

'Talking about God in Contemporary Culture'

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Abstracts

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Theology as Dialectics and the Limits of Patristic Thought in Modern Society: A Reading into St John of Damascus

At first, my paper will present the work of St John of Damascus as an adequate basis for understanding theology as a phenomenon of profound dialectical character. More specifically, it will focus on the very nature of Divine Revelation, the relation of theology to Revelation, the construction of theological notions, the production of theology over against its contemporary milieu, the continuity and interpretation of tradition, and the way theology operates in history. All the above-mentioned levels will be treated as aspects of the dialectical realization of Christianity.

Secondly, my paper will assess and evaluate the philosophical contribution of St John's dialectical understanding of theology. In this respect, special references will be made to the Ancient Greek / Hellenistic theoretical background, the relevant work undertaken by the Church Fathers, and the subsequent developments in Western dialectical thought. Thus St John's perspective will be proved to be a continuation, an innovation, an anticipation, and finally a shortcoming in relation to the dialectical self-consciousness of the European worldview.

Finally, my paper will demonstrate the significance that St John's dialectics seem to have for the dynamic self-consciousness of modern society and culture, and at the same time it will point out the limits that this profoundly Christian historical realization has in relation to a post-Christian social context. However, these limits will be treated mostly as a positive way of challenging Christian theological tradition so that it can transcend itself in an authentic and creative way – a way that establishes both its irreducible distinctiveness and its dialogical relation to the world.

Angert-Quilter, Theresa, and John Quilter

New Testament Exegesis, Theology Department, Charles Sturt University and School of Philosophy, Australian Catholic University"

Philosophy and Exegesis: Why they should talk to each other?

Quine is famous for his quip: "There are two kinds of person interested in Philosophy: those interested in Philosophy and those interested in the history of Philosophy". In an important paper of 1984, Alasdair MacIntyre argued that this typical attitude towards the history of Philosophy dooms its proponents to being of interest only to future occupants of the role the quip disparages. MacIntyre argues that its past plays a "constitutive role" in the contemporary doing of anything worth calling Philosophy. Similarly, Ulrich Luz has helpfully presented an exegetical method (*wirkungsgeschichte*) which takes account of MacIntyrean concerns. In this spirit, we argue that both Philosophy and Theology, taken as substantive disciplines, ought to have a "relationship of continuity" with their past. This requires that Scholarship concerning the past have a certain pride of place in both Philosophy and Theology. This is more familiar in Theology but also important for good Philosophy- in particular, Philosophy of Religion in a Christian context.

However, the precise topography of the continuity of Philosophy and Theology with their pasts requires careful nuance. In particular, continuity is not to be understood to require that any particular issue or text from the past, including the Biblical texts, must be determinative of contemporary Philosophy of Religion or Theology. We will develop this argument with illustrations from both ancient philosophical and biblical texts. We will seek to develop this argument in terms of the nature of faith without Fundamentalisms or Foundationalism. We will argue for a conception of faith as a virtue and a relationship, and hence we will consider directions for Theology and Philosophy of Religion in a Religious Pluralist context.

Bilimoria, Purushottama

Sophia, Deakin and Melbourne Universities

The career of exegesis and scholasticism in Indian Philosophy: friend and folly

The paper will illustrate the positive and negative aspects of exegesis in Indian (Hindu and Buddhist) philosophy, through three parts, each treating of the following:

1. An outline of traditional exegesis and scholasticism that is a central part of the Indian philosophical enterprise, with its nine characteristics: (i) *tradition* (ii) *language-depth* (iii) *proliferative inquiry* (iv) *adversariality* (v) *completeness* (vi) *accessibility* (vii) *systematicity*, (viii) *rationalism*, (ix) *self-reflexivity*; (from Mimamsa and Buddhist hermeneutics).
2. A short commentary on European philological discovery and exegetical excavation of Indian philosophical tracts; and the consequent transformations of the 'native' thinking in their hands. (Herder, Bopp, Schlegel and Grimm brothers, Mueller, Colebrook, William Jones, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Deussen, Nietzsche, Hegel, Schopenhauer - and Jesuits, like, de Nobili tackling the

Upanishads with Trinitarian assumptions; Ippolito Desideri fashioning a Tibetan Buddhist Testament on Catholic natural theology style, presuming that the question of existence depends upon God, not on Emptiness).

