

**The Nordic Society for Philosophy of Religion (NSPR)**  
**Conference: “Symbolizing Transcendence: the limits of language”**  
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**Abstracts**

**Between East and West: communicating God as a contradiction**

Igor Ahmedov

Marika Rose (2019) argues that in the twentieth century both continental philosophy and theology have taken a linguistic turn to try and counter the Enlightenment’s project of building up a new Tower of Babel. Apophatic theology taking the beginning in pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite was used as a tool to navigate the questions posed. Apophatic theology addressed the issues of the ability to talk about God. Acknowledging that the language is not only incomplete, but simply incapable of any meaningful God-talk, apophatic theology attempted to talk about God, by stating what God is not. Negation became a revelation. However, there is a fundamental difference between broadly put “Eastern” and “Western” Christianity in the question of the distinction in the *essence* and *energies* of God. According to John Romanides (2008) the Eastern Church has made a clear distinction between God’s essence and energy while the Western Church has confused the two. This is necessary to be able to communicate God and the extent to which theologians (and philosophers) can form ideas about God. Romanides argues that the Early Church Fathers maintained humans are only able to partake in the divine energies, essence being inaccessible to them. To know God in his *essence*, is to know God the way he knows himself (Ware, 1993:27). The Eastern and Western divide is thus being able to talk about God’s actions in the world (*energies*) vs being able to talk about God’s action and substance of who he is (*essence* and *energies*) respectively.

Based on the author’s on-going work for the doctoral thesis, this paper will discuss the problem of a direct communication of-and-about God, and take a cue from Søren Kierkegaard’s idea of indirect communication. After a critique of the Western Christianity’s attempt of positive God-talk, the paper proposes a framework for communicating God as a contradiction. Where contradiction enables the speaker to communicate the truth.

## **Language about the Transcendent**

Robin Attfield

Making language about the transcendent comprehensible is a problem, whether we are speaking about Yahweh, Krishna, Zeus or Thor. Such language is liable to the twin pitfalls of anthropomorphism and of ambivalence.

We are, however, familiar with language from the realm of human interactions being applied to animals. When someone says ‘the lambs are happy’, we can understand it through unspoken reliance on this being analogical language: human happiness is to human nature as the happiness of lambs is to the nature of lambs; and many of us are familiar with the nature of lambs.

Can a similar theory of analogy apply to predicates used about the transcendent? Thus the knowledge, power or goodness of God would be related to the nature of God as the knowledge, power or goodness of a person is related to human nature. The problem, as Humphrey Palmer argued, is that the nature of God seems not to be known, or at least agreed.

Yet language about the God of Judaism, Christianity and Islam refers to the universal creator, and in such theistic contexts can be understood to apply to an agent capable of bringing the universe into being when there might instead have been a different universe, or, there again, nothing at all. This fact about theistic language forms the standard-setting information that allows us to make sense of predicates applied to God.

Thus talk about the knowledge, power or goodness of God needs to be understood at this level. God’s goodness is goodness at the level of the creator, rather than of an observer with superhuman powers. Construed in this way, such language avoids anthropomorphism (for humans are creatures and not creators, and this is creator-related language) and also escapes the charge of ambivalence, as it is clear what the level is at which it is applied. It also survives the kind of criticisms recently raised by James Sterba which claim that a good God would prevent particular disasters; for this goodness is that of a universal creator, who would make provision for the universe as a whole, and arguably for creaturely freedom within it.

## **Transcendence through cyberrelationships**

Anastasiia Babash

In her paper “Transcendental Relationships? A Theological Reflection on Cybersex and Cyberrelationships” (2009), a theologian Stefanie Knauss argued that there are at least four aspects of cybersex that can enrich our understanding of transcendence: a) the imaginative nature of cybersex, b) the bigger role of the mind comparing to the role of the body, c) the different understanding of time and space in cyberworld, and d) the playful component of cybersex. However, twelve years have passed since she did her research and during this period technologies have been developed enormously, as well as our everyday usage of them. I would like to start my presentation with discussing how those four aspects proposed by Knauss can be addressed and nuanced in the contemporary world.

