



# AFTER HEIDEGGER AND MARION: THE TASK OF CHRISTIAN METAPHYSICS TODAY

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## *Abstract*

Without denying legitimate criticisms of metaphysics that have been made since the time of the Reformation, the purpose of this essay is to challenge prevailing assumptions in continental philosophy and theology since Heidegger that the age of metaphysics is now over and should be replaced as “first philosophy” either by some version of phenomenology, such as that offered by Jean-Luc Marion, or by a pragmatic linguistic approach in the spirit of Wittgenstein, such as that offered by Kevin Hector. Notwithstanding the genuine merits of their proposals and concerns, it is argued here that metaphysics is not so easily dismissed, and that there is, in fact, a way to do metaphysics otherwise – a way that was taken by Erich Przywara, whose analogical metaphysics is characterized not only by an analogy between God and creation, the *analogia entis*, but also by an analogy between philosophical and theological metaphysics. In this, form, it is argued, not only is metaphysics impervious to the standard criticisms of “onto-theology,” it also turns out to be, at its core, nothing other than a Christological metaphysics.

*We need not fear that the work of metaphysics has to be begun again, but it is equally true that it has to be reviewed and renewed in every age in relation of the difficulties and problems of the age.*

Dennis Hawkins<sup>1</sup>

*This is the ultimate truth: that Christians, as guardians of a metaphysics of the whole person in an age which has forgotten both Being and God, are entrusted with the weighty responsibility of leading this metaphysics of wholeness through that same fire. But metaphysics is not a ware that can be bought and sold ready-made: we must ourselves think...*

Hans Urs von Balthasar<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> D. J. B. Hawkins, *Being and Becoming* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1954), 176.

<sup>2</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. V *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, trans. by Oliver Davies, Andrew Louth, and Brian McNeill, C.R.V., John Saward and Rowan Williams, edited by Brian McNeill, C.R.V and John Riches (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 655.

How goes it with metaphysics? To judge from contemporary analytic philosophy and theology one might think that it has never fared better.<sup>3</sup> To judge from the continental tradition, one might think that it has never fared worse.<sup>4</sup> Nor, for the latter tradition, is this a morally neutral affair. On the contrary, for contemporary thinkers as different as Gianni Vattimo and Jean-Luc Marion the end of metaphysics is a desideratum, a consummation devoutly to be wished, and anyone who would attempt to revive it or resurrect it, as the celebrated German philosopher Peter Wust did a century ago, would have to be considered misguided.<sup>5</sup> What is one to make of this state of affairs, this dialectic for and against metaphysics? And what shall one say about the future of metaphysics – or lack thereof – in Christian theology?

In order to answer these questions, let us first ask a more basic question, namely, *what do we mean by metaphysics?* If it is the science of being qua being (τὸ ὄν ἢ ὄν), is it the same as ontology? If it is also the science of first principles (ἀρχαί) and the ultimate reasons, grounds, causes, or explanations of things (αἰτίαι), is it also necessarily a matter of theology? And if it is not just a science of being and its reasons for being, but also a reflective science of science, that is, a science of the nature and grounds of knowledge, does it also comprise epistemology? But if it does, and it is a matter of ontology *and* epistemology, must it not be defined as the science of the relation, even the correlation, between being *and* thought? And even assuming one can agree on a textbook definition of metaphysics, say, as “the philosophical investigation of the nature, constitution, and structure of reality,”<sup>6</sup> does it not come historically in many different shapes and sizes – too many to count? But then *which* metaphysics do we mean? Do we mean classical Greek metaphysics? If we do, then we would need to specify whether we mean Pre-Socratic,

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<sup>3</sup> See, for starters, Peter Simons, “Metaphysics in Analytic Philosophy,” in *Oxford Handbook of the History of Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 709–28, and among other milestones, E. J. Lowe, *The Possibility of Metaphysics: Substance, Identity, and Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); Richard Cross, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Michael Rea’s response to Bas van Fraassen in *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology*, ed. Michael C. Rea and Oliver D. Crisp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 23ff.; William Hasker, *Metaphysics and the Tri-Personal God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, Mark A. Wrathall, ed., *Religion after Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); John Panteleimon Manoussakis, *God after Metaphysics* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007); and Kevin Hector, *Theology Without Metaphysics: God, Language, and the Spirit of Recognition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). As an exception to the rule, see, however, the breezy and refreshing work of Graham Harman, e.g., “The Revival of Metaphysics in Continental Philosophy,” in *Towards Speculative Realism: Essays and Lectures* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2010), 108f. “The radical anti-metaphysical stance of the continentals has become stale and fruitless [...]. I will argue that continental philosophy needs a total overhaul in the name of realism and essentialism.”

<sup>5</sup> Of course, we would need to add the qualification that, for Marion, “phenomenology does not actually overcome metaphysics” – it is in some ways here to stay – “so much as it opens the official possibility of leaving it to itself.” See Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 4. See Peter Wust, *Die Auferstehung der Metaphysik*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1 (Münster: Verlag Regensburg, 1963); idem, “Die katholische Seinsidee und die Umwälzung in der Philosophie der Gegenwart,” *GW VI*, 62. What is unfortunately not seen is that Wust’s appeal to return to metaphysics is precisely an appeal to return to the objectivity of being – one might even say, with Marion, to the givenness of being as it appears to us – and away from Kantian transcendental conditions that would constrain its appearance. As such, the call to return to metaphysics from within Catholic philosophy at this time was very much in the spirit of early phenomenology as it was developed by Husserl’s students in Göttingen, namely, as a call to return to the things themselves.

<sup>6</sup> From the entry on “Metaphysics” by Panayot Butchvarov in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Robert Audi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 563.

Platonic, or Aristotelian metaphysics, or even, notwithstanding its materialism, Stoicism. Do we mean medieval metaphysics? Then, at the very least, we would have to come to terms with the differences among the schools as represented chiefly but not exclusively by Thomas and Scotus. Do we mean modern metaphysics? Then we would have to distinguish, just for starters, among the philosophies of Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz. Or do we perhaps mean German Idealism? Then we would have to consider not only the differences between Schelling and Fichte, but also the differences between Hegel and the *late* Schelling.

Or perhaps we think that all of this is moot, because Kant supposedly did away with metaphysics. In that case one would have to point out that even Kant has a kind of metaphysics, albeit of a practical kind, as is obvious from his *Prolegomena*. Indeed, it is obvious even from his three *Critiques*, inasmuch as they concern the classical transcendentals, respectively, of the true, the good, and the beautiful, and therewith, as E. J. Lowe rightly observes, the “fundamental structure of rational *thought* about reality.”<sup>7</sup> In which case metaphysics has not gone away, but has simply been shifted from an ontic into a noetic register, into a form of what Erich Przywara called “metaphysical *transcendentalism*.”<sup>8</sup> Or perhaps we think that Nietzsche did away with metaphysics when, affirming this world, he rejected every other. In this case we would have to consider Heidegger’s famous asseveration that Nietzsche was the “last metaphysician” – not because Nietzsche brought metaphysics to an end, but because his *metaphysicum* of the will to power left him stuck within the very metaphysics (of subjectivity) he wanted to overcome. And lest we think that Heidegger succeeded in becoming the first post-metaphysical philosopher, we would have to recognize that even his philosophy is a kind of metaphysics – whether it be the anxious metaphysics of his early period, during which he freely employs the term and nothing looms as ultimate, or the apocalyptic metaphysics of the history of Being of his ostensibly “post”-metaphysical period, which seeks to understand human being in light of what is *ultimate*, whether this be Being as *Geschichte* or the *Differenz* between Being and beings or the *Ereignis* of Being in beings. And, finally, lest we think that Derrida succeeded where Heidegger failed, one would have to point out that, insofar as *différance* is itself a fundamental structure (*archi-écriture*), even Derrida is a kind of metaphysician *malgré lui*.

My point, in any event, is that the question of metaphysics is far more complicated than its critics typically make it out to be, and that it comes with the territory of serious thinking. Indeed, it is evident even and precisely in the first principles of those philosophers declared to be against it – and no philosophy that is not purely descriptive, impressionistic, or naïve, not even phenomenology, which prides itself on the purity of its ascetical abstention, operates without some kind of at least tacitly held principles.

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<sup>7</sup> As Ian Ramsey points out, even Kant’s three famous questions “are easily seen as particular expressions of man’s metaphysical desire to plot his cosmic position.” See “On the Possibility and Purpose of a Metaphysical Theology,” in *Prospects for Metaphysics: Essays of Metaphysical Exploration*, ed. Ian Ramsey (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1961), 153; E. J. Lowe, *A Survey of Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 7. See also Christopher Insole, “A Metaphysical Kant: A Theological Lingua Franca?,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 25 (2012): 206–14.

<sup>8</sup> See Erich Przywara, *Analogia Entis – Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm*, trans. John R. Betz and David B. Hart (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), §2, 127–31.

So let us hold fast to the principle, which should by now be obvious, that metaphysics is not a univocal, one-size-fits-all term that is convenient for facile denunciations, but admits of a wide range of possibilities. By the same token, let us ask the critics of metaphysics not only *what* they mean by the term, but also and more concretely *whose* metaphysics they mean by it. For it might very well turn out that many of the charges brought against it are trumped-up and applicable only to very specific (possibly imaginary) forms of metaphysics that few today would consider theologically viable in the first place.

Now let us return to our guiding question regarding the role of metaphysics in Christian theology. Simply stated, my contention here is that an intelligible account of the Christian faith cannot do without *some kind* of metaphysics, inasmuch as it cannot fail to address the question and meaning of being. Indeed, without it the *Logos* of the Christian faith threatens to become the *mythos* of the Christian faith; and, as Reinhard Hütter trenchantly observes, theology threatens to become “theofiction.”<sup>9</sup> But, needless to say, Christians do not believe in stories – not even a divinely inspired story – unless they are understood to correspond with the way things *are*, which is to say that they are *true* and make implicit or explicit metaphysical claims. (And so, just as Christian theology cannot do without metaphysics, neither can it do without some kind of correspondence theory of truth, however implicitly held, and however disreputable such theories have become since Heidegger.) In other words, without metaphysics (whether it be affirmed implicitly or explicitly, whether it come into play as a prolegomenon or as a postlegomenon) faith is rendered absurd – a believing in fairytales – and apologetics, by the same token, is rendered otiose.

For these reasons alone, I would argue, metaphysics is a legitimate inheritance of the Church, which it would be inadvisable to disown. But there are others of no less consequence. Not only is metaphysics part of the grammar, so to speak, of the Christian faith; it is also part of its basic vocabulary, as is most obvious from the *Logos* philosophy of John’s gospel. In other words, to put it bluntly, without metaphysics one cannot understand the Bible.<sup>10</sup> Nor, without metaphysics, can we begin to talk about Christology. Who, after all, *is* Christ? This is no idle question, because in order to answer it properly, even before talking about the Trinity, we need to know what the word *Logos* meant in the metaphysical vocabulary of the ancient world. It might even be good to know something about Taoism, in order to remind ourselves of the rich connotations of the Word, and other testimonies to him even before he became uniquely incarnate.<sup>11</sup> But metaphysics is not just (negatively) indispensable to Christian theology, as though this were a concession that had to be made. It is also, I would argue, an inheritance that the Church should positively treasure precisely inasmuch as it values Christian *thought* – from Augustine to Thomas to Cusanus in the West, from Gregory of Nyssa to Maximus

<sup>9</sup> See Reinhard Hütter’s review of Matthew Levering, *Scripture and Metaphysics: Aquinas and the Renewal of Trinitarian Theology*, in *Pro Ecclesia* 14, no. 1 (2005): 108–10, and “The Directedness of Reasoning and the Metaphysics of Creation,” in *Reason and the Reasons of Faith*, ed. Paul J. Griffiths and Reinhard Hütter (New York and London: T&T Clark, 2005), 160–93.

<sup>10</sup> See Matthew Levering, *Scripture and Metaphysics: Aquinas and the Renewal of Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Hieromonk Damascene, *Christ the Eternal Tao* (Platina, CA: Valaam Books, 1999).

in the East, all the way up to such standard-bearers of the modern German tradition as Erich Przywara and Edith Stein, all of whom were profoundly metaphysical thinkers.<sup>12</sup>

But if one is to follow Peter Wust's call for a renewal of metaphysics at the beginning of the twenty-first century one cannot ignore the considerable criticisms that have been leveled against it, beginning more or less with the Reformation and reaching a climax in the second half of the twentieth century. Clearly, if there is to be anything like a "return to metaphysics," it cannot be a naïve return. Rather, it must be a return that has been proved – if not ultimately approved – by its critics. For only then, once we know *whether* metaphysics can survive the declared "end of metaphysics", can we pursue the question in a subsequent article of *what* kind of metaphysics might best serve the task of Christian theology in our time – and whether *this* metaphysics might also constitute a "mere metaphysics" common to the Christian East and West, notwithstanding the differences between them. To this end let us first take up the question of the "end of metaphysics."