3. The prejudices of *isogesis*: reading current paradigms (Western analytical and Continental) *into* the texts (or *through*): neo-Vedanta (via Deussen by Vivekananda), Advaita Vedanta (via neo-Hegelian Bradley by Radhakrishnan), Madhayamika Buddhism (via Kant by Murthy), Nagarjuna (via positivist empiricism by Kalupahana; via Wittgenstein by Thurman), Nyaya (via Quine-Davidson realism by Matilal), Indian theory of consciousness (via phenomenology by Bhattacharyya; via Husserl by Mohanty), Mimamsa (via Gadamer/deconstruction by Bilimoria), Bharthari (via Derrida by Coward). Although, admittedly, some exemplify guarded engagement and critical dialectic or conversation rather than orientalist submission.

I do however, in my conclusion, want to suggest a new kind of 'ideal-typically' exegesis and scholarship that combines the best of 1, after considering the caveats learned from 2 and some redeeming features of 3, in the interest of cross-cultural philosophy (... of religion & metaphysics).

Colledge, Richard

St Paul's Theological College, Brisbane.

Can there be a 'Beyond' the Metaphysical Circle? Heidegger, Desmond and the Idea of Transcendent Origins in Contemporary Thought

There is a clear trajectory within modern and contemporary ontology in which the notion of (an) originating transcendence, having first been placed in strict epoché (eg, Kant and Husserl), has come to be widely rejected altogether (eg, Nietzsche, Foucault and Derrida). This paper investigates the virtual disappearance of the metaphysics of transcendence from the contemporary philosophical mainstream, a development that has had significant repercussions also within theology and popular culture generally. It examines something of the immanent consensus that has emerged: of the universe as a (mysteriously) self-perpetuating whole, about which no notion of a radical possibilizing source more origin-al than itself is required or justified; that considers all such "platonisms" to have been thoroughly discredited; a consensus that has also taken heart from recent arguments in quantum physics. At this point, the question is briefly posed as to the relationship between this philosophical consensus and the contemporary trends in popular culture toward *both* an ambivalence about transcendence (traditionally understood) and an enthusiasm for its more 'exotic' expressions.

Among the many eloquent representatives of this trajectory within western philosophy, Heidegger is perhaps the most interesting, specifically for the way in which – despite his position on this matter – he is nonetheless *centrally* interested in the problem of the primordial (*ursprünglich*) origins of being. Something of the Heideggerian position is therefore investigated in the paper, particularly through a cursory consideration of the phenomenological methodology of *Being and Time* and the motif of the 'polemos' of world and earth in *The Origin of the Work of Art*.

There have nonetheless been those since Kant who have vigorously defended the notion of transcendence as they have variously conceived of it (perhaps most famously, Kierkegaard and Levinas). But among the most interesting recent and on-going work to directly challenge the hegemonic foreclosure on metaphysical transcendence comes from William Desmond. In tracing something of Desmond's challenge to this new orthodoxy, as well as something of his constructive alternative vision, the paper considers his various discussions (mainly in *Being and the Between* and several published and unpublished papers) of becoming vs coming-to-be (and hence, of demiurgic making vs creatio ex nihilo); of erotic polemos vs agapeic origination; and of the hyper-determinate ground of the coming-to-be of things that transcends a mere self-mediation within the 'circular' economy of the whole.

After some thoughts on the relationship between the idea of metaphysical transcendence and the thinking of God, the paper concludes with some meta-philosophical reflections on what I call "philosophical affectivity": in this case, the pre- (or non-) rational basis through which philosophers either *feel* the force of the "that there is something rather than nothing" question, or do not, according to what they *feel* to be a satisfying starting point for philosophical reflection.

Curkpatrick, Stephen

Melbourne College of Divinity and Monash University

Infinity, Insomnia, and a certain kind of theology

Theology is an ineluctable hermeneutical challenge with its compelling yet impossible testimony to *Infinity* in thought and language. Lévinas's metaphor, *insomnia*, in its 'vigilance without intentionality' in which the subject is hostage to thinking Infinity without circumscribing this thought, is useful for interpreting this theological challenge. The image of insomnia suggests the *other's* (transcendent) claim upon us. If we are wakened and vigilant without being the source of this wakefulness, it is the other who generates this vigilance in the self-same, yet we can never be certain who this *other* is—"God" or *otherwise*. In this *insomnia*, the subject is hostage to a vigilance of risk—questioning and uncertain as to the source of the

other's alterity or transcendence. This is the challenge of faith and ethical responsibility to an other as a visage of this assignation to infinity.

Del Nevo, Matthew

Centre for Christian Spirituality, Randwick

Talking About God in Contemporary Australia

This paper starts from the Halifax Portal lectures for 2002 in which Archbishop Jensen and Archbishop Pell addressed the subject of talking about God in Australia today and found themselves in much agreement.

