbank. For it was de Lubac who argued that theology had made a miserable turn when adducing into itself a concept of “pure nature” (natura pura). Milbank argues that it was de Lubac who made grace (the relation between grace and nature was a supereminent form of the relation between natural and supernatural) the teleological cause of the world.

Hence at a narrative level, the apparatus of the supernatural and natural are used as rhetorical arguments toward a certain grand narrative, which obeys a dramatic logic: the shortcomings can be conquered only by retrieving what is “original” and re-narrating it. But as pointed out previously, one cannot re-value all values without also transforming language. Next, therefore, I will explore the Nietzschean concept of the ontogenesis of language and how Hart and Milbank suggest theology should answer it in order to appear as “theoria.”

### 3.2 LANGUAGE, CHRIST, AND VALUES

As Hart notes, Nietzsche actually has a rather positive opinion of Christ: in a sense, Christ represents a precursor who will overturn the tables of antique metaphysics by affirming life (by “evangelical practice”) over truth or Socratic dialectics. For Christ did not enter the world to negate the world, but to pity it (according to Nietzsche), and thereby substituted dialectics with the (usually unspoken) rhetoric of love. In this, Christ is the ultimately innocent revolutionary:

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72 Montag 1999, 46.

73 Milbank 2005, 26; Mulcahy views the adaptation of de Lubac’s thesis by Radical Orthodoxy as its “latest flowering.” 2011, 189–190, 196.


75 Hart 2003, 65–66; AC 33 (2005, 31). This turn is heavily emphasized in the readings of the so-called neo-Nietzscheans, for it allows the continental tradition to criticize the Hegelian trends of thought popular at the time; hence Nietzsche, although hardly in the quoted passage, is usually vindicated, as Hart notes, as the “hero of the anti-dialectical and purely positive.” Hart 2003, 40, n. 4. Here, one is reminded of Wittgenstein, who pondered the Socratic tendency of doing philosophy: instead of “letting” the language “do” itself, letting it act and proceed in a concrete situation, Socrates pried into the discourse in order to know all possible variations of its uses, thereby reconstructing meaning into it. As in later Wittgenstein, in Christian theology, it seems that of highest importance is to see its own language in act, thus displaying also its logic, and not theorize about it and, by doing so, turn it into something that a Nietzschean thinker can pick out as an example of ressentiment toward life itself.
he spoke “only about what was inside him most deeply: ‘life’ or ‘truth’ or ‘light’ are his words for the innermost, he saw everything else, the whole of reality, the whole of nature, language itself, as having value only as a sign, a parable.”

But although Christ, according to Nietzsche, “opposed commonplace life,” he did so through “real life.” Christ seems, to Nietzsche, to be oblivious of supernatural deviation, which is how Paul interpreted Christ’s “meaning.” Christ is a figure who does not yet care for power authentically: he wishes to utilize, to interpret language, nature, and reality only as the material for parables and metaphorical allusions to “the innermost.” This evangelical essence of Christ is, for Nietzsche, Christ’s proclamation of the Kingdom of Heaven in the heart, for which he cannot find any suitable formulas or forms from the Judaic tradition. Thus, Christ appears as a twisted twin to Dionysius: Christ will not resort to any metaphysical truths in order to explicate his pure inwardness, his “feeling of being deified,” that is, this feeling and kingdom are still situated within the heart, not in the “other world.” To Nietzsche, Christ still represents a stage at which the inner is not transcendent.

The greatest “forgery” of the Christian life happens with Paul and the birth of the church. This “forgery” appears mainly as an act of “distancing,” by turning Christ into Christianity: Christ becomes a theologian, a Son of God. This overturning resorts to nihilism, which is nothing other than situating true life somewhere else, behind metaphysical barriers that can be climbed only when the whole structure is interiorized, sentimentalized, and thus established as the language of the Christian “reality” where being a Christian becomes an act of faith (faith is a sort of double illusion: it reflects the “stature” of a Christian life, which is only expected at the expense of this world, which it regards as “a monster”). Hence faith reveals, according to Nietzsche, why Christianity is nihilism par excellence. True life becomes distanced from immediate life itself, made to fit into an interpretive moral calculus and de-valued by valuing it anew. Hence the innocence of Christ is transvalued into “the criterion of value,” characterized by the figure of the Christian priest, whose basic dynamism operates on passive and reactionary elements of ressentiment of everything that is noble, healthy,
and affirming. Historically, one crucial moment extends this priestly and ascetic rule further away from the world of senses: the Reformation.

When priestly ressentiment takes over, a lot of preliminary transvaluations have already taken place. As mentioned, the most important transvaluation is achieved at the level of “culture,” namely language, through which every “meaning,” “truth,” and “sense” is impregnated to the very kernel of human thought, practice, and theoria.

So far, Hart and Nietzsche seem to cover much of the same ground regarding Christ’s strangeness. But it is precisely this strangeness that eventually diverges the two: for Hart, Christ is no “beautiful soul” who merely dreams of otherworldly ideas or sets up practices, but who is most of all “a form.” Moreover, Christ’s particular form, as incarnated as God in history, holds no secret idea or eternal “content” that can get corrupted (although the Church’s “living up” to this form in history is certainly debatable). Furthermore, the Christ-form is also manifest in the creation, as it analogically mirrors the infinite Godhead.

What, then, Nietzsche eventually declines is the Church and the possibility of holding a positive notion of creation: he analyzes the concept of Church via power, not the Christ-form. He also dismisses the ecclesiological necessity that makes Christian praxis appear in the first place, for as John Milbank says, “the life of a Christian is dramatically played out in a narrative sense if only it is ecclesiologically mediated [in order] to finally allow the analogia entis and the analogia Christi to come together.”

For Hart, Christ emerges as persuasion of all persuasion, not as a king of “facts.” Christ can oppose the world of dialectical rhetoric by appealing precisely on his aesthetic surface, that is, the beautiful. This is the way in which Hart can escape the Nietzschean accusations that the peace of Christ is only a veiled will to power; in the form of a suffering servant, Christ shows his very divinity as “hidden in plain sight.” Rather, Christ actually performs an overcoming of something that Nietzsche would call will to truth, the degenerated truth-seeking that has established its findings already beforehand; hence this will to truth, in its clinging to dialectics, must crucify

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83 AC 46 (2005, 44).
84 Ecce Homo (hereafter EC), “Wagner Case” 2, (2005, 139–141). Luther represents, for Nietzsche, a revolutionary who appeared at the worst time possible; in the flourishing Renaissance, when the nobler motifs of humanity were starting to blossom, Luther came and revitalized the church and steered it into stricter psychological moralism and, on the other hand, “found a way back to the old lie,” namely that truth should be identified with the “ideal.” John Betz argues that Nietzsche actually represents a “Promethean Lutheranism,” in which the Will has replaced the link of the subject to eternal Logos. Betz 2015, 390.
85 Hart 2003, 320. The reference is to Hegel and his critique of Jacobi. In Hegel, “the beautiful soul” is self-consciousness, which “It lives in dread of staining the radiance of its inner being by action and existence. And to preserve the purity of its heart, it flees from contact with actuality, and steadfastly perseveres in a state of self-willed impotence to renounce a self which is pared away to the last point of abstraction, and to give itself substantial existence, or, in other words, to transform its thought into being, and commit itself to absolute distinction [that between thought and being]. The hollow object, which it produces, now fills it, therefore, with the feeling of emptiness. Its activity consists in yearning, which merely loses itself in becoming an unsubstantial shadowy object, and, rising above this loss and falling back on itself, finds itself merely as lost. In this transparent purity of its moments it becomes a sorrow-laden ‘beautiful soul,’ as it is called; its light dims and dies within it, and it vanishes as a shapeless vapor dissolving into thin air.” Hegel 1984, §658. For Hegel and Jacobi, see Speight 2001, 113–115.
87 Milbank 1997, 29.
88 Hart 2003, 331; whereas the Nietzschean view of the same Beautiful represented precisely a veiled will to power. See Betz 2015, 390.
the truth of Christ’s rhetoric, must resist it. So, the Christian interruption in this sense consists of the openly rhetorical nature of Christ’s rhetorical appeal, not its signatum of higher truths.

But as noted, if there is a revolutionary element in Christianity, it must have also been able to re-value all previous values. To Hart, Christ does just that with what was said above. But what about Nietzsche?

First, the transvaluation of the values of Antiquity must have begun by conquering language, the central power node of communication, dispensation, and “valuing” knowledge as “information,” “truth,” or abstractly as “logic.” In an early essay, “Of Truth and Falsity on Extra-Moral Sense,” Nietzsche ponders the genesis of language. To him, the impulse to truth stems from the need for some social peace (to Nietzsche, the competing polises of Greece both exemplified a noble life-form and brought about the deterioration of the virtues of such a form). Antiquity seemed to represent an immediate adaptation of an ideal existence in a social sphere, where the values of war and strife were not contemplated “away” into values but rather taken as the “natural course of events,” and therefore the elements of truth are always connected with elements of self-preservation. Language is the product of this identification, and simultaneously the birth of language inevitably also brings about a primal “forgetting” of this link; it gets buried and ossified into language as presuppositions and as a secret telos of language itself. Forgetting also enables the construction of ideas, by making humans believe they “possess the truth” in the ability to create illusory semblances between similar cases (the birth of “logic”) and to forget the differences between particular cases.

So, truth is ultimately

[a] mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms: in short a sum of human relations which became poetically and rhetorically intensified, metamorphoses, adorned, and after long usage to a nation fixed, canonic and binding; truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they are illusions; worn-out metaphors which have become powerless to affect the senses; coins which have their obverse effaced and now are no longer account of account as coins but merely as metal.

Language is the primeval event that detaches, by construal of culture, humans from the world of senses and establishes subjectivities that operate on the economical distributions of meanings. Or as Nietzsche describes it, language is an epiphenomenon of will, clashing and forming values in history:

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89 Hart 2003, 332.
90 Nietzsche 1911, 177.
91 This story of linguistic genesis have striking similarities with Ricouer’s theory of the essence of metaphor, and actually Ricouer speculates (in agreement with Gadamer) whether the whole language is begotten by metaphorical act. See Ricouer 1977, 24. One could extrapolate this and argue that in the beginning there was Word, a metaphor, which gives birth to the capacity for language and languages without a logocentric “reminder,” only the trace of givenness, which can be recognized in the ability to speak and conceptualize.
92 Nietzsche 1911, 180.
Moralities and religions are the principal means by which one can make whatever one wishes out of man, provided one possesses a superfluity of creative forces and can assert one's will over long periods of time – in the form of legislation, religions, and customs.  

Dialectics and ideas are necessary dynamics and units of this safety-net that distort and confine the state of becoming into and within beings. In time, this “rhetorically intensified” and “culturally confined” prison gets valued morally, which reaches its peak with Christianity, with its interiorized truths, and thus completes the forgetting of man himself as creator, reducing him merely to a passive subject that merely experiences and knows. The supposed representative quality of language is actually the most vicious scheme that language eschews: it gives rise to a subjectivity that thinks in a way of forgetting, and constitutes itself as a passive neural unity, which is bombarded by phenomena that, in turn, are buried more deeply in language in the guise of the “names” of these phenomena.

More importantly, Christian subversion of language actually construes an additional artificial surface upon the reality of the world; for Nietzsche, Christianity means “a thoroughly thought-out method of psychological counterfeiting,” in which it “stays everywhere on the surface, as signs, gestures, words to which it gives an arbitrary meaning.” In this forgetting, re-naming as re-valuation, the priestly type has taken over: it establishes itself as the visible form of language, as the necessary mediatory power between God and man, by arguing that there are truths “between” man and God. Here, again, Nietzsche and Hart shake hands: Christianity’s truth lies upon the surface of being. Both acknowledge that interpretation consists of reading the surface; in this reading, the only (in the end, aesthetic) difference is how one chooses to understand “the depths” and their relation to this surface.

In Hart’s view, again in agreement with Milbank, Christianity did indeed assume much of Platonic language, but did so by no means uncritically nor uncreatively. The theme of the “Hellenization” of early Christianity is not treated exhaustively by either one, but only as sufficient for narrative ends. Basically, this transformation is based upon the move and journey that Christian theology made into the heart of Neoplatonism and its conceptions: by positing all the attributes of Good, Truth, and Beauty into the Godhead and dispelling the “bad infinity,” the unresolvable tension between the One and its emanations and all the simulacra, and transplanting One with the inner circumincession between the three persons of the Trinity, Christian theology could express the ontological difference via analogical concepts to the aforementioned classical concepts of Beauty, Truth, and Good. Therefore, it is precisely with Christ that theology can claim simultaneously to give birth to new language; a new discourse that the old wineskins cannot possibly contain and must thus burst. The actual development as seen by Hart is this: Christianity is not another metaphysical system

93 WP 144 (1967, 93).
94 Nietzsche 1911, 184.
95 WP 394 (1967, 212).
96 WP 1.140 (1967, 89). In this analysis, Nietzsche seems like a thinker of his time: striving in every sense to free himself from everything “mediatory,” even of himself as a self. But naturally this is not Nietzsche’s point: he only wants to explain that the birth of the will to truth is congeneric to that of language.
97 Milbank 2006, 297.
just replacing and inhabiting the already “spoiled language”; Christ, the rhetorical act *par excellence* by the infinite God, turns the metaphysical systems of Antiquity upside down by positing in Christ the analogical moment in the discourse of the world and God. This moment is, in Nietzschean terms, a transvaluation of Platonic and Neoplatonic language:

[…] one approaches Plato’s realm of the forms through abstraction from the world of particularity and difference, but something had fundamentally changed by the time Christian theologians began to identify their absolute with the infinite, to equate goodness, truth and beauty with the whole of being itself, and to introduce into their understanding of the Godhead the language of relation, responsiveness and creativity. Whether or not the “Platonism” patristic theology found congenial to its aims had already begun to unburden itself of the Platonic χωρισμός and to exorcise from itself the specter of a “bad infinity”, Christian thought, insofar as it appropriated a Neoplatonic morphology of being, transformed it in accord with its own narrative; what remained then was a formidable collection of concepts and terms, now integrated into a more generous scheme of signification and rendered analogous by another, radically more transcendent analogate.99

Here, we meet again the linguistic-ontological side of Hart’s vision of what it meant when Christianity “interrupted” the pagan world: the “bad metaphysics,” meaning the difference between materiality and ideality understood as an unsurpassable gulf, a negative distance, gets actually turned into fruitful mediation via analogy by assigning the classic transcendentental to the being itself and equating the absolute with the infinity of God. Thus, Christ in his Trinitarian being and as God-man incarnate is the new “form” of language that radically draws the former participatory Platonic model of being and the Neoplatonic emanations or gradations of beings into imparted analogies, enjoying the authentic difference of being. Being is no longer confined to its “source,” for creaturely beings can claim no self-sufficiency and no share in Being by their own right; rather, they are expressions of “divine delight,” which makes them appear as beings already differentiated.

Christianity is, for Nietzsche and for Hart, an urge and need to recast “every form of metaphysical reasoning.”100 They differ only in their genealogies: although Nietzsche was not interested in the birth of language itself, but rather in its effects and the powers that have set it forth, for him language seems to be the gateway to otherworldliness (“nihilism”). It is a catalyst to the impulses that it enables at the first place: the abandonment of this world for the sake of the other, negating Self as the triumph of this negation (“the ascetical illusion”), and the whole structure of the impulses of the spirit of *ressentiment*, which assumes the role of the grammar of existence and a non-affirmative interpretation of life101. This grammar is what

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99 Hart 2003, 104. Christian theology and aesthetics suggest that even in the eschaton, although often portrayed negatively concerning particularity, as Hans Urs von Balthasar explains, there is no negation of the particular in favor of some abstract universality. See GOL III, 138.

100 Hart 2003, 105.

101 Milbank has pointed out that the “noble naturality” that Nietzsche propagates, the warrior-tribes and its heroes, are as much a culturally constructed metaphor as the ones he presents as endorsed by his opponents. Milbank 2006, 288–9. Hart agrees completely here with Milbank, even if only to point out that there is “nothing new under the sun” in the field of pagan criticism.
is at stake here when comparing the difference in ethos between Nietzsche and his vision of Christianity. While admitting that Christianity has at times resorted to over-emphasized interpretations of negation of the world as such, Hart summarizes:

\[\text{[i]t was also into this crepuscular world of transcendental longings, of a pagan order grown weary of the burden of itself, that the Christian faith came as an evan...}\]

It is ironic that Nietzsche himself interprets the Pauline distortion of Christianity as a recourse to paganism, its mystery cult tradition.\(^\text{103}\) In short, according to Hart, Nietzsche burns down a spiritualized straw man in order to dance around the fire with Dionysian torpor. Neither is it plausible for Hart to treat Christ’s death as ultimately a repudiation of life, but rather the opposite: the narrational choice must be made between the violent and lonesome vintages of Dionysus and the agapic and communal wine of the “oino-theology” of Christian discourse, as somewhat humorously coined by Hart.\(^\text{104}\)

Personally, it seems to me that the analysis of language offers even more to the treatment of the parting of the ways between the pagan and Christian historical epochs. More importantly, postmodern followers of Nietzsche often operate on linguistics, textualities, and dissolving the myths of presumed onto-theology: these include concepts such as a deistic or theistic God, human consciousness, and otherness. Even at risk of being guilty of over-generalization, it is symptomatic of “the postmodern condition” that language (be it either spoken or written) is the surface of and from which subjectivity emerges and possibly fades into, where the surges of intensifications and laxations of forces become visible; in short, where, aesthetically speaking, seeing becomes possible. Knowledge, perception, and thought are indissolubly linked to and by language, even if one tries to grasp or detach this link by implying a non-foundational archi-ecriture\(^\text{105}\) of some kind. Here, Nietzsche is undoubtedly right when he asserts that a whole narration depends upon its optic possibilities: it can govern only the values that it lets through to be seen.

Actually, language seems to be the only place where the postmodern attempts can possibly be tried: only in language interpretations can they achieve their full potential as revealing something more interior, something more original, something more explanatory or persuasive; a desiderable moment that eventuates the “correct” or “unveiled” reading of the material at hand (one can substitute any chosen concept for this moment, but one cannot deny that this choice is made on aesthetic grounds or,


\(^{103}\) WP 167, 100.


\(^{105}\) The Derridean concept of “arche-writing,” which is present only as a trace in speech and writing alike, the constant referral and deferral act of meaning, the pharmakon that threatens the lexus of established semiologies. See Derrida 1997, 43
more appropriately, that it is a choice of how to interpret the birth of language).\textsuperscript{106} As Nietzsche laments in his \textit{Twilight of Idols}: “Reason in language: oh, what a deceptive old woman this is! I am afraid that we have not got rid of God because we still have faith in grammar…”\textsuperscript{107}

Postmodern neo-Nietzscheans have certainly preserved this faith in grammar: for it serves as the vessel for any theoretical outpouring of critical textual assessment. In language, the pursuit of a non-teleological and an-archic sublime can trample freely. Theology must not take the postmodern stance lightly, neither can it disregard the Nietzschean challenge. At the same time, it cannot simply “dive upwards” from its own tradition in order to traverse the surface of (con)textual diversities, meanings, and aleatory points; it must have a view of language of its own, and this view cannot be anything but the revelation of Logos itself, as Hart reminds us. It is therefore necessary for Hart, although he does not explicitly point it out, to proceed from doctrinal identity toward postmodern theories, not vice versa: “postmodern theology” as a concept already suggests a different kind of succumbing to a “new Enlightenment,” a new point of reduction, which does not allow narratives to speak freely and without interruption. Again, if we are to understand how Christianity actually replaced Antiquity, and succeeded in transcending it in such a manner that it gradually assumed the place of a “new reality,” we must follow Nietzsche insofar as his critique goes: the re-valuing of all values (I will treat it here as re-naming, for it seems to be applicable to the primary importance I give language in this study).

So, I will argue, scrutinizing Nietzsche’s analysis of language will constitute an indispensable moment (before allowing the narrative to develop further, into different metaphysical or anti-metaphysical levels) of distinguishing and marking what Christian theology actually transposed into a new key means. Furthermore, as was shown in Chapter 2.3, the concept of language constantly resurfaces as a formative layer through which different metaphysical views also emerge.

3.2.1 Nietzsche’s anti-realistic language and Hart’s realism

Language is, for Nietzsche, simultaneously an indispensable “method” of civilization (\textit{contra} culture, which gets romanticized in a very dialectical manner) and a veiling skin of human societies that “hides more than it reveals”; here the “skin” reveals much to a keen philosopher’s eye, for every culture displays its shortcomings, and its collective forgetting in its moral values (i.e. in its “effects”):

\begin{quote}
“the causal instinct”, the need for causality: So the causal instinct is conditioned and excited by feelings of fear. Whenever possible, the question ‘why?’ won’t point to thecause as such, but instead will point to a particular type of cause - a reassuring, comforting cause. The first consequence of this need is that causation gets attributed to something we are already familiar with, something we have already encountered and registered in memory. This forecloses the possibility that anything novel, alien,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{106}Telling a story must begin somewhere, and the beginning cannot exist without some kind of dialectical stance; hence every story must contain metaphysics: difference as the key concept will not dissolve this need one bit.

or previously unencountered can be a cause. So we are not looking for just any type of explanatory cause, we are looking for a chosen, preferred type of explanation, one that will most quickly and reliably get rid of the feeling of unfamiliarity and novelty, the feeling that we are dealing with something we have never encountered before, the most common explanation. Result: a certain type of causal attribution becomes increasingly prevalent, gets concentrated into a system, and finally emerges as dominant, which is to say it completely rules out other causes and explanations. - The banker thinks immediately of his ‘business’, the Christian of ‘sin’, the girl of her love.108

Here, language is treated as an artificial edifice that serves only to generalize, to suppress the extraordinary into mediocre, communicable things.109 At the same time, language represents a certain will to truth, an illusion that truth accompanies lingual representation, in this way forming the first stage of scientific reasoning.110 This is the reason why Nietzsche prefers solitude and silence, and repeatedly deems himself (and his Zarathustra) worthy only of retreating from company and waiting for the right time. Talking, researching, and discussing are simply the tasks of mediocre spirits, for even new innovations within this mediocrity (from this springs Nietzsche’s constant lament of the deterioration of his contemporaneous German culture111) are, by definition, echoed conceptual illusions.

As I explained earlier, Nietzsche certainly does not hold any romantic “back to nature” sentimentalism, but he wishes “to naturalize” everything, meaning that he wishes to unleash reality and the “world” from the fetters of false grammar, to unleash this world as the only world, and the senses as the media that morality and such power-expressions of the weak have left untouched and unspoiled. For Nietzsche, there is no possibility of discussion or communion; they are already “acts” that betray their slavery to the lowest common denominator.

Nature, as Nietzsche states, is superabundant reality, not a substructure or a concept. Nature merely appears as it is, it succumbs (or it should not) to no representational interval, it is indifferent (does not hold any values), “it agitates mind but is noble of origin.”112 It is “true” insofar as it is genealogically noble. Nature is also literally forceful; in this, no romantic sense of sublimity is meant, but the whole reality consists of competing forces, which dance and dissemble according to the figure of Dionysus, totally void of any backfiring referral to transcendent values or concepts. In short, it can be said that the Nietzschean true world is one of no friction at all — there are simply no points in time or consciousness that can be appropriately reified, objectified, coded, decoded, and so far.113 As Heidegger points out, the Becoming that Nietzsche preferred is not a feature or an attribute of Being, but for him it was “the peak of mediation,”

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110 Nietzsche 1984, §11 (18–19).
113 The talk of friction is naturally an allusion to Wittgenstein, to whom a language that solves all problems is like the downhill, everything goes smoothly without friction, without everyday life, but it is impossible to walk upon such a surface.
to “stamp Becoming with Being”\textsuperscript{114} and thus (for Heidegger) brought forth the hidden “genuine driving force” of Western thought.\textsuperscript{115}

Nature and life can be described or “seized” only in a decadent and posthumous sense, in language; and because language is the construction that reflects the most immediate needs (and the \textit{act of language} represents the generalizations of these needs), therefore choosing the language is also the cornerstone of one’s table of values.\textsuperscript{116} Language consists, therefore, of compressed signs, which can no longer sustain the primordial “comedy of existence”; it must carry meanings over Lethe.\textsuperscript{117} In short, language is the womb for all “oughts” and “musts,” for they are mere prolongations of a self-consciousness that strives toward self-preservation and thinks of itself as a stable unity or a “self”; but consciousness is only the worst part and the surface of thinking, for it takes place only in symbols, namely, language.\textsuperscript{118}

Language is, as Klossowski aptly notes, the symptom of the organic world infecting the inorganic world.\textsuperscript{119} It is “the human condition” that Nietzsche fights, almost to a degree that one is tempted to interpret this as Nietzsche’s version of original sin. In an organic world, and in their most intensified sense in culture, these signs operate on the repetitive act of comparison between phenomena, thus recognizing and creating logic and illusory continuities such as causality, consecutiveness, seriality, and so on. Culture is a system of domination that is therefore based upon the fear of error; and so culture cannot actually live without this terror, without its truth as a lie.\textsuperscript{120}

At this point, it is possible to construct a small chart of what the constitution of language actually amounts to in Nietzsche’s thought:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{114} WP 617 (1967, 330).
  \item \textsuperscript{115} Heidegger 1979, 19.
  \item \textsuperscript{116} BGE, IX, 259, 268 (2002, 152–153, 163–164).
  \item \textsuperscript{117} BGE, IX, 269 (2002, 165–165); in WP, Nietzsche says that the origin of all religions is the strongest impulse that weak men fail to attribute to themselves, and thereby they find their cause in transcendent entities. WP 1.135, (1967, 86).
  \item \textsuperscript{118} GS V, (2001, 354).
  \item \textsuperscript{119} Klossowski 1997, 45.
  \item \textsuperscript{120} WP 493 (1967, 272).
\end{itemize}
Table 1. What happens after the establishment of language in Nietzsche’s thought?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LANGUAGE</th>
<th>SILENCE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CIVILIZATION</td>
<td>CULTURE/SOLITUDE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HERD</td>
<td>PHILOSOPHER</td>
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<tr>
<td>DIMINISHING FORCE</td>
<td>ASCENDING, CREATIVE FORCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MULTIPLE INDIVIDUALS</td>
<td>ETERNAL RETURN OF THE SAME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MULTIPLE SUBJECTS/SELFs</td>
<td>MULTIPLE IDENTITIES</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRESERVATION</td>
<td>EMERGENCE, EVER-MORE</td>
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<tr>
<td>MORALITY</td>
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<tr>
<td>REPRESENTATION</td>
<td>WILL TO POWER, BECOMING</td>
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<tr>
<td>WILL TO TRUTH</td>
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<tr>
<td>CONSCIOUSNESS</td>
<td>PHENOMENALISM</td>
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<tr>
<td>FOLK METAPHYSICS</td>
<td>PERSPECTIVISM</td>
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<tr>
<td>(SUBJECT + OBJECT)</td>
<td>ETERNAL RECURRENCE</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESSENCE</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

This “taking over language” is a ruse of Christianity in Western thought; it marks the boundaries, the “rules of the game” instead of accepting the free “cast of dice and willing the outcome.” The playful child that Nietzsche portrays in Zarathustra is still threatened by the presence of the great dragon of values, which has scattered values everywhere along the notions, such as being-in-itself—in short, in all “things.” It is obvious to note that things on the left side will be interpreted easily as negative if one adopts the Nietzschean (and Neo-Nietzschean) perspective of power as one’s

121 For example, superstition is, for Nietzsche, preferable to faith, for the supporters of faith “have determined the linguistic usage” and given superstition a bad name.” GS I (2001, 23); WP 707 (1967, 375–376). See Klossowski 1997, 8, 12–13.
ultimate criterion. But if one adopts the Hartian method of re-narrating or “naming” those concepts, and one employs ontological peace as the ultimate criterion, things do not appear so gloomy; rather, it is the revolutionary right side of the table that naively supposes that killing God and destroying his remains will somehow free the underlying power to find freer forms or display a more original chaotic metaphysics of a Dionysian flavor.

For Nietzsche, the remains of the killed God lie primarily in morality. Morality is the utmost expression of preservation, for it imposes upon man the knowledge of supreme values, relinquishes his anguish over meaningless existence (which amounts to nihilism, in Nietzsche’s thought), and “cultivates” within itself a drive for “truthfulness,” which eventually leads to its own demise. Hence Christianity overcame, by morality, the initial nihilism that can be said to have ensued from language itself; Christianity distanced itself from language through a new language, and these layers of linguistic cover are heaped up in Western thought like carcasses of metaphysical entities.

Klossowski identifies Nietzsche’s project precisely to begin as destruction of the amalgamate between Christianity and morality, and only by this destruction “thought can be said to breathe freely.” Or, as Nietzsche himself puts it:

_Here no terms are permissible: here one has to eradicate, annihilate, wage war; everywhere the Christian-nihilistic value standard still has to pulled up and fought under every mask [...]._—Nietzsche

These masks rest and gain their being only in language, if we are to stay faithful to the totality of Nietzsche’s thought. Hence this destruction demands the re-naming of things: “But let us also not forget that in the long run it is enough to create new names and valuations and appearances of truth in order to create new ‘things’.” Or, in _Will to Power_, Nietzsche attests that it is the task for “us immoralists” to create world again according to “our image.” Heidegger insists that will to power should (with the doctrine of eternal recurrence) itself be regarded as re-valuing act of all values.

As Claudia Crawford sums up, Nietzsche does not believe in the correspondence of language with the world, nor in communal agreement to “tie” different things to different words. He believes only in the appearance of the world and saying yes to it.

If we are to follow Nietzsche and sustain his argument that the gathering Logos, the grammar of the world and the world as grammar, is to be destroyed, we can trace this tendency to outreach also the thought of Derrida and Deleuze. Hart also agrees with this basic thesis: “as Celsus understood, Christianity did indeed subvert the language of the noble virtue, especially insofar as the latter presupposed the necessity

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122 WP 1 (1967, 10). Nietzsche’s thesis is that when morality failed to suppress the “will to truth” or meaning altogether, Christianity resorted to the other-worldly meaning; a _placebo_ meaning that would make room for will to truth (and later on, science) and make it endurable. See WP 12, (1967, 13).

123 Klossowski 1997, 8.


126 WP 116 (1967, 71).

127 Heidegger 1979, 18ff.

of strife and honored strength for its own sake.” The re-valuation is always an act of re-naming. And re-naming can be treated, as Hart does, only as a cultural event of preference between stories; or, as Heidegger suggested, the destruction and re-valuing of values in order to bring the question of Being itself to light in a new way.

Hart also approaches this topic when considering creation as the “language of Christianity.” What, then, is Christian re-naming, and what does it consist of?

From this perspective, it can be affirmed that, to Nietzsche’s anti-realism, Hart answers with realism. Redemption and recapitulation are possible because Logos is the source, place, and end of all worldly logoi. Christ’s deeds constitute semiosis, which restores the original language of the world. His miracles are not tricks, but sudden bursts of divine transparent rhetoric; not interruptions of the “natural” course of things, but continuities within his being as Christ of God. Christ as reality is a "root metaphor" in the sense of Paul Ricouer; Christ is not the “beautiful soul” intended by Romantic hermeneutics, which reveals the “intention of the author”, but rather the "world of the work in question." Christ is an infinite thickness of rhetorical deposits, whose inexhaustibleness concurs with his being.

Furthermore, Christ’s resurrection is the halt and “an aporia” to the pagan language of power, thus marking a sudden and entire new way of “telling the story of the world” and bringing about the truth of Christ from hiddenness to the surface. It is precisely the fact—if only one holds a proper vision of analogia entis, the very display of particular beings that need not resolve as themselves or a comprehensive account of their becoming—that beings just peacefully “are,” which is the ultimate truth of the difference between beings and Being. Hart therefore suggests that we should not read Nietzsche as Heidegger does, as constantly denouncing “the flee into religious” as a means of resolving the difficult questions of Being, but rather look where Nietzsche himself looked: into the surface, where the Christian view of being is constantly openly displayed in the rhetoric of creation, Christologically interpreted and analogically conceived: the Beauty of the Infinite.

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130 Hart 2003, 117: “Nietzsche is engaged principally in identifying an aesthetic disposition, a critical vantage, from which to wage a war of stories”.
131 Heidegger 1979, 20. It is in his analysis of Nietzsche that Heidegger famously proclaims that Christianity has no philosophy, because it cannot think Being and beings because those are already given in theology beforehand. So in this sense, Heidegger and Hart both employ the same narrative logic: philosophy/theology should proceed only from within its own concepts. The difference lies precisely in that where, in Heidegger, the question on being is negatively given and should be allowed to re-emerge as a question, in Hart the question of Being is not a given, but a gift.
132 Hart 2003, 327.
133 Hart 2003, 328.
136 Heidegger 1979, 22.
God is, so to speak, infinite discourse, full of the perfect utterance of his Word and the limitless variety of the Spirit’s ‘reply’. Here, in the most elementary terms, is Christian metaphysics: God speaks God, and creation occurs within that speaking, as a rhetorical embellishment, a needless ornament.  

Again, a very particular version of “correspondence” is brought into play. Creation (perceived as such) and its “book of nature” is not a text of rational correspondence either of ideas or as a link of verifiable truth between nature and language, but only a doxology, without any inner necessity. There is no information to be gathered here theologically, only a response. The language of creation is a mediating discourse, which enables the interval of proper response, by “expressing” the gift of creation, and within this gift, it holds immediate presence at bay (which can be seen to appear in eschatology, where “God is all in all”); the language of creation thus serves theology against any simplistic Derridean accusations of logocentrism.

Again, analogy helps to clarify how we should conceive creation’s language and its surface:

what is first expressible in creation is the analogical interval between God and the creature, inasmuch as its rhetorical surfeit expresses the delight and freedom of that God is. Creation’s words are analogous to God’s eternal utterance of himself because in their restless dynamisms of essence and exposition, or content and expression, they reflect under the form of a finite and complex synthesis the perfect and simple convertibility in God’s essence and expression, ousia and perichoresis.

Here, we can finally see what the difference is between Hart’s and Nietzsche’s concepts of surface. Hart views creation not as a display of power, but as a reflection of absolute simplicity of God. This view, which holds seemingly contradictory terms together—the difference in the unity of God and the difference in multiplicity in creation—is solved by the “form” of the beautiful, which can reflect in “complexity” the simplicity of God in its being. Therefore, it is the form that is crucial here; not just an aesthetic subjective experience, but an encounter with how beings beautifully are. It serves as a category in a formal sense, too. It is the “surface” that, in Nietzsche, spreads out as “life,” as colliding (and also ever re-currring) events, from which all interpretations are interpretations of power (and, as such, are not “real”), while Hart’s Christian realism wishes to interpret these events as a peaceful donation of difference.