Moreover, I would like to pay attention to the fact that during last decade the Internet and technologies have become highly integrated in our everyday life: there is no more online/offline time (at least in the Western world) - we are connected 24/7, as well as technologies penetrate all spheres of our lives (this can be considered as the way how technologies symbolize transcendence). The COVID pandemic has intensified this even more. Clearly, such pervasion of technologies have changed dramatically the ways we find romantic and sexual partners, as well as the way we fall in love and have sex. However, cyberrelationships have a dual nature: on the one hand, they approach transcendence by giving us more choice (it is much easier that even before to meet a person from different continent or a person with a very specific interests) and more possibilities (you can text, call, see, play through technologies), but on the other hand, technologies disconnect us from each other (create “social bubbles”, make the distinction us/them worse, etc.). I believe that the ways to decrease the negative effects of technologies and especially how they influence our relationships could be found in accepting our need for transcendence. Specifically, I argue that our technological progress (especially in technologies that enhance our ways of communication) is driven by our desire to be connected and, thus, be in some way transcendent. I believe that in order to decrease the negative effects we need to make this more clear.

### **Ancient Greek and Roman Mythology as an Imaginative Metalanguage of European Culture in 17-19th centuries**

Elizaveta Bruk

At the end of the Renaissance, the vision of ancient Greek and Roman mythology could be described within the framework of two approaches. On the one hand, its images were seen as a moral allegory within the Christian discourse of the epoch. This approach could be confirmed by the use of antique images in various collections of moral emblems, existing as tools of designation religious piety and sins. The divinity as a special dimension also was an object of signification. This approach could be identified as a Christian adaptation of the mythological system. On the other hand, ancient Greek and Roman mythology was a kind of a symbolic system that can be filled with some meaning and be used depending on the context, e. g. within the framework of scientific polemics. Ancient authors in this case were read as sources of various images of the signifiers system, as rhetorical patterns. Thus, ancient Greek and Roman mythology becomes a universal figurative language or metalanguage which is capable of expressing various ideas, mainly of moral content. In the 17th century, this trend can be clearly seen in the visual and verbal rhetoric of various publications, for example, in the “Pictures of the Temple of the Muses”, published in 1655. The attitude to ancient Greek and Roman mythology as to something “historically determined” within the framework of the historical process appeared at the dawn of the Age of Enlightenment and resulted in the fully historian attitude within the romanticism of the early 19th century. The traces of this processes can also be seen in visual images, e. g. in engravings by B. Picart in the book “The Temple of the Muses”, engravings by B. Gagneraux and others. Simultaneously with the gradual formation of the historical vision of mythological plots, they cease to be understood as a system of signifiers, as a cultural metalanguage. Their moral or

allegorical sense was overshadowed by historical studies, remaining stable only in a simplified lateral form, for example, in some interior details on illustrations for the book “Monument du costume”, published in 1789.

## **Acéphale, the Impossible, Eroticism: the Technologies of Transcendence Beyond the Limits of Symbolization in Georges Bataille**

Ervik Cejvan

This paper proposes some observations opening for a critical analysis on symbolizing transcendence in George Bataille’s *The Sacred Conspiracy* (1936) and *Inner Experience* (1943) as the instances of an attempt to produce transcendence, and a personal experience of the divine.

In the first instance in Bataille, we are dealing with a fierce declaration of founding *Acéphale* as a transcendent principle. In the second instance, we are dealing with a meditation on excess going beyond any symbolic representation of the transcendent, in search for its immediate experience. The former, a short text, offers the *Acéphale* as the sacred symbol of the impossible escape beyond the possibility of excess. The latter, offers the *Impossible* as the failed symbolization of transcendence exceeding the possibility of experience. On the one hand, there is the limit of language and the imminent failure of a symbolic representation of transcendence. On the other hand, the human experience poses the limit beyond which the transcendence collapses in the symbolization that takes the form of vulgar exaggeration.

The paper approaches the two instances as the modes of production in Bataille, by alluding to Christopher Partridge’s notion of the “technologies of transcendence”. Partridge relates “technology” to Michel Foucault’s “technologies of the self”, the spiritual and esthetic practices of personal transformation, inspired by the ancient Stoics and the “dandyism” of Charles Baudelaire. Here, recalling Pierre Hadot’s critical remark on Foucault’s handling of spirituality as “a new form of dandyism”, the paper revises Partridge’s “technologies of transcendence” by bringing this very notion closer to Hadot’s notion of “spiritual exercises”, as well as proposing Bataille’s notion of excess and not, as Partridge does, “transgression”, hence offering analytically more accurate approach to transcendence drawing on Bataille. Finally, turning to Bataille’s *Madame Edwarda* (1941), the paper proposes that in Bataille, death itself becomes the technology of transcendence, and eroticism the means of the production of not-knowing, beyond the limits of symbolization. Following the failure of *Acéphale* to establish transcendence symbolically, Bataille, however, offers eroticism as the technology of transcendence at the level of spiritual exercises, that, rather than producing the symbols of transcendence cultivate the void of unknowing. Sometimes the erotic does not produce transcendence but points out transcendence which is not there.