### 1. The End of Metaphysics?

On the face of it, to judge from the works of many respectable philosophers and theologians writing today, any such return to metaphysics would seem impossible or, at the very least, ill advised. As Kevin Hector puts it, citing Hegel in the opening of *Theology without Metaphysics*, "metaphysics is a word from which more or less everyone runs away, as from someone who has the plague."<sup>13</sup> Although this excerpt does not convey the spirit of Hegel's amusing essay from which it derives (Hegel himself is obviously not averse to metaphysics), it certainly captures the trend of continental philosophy and theology in the twentieth century. Indeed, today the "end of metaphysics" would seem to be a *fait accompli* – after nominalism's critique of universals; after Luther's repudiation of metaphysics as a temptation; after Hume's committing it to the flames; after Kant's doctrine of the *Ding an sich* and denial of any theoretical knowledge of reality; after Nietzsche's repudiation of all "lying" forms of Platonism; after Barth's rejection of

<sup>12</sup> Among other German Catholics one would have to mention Gustav Siewerth and Ferdinand Ulrich; among French Catholics, one would have to mention, among others, Maritain and Gilson. Among Protestants, see the remarkable work of Edith Stein's friend Hedwig Conrad-Martius, and among Anglicans, the work of Austin Farrer, D. J. B. Hawkins, and Eric Mascall. While Lutheran and Reformed theologians have traditionally been suspicious of metaphysics, this has not kept Moltmann, Jüngel, and Robert Jensen, et al., from proposing sometimes daring metaphysical theologies so long as they take their departure from revelation. Indeed, following Jüngel one could say that this is the case with Barth as well. See *Gottes Sein ist im Werden*, fourth edition (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1986). Though refused at the front door, metaphysics thus comes in willy-nilly through the back. Nor is this consequence obviated by an otiose distinction between ontology and metaphysics.

<sup>13</sup> Hector, *Theology Without Metaphysics*, 1. The quote is from Hegel's 1807 essay "Who Thinks Abstractly," which Heidegger once set as the epigraph to his "Nachwort zu 'Was ist Metaphysik.'" See *Wegmarken*, second edition (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1978), 301. For Hegel's essay, see *Werke*, vol. 2 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986), 575–81; Walter Kaufmann, *Hegel: Texts and Commentary* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1966), 113–18. The opening lines of Hegel's essay read: "Think? Abstractly? — *Sauve qui peut!* Let those who can save themselves! Even now I can hear a traitor, bought by the enemy, exclaim these words, denouncing this essay because it will plainly deal with metaphysics. For *metaphysics* is a word, no less than *abstract*, and almost *thinking* as well, from which everybody more or less runs away as from a man who has caught the plague."

the *analogia entis* and every metaphysics of being<sup>14</sup>; after Heidegger's critique of metaphysics as "onto-theology" and the source of the evils of modern technology; after Derrida's deconstruction of metaphysics as "logo-centrism"; after Marion's apophatic critique of metaphysics as conceptual "idolatry"<sup>15</sup>; after the "post-metaphysical" pragmatism of Rorty and Habermas; and, last but not least, after the "therapeutic anti-metaphysics" of Hector, for whom a pragmatic theology inspired by Wittgenstein and Jeffrey Stout can do the work that metaphysics used to do and ground truth and meaning otherwise.<sup>16</sup>

Surely, in view of such unanimous testimony, one would have to conclude that the age of metaphysics is over, and that the Pre-Socratic quest for foundations, for first principles (*archai*), has finally come to an end – even if one grants Heidegger's qualification that its ending may last longer than the history of metaphysics itself.<sup>17</sup> As Marion unambiguously puts it, "The 'end of metaphysics' is in no way an optional opinion. It is a matter of rational fact. Whether we accept it or not, it dominates us absolutely, as an overwhelming event."<sup>18</sup> And should we have any doubts, let us consider the solemn asseveration of Adorno concerning the impossibility of metaphysics after Auschwitz. With regard specifically to Thomistic philosophy, he writes, "That is now finished. Such an interpretation of meaning is no longer possible."<sup>19</sup> How, then, can anyone be sanguine about the possibility of metaphysics – Thomistic or otherwise – today? Surely anyone who would call for its revival would have to be either ignorant of the history of modern theology, insensitive to the slaughter-bench of human history, or hopelessly naïve – or, worse still, one of those "sick, brain-damaged web-spinners" for whom Nietzsche had undisguised loathing, who posit as first what is "last, thinnest, and emptiest."<sup>20</sup> Of course, a Christian might be tempted to respond tongue-in-cheek that if

<sup>14</sup> See, for example Barth, *Church Dogmatics* trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), xiii; II/2, § 36, 530f.

<sup>15</sup> See especially Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, trans. Thomas Carlson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 1-26; cf. Hector, *Theology without Metaphysics*, 13: "[I]f idolatry is 'the subjection of God to human conditions or the experience of the divine' (as Jean-Luc Marion asserts), it would appear that metaphysical theism is unquestionably idolatrous . . ."

<sup>16</sup> See Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), especially 246-69. Notably, however, Hector does not entirely close the door on metaphysics, but only on a particular kind; indeed, he suggests that his work could be described as a kind of "revisionist" metaphysics. See Hector, *Theology without Metaphysics*, 3. If this is so, then there is more room for a theological discussion than would seem to be the case.

<sup>17</sup> Heidegger, "Überwindung der Metaphysik," in *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1954), 67.

<sup>18</sup> See Jean-Luc Marion, "Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Summary for Theologians," in *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 283; cf. idem, "La Fin de la Fin de la Métaphysique," in *Laval théologique et philosophique* 42, no. 1 (1986): 23-33.

<sup>19</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Metaphysics: Concept and Problems*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and trans. Edmund Japhcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 105. Of course, after the absolute metaphysics of Hegel, which Auschwitz makes all the more intolerable, Adorno's anti-metaphysical posture is perfectly understandable: "The whole is what is not true" (as a riposte to Hegel's famous dictum from the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, "The truth is the whole"). See Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life* (London: Verso, 2005), 50. But this was an overreaction. To use a pharmaceutical analogy, it was not a therapeutic dose, but an overdose, in which case the remedy becomes the poison.

<sup>20</sup> See Theodor Adorno, *Götzen-Dämmerung*, in *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 6, ed. G. Coli and M. Montinari (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1988), 76; cf. *The Twilight of the Idols, or How to Philosophize with the Hammer*, trans. Richard Polt (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1997), III, 4.

metaphysics should elicit such contempt from the self-declared Antichrist, then *ex negativo* there must be something good in it. But in view of the horrors of history, and those of the twentieth century in particular, it is hard to deny that Nietzsche's words have a ring of truth: in view of Auschwitz the God of metaphysics would appear thin indeed. So is it not time, finally, to come of age and do theology without it?

As tempting as this may be, I submit that this is impossible – for the same basic reasons I already indicated.<sup>21</sup> To be sure, one can array many authorities against metaphysics, but one can appeal to any number of others, such as Rowan Williams, John Milbank, and David Hart, who would defend it and call for its revival.<sup>22</sup> Nor can it be said that defenders of metaphysics are insensitive to the vexing question of evil and suffering. Take Hans Jonas, for example, certainly one of the great philosophers of the twentieth century, whose mother was a victim of Auschwitz. No one could say that he was a stranger to the question of theodicy. But for Jonas, instead of going away after Auschwitz, metaphysical questions became all the more pressing.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, whatever one makes of his late theological speculations, his probing philosophy remains a profound and enduring testament to the insuppressible *question* of metaphysics.

And then there is the testimony of just about the entire Catholic tradition, which has consistently taught that metaphysics is at some level indispensable to the Christian faith, leaving aside for now the important question of whether it is indispensable more specifically to apologetics or to the *intellectus fidei*. As von Balthasar observes in his *Theo-logic*, “Since the question about being as such is the basic question of metaphysics, the theologian cannot get around it. For him, then, there is only one conclusion: he cannot be a theologian *ex professo* without at the same time being a metaphysician, just as, conversely [...] a metaphysics that refused to be theology would thereby misunderstand and repudiate its own object.”<sup>24</sup> In other words, for Catholic theology, metaphysics and theology go together: as metaphysics is implied in the task of theology (as what theology presupposes), theology is implied in metaphysics (as its *telos* and that whereby metaphysics is wrought into its perfect form). And they go together, more precisely, in terms of analogy, in keeping with the venerable Thomistic principle that “faith (grace) does not destroy, but presupposes and perfects reason (nature),”<sup>25</sup> which we might re-

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<sup>21</sup> See my response to Hector in *Modern Theology* 31, no. 3 (July 2015): 489–500. The question, then, is whether the kind of analogical metaphysics proposed here is sufficiently revisionist to be an olive branch that could help to reconcile the confessions. For background to this conversation, see John R. Betz, “Beyond the Sublime: The Aesthetics of the Analogy of Being,” *Modern Theology* 21, no. 3 (July 2005): 367–411, and *Modern Theology* 22, no. 1 (January 2006): 1–50; and “Metaphysics and Theology,” editor’s introduction to Przywara, *Analogia Entis: Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014).

<sup>22</sup> See, just for starters, Rowan Williams, “Between Politics and Metaphysics: Reflections in the Wake of Gillian Rose” *Modern Theology* 11, no. 1 (January 1995): 3–21; John Milbank’s 2011 Stanton lecture, “The Return of Metaphysics in the 21st Century;” and David Bentley Hart, *The Hidden and the Manifest: Essays in Theology and Metaphysics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017).

<sup>23</sup> See Hans Jonas, “The Concept of God after Auschwitz: A Jewish Voice,” *The Journal of Religion* 67 (1987): 1–13.

<sup>24</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic, vol. 2, The Truth of God*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2004), 173.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 169. For some of the sources of this principle in Thomas, see *De Ver.* q. 14, a. 10, ad 9; *ST I*, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2; q. 2, a. 2, ad 1; *In Boeth. de Trin.* q. 2, a. 3; *ScG*, q. 1; *Prologue on Sent.* q. 1, a. 1 and 3; cf. *ST II-II*, q. 1, a. 5 ad 2 and 3.

formulate in terms of metaphysics and theology as *theologia non destruit sed supponit et perficit metaphysicam*.<sup>26</sup>

All of which is underscored by John Paul II in *Fides et ratio*, in which he not only reaffirms an “intimate relationship between faith and metaphysical reasoning,” which “plays an essential role of mediation in theological research,” but warns that “a philosophy which shuns metaphysics would be *radically unsuited* to the task of mediation in the understanding of Revelation.”<sup>27</sup> Indeed, he says that without metaphysics theology “could not move beyond an analysis of religious experience, nor would it allow the *intellectus fidei* to give a coherent account of the universal and transcendent value of revealed truth.”<sup>28</sup> Nor, he avers, can theology give an adequate account of the moral life without it: “If I insist so strongly on the metaphysical element, it is because I am convinced that it is the path to be taken in order to move beyond the crisis pervading large sectors of philosophy at the moment, and thus to correct certain mistaken modes of behaviour now widespread in our society.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, seeing so much at stake, he called upon fundamental theologians to recover and express “to the full the metaphysical dimension of truth,” and “to vindicate the human being’s capacity to know [the] transcendent and metaphysical dimension in a way that is true and certain, albeit imperfect and *analogical*.”<sup>30</sup> To derogate metaphysics is therefore no small matter. On the contrary, if John Paul II is right, it is detrimental to the Christian faith itself, precisely in the way that fideism undercuts the work of apologetics (cf. 1 Pet. 3:15), depriving faith of the very means of its articulation.

From the standpoint of Catholic theology, then, there is really no question of *whether* metaphysics is important, but only a question of the *aspect* and *extent* of its importance, which is essentially twofold. On the one hand, with respect to its apologetic function, metaphysics can help to *orient* reason to faith without compelling assent to faith. On the other hand, metaphysics can *enrich* the Christian faith as a reasonable gift to faith, namely, as an aid to understanding the truth, goodness, and beauty of what is already believed (the *intellectus fidei*). And for Catholic theology, at least, both uses of metaphysics are legitimate. The rest of this essay, however, will be concerned more with the second. Accordingly, my goal here is not so much to work to the threshold of theology through philosophical metaphysics, thereby showing how faith is a reasonable possibility in keeping with the consistent teaching of the Catholic Church from Vatican I to Vatican II.<sup>31</sup> (This, incidentally, is also one way of reading Przywara’s *Analogia Entis*,

<sup>26</sup> This is so regardless of whether a given metaphysics actually acknowledges its end and attains to its perfection through theology. See Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 170.

<sup>27</sup> §§ 83, 97 (my emphasis).

<sup>28</sup> §83.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Fides et ratio* §83; §105 (my emphasis).

<sup>31</sup> See Vatican I (*Dei Filius*, chapter 2): “*Mater Ecclesia tenet et docet, Deum, rerum omnium principium et finem, naturali humanae rationis lumine e rebus creatis certo cognosci posse; invisibilia enim ipsius, a creatura mundi, per ea quae facta sunt, intellecta, conspiciuntur* (Rom. I).” [“Mother church holds and teaches that God, the principle and end of all things, can be known with certainty [*certo cognosci posse*] by the natural light of human reason from created things.”] *Nota bene*, this was reaffirmed in *Dei Verbum*, §6. It should be observed, however, that everything really comes down to how one reads *certo cognosci posse*. The genius of this formulation is that it includes both the certainty and the implied admission that such certainty is *possible*, i.e., not that, in the actual state of affairs of a fallen world in which reason is darkened by passions, it will necessarily be actual. What the Council minimally affirms is that, under the right conditions, reason *should* be able to reach certainty about God’s existence, not that it inevitably will.

namely, as a thoroughgoing deconstruction from within philosophy of every philosophy that would presume to close itself off from theology.) Rather, beginning with the Christian faith, my aim is more modestly to elaborate the kind of metaphysics I take the Christian faith to imply. Accordingly, it is merely a matter of bringing to light and explicating what is already there.