137 Hart 2003, 291.
138 Hart 2003, 292; cf. Derrida 1981, 5, 48, 76–77. Derrida feels that for the medieval mind (his example), the “book of God” offered “an absolute adequation of presence and representation” of created things that preceded the finite knowledge of them. 1981, 44. Hart would say that it is precisely the absoluteness of Derrida’s vision that is wrong and should be replaced with analogy.
139 Hart 2003, 294. In von Balthasar, we also encounter the idea that in faith, man discovers himself to be “the expression of the triune life,” and this realization and striving towards it is what makes the image of God shine in a creature. GOL II, 302. See also Hart 2005.
140 GOL II, 101. Form is a core concept of Balthasarian theological aesthetics. Form and matter constituted the basic components of Aristotelian metaphysics, and in medieval times, they were employed in the thought of, for example, St. Thomas Aquinas. It would be a matter of a further study to explore how the concept of form has evolved into modern theological thought, especially in terms of causation and ontology.
In Heidegger’s interpretation of Nietzsche, the surface is life, which necessarily creates its own values, which after a while solidify as a transcendental (i.e. in Nietzsche’s parlance, nihilistic) measure for that very life itself. Now it is possible to see how the mentioned “double communicability” works in contrast to Nietzsche: being itself is originally created not according to the creator’s power, but in the form of the Trinity in Christ. The transcendence of Christian being does not mean solidification in relation to the absolute, but it implicates an infinite relation. Such a creative act is not a product of ressentiment toward life, not a step backwards from what appears (in the becoming of events), and becomes as it is, precisely both a creative and a preservative force that both maintains beings and lets them be in their difference. Nietzsche’s value seems to be, for Hart, that he reminds theology to appreciate the surface, not evading it as illusory, sensatory, transient, or merely a product of divine will.

Additionally, with this view, Hart can counter the linguistic challenge of Derrida by saying that the divine presence in the world is not one of logo-centrism but is rather based upon the constant referral and deferral of personae, in which all is said at once and infinitely. It is the Trinitarian movement between persons that “makes up” the divine essence; and this perichoretic movement ensures that its semantics are also perichoretic, its fixed meanings are kenotic, and its addressed “content” is a gift. There is, then, in the Trinity, a “language” that is constantly outpouring itself, where referring gesture is actually differential gesture, where meaning and content are one: self-evident in the scholastic sense. This divine pleonasm is analogically revealed in Christ. This act of the “rhetoric of love” cuts Christianity from its pagan predecessors as well their neo-followers. One is acutely reminded of the words of John Zizioulas, who described this break by writing: “Greek metaphysics could not utter being and existence at the same time; Christian theology had to say it all at once.”

Love as rhetoric and beauty as the infinite constitute the difference between the discourses, or rather the difference in the content of the discourses, of Nietzsche, his successors, and Christianity.

Is this view still under the sway of Derridean criticism of the sign? As Derrida put it in his early work on Husserl’s phenomenology:

> by asking “What is the sign in general?” we raise the question of the sign to an ontological plane, we pretend to assign a fundamental or regional place to signification in an ontology. This would be a classical procedure. One would subject sign to truth, language to being, speech to thought, and writing to speech. To say that there could be a truth for the sign in general, does this not suppose that the sign is not the possibility of truth, does not constitute it, but is satisfied to signify it—to reproduce, incarnate, secondarily inscribe, or refer to it? For if the sign in some way preceded what we call truth or essence, there would be no sense in speaking about the truth or essence of the sign.

For Derrida, ontology represents always a possibility to discern a discourse of what exists in the sense of its logos and its correspondences with truth. Ontology is therefore a depiction of binary (dialectical) realities, or after Christianity, tertiary realities that

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141 Zizioulas 1985, 79.
142 Hart 2003, 150–51.
construct epistemological thinking all the way up to Hegel.\textsuperscript{144} In religions, for Derrida, ontological thought is soaked with a transcendental signifier, whose presence in the “speech” will formulate closed totalities, a terrorized lacuna of meanings and truths. But this is obviously a rather misplaced depiction of Christian “ontology”: for Christian understanding of being does not appear (it can be thought afterwards) as a dialectical invitation of a ‘will to truth,’ as a mere sign or a welcoming container for meaning, but rather it gets “named” analogically in every act of interpretation, of faith, as an ontological gift. Therefore, what a Christian “primordially” encounters is not an ontology, but a language, a creation uttered; this is also the only possible beginning of any phenomenology of Christianity. As \textit{theoria}, the crucified and resurrected Christ constitutes the only needed \textit{epoche} for seeing the truth in the world.

Yet it must be asked whether the heavy emphasis on a particular reading of a Trinitarian act in creation comes with a price. The first question arises from the role of Christ and his relation to Trinitarian “rhetoric.” Is Christ’s salvific work reduced to theoretical (in the widest sense of the word) right knowledge of difference? At times, it seems that Hart’s thought attenuates toward Gnosticism, though he is very explicit in saying that, in an ontological sense, the Christian view precisely counters such a view. Secondly, it may be inevitable to theological aesthetics to stress the primordial status of creation in its transcendental Goodness. Ironically, however, this strong ontological emphasis brings forth a strong need for a very particular act of faith in order to be understandable: being must be understood as both already “finished” in creation but not as “ready” in a teleological or eschatological sense. This is, of course, a very Pauline way of viewing things, but it seems to leave the precise nature of both salvation and sin, what one is rescued from, a bit vague.

Yet here Hart wishes only to re-narrate. Expressing beings via the Logos of God does not correspond, according to Hart, to a Derridean reading of Western metaphysics like the pursuit and longing for an absent father.\textsuperscript{145} All in all, the schema ultimately inherited from Nietzsche, the critique of “textual onto-theology,” is simply a certain deafness to the \textit{narration} of Christianity; it is all too easy to arrange \textit{euangelion} into a dialectic story, to force it into a moment of some higher truth or into a veiled presence suffocating immediate meaning, and thus separate the Christian evangelical message of ontological peace, by separating its content from its \textit{telos} and thus ultimately separating the meaning from the sign. Rather, Hart suggests, with help from a quote from St. John Chrysostom, that the Christian text is a challenge to \textit{improve} the created text within a creature according “to the Book of the Spirit,” thus converting and tuning oneself with divine speech. This argument relies, although Hart does not explicitly say so, on von Balthasarian theological aesthetics, in which the saint is the one who is rendered completely transparent to the form of Christ, God’s image in man; in which the narrative of man does not simply “correspond” to the exemplarity of Christ; but in which narrative \textit{is} the most adequate state of being, a sort of iconic pure expressiveness.

\textsuperscript{144} See Derrida 1981, 49, 190.

\textsuperscript{145} Hart 2003, 296–7 and quoting Derrida 1978, 24–26. Although Hart admits such tones can be found in the tapestry of tradition, he argues that analogical supplementation is needed when describing the relation between the Logos and \textit{logoi}. 

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in which the immediate and the mediatory coincide as much as possible.\textsuperscript{146} And if beauty is what “impregnates” being, the formal vehicle of thought is what Stephen Fields has named “mediatory immediacy.”\textsuperscript{147}

This view, in which theology not only supplements philosophy but “salvages it,”\textsuperscript{148} as Milbank puts it, is a daring argument. It depends upon a particular reading of intellectual history, which critics of Radical Orthodoxy have pointed out.\textsuperscript{149} It usually has an ethos or a “tone” that gets criticized, for as already noted several times, it is obvious that Hart and Milbank are reading their material selectively and strategically. They certainly employ their discourse more in an assertive way instead of a recursive way. Reinhard Hütter’s argument, in which he responds to John Milbank’s proposition in \textit{Theology and Social Theory} that the only answer to nihilistic views comes from the construal of a different ontology from a particular narrative,\textsuperscript{150} is acutely correct at a general level:

\begin{quote}
\textit{The enemy, postmodern nihilism, dictates the logic of argumentative victory even in the occurrence of its own defeat, and moves like the Trojan horse as Christian mythos into the very citadel of Milbank’s theology! The central function of his concept of Christian mythos reveals the ironic dialectic of remaining caught in the ball game defined by the rules of postmodern nihilism. In order to escape this indirect dependency Milbank would have needed to integrate his deconstruction of modernity and modernity into the substantial unfolding of his neo-Augustinian theology — instead of writing this deconstruction as a programmatic prolegomenon to such a theology […]\textsuperscript{151}
\end{quote}

This is the major problem that Hart also faces, as it implies that the difference between narratives is either itself a “violent” act or, at best, arbitrary. It must be said of Hart that this rhetorical device is at least made apparent, and by not trying to conceal its rhetoric, the Christian story can be argued ultimately to hang upon the “persuasiveness” of

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\textsuperscript{146} Hart 2003, 297. This is the divine state of being, according to Hart. See von Balthasar, GOL I, 215; GOL III, 192. Here, the remark by Ricouer is also notable: he states that narrative is simply the best “way” of expressing what an individual is, for its explanatory power is greater than any reductionist “matter of facts” that can be used when describing an individual (Ricouer 1984, 66–67); hence it can be said that Christianity simply transposes this view from literary projects to “life”: the saint is “the manual” of Christian textuality. The saint is not the “truth” of Christianity, but expresses the truth perfectly in the inadequateness of himself, and in a similar manner also opens the ontico-ontological difference: beings reflect the supreme Being, not in neutral derivation of essences, but as glorious inadequacy, which can become readable, edible, and hearable only in the language of praise. In this sense, there is no expression of \textit{analogia entis} other than doxology; or, as von Balthasar puts it, the saint can be said to “give God noetically and existentially the predominance in its own self that he always has ontically.” Although by ontological status, man is “other” than God, yet by love (that is, by God’s ‘ontological status’, to put it very bureaucratically), this otherness gains a form of rapture. GOL III, 129.
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\textsuperscript{147} Fields 2007, 182.
\textsuperscript{148} Milbank 1999, 27.
\textsuperscript{149} Janz 2004, where Janz especially criticizes Milbank’s construal of Western thought, especially of the latter’s treatment of Kant. Janz argues that Milbank fails to see that \textit{noumena}, things beyond our capacity to grasp, are for Kant precisely idealist, not realist, and therefore the charge that Kant is the primary figure to blame for modern objectivism is a construct itself. See also Johnson 2010; Terezakis 2012; Cheetham 2013, 45–59.
\textsuperscript{150} Milbank 2006, 278–298.
\textsuperscript{151} Hütter 1993, 116.
\end{flushright}
its story.\textsuperscript{152} Hart is also careful that stories should not “mix”; that is, theology should always be engaged with metaphysical thought, but only insofar as it can be certain of God’s true transcendence and a proper infinity between Being and beings.\textsuperscript{153}

It should also be noted that the Derridean position is not that simple. For Derrida himself seems to suggest that the logic of the gift should perhaps replace the logic of being and presence. Here it should be noted that the theme of the gift opens the Christian surface to Hart rhetorically in such way that it can also later address Derrida and such works as Jean-Luc Marion’s phenomenological reading of Christianity.

Christian ontology, viewed as language, cannot amount to any totality, for it operates on a twofold setting of differences: first, the supreme Being always escapes being by expressing himself as triune love, and this expression is put into words in an apophatic manner and is constantly “deferred” as Logos in creation. Secondly, to put the “ontological gap” into use and, resulting from the indispensable transcendence of God from the world, into a rhetorical schema, every finite expression must be free and is free by virtue of its infinite difference from the supreme Being and its utterance from the divine utterance. This difference is not the chaotic “ground” of neo-Nietzscheans, it is not an example of linguistic sublimity or a bad infinity of some \textit{khorismos} of meaning, but rather the “letting be” of signs to be whatever they are, yet striving to express and, to utilize the Balthasarian concept, to \textit{con-form} analogically with the divine expression par excellence, Christ.\textsuperscript{154} As von Balthasar remarks, the original language of God is not the Bible, nor merely some kind of Hellenized Logos, but his Son, Logos, and Christ. The task that Hart proposes for theology, the constant re-narrating, occurs through this “original language” and nothing else. Moreover, narrative theology can perhaps pass Derridean critique in creative silence; it does not need to “subject” and “attach” language, for all human language is perceived as severely limited, and it is precisely here in this limitation where language will flourish in excess of its schemata, in excess of the divine “pull” toward the ground of being, the living God.

As Kevin Vanhoozer has pointed out, any theology that does not take the form of a response is in fact irresponsible, for it structures its theological discourse from a different vantage than God’s own self-expression.\textsuperscript{155} Hart reads this precisely so that narrative theology is grounded upon God’s own narrative of Himself. Thus, the narrative of theology is indeed incompatible with Nietzsche’s account of power, but it does not surpass it and forget it; it out-narrates it.

\textsuperscript{152} Hart 2003, 413–417; see Loughlin 2007, 600–608 and Hart’s response in Hart 2007, 617–623. The rhetorical brilliance or whimsy (depending on one’s taste) of Hart’s theological style has also been noted by Aers 2007.

\textsuperscript{153} Hart 2003, 418.

\textsuperscript{154} Hart 2003, 294; for von Balthasar, the Christian “truth” consists of act of \textit{Wahr-Nehmung}, an act of perception which actively interprets the luminous form of Christ in order to conform itself with this form; Christ-form is the supreme moment of divine rhetoric: it offers a “content” and “method” of salvation at the same time, in the form of Christ (“Incarnation perfects the whole ontology and aesthetics of created being”) the structuralist signifier-signified pattern is transcended, for Christ what he expresses, but he is not Who he expresses. See GOL I, 29. One could speak the language of theology only by supplementing it with Trinitarian grasps of breath. Therefore, von Balthasar can say that St. Denys, perhaps the greatest theologian to stress the divine unknowability, is “most aesthetic of all Christian theologians” (GOL II, 168) and he adds that “It is the greatness of man and his tragedy […] to be immersed in aesthetics of the world of images and at the same time to have irresistibly to dissolve all images in the light of the unimaginable.” (GOL II, 179).

\textsuperscript{155} Vanhoozer 2010, 469.
As has been hinted at several times already, this raises the problem of ontologies divided between “violent” and “peaceful.” If the Christian story out-narrates, would it not itself become an act of power, suppressing the pagan or secular story? Hart acknowledges this problem but evades it by letting it be so; the ontological \textit{agape} of Christianity is a story told of a different concept of infinity from that its pagan counterparts. Hart and Milbank both understand this peacefulness in the sense that Augustine wrote his \textit{City of God}: peace is the ultimate \textit{teleological} principle of being, not merely a “feature” or a “manner” of treating beings theologically or philosophically. Perhaps it would be correct to say that “peace,” the eschatological presence of the Gospel in history, is not \textit{a value} as Nietzsche understood it (being thus vulnerable to his accusation of nihilism), but precisely where peace is portrayed as value, Christianity has succumbed to the challenge of evaluating stories in alien terms. The most alien of these terms must be, if we follow Milbank and Hart, conceived either as strife or as, in a univocal sense, reducing God to the same category of being as other things.

Therefore, peacefulness must constitute in itself a sort of right “naming” of being, a certain language of it. This language amounts, in my view, based on Hart, to a sort of Christian phenomenology (even if the term is admittedly open to accusations of barbarizing phenomenology, at least in its Husserlian sense\textsuperscript{156}); phenomena (or beings or the “world”) appear only in the language of the gift, expressing a grammar of infinity in the two aforementioned stages of difference, and explicating things that can be named properly. This naming of things means no totality or logocentric grasp on reality as such; it precedes (and basically, gives birth to) the distinction between “natural theology” (or \textit{episteme}) and revelation. It precedes this distinction precisely by showing them to be one, as mainstream Orthodox theology affirms.\textsuperscript{157} This preceding is not an instance of “forgetting the Question,” as Heidegger would have it, but the simple notion that the surface of the world constitutes the plane of its truth, its expressive content as given (thus, “named”) reality by God. This surface of things, this “phenomenology,” is therefore a reading of difference as it is expressed in the superabundant language of God. As Augustine writes:

\begin{quote}
Indeed, if you give pious and diligent attention, every kind of creature which can come under the consideration of the human mind contributes to our instruction, speaking by its diverse movements and feelings as in so many diverse tongues, everywhere proclaiming and insisting that the Creator is to be recognized. \textsuperscript{158}True, “naming” can be used as Wille zur Macht, but then it does not open to “right reality”, for it does not correspond to God’s own speech act in Christ nor consequently evoke Church’s liturgical response to it. When the language, and the speech-acts that humans commit
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{156}I acknowledge the biting critique of Janicaud and his critique of the so-called “Phenomenological turn of theology”; yet I feel there is the possibility to speak of Christian phenomenology, although one is inevitably to discern it from the “classical” phenomenology of Husserl. So, in asserting that phenomenology in its theological form has pursued the “phenomenology of the unapparent,” Janicaud is right, but still in my opinion, this spoiling of phenomenological “purity” is not something to be lamented (though Janicaud is in no way “against” the theological as such). Janicaud 2000. For the transcendental “necessity” of phenomenological analysis, see Smith 2002, 16–56. Hart also sees that, for a Christian philosopher, a transcendental phenomenology is something that cannot be dispensed with. Hart 2005\textsuperscript{a}. For a discussion of phenomenological “an-atheist” thought, see Kearney 2009.

\textsuperscript{157}For example, in the theology of Dumitru Staniloae, the distinction is a formulation with “no meaning,” as it only displays the capacity and the limitedness of all human language. See Staniloae 2000.

\textsuperscript{158}De \textit{lib. Arb.} III. 70 (212).
in order to constitute any “meanings” or “information” or mere playful jokes, reduces itself to a totality, where the explorer finds ultimately finds only what he has already sowed beforehand methodologically, Hart sees that a divine interruption is needed. But, as he reminds us, “God speaks only God”: therefore, the language of salvation must be analogous to the very mystery of Trinitarian beings itself as revealed in Christ. Same thing applies also in the theological understanding of God: Christian God is a named God, the “One who is” and the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, not a deity to which is named only after its attributes, or via semantics of being. Christian God is a particular God, a present-in-difference God, the only God.

Thus, naming is an act of faith, faith expressed as seeing, in which one attempts fuller transparency and the abandonment of artificial difference between signs (language) and the named being (“essences”). Also, as we saw in Chapter 2.3, naming God is a theological procedure that already contains an authentic view of analogy with it. This naming, although necessarily a historical process, is by no means a Hegelian dialectic in which a final unity is reached, but one in which the final unity, that is the triune God, is always infinitely expressed (and at the same time, his transcendence is infinitely more “plain”). The Christian story allows a certain translucency of being; content does not remain hidden in the nexuses of power, nor is it attached merely to language that is afterwards confirmed, actualized, and legitimatized through acts of knowing, but it is splendidly visible, expressing a transparent Christ in a unique, personal, and analogous manner. This “saintly” addressing of creation is nothing but the outpouring rhetoric of God’s transcendental being:

[...] God’s utterance of himself is thus always opening into numberless variations, intonations, ornamentations, and delights, it is, so to speak, perlocutionary, always rhetorical; indeed, God’s life is – one is emboldened to say – rhetoric.

Here, one can see clearly the importance of hearing out Nietzsche; as Nietzsche declared, the reality depends upon its language and its meaning-givers, and if the reality is created by an utterance of this “perlocutionary” divine Word, then the whole fabric of reality can be seen as consisting of a surplus of meaning, not necessary in itself, but as a personal act of love. As Graham Ward writes, “the secret spring of faith lies not in demonstration but operation: being able to read the signs that are available correctly and work with them.” For Nietzsche, reading the signs means

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159 Hart 2003, 186; identifying a saintly being as reflecting the continuance of God’s action has connotations that can be derived from von Balthasar, but also from the Russian philosopher-theologian Pavel Florensky. For Florensky, a saint was someone and a phenomenon who kept Christianity from falling into either a magical worldview or a purely rational one. See Florensky, 2014. In his magnum opus, The Pillar and the Ground of the Truth, Florensky developed a complex theme in which seeing the truth is displayed in the saints, and in which this seeing, “the chain of love,” is grounded in the Trinitarian Being as such, and is multiplied in creation. In Florensky, the truth-event in the world is always a sanctification of the world, the two sides of the same coin. In the end, this event of sanctification produces neither “good” nor “wise” men, but “philokalic,” meaning “beautiful” saints. Florensky 2004, 56, 62, 72. It may be worthwhile noting that von Balthasar is careful to point out that revelation by no means contradicts the natural order, yet the unity of transcendentals in God is “confirmed in such a way that man sees all his preliminary sketches of systems included and fat transcended in the definitive systems of God.” GOL IV, 23. Therefore, the divine aesthetics only deepen the sense of catholicity of reality; it can be viewed as an aesthetic counterpart of the early theological development of the logos spermatikos theory of reality.

a genealogical unwrapping of will to power, whereas for Hart it means recognizing what is given, while simultaneously recognizing that the given does not exist “as such” but points toward an ever greater dissimilarity of God.  

3.2.2 The Other and ethics

If, then, Christian peaceful language appears in one way or another, it must also be possible to encounter it in a manner in which it can be recognized as such. If Nietzsche represented the stance of interpretative violence, the work of Emmanuel Lévinas exemplifies a postmodern attempt to approach ethics without transcendental resorts. Lévinas falls in the Hartian analysis into the category of “ethical sublime,” which should be treated here, since it shows how Hart’s thesis of peacefulness operates on a phenomenological level (in a way, precisely on the level that was previously, with Nietzsche, termed the “surface”).

Phenomenology, inaugurated by Edmund Husserl, sought to analyze how things appear to us, not speculate how they are in themselves or address them in a metaphysical way. Moreover, phenomenology meant that the theoretical picture of ideas residing in the mind and their correspondence with the world had to retreat before the analysis of intentional consciousness, which shifts the locus of thought from knowledge to the non-theoretical intentional grasp of consciousness, which in turn could not be translated back into knowledge.

French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas (1905–1995), a student of Husserl who basically brought phenomenology to France, developed his philosophy from phenomenological grounds that sought to displace ontology from first philosophy, placing ethics over it. His thought is centered around the concept of the Other (Autrui), which determines being-in-the-world and also raises the existential obligation to the Other as something that cannot be “thematized,” that is, put into a system, subjected to rational I, or tamed into a mode of behavior or projection. Ethics is to Lévinas “first philosophy,” and the Other was his way to describe radical alterity, which will not succumb to be mine in any sense, not thematized as an extension of my consciousness or being, not even synchronized to my time, but always remaining “otherwise than being.”

Lévinas speaks of “the infinity,” which is present only as a trace of extra-terrestriality (meaning it cannot be expressed in a cognitive sense) in a human being, and which informs a person about no ontological structure, no divine image as such, but a realization that in the sheer givenness of the world, there exists something else, namely, the Being itself. Being is exteriority. This means a turning in Lévinas’

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161 Cf. GOL III, 390, where von Balthasar links Mariology tightly to theological aesthetics precisely in treating the beautiful “as such,” “without any dialectic”: “in her the whole creation is worthy of God”.

162 I will treat this question from a phenomenological point of view, but it is helpful to keep in mind that such related notions as analogia entis and natural theology are not to be separated from Christian phenomenology, and this is done only for the sake of clarity and argument.

163 A short but clear introduction to Lévinas in his own words in Lévinas 1985. For the departure from Husserl’s conceptions, see Cohen 2004, 99–119.

164 Lévinas 1969, 79.

thought: the nocturnal experience of the being of the Being, and the invisibility of all
vision, lacking light but not imposing blindness; in short, the experience of the il y a
or es gibt: the fact of “there-is-ness,” which confronts consciousness. Lévinas puts this
asymmetry that dominates pre-theoretical consciousness, which is the core of the
Lévinasian philosophy, most aptly, and almost formally, without yet resorting to the
ethical obligations of the Other, in his Existence and existent:

But this nothing is not that of pure nothingness. There is no longer this or that; there
is not “something.” But this universal absence is in its turn presence, an absolutely
unavoidable presence. It is not the dialectical counterpart of absence, and we do not
grasp it through thought. It is immediately there. There is no discourse. Nothing
responds to us, but this silence; the voice of this silence understood and frightens like
the silence of those infinite spaces Pascal speaks of. There is, in general, without it
mattering there is, without our being able to fix a substantive to this term. There is an
impersonal form, like in it rains, or it is warm. Its anonymity is essential. The mind
does not find itself faced with an apprehended exterior. The exterior—if one insists on
the term—remains uncorrelated with an interior. It is no long given. It is no longer
a world. What we call the I is itself submerged by the night, invaded, depersonalized,
stifled by it. The disappearance of all things and of the I leaves what cannot disappear,
the sheer fact of being in which one participates whether one wants to or not, without
having taken the initiative, anonymously. Being remains, like a field of forces, like a
heavy atmosphere belonging to no one, universal, returning in the midst of the negation
which put it aside, and in all the powers to which that negation may be multiplied. 166

However, this does not remain a simple statement of an existential anguish; the
anonymity of the event of the sublime discloses the infinite Other, which may not
be reduced to the realm of the Same, or the world, or the interiority of the subject.
Lévinas is not an existentialist in a Sartrean sense; his project, along the lines of the
title of his later major work, is “not to be otherwise but otherwise than being.” 167
Ethics is to be found in the direction of the Good, not in the metaphysical ontology. 168
He stresses that the experience of es gibt or il y a does not take the form of anxiety in
a Heideggerian sense either. 169 Even though it is a not-being, nothingness does not
represent emptiness, but is always filled with “the anonymous rustling of the il y
a.” 170 In his interview with Philippe Nemo, Lévinas describes the “there is,” il y a, as
analogous to a child’s experience in a darkened room, where the being of things seems
to almost liquefy, and the sheer being of beings just strikes the child as “rumbling
silence.” 171

So far so good: a subject “needs” the alterity as the precise content of his subjectivity,
of his separation and awakening as a subject. But this remains not so; for Lévinas, the
whole point of encountering otherness in being is that the Other is the beginning of

166 Lévinas 1988, 58.
169 Lévinas 1988, 62.
170 Lévinas 1988, 60.
171 Lévinas 1985, 48.
ethics. It has “taken up Being,” and finds that goodness is not an ingredient of being, but it can be followed in the trace of the Other. Being “otherwise than being” thus means being better, an ethical obligation. In addition, the “appearing” of the Other ends the passivity of the subject and establishes language, which for Lévinas means justice. However, this Goodness cannot become present or “enter into representation.” It remains in its own realm, only targeted in desire and coinhered in the “neighbor,” to whom we actually owe our all.

Language is also the situation where meaning ensues; the symbolic function takes us only away from “the things,” if conceived only by a corresponsive and cognitive unity. Lévinas puts it as follows: “Signification surprises the very thought that thought it.” This signification is the Other, for it does not add anything to the inner monologue as such, for it operates and discloses the Infinite. This concept leads Lévinas to think that language, if founded by the face of the Other, is reason itself. Language is also connected to the gaze of the Self, for “the glance” cannot assume any neutral role; the gazed upon always speaks to the seer, the sight is never silent. Here, language, as awakened by the Other, as the face, does not merely signify things at hand, but rather is the absolute presence of the Other itself. This means that the Self cannot shelter itself by withdrawing into a world full of metaphors, ever-distancing itself by thought from the immediate “truth” of the Other. As Lévinas himself says, the Face always speaks, it establishes discourse, for which a response is needed, not merely contemplation. The world and the Other are ever-closer, one could almost say infinitely closer that one thinks. If one only thinks of the Other and the world, they may appear to have come closer, but actually they are concealed in the thematized vision of the thinking mind. Thus, a vision is not enough.

Because language objectifies the world, it establishes the possibility of thought, and grounds the “most radical distance” between the subject and the objects. This cannot remain within the dialectics of the subject and the object; for the play between negation and affirmation (and synthesis, for that matter) itself remains in the sphere of totality, and the subject finds itself in a Pauline state of “not yet,” which denotes precisely time: time is the “place” where man can separate his thought from himself, and thus “thematize” the world of objects. This also reveals one of the most important aspects of Lévinasian thought, considering the critique offered by Hart: thematization of the world is solved by desire, which surpasses the realm of lack and need, and

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172 Lévinas 1969, 213. By this justice, Lévinas means that the obligation established in a “self-sufficient” I-Thou relation is posited in the world, among “we” and thus, “the thou is posited in front of a we.”
174 Lévinas 1969, 206.
175 Lévinas views the Western philosophical tradition as resting on the equation of rationality and being, and thus privileging identity in a rational examination of being as the source of knowledge. For Lévinas, it was the genius of Hegel who understood the value of negativity in consciousness and thought. But in (post)modern times, Lévinas argues that philosophy faces an impasse, “an incapability to answer to its own measures,” that is, to reduce truth, being, and knowledge into a significant unity. For Lévinas, the way out must lie in the Other, which demands thinking to be awakened from its positivity. See Lévinas 1998, 118–121.
178 Lévinas 1969, 209.
flourishes on the infinity, “the surplus” of the infinite, which establishes finally the ethical dimension of being-in-the-world proper.

In all this, Lévinas is seeking to salvage the purity of ethicality, as being good is not a property of being, but appears always as an unattainable and unfillable responsibility. David Bentley Hart situates this pursuit under “the ethical sublime,” the postmodern theme of otherness and grounding ethical action and thought in something other than subjective freedom, objective ideals, or representable (and thus corruptible) contents. Lévinas seeks, according to Hart, an ethical sublimity, which makes pure ethicality possible without the possibility of constructing it from ideologies or subjective free acts, as in the case, for example, of virtue ethics. As I will show, the main criticism, however, lies again on the rhetorical surface of Lévinas’ thought.

Firstly, Hart proceeds to discredit Lévinas on his own grounds: Hart blames Lévinas for disfiguring the phenomenological tradition and its two monumental German figures, namely Husserl and Heidegger. The former, for Lévinas, according to Hart, presents a tendency to idealize, and thus rationalize, the phenomenological project with his methods of reduction of perception, which all subject the other to the realm of the Same.

In Lévinas’ treatment of phenomenology, Hart argues, the basic fault lies in the fact that Lévinas sought to keep his philosophical and theological (Rabbinic) thought apart, and thus his phenomenology is constructed in a-theistic terms.

The fundamental event is treated in a phenomenological manner, but its “result” or descriptions are not phenomenological, but ethical, which frames the possibilities of aisthesis. So, the matter can be resolved here only on the grounds of ethics, which, for Lévinas, is basically “optics.” For Lévinas, staying true to his phenomenological upbringing, there is no such thing as things themselves or ontologies of being: man’s perception is always already situated in the world, he makes his own “dwelling” in the world, yet he is “wakened” into subjectivity by the Other. In an early masterpiece, Existence and existents, Lévinas describes this primordial state of the consciousness:

The contact with light, the act of opening one’s eyes, the lighting up of bare sensation, are apparently outside any relationship, and do not take form like answers to questions. Light illuminates and is naturally understood; it is comprehension itself. But within this natural correlation between us and the world, in a sort of doubling back, a question arises, a being surprised by this illumination. The wonder which Plato put at the origin of philosophy is an astonishment before the natural and the intelligible. It is the very intelligibility of light that is astonishing; light is doubled up with a night. The astonishment does not arise out of comparison with some order more natural than nature, but simply before intelligibility itself. Its strangeness is, we might say, due to its

179 Hart 2003, 52–85.
180 Hart 2003, 76.
181 See Schroeder 1996, 14; though Lévinas himself at a general level sees philosophy always residing in theological discourse, staying true to his phenomenological upbringing, he cannot allow theology to dictate any characteristic or decisive side of being; theology must come afterwards if one is out to explicate being-in-the-world in a philosophical sense.
182 Lévinas 1967, 152ff.
very reality, to the very fact there is existence. The questioning of Being is an experience of Being in its strangeness. It is then a way of taking up Being.\textsuperscript{183}

This being the “human condition,” Lévinas explores the “effects” of this world-exploring as confronting; he modifies the Heideggerian position, which posited “care” (Sorge) as Dasein’s basic relation to world, reducing the world to be a vast vault of technology for Dasein’s sustainment.\textsuperscript{184} Man’s (atheistic) existence is “sincere”; it has the world in the beginning, yet he does not possess it:

*To be in the world is to be attached to things. Theophile Gautier’s line “I am one of those for whom the external world exists” expresses that joyous appetite for things which constitutes being in the world. The concept of intention conveys this relationship quite exactly. But is must be taken not in the neutralized and disincarnate sense in which it figures in medieval philosophy and in Husserl, but in its ordinary meaning, with the sting of desire that animates it. Desire and not care — except the care for the immediate.*\textsuperscript{185}

Hence in early Lévinas, the consciousness of man consists of affirming the world; it is saying (perhaps unconsciously) yes to the immediate surroundings and needs. This is the “pagan existence” of a subject still undisturbed by the Other.\textsuperscript{186} The consciousness in Lévinas is, however, always already struck by exteriority. This realization, which happens in the “youth of the thought,” finds consciousness to have a past, and this results in the separation of the thinking consciousness and the consciousness thought. This separation is crucial, for it implies the element of the infinity in us, which Lévinas grounds in the ideas of Descartes. The Cartesian subject also needs infinity to be aware of its own presence of finitude:\textsuperscript{187}

*The non-constitution of infinity in Descartes leaves a door open; the reference of the finite cogito to the infinity of God does not consist in a simple thematization of God. I of myself account for every object; I contain them. The idea of infinity is not for me an object. The ontological argument lies in the mutation of this “object” into being, into independence with regard to me; God is the other.*\textsuperscript{188}

\textsuperscript{183}Lévinas 1988, 22.

\textsuperscript{184}Lévinas 1988, 34: “In the effort to separate the notion of the world from the notion of a sum of objects we certainly see one of the most profound discoveries of Heideggerian philosophy. But in order to describe being-in-the-world, this German philosopher has appealed to an ontological finality, to which he subordinates objects in the world. Seeing objects as ‘material’—in the sense that we speak of ‘war material’—he has included them in the care for existing, which for him is the very putting of the ontological problem. But he has thereby failed to recognize the essentially secular nature of being in the world and the sincerity of intentions.”

\textsuperscript{185}Lévinas 1988, 27.

\textsuperscript{186}It may be said here that the referral to Husserl in the above quote means that, for Lévinas, the consciousness that is revealed in the transcendental reduction finds itself already constituted. See Purcell 2006, 47–48.

\textsuperscript{187}Lévinas 1969, 210–211; 1978, 135. As Lévinas notes, this means for Descartes the simultaneity of createdness: the infinity means, in effect, my created state, which stays and lives in this “promised state.”

\textsuperscript{188}Lévinas 1969, 211.
Here, the *cogito* finds an alterity that is not to be contained by the interiority, and finds it as a relation, “a relation between freedoms.”\(^{189}\)

This awakening does not come easily: it represents “a trauma” to the subject, “the monstrosity of the Infinity put in me.”\(^{190}\) Infinity is supposed to be a stepping aside from Western thought, as well as from Husserl and Heidegger; infinity is not achieved by operating the finite, either multiplying or reducing it, but it remains as in-finite, a condition for the signification without manifestation. Hence, the negation of infinity is subjectivity: the solid I that can experience infinity or finitudeness is still in a state of slumber. It is of foremost importance, for Lévinas, that this infinity remains an unspoiled fundamental, which does not appear, and does not lend itself to any form of capacity, potency, or lack thereof.