## **Art as an expression of ,religio'. The relationship between modern art and religion in the phenomenology of Michel Henry**

Jörg Disse

For Michel Henry religion is not supposed to be symbolized by art, but art is thought as an expression of religion. He develops his philosophy of art with reference to Kandinsky and to Kandinsky's theoretical writings in his book "Voir l'invisible. Sur Kandinsky" (1988), relating Kandinsky's theory of art to his own phenomenology of life. Henry's philosophy is based on the distinction between two forms of phenomenology: a phenomenology of the world and a phenomenology of life. In his phenomenology of life, Henry develops an understanding of life as self-affectivity. It culminates in idea that the life of an individual can only be properly thought if we consider the individual's life as being related to absolute life (interior to the individual), which Henry identifies with God ('religio'). But individuals forget their being related to absolute life. The means for overcoming this forgetfulness (=sin) are for Henry Christian ethics (expressed by the seven works of mercy). But art can have the same function as Christian ethics. In an interview ("Art et phénoménologie de la vie", 1996) he calls art "a form of religious life" and describes it as another sphere besides ethics enabling a reactivation of our relationship to absolute life. However, being a form of religious life doesn't mean that art symbolizes any religious contents. Kandinsky's conception of art (assumed by Henry) is strictly non-representational. The nature of painting is to be the (abstract) expression of interiority, not to represent any world-objects of whatever kind. And Henry, identifying Kandinsky's interiority with his understanding of life as related to absolute life, conceives the making or the experience of art as a (possible) experience of 'religio'.

### **Metaphor, Parable and Analogy**

Anders Ek

This paper argues that Biblical parables are often overlooked when discussing the foundations of Christian mysticism and presents an example of how the biblical concept of "parable" contributed to Christian mystical language.

In the introduction to Augustine's exposition on Psalm 78, Augustine is using a series of theologically loaded words (mystery, revelation, grace, faith) to describe how the intellectus of man can reach knowledge of God. Since the words "I will open my mouth with a parable" (quoted by Jesus in Matthew 13) occur at the beginning of the Psalm, Augustine sees the whole Psalms as a parable, and the things mentioned in the Psalm are seen as figures. It is argued in the paper that Augustine's commentary on the Psalms is an example of Christian mysticism, driven and motivated not primarily by Hellenistic philosophy but by the biblical concept "parable" and by the reception of the Psalm within the Bible (Matthew 13 and 1 Corinthians 10).

Just as in the case with later medieval theories of analogy, Augustine's understanding of the parables is based on the assumption that there is a certain similarity between what is said and what

is signified. There needs to be a "reasonable comparison" as Augustine puts it, between the language in the parable and what is signified. This relation is neither "univocal" nor "equivocal" but "analogical". Neither the same or different but same and different ("significatio eadem, non specie"). It is argued in the paper that Augustine does not treat the Psalm as a parable in the simple sense that it is a metaphor that gives certain moral teaching. Rather he treats the Psalm as a parable in the sense that it connects the reader with God in a mystical, sacramental way.

The Paper argues that Augustine's mystical thought in the commentary on the Psalm should best be understood in continuity with the biblical tradition and also that it could be seen as an early example of Christian theory of analogy. It is argued that the theory of analogy presented here is apophatic in the sense that the words give an understanding of God, beyond propositions.

### **Names, energies and epistemic contact with the transcendent: A patristic view**

Gunnar Gjermundsen

St Athanasius' word, «God became man so that man might become god», paves the way for the patristic emphasis on *theosis*, or deification, as the animating telos of Christian life and theology. Within the perspective of *theosis*, theology as a practice must at some point open out toward real experiential contact with, or participation in, the realities it purports to describe or refer to.

But the accretion of philosophical subtlety over the centuries has got us tangled in a web of humancreated conceptual apparatuses, and the problem of how to "symbolize transcendence" arises. The trenchant critiques of both Wittgenstein and Bergson of philosophical problems as "pseudoproblems" arising from faulty use of language and thought is still very much relevant. This paper aims to "show the fly out of the fly-bottle" (*Philosophical Investigations*, §309) by reading St Gregory of Nyssa's *De Virginitate* and St Dionysius' *De Divinis Nominibus* as representative of the patristic tradition, and demonstrating two things. First, that the theologian achieves epistemic contact with divine transcendent realities through a certain kind of platonic principle of *homoiosis*, formulated as "only like can know by known by like". Second, that theology – and in fact philosophy too, on a certain reading – is the noetic discernment and discursive expression of the Divine Names, which are the energetic manifestations of God in the world.