Finally, since what is proposed here is a *Christian* metaphysics, it should not be confused with other possible contenders, for example, with the metaphysics of Plato and Aristotle, however much the Christian metaphysical tradition may be indebted to them. Nor, given its explicit starting point in faith, should it be confused with what has passed for metaphysics in the modern period, in Leibniz or Wolff, for example, whose philosophies Kant censured as untenable according to the limits of reason. Nor should it be confused with the post-Kantian metaphysics of Hegel, who consciously transgressed Kant's limits and appropriated the idiom of faith, but did so only in order to colonize and incorporate it – its otherness now all consumed – back into the language of reason. For what is sought here is neither a metaphysics based purely on reason, which would serve as a necessary foundation for faith (although, *retrospectively*, it turns out to be apologetically serviceable in this regard), nor a metaphysics whose logic, once grasped, supersedes faith as its supposedly real content. Rather, what is proposed here is a metaphysics that faith itself *calls for*, and whose lineaments faith alone can fill out; a metaphysics that is reasonable on its own terms, based on the correlation and interplay of form and being, essence and existence, but without Christ would be a bare, empty schema lacking the very substance of its inspiration; a metaphysics that is implicit in what Christianity professes, but, like a grammar that gradually develops along with a living language, helps to render intelligible, as a service to the *intellectus et pulchritudo fidei*, the incarnate *Logos* it proclaims. And in this respect, whatever else Barth may have against metaphysics as a *foundational* enterprise, his little book on Anselm could be taken as programmatic.

## 2. Or the Loss of a Metaphysical Imagination?

In addition to the ongoing exigency of the *intellectus fidei*, however, I would suggest that Christian metaphysics is needed today for an even more urgent reason: namely, that faith in the secular West is growing pale and lifeless, indeed, in some places is downright moribund due in part to a *lack of metaphysical imagination* – by which I mean the lack of a more spacious metaphysical vision of the origin and destiny of all creation in Christ. As von Balthasar put it in a letter to Przywara in 1962, lamenting the current state of affairs, “[W]hat do we have today? A complete metaphysical impotence and lack of vision, such a formal functionalism that the original motivation for the *Analogia Entis* is no longer even felt and its necessity is no longer even perceived...”<sup>32</sup> In other words, in Balthasar's view, the problem facing the Church at the dawn of the Second Vatican Council was not that of an absolute metaphysics, which the Church had faced in the previous century in the form of Hegelianism (to which Przywara's *creaturely* metaphysics was in part a response), but more nearly the opposite: an almost complete absence of metaphysical nerve. To be sure, in a postmodern context we are prone to think that

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<sup>32</sup> See his letter to Przywara from November 27, 1962 (from Przywara's *Nachlass* in the Archives of the German Province of the Society of Jesus).

anti-Hegel is better than Hegel, and that a culture without metaphysics is better than one that presumes to have a complete metaphysical picture of reality, but this is not so. For how can one begin to speak of Christ as the *incarnate* Logos to a culture that cannot imagine any Logos, a culture that is so confined to what Charles Taylor calls an “immanent frame” that it has difficulty even imagining a transcendent reality? Under such circumstances, I submit, anti-metaphysics is actually inimical to the gospel, and the same goes for polemics against natural theology and natural law since these too, however hard they may be noetically to perceive and morally to follow, are intimations of the Logos, the Way, the Tao, of all things.

Of course, metaphysics is not everything. In the first chapter of *The Degrees of Knowledge*, “The Majesty and Poverty of Metaphysics,” Maritain observes that though metaphysics is a science of supersensible and even *divine* realities, it is at the end of the day a poor *human* science: “It names God, Yes! But not by His Own Name...You, True God, the Savior of Israel, are veritably a hidden God!”<sup>33</sup> And in the same vein: “It is true knowledge, certain and absolute, the highest pleasure of reason, and worth being a man for; but it still falls infinitely short of vision and makes mystery all the more crushingly felt. *Per speculum in aenigmate.*”<sup>34</sup> In other words, following Pascal, metaphysics reveals the chimerical greatness and wretchedness of man, the “thinking reed,” who knows so much and, alas, so little. Practically speaking, it was also of minimal importance during the first evangelization, and will always be compared to the simple preaching of the Word of the Cross (1 Cor. 1:17f.) and corresponding “demonstrations of the Spirit and of power” (1 Cor. 2:4). As even the learned Ambrose famously put it, “*Non in dialectica placuit Deo salvum facere populum suum.*” Indeed, following Paul, God prefers to convey his wisdom not through learned arguments, which might compel human freedom to assent to them, but precisely through folly in order to outwit those who think themselves “wise,” so that no one may boast (1 Cor. 1:27-9).

But even this is no argument against the use of metaphysics. For the same Paul who presented nothing to the Corinthians but Christ Crucified (1 Cor. 2:2) just as famously argued with the Athenians, appealing to the metaphysical sensibility of their poets and philosophers (Acts 17:22-30). And if Paul considered such appeals legitimate, how can the Church renounce them, effectively pitting Paul against Paul? Recognizing the limits of metaphysics is no excuse to throw out the baby with the bathwater – no more than Kant, who recognized the limits of reason, was suggesting that we abandon it. One simply needs the spiritual discernment to know when and in what context it is useful and when it is not, along the lines of Luther’s sensible advice about when to preach the law and when to preach the gospel.

Or if the arguments advanced against metaphysics are of the more modest sort, merely to the effect that the Church does not need metaphysics because it is thought to be obsolete, such arguments, too, seem shortsighted. For not only are metaphysical questions – concerning being, form, identity, difference, relation, time, eternity, modality, etc. – perennial questions, which no amount of anti-metaphysical slogans can suppress. They are also important on an occasional basis – and no more so than when society becomes secular and self-enclosed (*incurvatio in se*). In such cases they serve to

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<sup>33</sup> Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. Gerald B. Phelan, ed. Ralph M. McNerny (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

remind us of questions that transcend the profane limits of the marketplace, unsettle us in our all-consuming consumerism, and prepare us to hear a message that is not of this world. All of which goes to say that metaphysics' role in the twenty-first century remains what it was in the early Church, namely, that of a *praeparatio evangelica*.

But if metaphysics is indispensable to the ongoing task of apologetics, it is equally important, I would argue, to the ongoing edification of the Church – not only as regards the *intellectus fidei*, but also as an antidote to a temptation peculiar to the Church in the modern world: the temptation, namely, for the Church to lose its sense of divine transcendence, its sense for the *God-ness* of God, in short, for the Church to fall into a comfortable worldliness with the result that its speaking of God, even from the pulpit, becomes either presumptuous or a kind of tepid God-talk that is scarcely distinguishable from irreverent chatter. In such circumstances, when a metaphysical imagination can no longer be taken for granted, it is not enough to say that the Church lives by faith, much less by discursive practices, alone – such theologies tend to subjectivize and nominalize the faith, whether it be that of the individual or the community. Rather, the Church must emphasize the *objectivity* of the faith, and that it lives by faith *in the realities* to which its words and practices refer – from the reality of the Trinity, to the reality of Christ as the incarnate Logos, to the reality of the Holy Spirit, who with the Father and the Son *really* indwells the hearts of those who love Christ and follow his commandments (John 14:21f.). Obviously, this is not to detract from orthodoxy and orthopraxis, which are and remain the *sine qua non* of any Christian metaphysics. But these are not ends in themselves. Rather, their purpose, the purpose even of the Eucharist, is decidedly *metaphysical*: to communicate *reality* in the ultimate sense of the word, which is to say, the *reality* of Christ, who as the Logos of the Father and the Logos of creation is the unique Mediator and “substance of the entire cosmos” – and not for the sake of the Church alone, but so that the Church's members, once realized in Christ and conformed to the divine nature can continue to communicate this reality to a world suffering from countless illusions.<sup>35</sup>

For this reason, I submit, the Church should not, if it can be helped, be described as a “faith community” – least of all to its own members – but should be designated in a more *biblical* and *metaphysical* idiom that indicates what it *essentially* is and *existentially* is called to be. One such tried and true designation is *the mystical body of Christ*. Grounded in the teaching of Paul (1 Cor. 12:12–31) and Christ himself (Acts 9:4–5), it has the virtue of indicating both the Eucharist and metonymically the entire ecclesia as the body of the King. Another is the *bride of Christ* (Eph. 5:32). Both of these designations have the virtue of indicating what the Church is *essentially*, viewed, as it were, from above – *sub specie aeternitatis*. With equal justification, however, viewed *existentially* from “below,” that is, in terms of its status *in via*, one could describe the Church in keeping with earliest precedent (Acts 9:2) as *the Way (to Reality)*, since Christ is the Way (John 14:6) to the Father who is the source of all reality. A more popular example along these lines would be to speak of the Church as a “mother” – *mater ecclesia* – in whose “womb” souls mature *until* Christ is formed in them (Eph. 4:13) and they are born into eternal life. One might even describe the Church as the “furnace” of the Spirit (cf. Prov. 17:3; Isa. 31:9) in which souls are tried for the kingdom of God. The point here is not whether such

<sup>35</sup> For more on Przywara's robustly metaphysical Christology and Christological metaphysics, which he stunningly presented in the midst of the devastation of the Second World War, see *Alter und Neuer Bund. Theologie der Stunde* (Wien: Verlag Herold, 1956), 79.

phrases are practical or even desirable; for some the use of the phrase “mother Church” outside the context of official Church teaching might sound saccharine. The point is that these and similar designations, which are at once metaphorically rich and metaphysically profound, say much more about what the Church really is and its members are called to be.

Of course, metaphysical reality is by definition not evident to the senses – at least not fully. Typically, no one walking into a church on an ordinary Sunday sees a “bride” or a “mystical body,” much less a “consuming fire,” in which sins are consumed like stubble and souls are purified in order to shine like the sun (Matt. 17:2), each star differing from star in glory (1 Cor. 15:41). Such, rather, are the perceptions of *les yeux de la foi* – eyes that are strong enough to see through a glass darkly (cf. 1 Cor. 13:12), what is more, to see the *invisible in the visible*, and thus to see in the members of the Church the *substance* and not merely the “assurance” of things hoped for (cf. Heb. 11:1).<sup>36</sup> Thus fortified one can also live in hope that there is more to this world than meets the eye, and that Christ is either being formed or waiting to be formed in *every* person one meets: *omnes vos unum estis in Christo Jesu* (Gal. 3:28). But the metaphysical imagination, of which the work of C. S. Lewis is one of the greatest examples – from his abundant fiction to remarkable essays such as “The Weight of Glory” – is not just a matter of *aesthesis*. For the more it grows in proportion to one’s faith, the more creative, the more poetic, it also becomes. And in this respect one might speak of a metaphysical *poesis* inspired by the Holy Spirit, who knows (from the beginning) how creatively to *render* the invisible through the visible, and who does so, even more miraculously, through the secondary causes of a free creation – whether this be through the sermon or homily (which, if inspired, should be a kind of apocalypse), or through sacred music or holy icons, or even through a simple word or work of love, all of which belongs to the mystery of Christian *art*. And such *poesis*, in turn, leads back to an enriched *aesthesis*. Such is the circle of the metaphysical imagination. For, as Augustine tells us, a lively faith worked out in love (*poesis*) leads not just to understanding, even to a kind of gnosis, but also to vision – and not just to a remote beatific vision, but even to a vision of God in this life: whether this be a glimpse of God in the *logoi* of creation (according to Evagrius’s understanding of *theoria physike*) or that internal perception that is granted to the pure in heart who “see” the uncreated light of God springing up from their “deepest center,” flowing like a river (John 7:38).

But, again, all of this requires *depth* perception, *meta-physical* perception, which begins with a sense of the *analogia entis*, i.e., of the transcendent God indwelling his creation, permeating it through and through, indeed, flowing within it as its Way, but at the same time, as the river of life (Rev. 22:1), drawing it *beyond itself* to its end (1 Cor. 15:28). And this, in turn, like any depth perception, requires the joint operation of two eyes, in this case, the two eyes of faith: one eye that perceives the so-to-speak “vertical” dimension of the *analogia entis*, whereby God is understood to be *in-and-beyond* creation, the other that perceives its so-to-speak “historical” dimension, whereby the end, which is already given as an entelechy in Christ, is understood to be *in-and-beyond* history. Granted, in keeping with the teaching of Vatican I, one could speak of these two eyes as those of faith and reason, inasmuch as the first dimension can be thought by reason (though barely and only with difficulty, since the notion of an indwelling

<sup>36</sup> As Benedict XVI importantly notes in *Spe salvi* (§7) this verse should be rendered contra Luther in keeping with the sense of the Greek word *hypostasis* as “substance.”

transcendence is itself already paradoxical). But it is still more correct to say the two eyes of faith, since the seeing of the second eye is strictly a matter of faith, and since the first eye sees much more clearly with the help of the second. When Augustine confesses to God, *tu autem eras interior intimo meo et superior summo meo*,<sup>37</sup> for example, he is speaking not on the basis of reason alone, but on the basis of faith, which led him not only to perceive more clearly, but also mystically to experience (*cognitio Dei experimentalis*) what previously, with the help of the *libri Platonici* alone, he could barely make out: that God is mysteriously omnipresent to creation as its Creator and Logos, indeed present to it as the inescapable lover of every fugitive soul (Psa. 139), but at the same time ineffably beyond it as its Lord, who is “enthroned above the Cherubim” (Psa. 99:1). But this experience was not unique to Augustine. On the contrary, it is the common testimony of the saints, who likewise come to recognize the *transcendent* God *tabernacling* in their midst (Exod. 29:45; 1 Cor. 6:16): from an experience of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist (1 Cor. 11:29) to an experience of the real presence of the Holy Spirit *within* them as his most holy temple (1 Cor. 6:19): “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you?”