How simple is the thesis that the role of the churches today is to speak the truth in love? How domesticated are our churches and what does it signify? How do we make the Gospel plausible in a comfortable plural society like our own with its sceptical and scientific cultural heritage? The paper will put these questions into a philosophical context.

Dockrill, David

University of Newcastle

How to talk about God in the university: Sydney voices from mid-century

In 1961 the Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, Dr Hugh Gough, stirred up a large newspaper and academic controversy by attacking the philosophers at the University of Sydney as godless and amoral. As the newspaper controversy progressed, Ted Wheelwright, editor of "Vestes", the journal of the university staff associations, decided that the academic issues involved in the controversy should be properly cavassed. Four papers were printed, three in "Vestes" and one elsewhere. In "Vestes" 4, 1961, J.L.Mackie wrote on philosophy and the university and both he and Felix Arnott on the university and religion in "Vestes" 5, 1962. The papers on religion and the university are amongst the earliest in that decade which dealt with the way religion should be studied. They are little known though there is good reason to think that they exercised some influence on the Martin Report, "Tertiary Education in Australia" (1964). The two Vestes articles together with P.H.Partridge's earlier paper 'Politics as a University Subject', "The Australian Journal of Politics and History," 4, 1958 will be briefly considered in relation to the question, what is the role of philosophy in religious studies.

Forrest, Peter

University of New England

The Metaphysical Prolegomena to Exegesis.

This paper is the result of my re-reading *Hermes and Athena*, a volume of essays arising out of a somewhat heated workshop which brought together philosophers and exegetes. I raise and attempt to answer the following questions:

Why are such apparently secondary topics as the Empty Tomb or the authorship of the epistles attributed to St Paul so hotly contested?

Does adherence to a religious tradition set up an almost indefeasible presumption in favour of the truth of that tradition's scriptures?

What reasons might there be for Methodological Antisupernaturalism when thinking about Scripture?

Does the interpretation of Scripture have specifically metaphysical, as opposed to more general doctrinal, presuppositions?

What is it about the *logic* involved which polarises the debate?

Is there a moderate, compromise position and, if so, are there reasons for accepting it.

Ferguson, Ian D

The Psycho-Spiritual Buffer Zone between God and Man

How accessible is God? A theistic humanism approach to such familiar questions in personal and public life attempts to define the playing field. I speculate that the whole historical struggle to engage with God takes place in what might be called a "buffer-zone" which at one and same time facilitates awareness and prevents intimacy.

An extension of our space-time world, transcendent but not more divine. The whole is the intention of God but there is no intervention. More like a "noosphere" where we sort our beliefs, separating primal anthropocentrism, "chosenism" and favouritism from the holistic visions of the prophets.

Science and religion are part of the buffer-zone as are evolution and maturation, all preparing the way for talking about God. Innate differences in individual consciousnesses are a huge challenge in communicating. Suggestions are offered.

God is beyond the buffer-zone. Love is more demanding than intimacy. Distance makes the heart grow fonder. We will continue to mature and see beyond the God of the buffer zone. Many have already "killed" him.

A somewhat deistic picture of God, far from condemning us to a post-modern anomie, challenges us to discover the intention of God revealed in the natural world and to shape the buffer-zone accordingly. Consciousness precedes and frees love. Prejudice is the defence of a closed system.

God's complete system is neither closed nor determined but intended. As we discover the rules of aesthetics, the over-arching principle of creation, we are enabled to take full responsibility for the world. We engage with the sublime and terrifying Intentionality that flows from the external throne of the Wholly Other.

Gleeson, Gerald

Catholic Institute of Sydney

Speaking of persons, human and divine

This paper will examine the use of the term "person" in relation to human being and to God. It will criticise the widespread assumption that "person" names a particular kind of entity, and will note some contemporary debates about what it is to be a human person. The paper will conclude with a proposal about the analogous use of the term "person" with respect to the kind or manner of an entity's existence.

Harnett, Mary.

What is God Like? The Analogy of Mind.

This paper attempts to account for how we can come to know such attributes of God as being a personal and loving being, capable of loving us. A possibly fruitful way of approach to this question is by way of the analogy of the human and divine minds. The difficulties of this approach are explored. Apart from the nature of analogy, the problems start with the difficulty of knowing our own minds. Clearly the divine mind would have to be very different.