The energies or names, divine emissaries, accomplish the miraculous, antinomic feat, ungraspable by ordinary reason, of being both transcendent with respect to sense perception and reason, yet immanent in the world of human experience. For they are nothing but the various colors that the grace of the Son takes on in our experiential world, and without which no approach to the Father is possible (Jn 14:6). Certain traditional objections to the notion of divine energies, such as the charge of polytheism, and that it compromises divine simplicity, will be dealt with. The paper ends with implications arising for a more robust and contemporary account of the participatory nature of mind and perception.

## **Imitation and the Transcendent**

Per Bjørnar Grande

Imitation stems from the originary term mimesis and can be seen as a desire, something one wishes to appropriate, or it may be seen as a representation of reality. Both Plato and Aristotle, each in their own way, try to avoid the destructive implication of mimesis.

In the work of René Girard (1923-2015), transcendence is seen stemming from the act of imitation. Imitation creates the condition for sacrifice and sacrifice becomes a way of holding a society together. As imitation is disruptive, a society needs sacrifices in order to keep it together. The experience of relief and peace which arises after a sacrificial murder, will make people think that the victim has some sort of inherent power. This creates a shift from sacrifice to veneration. Thus, the sacrificial scene marks a transcendent event. The scapegoat becomes the force, which regulates a society.

The development from sacrifice to deification shows the structural similarity between primitive religion and Christianity. However, the imitation game changes when Christ is killed and becomes an innocent scapegoat in the eyes of the believers. This changes the focus from the victim's inherent guilt and paves the way for an attitude of imitating the scapegoat's innocence. Imitating Christ by siding with the victim is what in Christian thought makes the transcendent become a reality.

In this article, I try to understand the motif of imitating Christ from an everyday understanding of imitation. Today, due to the insight of the victim's innocence we experience a milder, more secular editions of scapegoating. Thus, Christianity's important breakthrough comes through siding with the victim. This seems to be motivated by an imitation of Christ, an imitation which feverishly tries to avoid creating new victims. The article ends by seeing the "imitation of Christ-motif" as an indication of a more common and everyday relationship compared to the motif of the more missionary motivated "following Christ".

## Religious Expressivism and Global Expressivism

Roomet Jakapi

Religious expressivism is an anti-realist view on the nature of religious language. Expressivists hold that religious sentences are not representational and do not express religious beliefs. These sentences do not really make statements about supernatural agents and do not report religious facts. Instead, they serve to express certain non-cognitive mental states such as emotions, stances and dispositions. Notable proponents of this position were R. B. Braithwaite (1900–1990) and D. Z. Phillips (1934–2006).

In a recent monograph (2013), Michael Scott provides a thorough analysis of religious expressivism and rejects it. He proposes an alternative called “moderate attitude theory” according to which religious sentences express cognitive as well as non-cognitive states. Scott contends, furthermore, that the sentences in question report and represent religious facts.

The arguments brought against religious expressivism are numerous. Critics claim that expressivism cannot distinguish between different forms and aspects of religious language. For example, the sentences of creeds are often uttered to express religious feeling and commitment, but they evidently also express religious beliefs. These sentences, moreover, aim to report religious facts. There are also sentences that convey religious explanations of non-religious facts. Sentences of that kind appear, e.g., in the formulations of the design argument. For more arguments against expressivism, see (Scott 2013: 71–85) and (Vainio 2020: 9–12).

In this talk I aim to assess whether religious expressivism could be improved and modified by embracing global expressivism, which is the view that all discourses are non-representational. The view has been famously presented by Huw Price (2013). In other words, I want to explore what consequences the adoption of global expressivism would have for the expressivist understanding of religious language.

Global expressivism does not state that language cannot express beliefs. I shall argue that embracing global expressivism would allow the religious expressivist to claim that, while language is essentially non-representational, religious sentences may well express religious beliefs.

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## **Religion, fiction, and facts**

Timo Koistinen

Religious fictionalism is a philosophical theory that tries to provide an alternative to metaphysically realistic (theistic or God-centred) view of the nature of religious discourse. The starting point of the theory is, on the one hand, a view that the central religious (metaphysical and historical) truth-claims are false. On the other hand, it is thought that religious stories, doctrines, teachings, and practices can offer valuable insights about the moral, spiritual, and aesthetic dimension of life also for atheists. Religious fictionalism argues that being an atheist is compatible with being religious because it is possible to understand traditional religious discourse as a useful fiction. It is intellectually and morally legitimate for atheists to participate in religious practices and make-believe that religious claims are true. In the first part of my presentation, I will outline the central ideas of religious fictionalism. After that that my intention is to highlight some key philosophical problems associated with fictionalism.