Hart views the Lévinasian position as horrific in many ways. First, the narrative form is, for Hart, untenable; in a much-quoted passage, Lévinas expresses the idea of the differences between the two grand narratives of Odysseus and Abraham. The itinerary of the Greek captain is a narrative of a returning to the Same, where one always belongs in the first place, where the Abrahamic pilgrimage into the unknown presents a situation where the Other cannot be totalized, reduced, or returned to the Same. In a way, Odysseus cannot simply get lost on his journey; he is always on the way home even if he is going in the wrong direction. In addition, for Lévinas, this circular notion that demands “ruge and ambush” is a typology of a bellicose being.\(^{191}\) To Lévinas, this narrative represents Western thought, its “rationalized theology,” in which the other is neutralized and symmetrized with the thought and confined within the boundaries of the Self.\(^{192}\)

Hart suggests that here, and in the aforementioned critiques of Heidegger and Husserl, Lévinas manages to throw the baby out with the bath-water. To Hart, the case of Heidegger exemplifies this tendency: “Lévinas simply accepts Heidegger’s ontology (to the extent he understands it), assimilates it to all previous metaphysics, and then turns his back on being itself, to pursue the ethical into a region that is “otherwise than being.”\(^{193}\) So Hart accuses Lévinas of unifying historicism: all philosophies of being (and thus, time as a realized or disclosed state of being itself, whether it is the being-unto-death of Heidegger, or Sartre’s nothingness, which haunts every being internally) must remain in the headlights of the same and finally be run over by the anonymity of the inescapable finitude of human beings. The cost of ethical purity is too high for Hart, and the whole rhetoric of it carries, for him, a despicable metaphor and a picturesque load.

Moreover, Hart thinks that Lévinas, besides evoking “nausea” at the sight of being, also fails to present the other side of his story, namely the Other, adequately. This is due mainly to Lévinas’ strict commitment to radical alterity:

> [...] such is the severity of its logic that the other – to remain truly other – cannot in any way actually appear: neither by way of phenomenology’s analogies and reductions,
nor by way of any prior understanding of being and beings, nor within the reach of simple recognition (in every case, one remains within the confines of the Same). Rather, alterity in intimate solely in moments of rupture or discontinuity; the otherness that makes demands of us is alien to us, from beyond the totality. Of course, the possibility of knowing something of this otherness must open somewhere within normal experience, even if the Other is not an object of experience.

Thus, to put it in aesthetic terms, Lévinas’ thought is permeated with Gnostic longing for a nameless voice beyond the totality of being—something that only appears as depraved, a lack, corruption. The desire for the Other shows only the miserable shortcoming of oneself and is in a way a negative revelation; or, as John Milbank argues, Lévinas produces “a bizarre inverted egoism.”

Hart proceeds by analyzing the other “properties” of the Other, for example, by quoting Lévinas’ essay Time and the Other, in which Lévinas explains his concept of diachrony. Diachrony means that the Other’s time is not the same as our own; the Other is our absolute futurity. There is no space for communion; the Other cannot be eternalized and thus made representable within the time-bound economies. Hence the being-for-other, which is the ethicality in Lévinas, means that we are constantly “haunted,” “oppressed,” and “held hostage” by the unattainable and unrepresentable Other.

The far more self-condemning aspect in Lévinas’ thought, however, is that it is totally devoid of any categories of beauty, joy, or delight—in fact, any precise “sense” or “sensation”—and presents itself as only an infinitely featureless “face” whose revelation is “speech.” This tendency to radicalize the Other only increases in later Lévinas, especially in his Otherwise than Being, which Hart dismisses as in every sense a “terrible book.” A brief account of art in this book is telling: “[art is] the pre-eminent exhibition in which the said is reduced to a pure theme, to absolute exposition […]. The said is reduced to the Beautiful, which supports Western ontology.” Lévinas is not belittling artistic endeavors as such; rather, his view of the thematization of art displays the ontological deficiency of the “rational theology” that Western thought simulates in its love of wisdom, truth-seeking philo-sophia, or, as Derrida expands the thought of Lévinas:

A recourse not to be confused with what has always been called a philosophical enterprise, but which reaches a point at which an exceeded philosophy cannot not be brought into question. […] it is a question of designating a space or a hollow within

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194 Hart 2003, 77–78.
197 Hart 2003, 78. See Lévinas 1969, 193. The face is the phenomenological equivalent to the concept of the soul; with an expressive face, the other (with a small o) is “a glimmer” of someone, that is a person, who has no use for as soul, as a somewhat reified personality like reason in Descartes, a monad in Spinoza, and the contemplative soul in Plato. Lévinas 2000, 12. The face evokes the “debt” that is never payable and also individuates me through this debt.
199 Although Lévinas wants to be clear that the “truth” of philosophy can be found within this same tradition, not by some “eastern mythologies.”
naked experience where this eschatology can be understood and where it must resonate. This hollow space is not an opening among others. It is opening itself, the opening of the opening, that which can be enclosed within no category or totality, that is, everything within experience which no longer can be described by traditional concepts, and which resists every philosopheme.\footnote{Derrida 1978, 82.}

Such a narrative, for Hart, is simply unacceptable, for it is effectually void of the benevolence of the surface. Lévinasian purity is directed toward the subject as a commandment, as an obligation, whereas in the Christian realm, the demand or ascetic feat of purity is “demanded” by understanding what one sees (and ultimately, recognizing who is seen). So, the Lévinasian position may be said to precede the Christian one, although Lévinas does not intend to essentialize this ethical purity as an ontological arche.

In addition, Lévinas’ Other as the Face, which not only discloses the phenomena, but also establishes an ethicality which is a bond not based on freedom (which is in Lévinas only a secondary and derivative reality), does not yield to any act of recognition. This is highly significant, for the whole Christian narrative of the loving God depends, at least in my opinion, upon this moment of recognition, a certain “familiarity” with the kerygma, as an inviting Other, in order to be aesthetically plausible. If Hart is viewed against Lévinas, one could conclude that a Christian must see (and taste) what he partakes; though he simultaneously grasps that this partaking is not reducible to him.

It seems, then, that the ultimate reality of Christian love demands a clear act of recognition, although this may not be taken in any positivist or even Cartesian idea “of a clear concept.” In Lévinas, the question is always about recognizing “not the form, but the force.”\footnote{Lévinas 1991, xiii.} One cannot identify the Other, re-cognize the Other, only be exposed to Him. Apparently Lévinas is too afraid of spoiling the purity of the Other by any act of cognition, not to mention representation or analogy. Hart strikes this vein: he makes his case by “the obvious” statement that an attempt to express Lévinasian reality in aesthetic theses comes close to monstrousness and is, in effect, a contradiction in terms.\footnote{Hart 2003, 80.} Thus, the sublime, the unrepresentable, is in the Hartian view, a void that can be filled with ideological power. More importantly, the sublime opens up a space in which the gift is unthinkable: the eucharistic dimension cannot appear unrepresented.

This argument can be leveled to a more moderate stance by taking the notion that Lévinas is trying here, by the asymmetricality of being, avoiding any question of origins (the Other is not the origin, it is our absolute futurity in the sense that Desire for the Other can never fulfilled; and phenomenologically, the world is always there to begin with, and any act of presentation and representation arrives too late to be an original one), and speaking in an already postmodern fashion about the force rather than being (here, one is reminded that Lévinas himself wished to keep the two corpuses of his oeuvre separated, claiming that his Judaic writings do not ground his philosophical work in any way).
Hart also agrees with Derrida, who modifies the Lévinasian position in his essay "Violence and Metaphysics." He is obvious that, for Lévinas, desire, which is the insatiable force that links one to the Other, is not a source of unhappiness; it would be more appropriate to speak about the Abrahamic journey on which encountering the Other means that there is no hope of return. With Lévinas, the categories of fidelity and faith are not important; only the desire for justice, which is the oppression by the Other. One cannot return into a Hegelian totality, withdraw from the journey or map it completely. It is the hopelessness that only aims to maim the all-inclusive subjectivity, the Molok of the Self. But as Hart’s critique shows us, Lévinas defends his position only on one front: the other, the concrete brother of I, does not simply disperse into an ethical bond; my brother is not my keeper, but also establishes a community: a community that cannot be controlled only by a nameless face. There must be a concrete event, though it can be only momentary, of the otherness that satisfies the desire, albeit momentarily.

In short, Hart thinks that the absolute demand of the Other cannot be borne by man and cannot ultimately sustain anything but, paradoxically, the subjective reflection of its own state, lapsing into harboring only negative totalities and haunted by the Otherness of the Other. So, one could conclude with a Derridean phrase: Lévinas makes the fundamental aspect of being ethical only by making its hostage, man, contemplate his own contemplation in the hopeless visions and fabulations of the Other, in which every real and communal event appears phony and as manipulated evidence.

As mentioned above, Hart views the Lévinasian position of the Other as an example of the ethical sublime and argues that, as ethics, it is vacuous when it is composed as an "ethics without ethics." To Hart, Lévinas is simply a rigorist, who—maybe due to his Judaic concept of transcendence, which he himself regards as atheism, which is a "gift to humanity"—would be accepted as useful if he had been satisfied with his phenomenological enterprise, "to liberate all these things [the aspects of Lévinasian divisions] from the transcendental empire of self-subsisting subjectivity." For Hart, the analogical being, wherever God is introduced, in the concrete sense of the term, and known in each act, cannot stand with any unrepresentable Other, just because the unrepresentability of God can be seen. It is simply incompatible with God the Creator and the incarnated God, that is, a revealing and revealed God, whereas in Lévinas, the perception of the other is found only in the realm of the former (not temporally) atheism, the world of lack and need (besoin), as desire and enjoyment. Again, it is the

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204 Derrida 1978, 95. Of course, Derrida tries to expound his own views on original writing when criticizing the classical notion of infinity: for Derrida, the wholly positive content of infinity is a sheer impossibility, for it must always contain a delimiting apeiron within itself, thereby marking the rupture between thought and language. See 1978, 114–115.
205 In fact, Lévinas describes the evasiveness of the Other coming close to absence to a degree that one can confuse this absence with il y a. Hence, existentialism for Lévinas is only an optic misinterpretation of naked freedom or Merleau-Ponty’s condemnation to a meaning.
206 Hart 2003, 79.
207 The meaning is, of course, that an atheistic existence is needed before the Other can be “welcomed”; separation is needed for the encounter with the absolute other. See Kearney 2009.
208 Hart 2003, 83.
“worlding” of the narrative, the rhetorical (non-)persuasiveness, that leads Hart to dismiss Lévinas’ thought as:

poor philosophy – the banal tortured into counterfeit profundity, the obviously false propounded as irresistibly true, other forms of thought caricatured and condemned with a vehemence frequently vicious, and a fulminant tone of mystical authority assumed wherever principled argument proves impossible – but, even so, this is my contention: as is the no doubt even coarser assertion that Lévinas advances a view of the world that is perhaps a little depraved.209

Hart does not, however, take into account that the Lévinasian position of ethics without ethics does not mean simply an absolute evasion of any structured ethics in the Kantian sense. Lévinas rather implicates that the “form” and the “force” are complementary, as are the ethical Other and the atheistic life. They are not opposed, as Bernasconi observes:

The saying is not opposed to the said; desire is not opposed to need; love is not opposed to eros; giving is not opposed to expectation of return and so on with the other phrases. A saying without a said, a desire without a need, a love without eros, a gift without expectation do not represent extreme cases, exceptions in a world dominated by the said, need, eros, economics and so on. The saying without a said, the desire without need, the love without eros, the gift without some return are enigmatic in terms of the system, never free of that order which they interrupt but irreducible to it. For that reason, they are challenging, haunting, but at the same time dismissed.210

This is truly easily dismissed: Lévinas can be deemed phenomenologically and aesthetically morbid only if one is not ready to implement an element of challenge to the human condition. He has his own true interruption, but just a different one in its rhetorical output and the “world” it narrates to be.

It could be said, in theological terms, that Lévinas’ position is an extremely kenotic one; it remains “a-theistic” in the sense that it appears without the supplement of resurrection: his ethicality reaches its peak in his analysis as “substitution,” where one’s identity is “unconditionally” absolved by the Other and his denuding saying. Thus, we remain within the mundane logic, and transcendence of the Other is merely its unattainability, a bad infinite. This means extreme passivity, in which one does not “coincide” with oneself, one “reverses his essence,”211 and thus steps into otherwise than being. Here, the encounter with the Other presents itself at its rawest:

Signification is the one-for-the-other which characterizes an identity that does not coincide with itself. This is in fact all the gravity of an animate body, that is, one offered to another, expressed or opened up! This opening up, like a reverse conatus, an inversion of essence, is a relationship across an absolute difference. It is not reducible to any synchronic and reciprocal relationship which a totalizing and systematic thought would seek in it, the thought concerned with understanding the “unity of the soul and

209 Hart 2003, 75.
210 Bernasconi 2005, 40.
211 Lévinas 1991, 50.
the body”. It is neither a structure, nor an inwardness of a content in a container, nor a causality, nor even a dynamism which still extends in a time that could be collected into a history.212

I think this is a key passage to understanding the similar impetuses of Hart and Lévinas, and seeing also where they part ways. The kenotic aspect of being suggests, in fact, compatible ideas with an authentic Christian encounter with God, of man becoming god, a person in communion. More to the point, Lévinas’ Other cannot in effect formulate a narrative, only separate acts of non-temporal encounters. It is precisely this last aspect that Lévinas shuts out: there can be no communion whatsoever, for it would be instantly devoured by the time of myself, temporalized, synchronized, and thus thematized as an extension to my essence, my duration. It also remains obscure how Lévinas thinks that an essence is capable of transcending itself in any way, if all the activity comes from the Other213. The animated body of Lévinas hardly opens up as anything other than an ethical corpse, which the Other surveys and operates in a sort of eternal autopsy.

However, it can be said that Christian aesthetics cannot assume such a passivity214, meaning that the Other must allow itself to be recognized to some degree. To put it in theological terms, without the Other as recognizable (to an analogous degree), as a covenantal Other, it is not enough to just phenomenologically “haunt” or “disturb” the pristine state of consciousness. Time is not only a phase in which the subject can discern himself, the infinite, and the thought, but time must have significance as the aesthetic narrative of salvation history, which opens up in the multitude of “phenomena” of the salvation, namely the covenantal history of Israel and Christians. This seemingly naive remark is actually the main division between the Lévinasian existential position and the Hartian version of the Christian narrative of “peace”.

Hart himself affirms that obligation flows from love or the possibility of love, and love (in both its strength and its indigence) is never entirely devoid of eros. It requires, of course, humility to acknowledge one’s need for the other’s response, to allow the “empirical” self its dependency, even if the “transcendental” self must then lose some measure of its purity: enough humility to be awestruck by the beauty of the other.215 Hart claims that in Lévinas’ case, the Other, being an absolute alterity, is actually possessed completely by the Self, by traversing infinitely the realm of indifference and insatiable distance. The proximity, the fraternal presence of the Other, which, for Lévinas, precedes every present of an I, turns out to be only my non-lived past, which does not feed my present in any satisfying way, leaving only a trace, “a hunger.” Hart actually argues that Lévinas is the individualist par excellence; the dominance of the Other, in its very absoluteness, is actually a cover-up for the crime scene called the I, and its ethical sublimeness and moralistic titanism.

212 Lévinas 1991, 70.
213 In fact, Lévinas suggests that the only activity of the I is the substitution itself, Lévinas 1991, 100ff.
214 Sensibility is not receptiveness, for the latter is already thematized; the sensibility is “maternal”, vulnerability, extreme passivity, “the whole gravity of the body extirpated from its conatus.” Lévinas 1991, 72. And regarding art, Lévinas treats a traditional view of art, as the coincidence of Good and Beautiful, as not appropriate itself for ethicality. See Schmiedgen 2002.
However, Lévinas’ thought is not devoid of the notion of others. The neighbor qua the other is always the first on this scene; he “does not have himself preceded by any precursor who would depict or announce his silhouette.”216 But again, Lévinas’ rigorous asymmetricality comes to the foreground. The other cannot be viewed as an image, for he always “commands me before being recognized.”217 This is something that could be described as the phenomenological prohibition of images in the strictest sense, for it does not include only objective or “transcendental” objects arrived at by some kind of reduction, but is a preliminary visionlessness, something that Derrida would describe as a silence that is only achieved by stifling all speech. The neighbor is not a brother in the Christian sense218, he is an obsession; his brutal dominance lies in the weakness of his form, as something close to the process of aging and its visible signs in the wrinkles on the face. In this ethicality, the glory of being (or otherwise) is described as a debit to the other: “This debit which increases is infinity as an infiniation of the infinite, as glory.”219

Here, it is easy to see how Hart portrays the difference between Lévinasian and authentically Christian views of being and its otherness. Christianity cannot sign the claims that ground the absolute otherness as absolute debt, it cannot succumb to the full emptiness or its audible silence, which in fact is the facelessness of the face, and hence somewhat demonic.220 Most of all, Christianity cannot do with the notion that reality is somehow dominated by original violence, be it ethical desire, which is itself the most subjective notion that there is, or a Derridean discourse that always succumbs to and humilifies itself against the superior *logos* of God.221 A middle ground should be sought between these two positions (Lévinas and Derrida can hardly be said to be either complementary or strictly opposite to each other). As Hart suggests, the thought of Lévinas must be moderated, and preferably in a Derridean manner, which at least takes the risk of approaching the other and is appraised as the more “clear-sighted” of these two philosophers.222 This amendment should proceed along the lines suggested by Derrida in his early essay on Lévinas, “Violence and metaphysics,” because Hart suggests that the ethical stance in Derrida stays somewhat unaltered in the course of his *oeuvre*.223

Hart reads the Derridean essay as moderating Lévinas’ absolutism in his formulations of the Other. It is perhaps the notion of a certain analogue understanding

216 Lévinas 1991, 86.
218 If phenomenologically constituted, the phenomenon of a neighbor must be seen in iconic terms, not as an obligation but as love toward neighbor, who is not only a different I, but an image of Christ. For this type of phenomenology, “phenomenological reduction of transcendence,” as James K.A. Smith calls Jean-Luc Marion’s work, which, according to Smith, aims at phenomenology of “pure givenness” as gift, see Smith, 2002.
219 Lévinas 1991, 93.
222 Hart 2003, 86. After all, the question of the Other is a philosophical reworking of classical theological approaches of kataphaticism and apophaticism; and only without the doctrine of Incarnation can the ineffability and transcendence of God and his revelation be seen as “options” or “opposite” aspects of speaking about God.
that Derrida suggests that seems to satisfy Hart. Following Husserl’s Fifth Cartesian meditation, Derrida explains Husserl’s treatment of other egos like the Other as such:

[…] an essential, absolute and definitive self-evidence that the other as transcendental other (other absolute origin and other zero point in the orientation of the world), can never be given to me in an original way and in person, but only through analogical appresentation. The necessary reference to analogical appresentation, far from signifying an analogical and assimilatory reduction of the other to the same, confirms and respects separation, the unsurpassable necessity of (nonobjective) mediation. If I did not approach the other by way of analogical appresentation, if I attained to the other immediately and originally, silently, in communion with the other’s own experience, the other would cease to be the other. Contrary to appearances, the theme of representative transposition translates the recognition of the radical separation of the absolute origins, the relationship of absolved absolutes and nonviolent respect for the secret: the opposite of victorious assimilation.224

What Derrida suggests here is that one should not take Lévinas’ point to the extreme, but only insofar as “the opposite of victorious” relation between I and the Other appears as a sort of distance, and with a healthy dose of moral suspicion. This, Hart views as an ethically more responsible stance to the matter225, but he still sees that Derrida cannot free himself from the temptation to radicalize the Otherness and thus separate goodness from being,226 as the motif of ethical action must then come beyond being and remain so if it wants to stay pure.

Finally, Hart tries to overcome this by stating: “What startles and provokes is glory, in which one finds a coincidence of strangeness and recognition.”227 This recognition, in corollary to the Balthasarian tremendum of the Old Testament visionaries and epiphanies, soothes in its strangeness; the analogical interval that is thus opened between the creature and the wholly other God is one of gentleness and appears as a call to communion. Encountering God means encountering being, and by this recognition he also recognizes the “given” state, that is, his createdness, and the world as separated from mere surroundings or the realm of enjoyment or lack thereof. If this corresponds to the Cartesian moment that Lévinas uses, it does so only within the narrative of Western metaphysics, where being is thought of, at least seminally, as a category or as the existence of subjectivity. Yet the Christian narrative speaks of the goodness of being rather than a naked being, and the difference between the Creator and the created does not open up as nameless, or an alter ego, which monopolizes and charges the categories of experience and thought with registers of violence or ethical obligations—in short, everything that Western metaphysics achieves when it tries to make the human leap from what is to what ought to be.

Thus, at the level of ontology (from which narrative ensues, as we have seen), the infinite of Lévinas is incompatible with that of Hart. In his lectures in Sorbonne in

225 Hart 2003, 89.
226 Derrida himself develops his account on Lévinas in Adieu to Emmanuel Lévinas, and he turns the tables by saying that every metaphor that Lévinas is using, and abhorred by Hart, is actually a way of saying “welcome” to the world and in relation to the Other. 1999, 56.
227 Hart 2003, 84.
1975–1976, Lévinas treated the concept of the infinite precisely as “excess” over the present, and the glory entering the present is not representation, but responsibility (as the infinite can never “reside” in the same, but only awaken it, wrest it from repose). For Hart, too, the infinite is an excess, but it is in being and reflected in it in created order. It is the task of theology to survey “how beauty can compel morally by its excess.”

Hart goes so far as to claim that ontology, in a proper sense, can be found only within Christian thought, for other ontologies either end up “solving” the ontological interval or letting Other and Difference rule in a violent sense. It is only the infinite that can, for Hart, keep the thematization of meanings at bay, by its offering of the names, that is, the analogates between created and divine realms. In short, the infinite, for Hart, refuses to be a counterpart to the finite, but even the freedom and “integrity” of the created being manifest “how the Trinitarian God is one God.” The concept of infinity will be treated in Chapter 4.

After these readings of Derrida, as a successor to Lévinas in the formulation of the ethical sublime, Hart summarizes his take on these two thinkers:

> Theology can take nothing from either approach to “ethics”: it cannot relinquish its faith in the goodness of being, or embrace the magical thinking that supposes that there is such a thing as a singular event that obliges part from the thematizations of creed and traditions; as it cannot accept the division between being and the good, or between the good and the beautiful, it can recommend neither “infiniation” or economy, but continue its pursuit its proper rhetoric, without “ethical” disquiet.

A few sentences later, Hart mirrors these critiques onto his own project:

> Thus this final narrative of the sublime points this essay [i.e. The Beauty of the Infinite] back to its initial task; to describe a rhetoric free of violence, an opening of the distance between selves that can span being without negation, privation, or strife, a rhetoric that shows finite difference to belong – before all else – to an infinite display of blessings at peace with one another, whose intervals are places of aesthetic mediation in which difference may be shared under the aspect of gift. This would ideally be a rhetoric, indeed, both predicative and nominative, invocational and evocative, adorational and lyrical, and endlessly rich in inventive transitions, inviting gestures, styles of grace: beauty.

In summary, against the background of Nietzsche and Lévinas, Hart wishes to stress the uniqueness of the Christian view of being. The difference between one and many (or being and becoming in Nietzsche), as well as the difference between the Lévinasian Self and Other, is, in Hart’s thought, out-narrated by theology by claiming that being itself is given as an analogous difference from God, and thus its surface can be beautiful.

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228 Lévinas 2000, 196–197.
231 Hart 2003, 90.
232 Hart 2003, 90.
and peaceful in the sense that is neither an example of will to power nor an ethics aiming at constant purity or succumbing to the obligatory sublimity of the Other.

Hence, by stressing the ontological side of transcendental unity found in being, Hart can offer an alternative reading to the two philosophers. I think that the most valuable aspect of Hart’s thought here is to pinpoint the importance of evading the sublime moment in Christian thought. There is no haunting “de-presence” in Christian thought; while creation is given as “knowledge” of the Creator, in Christ it is given its meaning. This evades the critique of Lévinas (and Derrida), for it is not presence of the Other (either as meaning or as the terminus of a causal relation) that characterizes how God relates to his good creation. It is rather as a difference that he is present to finite minds; and the world as creation will then appear as an ontological counterpart to this presence.

In addition, although Hart’s critique of Lévinas may be at times a little too rhetorical and tendentious, he shows that there cannot be such a thing as “Christian ethics” separated from other areas of Christian thought and tradition.

### 3.3 HEIDEGGER, HART, AND THE QUESTION OF BEING

So far, it has been discovered that at the center of Hart’s concept of re-narrative is rhetoric that can tackle different narratives. But so far, the ontological side of the Christian “interruption” has not been properly addressed. As Nietzsche proved to be an adversary on the level of rhetoric, and Lévinas on the level of aesthetic interpretation and the sublime, I will now proceed to explore Hart’s main ontological “adversary,” the thought of Martin Heidegger.

When one considers Heidegger’s importance, or his impact on clarifying the construct called “onto-theology,” his importance lies at the very foundation of thinking itself.233 The first major theme, and maybe the only one at the end of the day, of Heidegger’s thought is to try to retrieve the question of the Being of the beings from its metaphysical oblivion. The somewhat technical term, the ontico-ontological difference, refers simply to the concept of Being, which, as Heidegger aptly puts it, is one of the emptiest of concepts and is at the same time fullest of meaning. Being is not an entity among entities of beings. But what is it? Can it be said to “be” in some sense? It can be reasonably argued that this theme does not subside even in later Heidegger; it only assumes the form of Ereignis (an “Event”) or es gibt (passive tense of being, which implies the wonder that there is such thing as being instead of nothingness).234

In the same year as the publication of his Sein und Zeit, Heidegger, in a lecture, opposed philosophy and theology as two distinct “sciences.”235 In his view, theology remains “a positive science” distinct from the “ontological science” of philosophy, since theology proceeds from an already thematized vision of ontic being:

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233 Heidegger himself had an interest in Catholic thought in his youth, and also was later influenced by Schleiermacher. See Vedder 2006, 11–65.

234 Vedder shows how it is possible that later Heidegger, who distanced himself from theology, was influenced in his youth by Braig’s thesis that the Catholic vision of being already includes a “phenomenological motif” in itself. Vedder 2006, 11–13.

Proper to the positive character of a science is: first, that a being that in some way is already disclosed is to a certain extent come upon as a possible theme of theoretical objectification and inquiry; second, that this given positum is come upon in a definite prescientific manner of approaching and proceeding with that being. [...] Third, it is proper to the positive character of a science that this prescientific comportment toward what is given [...] is also already illuminated and guided by an understanding of being – even if it be nonconceptual.  

Heidegger argues that theology operates as a science in a sense when the concept of being is already given, and thus this givenness guides its thinking thoroughly, meaning that it thematizes it. Philosophy, on the other hand, fixes its questioning to being itself. For him, the “Christianness” of theology is a matter of faith, but its philosophical treatment can happen in a “pre-Christian” way, rationally. So, Heidegger can, for example, argue that only a Christian can be a sinner, but guilt as such belongs to the pre-Christian (without “awakening to Christianity”) Dasein’s being-in-the-world. Although conversion from the philosophical realm to the theological one is not possible via rational means, Heidegger stresses that there cannot be a particular “Christian ontology” as such. Theology, in a sense, is a very particular intensification of ontological themes into existential ones. Philosophy can be a “corrective” at an ontological level of pre-Christian axioms, but it does not depend upon it as itself.

Heidegger formulated the argument for (Christian) theology’s concept of being and its alleged “onto-theological” status as a “perdurance” of difference between Being and beings. Being appears only in beings, and beings appear only through Being. This forms a circular hiddenness, which captivates thought so that Being cannot be thought of in any other way but as this differing difference. The difference itself between Being and beings remains unthought. Being gets represented in a mistaken way and Heidegger exemplifies this with a story he borrows from Hegel: a man goes into a store and asks for fruit. He is offered different kinds of fruit but does not accept any of the particular pieces of fruit offered to him, since he is insistent that it is fruit he is asking for. In theology, the identification of God with the absolute being has similar effects. The deity enters philosophy as Aristotle’s “Unmoved Mover”; that is, when ontology “completes” itself by asserting the Highest Being and thus establishes metaphysics in onto-theological sense. This grounding of metaphysics is the so-called “double bind” of forgetfulness of being.

The question of the ontico-ontological difference is told differently as a narration in Heidegger’s and Hart’s work. Hart reads Heidegger as the major proponent and
propulsive genius of the postmodern mentality, in which the question of being seems to be already dealt with; that is, being is presented only as immanence or an event, a being that is not, but just eventuates itself, happens, and yet, at the same time, carries within itself a vague trace of the sublime, of the unrepresentable. Therefore, Hart sees this process as the developed continuance of the Kantian sublime through modernity, and one that finally transposes itself into the Heideggerian key. This means that the focus is centered on aesthetic categories of appearance and being, which in classical terms are treated as analogical, dialectical, and — in Christianity — revelatory opposites. Hart wishes to show that these are not opposites at all, for being appears in analogical difference regarding Being. His thesis runs like this:

In the experience of the sublime, on this account, what is intuited (in either Kantian or common usage of the term) is not the infinite lying beyond the sensible manifold (on either the hither or thither of the theoretical), but simply the eventuation of the difference that gives (and closes off within itself) the world.  

If appearing coincides with being, then the phenomena displaying this event can be treated in an aesthetic manner. The created state, which is experienced both in the phenomena and in the very experience of their appearing (as given) is then not merely an onto-theological argument, but a responsive evaluation of the original act of creation, which God deemed “good.”

Heidegger, however, wishes to De-Strukt Western metaphysics. This is not simply a process of demolishing ta meta physika, the possible entities beyond our sensible realm. Rather, this de-construction aims at philosophical work that sets out to think of the Being instead of beings. To do so, it must trace back its own history and see where it has deviated from this task. The quest for origins is a prevalent theme in Heidegger’s thought, whether it gets treated in a phenomenological manner as “fundamental ontology” as in Sein und Zeit (1927), as “Thinking” after his “Kehre,” or in turning his interest more toward the premises of possibility and the task of thinking (from 1930 onwards), or, in later Heidegger, as the poetic “dwelling” in the poetic language, as in Heidegger’s interpretation of the works of poets Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843) and Georg Trakl (1887–1914). In later Heidegger, the concept of Ereignis stands forth. By this term, Heidegger means that Being “requires” human thought to think itself, and it is a sort of historically evolving es gibt; as John Caputo puts it, Ereignis signifies the word “and” in Being and Time, as the principle that gives Being to thought and is thinkable in historical terms.

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242 Hart 2003, 72–73. In this, John Betz agrees. Betz views Heidegger as developing the Kantian and Nietzschean legacy into “ontological nihilism” much overshadowing the postmodern condition. Betz 2015, 391. See also GOL V, 412–413.

243 Hart 2003, 73.

244 This is not say that we could construct a philosophical and nostalgic Eldorado, where the Being shines forth in all its ease and splendor; rather, this task for philosophy reflects its own essence as historical thought, rooted in its own time (and with more National Socialist overtones, shows the signs of grandeur and epochality of the German Volk). Thus, the step of De-construction, in Heidegger, means a step forward, recognizing one’s position as a thinker (here the Nietzschean connections show themselves, especially in the writings of Heidegger during 1930s). See Heidegger 2000a, 46–47.

245 Usually treated as a phase covering years 1930–1946.

246 Caputo 1982, 168; see Hart 2005a, 269.
It could be asked if this obsession with origins itself reflects a metaphysical standpoint, namely a returning to a certain *arche*; but I myself find this trait of Heidegger scholarship very tiresome: Heidegger cannot be fairly studied if one is interested only in his flaws (whether philosophical or political), but as with Hart, one must hear first what he has to say in order to evaluate and situate him in the history of philosophy (and metaphysics, for that matter). A narrative should not be interrupted before its “opening up”; a narrative world cannot be evaluated before it is populated.

Nevertheless, the dispelling of metaphysics is a pursuit onwards (although at many points, such onwards appears only as returning to Greek thought and neologizing its terminology); it is a pursuit toward origins (which guarantees the task’s “nobility”247), and thus the entire Heidegger corpus is heavily inflated with expressions such as “primordiality,” “give possibility to,” and “in order to” at all levels, both as phenomenology and fundamental ontology and as a narrative of the Western history of Being, not to mention his more awkward dictums about the grandeur of the German language and people.248 First, however, we will explore how Heidegger constructs his most notable arguments.

### 3.3.1 Heidegger’s fundamental ontology

In order to understand what Hart sees as fundamental in Heidegger’s project, I shall first explore Heidegger’s most famous work, *Sein und Zeit*. This concerns itself with an attempt to analyze man’s being-in-the-world; man is a being who is already in the world and time. This basic structure of experience is Heidegger’s way of continuing the phenomenology of his teacher, Edmund Husserl.249 Husserl set out to consider the premises of experience by analyzing the intentionality of all thinking. His famous method of *epoche* attempted to bracket every subjective element from experience in order to reach the common, or “transcendental” basis of experience of an ego. Husserl’s grand idea, obtained from the work of Franz Brentano, was the concept of intentionality. Consciousness was not an empty tablet expecting to be worked upon, but always a consciousness of something; it appears only as already intentional, as toward and beholding something. Heidegger elaborated and, as suggested, radicalized his teacher’s project with his concept of *Dasein*: the very starting point of experience happens already within the world and time. Dasein is the state of man who thinks

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247 This nobility is impregnated with the religious overtones of Heidegger’s late thought of *Gelassenheit*, a-letting-be, which confronts the thinker when he is trying to reach “the nameless,” when human nature shows itself as dependent upon Truth, which only relates to man but is not be captured by him. See Heidegger 1966, 82.

248 “For along with German, the Greek language is (in regard to its possibilities for thought) at once the most powerful and most spiritual of all languages.” Heidegger 2000, 60.

249 As Heidegger is still struggling with his Catholic training and trying to establish himself in the academic world, he resorts to Husserl and his vision of the “crisis of European thought.” The latter is basically the phenomenological standpoint, where all previous epistemic horizons and metaphysics are questioned on the basis of experience itself; this means no empiricism, but an effort to reach phenomena, the things as they appear to us. Husserl pursued this all the more rigorously and idealistically, by trying to “bracket” off any subjective elements from the experience as such, and thus reach a “transcendental ego” with which we could explore, without any hindrance from any subjectivist influence, the “nature” or the event of human experience. Heidegger puts it simply in his early essay “Wilhelm Dilthey’s research and struggle for a historical worldview”: “[…] it [the crisis] involves a fundamental problem pervading the whole of Western philosophy: the problem of human life. What kind of reality is life?”, Heidegger 2002, 148.
of his own pre-theoretical being-in-the-world. Moran argues that Heidegger stressed more the practical nature of intentionality over Husserl’s theoretical application of it.\textsuperscript{250} To simplify matters, Heidegger stressed the lived and situated world in which man finds himself over Husserl’s exploration of human paradigmatic cognition over it.