The difficulties of pursuing such an analogy would have been even greater after Descartes. The investigations of Husserl however provide us with an account of the human mind with is more likely to provide us with a useful basis for analogy. But even if this leads to enlightening insights and perhaps even solutions to long-standing problems in theology, analogy cannot be proof. Proof requires evidence. The only possible evidence must be from experience. Is such experience possible?

Harvie, Mary

University of Western Sydney

Anarchy of the Vulgar

This paper situates its argument within scholarship on religious, literary and philosophical texts that has traced the merging of discourses on regulating the body, disciplining the soul and governing society. The paper argues that anarchy, is not something that existed before the rise of the state, nor is it a system for Bedouin people living at the margins of capitalism, but is resistance to government that has always been with us sited in the body, marked with a variety of biological and culturally coded differences as mortal, corporeal, sacred and secular.

Norbert Elias (1994), Turner (1984), Bynum (1997) and Schiebinger (2001) have enlarged our understanding of ways in which societies and subjectivities are shaped by experience of the body defined as ethical, cultural, secular, sacred, political as well as biological. Tim Ingold (1999) argues that the human body itself is marked as different from animal bodies only by a variety of biological, religious, legal, culturally coded differences.

St Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologiae*) argues that abstract concepts like "good" and "sacred" are applied primarily to God rather than to creatures, because these perfections flow from God to creatures; but as regards the imposition of attributes of the flesh, they are primarily applied by us to embodied creatures which we know first. Vico pointed to the 'scholastic conceit' that philosophical reasoning and conceptual abstraction is isomorphic to truth and he points to role that language, conditioned by experiences of the body, plays in the construction of metaphors which communicate across gaps in the lexicon. Leezenberg (2001) points to the scholastic conceit in *Philosophy of the Flesh* by Lakoff and Johnston (having mental images/concepts of the body is isomorphic with language uses). Groz (19847) and Lloyd (1984) in opposition to Habermas, argue that the formation of abstract philosophical and scientific concepts are the result of the social, cultural conditioning of the body and not the rational overcoming of the primitive and the vulgar.

The paper concludes that it cannot be assumed, following Habermas, that there will be a moment of enlightenment an epiphany, an ideal speech situation, when each individual subject can rise above embodiment and her determination by gender, class and ethnicity and be able to rupture the circle of governmental violence by a discourse ethics based on reason. Individual subjects' bodies and the body politic are both always, as Foucault says, inscribed within the conflicts of powerful institutional discourses. Challenges to institutionalized violence are possible, not because of discourse ethics but because the body as a site of social inscription is essential for order and essential as a site of anarchy or resistance to order. The impossibility of the discursive immanence of order and reason is ignored by Habermas because he proposes this moment of epiphany when the body and the vulgar can yet again be abstracted from the institutional and the political.

Horner, Robyn

St. Patrick Campus, Australian Catholic University

Aporia or Excess? Two Strategies for Thinking r/Revelation

Jacques Derrida's problematic of the gift is well known: a gift is only a gift where it is free and it is present, yet as soon as it is present, it is no longer free. The gift structurally exemplifies what Derrida calls "the impossible," where conditions of possibility meet with conditions of impossibility in an aporia, and it points in a particular way to the limits of phenomenology. The phenomenological reduction not only fails, but must fail, and knowledge of the gift gives way to desire and decision.

It is my argument that this thought of the gift in its possibility and impossibility mirrors a thought of God, or of grace, although it is a thought that does not give much comfort, at least in the traditional sense. According to this approach, an "experience" of God would never lose the hallmarks of its aporetic structure; transgressive, it would resist the positive content that an understanding of r/Revelation (the possibility of revelation—revelability—or its expression in a particular Revelation) demands.

While there are many responses to Derrida's work on the gift, including ones that bypass the impossible by way of a re-affirmation of the metaphysics of gift-exchange, the ongoing response of Jean-Luc Marion is of particular importance for its rehabilitation of phenomenology as well as for its theological implications. Marion argues for a phenomenology of the unapparent, which reaches its superlative self-givenness in the excess of the saturated phenomenon of Revelation.

In this paper I propose to examine these two strategies, taking into account the newest work of Marion in *De surcroît*. I will argue that while much of Marion's earlier work depends on a positive, though anamorphic account of r/Revelation, his later thinking of r/Revelation as excessive event in fact comes very close to Derrida's aporia of the impossible. The singularity of Revelation can only be thought by way of the trace, and then only on the basis of hermeneutical risk.