## **The Meanings of 'God': A Semiotic Approach**

Gesche Linde

The type of the word 'God' and its meaning have been a matter of debate throughout the centuries. The word 'God' has, for example, been taken for a noun, meaning a definable entity, something fixed and stable: whether a species or the only individual of that species. The word 'God' has been taken for a verb (or something verb-like), meaning a happening, an event, a process: whether the springing-up of faith, the event of revelation, or the ever-ongoing process of creation. The word 'God' has been taken for a name, meaning a person: with thoughts, intentions, actions, and even feelings. The word 'God' has even been taken for an indexical, meaning a location embedded within a wider horizon: a location occupied by the user of the word when attempting to understand herself and the world around her.

The suggestion that I am going to present differs from these proposals in that it does not categorize words by following common linguistic distinctions in the first place. It draws instead on the semiotics of the American philosopher Charles Peirce, especially his late semiotics that he developed in the years after 1900. In the first section of the presentation, a brief introduction into Peirce's semiotics will be given. In the second section, the word 'God' will be taken for a sign, and analyzed as to its possible meanings according to Peirce's system of sign trichotomies, the point being that it is the way a listener relates to a speaker that determines the spectrum of possible interpretants. In the third section, the (rather theological) question will be asked how the word 'Gord' may act as a sign (a predicate term) for something within the world (a subject term), in other words: how God may be thought to manifest within the world, and whether God should be thought of in terms of the distinction between immanence and transcendence at all.

## **The Controversy on Transcendence: Kant, Fichte and Jacobi**

Marius Timmann Mjaaland

In his *Letter to Fichte* (1801), Herman Friedrich Jacobi argues that “Either God exists and is *outside of me, a living being with an enduring existence, or I am God. Tertium non datur.*” (p. 49) Jacobi accepts Fichte’s claim that he is not an atheist in the *personal* sense, and yet he contends that his philosophy is nevertheless an expression of speculative atheism: the construction of God in man’s image, or “sublation” of God in human consciousness.

The divide between Fichte and Jacobi set the scene for discussions about faith and reason in 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophy, from Hegel and Schelling to Nietzsche’s. A key question in this debate is the either-or formulated by Jacobi. It is a debate about how to define, construct, adapt and symbolize transcendence.

Kierkegaard pursues the either-or as defined by Jacobi throughout his pseudonymous authorship, from *Either-Or* to *The Sickness unto Death*. I will argue that this is the decisive difference between two ways of symbolizing (divine) transcendence and self-transcendence in the opening paragraphs (A.A) of *The Sickness unto Death* (1849). Confusing the (infinite) self with God and thus rejecting God’s alterity is according to Kierkegaard the ultimate expression of human despair. Following this trajectory, I will discuss the difference between divine *exteriority* and divine *interiority* as a key distinction in Kierkegaard’s critique of speculative idealism.

Finally, I will draw attention to a little book published by Kierkegaard in 1849, *The Lily in the Field and the Bird of the Sky*. In this booklet, Kierkegaard discusses representations of God in nature, understood as a way of *symbolizing transcendence* in non-human creatures, such as birds and lilies. I will discuss whether the loss of transcendence described there equals a hidden atheism in Christianity, and whether the perception of God as transcendent, existing “outside,” might be irretrievably lost in modernity.

## **The Encounter and Transcendence – Martin Buber’s dialogical definition of humanity**

Marko Pajević

The famous German Jewish religious philosopher Martin Buber (1878-1965) published about 100 years ago his short book *I and Thou* (1923), a still unequalled conception of dialogical thought. Already in 1843, dialogical philosophy was hailed by Ludwig Feuerbach as ‘the philosophy of the future’, but it was only due to the profound rupture of WWI that the idea gained in momentum. In the 1920ies, a plethora of important philosophers developed this idea, mostly in Germany, alongside Buber thinkers such as Hermann Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig, Eugen Rosenstock, Karl Jaspers or Karl Löwith, in France Gabriel Marcel. But not even Emanuel Levinas later on could go any further with the dialogical principle than Buber. Unfortunately, this developing current was cut short by National Socialism and has not yet recovered since. However, and particularly in

Buber's version, the dialogical principle offers the possibility to think an access to transcendence via an earthly encounter of two human beings (in its ideal form). It unites a humanism approach with religious transcendence in an 'immanent transcendence', to use Ernst Tugendhat's expression (2007).