Of course, to emphasize the metaphysical reality of the Church is not to deny its apparent, everyday reality. For by definition there is no metaphysics without physics, and certainly no *Christian* metaphysics apart from the Church and its cultural-linguistic life. And whenever the Church is dealing with supercilious forms of abstract rationalism, which presume to do without language, tradition, and historically-grounded faith, it is precisely these elements that must be emphasized, as Hamann vigorously did vis-à-vis Kant. Such is the *particula veri* of theologies like Hector’s, which follow Wittgenstein in the spirit of Hamann’s metacritical “linguistic turn.” Indeed, there is very much a place for them, and perhaps there will come a time when they are needed again. Today, however, the challenge facing the Church is different. It is not that of an airy rationalism that would exalt itself over historically grounded faith, but more nearly the opposite: an almost brutish empiricism and empty nominalism.

For this reason, I submit, contra every cultural-linguistic account of the Christian faith, however pragmatic and sensible, whose final consequence is a form of linguistic idealism or theology without windows, what is needed *today* is a strong dose of metaphysical realism and a corresponding metaphysical imagination like that of the great metaphysical storyteller, C.S. Lewis – if we are adequately to appreciate not only what the Church teaches *about* reality, but also, and still more importantly, that its entire life is a corporate mystagogical journey *into* it. Indeed, all of the Church’s words and sacraments have but one final purpose, one metaphysical end: to awaken the world to the reality of Christ, its archetypal Logos, and to communicate him to it, so that the world might be conformed to him, who is *in* all things as their Way and *transcends* them as their Lord.<sup>38</sup> And if by grace it succeeds in communicating the world’s beginning and end in Christ, the result is inevitably overwhelming. So it was from the Church’s founding in Peter’s confession: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt.

<sup>37</sup> Augustine, *Confessions* III, vi (11).

<sup>38</sup> In this respect the faith of the Church is incomparably more substantial than the “minimal realism” or “modest pragmatism” of Jeffrey Stout, which allows at most “uplifting” moments in the course of human experience, which grant “intimations of morally valid obligation and genuine excellence.” See his *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 269.

16:16). So it was for John on Patmos: “And when I saw him I fell at his feet as dead” (Rev. 1:17). So it was with Paul: in seeing the resurrected Christ on the road to Damascus he did not encounter an idea, still less was he converted to an ideology or political cause – not even to a set of beliefs and practices to be carried on. Rather, what he encountered, like Moses at the burning bush, was reality itself, the reality of the “I AM,” which shattered his idea of himself as anything more than a minor part of the cosmic reality of the *totus Christus* that he subsequently strove with all his might to proclaim (Acts 9; Phil. 3:7-11). On the basis of revelation alone, therefore, to say nothing of reason, Christian theology cannot help but be committed to some form of metaphysical realism. Anything less would be tantamount not just to a *sacrificium intellectus*, but to a *sacrificium fidei*.<sup>39</sup>

### 3. A Reply to Theological Objections: from Luther to Hector

But if metaphysics is to survive into the twenty-first century and serve the *intellectus fidei* in the way just described, one must carefully consider the reasons for its gradual abandonment. To be sure, anticipations of anti-metaphysics can be found anywhere where the power of reason to fathom universal truth(s) is met with skepticism – as with the ancient Sophists and Pyrrhonists, or with late medieval nominalists such as Roscelin and Ockham. In the modern period, however, its decline is attributable chiefly to the influence of theologies stemming from the Reformation, which have tended to see metaphysics not only as alien to the Christian faith, but even as inimical to it: whether it be described more particularly as a seductive temptation (Luther), a counterfeit of true religion (Schleiermacher), a corrupting Hellenic influence (Harnack), a “perilous distraction” (Barth), or, most recently, a politically incorrect “ghost” that has haunted the house of theology for two millennia and finally needs to be “exorcised” (Hector).<sup>40</sup>

As diverse as these criticisms are, what they all have in common is one or another form of the objection that metaphysics subjects the God of revelation to rational categories, which either corrupt the original quality of our relationship to God, e.g., as one of “absolute dependence” (Schleiermacher) or universal paternity (Harnack), or prevent us in our presumption from seeing the humility of revelation *sub contrario* (Luther),

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Jean Borella, *The Sense of the Supernatural* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), or *The Secret of the Christian Way* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001). See also Christopher J. Insole, *The Realist Hope: A Critique of Anti-Realist Approaches in Contemporary Philosophical Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006). Cf. Karin Johannesson, *God Pro Nobis: On Non-Metaphysical Realism and the Philosophy of Religion* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007).

<sup>40</sup> See Luther, *Tischreden*, vol. 3 (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1914), no. 3722 (1538), 1564: “Thomas [Aquinas] is loquacious because he was seduced by metaphysics. But it has now been more than 20 years since God marvelously led us out of this, and without my knowing it led me out of this game” [“Thomas est loquacissimus, quia metaphysica est seductus. Nun, Gott hat uns wunderlich heraus geführt und hat mich doch unwissentlich über das Spiel geführt, nun über 20 Jahr]; Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 19: “[M]etaphysics and morals have [...] invaded religion on many occasions, and much that belongs to religion has concealed itself in metaphysics or morals under an unseemly form. But shall you, for this reason, believe that it is identical with one of these?”; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/2, *The Doctrine of God*, §36 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 531f.; Hector, *Theology Without Metaphysics*, 31. For a fine overview of the tradition of Protestant anti-metaphysics, and a fuller account of Luther’s understanding of metaphysics, see Timothy Stanley, *Protestant Metaphysics after Karl Barth and Martin Heidegger* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 1-29.

which *breaks through* every reasonable expectation on its own *sovereign* terms (Barth). Thus, in keeping with the distinctive character of each confession, while Lutheran theology tends to oppose metaphysics (read: the illusions of a *theologia gloriae*) with a down-to-earth theology of the Cross (*theologia crucis*), the Reformed tradition, taking cues from Pascal, typically adds to this the charge that metaphysics is idolatrous: that it reduces the living God of the Bible – the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – to a conceptual idol before which, in Heidegger’s oft-repeated words, “man can neither fall to his knees in awe [...] nor play music and dance.”<sup>41</sup> In sum, it is said, metaphysics “domesticates transcendence,” imprisoning God within a conceptual framework that effectively forecloses the possibility of an existential response to God in the novelty of God’s self-revelation.

But it is not just that metaphysics is said to be idolatrous or an illegitimate “grasping” at the divine – whether this be construed in terms of the fabled theft of Prometheus or the original sin of Genesis 3. Nor is it merely that metaphysics is a matter of projecting our own ideas and values onto God, confirming Feuerbach’s suspicion that theology is anthropology (Barth). For Hector, who identifies metaphysics with essentialism and “correspondentism,” it also violates the dignity of individual persons and classes of people by subjecting them, too, to various categories. Thus, for Hector, who in many ways brings the tradition of Protestant criticism to its logical conclusion, metaphysics is not a Greek gift, but a Trojan horse, concealing a form of conceptual violence vis-à-vis God and other persons. It is, in any event, not a providentially arranged marriage as the early Church tended to see it,<sup>42</sup> but more like an adulterous affair – something on the order of Israel consorting with Baal and Ashtoreth. And in this respect, for all their other differences, Luther and subsequent Protestant tradition, even Barth and his liberal Protestant teachers’ have been essentially agreed.<sup>43</sup>

Notwithstanding a tendency to rhetorical excess, which is natural enough when one is sensible of a particular danger, there is something to be said for these objections, so let us try to identify their respective *particula veri* and what Catholic theology can learn from them. *Firstly*, as regards methodology: if theology is to make use of metaphysics, or any philosophy for that matter, it must be conscious and discerning with regard to this

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<sup>41</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The Ontological Constitution of Metaphysics,” in *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 72. For a good elaboration of Heidegger’s critique, see Mary-Jane Rubenstein, *Strange Wonder: The Closure of Metaphysics and the Opening of Awe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008). Whatever one makes of Heidegger’s tenuous relationship to Catholicism, his affinity for Protestant theology from early on is well attested, having read Luther as early as 1908, Kierkegaard by 1914, and Schleiermacher by 1917. See Judith Wolfe, *Heidegger’s Eschatology: Theological Horizons in Martin Heidegger’s Early Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 46.

<sup>42</sup> Consider, for example, Gregory of Nyssa’s reading of Moses’ two mothers in *The Life of Moses*, Book II, §10-12.

<sup>43</sup> But this calls for some qualification. For as Matthew Rose has pointed out not only did Barth, contra Harnack, gradually come to see something providential in Christianity’s encounter with Greek philosophy, his own theology is itself metaphysically inflected. See *Church Dogmatics* III/2, § 45, 282f.: “Is it a mere accident that the Gospel of Jesus Christ, this seed of Israel, took root in the perishing world of Hellenism? Has it been a misfortune that this origin has haunted its whole subsequent career? Is there not here something obligatory, which it is better to see and accept than to ignore and deny, if we are ready and anxious to understand the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the full range of its content.” See Matthew Rose, *Ethics with Barth: God, Metaphysics, and Morals* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 40; Eberhard Jüngel, *God’s Being is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. John Webster (London: T&T Clark, 2001). For a nuanced account of Barth’s attitude toward philosophy, see Kenneth Oakes, *Karl Barth on Theology and Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). My thanks to Bertrand Rickenbacker for pointing out that there are significant exceptions within the Reformed tradition, e.g., Herman Bavinck.

use in the way that Scripture commends one to test the words of the prophets (1 Thess. 5:19-21; cf. 1 John 4:1). Above all, it must not be a metaphysics imposed upon the faith, to which faith is made to conform, but a metaphysics that arises naturally *from faith* and is connatural to it as a kind of “helpmate” and medium of its proper intelligibility. It will not do, therefore, simply to stand on tradition and say that the first apologists and Church fathers made use of Stoic and Platonic metaphysics, citing the venerable principle of the *spoliæ Aegyptiorum*, or to point out how much Boethius and the scholastics made use of Aristotle. Rather, like the first apologists, Church fathers, and Thomas himself in his own use of “the philosopher,” one must always be mindful of one’s sources, discerning about the nature and extent of one’s appropriations – modifying, qualifying, criticizing, and, if necessary, abjuring – not according to the demands of reason, but according to the demands of what Paul called the *analogy of the faith* (Rom. 12:6).<sup>44</sup> As Newman put it “Human philosophy was beaten from its usurped province, but not by any counter-philosophy; and unlearned Faith, establishing itself by its own inherent strength, ruled the Reason [*sic*] as far as its own interests were concerned, and from that time has employed it in the Church, first as a captive, then as a servant; not as an equal, and in nowise (far from it) as a patron.”<sup>45</sup> Whether or not Barth would concede that this is, and has always been, the method of Catholic theology vis-à-vis philosophy (since Thomas’s understanding of the relation between faith and reason willy-nilly paved the way to modern philosophical foundationalism), such methodological clarity would help to alleviate Barthian concerns about the Catholic Church’s use of metaphysics in general and its understanding of the *analogia entis* in particular.<sup>46</sup>

Secondly, theology must always be on guard against the subtler and more existential danger of which Luther and Kierkegaard, not to mention the Catholic Pascal, were keenly aware, namely, that metaphysics can become a sterile substitute for living faith – with the result that one’s commitment is at the end of the day to a set of propositions, perhaps twenty-four theses, and not the person of Jesus Christ.<sup>47</sup> Given this danger, one can genuinely understand why Luther was so hostile to metaphysics, and why he affirmed a *theologia crucis* in dialectical opposition to every speculative *theologia gloriae* (thereby setting the stage for Barth’s later rejection, as Luther *redivivus*, of the *analogia entis*), emphasizing that theology is not so much about out knowing divine things, but about *suffering* divine things.

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<sup>44</sup> To be clear, I do not mean *analogia fidei* here in the sense given by Barth, as pertaining to the ontological relationship between God and human beings, which is for Barth strictly a matter of faith, but the phrase as it has traditionally been understood, namely, in terms of the *regula fidei* and the unity of the two covenants in Christ.

<sup>45</sup> See John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford Between A.D. 1826 and 1843*, introduction by Mary Katherine Tillman (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 58.

<sup>46</sup> Of course, inasmuch as it remains committed to the teaching of Vatican I, the Catholic Church will not deny that beginning with reason one can come to the threshold of faith, and that metaphysics, specifically, the metaphysics of the *analogia entis*, belongs at some level to the *praeambula fidei*. But neither does the Catholic Church contend that its faith *rests* upon such arguments in the strong sense of modern philosophical foundationalism. They are reasonable arguments, to be sure, and even objectively convincing arguments, but as Pascal and Newman understood, the reasons for their acceptance or rejection are rarely a matter of reason alone.

<sup>47</sup> See Cornel West, *Prophetic Fragments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 269: “[...] the ideology of religious realism may sap some of the authenticity of religious faith by robbing it of existential risk and anxiety”; indeed, he continues, “old-style metaphysics may even harm one’s religious faith.”

But again, the risk of rationalizing the faith is no argument against the use of reason or metaphysics in its service – no more than the risk of an overdose is an argument against the proper use of medicine. A *pharmakon*, according to the original meaning of the word, can both benefit and harm, depending upon use. The same is true here. On the one hand, one can err by putting too much stock in metaphysics, to the point that one ends up confusing faith with reason. Such is the pitfall of Hegelianism, in view of which we may be grateful for Kierkegaard's trenchant point that being a genius, or a metaphysician who appropriates the language of faith, does not by any stretch of the imagination make one a disciple.<sup>48</sup> The rejection of metaphysics *tout court*, on the other hand, would constitute the opposing error, denying to faith its implicit claims to realism, its proper metaphysical depth, and indeed its very intelligibility. For without metaphysics, even so basic a theological claim as that God *exists* would be nothing but a convention of speech. And must we not be able to say what we mean when we say that God exists or that God *is* the Trinity? Does the "is" here mean the same thing when applied to God and creatures? If we think that it does, then we have just denied the difference between God and creation, and confused what should not be confused. And is this not the essence of idolatry? My point, in any event, is that just as metaphysics can lead to idolatry if it is given priority over faith, so too can the absence of metaphysics – the moment one supposes that God and creation *exist* in the same way, in which case we very much need metaphysics in order to disabuse us of the idolatry of univocity. Although it might not seem so at first, the stakes with the *nominalist* rejection of metaphysics are therefore just as high as with the *rationalist* reduction of theology to metaphysics. Indeed, without metaphysics Christ himself threatens to become merely a sign within a system of signs – such is the end of all nominalism – and not *the* Word (Logos) and *the* Way to reality that he *Is*. And so, *pace* Kierkegaard, one must take care to distinguish between an illegitimate rationalization of the faith and a legitimate attempt to understand it and explain it, in keeping with 1 Pet. 3:15.