Johnson, Marguerite

University of Newcastle, Central Coast Campus

Pan or the Devil? The Polytheistic Beliefs of Rosaleen Norton

Rosaleen Norton, dubbed 'The Witch of Kings Cross' was an artist, writer, philosopher and practitioner of esoteric arts from the 1930s until her death in 1979. Possessed of an acute intellect, Rosaleen studied and effected a personal and complex system of polytheism, which was characterised and caricatured as 'witchcraft' by the Australian popular press.

This paper aims to explicate the 'pagan' beliefs of Rosaleen, particularly her worship of Pan, in order to shed some light on the sensationalism surrounding her concepts of 'divinity' in 20th Century Australia.

Karalis, Vrasidas

Dept of Modern Greek, University of Sydney

Hans Kung: theological engagement with modernity and its philosophies

In this paper we examine Kung's encounter as a Roman-Catholic theological with major philosophical movements that emerged after modernity became the mind-set of post-Enlightenment Europe. Furthermore, we discuss some of his critical points addressed by Kung against the dominant Christian paradigm and briefly analyse his personal reinterpretation of Eastern religions.

Kearney, Matthew

Using the Music of U2 to inform our Method of Talking about God in Contemporary Culture

A critical issue for our talking about God in contemporary culture is the method we adopt. Contemporary theology has many rich fruits to harvest. However, the church has problems communicating that theology.

At the moment Matthew is writing a minor thesis which looks at the theology of the Irish Rock group U2. U2 have often been called 'The Biggest Band in the World.'

It is important that academic theology recognises that theologies are being explored in contemporary popular culture. These theologies are in films, on television and in music. If academic theology is to engage with contemporary culture it must study the theologies of popular culture and analyse their methods.

In terms of substance, the theology of U2 is not vastly separated from theology of academia. What is different is the way in which it is developed and presented. U2 uses what is a substantially oral method to develop its theology, while academic theology normally uses a literate method. The oral method and musical presentation allows U2 to explore theology in a way which academic theology often does not.

The music of U2 explores a personal spiritual journey. The articulation of this journey and its meaning is open ended so that listeners have the possibility of relating it to their own experiences.

Kelly, Gerard

Catholic Institute of Sydney

Lutheran–Roman Catholic Agreement on Justification – Suggestions for Talking about God Today

In 1999 the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church signed the Joint Declaration on Justification. While it did not signal the end of the division of the Reformation, it did mark a significant agreement on a major question that divided both churches. A close reading of the document will indicate that with a question like justification we are concerned about the image of God, the understanding of revelation, and Christian anthropology. Indeed, it is hard to separate our language about God and our

images of God from our understanding of humankind. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that some in both churches have found the Joint Declaration to be inadequate. This raises the question as to whether the Christian churches are able to speak coherently about God today. Even if we look positively at the Joint Declaration a further question can be asked: Will the resolution of a 16th century problem at the end of the 20th century help us to speak more coherently about God at the beginning of the 21st century? These questions will be the concern of this paper.

Murray, Andrew

Catholic Institute of Sydney

Menus and Mice: Analogy Revisited

Thomas Aquinas developed a theory of analogy or 'pros hen equivocation' from Aristotle in a way that enabled him to claim that human language could be used of God in stronger than a metaphorical sense. This paper will restate Thomas's theory in the light of more recent research. It will attempt to use examples from contemporary language developed for computers in an attempt both to illustrate his theory and to keep it alive.

Nijjem, John

University of Sydney

Self, Soteriology and the Gift of Memory

Memory is, of course, an essential part of the self-experience of the self and, as I will argue, to think the self appropriately is to think it temporally. But how is the 'salvation' of the self fundamentally grounded in the temporality of the self? What does it mean to be saveable? And how is it that the gifts of selfhood and memory are the most taken-for-granted; why are these the most 'given' of gifts? Indeed, that there is memory at all is something that we fail to be astonished by...

In relation to the self there are many senses of, what I will call, the 'soteric' and 'sotericity.' Some of these are the temporal-personal, the political-historical and the eschatological-mystical. What, however, discloses the self in its radical contingency, its gratuitousness and its saveability? What constitutes the sotericity of memory and time? And, finally, in what modes and according to what conditions does the Divine effect sotericity?