The paper will firstly trace the history of dialogical thought and present Buber's dialogical principle, greatly influenced by the Jewish mystical movement of Chassidism, and his foundational *being-in-relation* of the *I-You-relationship*. I will develop Buber's ontology and dialogical anthropology, and position this idea in our time by referring to thinkers such as Peter Sloterdijk and Jean-Luc Nancy. The paper thus demonstrates Buber's relevance in the context of our contemporary debates about the human. It will then discuss the possibilities of representation of transcendence in such a charged notion of encounter in the I-You, and, in particular, the role of language in these processes.

Transcendence and humanity, for Buber, cannot be understood in the individual human being. They need to be regarded in their *Mitmenschlichem*, that is, in a human being in relation to another human being. According to this position, humans are only anthropologically fully existent when in relation to one another, in a subject-subjectrelationship, and from this emerges a transcendent moment. Transcendence thus can be considered the result of an earthly human encounter. Based on these reflections, the paper proposes a *potentialist anthropology*.

### **Can a Semantic Agnostic Partake in Religious Life?**

Carl-Johan Palmqvist

According to the contemporary view in analytical philosophy of religion known as non-doxasticism, a religious life does not require religious belief. Instead, it might be fruitfully based on some weaker cognitive attitude (like hope or assumption) in combination with agnosticism concerning the truth-value of central religious propositions (Alston 1996; Howard-Snyder 2017; Schellenberg 2005).

The agnosticism involved in non-doxasticism presupposes a realist interpretation of religious language – to be agnostic in this sense means to neither believe nor disbelieve the literal truth of the propositions like "God exists". Recently, however, Le Poidevin (2020a, 2020b) has argued that a religious life might also be based on semantic agnosticism. Unlike the traditional agnostic, who is agnostic regarding the truth value of religious propositions, the semantic agnostic is concerned with the truth conditions of religious discourse. Le Poidevin's semantic agnostic considers two views of religious language equally likely: realism and fictionalism. The central idea is that the semantic agnostic can participate in religion without knowing whether religious discourse is literally true or whether it is a fiction.

While I find Le Poidevin's proposal highly intriguing, I have some serious misgivings regarding its feasibility. Le Poidevin's suggestion seems overly simplified in that it only considers two views of religious language. To nuance the picture, we would also want to include more figurative

approaches, like the view of Aquinas that religious discourse is analogical, as well as the view that religious discourse is essentially metaphorical.

One's view of religious language is vital in determining the proper attitude towards its content and its proper relation to action. Realism indicates that truth-normed attitudes (like belief or assumption) are suitable and that the propositions involved are a suitable ground for action. Fiction is appreciated through the imagination and the only action it warrants is pretence and make-believe (Sinhbabu 2017). Understanding religious language figuratively makes things more complicated, but it seems safe to assume that what counts as right attitude and proper action is determined by the subject's interpretation.

If the semantic agnostic is ignorant concerning which of several competing views of religious language is the correct one, she should also be ignorant regarding which attitude to take towards its content and concerning the proper kind of action. Therefore, unlike the truth

value agnosticism of mainstream non-doxasticism, semantic agnosticism seems hard to combine with religious practice.

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### **Truth and Realism in the Philosophy of Religion vs. Truth and Realism in the Philosophy of Theology and Religious Studies**

Sami Pihlström

This paper begins by distinguishing between the multiple layers of the problem of realism and truth in discourses concerning religion and theology. It then proposes a (broadly) transcendental account of the issue of realism to be applied in these different inquiries.

First, it can be plausibly argued that theology and religious studies must be practiced as humanistic and social-scientific disciplines comparable to history, sociology, and the other human sciences. Whatever truth these practices of inquiry pursue, there is no essential difference to the pursuits of truth within historical, sociological, and other inquiries. Theology and religious studies, thus, do

not directly engage with the transcendent at all. What they do inquire into is humanly created cultural reality, that is, human beings' historically developing ways of trying to speak about the transcendent. Generally speaking, theology and religious studies, as practiced at academic institutions, can thus also be expected to share the broadly naturalistic worldview of current science. Their ontology and epistemology can be further examined within a more general philosophy of the humanities.