The concepts of \textit{Being and Time} are already at a seminal phase in Heidegger’s early lectures on \textit{Phenomenology of the Religious Life} (lectures given in 1920–21).\textsuperscript{251} For example, his treatment of the concept of phenomenon resembles much of the starting point of \textit{Being and Time}:

\begin{quote}
Because the basic phenomenon is factual life experience, and because it is historical, so the first task is to determine the life complex of phenomena object-historically, pre-phenomenologically, as a historical situation, but already from out of phenomenological motives.\textsuperscript{252}
\end{quote}

This phenomenological “motif” ripens fully in \textit{Being and Time}. The main distinction here is made between the object and the phenomenon. Here, the former represents something historical, something that already has a history, and the object (for example, a chair) rests on its fulfilling historical variety. However, this “objectivity” of the object also forms its burden: the object “objects” the experience, it shows traces of life “trying to secure itself,”\textsuperscript{253} meaning that the confronted object already sets up a certain fixed epistemic and empirical horizon through which it gets interpreted. Therefore, the traditional division between the cognitive subject and the passive object must be discarded; it reflects all the negative aspects of veiling tradition, the prescribed “truthfulness” that gets merely repeated in every singular experience.\textsuperscript{254}

The phenomenon, on the other hand, is the gateway to reality, to experience \textit{as such}. Heidegger exemplifies the difference between the object and the phenomenon using Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians. Whereas Paul’s letter as an object (\textit{Objekt}) opens up a traditional way of “reading Paul’s text,” the phenomenon of Paul’s letter tunes us into the eschatological \textit{Stimmung} of Paul’s writing, and pulls us toward an existential state of eschatological anxiety.\textsuperscript{255} Hence, the theological thought stemming from Paul is not to be discovered from the truths extracted from the text, but from the dogmatic attunement that Paul’s text induces and makes possible in the first place for truth to be extracted. This elemental parousian attunement also makes it impossible to explore it historically or analytically: in brief, it is “serving God.”

Here, we meet the basic mood that Heidegger is trying to illuminate in all of his works: thought must not concern itself with searching for “the truth” in phenomena,

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\textsuperscript{250} Moran adds, however, that the matter is not so simple. Husserl himself changed course more than once, and revised and revalued his own work constantly. Moran 2000, 62–63.

\textsuperscript{251} Heidegger’s \textit{Habilitationschrift} (1915), which was demanded then for approval for a teaching position, dealt with Duns Scotus. From Scotus, Heidegger learned the concept of \textit{haecceitas}, a certain intentionality of being, which developed in \textit{Being and Time} into a recovery of the neglected temporality as the pre-theoretical horizon of human experience. See McGrath, 2006, pp. 60ff.

\textsuperscript{252} Heidegger 2014, 58, §22, 83–84


\textsuperscript{254} Historically, Heidegger sees that actually this objectivity, the experience that flows from a singular object, also withholds a “sense of transitoriness,” that is, a feeling of the inevitable finitude of the existence of that particular chair. Heidegger sees that Platonism has its roots in this idea and battling it. Heidegger 2014, 25–6.

\textsuperscript{255} Heidegger 2014, 67, §26, 95–98.
things, or objects, but rather must search for such an origin that makes it possible for these relations, statements, or things to appear in the first place. Paul’s letter is not a text; it is an opening up of the reality of what Paul is writing about, and only in this realm can we assert whether this “text” can be said to hold such adjectives as “authentic,” “truthful,” or “beauty.” Moreover, this setting up of a certain Stimmung in man is a crucial point at which one advances in the world of Being and Time. Paul’s opening is not a merely “existentialist” analysis of “Paul’s state of mind,” but an opening of Dasein (Paul) to being, which is conditioned by eschatological premises.

In Being and Time, Heidegger sets out to formulate his most famous question in a similar manner, as a question that “is” only for a thinking being. The question regards the being of beings, not only a problem that propagates the philosophical difficulty of thinking of the Being of the beings, but a process that has formed the whole Western tradition of metaphysics. That tradition, something that gets named, rather ominously, onto-theology, must be “destroyed,” not annihilated, but de-structured in order to let the space appear where this difference, that is, the difference between beings and their Being, appears.

We must […] stoke out the positive possibilities of that tradition, and this always means keeping it within its limits; these in turn are given factically in the way of question is formulated at the time, and in the way the possible field for investigation is thus bounded off. On its negative side, this destruction does not relate itself towards the past; its criticism is aimed at ‘today’ and at the prevalent way of treating the history of ontology, whether it is headed towards doxography, towards intellectual history, or towards a history of problems. But to bury the past in nullity is not the purpose of this destruction; its aim is positive; its negative function remains unexpressed and indirect.256

The man is a being of the world. Man does not exist without the world, but his position, here and now, is always conditioned. Thus, he is Dasein, a being-in-the-world. Dasein is not simply a human being, but a being whose being is a question for itself. Dasein cannot change this fact, yet it has possibilities over the everyday throwness that Dasein finds itself to be in.

Things appear to Dasein. Heidegger’s vision of the phenomenological starting-point of the being-in-the-world carries a somewhat bucolic overtone: the surroundings of Dasein appear as physis, a term that Heidegger tries to rehabilitate from the “decay” of Romanizing and Christianization tendencies that establish and solidify these phenomena as natura (and creaturehood).257 Here, we encounter a version of nature in a sense very similar to that of Nietzsche. Nature is an abstraction that does not let beings appear but is already structured as an ontology or metaphysics. The phenomenon is

256 Heidegger 1965, §6, Int. II, 44, 22–23 (former number the Macquarrie translation, latter the German original).

257 Heidegger 2000a, 13. Physis is a concept that Heidegger keeps referring to, even in his later works, in different guises. Physis stems from the Greek root fyo, which unfolds the Being as beings and makes them appear. Actually, later on, when Heidegger gets interested in Nietzsche more explicitly, physis and logos (which is the gathering up of the physis) reflect the primordial unity of the world, each element playing against and with each other, as the play of clearing (aletheia) and closedness (lethe). This play is polemos, the strife of war of Being, which is a possibility for Dasein to grasp it by logos, by a gathering up of the sway of physis. So, physis makes Being emerge as beings and this clearing, which is possible for the thinking Dasein, gets thought as logos. Where this war is settled or a truce called, there also the world hides from sight.
to be distinguished from the appearance, for the latter would not appear without the proper understanding of the phenomenon itself:

“In spite of the fact that ‘appearing’ is never a showing-itself in the sense of ‘phenomenon’, appearing is possible only by reason of a showing-itself of something. But this showing-itself, which helps to make possible the appearing, is not the appearing itself. Appearing is an announcing-itself (das Sich-melden) through something that shows itself. If one then says that with the word ‘appearance’ we allude to something wherein something appears without being itself an appearance, one has not thereby defined the concept of phenomenon: one has rather presupposed it. This presupposition, however, remains concealed; for when one says this sort of thing about ‘appearance’, the expression ‘appear’ gets used in two ways. […] According to this, phenomena are never appearances, though on the other hand every appearance is dependent on phenomena.”  

and

“‘Phenomenon’, the showing-itself-in-itself, signifies a distinctive way in which something can be encountered. ‘Appearance’, on the other hand, means a reference-relationship which is in an entity itself and which is such that what does the referring (or the announcing) can fulfill its possible function only if it shows itself in itself and is thus a ‘phenomenon’. Both appearance and semblance are founded upon the phenomenon, though in different ways. The bewildering multiplicity of ‘phenomena’ designated by the words ‘phenomenon’, ‘semblance’, ‘appearance’, ‘mere appearance’, cannot be disentangled unless the concept of the phenomenon is understood from the beginning as that which shows itself in itself.”

All this amounts to a statement that “only as phenomenology is ontology possible.”

Heidegger means that ontology, the Being of beings, must not be interpreted traditionally, meaning that the phenomena of beings do not stem from some “upper” or beyond reality. Traditional philosophy has sought theological ingredients when it has attached its goal to “ultimate things,” deterring the facticity of life. On the other hand, this does not mean that we are only passive lookouts for Being, or that this should somehow imply an unreflective attitude toward being. Therefore, even in his later so-called mysticism, Heidegger’s Being is always conditioned by thinking. It is no mere phenomenality, a Heraclitan pool of different immediate currents, but—in Being and Time—a certain resoluteness to be in such a way that appearing and being coincide and thus originally disclose also the question of Being. This Seinsfrage, the possibility to ask “why are there beings rather than nothing,” occupies later Heidegger more hauntingly.

The ontico-ontological difference is connected in Being and Time with this phenomenology qua ontology. Heidegger suggests that Christianity has disfigured

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260 Heidegger 1962, §7, 60, 35–6
261 Heidegger 1998, 42.
262 Heidegger 1962, §7, 61,37.
this difference by attributing Being to a Supreme Being, namely, God. Later on, this
view gets fortified with Descartes and Kant, who “only explore nature instead of
the World.” The genealogical argument here is very similar to that of Nietzsche:
first, reality gets distorted by supplying essences and their prima causa; secondly,
this distortion takes the shape of modern science, which is simply a return to nature
without God, but not the world (Heidegger) or life (Nietzsche) itself.

Heidegger thinks that onto-theology means precisely this: Being cannot itself be
thought, but it must be attributed “away,” and yet somehow this “away,” for example,
the transcendental difference between God and the created being, must be explained
with this Being. This presupposes a univocal conception of Being: that the difference
between the infinite and the finite is merely a matter of degree or the limen of human
capacity. This resulted, in medieval times, in the doctrine of analo gia entis, in which
the relation between the finite and the supreme being is conceived analogically, instead
of proportionally or univocally. Heidegger argues that this innovation does its part in
the history of Being by developing the dementia concerning “the question of Being.”
Analogia entis is a bold endeavor, yet it leaves the question of Being unasked. Here,
obviously, Hart and Heidegger part ways.

Heidegger emphasizes that all the claims of onto-theology, such as the essence
of man, and his state of corruption or grace, are categories that are only meaningful
if applied after the existential analysis of Dasein, the being-in-the-world. Dasein’s
basic attunement toward the world, and the moment of its individualization, is
anxiety as care (Sorge). This is not a mere feeling, but a fundamenta realization
or a horizon on which Dasein operates and also grounds the authentic way of being
for Dasein (as the realization of Dasein’s potentiality-for-Being). Heidegger even
names this possibility to be authentically “a call,” that is, the call of conscience to
Dasein to “choose itself.”

It must be noted that anxiety or care is what makes the difference between Being
and beings shine. It is true that one can read Heidegger’s work from the viewpoint
of a failure, namely, the failure of the “obnoxious” world to resist appearing: the
world announces itself only when it is “lit up” as equipment, sighted in care and in
circumspection, so the whole project of deconstructing metaphysics appears to be
one great act of cleaning, struggling its way through prescription upon prescription,
dusting the old books, and letting that dust settle again (appear) in a new light.

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263 Heidegger 1962, §21, 126–7, 94.
264 Heidegger 1962, §20, 126, 93.
266 Heidegger notes that Dasein can exist either authentically or inauthentically, that is, it can be absorbed
into the world or, as Heidegger puts it, take “a Fall” into the world, become only “them” instead of an I.
267 This is Dasein’s Being. Anxiety is anxiety in the face of Dasein’s condition within the world, and there
is no entity (as in a sense in the thought of Lévinas) to which this anxiety is related. Rather, anxiety is
the primal sub-structure that makes it possible for Dasein to discover its potentiality-for-Being-in-itself.
273 For example, Heidegger 1962,3, 105/74.
Heidegger does himself in his corpus, this dusting must also be the new soil for new language.

Of course, if one is to scrutinize Heidegger’s concept of anxiety, one must bear in mind that anxiety has no object proper; it is an installment of being-in-the-world and only anxiety in the psychological sense should in fact be felt in the face of the crumbling metaphysical systems (if one is relying on classical metaphysics). In *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes anxiety as the call of the conscience to Dasein and one by which Dasein “is dominated.”272 This gives him a twofold possibility: one may identify the “caller” as a personal force, namely, God, or one may explain the process biologically. Heidegger simplifies the phenomenal stance by asserting these two “traditional possibilities” and then introducing his own: “Dasein is anxious with anxiety about its ownmost potentiality-for-Being. *What is this Dasein, which finds itself* [sich befindet] in the very depths of its uncanniness, should be the caller of the call of conscience?”273

Sorge is neither a simple matter nor a constant “state.” Rather, it entails a “circular logic” that surfaces in Heidegger’s thought repeatedly. 274 Basically, it means that there are no ultimate fixed positions, states, vantages to which we could attach neutrally and also at the same time be authentically.

As Heidegger puts it:

*the entity which in every case we ourselves are, in ontologically that which is farthest. The reason for this lies in care itself. Our Being alongside the things with which we concern ourselves most closely in the ‘world’ – a Being which is falling – guides the everyday in which Dasein is interpreted, and covers up ontically Dasein’s authentic Being, so that the ontology which is directed towards this entity is denied an appropriate basis. Therefore, the primordial way in which this entity is presented as a phenomenon is anything but obvious, if even the ontology proximally follows the course of the everyday interpretation of Dasein. The laying-bare of Dasein’s primordial Being must rather be wrested from Dasein by following the opposite course from that taken by the falling ontico-ontological tendency of interpretation.* 275

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273 Heidegger 1962, §57, 321/276. Is such a thesis, or rather a vision, tenable? Is it only to affirm the existential choosing, in which Dasein choices its own Being by following it? To a Christian phenomenology, which by no means declares itself as the original one (for the revelation, which conditions the whole “worlding of the world,” is a historical event, that of Christ), such a choosing loses its radicality and reduces itself to a cartoon drawn about using your freedom. In fact, freedom for Heidegger is only *the used freedom*; it never appears as the recognizable element of experience of the gift, even in thinking, or the “Thanc” of Heidegger (See Heidegger 1968, 138ff). See also Hart 2003, 70.
274 For example, in *Being and Time*: “When one talks of the ‘circle’ in understanding, one expresses a failure to recognize two things: (1) that understanding as such makes up a basic kind of Dasein’s Being and (2) that this Being is constituted as care. To deny the circle, to make a secret of it, or even to want to overcome it, means finally to reinforce this failure. We must rather endeavour to leap into the ‘circle’, primordially and wholly so that even at the start of the analysis of Dasein we make sure that we have a full view of Dasein’s circular Being. If, in the ontology of Dasein, we ‘take our departure’ form a worldless ‘I’ in order to provide this ‘I’ with an Object and an ontologically baseless relation to that Object, then we have ‘presupposed’ not too much, but too little.” Heidegger 1962, §63, 363, 315–6.
275 Heidegger 1962, §63, 359/311.
Therefore, there is always a threat for Dasein to fall into the inauthentic being of “they”; the metaphysical way of expounding ontico-ontological difference is always attempting to close off the way to Being. One must “wrest” and fling one’s own being in the opposite direction from that which the “normal course of events” would suggest; the normal here is equated with thinking within the premise of the classical understanding of the ontico-ontological difference. This wresting of ontology is violent. The concept of anxiety is supplemented fundamentally by Dasein’s finitude, as being-towards-death, which “sets the scene” for the temporal and historical being of Dasein.276 The somewhat “ascetical” sense of the Heideggerian wrestle does not take place in combating angels, nor within any metaphysical or celestial hierarchy, but as the realization of the potentiality-for-Being of each particular Dasein.277 Dasein must be resolute in his standing on the horizon of the world and also in his own temporal being. Heidegger names the latter Dasein’s ek-stasis, that is, he stands out in time, which projects the present from the having-been of the future.278

Hart reads Heidegger as the proponent of an “alternative story,” namely that of Western nihilism. In an article, Hart even calls the Heideggerian projects “one of the profoundest meditations on modernity and on the nature and history of modern nihilism written in the last century.”279 “As a precious ornament” of philosophy of the 20th century, he sees the positive sides of Heideggerianism as twofold.

Firstly, it is a fertile continuation of Nietzsche’s nihilism in a way that both criticizes the error of modernity and attempts to replace it with a philosophy that is again able to confront all being in its fullness (whatever that may ultimately mean).280 Secondly, this “wholeness” results in philosophy that links truth not only to some prevalent or privileged epistemological category, or at least attempts to do so, but also to Being.281

Hart’s thesis is that despite all Heidegger’s awareness of the historical sideroads of the Western thought of being, its stepping aside from the original Greek (and later, of Hölderlin) Dasein and its Platonic venom that must be conquered with phenomenological antidotes282, his view of the history upon which he builds his whole philosophical project is seriously limited. It is, according to Hart, limited in two senses: in its actual sense of how history and tradition are displayed and in the conception of tradition itself. Heidegger himself dismisses tradition, as it is usually conceived, as the adversary of Dasein’s thought of its own historicity, as follows:

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276 It has been contested that Heidegger’s choice to use anxiety as the primal Stimmung of Dasein compromises his neutrality in matters of ontology. Caputo 1993, 53. This choice may be due to his theological training: the concept of anxiety is borrowed from Kierkegaard, who envisioned it as an authentic and prephilosophical (in his terms, “biblical”) way of existing in the world. See Caputo 1993, 61.

277 Caputo names this idea the theologia crucis in Being and Time. 1993, 79.

278 This technical discussion means basically that Dasein is a being of both future and past, a structure that reflects the structure of Sorge analyzed above. Only authentic being in time discloses the finite structure of Dasein’s being. Heidegger 1962, §74, 437, 385.

279 Hart 2011b.

280 Hart regards Heidegger as not so “catastrophic” in his views of Christianity’s involvement in Western thought. Hart 2003a.


282 In this, Hart’s view coincides with Dominique Janicaud’s, to whom the “theological turn” of phenomenology without Heidegger could not happen (2000, 31).
When tradition thus become master, it does so in such way that what it ‘transmits’ is made so inaccessible, proximally and for the most part, that is rather becomes concealed. Tradition takes what has come down to us and delivers it over to self-evidence; it blocks our access to those primordial ‘sources’ from which categories and concepts are handed down […] Dasein has had its historicality so thoroughly uprooted by tradition that it confines its interest to the multiformity of possible types, directions, and standpoints of philosophical activity in the most exotic and alien of cultures; and by this very interest it seeks to veil the fact that it has no ground of its own to stand on. […] Dasein no longer understands the most elementary conditions which would enable it to go back to the past in a positive manner and make it productively its own.283

Secondly, Hart agrees that Heidegger succeeded in rescuing philosophy by returning to a presocratic immersion of being, of a pagan closed universe, where violence of being is a necessity since it cannot entail any authentic transcendental relief.284 Hart suggests that Heidegger’s thesis of oblivion of being in Western metaphysics is in a state of forgetfulness itself.285 Hart turns the tables on Heidegger by saying that the latter’s whole enterprise shows disregard for the transcendental opening of being, which makes the horizon of Being and beings possible in the first place.286

Additionally, Hart argues that Heidegger does not include in his grand narrative the “interruption of theology,” which has always suggested that being and becoming are not opposites but rather a preliminary and inevitable “way of being” that points to being’s difference, not to its “onto-theological” persistence and dry conceptualities. The Ontic is, in a Christian sense, never a singular entity, which in turn only “represents” an ontology; nor is Dasein only practical and existentially in a state of anxiety (even if this anxiety is a completely neutral way of portraying his being-in-and-towards-the-world):

With this “Christian interruption” of metaphysics, every principle of necessity was made subordinate to the higher principle of grace. Christian thought […] was in fact so profound a disruption of many of the most basic premises of philosophy, and so audacious a rescue of many of philosophy’s truths from the impotent embrace of mere metaphysical ambition, that it is doubtful yet that philosophy can grasp what has happened to it, or why now it cannot be anything but an ever more indignant and self-tormenting flight from that interruption.287

The modesty of Hart’s argument set aside, the Christian interruption offered a view on being that is not ideistically tied to Being (as in Plato) nor a mere unit of a linguistic relationship with categorical concepts (Aristotle). Basically, what Hart seems to suggest is that Christian belief has a phenomenology that does not “evade”

283 Heidegger 1962, INT II, 43, 22.
284 Hart 2003, 226.
285 Hart 2003, 221.
the question of Being, but rather lets it be; this will be elaborated more when dealing with Hart’s conception of analogia entis.²⁸⁸

For Hart, it is as if Heidegger and his disciples present Western metaphysics as a main course between the theological appetizers and dessert: being is thought to be a stably Grund or a network of conceptual systemata that is, supposedly according theology, first present as the “objective world” of creation (appetizer), and that ultimately gains its being and its purpose from a higher being, namely God. However, the whole dinner is what gets de-constructed; yet de-constructing a meal does not leave any flavors, or even ingredients. We are left with the essence of supper, which consists of nothing edible.²⁸⁹ I mean to say that, according to Hart, the upturning of the whole metaphysical project is a project of impossibility; metaphysics always gets replaced and veiled in turn by another metaphysics, whether that is one of fundamental ontology, thought of Being, deconstruction, an Event, or the Other. Destruction is always a metaphysical act itself. In short, if one agrees with Hart, every discourse that relies on the ontic realm and draws its principles or foundings there, must remain a mythology.²⁹⁰ Any dream to get to “things themselves,” as with Kant or any primordial structure of Dasein’s experience, is doomed to lay its hands upon nameless matter, sanctify it, and baptize it as sublime. Being represented does not get salvaged by the unrepresentable. For Hart, the mystery that accompanies the event of being, or its appearing, is not a fault or a lack in being, but rather the opening up of it. For Hart, Heidegger explored being only horizontally, mining the vocabulary of ancient Greeks, but was oblivious to the vertical interruption, the vertical revolutionary surface that Christendom offered.

In addition, it is the very Stimmung of Heidegger to which Hart objects. Indeed, why choose anxiety as the determining and orienting layer of Dasein? Why not attraction, delight, or love? Again, it is the seemingly mythological unveiling of Being that Hart wishes to overcome by reminding Heidegger of the Christian “interruption.” Here, the concept of Being is what becomes “interrupted,” since for Hart, it cannot be salvaged from the position determined by the polarity explained above, namely the inevitable choice between a Parmenidean and a Heraclitan view of being. In a nutshell, Hart tries to show that all other ontologies are victims of certain gradual metaphysics: only with a Christian interruption, the continuum between One and the Many, can they be perceived in analogical terms, not variations of forgetfulness of Being nor in a mythological return to Dasein devoid of all transcendence.

In later Heidegger, it may be said that this choice comes to the surface in a different disguise. John D. Caputo writes that until What is called thinking?²⁹¹, Heidegger had tried to overcome metaphysics using another metaphysics (which Hart thinks continues throughout Heidegger’s œuvre), namely that of Nietzsche, which is filled

²⁸⁸ Hart, in his rhetorically ornate style, tells us that Heidegger spent his career powerfully invoking the question and, with similar fortitude, evaded it. Hart 2003, 130.
²⁸⁹ This is something that Heidegger agrees with (to a degree) in stating that the question of Being is, at the same time, the emptiest and the most meaningful of questions.
²⁹⁰ This mythology always also forms a “pagan” view of reality, for whether it grounds itself in the playfulness of the immediate or, for example, the infinite flight of ethics (Lévinas), it reflects the “iron grip of fate” that fortifies the “pathology of modernity,” which Hart sees as “a difficult choice or mad oscillation” between the two extremes. Hart 2003, 91–92. Later, he adds: “Under the regime of necessity, the philosopher is the king.” Hart 2003, 129.
²⁹¹ The original printed German version appeared in 1954; the actual lectures were given in 1951–2.
with choosing, the will, and the resolving in *Being and Time*.\(^{292}\) In “Postscript,”\(^{296}\) even this metaphysics is surpassed. This has sometimes been interpreted as the “mystical” turn of Heidegger.\(^{294}\) That surpassing takes the form of *Gelassenheit*, in which Dasein is no longer the active element, but rather (even the will of Nietzsche) the other is allowed to have its way with us. For Caputo, this is the elementary mystical experience.\(^{295}\) Hart agrees that Heidegger is right that, from the viewpoint of modern nihilism, the “independent enterprise of critical reason is collapsing,”\(^{298}\) but will not adhere to Heidegger’s vision that philosophy will solve its problems on its own.

Later, this alleged mysticism only intensifies. It flourishes in Heidegger’s “dwelling” in the world and “Fourfold,” a visionary setting of the living world. The Fourfold, namely earth, sky, mortals, and divinities, stands as a poetic stance toward being in which we “dwell” as human beings.\(^{297}\) The language that Heidegger uses is most complicated; yet we can trace from his later writings a tendency to attempt a thinking that safeguards the results achieved in *Being and Time*, freed from any representational (as in “metaphysical”) content.\(^{298}\) It is not necessary to summarize these reflections here; rather, it suffices to conclude that later Heidegger came very close to mysticism, which tries, paradoxically (or in Christian terms, para-doxically, imbued with God’s glory), to recover the immanent and factual world and still find a place where man can think (i.e. recognize the need to either think about the question or “dwell” in the world”). Moreover, Heidegger shifts his thinking to a more passive gear; the Fourfold is not some representational idea or experience of our own ego, but an Event in which Being shines forth. As we have seen, in earlier “theological” writings Heidegger already sought a religious form of intentionality, that is, God must be something that can be worshipped, not only postulated as the Highest of Beings or *causa sui*.\(^{299}\)

In a sense, if we believe Caputo’s reading, Heidegger ended up where he started from: from the early “givenness of beings” (the interest in a factual life-world), he returns to “multiple sendings of Being and truth.”\(^{300}\) Hart argues along similar lines

\(^{292}\) Caputo 1986, 24, 142–143.

\(^{293}\) A postscript that Heidegger added in 1943, and revised in 1949, to his 1929 lecture “What is metaphysics?” Already in 1934, however, the term “holy” starts to appear in Heidegger’s works. See Vedder 2006, 215–216. John Caputo argues that Heidegger’s religious outlook changed in the 1920s. According to Caputo, Heidegger “threw away” the key he had previously developed in his *Habilitationsschrift* to understand medieval ontology and mysticism. Caputo 1982, 251.

\(^{294}\) For this, see Caputo 1998, 36ff.

\(^{295}\) Caputo 1986, 25: “The only way to access to Being itself is to let Being be and to let it address man.” This is termed *Gelassenheit* in Heidegger, and in his book Caputo explores the term’s relation to Rhineland mysticism, and especially to Meister Eckhardt.

\(^{296}\) Hart 2003, 226.


\(^{298}\) This happens, according to Caputo, already in *Satz vom Grund*, Heidegger’s reading of Kant in 1929, in which Heidegger tries to escape the infinite regression of causality (and thus the need for metaphysics) by identifying Being as something that man cannot pressure to fit into his own categories. I would like to add that this conclusion is not far away from classical *via negative* or negative theology, and as it is, it represents the most metaphysical element in Heidegger’s thought. Caputo 1986, 25. Heidegger himself answers to this that his project differs “by a world” from the Christian viewpoint; the “abyss”, the not-representable, “appears as baseless only to those who are still under the spell of metaphysics…” Caputo 1986, 80.

\(^{299}\) Vedder 2006, 230.

\(^{300}\) Caputo 1993, 30.
(though not as benevolently as does Caputo) that Heidegger actually remains within beings in his analysis, and mistakes this multi-faceted immanence by treating it as ontological difference.301

Hart also criticizes Caputo’s interpretation of the latter’s study *Heidegger and Aquinas*.302 To Hart, it is a “crucial issue” to take a different stance than Caputo does in his book. In the final chapter of the study, Caputo seeks common ground for St. Thomas and Heidegger in a mystical realm.303 Caputo explains how Heidegger’s concept of *Ereignis*, which in English is usually translated as “appropriation,” is to be set in contrast to Aquinas’ concept of *esse*.304 In the event of *Ereignis*, Being is given, opened; but this giving is not a causality (otherwise it would become onto-theological) but a presenting itself, as being appears as presence (*Anwesen*).305 This is what is lost, according to Heidegger, in an ontological system, in the original (i.e. early Greek) of being as appearing presence, not a later, more solidified concept of *ousia* or such. The metaphysical tendency is to close and cover this primordial eventual being. *Ereignis* is, as put by Philip Tonner:

> The meaningful relatedness of beings to our understanding and interest is determined by the historical event (*Ereignis*) which appropriates us and which we can appropriate and make our own during those rare moments constitutive of our historical dwelling. Such moments reveal our cultural logic to be what it is and allow us a fresh encounter with the mysterious fact that there is being. Historical civilizations are constituted by particular revelations of being (the truth of being) and involve a particular view of truth. Heidegger’s concern is with epochal shifts in the way historical humanity.306

In addition, in the light of his phenomenological analysis of Dasein, Heidegger views Dasein as something conditioned by his involvement through *Sorge* in time and in the world, as being “never at rest.” In the words of Ben Vedder: “Projecting toward the possible is prior to having and appropriating the actual.”307 That means that, for Dasein, the will for possibilities of existence are projected over the thinkable actual states. The point that Hart is making is that the participatory language of creation cannot be handled in the sense Heidegger displays it. What he finds untenable is precisely the statement that Caputo makes at the very end of his book: “And possibility is always higher than actuality, *sicut Martinus dixit.*”308 The concepts of actuality and possibility

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301 Hart 2003, 222.
302 Caputo 1982.
303 To be fair, it must be said that Caputo does so with a great number of reservations, and he presents his case more in the manner of an intellectual possibility. Caputo 1982, 279.
305 Caputo 1982, 169.
306 Tonner 2010, 146.
307 Vedder 2006, 241. Vedder adds that the primacy of the possible over the actual runs through Heidegger’s works.
308 Caputo 1982, 284; Hart 2003, 222. This is also what Jean-Luc Marion suggests in his concept of the saturated phenomenon: he suggests that we should think of the relation between I and the saturated phenomenon in an upside-down manner, the phenomenon determining the I, not the other way around. See Marion 2008, 23–24.
are, of course, from Aristotle; in his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle sets out his concepts of actuality and potentiality by using the words *dynamis* and *energeia*.\(^{309}\) A potentiality to be something is indefinable in itself, and can be actualized in multiple manners. Hart argues that Caputo uncritically assumes Heidegger’s thesis that these original Greek terms have been translated into Roman vocabulary (*dynamis* into *potentia* and *energeia* into *actualitas*) in terms of conquest, that is, as effective causality. The problem here is that Caputo and Heidegger’s reading depends upon a certain univocal reading of being, and for Hart, that is simply mistaken.\(^{310}\) In his view, such a stance betrays “naive essentialism,”\(^{311}\) and this reduction of all Aristotelian causalities into an effective one is, in the Hartian reading, precisely what Radical Orthodoxy has criticized as a problematic legacy of nominalism.

So, at general level, Hart views Heidegger as a captive of the very same tradition that seeks to destruct and retrieve creatively. His project was, like Nietzsche’s, a healthy reminder to theology to be vigilant of its own roots. In addition, Hart also uses the same rhetorical argument “of turning of the tables,” as was the case with Derrida: the Heideggerian critique of onto-theology is misplaced and praiseworthy at the same time, since it begins with the wrong ontological *theoria*.

### 3.3.2 Engaging later Heidegger and metaphysics

It can be said that *Being and Time*, with its second part never finished, concluded the systematic approach to philosophical problems for Heidegger. This also meant a turning away from the fundamental ontology, which tried to explore the temporal structure of Dasein as it appears. For Hart, the later Heidegger, usually coined as “more mystical,” shows more promise than his philosophical early career.

During the 1930s, Heidegger wrote his politically most ominous pieces, but that decade also brought forth a tendency that led him to emphasize more the role of “Thinking.” Special emphasis was laid on the concept of truth, which Heidegger again saw as developing (and deteriorating) in the history of Western thought. As a matter of fact, Heidegger argued, history proper *begins* only with the question of being:

> Being as a whole reveals itself as physis, “nature”, which here does not yet mean a particular sphere of beings but rather beings as such as a whole, specifically in the sense of the upsurging presence [aufhebendes Anwesen]. History begins only when beings themselves are expressly drawn up into their un-concealment and conserved in it, only when this conservation is conceived on the basis of questioning regarding beings as such. The primordial disclosure of being as a whole, the question concerning being as such, and the beginning of the Western history are the same; they occur together in a “time” which, itself unmeasureable, first opens up the open region for every measure.\(^{312}\)

Here, questioning of Being holds beings in un-concealment and lets them appear as history in a traditional sense. This is uniform to Heidegger’s task to describe the

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\(^{309}\) *Met*. Θ.6, 1048a25.

\(^{310}\) Hart 2003, 223.

\(^{311}\) Hart 2003, 224.

human condition, but one is eager to ask if this represents a heavy burden for a thinker, for it is up to him that the question gets asked. Does this not result in a hugely “anthropomorphic” concept of history, and language that takes hold of the questioning? Dasein, while not to be treated as a subject or an individual, is already a rupture in \textit{physis}, an asking force that imposes history upon the world. This is a mythological operation, to be sure: in it, Dasein finds truths as they are “revealed” to him by Dasein’s own activity, which it cannot resist in the act of thinking.

It is, then, no small wonder that Heidegger later expands on the confusion and effacement of Being and also on the language that Occidental thought solidified very early on.\textsuperscript{313} In addition, every humanism, every specification of man’s essence, whether religious or philosophical, is always a sort of metaphysics,\textsuperscript{314} and “[m]etaphysics does indeed represent beings in their Being, and so it thinks the Being of beings. But it does not think the difference of both. Metaphysics does not ask about the truth of Being itself.”\textsuperscript{315} Thus Heidegger’s “Kehre” represents his attempt to surpass metaphysical thinking altogether.

Again, we fall into the problem of thinking of the ontico-ontological difference. This difference must also somehow “appear” in order to be thought, and yet it must be thought in order to draw beings from oblivion, \textit{lethe}. We require a vision of the \textit{meta} that separates beings from Being. Heidegger puts it (perhaps, conveniently) in terms of looking at a church building:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Seeing in the light of what is, the facing, the idea of beings always goes beyond beings. For instance, when are facing the cathedral, we are faced not just with a church, a building, but with something that is present is, in its presence. But the presence of what is present is not finally and also something we face, rather it comes before. Proper to all else it stands before us, only we do not see it because we stand within it. It is what really comes before us. The facing, the idea of what is, judged from what is, is always beyond what is – meta. To have seen this meta, that is, to have thought it, is the simple and thus inexhaustible meaning of all Greek thought. The idea of what is, is in itself metaphysical.}\textsuperscript{316}
\end{quote}

Heidegger tries to show that since Heraclitus and Parmenides, all the lesser areas of thought have taken the place of the primordial questioning, namely, all “isms,” logic and, later on, in the Middle Ages, the conception of truth as Aquinas of \textit{veritas} as \textit{adaequatio rei as intellectum}, the potential correspondence of man’s capability of truth as \textit{ens creatum}, and divinity’s eternal “idea of truth.”\textsuperscript{317} It is only after Christianity, in the age of nihilism, that the logicality of worldly epistemic grounds succeeds the Christian view of the truth. For example, and most importantly, already with Plato and the sophists, the appearance gets degraded into “mere” appearance.

\textsuperscript{314} Heidegger 1993, 226.
\textsuperscript{315} Heidegger 1993, 226.
\textsuperscript{316} Heidegger 1968, I, IX, 98.
The chasm, khōrismos, was torn open between the merely apparent beings [essent] here below and the real Being somewhere up there. Christian doctrine then established itself in this chasm, while at the same time reinterpreting the Below as created and the Above as the Creator, and with weapons thus reforged, it set itself against antiquity [as paganism] and distorted it. And so Nietzsche is right to say that Christianity is Platonism for the people.318

Ultimately, this historical process leads to our own times and manifests itself as technological superiority over nature, and it leaves man, who in Greek times was the “shepherd of Being,”319 confronting nature and reality as an engineer and a warlord.