Owens, John F

Good Shepherd College, Auckland, NZ

The God Whereof We Speak: D Z Phillips and Philosophy of Religion

D Z Phillips' ability to throw new light on religious phenomena, while resolutely denying them any metaphysical basis, has fascinated and frustrated philosophical commentators for over three-and-a-half decades. Phillips frequently jolts his readers into a new awareness of religious things, managing to evoke a sense of the holy to a degree rare among philosophers of religion. For all that, his programme often leaves critics nonplussed, wondering just what he thinks of religion or God, in the end. Some insist he alters Christian belief beyond recognition, and finishes with a version of Christianity which is foreign to most Christians. Phillips has responded spiritedly to such criticisms, but generally left his critics unsatisfied. This paper will examine Phillips' work as an example of a typically twentieth-century philosophical approach to the question of God, and try to discover why his position seems ultimately unsatisfactory. It will suggest that in spite of his attempts to avoid metaphysics altogether, the position reflects a particular, overly narrow view of reality and existence, limiting the ways in which they can be questioned.

Patterson, Fiona J

Latrobe University

Saying and Thinking the Divine: Heidegger, 'Pneuma,' and 'Mana'

To speak about God *entails no small risk*. It is indeed dangerous, for speaking about *that* which transcends all that can be stated, reveals the battlefield between language, thought and Being. In this paper I consider the theological problem of the ineffability and possible unintelligibility of God. My discussion centres upon the thinking of the German, twentieth century philosopher Martin Heidegger, who considers the theological task as one which must raise the issue of the meaning of objectifying, thinking and speaking and determine whether a non-objectifying thinking and speaking is a genuine problem for theological discourse. It is a task which must understand the metaphysical landscape in which thinking dwells and determine whether speaking can be subjugated to a logically and technically constructed sign system or whether it has the character of a speculative, hermeneutic experience.

My contention is that thinking and speaking are implicitly objectifying within a metaphysical, which is to say western, philosophical tradition. The consequence is that the Christian faith, in its attempt to think and speak about God remains embedded in a metaphysical *misrepresentation*. A hermeneutic phenomenological approach on the other hand, could provide an insight into the nature of thinking and speaking as non-objectifying. The discussion thereby transposes the problem of thinking and speaking about an implicitly metaphysical idea of God to a question of "meditatively" saying, thinking and perceiving the Divine. I suggest

that the “spiritual force” of the Greek *pneuma* and the mythic idea of *mana* provide a basis for insight into the nature of the Divine. While thought and language risk the perils of misrepresenting what cannot be represented and objectified, we nonetheless locate an essential problematic, one that confirms the human being’s tenuous relationship to what is *above* and *beyond* and yet most *present* in the world.

Penwill, John

Department of Arts, La Trobe University, Bendigo

Epicurus and Lactantius’ De Ira Dei

The position of Lactantius on divine anger is diametrically opposed to that of the Epicureans. Epicurus argued that to be provoked into feeling either hostility or kindness towards human beings would be inconsistent with the blessedness and indestructibility that are the necessary attributes of the divine. As a Christian, Lactantius cannot accept this notion. It is inconsistent with the concept of divine providence, the idea that God both created and cares about the world. Lactantius employs a good deal of rhetoric in his attack on Epicurus; this paper examines whether he in fact has any real argument to put forward and if so whether the argument is strong enough of itself to refute the Epicurean position. It also examines whether there is any common ground between Christianity and Epicureanism, which would enable their differences to be resolved.

Saunders, Nicole

Monash University

Is John Hick’s pluralism a satisfactory realist response to the fact of religious diversity?

John Hick has put forward the thesis that the different religions are variant human systems describing the same reality. Each religion is unique, and must be respected as the authentic way that truth is revealed to a particular culture at a particular time. The various religions are complete in themselves and offer different paths to the same salvation. This stance, whilst attractive for a number of reasons, is vulnerable to criticism from a number of directions: it has been called revisionist, reductivist and ideologically or methodologically suspect. The most telling kind of objection, however, is that pluralism is unsustainable, even when one grants most of its starting assumptions. I will explore three aspects of this latter kind of problem: (1) that the two main arguments that pluralists use to undermine the epistemic and moral credentials of other forms of religious realism do not, in fact, succeed; (2) that two main drives of the pluralist view are at odds; and (3) that the combination of metaphysical realism and relativist perspectivism is ultimately untenable. These issues of internal consistency force the conclusion that pluralism is not a satisfactory realist response to the fact of religious diversity.