Secondly, however, it can be suggested that the issues concerning realism and truth in the philosophy of religion differ crucially from the articulation of those issues in theology and religious studies. (If philosophy of religion is classified as a field within systematic theology, however, this is relevant to our understanding of theology as well.) In particular, it cannot be presupposed that philosophy (in general, or philosophy of religion in particular) is simply a discipline within the humanities in the way theology and religious studies are. This is because philosophers of religion do seek to refer to the transcendent, especially when debating on God's existence and non-existence. According to this traditional understanding, philosophers of religion can (at least try to) make claims about the way the world is at a fundamental metaphysical (transcendent) level independently of human beings and their conceptualizations of the world.

However, this division of labor between theology and religious studies (conceived as humanistic disciplines), on the one hand, and philosophy of religion (conceived as legitimately pursuing truth about transcendence), on the other hand, presupposes a realistic conception of reality and truth – more or less along the lines of what has been called “metaphysical realism”. In order to be able to justify the claim that philosophers of religion can legitimately (try to) speak about transcendence (in a metaphysically-realistic sense), one would have to settle the prior issue concerning the relation between any human conceptual categorization and the categorization-independent world. This is, we might say, a transcendental issue that cannot be resolved merely by presupposing realism or the correspondence theory of truth.

This transcendental reflection, despite its simplicity, carries enormous critical potential applicable to the assessment of contemporary orthodoxies in the philosophy of religion as well as analytic theology. The key distinction between the transcendental and the transcendent must also be duly made in this context.

Further reading

Pihlström, S. (2020). *Pragmatic Realism, Religious Truth, and Antitheodicy: On Viewing the World by Acknowledging the Other*. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.

Pihlström, S. (2022). *Pragmatist Truth in the Post-Truth Age: Sincerity, Normativity, and Humanism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming.

## **Is finitude original? A re-reading of 'Violence and Metaphysics'**

Theodor Sandal Rolfsen

With the discussion regarding the possibility and limits of articulating transcendent phenomena within the boundaries of phenomenology still ongoing, a re-reading of Jacques Derrida's epochal essay 'Violence and Metaphysics' is called for. This essay is generally regarded as the most decisive interpretation of Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy, the thinker recognized as the catalyst for the so-called theological turn in French phenomenology. The essay concerns precisely the questions around which the debate about the theological turn revolves: is Levinas' claim that the Other transcends phenomenology and ontology possible within the finite framework of philosophy?

It is normally understood that this essay is not simply a critique of Levinas' project, but rather a double-reading in which both the impossibility and necessity of the thought of the Other is recognized. The present paper seeks however not to retrace the steps of this well-known path, but rather to ask if Derrida himself is not limited to speaking of transcendence in one particular way, that is, as limit-phenomena. It does so by showing how Levinas himself explicitly formulates his own conception of transcendence in opposition to this idea of the Other as a limit-phenomena, only signified in the failure of comprehension to grasp her.

My strategy is first to show how important the theme of original finitude is in 'Violence and Metaphysics'. It then seeks to show how Levinas' analysis of enjoyment – a theme neglected in Derrida's essay – provides an alternative to the idea that our finitude is original. By doing this, I hope to show that Derrida can only approach transcendence in the failure of language to formulate it, so that transcendence can only be signaled in/as the incapacity of our comprehension. Levinas on the other hand begins his analysis of transcendence from a place of complete adequation, that is, the self-sufficiency of the enjoying ego. Transcendence is for him therefore not signaled in the inadequacy of language, but as the surplus that remains when everything else is adequate. This leads in its turn to a renewed understanding of finitude, namely not as the failure or inability of the subject, but as the recognition of an ethical limit, where to grasp would be to transgress. While I do not intend to argue that all of Derrida's worries are resolved by this, I do believe it stakes out notions of both finitude and transcendence different from those Derrida was able to entertain.

## The Embodiment of the Word in Arvo Pärt's Music

Toomas Siitan

The focus of the paper is on the specific relation of spiritual texts and music in Arvo Pärt's compositional technique called *tintinnabuli*, invented by him in 1976. "Sound is my word. I am convinced that sound should also speak of what the Word determines. The Word, which was in the beginning" – this frequently quoted statement by Arvo Pärt characterises his method of converting the sacred texts into musical structures. Alongside the mathematical formulae structuring the tonal language and musical form of his works, Pärt is often treating the sacred texts as a kind of formula as well, deriving the musical structure from the text's various parameters – the number of syllables, word emphases, and punctuation. In the logogenesis of his music Pärt seeks the essential union between the Word/*Logos* and music as it is understood in the Christian tradition of liturgical chanting.