Because beings have been created by God – that is, have been thought out rationally in advance – then as soon as the relation of creature to creator is dissolved, while at the same time human reason attains predominance, and even posits itself as absolute, the Being of beings must become thinkable in the pure thinking of mathematics. Being as calculable in this way, Being as set into calculation, makes beings into something that can be ruled in modern, mathematically structured technology, which is essentially something different from every previously known use of tools.320

This historical portrait exists naturally to denounce modern technological nihilism. Hart argues that Christian theology’s “interruption to history” suggests an ontico-ontological difference that reflects the event of beings as a gift.321 The “disfigurement” of Antiquity is now the “interruption of Christ”; these are the two narratives that can now be seen as competing throughout history. In effect, while affirming Heidegger as a sharp-eyed critic of modernity, Hart dismisses Heidegger on similar grounds to Nietzsche: both thinkers fail to see the radical novelty that Christianity introduced into the realm of men and thought. The Platonic legacy on its own was recognized by Erich Przywara as always carrying “a rift of tension” within it322, and Hart is keen to show that Christian thought unleashed this tension (while not absolving it) in a novel manner. Unless this novelty is perceived, the Christian difference fails to appear at the same time as the “foundation” of our being as unnecessary, free, created—and these are played out not as metaphysical categories, but as beauty. To put it simply in the words of Hart: “[…] the event of the world simply is the occurrence of this analogical interval.”323

Ontico-ontological difference is thereby transformed by Christianity, and Hart adds that it is plausible to see Heidegger’s philosophy reflecting a recoil from this

318 Heidegger 2000a, 111.
321 Hart 2003, 131.
322 Namely, the tension between idea and reality, between universal and real particular. Przywara 2014, 251. See also 259–260.
323 Hart 2003, 131.
blow.\textsuperscript{324} The Christian \textit{meta} does not mean \textit{meta ta fysika}, but an analogical icon of beauty. \textit{Meta} appears as the created being, unnecessary and contingent on itself, as an opening more original than any “thinking” would have it. This blow has shattered the uniform \textit{Grund} from which any metaphysics could be deduced and has replaced Platonic idealism as the splendor of earthly, created, and analogical beauty. The Christian creation has no \textit{Grund} of its own; it is created freely out of nothing by the Father, and thus its Being is none other than the analogicality of created beings to divine being, revealed and corrected in the Supreme Analogate, in Christ. On this “ground” rests the theological interruption of being.\textsuperscript{325}

Hart presses his case onwards: to him, the late Heideggerian “paganism” means basically a return to the “origin of metaphysics,” that is, to the presocratic undifferentiated vision that mixes awe at the face of nature, all becoming, and totality, an ontic and mystified economy, as was hinted upon in the previous chapter. This vision is obviously historically re-constructed and depends upon Heidegger’s very original readings and renderings of the Greek philosophical works. In this, Caputo’s playful statement is echoed:

\textit{Let us remember that good storytelling requires a conveniently short memory. […] Let us take it [the Heidegger’s story of the Greeks] for what it is, a philosophical myth […] That, I think, will liberate the considerable power of Heidegger’s thought from an energizing nostalgia and new dawn-ism, which strands us in a nostalgic longing for a lost world and a longing hope for a new dawn, trapped between two beginnings, too late for gods and too early for Being, feeling bad that we longer speak Greek and afraid of being of bad faith if we buy a computer.}\textsuperscript{326}

Heidegger’s story is alluring. Hart even calls it “damnably seductive.”\textsuperscript{327} However, as a narrative, it can claim no right to reach out over the millennia and wrest, in a Promethean act, the fire and light from the Greek gods. Although it is contestable that Heidegger suggests that simple a return, the myth of origins is doubtless prevalent in his work. To Hart, it seems that the beginning of philosophy, in Plato, also means the beginning of a possibility to think of ontico-ontological difference, whether this in turn gets interrupted by the Christian vision or not. Heidegger thus represents a return to this undifferentiated reality of the ancients.

In a historical sense, the vision of the early Alexandrians, in which the ancient philosophers are presented as teachers of the unknown Christ and as “making way to the Lord” alongside Israel’s prophets, is still vividly present in Hart’s thought: theology “needed” Plato to “open” the aforementioned awe, and late antiquity to refine its syncretic Platonism, only to be finally “shattered” by Christian thought (with

\textsuperscript{324} Hart 2003, 132. Hart also observes that nihilism is a logical event in the history of Western metaphysics, as well as Western theology itself: the latter, by inducing nominalism, which reduced the whole vision of the creation and transcendence of God into representations of God’s will and the possible act of voluntarism on behalf of human being, ripped apart precisely the ripping of Christianity itself: its authentic vision of transparency of the world and its beauty (133–4). In an article in 2009, Hart even adds that modern atheism is precisely the forgetfulness of modernity’s God, not of the analogically conceived classical Christian God. See Hart 2009, 321.

\textsuperscript{325} See GOL V, 120.

\textsuperscript{326} Caputo 1993, 36.

\textsuperscript{327} Hart 2003, 213.
the Judaic concept of transcendence to work as a leaven). To theology, this, in turn, is a tempting narrative. This shattering has blown away the finiteness and lets the mystery of the immediate otherness shine in its infinity. It also takes into account the salvific content of history; the soteriological kairos that are present in concrete history. So, basically, according to Hart, Heidegger equates the aletheia, the clearing of being, with the un-shattering, and returns to the (pre-Christian, and not pre-ontological as Heidegger would have hoped) roots of Western thought.

In addition, the Christian narrative, should it present itself in the world of appearance, is happy with the conclusion that Western metaphysics went astray when choosing as its starting point the human ego or will. The original thaumazein of philosophy, the awe before things as they appear, does not necessarily lead to Heidegger’s conclusion, namely nihilism, yet it can be recovered and presented as authentically Christian.

The Christian version of the story presents ta fainomena (things that appear) not as something conformable to our senses and to our understanding; rather, it always implicated a meta, a beyond that the gaze is called upon. On this basis, the erotic content of Christian seeing can be explained and, at the same time, any element of Gnosticism (the temptation toward emphasis of epistemological aspects of the truth) dispelled: Christian being-in-the-world consists of being among beings, which all yearn and tend toward a greater reality, not in any otherworldly melancholy but as an affirmation and an amen to a “very good” state of creation.

Here, we can return to what was said at the end of the previous chapter. In philosophical terms, the Christian view on being suggests that an actuality must always precede a potentiality, for a potentiality as such cannot appear before a previous actuality. Furthermore, God is an infinite actuality, comprising every potentiality. This is not to be taken in Heidegger’s manner of effective causality, which founds an onto-theological base of operations, but in a manner through which the presence (Anwesen) is not exhaustive of being’s appearance. Rather, as the quote from the Radical Orthodox compilation earlier went, the Christian theory of being is such that it says “that all there is only because it is more than it is.”328 It can be said that an analogy of being suggests that being itself is not the final word of beings, or in other words, the “transcendental remainder,” which is always inherent in a present being, is not be attributed in causal or metaphysical terms, but it appears only in a greater difference in which it participates (stressing Przywara’s formulation of analogia entis and his notion of “creaturely metaphysics” as a distinctive Denk-form from either purely a priori or a posteriori metaphysics329). At the same time, the aesthetic “surface” of Being does not “lie” and merely “conceal” Being, but reveals its givenness and must be available to inspection, and most of all, available for delight.

The ways of Heidegger and Christian stories break up precisely in the description of Being itself; where Heidegger treats Being “without verticality,” “Christian theology is obliged always to point out the infinite ‘distance’ between God and his creatures.”331 In other words, the Christian “plot” always has transcendence as infinity of God as its narrational tropos and hermeneutical key to beings. In phenomenological terms,

329 Przywara 2014, 164, 310.
330 This is a remark made by Hans Urs von Balthasar, GOL II, 49.
331 Hart 2003, 213.
this transcendence is given an element of immanence itself, or theologically speaking, the createdness of beings. Infinity appears to the world as difference. Being created means not only that beings are a result of a creative act, but also in participation with the Creator. In aesthetic terms, this means that this difference is recognized as such as an expressive force, something that illuminates both our Dasein and its participation in God’s glory. So, when Heidegger teaches us that Being is in constant strife of revealing and concealing itself, to Christians this is already a recognizable event of presenting the utter freedom of God, his “spokenness,” and the nothing from which the creation is created.332

Hart puts it simply: metaphysics is wrong when it tries to represent being as a univocal “substance” or “presence.” The ontico-ontological difference is analogical:

[…] beings express God’s infinite being by being other than God, not as negation or occlusion of that being, but by bearing testimony to the richness and glory of the infinite they traverse, as moments of distance opened within God’s transcendent act of distance.333

The principle of analogia entis is Hart’s answer to Heidegger’s onto-theological critique. Hart has obviously read his Caputo, for the latter also identifies the core of Heidegger’s thought in aesthetic terms, in something he calls “phainesthetics.” As mentioned, Heidegger’s basic thought of Being is that it “shows itself, appears, informs about itself as appearance.” Thus, it is phainesthai, self-appearing.334 Whereas Hart treats this shining as the ontico-ontological difference as gift (and thus as the basis of Christian aesthetics), Caputo sees that the Heideggerian treatment does not offer any idea of the sublime, of something that would call us to ethics (in the way that the philosophy of Lévinas does).335 In this sense, the erotic dimension of the gift is not taken into account by Heidegger.

3.3.3 Phenomenology of the gift

If ontology in itself presents a problem (Nietzsche), and if ethics (Lévinas) or the destruction of onto-theology (Heidegger) should fail, as we have seen, the theme of the gift has appeared in Hart’s account of the analogical view of being and, by derivation, in multiple ways in regard of the possibility of both ethical action and theoria. The theme of the gift is important not only for grounding ethics, but, as we have seen, it is also crucial in the manner that Christian being “appears” (in a conditioned) phenomenological sense. The gift is, then, not just a supplementary logic that Hart evokes; it is, in a sense, the thinkable content of the experience of beauty in beings

332 To this, Heidegger would object that, for the Greeks, the concept of space was unknown: “The Greeks have no word for ‘space.’ This is no accident, for they do not experience the spatial according to extension but instead according to place (topos) as chôra, which means neither place nor space but what is taken up and occupied by what stands there.” See Heidegger 2000a, 66. Of course, Heidegger is not talking about nothingness as something that a fiat can be called upon; rather he suggests that the factual life experience of the Greeks does not authentically resort to the concept of empty space.

333 Hart 2003, 213.

334 Caputo 1993, 142-145.

335 Caputo 1993, 143.
and through them, their inner unnecessary being and reflective and analogical status regarding God.\textsuperscript{336}

Catherine Pickstock has argued that the theological current of thinking about giving the gift provides a necessary correlation to the secular readings of the gift, which hopelessly flicker between action and passivity.\textsuperscript{337} According to her, theology can offer a “middle voice” that escapes the economy, the sacrificial, or the political sphere of exchange suggested by postmodern authorities, and it does so by granting the ability to give, which is precisely the “original” gift itself.

The discussion itself, albeit hopelessly varied and at times elevated to the status of a grand narrative, is based on a sociological classic by Marcel Mauss and his analysis of the system of reciprocity in different sociological settings.\textsuperscript{338} Mauss’s concept of the gift is famously elaborated by Jacques Derrida, especially in two works, namely \textit{Given Time}\textsuperscript{339} and, especially of interest here, \textit{The Gift of Death}. In the first work, Derrida reads a tale by Baudelaire and tries to discern the possibility of giving in principle.

The logic of Derrida can be summarized thus: giving is impossible because a gift always both ruptures the economy of exchange and succumbs to it. In other words, the ordinary structure of the gift, as consisting of a giver, gift, and receiver, is present by bringing about a debt, an obligation of charity and reciprocality, which simultaneously “designates the impossibility of the gift” and “brings the gift to its destruction.”\textsuperscript{340} The gift is impossible precisely because it demands an an-economic status that it cannot possibly maintain or that it loses at very moment the gift itself comes into being.\textsuperscript{341} In the end, the gift is possible only as a “trace” in the text; it can only appear as \textit{dissemination}, “can only act in total forgiveness or excess forgetfulness.”\textsuperscript{342} This strikes the reader familiar with Derrida: the claim that the deconstruction of stable subjectivity is needed (for in \textit{Given Time}, subjectivity is grounded firmly in the realm of economy\textsuperscript{343}) in order to reach a giving that is pure of any economical, and therefore somehow impure, logic.

Here, it is of interest to trace Derrida’s concept of the gift genealogically to see how it plays out in the light of Hart’s argument for “the interruption of Christ.” To Derrida, it was Christianity that introduced “a second tremor in the genesis of responsibility

\textsuperscript{336} Cf. Milbank 2005, 108.
\textsuperscript{337} Pickstock 1998, 112.
\textsuperscript{339} Derrida 1992. In the introduction (ix, note 1), Derrida also offers a useful survey referring to his previous works concerning the theme of the gift and giving.
\textsuperscript{340} Derrida 1992, 12.
\textsuperscript{341} That is why Derrida says that even the phenomenon of the gift (without any actual or concrete form) is enough to destroy the gift. Derrida 1992, 14.
\textsuperscript{342} Derrida 1992, 101ff.
\textsuperscript{343} Derrida 1992, 24: The subject is constituted “in a view of dominating, through calculation and exchange, the mastery of this \textit{hybris} or of this impossibility that is announced in the promise of the gift.”
as a history of secrecy.” What does this mean? First of all, it means a development from the Platonic premises of exteriory of responsibility to interior and inaccessible Christian ones. Derrida sums this development up by connecting it to the “culture of death,” and so the question is asked now in this way:

> How does one give oneself death [se donner la mort]? How does one give it oneself in the sense of that putting oneself to death means dying while assuming responsibility for one’s own death, committing suicide but also sacrificing oneself for another, dying for the other, thus perhaps giving one’s life by giving oneself death, accepting the gift of death, such as Socrates, Christ, and others did in so many different ways.

Giving necessarily establishes some form of responsibility or reciprocality, or, in more general terms, implies an inevitable change in relations between the exchanging parties. In Derrida, as Spitzer has noted, the gift cannot ever come into being, for if it appears, it demolishes itself; the gift can appear only as a promise or as a trace of the gift. The same seems, eventually, to apply to God himself; John Manoussakis argues that if the phenomenological “purity” of the Other is stressed, God can never “appear,” for the appearance must always occur within a pre-established I.

Derrida informs us that Patocka’s claim is that Heideggerian philosophy actually treats only Christian themes of ontology (albeit in a “de-christianized way”), and in this Patocka only clarifies the original Western aporia of responsibility, which is woven into the very structure of Western Platonic and Christian inheritance. So, in this view, which Derrida finds inadequate, the primary ontological unit of Christianity is not the Platonic Good or the transcendent Godhead, but the Christian notion of the person, their soul and the gaze of the soul, which they cannot relate to any object but to the person themselves. This is the mysterium tremendum of Christianity: the gaze within which the subject finds himself in the Christian condition—according to Patocka.

Neither Hart nor Derrida can agree. Derrida himself finds this thematization of responsibility to distort the very concept of responsibility. This whole discourse is part of a wider assumption of “the Other,” of which one can naturally find ample

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349 Namely that in order to be responsible, one must have all the necessary knowledge of it and at least the capacity of knowing them—which amounts to subordinating the possibility of responsibility to objective knowledge. It is the “purity” that haunts western obligation of morality, and that is a false purity, devoid of goodness, as Hart argues in the case of Lévinas.

350 Derrida 1995, 27. To Derrida, the question is always preserving the possibility of things. If one thematizes responsibility, one domesticates it into doctrines, knowledge, and so on. Derrida insists that it is not possible to thematize responsibility; it must always be “heretical”, meaning: “there is no responsibility without a dissident and inventive rupture with respect to tradition, authority, orthodoxy, rule and doctrine.” Derrida 1995, 27. It is, of course, very revealing that Derrida understands the concept of the person in politically flavored ontological terms. Actually, later, Derrida argues that clarifying the question between responsibility and the gift is a crucial question of European politics to come. Derrida 1995, 33.
examples from the Christian tradition. To Patocka, this meant that Christianity has to recover this *mysterium* of the Other in order to break free from the Platonic “residue,” to separate it conclusively from the Platonic *agnoston* and orderly knowledge. Derrida radicalizes this view:

* Taken to its extreme, the text seems to suggest on the one hand that Europe will not be what it must be until it becomes fully Christian, until the *mysterium tremendum* is adequately thematized. On the other hand, it also suggests that the Europe to come will no longer be Greek, Greco-Roman, or even Roman. The most radical insistence of the *mysterium tremendum* would be upon a Europe so new (or so old) that it would be freed from the Greek on, Roman memory that is so commonly invoked in speaking of it; freed to the extent of breaking all ties with this memory, becoming heterogeneous to it. What would be the secret of a Europe emancipated from both Athens and Rome?  

This question echoes a Heideggerian tone. Hart’s answer would be, of course, “Jerusalem.” The whole question of separating Platonism from Christianity is already solved in Christian terms: their separation never happened. The radical nature of Christian doctrine did not happen *ontologically* as a lightning strike, and thus there is simply no authentic critical moment to be discovered, only banalities of historical proceedings. Of course, this does not mean that the dilemma is solved; this basic notion of Christian self-understanding, especially as it was formed in the first centuries of its existence, is only mentioned as a different *narrative* position. It remains to be shown how actually the Christian gift, and all the necessary deductions that can be made from it in order to construct a Christian concept of personhood or subjectivity, can “be.” Can it possibly concur with Derrida, to whom subjectivity is defined by the gift of death, the only thing that is irreplaceable in a human being? In the final analysis, “only a mortal can be responsible.”

However, we must first return to the narrative of Patocka, which is developed further by Derrida. According to the former, in a very Nietzschean manner, Christianity has attempted to surpass Platonism by *reversals.* The one of interest here is the claim that Christianity overturned the concept of the Platonic gift into a secret gift that never appears: Christian life and its praxis were conceived as responsibility in “an event” that carried notions of Platonic Good and, at the same time, a trait of profound inaccessibility. This results in a sinful state that finds the responsibility of repentance as the method of avoiding the economy of exchange by self-sacrificing itself. All in all, this is nothing but neo-Nietzscheanism in disguise; Patocka says that the Christian *mysterium tremendum* is basically awe and subjugation in the face of the inaccessible Other that holds us in check not as an exterior, but as an interior Other.

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353 Derrida 1995, 41. This, of course, is not an exhaustive definition of the Derridean concept of the subject or person, but only in relation to the theme of giving. As the passage here referred goes on, the link with Heideggerian *Sein-Zum-Tode* is noted as the very core of singularity, with death being the only thing that cannot be done *instead of me.* Heidegger 1962, §4, 240.
354 Derrida, 1995, 41.
In Christian terms, as Patocka explains and Derrida comments upon, responsibility is then constituted of structural dissymmetry between the subject that gains its form from its irreplaceable mortality and the infinite love of God that gives to forget its gift, effacing the trace of the possible economy that the gift carries with it. However, the conclusions drawn from this dissymmetry, it seems to me, are false on the basis of Christian anthropology. Derrida deduces that the event prescribed in the dissymmetry of the gift results in the feeling of guilt (one’s impossibility to respond to or reach the level of the infinite gift), which is thus transcribed into the responsibility itself. This is very Lévinasian; it recalls a situation in which one is guilty before one “is”; in which the purification of the Other is preliminary to anything I can do, intend, think, or be. Derrida names this mode of being adieu, as standing under the presence of God, who is not there, from whom we cannot hear any laws or commands. The whole situation must be assumed upon oneself (Heideggerian aufnehmen), which is very much something that Christian theology would simply call an utter transcendence of God. Yet theology cannot plausibly support a claim of a total deus absconditus.

More importantly, language is precisely the moment at which an individual enters into generality; language “translates” us into the general. This “strange contract” binds one to the mysterious dialectic of secrecy of responsibility and publicity of human signification and language. As Derrida agrees, language is not only a shared capacity for transferring meanings, but it is also “a scandal and paradox” without which one is doomed to total silence of solipsistic tremendum of the inaccessible God. In this sense, the gift of death is something that happens out of love (Abraham and Isaac), and thus the sheer excessiveness of responsibility mysteriously escapes any “normal” sacrificial economy. This is the view that Derrida attributes to all the “religions of the

Derrida 1996, 51. See also page 91ff, where Derrida analyzes the gaze of God in an Augustinian manner. Correctly, he points out that in Christianity, the economy of giving in Christian praxis obeys an eschatological logic (storing treasures of the heart in the heavens), only to reduce it to a sort of capital investment that cannot be devalued, corrupted, or taken away. Although he makes note of the requirement to love one’s enemies and the infinite repository of the gift, Derrida wishes to replace the metaphysical or, here more appropriately, the omniscient and all-seeing God with one that is “the name of possibility I have of keeping a secret that is visible from the interior but not from the exterior.” Derrida 1995, 108. Thus, his God is “a structure of conscience,” a secret interior invisibility “self,” a God in me which simply unveils, manifests itself in the life of the self-entity itself. From “this heretical and evangelical,” “interior critique of Christianity,” Derrida concludes that it can evade the state that Christianity is in. Christianity is doomed, with support from an argument made by Nietzsche, to obliterate itself, for its justice depends upon grace, which itself dissolves justice per se and “takes the economy of excess in the sacrifice of Christ for love of the debtor.” Derrida 1995, 114.

For example, see Lévinas 1969, 213.

It should made clear that Derrida thinks here of God’s transcendence as absolute: he is tout autre. Thus, his uniqueness “doesn’t tolerate analogy.” Derrida 1995, 79. His analysis reveals a constant tendency to assume purity, almost in a pharisaic manner. His concept of faith is without any certainty and thus also without any history; that is, it cannot be transmitted from one to another. Every linguistic speech act of conceptualizing spoils it. One can almost say this Derridean nepsis comes close to a form of twisted philosophical hesychasm, yet without its practices of calling the very specific name in prayer, without its identification and rootedness in and with Christian revelation. Derrida himself recognizes something of the problem inherent to the dictum tout autre est tout autre. Derrida 1995, 82ff. See Hart’s evaluation 2003, 89–90.
Book,” meaning the three great monotheistic traditions. Moreover, the impossible demand of sacrifice is “the revelation of conceptual thinking in its limit.” And for Derrida, this is an impossibility, since thinking, even if it is a revelation that imposes limits, crosses over them at the same time, “overflows” them, and thus forms an unrepresentable “over.” The gift in Derrida must appear to be an unanticipated event; in Spitzer’s analysis, a Derridean gift must appear “as chance.”

Thus, in contrast to Hart, Derrida brings out the gift in its pagan form, and treats his Other as Judaic absolute transcendence, or what he understands as such. In this logic, if a gift appears, it succeeds only in sacrificial terms, in the already spoiled terms of barter, obligation, and moral aporias.

### 3.3.4 The Christian gift

David Bentley Hart links the gift to the creation itself. To him, the “French debate,” most notably visible in the figure of Derrida, displays the problematic trend of “chic academic radicalism.” Hart sees correctly the certain fanaticism of this radicalism: Derrida’s clinging to the purity of aporias, the avoidance of any “logic” ensuing from the appearing gift and thus neglecting the very possibility of the gift, completely misses the positive sides of giving the gift. In fact, as seen previously, the subjectivity that, for Derrida, is engendered only in economic exchange is actually, for Hart, the very moment that ensues from the gift. Hart writes:

> One becomes a “person”, one might say, analogous to the divine persons, only insofar as one is the determinate recipient of the gift; one is a person always in the evocation of a response.

So, the gift is not only ethical (pace Lévinas) because the self itself is constructed in the movement of the charity of the gift, in an analogous manner to Trinitarian persons, in whom “desire and selfless charity are one.” In addition, as Richard Kearney has observed, if the gift is reckoned only in neutral terms, such as obligation or debt, the very Christian-ness of its logic vanishes; so we can elaborate Hart’s personalist reasoning by saying that becoming a person demands recipience of the gift by a named and “determinate” God. This “determination” distinguishes the other’s particular

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362 Derrida 1995, 64–65. Derrida exemplifies his argument by referring to the bloody history of the Holy Land, where three monotheisms describe the sacrifice of Isaac for their own political ends, each telling their own version of the preliminary narrative at Mount Moriah, by linking its theological content to other orders such as economics and politics. Derrida 1995, 70.

363 Derrida 1995, 68.

364 Spitzer 2001, 122–123.


367 Hart 2003, 261.

368 Hart 2003, 261.

369 Kearney 2001, 74–75.
features, not only his “meaning” or “obligation.” Precisely because the Christian gift can offer a third way, a way of giving that does not induce an infinite series of debt, as Nietzsche analyzed the Christian inner experience of exteriority, but that is “recognizable, apart from other economies of exchange, because it can and must be given again.” The gift is not a derivate reality. Divine economy is not a singular act, reflecting a priori moments of ethical purity or impurity, but a constant act of giving, outpouring that is not exhaustive but excessive. This “language of love,” as Hart coins it, represents the linguistic model offered by him as a radical alternative to all immanent radicalizations of otherness, personhood, and subjectivity.

This divine language is voiced already in creation, thus making it precede creaturehood, which in turn is conceived in this model as constructed by the divine address and by responding to it. Hart’s analysis of the gift leads him to a categorical statement:

*To believe in the possibility of the gift within the immanent exchanges of finite existence is to believe in the possibility of analogy, the possibility that what is given can be received differently and restored, without alienation from itself and without the entire dynamism of exchange being reduced to a single uniform reality like the circulation of power and debt.*

In short, Hart links his concept of the gift within the larger framework of his theology, especially with the aesthetic affirmation of analogy, to the conviction that “surfaces are ‘profonder’ than the depths.” For it is the very “surface” of being where being actually happens and is “real,” for the surface is the only “readable” surface of being, because the Christian being is foremost characterized and expressed in responding, yielding no stable essences or natures or metaphysical notions of a self. This is highlighted in the Trinitarian being itself and its relation to Creation, which is the giving of the gift, not any combination of exchanges between individual persons of the Godhead or their premiere actions over and upon the world as such. This theological “suspicion of substance” reflects Hart’s argument, in which the postmodern concern for the Other is considered affirmatively, and through the model of the Trinitarian being as gifting, which conceives as recognizable the Other (God) and others, as concrete and unnecessary eventuations of divine economy of excess in creation.

When considering the gift and subjectivity in this manner, they appear to be almost opposite to those employed by Derrida. For Derrida saw subjectivity as arising from an interrupted gift (only a corrupted gift can be given), and recognition of it as resulting from recognizing the economics of power that gave and gives birth to it. To Hart, subjectivity, or personhood more precisely, means recognizing (and

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370 Hart 2003, 144.
371 Hart 2003, 266.
373 Hart 2003, 268.
374 As Milbank describes as being inherent in theological endeavor (1997, 110). Both Milbank and Hart are thereby creatively inverting and translating the metaphysical critique of Nietzsche, to whom the notions of substance and selfhood, for example, are only *results* and *effects* of the dynamics of will to power. BGE 18–19 (2002, 18–19). Interestingly, Nietzsche himself laments that Christianity is always “staying within the surface of things,” and he interprets this as psychological deviation. WP §394, (1968,212); §424, (229); cf. GS II, 58 (2001, 70–71).
thus ‘accepting’ the fact that no phenomenological *epoche* is, in the end, needed) the charitable generosity in an aesthetic way, not ethically, as Derrida seems to suggest. As opposite discourses are hardly ever fruitfully comparable, it is of course impossible to verify or falsify either one as such. Again, alternative narratives compete.

In addition, the concept of giving, although it describes the “mode of being” both in Trinitarian life and in its economic manifestations, must, in order to delineate “the theological alternative” to subjectivity and its construal, be supplemented with the concept of desire. The gift must be desirable, otherwise it would reduce itself only as power or will.

Here, it becomes necessary to touch on the work done by Jean-Luc Marion on the gift and givenness. Hart sees correctly that Marion’s attempt in his *God without Being* is an endeavor that seeks to dismantle the Heideggerian subjugation of God under an onto-theological setting of Being. Marion argues that God could be thought of otherwise, as without Being, since his “being,” or existence, is given only as a gift, as Love, *agape*. This conceptual shift is crucial for understanding Marion’s phenomenological approach: God does not appear under Dasein’s concept of being, but only as a gift, a distance that can be approached in two ways. It can be seen in an “idolatrous” sense, which means that a perceiver thematizes the phenomenon and is therefore able to see only a mirror of his own finitude (thereby converting it into an idol, a mental picture). The other option is to succumb to the iconic gaze, which makes invisible in its infinity and thereby reverses the gaze of the perceiver as perceived, but not in the passivizing sense that Lévinas suggested as always entailing engagement with the Other. The icon opens up as a “face,” not as a mirror. Hart agrees with this phenomenological basic setting and affirms that theological discourse can speak of distance seen in creation in a manner that neither mixes God and creation nor separates them in the manner of a bad infinity. Hart clarifies:

> All of this is conceivable, for theology, because of the priority (which the icon declares) of hypostasis, this coincidence of the aesthetic and the infinite – this liberty of God to be in his infinite distance as the God he is, this eternal beauty of distance, and this transcendence of the aesthetic over the thought of “being as such” – that is the uniquely Christian story of the infinite, the uniquely Trinitarian thought of beauty.

Numerous important features of thought collide in this passage. First of all, Hart affirms that Christian truth does not reside in a general form (not in the Other, not in Being, not in Truth), yet it has a form, since it is a hypostasis, a person. Secondly, the priority of hypostasis over essence is here transformed into a phenomenological key. Thirdly, it is the aesthetic dimension of the gift of creation, meaning the gift of distance, that transcends it and links it to the infinity of God.

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376 Marion 1991; Marion 1998, 167.
378 For example, Lévinas wrote (1969, 34) that desire of the Other is for the sake of the Other, and not for the sake of I or the Same; yet he describes this encounter more as “hunger” than *agape*.
379 Hart 2003, 237–240. Hart only criticizes the possible excesses that can be found in Marion’s texts, but it seems to me that these warnings show more the tendency of the reader than the actual content matter.
The point on which Hart disagrees with Marion is the latter’s disregard for being, and this disregard is displayed as ultimately positing a dialectical moment between God’s being and creaturely being. How is this so? Hart explains, by taking Jean-Luc Marion and Robert Scharlemann’s article under scrutiny as examples, what one is facing if one tries to separate God from being or think of him outside of it. In Marion’s case, Hart views the phenomenological impetus of his work favorably, but his conclusions seem to Hart to reveal a univocal understanding of being, even if it evades the notorious notion of “Being.” As Hart remarks, every attempt to dissolve the metaphysical dimension between God and the world results in “situating” God at either the phenomenological end or the ontological end of the spectrum, which operates dialectically in univocal theologies. Moreover, the conclusions neglect Gregory of Nyssa’s contemplation on divine infinity, which transcends all concepts and yet displays itself in created differences as true difference. This aspect is clarified further in the next chapter.

True, Marion suspects the possibility of analogy between God and beings, as he reads that, in Aquinas, esse belongs properly to God, not in the realm of creaturely being in any form (thus not even analogy). It is also true that Marion follows a Heideggerian onto-theo-logic to the point that he regards an ontological interval as certainly an idol, but the most useful “negative propaedeutic” step to take in contemplation of God. He envisions that as agape, God does not have to be, but only gives himself as a gift; the divine names used for God are there just to highlight the impossibility of naming Him. Yet these names evoke praise, and therefore discourse, and this is why God beyond Being must be addressed and not convicted to knowable silence. Encountering God is encountering his distance as the gift.

Hart argues that this prominence of distance is too greatly emphasized, while acknowledging the fact that Marion seeks an authentic way to “commune” with God and does so explicitly and in many instances contra Heidegger. Hart sets Gregory of Nyssa’s “primordial analogy” in contrast with Marion’s distance, while such scholars as Horner and Laird see Marion’s emphasis here as being one of both safeguarding the apophatic language of God and avoiding onto-theological idols that may send the discourse of and about God haywire. Hart says that Marion “nearly falls prey” to extending the concept of distance so far (beyond the reach of analogy) as to collapse it into the distance between two different things on a single plane. This is factually not what Marion intends to do; but Hart basically argues, perhaps being a little over-vigilant of Lévinasian tones of Otherness, that Marion approaches the question of God as a phenomenological Protestant, which he obviously is not.

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380 Hart 2003, 230–232. Scharlemann’s article “The Being of God When God Is Not Being God: Deconstructing the History of Theism” (1982, 79–108) argues that the name God actually refers to an absence that can be said of any being, that God is “other” than God when encountered in creation and historical Jesus. It is not a matter here to research this article further; it serves as a rhetorical example, according to Hart, of what happens if one chooses to read theological terms based on a false ontology.

381 Hart 2003, 235–236.

382 Marion 1991, xxiii.


385 For example, Marion 2002, 323.

However, the structure of the argument is of interest here, and for Hart, only an analogical account of Being can “survive” both the metaphysical burden of being and the giftedness that does not enter a dialectical scheme, not on the level of being, not on the level of ethics, and certainly not on the level of phenomenology. Thus, Hart’s argument consists more of regarding Marion’s distance as inadequate in stressing the meaning of creation and in the analogical interval that opens up the proper distance already in the beings of the world. So, in the phenomenological sense, \textit{agape} is the primary “mood” both in Hart and Marion, yet for the former, it is being that “amounts” to more than Marion would allow in a \textit{phenomenological} sense.\textsuperscript{387} To put the matter in linguistic terms, in Marion, man is capable of doing theology insofar as the discourse is put in terms of Logos, which in turn has let itself be “said” by the Father.\textsuperscript{388} To Hart, this speech is already present in created being as such, as unnecessary (therefore, non-dialectical) ornaments of God’s outpouring rhetoric. Creation “occurs within Divine speech, as a rhetorical embellishment”.\textsuperscript{389} As this speech of creation, the gift offers a hermeneutical model that does not lapse into an exercise of negative theology or apophaticism. For Hart, the apophatic content is made “visible” in the kataphatic realm, although it remains within creaturely linguistic terms.

\paragraph*{God himself is, one is tempted to say, an eternal play of the invisible and the visible, the hidden Father made luminously manifest in the infinite icon of his beauty, God “speculating” upon himself by way of his absolute self-giving in the other.\textsuperscript{390}}

As we have pointed out, “the philosophical” and “the biblical” content of Christian theology cannot be separated in a meaningful way. Now it can also be added that phenomenological “content” cannot be separated from the metaphysical account of being. The gift and ontology are creative moments of rhetoric, speculative acumen reflective of the divine speculator of his own Being.

The gift also ensures that Christian discourse must be set as an alternative to “pagan” ones that tend to emphasize sacrificial and substitutive logic in their ethical settings. After all, what prevents a Christian gift from lapsing into economy of sacrifice and therefore debt to the Creator God through the ultimate sacrificial Lamb of Christ? Stephen W. Webb argues that the language of sacrifice and the language of generosity are what separate a conservative Christian discourse from its contemporaneous liberal ones.\textsuperscript{391} Hart, by taking Marion’s phenomenological mood a starting point, is not, however, easily situated within “liberal” circles. It is precisely the sacrifice of

\textsuperscript{387} Hart does not deal with Marion’s later work on saturated phenomena extensively and mentions only his “brilliant but flawed” disregard for ontological matters in theology. Hart 2003, 261. He mentions, in the context of Derrida and Marion, that if one proceeds strictly from the concept of the gift, and transfers “it is given” for \textit{es gibt}, one is already detached from an ontology that leans on the creation of God. Hart 2003, 261–262.