*Thirdly*, and finally, in response to Hector, I would argue that his legitimate concerns are best addressed by the doctrine of the *imago Dei*, according to which every person, created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26f.), possesses an inherent *and* transcendent dignity surpassing anything we can possibly comprehend – the kind of dignity that C. S. Lewis perceived and felt as the "weight of glory." Certainly, we should be aware of how concepts are deployed, and to what end. For language, as we all know, can be abused, sometimes grotesquely so, as Hannah Arendt's analysis of National Socialist language in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* so incisively showed.<sup>49</sup> But the dignity of persons is not violated by saying that all persons have inherent essences or natures to fulfill, or that each of us, as a particular image of God, has the vocation to realize that essence (and thus

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<sup>48</sup> See Kierkegaard's wonderful ethical-religious essay on the difference between a genius and an apostle in Soren Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 91-109.

<sup>49</sup> In modern western societies we might note the way that language is used to make the dignity (and even life) of entire classes of persons disappear, as when one speaks of "reproductive health" when one really means "the right to kill an unborn human being," or when one classifies other human beings likewise struggling for survival and a better life as "illegal aliens," as though this gave one license to treat them without dignity or even humanity.

the divine likeness) in a particular way.<sup>50</sup> On the contrary, I submit, it is only when we recognize other persons as underway to *what* they are in Christ that we appreciate them for who they *really* are – each a very *particular* image and potential *likeness* of God – and as such worthy of a reverence and love analogous to that owed to God himself (Matt. 22:39). In sum, I would argue that a dynamic, *analogical* metaphysics that recognizes the tension between essence and existence is precisely what is needed in order to establish theological ethics on its properly positive basis in the haecceity of every individual before God, and to resist the violence of *univocal* ascription and the reduction of all to the same – which is the ironic result of Levinas's otherwise well-intentioned ethics of otherness.

In any event, instead of dismissing metaphysics out of hand, or, for that matter, accepting it without hesitation, what is needed is spiritual discernment of the kind commended by Paul: “appraise everything, holding fast to what is good and beautiful, while avoiding every manifest evil” (1 Thess. 5:21-2).<sup>51</sup> Although this was said concerning prophecies, it applies to metaphysics as well. And the *measure*, once again, is the *analogia fidei* (Rom. 12:6). In response, therefore, to the standard theological objections to metaphysics, I would argue that the Christian use of metaphysics is legitimate and to be valued *to the extent* that it can (1) serve the cause of apologetics by awakening souls to the reality of another kingdom that is hidden within them (Matt. 13:44), but also beyond them and not of this world (John 18:36), (2) serve the *intellectus et pulchritudo fidei* by helping to articulate the beauty and intelligibility of what Christians already believe, and (3) help persons to see who they are as particular dynamic essences with a metaphysical destiny to be fulfilled in Christ.

#### 4. A Reply to Philosophical Objections: Heidegger and Marion

Over time many of the foregoing theological objections to metaphysics mutated into modern philosophical objections, some of the more important being those of Martin Heidegger, who was reading Luther as early as 1908, and Jean-Luc Marion, who in many ways is a Catholic Barthian.<sup>52</sup> While the differences between the two philoso-

<sup>50</sup> Two important qualifications, however, are necessary: *firstly*, that created natures are known in their fullness only to God. *Secondly*, one must stipulate that, while the doctrine of essences in the eternal Logos entails their predetermination to be fulfilled in Christ, this does not mean their necessary determination to this end. See Nevena Dimitrova, *Human Knowledge according to St. Maximus the Confessor* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016), 27: “In this respect, the *imago Dei* is characterized as being both a natural endowment and a variable state that is dependent on the personal capacities of specific human beings. Thus, interactions among intellectual capacities, the disposition of the will, and bodily conditions are all connected in the process of awakening and guiding human beings to perfection.” Accordingly, one must say that if all essences are predestined in Christ, who has been slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8), thereby providing everything needed for godliness (2 Pet. 1:3), such predestination also depends upon free creatures responding to these “great” and “precious” promises and cooperating with the grace that has been given to them.

<sup>51</sup> As we have seen, Paul himself practiced this discernment: to the Athenians he appealed to philosophy in the mode of apologetics (Acts 17:28); to the Corinthians he did the opposite, preaching of Christ Crucified, which is foolishness to the Greeks and a stumbling block to the Jews (1 Cor. 1:18). In no way, however, should the apostle be pitted against himself, or one part of scripture be used against another – neither in the matter of justification nor metaphysics.

<sup>52</sup> It would be even more accurate, if chimerical, to say that Marion is a Catholic Pseudo-Dionysian-Barthian, who accepts wholesale Heidegger's critique of metaphysics before attempting to go beyond him with the help of the late Schelling. But what I mean is this: just as for Barth God, who is the *subject* of revelation and never the object, gives himself to be known free of all creaturely analogy, for Marion the saturated phenomenon likewise gives itself “as absolute—free from any analogy with already seen, objectified, comprehended experience. It is free because it does not depend upon any horizon.” See Marion, *Being Given*, 211f. *et passim*. Thus, not only is every metaphysical pre-conception woefully inadequate, it is also a presumptive misprision, which stands to be negated or at best suspended for the sake of the unconditional appearing of the givenness of revelation.

phers are well known (as is evident from Marion's critique of Heidegger in *God without Being*), as far as metaphysics goes they are cut from the same cloth. For both think that metaphysics must be overcome – not just for the sake of philosophy, but even for the sake of theology.<sup>53</sup> But, again, in order to understand their critique, let us return to the all-important question, "what is metaphysics?"

Before metaphysics was fixed in postmodern discourse as a term of abuse, it called to mind all manner of things: about Heraclitus and Parmenides, about Plato and Aristotle, about the work of the latter from which the term derived, about the reception of Plato in the early Church (e.g., in Origen, Augustine, the Cappadocian Fathers, and Maximus), about the scholastic reception of Aristotle, and in general about an entire range of perennial philosophical questions concerning being and becoming, form and matter, permanence and change, the One and the many, existence and essence, the transcendentals, and so forth. It was a term rich enough that it could be said, like being, in many ways – indeed, rich enough to embrace by dint of the transcendentals (being, truth, goodness, beauty, unity) the whole of philosophy including the sub-disciplines of logic, ethics, and aesthetics. But after the late Heidegger and Marion it tends to mean, remarkably enough, just one thing.

Strictly speaking, what Heidegger and Marion mean is what metaphysics came to mean after Aristotle: the science of being qua being (τὸ ὄν ᾗ ὄν), but understood both as substance (οὐσία) and in its etiological connection with the highest being, which Aristotle called the first mover.<sup>54</sup> Accordingly, metaphysics means the science of being (ontology) in connection with divine being (theology). As Aquinas put it in his commentary on Aristotle's *On Generation and Corruption*, metaphysics is that science which "simul determinat de ente in communi et de ente primo quod est a materia separatum."<sup>55</sup> Of course, it should be pointed out that Thomas is simply commenting on Aristotle, and not giving his own definition of metaphysics per se.<sup>56</sup> But commentaries, too, have their *Wirkungsgeschichten*, and it is this definition, Marion observes, that governs the whole of philosophy from Suárez to Kant. Thus, what Marion means by metaphysics, following Heidegger, is "a single science bearing at one and the same time on the universal of common being [*metaphysica generalis*] and on the being (or the beings) par excellence" [*metaphysica specialis*].<sup>57</sup> Now there may be good reasons to find this definition wanting: can more than two thousand years of thought be thus reduced and dismissed? But before contesting it, let us consider what Heidegger and Marion think is wrong with metaphysics *thus defined*.

For Heidegger, in keeping with the above definition, metaphysics is synonymous with "onto-theology," by which he means the logical positing and reciprocal grounding of universal common being (*ens commune*) and the particular, supreme being (*summum*

<sup>53</sup> See, for example, Jean-Luc Marion, "Phenomenology and Theology," in *Pathmarks*, trans. James G. Hart and John C. Maraldo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>54</sup> *Met.* IV, 1003a 21; *Met.* 1028b2-4.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Proemium in Librum Aristotelis de generatione et corruptione expositio*; quoted by Marion in "Metaphysics and Phenomenology," 574.

<sup>56</sup> For one thing, one would have to distinguish between Aristotelian and Thomistic metaphysics in that for Aristotle the first mover is not a creator, but the first mover of an eternal world and not the "first cause" of a freely created universe.

<sup>57</sup> Marion, "Metaphysics and Phenomenology," 575.

ens), the latter of which functions as the cause, ground, and sufficient reason of the former.<sup>58</sup> The characteristic feature of metaphysics is thus a logical and ultimately closed circle between *metaphysica generalis* and *metaphysica specialis*: whereas the former ostensibly poses the question of being, the latter without pondering it answers it without further ado, which is to say, forecloses it as a real question, immediately explaining being with an account of being's etiology or *reason* for being. Beings are, we automatically reason, *because* they are *caused*; they are produced by a highest being. Under the regime of metaphysics ontology thus reduces to etiology, and all thought is henceforth caught and locked up within Leibniz's principle of sufficient reason. Whether the principle is formulated as "nothing is without a cause," or, more popularly, as "everything has a reason," the point is that in the wake of metaphysics being cannot be thought *otherwise*, i.e., without a *raison d'être* (the French phrase itself being symptomatic of the problematic connection).

All of which is brought to its logical conclusion in Hegel's famous assertion in the *Philosophy of Right* that "the rational is real and the real is rational," which expresses in the form of an axiom precisely what Heidegger means by the closed circle of metaphysics. For Heidegger, the culmination of metaphysics in Hegel is thus, ironically, the end of thought. For all is now locked up: the mystery of being is no longer a mystery. Before Hegel one might have escaped from the cave and been startled, awakened from one's metaphysical slumbers, by the brilliant gratuitousness of the "thatness" of the "being-there" of existence, but after him this is no longer possible (*nil admirari!*). For being is logically contained in and returns to the Concept. Thus, Heidegger laments, the final result of metaphysics is a kind of mindless intellectualism and cultural darkness, as the question of being, the very question that makes us *human beings*, aware of *being-there* (*Da-sein*), disappears into the various subject areas of the sciences – being parceled out into the study of God, world, and soul under the rubric, respectively, of natural theology, cosmology, and psychology. In sum, the givenness of beings no longer appears, being taken for granted; the fundamental question of the *being* of beings, the philosophical question par excellence, is no longer even asked; and so the world no longer "worlds" in its mystery but just stands there in reserve as a collection of objects to be represented and exploited by a calculating, technocratic modern subject, which is Heidegger's version of the "last man."

With Heidegger we thus quickly reach the point where logos ends and existential pathos begins. We reach a point where metaphysics is not so much an academic discipline as it is a way of thinking that, wherever it has taken hold, negatively affects our being-in-the-world, leading to the "non-world" [*Umwelt*] of modern technology – a "world" in which being (including human being) is reduced to *data* without any thought given to the "is" in what is given, or to the "es" in "*es gibt*"; a "world" in which human beings as constitutively *in-the-world* are precisely *not-at-home-in-the-world*. And, for Heidegger, the state of alienation is so great that "only a god" or (perhaps) a German poet "can save us."<sup>59</sup> And yet, for the vatic philosopher it is an alienation that, patheti-

<sup>58</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Ontological Constitution of Metaphysics," in *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 54.

<sup>59</sup> See especially, "Überwindung der Metaphysik," in Martin Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfullingen: Günther Neske Verlag, 1954); translated by Joan Stambaugh in Martin Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1973).

cally, the vast majority of people, *das man*,<sup>60</sup> no longer even notices, having fallen into an essentially harmatological condition of *Seinsvergessenheit*. In such circumstances, Heidegger weeps for Germany like the prophets over Jerusalem – his own philosophy being a self-conscious attempt to “awaken” us who are in the cave of metaphysics to the mystery of being, to the intimate connection between philosophy and poetry, and to the possibility of a new, poetically-inspired age in which we (or the Germans) might be at home in the world again. But if this is to happen, we must get beyond – or at least over – metaphysics. Put differently, following Heidegger’s clever pun on the German word *Satz*, we must make the leap [*Satz*] beyond the principle [*Satz*] of sufficient reason into thought; beyond beings [*Seiendes*] to Being [*Sein*], whose veil is precisely no-thing; and back to the contemplation of the kenotic advent of Being in beings that metaphysics (ostensibly) forgot.