Scarlett, Brian

Department of Philosophy, University of Melbourne

On the Logic of Theocracy

In considering the relation between religious faith and the world, one of the options in play is theocracy. One way to argue for theocracy would essentially involve the premise that moral values are nothing but the arbitrary choices of God. This premise has had a curious history and influence:

- It is inconsistent with one of the major traditions of moral thought in Christianity, namely the Natural Law tradition. But even within that tradition the temptation to theocratic rule has sometimes broken out, for example with the declaration that some action or other is *malum quia prohibitum*.
- Similarly, some people (Nietzsche, Sartre, e.g.) who discern little or no place for a valuable religious contribution to the world, have given that theocratic premise some sort of credibility by assuming that it identifies the only way in which there could be a divine input into moral value.
- This is despite the very general agreement that an argument in Plato’s *Euthyphro* refuted the divine command theory thousands of years ago.
- Finally, those who do accept the *Euthyphro* argument, or usually some simplification of it, often take it to show that God could not possibly have any relevance to morality.

My project is to attempt to clear up this mess.

Seton, Mark Cariston

University of Sydney

Resisting Bodies; Mutating Spirit – Invocations of spirit through actor training in Australia.

Resistance is both an experience and a practice. Wittgenstein saw value in the resistance of blades on ice that enabled one to traverse across a slippery surface. Yet the life of organisms is put at risk by their resistance to necessary change and adaptation. Many social ‘bodies’ or ‘communities of practice’ in performance have demonstrated resistance to negotiating divergent encounters with an experiential phenomenon sometimes identified as *spirit*. In much contemporary academic and vocational performance training, *spirit*, integral in the writings of theatre practitioners such as Stanislavski, Artaud and Grotowski has come to be regarded as archaic and meaningless.

My analysis of various communities of performance training examines how teachers and their students, through language, knowledge and power, negotiate their experiences of ‘connection’, ‘energy’ and ‘flow in

the moment' – the experiences when the performer or spectator recognises that they have 'it'. Institutions have included the Ensemble Acting Studios, Victorian College of the Arts Drama School, Re:Actor Monologue Audition course and the Moore Theological College orientation programme. The categorising and framing of *spirit* is undergoing mutation as communities of practice in business, sports, martial arts, social work and psychotherapy open up dialogue about the embodiedness of spiritual phenomena. I will illustrate how such mutation of the categorisation of *spirit* encounters and engages with resistance in various actor and performance training institutions in contemporary Australia.

Sidhu, Sarjit Alexander

University of Melbourne

The Challenge of David Schindler's "Communio Ecclesiology"

In this paper I focus on the challenge to contemporary thinking on the Christian's – and Church's – role in the world role, posed by David Schindler's "communio ecclesiology." Finding the existing post-conciliar models of Church/world unacceptable (those of "liberation theology" and "neoconservative" Catholic theology), Schindler proposes "communio ecclesiology". Essentially this model involves understanding the Christian's – and Church's – relation with the world first through Trinitarian Christology. Schindler intellectual project involves two major core elements, the positive development of his "communio ecclesiology" vision and its implication for the Church and Christians. He advances this vision through the second element which is (the negative) critique of the other post-conciliar models, in particular the "neoconservative" approach and a critique of contemporary culture. In this paper I present an outline of the Schindler project of "communio ecclesiology", focusing in particular on his proposals for the how the Church and Christian should operate in the realms of politics and economics.

Sinn, Steven

There's no judgments, no questions

This title is taken from the end of a tape that I will play. On this tape Jai speaks about her experience of God and how it has changed. Jae was sexually abused as a child; she has been a psychiatric nurse for over 20 years and has lived on the streets as a prostitute and dealer before living at Blaiket, a parish house in Kings Cross. On the tape Jai shares her life with a group of Year 12 students. In my presentation and in the discussion I want to reflect on the conditions that are present that allow Jai to speak about God in a language that is different from how she used to speak about God. I also want to reflect on and discuss the depth of and unique vulnerability that 'carries' language about God. My presentation will include the use of photographs.

Sloane, Andrew

Morling College

Towards a biblical-theological framework for Christian epistemology

In this paper I will seek to bring together Christian epistemology and biblical theology so as to foster a conversation between the two disciplines. In particular, I will attempt to *articulate* Christian biblical theology in relation to recent epistemology. And by articulate I have two things in mind: first, draw connections between the two disciplines; second, speak clearly and reasonably comprehensively about them. I will outline and briefly defend a particular narrative account of Christian biblical theology which draws upon neo-Calvinist articulations of the biblical story in terms of creation, fall, redemption, incarnation and the eschatological transformation of all things. In so doing, I will identify themes in the Christian story that seem relevant to contemporary epistemology, relate these themes to relevant perspectives in contemporary epistemology, critically interact with these perspectives, and suggest how they can be creatively synthesised in a coherent Christian epistemology. I will pay particular attention to what I see as a neglected theme in Christian epistemology, namely, the noetic effects of redemption. I will discuss this in relation to William Wainwright's notion of *passional reasoning*, noting the value and limitations of his work. I will then outline what I believe is a more adequate account of the noetic effects of redemption in terms of the systemic transformation of our distorted noetic dispositions. While this paper will simply begin the process of articulating biblical theology and Christian epistemology, I hope it will encourage conversation between philosophers and biblical scholars, and show the value of biblical studies, and a narrative biblical-theological framework in particular, for Christian epistemology.