\textsuperscript{388} Marion 1991, 143–144.

\textsuperscript{389} Hart 2003, 291.

\textsuperscript{390} Hart 2002, 548. Thus, it is the beautiful, the invisible made visible analogously, that also makes the difference between modern thought and the “interruption of Christ”: for without a proper notion of the supernatural, thought inevitably establishes “an autonomous stance between God and creation,” rendering the narrative of supereminent Beauty very difficult, if not impossible, precisely because it cannot be seen. See Montag 1999, 46–48.

\textsuperscript{391} Webb 1996, 26.
Christ, as an outpouring gift, that fulfills the economy of sacrifice and therefore links it with the eternal “generosity” of the Trinitarian life. The gift of being is connected naturally to the theological subject of atonement. Hart is careful to note that Christ’s sacrifice should be seen primarily as a Trinitarian act “in the Son’s campaign against death,” not by any calculus of debt or satisfaction. Hart names the Christian gift the “gift of the covenant,” since it is not simply a single Christ-event that determines the interruption of the world’s sacrificial cycle, but it is an interruption in the continuance and fulfillment of the covenant between God and Israel. Furthermore, Christ’s sacrifice is not an “economic act” of the Godhead, but rather a feature of his divine life in which justice and mercy cannot be but one. The gift of Christ is then situated within the narrative of Christ, and as such, it can operate not as a model or as a general judiciary state of redemption, but as an act of the “peaceful self-donation” of Christ to the Father.

Moreover, it seems that Hart is also equating the dialectical method of theology to the logic of sacrifice. In linguistic and ontological terms, analogia entis means, for Hart, precisely that the language of creation excludes the dialectic between the Same and the Other (thus excluding also all “calculus” between them). Again, we return to the core of Hart’s argument for analogia entis: its central use is, in language about God, that it allows “naming” God as good, for example, but while precisely simultaneously noting that such language cannot grasp the goodness of God as he Himself is, but only as a participating reality, not a similar attribute that applies both to man and God in different degrees. The same goes for every concept or attribute; it is Erich Przywara’s analogia entis that stresses the greater dissimilitudo between God and creatures that ultimately safeguards the authentic way of grasping the distance between God and creature, not reducing it to conceptual or univocal categories (for example, being).

392 Hart 2003, 350. Catherine Pickstock argues along similar lines that the Eucharistic liturgy is a continuation of the gift that God himself gives himself in Christ; thus, the worldly phenomenological gaze upon mere givens is transformed into an act of a “spontaneous” gift. Pickstock 1998, 244.


394 It can be said that, in a sense, Hart is very “Athanasian” in his understanding of God’s transcendence and salvation history. As Anatolios has showed, for Athanasius, the history of mankind is ontologically polarized, there is no neutrality toward God. The post-lapsarian state means precisely that God’s transcendence is experienced as an ontological gulf, not as a gift (1998, 37). In Christ, the ontological gulf is mediated back in an original way, and as such the ontological gap expresses God’s benevolence as much as his transcendence. (41). The analogical difference (or Marion’s “distance”) understood as a gift opens up the possibility to discern God’s “attributes” without claiming a totalizing act of grasping them as something, but only as transcendental signifiers to which there are no opposites in a mundane realm. In a phenomenological sense, the only apparent dialectical opposite to God’s being is what this being makes possible in itself: the nothingness from which man and creation are created. So, it could be said that the notion of the transcendence of God does not “precede” the capability for natural theology; it is an idea of natural theology.

395 Hart 1998a, 347.


Ultimately, a univocal understanding of God is, for Hart, “logical nonsense,” for it assumes that God has a counterpart, that his attributes make up a composite nature, and thus ultimately, that he is dialectically identified with his opposite, non-being, thus ending up in nihilism. At this level, the analogy fails, for it operates on comparing substances, which is, for theology, not available. Again, we meet the argument against gradual metaphysics. Rather, Hart suggests, we should employ a “more direct form of theological analogy,” “proper prediction,” which, by stressing participation, can view creatures in God, not by some third concept displaying their similarity or dissimilarity. On the other hand, even a hierarchy can be conceived as a positive, “a secure and open framework” within an analogical worldview, and it can “develop the rhythms of its thought and life in all directions.” The analogical relation is “one of grace.”

3.4 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 3

In this chapter, I have tried to follow Hart’s use of “counter-narrative” in his analysis of the thought of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Lévinas. Hart finds the first of the three thinkers indispensable for understanding not only modernity’s pathology, but also for recovering the authentic nature of Christian discourse itself, as outlined in chapter 2. These thinkers are treated under the thesis of the ontology of violence, to which Hart opposes his “ontology of peace.”

Hart’s appraisal of Nietzsche concerns the fact that Nietzsche pinpointed the need for understanding of the rhetorical and narrative nature of the Christian Gospel. Hart uses the Nietzschean notion of “re-valuation of all values” for his own ends, to portray Christianity precisely as “recasting” all metaphysical molds of Antiquity. Nietzsche’s more accurate merit lies, though, in concentrating on the supreme level of “surface,” which, for Hart, is also the level on which both aesthetic and ontological matters

398 Hart 2008, 256–257. For Przywara, the difference between analogia proportionis and analogia attributionis is not separative, for they exist within each another. Przywara argues that for St. Thomas, “the decisive analogy” was analogia proportionis because the same term that would be used for God and creature in analogy would precisely be the one that shows the alterity between the two. The similarity and dissimilarity are not opposites or two terms balancing each other out, but rather the dissimilarity is the transcendence of the similarity of a certain thing said about God and creatures. However, this is not simply a human capacity to “guess” what God should be like, but an act by God, calling out the creature and establishing the longing or desire for transcendence. Or, as Przywara himself puts it, “Longing” (in the ascending analogia attributionis), in order to become ‘service’ (in the descending analogia attributionis).” The rapture that man enters is the same one that humbles him. See Przywara 2014, 230–235. Von Balthasar puts it concisely: “The more correctly the analogies are drawn, the more definitively will the distances yawn.” GOL IV, 35.


400 GOL II, 139, 200. As Stephen Fields explains, St. Basil argued that the seemingly multiple faces of God are a concession to our finite minds, unable to conceive the simplicity of God. Fields 2007, 180–181. Hart thinks that to hold such a view (apart from a step of preambulae fidei) is logically untenable. The naming of God according to his multiple manifestations (in the world or in the mind), whether we call this economy “energies” or “economic Trinity,” must reflect in an analogous manner the infinite simplicity of God. In effect, a failure to appreciate the simplicity of God is to denote his existence, for introducing multiplicity or composition in his essence is to make him ontologically dependent or “a moment” of his inner relations. See Hart 2008, 212. For a recent discussion of the relation of simplicity and multiplicity, see Levering 2017, 73–108.

401 Hart 2003, 297.
are indissolubly linked. Where Nietzsche saw becoming, power, and play of forces, Christianity could “read” and see being, beauty, and participation. Both thinkers have disregard for deciphering nature, to submit it to a scrutiny alien to its appearance. In addition, for both Hart and Nietzsche, Christ is a strange figure; for the latter, Christ was an inner man without transcendence, whereas for the former, Christ is precisely the supreme instance in which transcendence could emerge correctly, and as an interruption (or re-valuation).

I have laid special emphasis on Nietzsche’s usage of language. For him, language is simultaneously a valuing and a deteriorating act in culture; it both consolidates the power that creates it and makes it nihilistic (in Nietzsche’s terms) by idealizing it, thus separating it from the actual becoming of the world. In this, again, the element of the surface comes forth. If metaphysical truths lie in grammar, theological re-narration can act as a re-naming, finding relations between Logos and the *logoi* of creation. And with Hart, this is no operation of the “depths,” of predicating essences, but realization that particular beings are to be considered as peaceful donation. I argued that the Hartian narrative can out-narrative narratives of nihilism if it is aware of what this re-naming consists of. Its ground lies in correct understanding of the doctrine of creation. Inevitably, it seems to be an act of faith to see that creation is part of God’s own rhetoric, a surplus of meaning. Hart even says that God speaks God; meaning that creation should not be understood in the accusative sense, but in the vocative, unnecessarily called forth from nothingness. This rhetorical act is not a matter of the creator and the created, but inevitably, the beings that actually are, are able to reveal something of how God is in himself.

All in all, it is the aesthetic surface that decided between Nietzsche’s nihilistic narrative and Hart’s theological vision. For Hart, Nietzsche had a bad taste. But it is to Nietzsche that Hart owes his argumentative structure of narrative: Hart’s version of Nietzschean genealogical method seeks, in effect, ruptures in history, that is, where the theological view is either tamed or distorted.

The same surface also emerges in Hart’s treatment of the philosophy of Emmanuel Lévinas. For Lévinas, consciousness and signification are opened by the Other, which in turn is never manifested as object. This is the basic stance from which Lévinas seeks to expound his view of ethics as first philosophy. By this notion, among other things, Lévinas wants to seek an alternative, non-metaphysical account of being in the world, “otherwise than being.” Hart is critical of Lévinas’ unitary model of metaphysics, but the sharp point of his criticism targets precisely the Lévinasian idiom: Hart’s view of being cannot tolerate any nameless Other, vacuous of any notion of beauty or sensatory, for it remains, for Hart, an example of Gnostic longing instead of Christian hope. The infinity of Lévinas, as a wakening from totality, remains too featureless to be compatible with his own “beauty of the infinite.”

I have hoped to show that theological seeing and knowing always entail an act of recognition, of mutuality-in-difference (or more accurately, mutuality-in-analogy). In addition, constructing “ethics without ethics” is, to Hart, a moot attempt, as was a similar project of constructing “metaphysics without metaphysics.” Theology cannot, according to Hart, take anything from such ethics, for it must primarily emphasize the gifted nature of being and the experience of it.

Martin Heidegger is one of the philosophers that Hart reads most extensively and sees as one of the unparalleled thinkers of modern nihilism: philosophy separated from theology. Heidegger’s famous claim of “onto-theology” is right if such separation is in effect. For Hart, Heidegger’s philosophy is precisely an echo of the broken
interruption of ontico-ontological difference. The question of being, for Heidegger, is simply unaffected by authentic Christian analogia entis. At a phenomenological level, the care (Sorge) that Heidegger analyzed in Being and Time to be the mode of Dasein’s being-in-the-world, is to be corrected; and this correction should precisely occur within the great theme Heidegger is after: Being. Hart accuses Heidegger’s conception of Being, especially in its critical moment, of being too univocal to be able to account for theological discourse. Even Heidegger’s later notions of the event, the worlding of the world and Ereignis, are to be supplemented with a theological guarantee that the event of the world is in fact the opening of the analogical interval. Again, it is this interval that both illuminates Dasein and opens up the being for the glory of God. And again, it is the concept of divine infinity that reveals the being’s gifted nature as divine excess, not its exhaustive totality.

The theme of the gift, then, was necessarily explored in the context of its treatment by Jacques Derrida. If treated in a neutral or mere philosophical sense, as was case with being, the gift cannot disclose its Christian features. Hart argues that believing in the gift means faith in analogy, for only as benevolent distance can the economy of reciprocity and violence, of sacrifice, be surpassed. The gift’s desirability is to be preferred to the gift’s conceptual purity. Hart also criticizes Jean-Luc Marion’s exposure of the gift in same manner as he criticizes Lévinas’ basic positions: it is the augmented vigilance of human concepts that diminishes the revelatory capability of each particular being and gift and pushes its aesthetically generative desire for “more God” into the background. The gift must be understood through Christ, as “the gift of the covenant.” It is again the correct narrative that opens up the “right reality” where things can be seen in a theological way.

In all of these aspects, I have also tried to show Hart’s dependence on Radical Orthodoxy’s themes. Through the critiques, Hart shows how his re-narration works in effect. Hart’s theology is at is sharpest when it finds strong links between a Trinitarian life and the doctrines of creation and incarnation, and manages to convey them as alternatives to “ontologies of violence.” His argumentation is indeed perceptive; yet the heightened sense of narrative reading must be kept in mind to understand the coherence of his thought.

However, it must be asked whether, in the end, the interruption of Christ that Hart wants to proclaim consists of anything much other than a particular reading of the theological concept of creation. Certainly, Hart pinpoints his narrative on Christ, but his emphasis on Christ’s reaffirmation of the created being seems, at times, to be a vehicle of rhetorical assurance that, in the end, Christology is a derivative phenomenon to creation. Perhaps this criticism is a little forced, however; but one cannot deny the Stimmung of Hart’s writings that if one assumes a correct, analogous reading of creation, then Christ and Christology also make sense in this way. I have formed the notion of a certain circularity of Hart’s thought at times, while simultaneously noting that a project pursuing a grand vision of Christian reality cannot, perhaps, do otherwise.
4  HART’S THEOLOGY

We have seen that, for Hart, Christian ontology offers a view on being that surpasses both ontologies of violence and distorted Christian ontologies based on either univocity or equivocality of being. Essentially, it must do so, because otherwise the alterity of the Christian Gospel would not be radical, only a modification of already established terms. As Hart himself puts it:

No matter whether one speaks with the disruptive exuberance of Deleuze, or the moral pathos of Lévinas, or the aporetic prudence and delicate suspicions of Derrida; we remain in a Kantian place, and the world of textuality (insofar as it appears to us as intelligible) belongs to the shimmering veil of the theoretical, suspended between two sublime and unrepresentable things: self and other (whether analogizable or not). The edifice of the transcendental project—resting upon the slightest of supports—collapsed, but its ruins remain our grammar.¹

The modern remnant of Descartes and Kant is here rhetorically inverted by Hart; the Nietzschean view of the dead God hiding still in the grammar of Western ethos and pathos is now the state of theology in postmodern times, where the ghosts of apperceptive knowledge and transcendent Ego still linger in postmodern idioms. The Christian interruption, as I hope becomes clear during this study, needs a completely new vision of ontology—or transcendence, to be more precise.

In addition, we have hinted upon how the Christian experience can entail both notions, the gift and otherness of the Giver, in a positive sense, and does so primarily in aesthetic terms. Both aspects constitute different sides of analogia entis, which is the penultimate ontological participatory mode of Hart’s theology.

In this final chapter, I will explore the two key notions that Hart uses: divine infinity and beauty. They have both appeared as moments in Hart’s narrative and re-narrations. I will now read them as keystones in his theological theoria.

4.1  GOD’S INFINITY

The thought of Saint Gregory of Nyssa is crucial for Hart in constructing his argument for authentic Christian discourse. The modern scholarship on Gregory has boomed since Werner Jaeger’s editions of Gregorios’ Opera, and as the profile of Gregory has widened, his works have been a prominent part of recent philosophical discussions.² Special interest has been attributed to Gregory’s concept of epektasis, the notion of the soul progressing toward the infinite Godhead both temporally and eternally.³

The first wave of modern (following the division offered by Ojell) interpretation of Gregory’s concept of the infinite focused on Gregory’s mystical theology. This view was supplemented by Ekkehard Mühlenberg, who claimed that Gregory’s thought

¹ Hart 2000, 187.
brings about something new in classical metaphysics. This basic view is also one with which Hart agrees (while disagreeing with Mühlenberg otherwise, as we shall see).4 Hart states that the infinite God, as conceived by Gregory, stands at the opposite shore of “‘Philosophy’ – eidetic theoría, dialectical idealism, postmodernism.”5 This “infinitist” reading of Gregory offers a way for Hart to understand being and becoming as grounded and oriented toward an analogically perceived God.

Hart argues that in Gregory, we have the patristic thinker who could articulate the proper concept of difference, precisely within finite differences themselves as they are “aimed” in participation toward the infinite God. It is ἐπεκτασίς, or the perpetual progression of the soul toward God, that “perfectly describes an ontology that has broken with every myth of metaphysical degree.”6 Hart means that a created creature, as he is created out of nothing, holds only a stable “essence” insofar as he is traversing towards God. Thus, there can be no dialectical scheme in which a creaturely nothing suggests a negation necessary to reveal and open the divine positive realm. In addition, Gregory’s idea avoids the pitfall that Hart sees as inherent in all metaphysical systems that equate truth with identity: eventually, as he notes, all dialectic truths are falsely on the same ground as monistic ones; both construct the Same and the Other and are captivated either by their difference or by their hierarchical subversion from the One. Here, Hart offers his most useful insight into this discussion: “the primordial analogy” in the creature is “more” than it is in itself, in its “essence,” for the ἐπεκτασίς of creaturely being means that its identity consists of growing more “into the measure of its difference.”7

Hence the fact that the creature is not God is not a tragic moment (excluding the paradoxes of, for example, simultaneously being a sinner and a saint), but precisely by its very particularity, the creature displays in its difference, in its actuality, God’s “actuality in its fullness.”8 Participating in God’s absolute actuality, creatures resound more with God than remain without him. Creatures find truth in their very particularity, yet truth consists more of the actual horizon of actualized progress toward and into infinity than isolated instances of correspondence between the analogate and

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4 The claim that Gregory’s metaphysical view was unprecedented has been contested, for example by Weedman (2010). Weedman’s argument that infinity was a Pro-Nicene argument before Gregory does not, however, diminish the novelty of his formulations regarding classical philosophy, which is in focus. See also Blowers 1992. However, the debt of Gregory to Platonism is undeniable, and his concept of the transcendence of God develops precisely the same notions that Philo did, and as Ramelli (2014) points out, this philosophical heritage is moderated by biblical revelation.

5 Hart 2003, 207.

6 Hart 2003, 244. For some modern interpretations of ἐπεκτασίς, see Ludlow 2007; Sferlea 2014, 564–587. This movement is grounded upon the beatific vision of God as an ever-greater entity, therefore surpassing the dialectical position that is present in most apophatic discourses of God. When seeing God, man sees also a “non-God,” which does not mean a Hegelian negation of identity, but such that it is the horizon of the experience that provides the infinite “context” for the finite gaze. My suggestion is that it is the distinction made by Palamas of divine essence and energies that can offer one possible model for such a gaze. Boersma 2015, 133–134. The question cannot be separated from analogy, for analogical expressions can be used in the realm of faith and in the realm of metaphysics, and usually are made as such in order to confirm each other. Drobner’s dictionary definition of Gregory’s use of analogy is enlightening, since he points out how ἐπεκτασίς actually operates on analogia fidei, but his analogical thought culminates in analogia entis, that is, in God’s Trinitarian life. 2010, 30–36.

7 Hart 2003, 246.

8 Hart 2003, 246.
the analogatum. Again, the particular instance of being is vindicated; as there are no “scales of being,” there is also no negativity to balance things (this is reflected, in turn, in divine apatheia, in the notion of a God who does not “need” anything). As Hart is keen to point out, it is Gregory who, most of all, suggests that all things should be interpreted on a surface level, because on that level, the multiplicity of beings resembles the music of creation, each participating in the infinity of the Creator. This view also acts as a ground for the existence of evil in the patristic sense of privatio boni, since in ontological terms, evil is but mere finitude, not partaking in the infinite, “nothingness and formlessness of a self-positing sublime.”

Evil is something that merely haunts, does not reflect because it does not participate, a broken pause that does not “carry” the music into the next note. More accurately, evil in Gregory has a finite-ness precisely because it does not exist in same sense that good does.

Hart argues that in the works of Gregory, the central metaphor of the mirror is used both to denote the experience of God and to offer a glimpse of the ontological structure of being:

One might say, to begin with, that for Gregory all knowledge consists in theoria of the reflected, and this is in some sense so even within the life of God: the Son is the eternal image in which the Father contemplates and loves his essence, and thus the Father can never be conceived of without his Son, for were he alone he would have no light, truth, wisdom, life, holiness, or power; “if ever the brightness of the Father’s glory did not shine forth, that glory would be dark and blind.” This “mirroring” is that one original act of knowledge in which each of the Persons shares; the Only Begotten, says Gregory, who dwells in the Father, sees the Father in himself, while the Spirit searches out the deeps of God. God himself is, one is tempted to say, an eternal play of the invisible and the visible, the hidden Father made luminously manifest in the infinite icon of his beauty, God “speculating” upon himself by way of his absolute self-giving in the other.

So, the otherness of God “occurs” within the Godhead himself, not originally in his economy. Hart plays on words when he suggests that God “speculates,” that is, sees himself in the speculum of self-giving persons of divine perichoresis, as we already saw with his treatment of Heidegger. The primordial ontology of the Godhead is structured so that each person is constituted precisely as this self-giving act of the other. This highlights the fact we mentioned earlier: creation is continuance of this giving, accomplished already in creation and redeemed in Christ. This also clarifies the metaphysical interruption of Christian theology, since it plays not on difference between the Oneness of God and the Multiplicity of Creation, but the accent is on the Trinitarian difference itself, unveiled in the personal narrative of Christ, as creation reassured and reaffirmed in Him.

The “de-mirrorized” nature is a vehicle of a modern deviation of the “Christian text”; in this rationalized modern sense, the mirror is interiorized (again, Hart uses a subverted trope from the Nietzschean corpus), and truth is turned into a matter of

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9 Hart 2003, 247.
10 Hart 2003, 206; 2015, 4. For Gregory’s concept of evil, see Mosshammer 1990.
correspondence between consciousness and the world. Such a view may be “effective” in gathering empirical knowledge, but it remains sterile in the phenomenological and existential sense. Moreover, it fails the “grand theme of being.”

This continuance is not to be interpreted so that it would suggest that creation is an “extension” of God or a dissection of his nature, thus constructing a sort of deified natural realm. It is merely to say that in God, the same difference that appears in creation as analogy, is redeemed and perfectly complete in the simplicity of one God. It is analogical language that captures not different degrees of being, but one being and one superessential being in its difference.

Mirrorized with the critique of totality and the Neoplatonic infinity of the One, Christian infinity emerges from the Trinity itself, as presented by Gregory of Nyssa (or, as Hart reads him). The infinite cannot be conceived as the apophatic boundary of finite beings, ideas, or values, nor as the final unity of all that exists, but it is based upon the infinite movement within the Godhead himself. God’s infinity is by no means a stable essence, but rather the perichoretic unity of the three persons, an infinite act of desire of the other and simultaneously their unity. Hence, God is the ultimate source of being, and he has also created in a similar manner to his nature: the infinite difference between the created and the Creator is not the infinite chasm or nameless otherness, but a fertile space where the created state can be projected and conceived as a gift and a call to an ever-greater perfection. Indeed, the creation itself is an occurrence of this “named” and “speculated” difference.

Hence, being is traversal, its becoming is its being, and this can be perceived in the relation of the world to God: infinite itself, but displaying analogically the given difference of creation and illumined by the divine “difference,” the perichoresis of divine persons and the absolute transcendence of the Godhead. This analogical interval between Being and beings will not succumb to any deductive contemplation nor to comparative anthropomorphisms, which tend to conceive God as an extension to human finiteness. Here, Hart displays his belief in classical Platonistic theology: we may approach divine reality only via language which is inappropriate to its “object,” that is to say, all theological language is necessarily analogous, for it is employed, invented, and established by creatures who are by nature composite, synthetic, and becoming. Hart writes that, as creatures, we are becoming according to our logoi, and the analogical conclusions we draw from this find their proportional terminus in the infinite Godhead “of God’s perfect self-knowledge in his Logos, and of the coincidence in his simplicity of all he is and ‘has’.”

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13 Hart 2000, 186.
14 Hart 2007, 618.
16 As will be noted later on, such a view of Christian being does not offer an equilibrium between the finite and infinity, but the doctrine of analogia entis, which is implicitly suggested by the finite-infinite pairing, represents a view of Being, where there is simply no end at the other side, where perfection is infinite progress based on the perichoretic desire between the divine persons, which “grounds” their unity simultaneously. It may be even said that the Nicaean formulation of God as adiastator, as Being where there are no intervals but only persons, offers already a useful conceptual tool in defense of analogia entis. This is the contribution of Hart that, for example, is laudatory according to Lois Malcom (2007).
17 Hart 2003, 303.
of the being of the Godhead in which they participate; or, as Hart puts it in a quite dense passage:

Our being is synthetic and bounded; just as [...] the dynamic inseparability but incommensurability in us of essence and existence is an ineffably distant analogy of the dynamic identity of essence and existence in God, the constant pendulation between inner and outer that constitutes our identities is an ineffably distant analogy of that boundless bright diaphaneity of coinherence, in which the exteriority of relations and interiority of identity in God are one, each Person wholly reflecting and containing and indwelling each of the others. Because for us personality is synthetic, composite, successive, and finite, we are related always in some sense “over against”, in a fragmentary way, and to be with others always involves for us a kind of death, the limit of our being. In God, though, given the simplicity of his essence, there is an absolute coincidence of relation and unity. For God, the “inwardness” of the other is each Person’s own inwardness, the “outwardness” of the other is each Person’s outwardness and manifestation.18

Paradoxically, all this differential play of Being and beings is the result of the utter simplicity of the classical definition of God, while paradoxical logic is something necessary (contra dialectical logic) in order to understand the Christian God apart from deistic apparitions of reason, or so argues Milbank.19 Yet, as I have shown, an attempt to “solve the paradox” would end up in dialecticism. Perhaps the surface, where the Hartian being unveils its infinite difference, should be embraced rather than solved; the paradox form betrays more a human need for ontological closure than an actual ordo amoris of creation.

Hart argues that the infinity of God is not mathematical (that is, an eternal series of dividable scales), but ontological; the classical notion of the absolute as actus purus can be said to “be” but not to exist in the same manner as everything else. For in order for being to exist in the first place, as Hart reads the matter, it must do so in a realm where principium contradictionis holds true (“in a very real sense, finite existence is noncontradiction”), for a particular being needs a form (to stand out, ex-ist from the ‘infinite’ formless matter) and is thus a thinkable, posited being.20 Henri de Lubac has affirmed that displaying finite against infinite may result in thinking of infinite in a “composite” way.21 There is tension, but holy tension, an establishment of hierarchy.

18 Hart 2002, 546.

19 Žižek & Milbank 2009. It is noteworthy that Milbank’s portrayal of the Trinity here is supremely aesthetic, for the paradoxical logic of the Trinity shows itself in “relations” between the persons of the Godhead. These relations do not of course “exist,” for even at substantial level, in trinitarian life, the one that is expressed (Son) is completely and only who gets expressed in it (Father). Again, the importance of von Balthasar and his biblical theological aesthetics can be discerned in the background: for him, Christ is always the perfect expression of the Father, yet he is not who he reveals. This is the basis of true Christian symbolism or, in the language of Jean-Luc Nancy, the icon proper: the “expressed” is the possibility of the gaze itself, not its object or content, for the icon (Christ) “expresses” completely the expressed, yet this completeness is not identity, but an opening into relations and participatory elements of the expressed identity. See Nancy 2005, 11–12. Hart’s critique of wider aspects of Nancy’s thought (2003, 73–75). Although Nancy puts his case in aesthetic terms, his basic discourse on the beautiful and the sublime is overall very Heideggerian. See also Betz 2015, 393–394.

20 Hart 2017, 92.

So, in God there are no oppositions, no extensions, no time, no change; but there is alterity, movement—namely, desire for the other. As God is transcendent, he is also immune to any pathos. This *apatheia* means, besides “the traditional” portrayal of God, the rational coherence of theological narrative.\(^\text{22}\) Precisely because *apatheia* is to be understood as love, it does not only safeguard the conception of being in the narrative, but is also “within” the created being in the experience of the gift. The same desire that makes the Trinity move in perichoretic love is evoked analogically in humans, as von Balthasar argues, in the biblical experience of the eschatological urgency of the Gospel.\(^\text{23}\) Furthermore, von Balthasar notes that experience is not directed at something totally different, not totally Other (or Sublime), but at infinitely “Always-More.”\(^\text{24}\) This is the difference between the Levinasian Other and the Christian one.

This is remarkable at the conceptual level—and of course, nothing new in theological language—for, in contrast, in a created order everything gathers its meaning from oppositional polarities or their possible synthesis, and yet their own beings are *constituted analogically in the model of divine desire for the other*. There is a tension, but not discord; there is rupture, but not in the sense of abysmal abandonment of the world by *Deus absconditus*. Quite simply, there is no dialectics between the nothingness, from which creation is brought forth, and God. The tension is “at rest”:

*Thus the energy of desire drawing creation to God is not recoil from finitude, toward an unexplicated and disinterested simplicity whose “eyes” are forever averted from the play of being and its deficiencies, but answers — corresponds to — God’s call to what he fashions for himself, and what is in itself nothing but an antec ecstasy ex nihilo and in infinitum. The relationship, then, of our desire for beauty to the eternal source of beauty is not grounded in a prior identity, even though it subsists upon creation’s participation in God; our desire does not subserve a return to stillness of our proper being; it is our being.*\(^\text{25}\)

Being itself is desire, and this desire is infinite. In this part of Hart’s theology, many currents coincide: it is faithful to, first of all, the modern readings of Nyssa, where trinitarian life in its infinity corresponds to the being as such, as a telos that always maintains its horizon (not amounting to any totality), and that can accommodate peacefully both the notions of becoming and being, and dialectical oppositions that exist in a created order (at least in finite minds). Secondly, this infinity of desire and the desire for infinity expresses the Radical Orthodox motif “of us being more than we are,” that is, an ontology that Nicholas Loudovikos has characterized as “immanent transcendentalism.”\(^\text{26}\) Hart’s view seems to suggest a sort of conditioned Christian phenomenology, where being in the created world, recognizing it as such, is actually equated with participating in the difference between the world and God, namely in desire, which constitutes both the *Stimmung* and the “appearance” (or a *physis* in Heideggerian terminology) of Christian experience. This experience is, as in von

\(^{22}\) Hart 2002a, 188; 2005, 76–77.
\(^{23}\) GOL I, 320.
\(^{24}\) GOL I, 320.
\(^{25}\) Hart 2003, 192. See also 2003, 259 and 2015a, 2–3.
\(^{26}\) Loudovikos 2009, 142.
Balthasar, then “con-formed” to the form of Christ, thus constituting the revelatory mode and telos of this experience.

The “infinitist” reading of Gregory of Nyssa was, in a sense, inaugurated by the work of Jean Daniélou in the resurgent new scholarship on Gregory. As Ovidiou Sferlea notes, Daniélou’s thesis that Platonism was crucially transformed into something unknown to the ancient world by Gregory’s concept of divine infinity remains a working thesis for much of the modern scholarship of Nyssa, especially in the research done by Ekkehard Mühlenberg. Twenty years after Daniélou, Mühlenberg criticized Daniélou’s mystical emphasis, and Mühlenberg saw epekstasis primarily as a polemical vehicle against Eunomius. At the philosophical level, it was a matter of reconciling the notions of simplicity of God and multiplicity of persons in God. Hart joins the discussion, siding with Mühlenberg, that the infinity of God is what separates God and creation, and infinity is precisely the participated horizon of God on the side of the finite. As we have noted, creaturely being is essentially in movement toward that infinity, without the possibility of direct knowledge of the Godhead as he is in himself. However, Hart argues that this impossibility does not mean that one should read Nyssa as only safeguarding the divine transcendence: it is Christ who balances this impossibility, it is the economy of God that is not simply a partial glimpse of the utter ineffability of God, but a loving gesture in itself, a gift.

It is, however, the imbalance of Mühlenberg’s thesis that Hart wishes to criticize. The real argument for Hart stems from the fact that he sees the difference between the temporal realm and the infinite divine realm as positive, as “true” distance redeemed in Christ. Hart’s main point is that the Christian interpretation of the difference should always remain within the logic of the divine gift; if one departs from this, the difference turns bad and then marks only the absence of God or a lapse into gradual metaphysics. Again, in the background looms Hart’s distaste for any dialectical vehicles of thought: the venture toward God is the soul’s journey into ever-intensifying difference, as it itself is only the capability of reaching out of itself. As he concisely puts it, “The

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27 Sferlea 2014, 565–566; the article also offers bibliographical notes both on the Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa and his departing from it. See also the article by Stephen Pardue, in which Pardue wants to point out the shortcomings, perhaps unconscious, of arguments that stress only the infinitist reading of Nyssa and downplay the apophatic dimension of the human experience of God. Pardue 2011. Pardue’s argument is that Hart’s “constructive” approach offers only a summary of Gregory’s thought, a tendency that he sees in play in most treatments of Nyssa, which concentrate on doctrinal development.

28 Sferlea 2014, 566; see Geljon 2005.

29 Hart 2003, 193.

30 Hart 2003, 197–198. Mühlenberg denied the possibility of deification (or unio mystica) on the basis of divine infinity (Sferlea 2014, 568). The possibility of attaining God has been debated in Gregory’s works and this revolves more around the question of whether Gregory’s concept of Nyssa’s participation (metousia) in God be interpreted dynamically or statically. Hart implies that such a view results from a lack of a proper analogical reading of the matter. Hart 2003, 200. Sferlea points out the articles of Colin McLeod, in which mystical reading in Gregory is portrayed in allegorical terms. Sferlea, however, takes sides with Hans Boersma, who sees mystical and allegorical “as the two sides of the same coin.” Sferlea 2014, 573. It is perhaps to be noted here that Hart regards the exegetical categories of literal and allegorical readings in general as categories that show what the text says and the range of their interpretations: “For them [the Fathers] the difference between the literal and the allegorical was simply the difference between what was there to be seen and what was given to be discovered.” Hart 2015.

31 Hart 2003, 201.
soul of course has no effective ability to become infinite but does have the capacity infinitely to become.”

This resounds in a nutshell a notion that Milbank extrapolates as a characteristic of the whole Christian tradition. For Milbank, all this rests on God’s infinity, for the infinite cannot be possessed or attained; “Nyssa offers no logos for virtue.” The evermore progressus, the activity unto activity, reflects this basic schema and also makes the memorability of ancient figures possible. This doxology is a logic of tradition, of exemplifying the saints without copying them slavishly, but “extended differently and yet sustained the same.” Epektasis is movement that is internal, but also trans-generational. Here, epektasis ties together apophaticism, tradition, difference, and self-transcendence. As Tamsin Jones has pointed out (with Anthony Meredith), it is precisely the combination of divine infinity and divine incomprehensibility that makes Gregory’s concept a novel one.

Hart also reads his Nyssa as a champion against metaphysical identism, which either in the manner of Plotinus establishes “grades” of being of the One, or, in the manner of Descartes, establishes knowledge in relations between subject and object:

*The turn inward proves to be, in a still more radical sense, a turn outward: I am an openness whose depth does not belong to me, but to the boundless light that creates me, and whose identity is then given me as other. And as the otherness of God is the soul’s true depth, she can possess no identity apart from the otherness of the neighbour; and both the soul’s otherness from God and the otherness of each soul from every other reflect the mystery of God’s act of “othering” himself within his infinite unity.*

As God is simple, the assumed multiplicity of humankind in Christ makes it possible that God is viewed as persons-in-unity and created beings as expressions of that difference. As Han-Luen Kantzer Komline observes, Hart’s rhetorical aim is to use Gregory of Nyssa’s infinite God not only to describe how the soul participates in God in *epektasis,* but also to point out that humanity gets “re-narrated by Christ according to original sense,” thus evoking again *analogia entis,* and evoking the same link to human life in the Christian tradition that both von Balthasar and Milbank stress.