Aside from the pathos of Heidegger’s narrative, which is appealing to anyone looking for a ready explanation of modern alienation (*nota bene*, for Heidegger, metaphysical etiology is suspect, but not genealogical etiology), these are serious charges indeed. There is also much here with which a Christian can – and perhaps must – sympathize. For whether or not the question of being has been forgotten, and whether or not Christianity is complicit in the cover-up, as Heidegger alleges, he has a point: beginning with Aristotle the question of being (ontology) has been linked with the question of causality (etiology), which may have impoverished our worldview – notwithstanding the fact, which Heidegger downplays, that for Plato and Aristotle philosophy *begins* with wonder.<sup>61</sup> So how is one to respond? How can one defend metaphysics *after* Heidegger? For that matter, how can one defend Christian philosophy, which Heidegger dismissed as a “wooden iron,” i.e., a *contradictio in adjecto*?<sup>62</sup>

While a full response to Heidegger’s complex critique cannot be undertaken here,<sup>63</sup> one might begin by questioning his reduction of metaphysics to Aristotle, however indebted the metaphysical tradition is to him, and by questioning his tendentious reading of the

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<sup>60</sup> This is obviously Heidegger’s version of Nietzsche’s “last men,” with the difference that Heidegger, who is more resolutely Christian, is happy to adopt harmatological language to describe this existentially fallen condition.

<sup>61</sup> See Plato (*Theaetetus*, 155d) and Aristotle (*Metaphysics*, 982 b). But even this is no exculpation, because on Heidegger’s view such wonder (for Aristotle especially) is only a momentary wonder – and not about being so much as about how something works. In short, it is the wonder of a scientist, not of a philosopher or poet, which leads directly to an investigation of the causes that will explain it and make it wondrous no more. Thus, for Heidegger, it remains the case that with Plato and Aristotle the question of being is covered up and disappears – and that it disappears, to continue the grand cover-up narrative, for more than two millennia until he recovers it and brings it back to light.

<sup>62</sup> As David C. Schindler has pointed out by way of an amusing allusion, if one accepts Heidegger’s terms of debate one is *eo ipso* put in a compromising theological position, and therefore the terms in which Heidegger frames the question of metaphysics ought to be refused. See David C. Schindler, “Wie kommt der Mensch in die Theologie?” *Communio* 32 (Winter 2005): 637–68. For Heidegger’s critique of Christian philosophy as a nonsensical term, see his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 8.

<sup>63</sup> For other attempts at a response, see John Betz, “Beyond the Sublime: The Aesthetics of the Analogy of Being (Part Two),” *Modern Theology* 22, no.1 (January 2006): 1–50 (especially 12–20); idem, “Metaphysics and Theology,” in *Analogia Entis*, 76–83; and, more recently, specifically vis-à-vis Heidegger, “Overcoming the Forgetfulness of Metaphysics: The More Original Philosophy of William Desmond,” in *William Desmond and Contemporary Theology*, ed. Christopher Ben Simpson and Brendan T. Sammon (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017), 57–92.

Christian tradition, e.g., his assumption that anyone who believes in a Creator cannot be a *real* thinker, much less, presumably, a *real* poet, because he or she must have answered the question of being before seriously considering it. (In other words, Heidegger alleges, faith in revelation has already corrupted his or her thinking of being from the start.) This is a strange argument, whose apparent strength consists in preferring questions to answers, inversely mirroring the catechist who prefers answers to questions. In truth, one could say, neither really thinks, because each has excluded something – either the possibility of a question or the possibility of an answer – from the start. Nor is Heidegger's pretension to phenomenological purity vis-à-vis theology (and Christian revelation, in particular) remotely plausible when one considers all of the theological and specifically Christian tropes that furtively make their way back into his ostensibly pure thinking: from his early existential analysis of the “fallenness” of *das man* during a period of dialogue with Bultmann, to his understanding of truth in terms of revelation [*Unverborgenheit*], to his formally Christological doctrine of the *kenosis* of Being in beings, to his “eschatology” of the poets qua shepherds awaiting the “advent” [cf. *Ereignis*] of being, to his own favorite German poets, such as Hölderlin and Trakl, who assume the role of the Hebrew prophets as mediators of Being. In other words, Heidegger's philosophy is obviously, from beginning to end, despite pretensions to the contrary, a *secularized theology* – above all, a secularization of the apophatic tradition, as Przywara among others pointed out.<sup>64</sup> And so we come back to the question of how Heidegger reads the Christian tradition he extensively plagiarizes, and to the fact that he reads it essentially as a Protestant. For here, too, we have the basic story of an original revelation, which has been covered up for millennia until a deconstructive reformer brings it back to light. And it all turns on the claim, which is itself a variant of Kierkegaard's existentialism, that the Catholic tradition has forgotten the question of being – the question of existence. But has it really? Or is it Heidegger who has forgotten or even willfully misrepresented something?<sup>65</sup>

On the one hand, there can be no doubt that Heidegger has legitimate concerns, which come to light if one takes Scotus and Suárez as exclusively determinative of Catholic metaphysics (specifically, the Scotist *distinctio modalis* and the Suarezian *distinctio rationis* between essence and existence). For on their view, Heidegger observes, existence is nothing but the actualization of a possibility that *already exists*, having been “previously produced by God.”<sup>66</sup> And so, for Heidegger, the radical nature of the question of being, of existence, disappears from view. But it would be erroneous and

<sup>64</sup> This has been pointed out by many others, including Przywara and later Karl Löwith. As Löwith observed, “Przywara and Guardini [...] saw through Heidegger's presuppositions better than the rest of us.” See *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, ed. Richard Wolin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 214. For the connection between Heidegger and Eckhart, see John D. Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1988). As Julian Young has noted in conversation, the early Heidegger is perhaps best understood as, paradoxically, a “Protestant atheist.” For a recent discussion of Heidegger's relation to theology, see Ryan Coyne, *Heidegger's Confessions: The Remains of Saint Augustine in Being and Time and Beyond* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

<sup>65</sup> See Cyril O'Regan, *The Anatomy of Misremembering: Hans Urs von Balthasar's Response to Philosophical Modernity*, vol. 2: Heidegger (New York: Herder, forthcoming); Betz, “Overcoming the Forgetfulness of Metaphysics.”

<sup>66</sup> Suárez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, Disp. 31, 6, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. Berton, vol. 26. Quoted in Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982), 97. Notwithstanding his Thomistic credentials, we find a similar position in Báñez, “*Essentiae rerum antequam existant sunt entia realia, ut ens reale distinguitur contra fictivum...*” (*In Sum. Theol.* I, 10, 3), as quoted in Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, 98.

disingenuous to suggest that Scotus and Suárez represent the whole of Catholic metaphysics on this point in view of the sizable Thomist tradition as represented by, among others, Giles of Rome (though he was an Augustinian) or Capreolus, for whom the question of existence was precisely *not* included in the question of essence and who upheld the *distinctio realis* precisely in order to ensure the gratuity of creation. Crucial to any reply to Heidegger, therefore, is precisely *how* one reads the scholastics on the distinction between essence and existence.<sup>67</sup>

In this regard the difference between Heidegger and Gilson is instructive. Whereas Heidegger, influenced no doubt by his habilitation on Scotus, alleges that the entire history of philosophy and theology has forgotten the question of being, which has been reduced to logic, for Gilson it is the crowning achievement of Aquinas precisely to have to have *redeemed* the question of being by drawing a clear distinction between essence and existence – what is more, to have safeguarded thereby the *novelty* and *gratuity* of creation as a *gift* that cannot be reduced to a *given*. In no sense, therefore, does the Christian tradition oblige one to forget the question of being – the question of why there is something rather than nothing, “the miracle of miracles,” as Heidegger puts it, “that beings are.”<sup>68</sup> On the contrary, over against the pagan conception of the eternity of the world, which fatefully obscured it, it was precisely *Christian metaphysics*, above all the Thomist *distinctio realis* (which marked a metaphysical advance beyond Platonic-Augustinian exemplarism) that brought the question of being for the first time radically into view. Thus, when Heidegger critiques the Christian metaphysical tradition for forgetting the question of being, he is borrowing from its own insights, while concealing what he owes it.

But Heidegger still has a point very much worth heeding. If revelation is taken for granted, as a given, it is certainly possible that one could fail to consider or ponder the mystery of being given in the distinction between essence and existence. It is, after all, a matter of philosophical reflection and not, strictly speaking, a matter of faith. It is possible, furthermore, that one might understand being-in-the-difference-between-essence-and-existence as itself just another effect of another cause, univocally understood, and fail to understand the cause of creation strictly in terms of analogy (as would be required if whatever we mean by God as *causa prima* would apply only *per analogiam*). It is possible, in other words, that understanding God univocally as just the first cause in a hierarchy of causes could lead to an impoverished understanding of the world as nothing but a system of causes and effects, producers and produced – and all the more so to the degree that we fail to hear in the word Creator the artistic resonances of the “Poet” of heaven and earth. But, *nota bene*, there is nothing in the real distinction qua real distinction that necessitates this. On the contrary, the real distinction presents itself to thought *prior* to any etiological considerations as a *mystery* that human thought precisely *cannot* explain (inasmuch as essence and existence, form and being, are irreducible to one another), and therefore leaves human thought, to the degree that it is

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<sup>67</sup> By this I do not mean to suggest that Thomas is right and that Scotus and Suárez are necessarily wrong. Indeed, as will become clear from what follows, the notion that essences *in some way* pre-exist in God must be retained, even while, with Thomas, one must also contemplate the sheer gratuity and *Zu-fall* of their historical existence. Holding these together may not be easy: on the one hand, the freedom and novelty of history; on the other hand, the eternity of God’s ideas of creatures. But it is nonetheless a requisite task for theological thinking, and (as we shall see) for reconciling opposing parties within the Orthodox Church such as Bulgakov and Florovsky.

<sup>68</sup> See Heidegger, “Nachwort zu: ‘Was ist Metaphysik,’” in *Wegmarken*, 305.

thoughtful, *open* to an explanation that exceeds it.<sup>69</sup> Nor, pace Heidegger, is faith in a theistic explanation the end of mystery. For once it is believed that God is the source of the created distinction between essence and existence, it becomes even *more* mysterious as an *analogy* of the God who is in-and-beyond it; indeed, liberated from Heidegger's pagan fascination with fate, it is now set free to appear as a divine poem – and is no less mysterious for being an artifact.

If one charitably thinks through the metaphysical tradition rather than borrowing from it and then looking for problems within it (as when it elevates form over being or even equates them, to the point that being itself is simply a representation corresponding to a human or divine subject) one is therefore not obliged to overcome metaphysics or, more modestly, to “leave it to itself.”<sup>70</sup> For, rightly understood and carried out, philosophical metaphysics delivers one into the openness of the mystery of being *between* essence and existence, form and being, each of which taken by itself can startle us as soon as we contemplate it – this *gift* of form, this *gift* of being – in every thing. And if *this* is metaphysics, then it precisely cannot be overcome, being implied in every experience of the beautiful, whose form entrances us and whose gratuity startles us. Moreover, it must not be overcome, lest one do away with the very wonder of being whose loss Heidegger himself laments. Yet, notwithstanding the injustices of his critique, Christian theology owes Heidegger a debt of gratitude for helping Christian metaphysics to remember what could be called the first grace, namely, the grace of *being*, and with it the grace of seeing the differential relation (and hence analogy!) between Being (which is no thing) and beings; moreover, for helping Christian metaphysics to think with him and past him to the true meaning of metaphysics and to the true meaning of Being as that which is not only different from beings, but so different from them as to be detached even from itself. In other words, one must go beyond Heidegger to a *properly metaphysical* understanding of Being as that which exists kenotically *beyond* its *nature* (Phil. 2:6f.) and therein *manifests its nature* as love.

Turning now to Jean-Luc Marion, we would seem to be that much closer to the goal of a properly Christian metaphysics, since Marion too wants to go beyond Heidegger, and since he does so – admirably wrestling with Heidegger and in many ways overcoming him – chiefly by attending to what Heidegger left unthought, namely, love;<sup>71</sup> indeed, by taking us *beyond being* and the entire discourse about it, with which Heidegger was idolatrously concerned, *to love*, love being, following Paul, the *higher* way (1 Cor. 12:31ff.), since love, being freely given, *need not be*. Thus, for Marion, drawing on the late Schelling, the *Liebesfrage* eclipses the *Seinsfrage* – and therewith, too, Heidegger's pagan fascination with fate [*Schicksal*]. All of which makes Marion, unlike Heidegger, a genuinely Christian philosopher and phenomenologist, whom no Catholic theologian can help but appreciate and admire.

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<sup>69</sup> Whether in view of the real distinction one subsequently affirms a hidden explanation for it, confessing with Thomas and Przywara, *Adoro te devote, latens Deitas*, or refuses one, is not so much a matter of thought, since thought of itself can go no farther, as it is a matter of faith, which is to say that Heidegger, in refusing faith in the Creator, is just as much a believer as Aquinas, however different in kind, whether he be a believer in Being or in his own mythology of the *Geviert*.

<sup>70</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denkens* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1969), 25.

<sup>71</sup> See Marion's beautiful piece, “Christian Philosophy and Charity,” *Communio* 19 (1992): 465-73.