### "Ich werdend spreche Ich Du"

#### – Creative dialogue in the relational anthropologies of Martin Luther and Martin Buber

Sasja Emilie Mathiasen Stopa

"Look on me and answer, Lord my God" (Ps 13:3). This is the despairing cry of the psalmist in Psalm 13, admonishing God to enter into dialogue with his suffering creatures. In the Bible and the theological tradition, human existence is dialogically constituted. In dialogue with God, the human being becomes a 'you' in relation to God's creative and saving 'I'. Additionally, the 'I' is instantiated as a self, calling upon God's 'you' in confession, in prayer, and in praise.

Since the early 20th century, 'dialogue' has become a central concept across different academic fields such as philosophy, psychology, theology, and political science. Moreover, dialogue has come to play a crucial role for enabling and nourishing interreligious and intercultural co-existence in societies defined by increasing multiculturalism. This interest in dialogue was pioneered by the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber (1878-1965) in the philosophy of dialogue presented in his main work *Ich und Du* from 1923. However, Buber's main interest was not political, but existential; with his philosophy, Buber examined the relational and communicative constitution of human subjectivity. According to Buber, identities are created in dialogue between an 'I' and a 'You' staged by the eternal "You": "Ich werdend spreche Ich Du." As a speech-act, this dialogue creates a world of relations different from the world of experience ("Erfahrung") defined by I-It-relations.

In this paper, I interpret Buber's relational anthropology and argue for the relevance of a notion of creative dialogue, resting on the Biblical perception of the world as created by God's utterance of his Word and, thus, of reality as spoken. Buber understands human beings as co-creators of this reality through their interpersonal dialogues and rephrases John 1:1, stating: "Im Anfang ist die Beziehung." I unearth the rooting of such creative dialogue in the Hebrew Bible and analyse it's flourishing in Martin Luther's relational anthropology. I will argue that the common grounding of

the theologies of Buber and Luther in the Hebrew Bible lead them to suggest similar relational anthropologies, centring on creative dialogue as the kernel of interpersonal relations, which reflect the human relation to God as a Word creating through speech. This understanding of reality made them question the prevailing philosophical ontology of their time: In Luther's case, Aristotelean substance ontology, and in Buber's case, Kantian subject-object dualism.

### **Alternatives of immanent transcendence**

#### Normunds Titans

In this paper I will address some trends of conceiving "immanent transcendence" (a *prima facie* oxymoron), apart from the classical theological incarnational understanding. There are various classifications of types of transcendence, but for simplicity's sake I will follow the basic division corresponding to the three main branches of metaphysics. William Desmond (in his book on Hegel's "counterfeit", fakely transcendent God) denotes these transcendences as T1 – other-being of nature, T2 – other-being of the human self, T3 – other-being of the divine (meaning a theistically conceived God). Of course, there are many subdivisions that can be fitted under each type.

In modern philosophy of religion T2 in great varieties has been the dominating route of development of thinking immanent transcendence. Quite a few names come to mind: Spinoza (e.g., Deus sive natura, natura naturans, identity of divine and human mind), Kant (e.g., transcendental conditions of experience, categorical imperative, moral religion within the bounds of reason), Hegel (e.g., an immanently self-completing, relative absolute, speculative Good Friday, the Calvary of absolute spirit), Nietzsche (e.g., "death of God", ecstatic innocence of becoming, Übermensch, amor fati), Heidegger (e.g., transcendence of Dasein towards death, language as a house of being), Bataille (e.g., transgression in experiences at the limit of death, through horror, violence, sacrifice), Deleuze (e.g., self-differing of absolutely immanent life), Derrida (e.g., passion for the impossible to come, every other as totally other), Nancy (e.g., transimmanence, outside unfolding from within).

Some people become weary of the prevalence of T2. In the 20th century and contemporary philosophy of religion there have been notable undertakings, e.g., by Levinas, and Marion, and others, to recuperate T3, as "hypertranscendence", from being contaminated or outstripped by T2. However, those who feel uneasy about T3 but still seek something "beyond" the finite human self-surpassing in T2, can also take a step in the opposite direction – towards T1, a somewhat neglected but available option, in the recent decades taken by proponents of "religious naturalism" such as Gordon Kaufman, Donald Crosby and others. Notably, T1 can be bolstered by ever more amazing scientific discoveries of how the universe, the world and forms of life within it works. In the words of Crosby: "Nature is every bit as mysterious and wonderful as traditional conceptions of God, and perhaps far more so in that it is not the outcome of deliberate purpose or design but of self-contained, incredibly self-transcending creative processes." Yet, are such ventures in T1 so far a cry from T3?