Komline also correctly argues that the metaphor of the mirror stands forth in Hart’s vision, in that deification is to be understood more in dynamic terms than in forming a sort of duplicate of God in a perfected state of saintliness. However, Komline argues that the terms finitude and infinity are used confusedly by Hart. Hart seems to suggest at least two things when speaking about finitude: first of all, the talk can be about negative finitude, a lapsed finitude without Christ. Komline argues that Hart equates evil and finitude in itself. The second instance shows finitude in a positive sense, the state that a created being is in anyhow, sinful or not. Komline argues that Hart uses

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32 Hart 2003, 204.

33 Milbank 1997, 197–198. This echoes the remark made by Hans Urs von Balthasar, that the infinite is not a limit to the finite, but its infinite super-form. GOL I, 432.

34 Jones 2005, 71.


36 Komline 2009.

37 Komline 2009, 810.
these terms in a confused manner, and this failure is due to the mixed evaluation of the thought of Plotinus.

In the end, Komline evaluates Hart’s usage of Plotinian methexis, or participation, as misplaced, since it brings with it a certain anti-materialist tendency to view finitude as an obstacle to God, and certainly not openly beautiful in its particularity as Hart wishes it to be.³⁸ The hues that Komline presents as dark may be waived off as a tendential reading of the matter, but his more interesting criticism consists of questioning the whole participatory model. Basically, if creation is participating in the infinite Good, how can this preliminary linkage ever lapse into a narrative of sin and death? One might also add to Komline’s questions that if the narrative of sin, professing a false totality and finitude, is a secondary story, a slippage from the proper narrative of creation, is Christ’s redeeming work (establishing the correct narrative of analogical difference and participation) somewhat redundant? Though Hart wants to profess “a full-blooded” incarnation³⁹, meaning that everything human was assumed in and by Christ, does that not yield the grand narrative of Christ as something tertiary and a sort of anamnesis of participatory paradise lost? Komline does not make any specific case at a general level, but is this not the weakness of all theologies that stress the creation and the restorative character of Christ’s salvific work? It is not a coincidence that the same questions have been hurled at the proponents of analogia entis.

Komline himself suggests that simply adding the notion of koinonia to methexis would correlate better with the unique person of Jesus Christ and not merely sign him off as a moment in the salvific narrative or as the only possible target for human eros, otherwise captured by the ontological bind of methexis.⁴⁰ As Komline uses only Hart’s Beauty of the Infinite as his source, I think that his criticism, valid as it may be in the case of Plotinus, may be misplaced concerning Christ. In my reading, Hart treats Christ more in a narrative manner, and God more in a philosophical manner. For example, Hart’s Christ is often portrayed as Christus Victor—a theme that gets various guises depending on when he is speaking about, say, the meaning of Christ’s incarnation or resurrection.⁴¹ This aside, the more important treatment of Christ is neglected by Komline: Christ’s “form” or his beauty. It is not simply the infinite that informs Hart’s argument, but precisely The Beauty of the Infinite. The concept of beautiful will be examined further below.

At a cultural and historical level, we have seen how Hart argues that the concept of infinity and the analogical distance it proclaims have broken the dialectic and mere philosophical attitude toward the world and being. In fact, this rupture is precisely and inherently intertwined with God’s beauty.⁴² For if the “mirrorized” creaturely being is a reflection of God’s simplicity and freedom, then every particular instance

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³⁸ Komline 2009, 811.
⁴⁰ Komline 2009, 817.
⁴¹ For example, Hart 2005; Hart 2012, 461–462. In numerous more popular texts, the Victor-theme is dominant. Hart 2003; In a 2015 article Hart says that given the fact that textual interpretation is dependent upon interpreter’s context, the biblical books are not really the same books for us than they were for example the fathers. A question arises, however, whether the works of Gregory of Nyssa or his relation to Platonism and Neoplatonism are any different in this degree.
⁴² Hart 2008, 276.
of such mirroring must also participate in what it mirrors. In this equation, Christ appears as a restorative figure.

Only by expanding the critique that Komline offers is it possible to argue that the figure of Christ is perhaps only a redemptive addendum to what is already present in creation, thus somehow downplaying the importance of his salvific works alongside his incarnation and mission. As noted, the interruption is precisely one that appears only with Christ (although already present in creation at an ontological level). Perhaps, at the end of the day, the Christ that Hart professes is in coherence with his own theology of creation and perhaps not so much with thought that seeks to stress the fallenness of creation as a primary and adjunctive theological moment against which the salvific work of Christ is displayed. Creation and Christ are not complementary chapters of the same narrative, but the narrative itself; Hart’s intention is simply to balance these out in a way that ultimately discloses a peaceful “campaign against death,” not (primarily) a theo-drama in which the ultimate victim is needed in order to bring about the victor. This would go both against the notion of divine simplicity and, again, against Hart’s distrust toward dialecticism; accepting these would, in Hart’s view, end up in viewing the Christian narrative in sacrificial terms, in terms of a mutual economy between sin and salvation, and eventually in a lacking notion of God.

The previous chapters covered the way in which Hart not only portrays his adversaries, but also uses them to open up space for an alternative and authentic vision of Christianity. Regarding his notion of infinity, it is worthwhile, in a cursory manner, exploring themes that he opposes in philosophical terms and that thus fuel his anti-modern stance. In his *Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* (2013), Hart seeks to both repudiate pure materialistic views and also show the junctures of “all great theistic traditions” regarding questions on the subjects listed in the title of the work.

This book can be analyzed accordingly, treating the critique and the positive content separately. This division is again assumed for the sake of clarity: it roughly corresponds to the former distinction made in this study, namely in the spirit of the model of the “narratives” and “counter-narratives.” The distinction can be supported using other material across Hart’s corpus.

### 4.2 SHORTCOMINGS OF APPROACHES WITHOUT THE “INTERRUPTION”

For Hart, purely materialistic or often “mechanistic” thought cannot account adequately for such phenomena or subjects as being or consciousness. In its ethos, *The Experience of God* belongs to the same lineage as Hart’s *Atheist Delusions*. Again, Hart notes that any moral objection to Christianity can be understood, since rebellious acts or incredulity at theodicy may be authentically harbored only within the Christian

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43 The dramatic element is something that gets overshadowed by the peaceful nature of Hart’s Christian discourse. It is perhaps the anti-dialectic stance that makes him wary of dramatic connotations. As a philosophical question, the dramatic interpretation of the Christian narrative appears to Hart precisely to betray the classical notion of God (and his impassibility) and Christ, as is evident from his writings on theodicy. Hart 2002; 2005, 2009. As a historical note, von Balthasar writes that the drama of antiquity has been subsumed by the drama of Christ, yet the drama was the major “cypher” through which early Christians attempted “to represent the glory of God and of the God-Man.” GOL IV, 101. Of course, his whole Theo-Drama explores the theatrical and dramatic aspects of “doing” Christianity.
tradition.\textsuperscript{44} But at a philosophical level, “the only fully consistent alternative to belief in God, properly understood, is some version of ‘materialism’ or ‘physicalism’.”\textsuperscript{45} Hence, at the level of narrative, the counter-narrative is secular nihilism; on the other hand, when the question is framed in philosophical terms, the counter-narrative is naturalism.

Indeed, the basic fallacy of this alternative is that it cannot account for itself. The pure natural world, whatever it consists of, cannot explain being as it is; its naturalness cannot be proven via natural means. Again, the argumentative structure, which Hart used in onto-theological critiques, is used here: the materialistic philosophies and philosophemes cannot explain the integrity of such phenomena as being, as such, and consciousness, which relates to them. As Heidegger eventually clouded his own question after Being, materialists fail to witness a grand theme of being via analysis of material elements.

They do try, however. From Hart’s exposition, three “fallacies” or false non-sequiturs can be distinguished within materialistic discourse:

1) Genetic fallacy
2) Pleonastic fallacy
3) Pathetic fallacy

First, point number one, “the genetic fallacy,” means basically a certain conviction that rests upon the modern shift and transformation in Western thought. When the modern mechanistic ways of thinking about causality gained dominance, this meant that the antique Aristotelian forms of causality\textsuperscript{46} were stripped and subjected to a new “ascetic” empirical method.\textsuperscript{47} This transformation, among other things, meant not only empirical advances in cosmology, but a more subtle renunciation of the metaphysical, of the possibility of any “supreme” or “spiritual” causes. Thus, “an imaginative chasm” was “opened between premodern and modern worlds,”\textsuperscript{48} one which can offer only “a parody” of creation’s vocabulary.\textsuperscript{49} In metaphysical terms, it may stir confusion in what Hart regards as paramount to a theologian’s metaphysical instincts, namely always keeping in mind the Christian version of the distinction between primary and secondary causes.\textsuperscript{50} Here the arguments ring, again, a Nietzschean tone: it is the new methodology that has suppressed, in seeking purely causal or materialistic efficiency, a far richer vision of past thought. Only in Hart’s case, this deteriorating lineage was originally interrupted by Christianity, whereas in

\textsuperscript{44} This thought recurs in Hart’s works from Beauty of the Infinite and The Doors of the Sea all the way to his numerous short articles and The Experience of God.

\textsuperscript{45} Hart 2013, 17.

\textsuperscript{46} Namely, the famous four types of causality—formal, final, efficient, and material—classically treated in Aristotle’s Physics (II, 3) and Metaphysics (V, 2). For a lucid introduction of these causes in the Scholastic era, see Feser 2014, 42–45.


\textsuperscript{48} Hart 2013, 58; Hart 2009, 237.


\textsuperscript{50} Hart 2009; 2015, 3–4. For example, it is providence that operates on the level of primary cause, giving freedom to creatures, yet safeguarding God’s final good causes intact from misuse of that freedom. Hart 2005, 85–87. See Przywara 2014, 229–230.
Nietzsche, modernity only reached its peak with the interiorizing process of this new “asceticism” of modern science.

The confusion and disappearance of final causes from thought also had its repercussions at an anthropological level. When the relation between the world and the creator devolved into being seen primarily in voluntarist terms, the freedom of humans also began to portray itself as a space for choice, not in terms of participating more fully in humanity’s resumption in Christ, in his form, in a freedom that is nature made unhindered, not a result of personal volition. The realization of purely human freedom is always a matter of power, and in Hart’s analysis, the search for absolute freedom is nothing but a sample of metaphysical nostalgia. For theology, the confusion of the two inevitably leads to confusion in trying to secure divine transcendence.

Hart interprets this cultural eclipse in familiar manner. When the new mechanistic causal picture was imposed on epistemology, the bracketing did not stop only at a methodological level: the new method became the new metaphysics. The object of modern enquiry, nature, became its theme, so to speak. In this view, nature was conceived as a machine and God as a supremely efficient cause—or in aesthetic terms, the premodern vision of nature as an analogical “reflection of God’s nature” was replaced by a closed system of nature, only to be effected outside by divine power. What was gained in minute precision was lost in aesthetic splendor; what was gained in the explanatory power of a pure event, mechanical proceedings, was lost in terms of a call for participation, “a far more spiritually inviting understanding of transcendent reality.” Ultimately, the circle was restored and it recoiled from the interruption of Christ. In modernity, the coming about of a new theism and atheism, according to Hart, resulted in two versions of atheism competing against each other again. Here, we can see the familiar argument appear again: after modernity, the God that the new thought seemingly criticized, was already a purloined one.

The term genetic fallacy thus refers to a model of thought that seeks to unravel or go backwards within this culture so deeply influenced by a mechanistic and naturalistic worldview. Hart writes:

>We tend to presume that if one can discover the temporally prior physical causes of some object – the world, an organism, a behavior, a religion, a mental event, an experience or anything else – one has thereby eliminated all other possible causal explanations of that object. But this is a principle that is true only if materialism is true, and materialism is true only if this principle is true, and logical circles should not set the rules for our thinking.

So, the genetic fallacy is possible only in a modern setting where other causalities are excluded in favor of efficient links of causation. Thus, unfolding a phenomenon,

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51 Hart 2009, 25, 224–226. Hart also argues (179–180) that the difference between Aristotelian nature and Christian (St. Gregory of Nyssa’s) conviction of nature is that the latter is “contaminated” with a revolutionary Easter event, “inversion of Christian social order,” while the former concentrates on classifying species and evaluating individuals according to these categories. See Hart 2003, 123–124.

52 Hart 2013, 61.

53 Hart 2004, 68. This is what Hart accuses the New Atheist Movement of, especially in his critique of Daniel Dennett. 2009, 7. At a cultural level, New Atheism can even be said to be invigorating a literary genre of its own, which espouses “militant atheism, evolutionary biology, neuroscience and political Neo-Conservatism.” Tate & Bradley 2010, 11; quoted in Lazenby 2011, 49.
extracting the “truth” of some matter, is a process that traces the precedent causes or analyzes its constitutive particles. The epistemological problem here is that existence itself is posited before the existent is knowable in the first place.\textsuperscript{54} Basically, the triumphalism and undeniably great advances of modern science are truths that are reached by a different method, and the truths that are “found” in that way are limited to reflection and application of that method itself. So, even the neutrality claimed by modern science carries an ideological remainder, consciously or unconsciously, and Hart is not dismissing the efficiency of this method, only questioning the tendency to present this method as truth itself.\textsuperscript{55}

In essence, this argumentation, of a naturalistic tendency to become oblivious to its own efficiency precisely as self-limiting discourse, is, of course, an anti-reductionist one, very similar to objections presented by numerous theologians but also scientists.\textsuperscript{56} As Hart himself notes, his affiliation to classical metaphysics makes him privileged to speak of the possibility of the “perfect rational integrity of nature.”\textsuperscript{57} The alternative is to view being as a chaotic whole in which the laws and consistencies are not grounded upon anything and yield only illusionary lacunae of stability. In Hart, the differential model of thought of postmodernity joins hands with a conservative pre-modern holistic model.

Number two, the pleonastic fallacy, is, as mentioned, a kindred concept to the genetic fallacy. In short, it is a belief that “an absolute qualitative difference can be overcome by a successive accumulation of extremely small and entirely relative quantitative steps.”\textsuperscript{58} Again, it is a question of reduction: if, argues Hart, one can offer an explanation for each step of development from “barest imaginable elements,”\textsuperscript{59} it still cannot offer any more valid proof in the question of existence in general. The very question of being as such is never answered, it is rather always a given in pursuit of the all-natural components it may present itself.

For Hart, then, there can be no cosmological “evidence” that could solve the logical problems of being in general. The same phenomenon is at work when it is proposed that human consciousness is simply a natural product, albeit a very complex one. Human consciousness is a unitary first-person experience of itself that, first of all, cannot be surveyed from a third-person view.\textsuperscript{60} Second, the ability to create abstract concepts (i.e. mental “things” that have no natural or physicalist basis) is a sign that consciousness cannot be only a passive register of sensual reactions but also an intentional activity that gives phenomena meanings and thus constructs understanding of anything in general.\textsuperscript{61} Intentionality is to consciousness to what language is to thinking: it cannot be undone, reduced away, for there is simply nothing “beyond”


\textsuperscript{55} Hart 2013, 70. Or to present the method as ontology itself, see Hart 2011*.

\textsuperscript{56} For example, Hans Urs von Balthasar’s whole work is a grand discourse against reductionism in any form of human thought; from the field of philosophy of science one might quote Michael Polanyi.

\textsuperscript{57} Hart 2013, 80; Hart 2009, 7.

\textsuperscript{58} Hart 2013, 98; in theological history, attempts at pleonastic fallacy can be seen in Neoplatonist legacy and in Arianism, which preserved too much of the emanationism in the hierarchy of divine and worldly things. Hart 2005\textsuperscript{b}; 2011, 403.

\textsuperscript{59} Hart 2013, 98.

\textsuperscript{60} Hart 2013, 198.

\textsuperscript{61} Hart 2013, 148, 183, 203.
them. Hart is, then, in terms of philosophy of mind, a dualist and intentionalist: mind
(or here, consciousness) is not a materialistic phenomenon and its “content” is always
what it is conscious of.

The pleonastic fallacy is thus a reductionist fallacy and an example of modern
naturalistic hegemony. However, it is important to note that, as in the case of the genetic
fallacy, the pleonastic fallacy also uses a more monochromatic view of causation than
in classical thought. For Hart, it does not matter how elaborate the material analysis
is or how convincingly any mechanistic cause can be shown to appear between
two things or states, because the problem is again logical, not “factual.” The mental
cannot be reduced to the material; ontological cannot be reduced to cosmological,
and intentionality cannot be reduced to facts or things. There are simply no steps to
be taken from purely materialistic components to mental ones. To Hart, it is more
meaningful and fruitful to go in different direction, to “go all mental”:

In fact, reality becomes more intelligible to us the more we are able to abstract it into
concepts, and to arrange it under categories, and then to arrange our concepts under
ever simpler, more comprehensive, more unconditioned concepts, always ascending
towards the simplest and most capacious and most unconditional concept our minds
can reach. To say that something has become entirely intelligible to us is to say that we
have an idea of it that can be understood according to the simplest abstract laws and
that leaves no empirical or conceptual remainder behind. This is the highest form of
intelligibility. We may not or may not be Platonists in our metaphysics, but we certainly
must be practical idealists in our epistemology.62

Hart adds, revealingly: “The essential truth […] is that the very search for truth is
implicitly a search for God (properly defined, that is).”63 This is what Hart, implicitly
and explicitly, in his different works, proposes: there must be a “guarantee” of thought
and it is conceivably only in perfect and transcendent Being.64 God’s unity and
simplicity is what the human mind is formally inclined to. Without this guarantee,
to Hart, we must lapse into a chaotic non-resemblance of mind and the world, and
nihilistic ontologies that see neither stability nor meaning. Again, Nietzschean rhetoric
appears, although familiarly converted: God does hide in grammar, but this grammar
is also that on which the mind operates.

As D.C. Shindler has noted, modern epistemological projects have cleared the room
of “any fruitful ambiguities” of classical thought and have equated the possibility
of truth with the possibilities of reason.65 These ambiguities lie in the premodern
concept of man’s intellect as having some truthful correspondence with the world
of objects. In Plato, we have the notion of knowledge as recollection; in Aquinas we
have the famous *adaequatio intellectus et rei*,66 which stresses the nature of knowledge
and truth as correspondence between mind and thing, grounded upon the perfect

63 Hart 2013, 233; see 2015a, 3–4.
64 God as “a guarantee” of clear concepts is derived from Descartes; thesis has been developed in recent
times in non-materialistic approached to philosophy of mind, known as occasionalism and parallelism.
See Feser 2011, 43–44.
65 Shindler 2013, 42.
66 Aquinas, *De ver*. 1.1.; quoted in Shindler 2013, 41.
self-knowledge and simplicity of God. Echoes of this process can be heard in the mechanistic philosophy of Descartes, to whom God was famously the guarantor of truth even in the face of radical skepticism. But for Hart, God is not a guarantor by his “will” but rather according to his form. The premodern correspondence between mind and things is actually a correspondence between the soul and the world, to put it in theological terms; and this correspondence is precisely not one of monosynchronicity but a differential play of formal unity.

It is not within the scope of this study to enter the discussion of philosophy of mind or the question of consciousness. For our purposes, it is enough to note that Hart argues that a theological element is present in every authentic act of mind toward the world or toward itself. Hart does not conclude that it is this perhaps unconscious element to which everything is reduced in turn, but something that should be raised to ever greater clarity and to an analogical degree, greater correspondence (within greater dissimilitudo). As in aesthetics, greater particularity does not dissolve or hamper general knowledge, rather it gives it incentive and analogical propensity to God’s truth and beauty.

The third fallacy, the “pathetic fallacy,” is of a more rhetorical nature and does not concern anything more than the notion that even presumably and apparently true naturalists tend to project human sentiments onto the natural world. The case in point is Richard Dawkins, who has famously popularized (and controversialized) biological theories into an atheistic discourse. The case of the New Atheists will not be treated in this study in more detail, but here it must be noted that the argumentative structure of this fallacy follows the logic of the two other fallacies. Dawkins uses metaphors that tend to mix up categories such as natural and mental phenomena. In this light, Dawkins’ perhaps most well-known single idea of the “selfish gene,” the idea that genes follow a pattern of self-preserving “goals,” is simply a projection of human intentionality onto pure materialistic organisms.67

It is possible to argue, in my opinion, that these philosophical fallacies, although possibly refutable in philosophical terms, also appear false within Hart’s theoria of Christian infinity. As shown, his arguments against materialism combine the rhetorical vehicles of Nietzsche and his theological convictions. In short, it may be said that materialism is, in Hart’s narrative, one more victim of the wrong picture of transcendence, that is, God’s infinity. As Hart explains in an article, the Western concept of ontological infinity combines both notions of infinite indeterminacy and infinite determinacy.68 These in turn reflect the thesis that has appeared in the pages of this study: in metaphysics, infinity is portrayed either as Parmenides’ absolute identism or Heraclitus’ absolute becoming. And it is precisely with Plotinus that Hart sees this dualism showing the “first evidence of a purely ‘positive’ metaphysical concept.”69 But it is Christianity that employs the infinite and finite in terms of Being and beings. True, metaphysics can speculate on the participation of a particular being in a higher being, but Hart wants to underline that this is only as an analogical difference between beings and Being, which precisely “disrupts” the continuum of univocal beings (and makes it possible to appear as truth or beauty — something that an absolute equivalent

68 Hart 2017, 91.
69 Hart 2017, 95.
vision of being could not). Within this view, no pure materialism is possible, for one is tempted to say that as mind has its content in its intentions, being has its “content” in its “intent,” metaphysical yearning toward the infinite God.

Eventually, it is again a matter of aesthetic possibility: in order for there to be something that can be regarded as beautiful, it must be beautiful in its particularity; yet this beauty is sustained by its participation in Divine Beauty, which is not set “a metaphysics apart” from this particular, but is precisely present in this particular being’s becoming what it is. So, it is the ultimate question of being in the first place that brings a transcendent (infinite) factor into play, and this is something that naturalism, if it follows its own premises rigorously, cannot account for. “The calculus of the infinite is absolute,” Hart writes; the infinite cannot be reached in any way by multiplying the finite (even infinitely) or by submitting it to infinite regressions of causality. More to our interest here, because the infinite must still “appear” in order to be something other than subliminal unrepresentable barrier, such a view elevates beauty to the primary moment of encountering being in its analogical splendor.

4.3 THE BEAUTIFUL

Hart’s reading of Nyssa provides us with the context of divine infinity, which presses toward an understanding of *analogia entis* as the correct Christian way of describing phenomena. Earlier, it was noted that Hart also wishes to depart from a Kantian treatment of the beautiful, since it could not address the traditional transcendental unity of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. As such, beautiful is a concept without a clear definition. If, however, the Beautiful is severed from other transcendentals, argues Hart, then the world gains a certain false autonomous ontological stature in which it can only be understood as an event itself, which, in turn, it is possible to characterize only by resorting to mystical vocabulary. We have encountered this resort in the treatment of the ontologies of violence: in Nietzsche, we had the mysticism of eternal recurrence and will to power (the “cosmological sublime”); in Heidegger, we had the mystical as *Ereignis* of being; and in Lévinas, the ethical sublimity of the Other served as unrepresentable and always before and beyond I ("the ethical sublime"). As we noted in the first chapters of this study, for Hart, it must be possible to convey the Christian discourse, or *theoria*, in a rational sense, too, though this endeavor may “require” a very particular rationale to begin with.

It was the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar that started the harvest of data and the theorization of the Christian concept of the Beautiful. As Hart’s thought is heavily influenced by von Balthasar’s, a brief survey of his thought would be appropriate.

In von Balthasar’s trilogy of systematic theology, the first part concerns itself with “theological aesthetics,” thus inverting the order of the Kantian trilogy by beginning precisely with the concept of the Beautiful in the Christian tradition before venturing

70 Hart 2011, 401.
71 Hart 2005b.
72 Cf. GOL II, 143: “In the kingdom of being there are thus only two monuments, that upwards towards truth (*caritas*) and that downwards from truth towards appearance (*cupiditas*): all being in time and history
73 See Hart 2003, 45–46.
into Theo-Drama (the Good, praxis) and Theo-Logy (the Truth). A. Nicholls suggests that the “key to the trilogy is found in the Scholastic notion of transcendental determinations of being, qualities so pervasive throughout reality that they crop up in all the categories of particular being.” So it is clear that the question is not an aesthetic one in the Kantian sense, as in our evaluation of a particular experience, but rather the Beautiful that surpasses and gathers together all qualities and accidents that may fall upon particular instances of beauty. In theology, this is no abstract category, but a personal event—that is, the glory of God.

It could be said that the metaphor of the mirror that was explored previously, corresponds to the fact that von Balthasar saw as a “primal phenomenon,” which constitutes our everyday structure of experience as “con-fronting” within ourselves pictures, thoughts, and language. Yet this experience is not formless, it is precisely “a form” (Gestalt); even a man in himself is a form, conjoining body and soul: “Our first principle must be indissolubility of this form [...] [and it must also be noted] that such form is determined by many antecedent conditions.” In theological terms, man is a free spirit but cannot dissolve his form. As Nichols remarks, these “antecedent conditions” do not determine the form or exhaustively explain it. Furthermore, von Balthasar emphasizes that form is not to be understood in a modern sense (which displays a “tendency towards destruction of form”) but in an “unmodern manner”, that is, a Christ-centric form of revelation with its “infinite variations” of Holy Spirit. This concept of Christ-form has already appeared multiple times in our analysis of Hart’s thought.

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75 The first part of the trilogy concerning aesthetics appeared in 1961–1969; English translations that took 7 volumes appeared in 1982–1991 (The Glory of the Lord). The references used here are to the English translations. For the legacy and recent developments on Balthasarian aesthetics, see Bychkov & Fodor 2008. Offering an exhaustive bibliography on the subject of theological aesthetics would be impossible, but useful and also at times critical of von Balthasar’s trilogy are Viladesau 1999; Brown 2008; a quite comprehensive working bibliography is upheld by Laura Smit at https://www.calvin.edu/admin/provost/faith/documents/aesthetics_biblio.pdf. For Orthodox theological aesthetics besides the works of Hart, see Manoussakis 2007; Tsakiridou 2015.

76 Nichols 1998, xviii. By transcendentials, it is meant something that applies to every possible being. For conceptual development, see Sevier 2015; and for its traditional usage, Gilson 2000. The basic theoretical impetus is to emphasize that in classical thought, the transcendentials could not be separated, though their integration might have varied in history. See GOL IV, 21.

77 GOL IV, 28, 38. Frederic Bauerschmidt argues that this makes the Balthasarian aesthetic incompatible with such postmodern aesthetics as Lyotard’s, for it assumes that the sublime (unrepresentable) is not the final word but rather a shattered and crucified gateway into the Beautiful. See Bauerschmidt 1999, 208–209 and Hart 2003, 52.


80 Nichols 1998, 4; see Hart 2008, 276, where he explicitly refers to God as “infinite form.” It is a precisely Balthasarian notion that theological aesthetics should be grounded upon the glory of divine revelation, that is, “God’s new manner of being in the form of the world.” GOL II, 22–23. See Hart 2003, 25: “the beautiful [...] is excess but never formlessness [...] proclaiming glory without ‘explaining’ it.”

81 GOL IV, 37. Even Przywarian “rhythm” is said to be to “too univocal.”

82 GOL IV, 37.
For von Balthasar, man is himself an expression “of laws of beauty,” an entity whose whole being is governed by form. To analyze this form is to err; it can properly be evaluated only as unity, which man basically is (the unity of soul and body). Man’s own form is the most inner, free, and personal aspect of his existence, and to perceive this form, spiritual eyes are needed. Perceiving in this case is Wahr-Nehmung, grasping the truth or the real, an act that guarantees the indissolubility of the form.

Here, von Balthasar is not talking about mere fideism. “Truth-grasping” means a lot more than succumbing to an overwhelming principle, ethical maxim, or sensational rapture. It means that man’s own personality, his own genealogies, histories, and stories, are put in place under a positive totality, which can be described only in terms of their process in con-forming to the form of Christ. So, in other words, “per-ceiving” [Wahr-Nehmung] the form means basically acknowledging that “the truth is out there”: man is not a sovereign being who creates meaning out of nothing. Balthasar says it directly: “To be a Christian is precisely a form.”

Seeing the form means seeing the creatureliness of the creature, but also the revelatory character of this being. The form appears to man as his personal calling, freedom, and beauty, and at the same time it points beyond itself, to the depth of Being itself, to what is usually referred to as God’s glory. This form in the world is called, in biblical terms, “the precious pearl,” which is given as a mission to Christians.

Balthasar admits that, in the phenomenon of the Church, there is always a certain amount of “healthy esotericism” involved, meaning that the genuine Christian way of looking demands Wahr-nahmung and con-formation to the original Christ-form. Christians cannot expect any neutral or scientific ‘third-party’ vantagepoint from which to evaluate the truth-ness or beauty of the revelation. The truth of the Church is catholic, not universal (in a modern epistemological sense) by nature. It is all-pervasive, to be sure, but it must be done according to the form, which of course means in the Christian realm following the lives of the saints. Christ is not an example, but the very being of his own message; therefore, it is not possible to separate the three transcendentals according to each one’s particular method of inquiry. It is the tragedy of modernity that it has become almost impossible to articulate Christianity in aesthetic categories, for the human habit of making analogies will disintegrate this Christianity to a matter of taste.

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83 GOL I, 21–22.
84 GOL I, 24.
85 GOL I, 26.
86 GOL I, 28.
87 GOL I, 323; GOL II, 28. The influence is clear to John Milbank, who argues that Christ is “a concrete poetic universal” (1997, 136–137) who “apostrophizes us” (140), that is, he brings about the realization that personal existence is already an address.
88 GOL I, 34.
89 Yet von Balthasar in several places refers to Christ as not doing his will, but only his Father’s; therefore, the “identity” of Christ is itself a concrete realization of an idea. Christ is the arche-form in whom other and I coincide, and his “meaning” is what he both is and what he professes. This arche-form is adopted by Hart in terms of a “supreme analogate.”
90 GOL I, 38; GOL IV, 12–13: “All great art is religious, an act of homage before the glory of what exists. Where the religious dimension disappears the homage degenerates into something that is merely attractive and pleasing; where the glorious disappears, we are left with what is usually called the ‘beautiful’.”
Therefore, von Balthasar presents Christian beauty as interplay between the form (Gestalt, species) and the light (Glunz, lumen, splendor), as found in Aquinas. The form must be ‘lit’ in order to be grasped (Wahr-nehmung). This is the basic existential position of man when viewed through theological aesthetics. On the other hand, the concept of form must rest on a comprehensive doctrine of Being, as a form full of reality and at the same time pointing beyond itself. This is the dimension of faith and reason, which man can enter after he receives the grace of light from God. “Faith itself is a kind seeing,” which “in the broad sense must be called an aesthetic vision and yet which stands up to rational examination and which can even be made visible to the person who purifies his mind’s eye.”

By speaking of knowledge in connection with the Christian revelation, von Balthasar means the patristic concept of intellectus fidei, understanding what one has faith in. Christian eros, striving after fuller vision and toward God, “challenges man essentially in his act of faith and brings philosophical knowledge, along with its eros, to its interior goal.” And even further: “No wonder, then, if all Christian theology claims to be a contemplative reflection of faith, which does not, however, proceed in an exclusively or primarily abstracting manner, but on the contrary (through the ‘gifts of Holy Spirit’) experiences and perceives the meaning of Being hidden in the concreteness of revelation.” Hereby, von Balthasar tells us that boundaries between the human capacity to attain its own intellectual goals and God’s revelation can indeed be drawn, but only in a positive sense. From a healthy analogia entis, there seems to follow a healthy apophaticism.

Mysteries of Being are ‘turned into images’ in the reality of the world, and any Platonism between these images and the imaged are to be attributed only to abstractions of the driest errors of rationalism. This conversio ad phantasma, which occurs in von Balthasar frequently, guarantees aesthetics its privileged position as the gatekeeper of human capacity to understand (also philosophically) the depths of Being. And it is mainly theology that can actually address the Heideggerian question:

“It is only [...] in the innermost sanctum of the spirit that the deeper and higher light of the self-disclosing God can shine out of the light of Being. And this dispels the philosopher’s objection that with the rise of Christian theology there has been a regress from Being back to the existent. Being itself here unveiling its final countenance, which for us receives the name of trinitarian love; only with this final mystery does light fall

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91 GOL I, 118; 235; GOL II, 58.
92 GOL I, 118–121. Reading Dante, von Balthasar implies that even hell can be considered to be an “artistic creation of love,” which is pure formality, “rigified, petrified love,” where truth is a “complete objectivity,” “a sacrament without grace.” GOL III, 86–87; 90–91.
93 Nichols 1998, 25. Yet it is important to note that in speaking of revelatory seeing, it is God that first must “see” the creature, and thus being a creature is being seen by God. Von Balthasar elucidates this by saying that “Christ is the perfect correspondence between God and man, which rests on God’s free initiative, and, therefore, always leaves to God the priority of vision.” GOL I, 330. Yet von Balthasar reminds us that even analogia entis cannot be used to govern the “artistry of the [supreme] artist.” GOL I, 443. Hart also affirms that God must be infinitely free to create, and creation cannot by any means, even analogia entis, be considered a finished work, even though nothing of it would be lacking on God’s side.
94 GOL II, 139.
95 GOL I, 146.
96 GOL I, 146–147.
at last on that other mystery: why there is Being at all and why it enters our horizon as light, and truth and goodness and beauty.97

In short, the revelatory character of reality is true in the sense that “God may be found in all things” and, at the same time, without falling into some vague pantheism (which attributes God to everything and is basically no more than an extreme form of rationalism)98, and this primordial light of Being is seen ultimately to be God’s freedom. The question for Being is made possible only if Being or beings (not merely ‘existents’) are experienced personally. In the form of Christ, this experience finally “makes sense” and only with it do the faith and grace find their “valid verification.”99

As Aidan Nichols puts it, it can be said that von Balthasar’s concept of intellectus fidei contains a degree of Gnosticism, or “knowledge of salvation.” However, this bit of Gnosticism is the price that has to be paid if one fully (or, perhaps, catholically) adheres to the analogia entis. Of course, this does not mean any crude notion of “certainty of one’s salvation” but is rather grounded upon the Christocentric hermeneutics explained above. Authentic knowledge concerns itself with its “distance” as it corresponds to the measure of one’s own form and Christ-form. This aesthetic problem also lies at heart of von Balthasar’s Catholic apologetics: the posing of the question of form guards all-embracing theology against Protestant ‘existentialist’ faith, as well as historical-critical scientism.100 Or yet, in a bolder image, von Balthasar describes the form of Christ as “the masterpiece of the divine fantasy which puts all human fantasy to naught.”101 To pick on scientific theology, von Balthasar demands to allow God his irony and divine sense of humor.102

It is quite easy to spot the similarities with Hart regarding these basic ponderings of von Balthasar in his trilogy’s opening work. Hart also employs the term form when elucidating his concept of analogia entis:

97 GOL I, 158. The light of Being is, as von Balthasar explains a few pages later, not a ‘mere perception’ but a grounding metaphor, “the theological a priori” that comes before any “instruction from outside, whether from the sphere of the Church or history.” 162–163. This light also ensues from “passion” for God, and questioning him can be pursued only in faith toward “the Sovereign Light.” So, the freedom of God encountered in the light of Being is endowed with great necessity to the one holding the faith.