Yet, just when it appears that Marion might help advance the cause of Christian metaphysics (and I still believe that he can), we have to confront the fact that, when it comes to metaphysics, there is little difference between him and Heidegger. Indeed, he accepts wholesale Heidegger's critique of metaphysics and call to overcome it, seeing in the "God" of metaphysics an idol that can be captured by our concepts, a "God" who far from being God, *cannot help but be* the foundation, linchpin, or capstone of the world as an *ens supremum, ens necessarium, causa sui*, etc. But *God*, for Marion, is not only "pre-conceptual" (*unvordenklich*, to use the felicitous term of the late Schelling), which is to say that he cannot be captured in any categories *a priori*, he is even "free with regard to his own existence" (again borrowing from the late Schelling).<sup>72</sup> Thus, if *God* is to be more than "God," i.e., an idol of reason, God needs to be liberated not only from every necessity and requirement of being a ground that would satisfy our reasoning gaze, but liberated even more drastically from being itself. And so, with the help of Pseudo-Dionysius (as is only appropriate for a French philosopher), Marion suggests that we need to go beyond Aquinas and the whole of scholastic metaphysics to a non-idolatrous understanding of God *beyond* or – even more provocatively – *without* Being. By the same token, he argues that phenomenology should replace metaphysics as the new "first philosophy": "General metaphysics, like *ontologia*, ought therefore to give way to a general phenomenology of the donation of every being-as-given."<sup>73</sup> This, Marion suggests, would be the better way, the better prolegomenon, to theology: a way paved not by the metaphysical concept of a necessary ground, which approaches theology with stipulations as to who or what God can be, but by a comparatively modest phenomenology that can span the (analogical?) difference between the natural givenness of everyday phenomena (as studied primarily by philosophy) and the supernatural gift of the saturated phenomenon (as studied primarily by theology).

Leaving aside the considerable question as to whether divine love can be something other than (or beyond) divine being, as though love were not precisely the nature, the being, the essence, of God<sup>74</sup>; and leaving aside the inextricability of metaphysics and phenomenology in any consideration of "*being-as-given*"; and leaving aside the question just raised as to whether Marion has simply transposed the analogy of being into an analogy of the gift – given that he builds upon Heidegger as an "incomparable guide,"<sup>75</sup> Marion's critique of metaphysics is arguably the more important for Christian theology in our time and therefore warrants careful consideration. But once again, *what exactly do we mean by metaphysics?*

If by metaphysics we mean "onto-theology," and by that we mean a closed system that even revelation cannot disrupt and into which revelation in Procrustean fashion it is made to fit, then Marion (and Heidegger) are right. But who is to say that metaphysics *must* be defined in this way? What if according to the *best* of the Christian metaphysical

<sup>72</sup> See Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being: Hors-Texte*, trans. Thomas Carlson (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 2.

<sup>73</sup> See Marion, "Metaphysics and Phenomenology," 287. See also Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given*, and, most recently, his Gifford Lectures, *Givenness and Revelation*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>74</sup> For an appreciative but sober critique, see Kenneth L. Schmitz, "The God of Love," *The Thomist* 57 (July 1993): 495–508. For the most trenchant criticism thus far, see Lorenz B. Puntel, *Sein und Gott* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2010), 313–426.

<sup>75</sup> Marion, "La Fin de la Fin de la Métaphysique," 23.

tradition, God is more – infinitely more, *semper maior* – than the metaphysical capstone of a closed system? And what if Thomas himself turns out to be a quintessentially apophatic theologian in the tradition of the Areopagite, which, of course, he is. Indeed, what if, as Marion has been increasingly willing to admit, Thomas proves to be an *exception* to the definition of metaphysics that originated with him, even and precisely with regard to the problem of causality and the reciprocal founding of being and beings? As Marion himself observes in the 1991 preface to the English edition of *God without Being* in a gracious concession to his Thomistic critics:

[Thomas] does not chain God to Being because the divine *esse* immeasurably surpasses (and hardly maintains an *analogia* with) the *ens commune* of creatures, which are characterized by the real distinction between *esse* and their essence, whereas God, and He alone, absolutely merges with *esse*: God is expressed as *esse*, but this *esse* is expressed only of God, not of the beings of metaphysics. In *this* sense, Being does not erect an idol before God, but saves his distance.<sup>76</sup>

Understandably, given popular (mis)understandings of analogy as nothing more than a kind of “similitude” and the metaphysical linkage this suggests, Marion is cautious about the use of analogy to describe the relation between *esse* and *ens commune*. Yet, *nota bene*, what Marion affirms here as the genuine teaching of Aquinas is precisely what Erich Przywara understood by the *analogia entis* – not an analogy that captures God within metaphysics, but an analogy that ultimately “explodes the limits of every metaphysics as such,” yet without evacuating philosophical metaphysics of its implicit ordering to theology. As Przywara strikingly put it in a late essay from 1956, entitled “Metaphysics, Religion, Analogy”:

“analogy as metaphysics” and “analogy as religion” are related to one another by a “similarity, however great” (to the point that every age exhibits forms of “religious metaphysics” and “metaphysical religion”), yet in such a way that the “ever greater dissimilarity” nevertheless proves to be ultimate: in the “ever greater God,” who explodes the limits of every metaphysics as such, and even within the realm of religion itself uproots every “rootedness” and lifts it into a condition of “pure hanging.”<sup>77</sup>

In the midst of a complex argument Przywara is speaking here of an analogy between two different analogies, one proper to metaphysics and one proper to religion, but his point is nevertheless clear: the analogy between (philosophical) metaphysics and religion (theology) is not so much a passage as it is a passing over, which implies a radical disjunction. For as one passes over from philosophical metaphysics with its grounds and causes into the proper mystery of religion, one is left hanging or suspended in God with no metaphysical ground beneath one’s feet. As Przywara put it many years earlier, “It is the mystery of Augustine’s favorite phrase from the Psalms: *adhaerere Deo*. ‘To be suspended in God’<sup>78</sup> means that he who clings has only an ‘abyss of emptiness’ beneath him.”<sup>79</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Marion, *God without Being*, xxvi.

<sup>77</sup> Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 427.

<sup>78</sup> Trans.: “Hangen in...”: literally, “hanging in” or “depending from” (like a picture hung upon a hook).

<sup>79</sup> Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 269.

But for Przywara even this is not enough, since the Augustinian analogy is still situated “within the ‘similarity, however great’ of a ‘God more inward than my inmost’ (as a ‘similarity, however great’ between ‘my inmost’ and ‘God more inward’).”<sup>80</sup> And so, if we are to appreciate the full dynamic range of Catholic metaphysics, in its resonance between Augustine and Thomas, we have to pass beyond Augustine to Thomas, who emphasizes even more than Augustine does the ever greater dissimilarity between (philosophical) metaphysics and religion: “not only because God is the transcendent unity of the antitheses of the universe, which already within the universe constitute something incomprehensible, but also because here the only thing that is ‘inmost’ is a pure ‘hanging in God (as in the incomprehensible).”<sup>81</sup> In other words, Przywara thinks that Thomas makes it even clearer than Augustine does that the entire universe is suspended between nothing and the Creator out of nothing<sup>82</sup> – even more emphatically leaving no metaphysical ground on which to stand: neither any ground in a Neo-Platonic doctrine of emanation, nor in any Augustinian exemplarism, which tends to see the world “as a direct ‘image and likeness’ of the divine,”<sup>83</sup> much less any ground secured by a univocal understanding of God as *causa prima*. Indeed, as Marion himself notes in a further clarification of his views, “Thomas Aquinas does not so much submit God to efficient causality in the way in which subsequent metaphysics has understood its concept as he reinterprets the causal relation between the created and the uncreated according to the demands of analogy.”<sup>84</sup>

##### 5. *Toward a Christo-Analogical Metaphysics*

Marion’s mention of analogy in these clarifications (even if it is “hardly” an analogy), and the softening of his stance toward Thomistic metaphysics in general, are critical to the rest of this proposal, because they admit the possibility of the kind of *analogical metaphysics* with which the rest of this essay (and the subsequent) will be concerned. For what I mean by analogy, following Przywara, is precisely what Marion would seem to allow: not an analogy that on the basis of the similarity of creation to God would give one some kind of “standing” before God, say, according to the scholastic axiom *omne agens agit sibi simile*, but an analogy that by emphasizing the ever greater dissimilarity between God and creation, leaves one suspended in a “suspended middle” (to use Przywara’s term) not only between one’s essence and existence, but between nothing and the Creator out of nothing. In fact, at one point Marion invokes precisely the formula from the IV Lateran Council that Przywara considered to be the magisterial definition and summary of the *analogia entis: inter creatorem et creaturam non potest tanta similitudo notari, quin inter eos major sit dissimilitudo notanda* (Denz. 806).<sup>85</sup> All of which suggests deeper sympathies between these two Catholic philosophers, and between

<sup>80</sup> Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 427.

<sup>81</sup> Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 427.

<sup>82</sup> Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 237.

<sup>83</sup> Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 428.

<sup>84</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, “Saint Thomas d’Aquin et l’onto-théo-logie,” *Revue Thomiste* 1 (1995): 31–66, newly translated and included as chapter eight in the second edition of *God without Being* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 199–236 (217).

<sup>85</sup> See Erich Przywara “In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of ‘Negative Theology,’” in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, ed. John Caputo and Michael Scanlon (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 39.

metaphysics and phenomenology in general, than Marion's strictly phenomenological, anti-metaphysical stance, on the face of it, allows. For just as a properly analogical metaphysics has room for phenomenology, even as a necessary moment within it,<sup>86</sup> phenomenology can only for so long bracket the question of being and still be considered philosophy.

But if analogy is back in play, not as attenuating apophatic theology, so much as calling for it from within the similitude it maintains, what then of the much-disputed word "metaphysics"? At the end of the day it would seem to be a matter of semantics. If we follow Heidegger (and Marion) and define metaphysics reductively as "onto-theology," then we run into the same problems they have legitimately identified, and so one might be tempted to abandon it. But as should by now be clear, this definition is a caricature of the Catholic metaphysical tradition, suitable perhaps for facile denunciations and for dismissing millennia of thought with a wave of the hand, but hardly what Przywara – arguably the greatest and most creative synthesizer of the Catholic metaphysical tradition from Augustine to Nicholas of Cusa – meant by it. For what the *best* of the Catholic metaphysical tradition means by metaphysics is not a closed system in which God figures as the intelligible capstone of the universe (in the way that Aristotle's god is immanent to the cyclical universe it causes by the rotary motion of thinking itself), but precisely the meta-physical going beyond every such system to the God who is not only beyond all beings, but also beyond all thought; a metaphysics whose final determination lies not in what we can grasp but in what we cannot. In the words of Augustine, which Przywara frequently cites as an axiom, *si comprehendis non est Deus*.<sup>87</sup>

All of which suggests that there *is* a way to do metaphysics otherwise – a way that was taken by Przywara, Heidegger's Jesuit alter ego, prior to Heidegger's critique of onto-theology, and remains impervious to it.<sup>88</sup> One must simply underscore that Catholic metaphysics is not just philosophical metaphysics, which can perhaps be construed as onto-theology. Rather, precisely because it is an *analogical* metaphysics, it consists in an analogy *between* philosophical and theological metaphysics, whereby the former is led beyond itself and its own light into the dazzling darkness of the Areopagite. As Przywara puts it, presenting the analogy between them as a rite of passage from the profane into the sacred, it is a *reductio in mysterium*: "It is a *re-ductio in fieri*, an incursion

<sup>86</sup> See Przywara's late essay from 1957, "Phenomenology, Realogy, Relationology," in *Analogia Entis*, 463-79.

<sup>87</sup> Augustine, *Serm.* CVII, iii, 5 [if you understand it, it is not God].

<sup>88</sup> As Przywara put it as early as 1925, anticipating Heidegger's criticism of European rationalism, "The quintessence of humanity, its inner unity, is God. God is nothing but the essential ground of humanity. It is therefore clear that God arises [with] creation; he has no other meaning but to be the inner ground of the being of creation and the inner [essence] of humanity. God – to put it pointedly – is the world, is humanity. Through a slow process, this conception of European rationalism is then incorporated into the philosophy of religion proper: from the so-called universal religious theism up to Schleiermacher." See Erich Przywara, "Die religiöse Krisis in der Gegenwart und der Katholizismus," reprinted in *Katholische Krise*, ed. Bernard Gertz (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1967), 42. Przywara then goes on to criticize precisely what Heidegger would later call "onto-theology" (e.g., in Leibniz, in modern science, in Kant), for which God is nothing but the "inner ground" of the world's teleology or lawfulness or the harmony of virtue and happiness. "In the end God is simply and solely there to connect the oppositions of world and humanity. And so it is now self-evident that this entire development concludes with Schleiermacher's philosophy of religion, where God is nothing but the unity of the universe...God is world. The actual calamity of this philosophy of religion, however...is that it has made its way into religion itself" (42f.). The notion that Przywara was Heidegger's alter ego is from a conversation with Eberhard Jüngel.

of the bright corona of the conceptual into the dark center; and, in that it is a *re-ductio*, it is a being led along paths according to a plan. It is in this form that concept and mystery are connected along the path that leads from the philosophical into the theological.<sup>89</sup>

But even this is only the threshold of the mystery, not the mystery itself, because theological metaphysics is not just philosophical metaphysics writ large, extended to infinity, according to a prior philosophical understanding of God as *ens infinitum*. In other words, it does not consist simply in the recognition that God is ever greater (*Deus semper maior*) than we are, and that there is therefore always more to God than one can comprehend. Even this understanding, inasmuch as it is a *prior* understanding, stands *sous rature*. And so one must underscore that what is meant by analogy is not a sliding scale – no genuine analogy is – but rather a manner of similitude within what is more fundamentally a *radical* difference, as “the positive commonality of the *ad aliquid unum* is led beyond itself into the genuinely Areopagatic ‘dazzling darkness’ of the *diversas proportiones* – into an ‘ever greater dissimilarity’: *creaturae...quamvis aliquam Dei similitudinem gerant in seipsis, tamen maxima dissimilitudo subest.*”<sup>90</sup> In other words, any last conceptual hold that the creature might presume to have on God must be broken. Specifically, one must come to understand (objectively) that no creature *qua creature* can traverse the analogy of being, and that the abyss separating God from creaturely being can be crossed only by grace. Equally, one must be *affected* (subjectively) by the apophatic knowledge to which one has attained, in an experience of what Cusanus and Hamann, looking back to Socrates, meant by learned ignorance, which is something *toto caelo* different from a glib concession and more like what Hamann called a *descensus ad inferos* of self-knowledge.<sup>91</sup> For only then, when one has come to understand that this ignorance (paradoxically) is wisdom, and that the height of comprehension is (paradoxically) a *being comprehended* (cf. 1 Cor. 8:2-3), is one ready to be grasped *by* God rather than attempting to grasp him as before (Gen. 3:6; cf. Phil. 3:12); only then is one ready to be led by the hand like a child (cf. John 21:18), understanding that becoming mature, however incomprehensible this may have been to Kant, means becoming dependent, and that only the humble are exalted (Matt. 19:14; 23:12). Such, one now knows, is the paradoxical way of the Logos.