Thomas, Bob

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Divine Disorder: A Foundation for a Neo-Natural Theology

Images of God are required that have some connection with our existing traditions, but which maintain continuity with the experience of people today, particularly the experiences gained from a scientific examination of the reality in which we live. My paper will include an examination of the on-going processes of creation from microscopic to macroscopic to cosmic in order to find an image of God that is congruent with

the empirical evidence. The resulting image is of a dynamic that embraces chaos and order in a divine dialectic.

Every act of creation, including the initial act of creation, seems to be first an act of disordering or destabilising the status quo. Order, including the preexistent undifferentiated whole for which the word "chaos" was coined, is repeatedly cast into disorder so that the cosmos may give rise to new forms. The Second Law of Thermodynamics, often referred to as the Law of Entropy, is perhaps the most definitive agent in the creative process, and the one that will determine the ultimate end.

To understand God as the essence of the eternal tension between stability and instability, order and disorder, creation and destruction not only helps us meld spirituality and science, but it also promises to make sense out of difficult questions about the origin of evil, disorder and imperfection, to eliminate the apparent contradiction between the purpose of God and freedom. This image may even enhance the sense of meaning of human life as it casts it in the role of a conspirator in *creatio continua*, which brings consciousness and "top-down" causation to the otherwise random "bottom-up" processes of evolution.

Tulip, Jim

Spirituality in contemporary Australian literature: the divergent approaches of David Malouf and Les Murray

David Malouf and Les Murray are two contemporary Australian writers who have won worldwide acclaim for their work. Their achievements, I believe, lie in a distinctive awareness of spiritual depth in the life they are presenting. Yet while sharing access to a spiritual dimension, they approach it in opposite ways. Malouf speaks as the enlightened modern. Cultured, cosmopolitan and highly educated he raises the liberal mind to a rare level of wisdom and spiritual awareness. Les Murray, on the other hand, locates himself, provocatively at times as in his "Subhuman Redneck Poems", at a distance from city culture and opposed to the ethos and ambience of things modern, or at least modish. Yet Murray in a seemingly arbitrary way leaps across the gap of modern secularism and scepticism to be a firm Christian believer, to the extent of dedicating his books "to the glory of God". It is a valuable experience to appreciate the likenesses and differences of these two minds and imaginations, and how they relate to the Christian faith.

Visser, Tony

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God and cyberspace: Religion in the age of information and communication technology

Cyberspace is the dominant component of our 21st century cultural landscape. Many writers have identified religious dimensions in cyberspace and often use religious language when describing that space. On this subject, this paper offers a literature review and a synthesis of contemporary thought about the interrelationship of religion, cyberspace and language.

It critically examines the human experience of God in the emerging domain of cyberspace and how it is/ is not a context for that experience. It addresses the 'sacramental' dimensions of that space.

It considers the relationship of religion to the age of information and communication technologies and the implications of this for organised religions. It examines the interrelationships of technology and culture: negative and positive, and considers technology trends for the future of religion.

It outlines the challenges the new media present to established churches, and considers the particular challenges for the Catholic Church and its responses to the new media, especially in the light of recent Church documents.

This paper offers insights about how to view technology today. It discusses how we can relate to this emerging reality. In keeping with the conference theme of 'Talking about God in contemporary culture', it initiates a discussion on language; on semiotic engineering; on the creation of metaphors and narratives; and on dialogue. It offers ideas for theology – in the face of the emergent culture.

Vnuk, Joseph

Good Shepherd Seminary, Homebush

Pre-modern and Post-modern: Irenaeus' theology of the Trinity in the light of Luce Irigaray

Many models of the Trinity ultimately subordinate plurality and otherness in God to unity and sameness. Irenaeus affirms an otherness and difference in God that is in many respects similar to Derrida's *différance*. He avoids speculating about generations, and instead uses spatial metaphors and the biblical language of the "hands of God" that can at times seem a little naïve.. Luce Irigaray's writings on non-phallogocentric ways of conceiving space and touching can bring out some interesting possibilities in Irenaeus' thought.