98 A more balanced account of the role of conversion ad phantasma that von Balthasar means can be found in his epistemological account in Theo-Logik, the last part of the trilogy.

99 GOL I, 171. Christ is also “the form because he is the content,” thereby demolishing any sense of duality in encountering Christ and, for example, his message or meaning. GOL I, 463.

100 GOL I, 174, 177. For criticism on the Protestant side, see Barrett 2008. Also, the psychological implications of theological aesthetics are downplayed by von Balthasar by stressing the strong link between the “archetypal” experience of Christ and human experiences. See GOL I, 341. The same applies to every mythological attempt to reduce revelation and these archetypal experiences under some general ‘aesthetic theory.’ This is mainly because such a theory suspends the living man encountering God from its field of vision by treating only the ‘extremes’ of mystical and sensory experiences. See GOL I, 367 and, for a proper Christian account, GOL I, 402–405.

101 GOL I, 172. The Christ-form can even be said to reach “objective” status, because in an analogical and incarnational sense, the risen Lord is not captive to the Platonic dialectic between spiritual reality and its lesser images in the material world. GOL I, 416; cf. GOL IV, 31.

102 However, as Francesca Aran Murphy has shown, von Balthasar’s interest in theological aesthetics cannot be wholly credited to serve merely as an apology or to offer a counter-intellectual standpoint in Christian truth. Murphy 2008, 5–17.
Analogy is the art of discovering rhetorical consequences of one thing with another, a metaphorical joining of separate sequences of meaning and thus “corresponds” to the infinite rhetoric of God [...] And to speak more truly, more beautifully of God is to participate with ever greater pertinacity in the plenitude of God’s utterance of himself in his Word. In its inventiveness the good analogy discloses the artistry of God’s eternal Logos [...] [to] direct thought and desire towards the supereminent plenitude that is the ultimate truth of every created quality or form and to manifest the belonging together of all things gathered in the splendor of God’s beauty.103

Here, Hart’s reading of Nyssa joins hands with von Balthasar’s intention to preserve the unity of the transcendentals. In linguistic terms, the analogical referent lies in the infinite unity of God, thus forming very real “metaphors” of this unity in multiplicity with individual mirrorings of the Divine discourse already present in creation.104 This implication is also one that makes the difference between theological aesthetics and aesthetic theology: the former proceeds with the notion of creation, and the latter is “a pre-theological” enterprise that only perhaps later seeks to accommodate theological truth as one of its possible interpretations, or even perhaps represents “an astonished halt”105 to seeking a theological interpretation of the Beautiful. In the case of Hart, the interruption is not a halt, but a peaceful utterance that can accommodate criticism.

Both von Balthasar and Hart also see that, in the analogical view, God’s beauty is also conveyed as his intra-trinitarian life. Von Balthasar argues that in encountering the form of Christ, the maior dissimilitudo of God’s person (the eternal Father’s relation to the Son and the Spirit) is not univocal in human terms.106 It is the view into the invisible and the response to the silent utterance that analogy points to, not stressing their paradoxical status (for that would bring about a dialecticism where it cannot be tolerated). In postmodern language, analogy opens up infinite, qualitative difference.107 At a general level, von Balthasar remarks, seeing God the Father in his transfigured Son is “no more ‘indirect’” than philosophically exploring Being in the singular existents. The same Trinitarian moment can be spotted in Hart’s writings. Yet Hart writes that von Balthasar seems to be a little hesitant in placing in Christ the ultimate analogous sense of the dissimilarity, for this could threaten the vision of Christ as the perfect human and the perfect God, and thereby the nature of salvation.

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103 Hart 2003, 307. In von Balthasar, the archetype is always clarified through its copies, and it displays “theological transcendental reduction,” a theological counterpart to phenomenological reduction, in “demonstration of the conditions of all knowledge and striving.” GOL II, 307.

104 See Andrejev 2004, 61.

105 GOL I, 37, 73, 311. Pattison argues that this “halt,” which may result in a hostile or an alien aesthetic judgment upon theological thought, is something that von Balthasar criticizes as being a procedure that employs merely a worldly aesthetic endeavor and can orient thought without the notion of the transcendentals. In effect, this represents “a temptation” of purely aesthetic interest to man, but even as such, it still carries an analogical opening to theological truth, albeit in a distorted form. Pattison argues that this analogical hinge is one that underlies whole of von Balthasar’s argument. Pattison 2008, 109. See also Fields 2007, 174.

106 GOL I, 195, 304–305. It is precisely a whole Trinitarian act that makes the Christ-form reach its “plastic fulness.” GOL I, 408. And “reflection of the persons, one in the another, is the archetype of beauty.” GOL III, 149.

107 Hart 2003, 194.
Hart says that it is precisely the stress on the word “ever” that “lifts the doctrine of incarnation out of the realm of myth.”

Again, the particular being, in its unnecessary being and in its ground in nothingness, is that through which beauty steps forth and receives its ontological “primacy.” As a human being can conceive its own limited nature by the very distant analogy of infinite personhood, it is perfectly possible to speak of this relation as classical vocabulary would have it, namely that a creature is a synthetic being and God is simple. In the former, essence and existence are held in tension (a very Przywarian concept), whereas in the latter, they simply coincide, and by analogy, it is possible to view this difference as gifted reality. As mentioned at the beginning of this study, infinite difference “is still itself beauty,” not a tragic niche of being of the created Dasein nor an anonymous ethical obligation. In short, beauty shows how being is “open.” And creation speaks of how God is (not what he is), but in creation, this modality comes to be perceived “as substantiated semiology” of the Logos. God speaks “God” and creation is another mirrorized reflection or an utterance of love of this primordial speech, with the resulting creation itself completely unnecessary, an ornament. This unnecessary status of creation does not undermine the “value” of creation, but precisely it seeks to highlight it in terms of beauty. It is truly grasped only in “delight.” And metaphysics, although it may be laid, as Hart suggested, only at the foot of the cross, also gains it relevance in relation to the splendor of the form: “the higher and purer a form, the more will light shine forth from its depths and the more will it point to the mystery of the light of being as a whole.”

Thus, a proper theological account of Beauty must acknowledge the transcendental rooting (and its unity in God) of every single instance of the beautiful, and this acknowledgment also reveals the rationale and the ethical obligation that such a
rooting entail. This acknowledgment is not, however, one of correspondence, but one of analogy. As John Milbank puts it:

Between one unknown and the other there is here no representational knowledge, no ‘metaphysics’, but only a mode of ascent which receives something of the infinite source so long it goes on receiving it, so constituting, not a once and for all theory (or account of the ontological difference) but an endlessly repeated-as-always-different theoretical claim which nothing other than all the biographies of every ascent, and the history of human ascent as such.\(^{117}\)

If, ontologically, being is not a gradual descent from the absolute to the contingent, and if the Godhead is portrayed in classical terms (i.e. as being simple, free, and devoid of any pathos), then the beautiful in created order appears as expression, not as a continuum or not merely as a result of an omnipotent will. As Hart puts it, “[P]recisely because creation is not a theogony, all of it is theophany.”\(^{118}\) There is no “bridge” but a “mirror.” While creation expresses how God is, it does not determine God nor exhaust him, but rather stands in a cosmic reflection of delight in difference.

The mediatory role of Christ should not be considered only as an ontological moment of abstract mediation between infinite and finite, but precisely as a prismatic form in which a new creation is displayed in the old, and divine life is analogically “spoken”. And created matter is, as von Balthasar reads Bonaventure, in a state of striving toward form, in a state of appetitus for form.\(^{119}\) As von Balthasar explains, supreme beauty, truth, and good in its diffusiveness is what separates Christian thought from Platonic.\(^{120}\) It is no longer a question of tracing phenomena or beings back to their monistic origin, but their presence precisely reveals the divine order (analogically) within the natural, making the latter, too, capable of glory and intrinsic rationale.

An “eidetic,” representational knowledge and view of beauty cannot account for analogical difference, since it must set aside the concept of ex nihilo in order to find

\(^{117}\) Milbank 1997, 44–45. Hart argues that Augustine also realized that the relationship between God and creatures lies within the ancient paradigm of image and archetype: the “mood” of image and archetype is one of participation, not alienation, and so the difference perceived on the side of the creature can be analogically perceived as “an actual communication of God’s own inward life, his own eternal Image of himself within the Trinitarian mystery. It is [...] a created reprise of the movement of God’s being as God, coming to pass within beings who have no existence apart from their capacity to reflect his presence.” Hart 2008, 222. It must be noted that Hart is very critical of Augustine’s moral teaching; see Hart 2015. For von Balthasar, in Augustine, the very structure of beings reveals the unity of their creator, reflects his beauty, and is “informed” by the creative act toward matter’s nothingness. GOL II, 115. Von Balthasar also interprets Bonaventure in saying that, in God, the archetype absolutely is equal to the image, and thus as this is the perfect correspondence, the truth “is the basis of absolute beauty.” GOL II, 298.

\(^{118}\) Hart 2015, 5.

\(^{119}\) GOL II, 311.

\(^{120}\) GOL II, 285; at the same time, it is the infinite and incomprehensible that “attunes” the background against which the finite and comprehensible manifest. GOL III, 195.
grounds for some identism between a particular instance of beauty and its “idea.” It is easy here to remark on the similarities to Hart’s argument. The downfall of analogia entis also means a turn toward dialectical models in theology; von Balthasar sees the demise of analogia entis to prepare “the way for the Lutheran dialectic between the kingdoms and for the principle of sola fide.” And one symptom of this “internal” necessity is shown in the modern reduction of classical causality into a mere efficient one, as explained in the previous chapter; but it is also a postmodern symptom, driving beauty into sublimity, where it cannot gasp for any analogical breath. The other symptom is the diminishing of freedom into personal acts of volition, making it a matter of unhindered individual choice rather than growing toward ever-more transcendental unity of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. So, if in the beginning we noted that the postmodern is encapsulated and entangled in narrative form, we can also now discern, with Hart, that it is precisely the representative categories that come under suspicion, though not in the manner of the sublime. Insofar as the Platonic concept of representation is not “interrupted” by Christ, the analysis conducted by postmodern thinkers is correct as it strives for multiplicity and difference where there is no vertical analogy or horizontal abundance, but only an immanent “dis-presence” (not even worthy of the name absence). The surface of such a postmodern landscape cannot produce any harmony, or can do so perhaps only accidentally, nor can it give any positive value to the experience of faith. This is what von Balthasar sees as making the difference between the Catholic vision (Pascal and St. John of the Cross, in this case more particularly) and the Reformation’s stress on “theo-panism” (a label introduced by Przywara); the Catholic tradition retained “an aspect of the experience of faith over the Reformer’s assurance of faith.”

It seems, then, that only by analogy can authentic beauty (with ontological stature) be postulated. Von Balthasar explains that if Christ is the “image of images,” this must affect all other images as well, thus constituting a series of revelatory and concealing images in the world: “The reality of creation as a whole has become a monstrance of God’s real presence.” In short, it is “to believe that surfaces are ‘profounder’ than ‘depths.’” This means that the aesthetic splendor of the world is “prohibited” to be

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121 It is John Betz’s view that it is precisely postmodern readings, leaning to the Nietzschean thesis, that crudely equate Christian theology with Platonism. In this study, the most remarkable feature is that, according to Betz, postmodernists of this type fail to appreciate precisely the analogia entis in its “economy of love” instead of its “economy of representation.” 2006, 19. Cf. GOL II, 134. Von Balthasar stresses that it is precisely as analogia personae, not only as analogia entis, that “Biblical and Christian content bursts out of the Platonic frame.” GOL II, 140. His treatment of the case of Anselm in the same volume clarifies this even further: for him [Anselm], the philosophical analogia entis becomes the analogia personalitatis or libertatis, and correspondingly the perfection of the creature is found in its perfect liberation in absolute divine freedom as it is taken up into the divine will.” GOL II, 245. See also GOL IV, 311–312.

122 GOL III, 105.

123 Hart 2003.

124 GOL III, 106.

125 Cf. GOL IV, 14.

126 GOL I, 419–420; 423–425; 451–452. In tradition, the vision of God moves historically; faith hangs upon encounters with God in history, yet it is moving toward an eschatological “perfected vision of God.” GOLII, 46.

127 Hart 2003, 268; GOL I, 437, 443; GOL II, 45: “Theology begins by seeing what is. […] It is either realistic or it is not theology at all.” See also GOL II, 55.
exhibited as anything other than divine “surplus,” and therefore theology should not shy away from categories of being and presence. This is especially so because the presence of God does not only convey the being of God, but precisely God as Trinity. The fact that eidetic categories are replaced by iconic ones is what separates Christian beauty from purely aesthetic or Kantian categories and from the notion that Christian aesthetics is a “general aesthetic.” It is, conversely, a very particular aesthetic while being not merely aesthetic. Here, we can return to rhetoric as “aesthetic reason,” to the idea explicated by St. Anselm and expressed by von Balthasar that it is precisely spiritual progress that sets worldly aesthetics apart from this aesthetic reason. If one should try describe the mode of appearance of this reason, perhaps it would be justified to say it is one of abundance, excessive yet formative (both for discerning form and giving it); it is persuasive because it is beautiful and peaceful. Von Balthasar even suggests, while reading St. John of the Cross, that a soul contemplating God’s beauty can, “in vision,” see analogia entis.

However, it is the question put forth by James K.A. Smith that is appropriate to ask again here: if encountering being and presence is governed by aesthetics, are there no preconditions for how one should strive toward such cognition in the human realm? How is proper taste acquired? Hart himself replies to Smith that there simply cannot be a totally different seeing from the one that a Christian affirms, for that would amount to having “no actuality.” This may be a coherent answer, given the fact that Hart views God as an infinite actuality in which everything, including potentiality, participates. But at the level of narrative, the question seems to be well-placed: if one is simply not persuaded by this narrative and its ontology, is the only option to lean into “lesser” seeing and toward the perils that are economy of violence and violent metaphysics? This is a rhetorical question, of course, but at least it manages to display the criticism of a certain elitism that Radical Orthodoxy, and Hart, have faced. The selective use of historical sources has already been noted; to it must be attached a suspicion of a certain aesthetic Gnosticism (while certainly being wary of Gnostic

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128 Hart summarizes: “Creation is, before all else, given by God to God” (2003, 268) and the biblical view of creation is most of all l’art pour l’art, “a deliberative invention […] a kind of play” (2003, 251) and “a divine semiology […] that comprises all signs in the infinity of [God’s] determinacy.” (2003, 308). Manoussakis offers a concrete example: a person hearing music can locate where the music comes from (orchestra etc.) but cannot account clearly whence the music itself comes from, as it comes from silence. (2007, 113) So, although God is “given” as the creator in creation, it is still ex nihilo that creation comes from and it is in the darkness of divine essence that the light appears. As von Balthasar remarks on several occasions, in revelation the revealed is both given and hidden, in every worldly sign a twofold hiatus is present, both pointing to its origin while concealing it. Although Manoussakis makes no notion of analogy here, it is clear that his personalistic emphasis leans heavily toward an analogical existence.

129 GOL II, 288–289.

130 For Hart, beauty appearing as a particular peaceful narrative, as we have seen, has an universal “coverage”; von Balthasar puts the same issue in a different form when saying that “the biblical revelation can and must enter into dialogue with […] transcendental aesthetics; by the same token it can have no interest in a partial aesthetics that is confined within boundaries of the world.” GOL IV, 20.

131 For von Balthasar’s discussion of Anselm’s “aesthetic reason,” see GOL II, 222–223, 227, 236, 251.

132 GOL III, 149. Von Balthasar sees that “seeing the form,” “a double seeing of finite and infinite” is already present in the vision of Antiquity. GOL IV, 22.


134 Hart 2007, 613.

ontology) that runs through tradition itself, perhaps mostly unarticulated, but always surfacing where it is strategically needed. Hart seems to fall under this suspicion as well; yet this emphasis on the persuasiveness of beauty seems to soften the strict realms of truth and untruth, and to redelegate the question to a rationally grounded aesthetic court. Hart himself would deny this; for him, the primacy of beauty is precisely the fact that “guards any tendency towards Gnosticism.”¹³⁶ He wants to argue for beauty that is unnecessary, freely flowing, “negating nothing,”¹³⁷ for there is simply no vantage from which to capture it in the inner works of the Self or make it convertible with some higher or lower denominator. Beauty shows that creation’s meaning is precisely its constant flow and the particulars reflecting the mirrorized infinite in them. Everything is ready, but nothing is finished. However, does this “excessive superficiality” (in the literal sense) not convert a Gnostic pneumatikos into a Gnostic aisthetikos?

In any case, if the beautiful appears in narrative as rational persuasion, it surely must have some prerequisites, for otherwise the general nature of Christian truth should be more easily attained and recognized. Though beauty “resists reduction to the symbolic,”¹³⁸ it also affirms the “integrity of Christianity’s historical specificity.”¹³⁹ And these prerequisites, as have become clear in this study, entail a certain view of Christian tradition, not to say a learned capability to discern a few central ontological questions before it is intelligible to speak of aesthetic truths—while Hart is ready to accept such pieces of praeparatio evngelica in other traditions when they seem to cohere with the peaceful nature of the Christian narrative.¹⁴⁰ So, again, we are facing a circular logic; and again, it must be said that circularity perhaps cannot be avoided (but perhaps cherished?) if one seeks, like Hart and Milbank do, to offer more a statement-like vision than an analysis of the supposedly neutral premises (whatever that notion should entail).

So, in the end, it is a matter of persuasion, which Hart also acknowledges as a possibility of violence. However, he seems to think that convincing “reasons” emerge by cultivation of a vision¹⁴¹, and again we are left asking if a correct understanding of Nyssa’s infinite ascending desire is needed to grasp the difference between the theological interruption and the myriad options “of the market,” which offer only insatiable, vague, and parochial loci for self-generating desire. There has to be an element of paideia of the soul (or mind) for truth to be persuasive; yet this puts the phenomenological side of the beautiful under serious question. But as we have seen, the Christian appearance of the beautiful is never a happenstance of “pure phenomenology,” but always a conditioned one, and for that matter, Christian ethics cannot operate on the notion of the pure Other alone. All in all, it is again a matter of “letting” narrative run its course, and then one is able (or not) to begin seeing.

However, it must be noted that Hart’s thesis of infinite peace tries to present an alternative to all systems that need dialectic and sacrifice in order to maintain

¹³⁹ Hart 2003, 28.
¹⁴⁰ Hart 2003, 440.
¹⁴¹ Hart 2003, 416. It may be worthwhile to keep in mind the observation that David Tracy, following Habermas, made that merely a hermeneutical approach to tradition may, in effect, never alter the status quo or give fresh perspectives to it. Tracy 1981, 74–74.
a cycle of becoming. For example, the tragic implications of the suffering servant, Christ on the cross, cannot, according to Hart, be read as the manifestation of some background dramatic economy. The narrative of peace and beauty must adhere to particularities, whether it is really the God-man on the cross or the analogical beauty resplendent in every particular being. Only by this adherence can the surface emerge as universal; only so can meaning emerge so as not to be susceptible to convertibility between singular and universal in a univocal sense. And Christ’s life is precisely what constitutes a “narrative reversal,” restoring creation’s goodness, and his form reveals all worldly forms to be false images.

143 Hart 2003, 325–327.
5 CONCLUSIONS

To return to the prosaic speech I professed in the introduction, it seems to be the case that a particular pond can claim superiority over others while renouncing totality. This may not be due to its superior ingredients but rather its composition: the more in unison it is with itself, the more it can reflect something superior. This, indeed, also appears certainly to be the strength of narratives that are openly biased; yet, inevitably, it is also their vulnerability. The inner coherence of particular narratives is bought at the price of their convertibility into anything else, as their coherence relies precisely on the evaluation of the person encountering them and their reflections. And the more still a pond is, the more reflective it becomes vertically, while more open to horizontal stirrings: the historical inevitably interferes with the eternal.

I began by asking how David Bentley Hart’s theological thought should be interpreted within general theories of narrative theology. It became clear that a re-narration of the theological narrative is needed, for both secular nihilism and Christian theology were in need of a “Christian interruption,” meaning a rhetorically constructed theology that finds its ultimate court of appeal not in the epistemic (or “eidetic”) representational mode of neutral knowledge, but rather in the field of transcendental beauty.

If beauty should be reinstated into the core of theology, David Bentley Hart argues, the restoration should be done in theological terms. For Hart, these theological terms are the narrational nature of Christian truth, its rhetoric, and how one is convinced of this rhetoric by appealing to the beauty of beings. These claims notwithstanding, I have studied the nature of narrative in Hart’s thought, how this narrative is used to out-narrate other narratives (by re-narrating itself), and finally, how the aspects of divine infinity and the beauty of the infinite form the core of such narrative acts.

I have shown how Hart uses his argumentation to provide for a theology that is simultaneously as anti-modern as it is post-modern. I have also found Hart’s vision of a theoria inherently and theoretically coherent, while problematic issues arise in finding a balance between the aesthetic allure of this vision, its claim of peaceful conquest both ontologically and rhetorically, and the claim that such a vision is simultaneously particular and universal. Yet it seems that these unbalanced positions can be meaningfully inserted in a framework that Hart uses.

The repercussions of this position are many: the rhetorical appeal for a certain ontology first of all means that, for Hart, ontological is rhetorical (being is itself a divine surplus of divine life). Furthermore, a particular being, a being created out of nothing and yet participating in the infinity of Divine being, is universal through its aesthetic implications, of which Christ is the arche-analogy (the narrative of historical God-man reveals the true form of transcendence and God’s infinity via analogy, and a particular created being reflects partially its truest actuality and consummation in the Triune life). So, all in all, to be means to be given being in beauty (the beauty that appears in beings affirms analogia entis as the proper way of viewing being).

These tensions, or paradoxical and even surprising counter-themes, follow from Hart’s basic view that theology has to be rescued from both neutrality and dialect patterns. Being is because it is “biased” toward the infinite. This “bias” can be “seen” through beauty that transcends the mere subjective affirmation of taste. So, when Hart’s theology prefers rhetoric over dialectics, it does not bother to attempt to “solve”
these tensions (while most of the time acknowledging them). The peaceful notion of God, divine *apatheia*, finds its argumentative counterpart in Hart’s distaste for dialectic metaphysics or theology, whether that of Hegel or Barth. Hart’s historical opponents, from presocratic metaphysics to the nihilistic philosophers of our age, seem to suffer either from a metaphysical lack or from an aesthetic deficit. And sometimes, as Hart argues, these lead to one from the other: the metaphysics of antiquity could not account for a true transcendence or difference, while certain ontologies of violence since Nietzsche have suffered from a difference whose metaphysical nature is clouded or soaked in the postmodern fog of the sublime.

When Hart puts his version of the Christian narrative to use, it must be taken as osmotic cultural reading; while preserving the novelty of its interruption of classical metaphysics, it must be able to be re-narrated, in answer and in contrast, in contemporary debates. I have explored aspects of this reading, both as it is portrayed and as it is re-narrated. This double communicability, as I have called it, responds to the model of Hart’s endeavor to present a wholesome *theoria* of reality while upholding the human possibility to “rationally” see. In this, the category of the beautiful emerges as primary: it reveals supremely, in the form of Christ, not only how created being is, but also how God is. This revelation is analogous by nature, and this notion is what Hart sees as theology’s “holy gift” to thought: by analogous understanding, it was possible to think of transcendence in the transient, to actually see the difference between the Creator and creation, and to distinguish that a particular being can be viewed as a mirrorized spectacle of God’s own life and Glory, without ever exhausting the infinite difference but participating in it.

As I proceeded through the first chapter in pursuit of my second question, which sought to place Hart within a wider framework, it became clear that Hart’s overall take on theological narrative feeds off much of the same source that Radical Orthodoxy does. In his concept of ontological peace, his thought converges with John Milbank’s for the most part, as do his notions of the Christian interruption (metaphysically) and its revolution (ethically and culturally). Hart’s own rhetorical style corresponds to much of the assertory nature of Radical Orthodox theologies. His dismissal of dialecticism seems to stem from the same root but crystallizes in his vindication of *analogia entis* and following Przywara’s Catholic *Denk-form*. By these notions, he can certainly be labeled as a post-conservatist theologian, while it must be said that the emphasis on the aesthetic beauty of particular beings seems to allow a more flexible stance even toward conservativism than, for example, clinging to moral or cultural critique. Philosophically, Hart has called himself a Christian Platonist; and if such a definition is understood in a broad sense, placing emphasis on the emerging era of Christian thought, then Hart can be seen as an ontological conservative. He will not allow relativism or textual postmodernity to affect the core of his narrative; rather, he wants to show with this particular narrative that theology has already answered and surpassed such positions. So, as I pointed out, Hart’s postmodernism is governed by his anti-modernist thought: there is a more original difference in the Trinity and a more radical element of beauty in its analogical splendor than any sublime or differential postmodern could account for. This is what he means by the interruption of Christ.

I think that it is vitalizing to think that narrative form is not simply one method among others, but the most appropriate form of grasping “God speaking God” in himself and in creation. And analogy of being does seem to offer a balancing view for this fundamental narrative: it safeguards theological language from lapsing into univocal idolatry or equivocal mysticism. It is the analogy of being, modeled
after Przywarian thought, that also seems to separate, to a degree, Hart from most mainstream Orthodox theologians—yet this is a matter needing further study. As was noted in the case of von Balthasar, a certain vigilance is in order when stressing the dissimilitudo, however; it cannot act as an absolute safety valve for all indeterminacy concerning our language about God. Hart’s case for analogia entis is indispensable for his theology, in the aforementioned sense of out-narrations as re-narrations.

I explained how Hart’s narrative take on Christianity is certainly critical of the Yale-School narrative theologies or ideas affiliated with it. Christian meaning can be neither a matter of community reproducing it for themselves nor a self-contained narrative; it must remain open for two reasons. First of all, its nature and final meaning are eschatological; and secondly, it speaks of an infinite God who cannot be secured as a moment within worldly discourse. This being said, narrative emerges in Hart as more engaging and “interrupting” moment than simply a “version” of older stories. In Chapter 2, I outlined the features of Hart’s narrative as ontological, peaceful, and aesthetic.

In Chapter 3, I pursued the thinkers that Hart poses as adversaries to his narrative. I made notion of Radical Orthodoxy’s “need” for such adversaries and raised the question of the relation between the claim for peacefulness and the simultaneous need for adversity. The relation remains unclear; Hart himself notes that the “war of persuasions” is real and perhaps cannot be settled without becoming violent. If one cannot be persuaded without any rhetorical violence, Hart himself notes, there is perhaps nothing much left but hope of conversion. A similar problem, although in a different guise, appeared in Chapter 4, where Hart’s concept of the beautiful was explored. It is at least appropriate to ask whether Radical Orthodoxy’s and Hart’s readings entail a bit of Gnostic elitism, for they both argue for a distinct way of seeing and tasting. Again, however, this does not rob the real power (sic) of its arguments, but merely shows them to be challenging alternatives (which, perhaps ironically, come close to the Yale-School sensibility that meaning ensues from practices, no matter how theoretical). In any case, while I feel that this problem is not decisive, numerous critics have made the case that Radical Orthodoxy tends to displace other narratives with its own, and sometimes, with the same vigor, it criticizes the secular narratives themselves. I feel that the case cannot be decided, ultimately; it depends on so many prerequisites and premises that being neutral about it is basically to be able to say nothing of the matter. However, I feel that the point is to be recognized; there should always be a certain vigilance over hegemonies but, nevertheless, one must also employ empathetic reading in discovering what is actually said.

Hart’s treatment of the importance of the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche is refreshing in itself: Hart sees Nietzsche as an apt seer of the inner logic of Christianity and its dependence upon a particular narrative, who treats its misgivings ruthlessly. From the thought of Nietzsche, the supremacy of the concept of “surface” over “the depths” is acquired: what is actually seen, heard, narrated, and experienced, is what ultimately “makes sense.” In Nietzsche, this was power and eternal recurrence; in Christianity, peaceful donation and beauty. In addition, language in Christian terms should not be considered a distortion of nature, but a creative act of re-naming (thus re-narrating and, sometimes even, out-narrating) it as a response to God’s own rhetorical acts. It would be interesting to pursue the linguistic aspect of this phenomenological description further.

The thought of Emmanuel Lévinas served, in this study, the role of presenting what Hart called the most vacuous of trend of postmodern thought, namely ethics.
Lévinas’ thought, though perhaps rhetorically simplified by Hart, represented the shortcomings of a merely philosophical account of ethical obligation and otherness. Lévinas acts as an example of what Hart portrays as “philosophy’s slumber,” that is, without the interruption: while understandable in its efforts to portray an otherness or an ethics beyond essentialism, it remains a captive of the metaphysical aesthetic shortcomings, as I noted above. In Lévinas’ case, I showed how precisely it is the recognition of the given gift and its Giver that gives fortitude to Hart’s argument for his Christian out-narration of Levinas’ ethics.

In Hart’s reading of Martin Heidegger, the interruption of Christ acquired a fuller treatment regarding the concept of being. Where Heidegger, in his famous assertion of “onto-theology,” criticizes the metaphysical accounts of Being, Hart affirms that it is precisely the classical notion of the supreme actuality of God that makes being available to the aesthetic and erotic gaze. In this analysis, Heidegger remains a nihilist who, while laudable in his own analysis of the nihilism of modernity, chooses not to care about the Christian interruption but proceeds to pursue Being in ever more mystical terms of his own. Hart seems to argue that it is more the Heideggerian tone than his content that should be interrupted with a correct analogical view: it is not Sorge but agape and eros that form a creature’s main Stimmung of being-in-the-world.

Hart also wants to show the Christian interruption as a meaningful tool in discourse about the gift. As a sociological and philosophical dilemma, there can be no pure exchange of the gift, since its appearance seems to abolish itself simultaneously. However, Hart argues that the Christian gift, present in creation and supremely in Christ, is what denounces both worldly economies of debt and gift. For him, even in Christ, sacrificial logic is not applicable; nor is a moral development in the sense that suffering or evil should have any role in the divine calculus of mercy. Again, “evidence” for this claim should be sought on the surface of being: as mirrors of the divine eternal gift, particular beings show forth the excessive and free nature of God’s gift in creation. Creation’s utter dependence on its Creator, while simultaneously displaying its ground in nothingness, is an extension of the divine rhetoric play of delight. And Christ exemplifies this: his sacrifice is not an atonement in the sense of substituting victims, but a form of how God is, appearing in the world. An economic Trinity is an immanent Trinity; and how being is thus reflects how otherness-in-unity in the Godhead “is.” I have concluded that Karl Rahner’s maxim is to be taken with Hart as an analogical correlative to attempts such as Jean-Luc Marion’s analyses of givenness and gift.

Reflection, analogy, mirror: these are the metaphors that populate Hart’s theological idioms. With them, he describes how modern conceptions of autonomous reason and nature, intellectualism and naturalism, fail; they do not have the participatory reflecting infinity that Christianity can provide. While Hart affirms that in purely epistemological proceedings, it is best to be “a practical idealist,” in the grander scheme of things, such endeavors also have their metaphysics. As such, they are doomed to be technological totalities or biologically reductionist models of impoverished causality. Because every search for truth is ultimately a search for Being, without a transcendental opening, it will remain caught in a metaphysics that fails the great theme of Being by either succeeding only in clarifying efficient causes or by portraying it as violence, as a play of forces. I showed how Hart argued that the human mind has a unifying and intentional structure, and so resounds with a transcendent source (whether as merely an Absolute or a theistic God). And I argued that naturalistic philosophies can
be portrayed within Hartian discourse as false accounts of infinity, that is, views of reality that either denounce transcendence altogether or distort it.

As his treatment owes much to the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar, Hart reads his theology of God’s infinite beauty through the “Christ-form.” Aesthetics is reasonable insofar as it is viewed as God’s rhetoric in his Logos, mirrorized in the open-endedness of being in creaturely logoi. Saints Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor are the obvious patristic sources Hart employs. In this, he also joins the infinitist readings of Nyssa, while being critical toward some of its proponents (Mühlenberg). The infinitist interpretation of Nyssa, combined with Maximus’ use of Logos, brought us to Hart’s use of patristic sources, which are surprisingly scarce given they are so authoritative in his thought. The accusations of strategic reading of historical figures hurled toward Radical Orthodoxy can be seen as valid here as well.

These readings notwithstanding, ultimately, it is a holy calling to “see with Christ’s eyes,” or at least to be appreciative of being that is not only given but a gift. It is the beautiful, revealed in the “supreme analogate” of Christ, that also makes Christian aesthetics a distinct endeavor from any general aesthetics. This is a crucial feature, since previously it was noted that Hart regards his narrative both as a supreme form of narrative (being rhetorical) and as a supreme narrative (an analogy revealed in Christ). In this, Hart applies a Balthasarian distinction between theological aesthetics and merely aesthetic theology. While Hart is certainly also familiar with von Balthasar’s dramatic approach to theology (in the second part of his trilogy), Hart’s own theology is highly non-dramatic (though certainly not undramatic in some of its formulations).

The non-dramatic aspect also brings forth the possible problems of emphasizing the novelty of Christian metaphysics. If one places such a weight on the doctrine of creation ex nihilo, the salvific work of Christ may sink into the background; the Christus Victor theme sometimes seems to continue only the novelty that already “happened” in creation. True, Hart speaks about a new creation in Christ and wishes always to stress the importance of assumed humanity in Christ, as well as history’s opening toward eschatology, but the peaceful primacy of his narrative seems at times to pull theology under his aesthetics. In theological terms, the von Balthasarian question of whether a Przywarian notion of analogy is really capable of sustaining a healthy Christology, seems also to be in place.

This can be seen as problematic, but on the other hand, it is maybe a certain “Chalcedonian” dilemma of theology itself to be able to speak in a wholesome way about being and the Christian narrative. So, I would like to see Hart’s theology as more orienting in its intention than in a conclusive sense (although some might disagree in that this notion downplays his whole endeavor for a supreme narrative); and I readily acknowledge that such a view also offers paths for further study.

More specifically, Hart’s position among other Orthodox theologians, to read them in contrast and in harmony, constitutes one of these possibilities, as I have already mentioned. This would have an impact on ecumenical understanding, but even more so on modern Orthodox scholarship, which still, at times, seems to suffer from a certain imbalance between fertile crossfeeding of Eastern and Western traditions and the polemics of these relations. I have also pointed out that Radical Orthodoxy’s central theses could be re-evaluated. More to my interest, however, would be to explore in more depth the current status of theological aesthetics and to treat Hart as one of many voices echoing or criticizing von Balthasar’s legacy. It would also be valuable to offer a more nuanced phenomenological reading of Hart’s “peaceful seeing with the eyes of Christ.”
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This dissertation focuses on the thought of the American Orthodox theologian David Bentley Hart. Hart argues that the beauty of the infinite God is a persuasive truth which establishes a new order of being. This study shows how Hart constructs his theological argument within and against postmodern aspects of ontology, hermeneutics and aesthetics.

Hart’s theology is a unique endeavor in contemporary Orthodox scholarship. This study is one of the first attempts at a comprehensive analysis of his thought.