And now, finally, we are ready to cross over into theological metaphysics, when all philosophical pretensions have been left behind. But, to draw a qualified comparison, if we stopped here we would still have reached only the second of the three theophanies described by Gregory of Nyssa in *The Life of Moses*.<sup>92</sup> To be sure, we would have come to know after the first theophany in the Burning Bush (concerning being) that only God really IS, compared to whom everything else is “existence only in appearance, with no self-subsisting nature.”<sup>93</sup> And after the corresponding second theophany (con-

<sup>89</sup> See Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 182, quoting Aquinas, *De ver.* q. 1. a. 10, ad 1.

<sup>90</sup> Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 232.

<sup>91</sup> See John Betz, *After Enlightenment: The Post-Secular Vision of J.G. Hamann* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 78.

<sup>92</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, trans. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 60. The comparison is wanting in that Gregory presents the advance of the soul in terms of theophanies, rather than in terms of a gradual philosophical understanding. For whatever understanding philosophy can attain in these matters (even as regards the first and second theophanies) is but a shadow of the truth as it is known by revelation to the ascetic.

<sup>93</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, 60.

cerning knowledge) we would have come to understand that true knowledge is a “seeing that consists in not seeing, because that which is sought transcends all knowledge, being separated on all sides by incomprehensibility as by a kind of darkness.”<sup>94</sup> In other words, we would have come to understand that the height of human knowledge is an apophatic knowing-not. But, however lofty such knowledge may be (as is indicated by Moses’ ascent of Mt. Sinai), we would have been initiated, as it were, only into the cloud (of paradoxes), into the dark sanctuary, which is God’s “hiding place” (Psa. 18:11), and not into the *sanctum sanctorum*, where God Is and reveals himself in his Word to those who seek him in and through the darkness.

But for philosophical metaphysics, which is already perplexed by such paradoxes, which are like so many signs adumbrating the nature of the Logos himself as *vere Deus et vere homo*, this final step is also the most difficult. For unlike philosophical metaphysics we are no longer talking about *intellectual* knowledge *about* God, but about an *experiential* knowledge of God (*cognitio Dei experimentalis*), indeed, a suffering of divine things.<sup>95</sup> And no one, except for love, except in response to the call of grace, willingly embraces suffering. Naturally, therefore, one hesitates – just as Augustine hesitated to pick up the writings of Paul<sup>96</sup> – until by grace one is led on to an encounter with the Word himself, the paradox of paradoxes, shining in the darkness (John 1:5), who was there all along the way in so many unrecognized signs (Luke 24:15), and one is necessarily taken aback (cf. John 18:6). For in a paradoxical reward for following thus far in faith, the Word now reveals that anyone worthy of him must die with him. Now, if not before, philosophical metaphysics qua philosophical metaphysics is finished. For in the brilliance of the Word it now sees all of its conceits definitively reversed. Whereas before it set out from creation and *terminated in God* as its ground, *eo ipso* remaining captive to “onto-theology,” it now sees in the light of the Logos that metaphysics *begins with God* and terminates in creation, more precisely, in the union of God and creation in Christ. Whereas before it concluded its quest *reasonably* in God as the origin (*principium*) and end (*finis*) of creation, it now sees that it must begin with the God who *freely* and *inscrutably* identifies himself with it, even to the point of taking upon himself in Christ, in a wholly gratuitous exchange, the sins of the world. In sum, whereas philosophical metaphysics aims *intentionally* from below to “above” at an abstract *ens realissimum*, theological metaphysics *follows* the stupefying, downward, kenotic movement of love, until it finds in the humility of Christ, and not in the imagined Absolute of philosophical metaphysics, the *pleroma* of the ever greater God (Col. 2:9).

It is before Christ, therefore, more than before any “unknown God” (Acts 17:23), even more than before any divine darkness of the Areopagite, that philosophical metaphysics must come to a Kierkegaardian “halt” and bend the knee (Phil. 2:10). For what is here revealed and reason alone could never fathom, not by any stretch of the philosophical imagination, is the *mysterium mysteriorum* that the ever greater God is not only beyond every opposition between infinite and finite, but also *overcomes* every such

<sup>94</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, 95.

<sup>95</sup> See Reinhard Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000).

<sup>96</sup> As Augustine narrates his experience in *Contr. Acad. II*, 25: “titubans, properans, haesitans arripio apostolulm Paulum.”

opposition – “every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God” (2 Cor. 10:5), indeed the entire history of human sin and defiance – in an *admirabile commercium* of the greatest transcendence and the greatest immanence, of the most exalted majesty and the most debased self-emptying (Phil. 2:6-10). As the letter to the Ephesians has it: “When it says, ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things” (Eph. 4:9-10). In light of revelation we thus see that the mystery of being, which is to say, the mystery of the analogy between Being and beings, the *analogia entis*, turns out to be an *analogia caritatis*, which is to say, concretely, a Christological mystery. As Przywara put it in 1939 in his *Mysterium Crucis*, which along with his *Alter und Neuer Bund* must be read in tandem with his *Analogia Entis* if one is to begin to do justice to the measure and stature of his metaphysical vision: “The ever greater God [*das Je-immer-grösser Gottes*] is revealed precisely in his ever greater self-emptying [*das Je-immer-mehr-Nichts wird*] in the mystery of redemption (Phil. 2:7), in being the one who ascends ever higher [*der Je höher Aufsteigende*] as the one who descends ever deeper [*der Je tiefer Absteigende*] (Eph. 4:9).”<sup>97</sup> Such is the Christological core of the *analogia entis*. Accordingly, following Przywara, who may be the most reliable guide in the matter of Catholic metaphysics today, looking back on its rich history and forward to its future, philosophical metaphysics is perfected in theological metaphysics, and theological metaphysics, in turn, is perfected as Christological metaphysics.

#### 6. *Dialectical Analogy: Toward an Ecumenical Metaphysics*

Now, finally, in light of Christ we can also see what the venerable word meta-physics, according to a *pros hen* analogy, really means (and compared to which the philosophical meaning of the word is only a remote analogy), namely, a “going beyond [one’s] nature” or self-transcendence.<sup>98</sup> In other words, we can see from this reversed perspective that the word metaphysics applies in the first instance to God – principally to the Father, who from eternity does not cling to his nature, but goes beyond himself in the Son; equally, to the Son, who perfectly imaging his Father does not cling to his nature as though it were a possession, but leaves it behind (Phil. 2:6f.); and by analogy to created natures, inasmuch as they, too, caught up in the fire of the mimetic Spirit of the Father and the Son, are prompted to drop their nets and follow their archetypal Logos in eucharistic self-abandonment to the Father, thereby fulfilling their Christological part in the purpose of creation to be a voluntary offering of thanksgiving (1 Cor. 15:28) and praise (Eph. 1:12). Accordingly, seen from this perspective, far from being a merely human science or intellectual exercise, metaphysics is really another word, and perhaps the highest philosophical word, for love, and God, the *primus metaphysicus*, is the only metaphysician worthy of the name.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Erich Przywara, *Crucis Mysterium. Das Christliche Heute* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1939), 48.

<sup>98</sup> Obviously, I mean the traditional, etymological meaning of the word, notwithstanding the possibility that it may originally have meant nothing more than a bibliographical designation for the body of Aristotle’s writings that followed his *Physics*.

<sup>99</sup> See Betz, “Overcoming the Forgetfulness of Metaphysics,” 92.

By the same token, we can now see more clearly in what the analogy between philosophical and theological metaphysics consists. From the vantage of the former it means the *intellectual* transcending of nature toward its origin, ground, and end: a rising up of the creature to the contemplation of its Creator. From the perspective of theology, i.e., from the perspective opened up by the incarnate Word of God, it means the *voluntary* self-transcending of divine love. And this, finally, sheds light on the *analogia entis* as a *pros hen* analogy of self-transcendence: from the slightest movement of the merest organism to the eternally ecstatic, self-transcending movement of the Trinity, which remains *in* itself by ever going *beyond* itself, i.e., by resting in love. But the *analogia entis* is not, let us recall,<sup>100</sup> a simple scale, which would make God simply the maximum of a creaturely perfection. Rather, following Przywara, it is at the end of the day an *analogia entis*, which is to say an *analogia proportionalitatis*, between two entirely different modes of being: between the trinitarian Being of God, whose essence is to ex-ist (to stand outside himself, eternally in himself and beyond himself, indeed, in himself *as* beyond himself), and the derivative being of creation whose essence is *not* to ex-ist, but to *become* by self-transcendence and participation in the divine nature what it analogically is.

In view of this gaping ontological chasm between the *diversas proportiones* philosophical metaphysics can do nothing. For we now see with even greater clarity that the *analogia* can be spanned only in Christ, who embodies it, indeed who *is* the *analogia entis*, inasmuch as he inscrutably unites divinity and humanity, Being and becoming, in himself – and not simply in a static way, but as “the Way” of the one into the other, and vice versa. In the prophetic words of Heraclitus: “The way up and the way down are one and the same.”<sup>101</sup> In other words, Christ is not simply the point at which divinity and humanity meet; he is also the *crossing* of the one into the other: the one in whom humanity perfectly transcends itself toward the Father, and the one in whom the Father perfectly transcends himself toward humanity (John 3:16; 14:9). And it is *as such* that he “holds all things together” (Col. 1:17), “spanning the entire *amplitudo mundi*,”<sup>102</sup> being not only the *allo* and the *allo*, but also the hypostatic *pros* of the *allo pros allo* of the *analogia entis*.

*Christ*, then, and no other, is the Absolute at which philosophical metaphysics unconsciously aims, because in him alone the finite is one with the infinite, becoming is one with Being, and the creature is one with the Creator, and because any other “Absolute” would not be the infinitely real and free Absolute, but would be an “Absolute” set over against the finite, and thus in some way determined by it as one object by another, as an other “being.” But, again, philosophical metaphysics qua philosophical metaphysics cannot attain to him; for such knowledge is “too wonderful for me” (Job 42:3).<sup>103</sup> Indeed, the encounter with the face of the Absolute (2 Cor. 4:6) is for philosophical metaphysics necessarily a kind of death, for “no man can see my face and live” (Exod. 33:20). And so the analogy between philosophical and theological metaphysics, which makes Catholic metaphysics *Catholic* metaphysics and not some other kind, ultimately entails a crossing

<sup>100</sup> See Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, pp. 39, 73f., 232–235.

<sup>101</sup> Diels, Fragment B 60.

<sup>102</sup> See Przywara, *Alter und Neuer Bund*, 79.

<sup>103</sup> In Cusa’s terms, such an absolute to which something could be opposed would not be the absolute maximum. See *De docta ignorantia* in Nicholas of Cusa, *Selected Spiritual Writings*, trans. H. Lawrence Bond (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 89f.

over that is also a crossing out, i.e., a rite of passage through the Cross. As Przywara puts it: "insofar as the form of the cross constitutes its ultimate form, philosophy preserves its natural form. Concretely, existing philosophy occurs as genuine philosophy within the one concrete order of sin and redemption to the degree that its operative principle is the Pauline 'dying, and yet we live' (2 Cor. 6:9)."<sup>104</sup> In other words, philosophical metaphysics is saved (and perfected) only inasmuch, i.e., according to the measure of its Christological conformation.

In the end, therefore, we are confronted with a choice: either a dialectical end(ing) of metaphysics à la Marion, such that metaphysics is gradually done away with, replaced by phenomenology as the only adequate response to the phenomenal gift of revelation, or a theological ending to metaphysics à la Przywara, whereby metaphysics is not done away with, but saved as through death. How is one to decide between them? At the end of the day it depends upon how one construes the relationship between nature and grace, or reason and faith, and whether one adopts a more Protestant dialectical approach or a more Catholic analogical approach. In order to overcome the stalemate between the confessions, however, I would suggest in the spirit of Pascal that a genuinely Catholic approach not only can but should incorporate a moment of Lutheran-Reformed dialectic as a *Wahrheitsmoment* within any analogy it maintains – whether between reason and faith, nature and grace, or here, more specifically, between philosophical and theological metaphysics. For in the absence of dialectic, one could argue, there really is no analogy, but only a disguised continuum (between nature and grace, reason and faith), and so no real difference, which any genuine analogy presupposes. But then neither is dialectic the end of analogy. Rather, dialectic is a moment of grace whereby a genuine analogy, a "dialectical analogy," understood as a *crossing out and over* of reason into faith, nature into grace, philosophical into theological metaphysics, is accomplished – a crossing over into life as through death, according to the inexorable logic of the gospel: "Unless a grain of wheat fall to the ground and die, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John. 12:24). Thus, to the proper end of Christian metaphysics we can say *with* Marion that metaphysics too must die, but equally *with* Przywara that such a death is not its end, but rather, as for the grain of wheat, the beginning of its true life.

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<sup>104</sup> Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 404.