

Editors' Note

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In the Summer of 2015 Sotiris Mitralaxis and Andrew T. J. Kaethler organized a conference held in Delphi, Greece, titled “Ontology and History: A Challenging and Auspicious Dialogue for Philosophy and Theology.” The conference brought together over sixty scholars from various parts of the globe, representing Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Protestantism—truly an ecumenical affair. The topic of the conference, which is well represented in this volume of *Forum Philosophicum*,¹ was purposefully broad because it is a question that remains open and which sits at the centre of the Christian philosophical and theological tradition. Joseph Ratzinger posited in several works that the interplay between salvation history and ontology is the most pressing concern for modern theology. In *Introduction to Christianity*—a modest title for a robust piece of theology—Ratzinger notes that early in the Christian tradition a division arose between theological metaphysics and theology of history, each seen as two different things; “people indulge either in ontological speculation or anti-philosophical theology of salvation history, thus losing in a really tragic way the original unity of Christian thought. At the start Christian thinking is neither merely ‘soteriological’ nor merely ‘metaphysical’ but molded by the unity of history and being. Here lies an important task for modern theological work, which is torn once again by this dilemma.”²

1. Hanoch Ben-Pazi’s paper was not presented at the conference, but we thought that it fitted within the theme of this volume.

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Is it impossible for being and becoming to intermingle? For the Christian tradition the answer must be “no,” for the Eternal One entered into history and became man. In Christ, God is not imprisoned in his eternity, nor is humankind imprisoned in the flux of history. Although in different ways, this is as radical today in a post-Heideggerian era as it would be for Plato, and it sets out new philosophical questions and quandaries concerning language, meaning, culture, identity, reality, and tradition. The papers in the volume, entitled “Faith in the Web of Evanescent Meaning,” engage with this massive topic from a variety of angles.

RAGNAR M. BERGEM, in his paper “Transgressions: Erich Przywara, G. W. F. Hegel, and the Principle of Non-Contradiction,” shows how Erich Przywara struggles to adapt Scholastic rationalism to a vision of reality which, after Hegel, is entangled in history. In a world that is dynamic, and is one of dynamic meanings, of essences that emanate from historically changing consciousness—whether this consciousness is one of Absolute Idea, one of God, or one involved in human description of the world—the principle of non-contradiction “as a fundamental mode of thought” has to be transgressed. Przywara views this transgression not as destructive of this principle but as revelatory of God’s active presence in history. This is how it is possible to think, through a rhythm of analogy, about the tension between existence and essence in any being. A being’s essence is both what a thing is and what it is not, since any being as such, i.e., as being, is opposed to nothingness. This opposition cannot be explained by essence, i.e., by being “that and that.” This opposition, in point of fact, reflects the ungraspable opposition between God as *esse ipsum* and nothingness. As a being is created from nothingness, its very being leads it beyond *what* it is. This is reflected in history, including human history, and “cannot be captured by a discourse governed by the law of non-contradiction.”

Proposed as an answer to the Hegelian view of history, one may see in Przywara an attempt to be truthful to the world by focusing philosophy on the manner of how we *think* about the world and what *meaning* we give to it. As one may conclude from ANNA JANI’s paper, “Historicity and Christian Life-Experience in the Early Philosophy of Martin Heidegger,” this is the kind of approach to religion and faith Heidegger engages in. Religious experience is one of the ways in which we may experience authentic life within historicity.

2. Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. Joseph Reginald Foster (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 332.

Furthermore, in the concluding paper, "Reading Heidegger Through the Cross: On Eberhard Jüngel's Heideggerian Ontology," DEBORAH CASEWELL highlights that the very idea of looking for authenticity in human life, for the essence of Dasein, is rooted in religion, to be precise, in Christian philosophy and theology. This is where Heidegger draws his notion of Dasein from. As nothingness replaces God, Dasein has to give sense to its mortality. Deborah Casewell also demonstrates how Heidegger was "re-christianized" by Jüngel—but it is worth looking into the preceding papers in this volume before pointing to Jüngel's answer. This is because the idea of Dasein finding authenticity in its existence appears, on the reading presented by Casewell, close to the idea of creating authenticity out of nothingness. Humans have only one way to do this: create quasi-realities through the meanings of our language. But this kind of eschatology and creation calls for criticism. If we create through meanings, do we not create meaning? If we can do such things through words, is the very act of using words one of veiling reality? Is the very act of reading, of receiving a message in signs, one of altering what was meant?

From this perspective, HANOCH BEN-PAZI's article, "The Immense House of Postcards: The Idea of Tradition following Levinas and Derrida," looks into tradition and the act of handing down the faith. Focused on the specifically Jewish approach to tradition as texts, it shows how the very act of reading such texts in any contemporary, but also past, context, amounts to betraying them. The contexts have been altered; in addition, the recipient is not someone to whom the message has been addressed. Following Derrida, Ben-Pazi argues that even if the recipient is a contemporary, a member of the same culture, in the reading of the text the truth conveyed by the message is not absorbed, but rather re-enacted. A message that is accepted within a faithfully preserved tradition as true is, as one could say, also re-created as true.

Does this mean that we should abandon faith in the truth and in the salutary power of any message of such kind? This is what ANTHONY SMYRNAIOS seems to suggest in the paper "From Ontology to Ontologies to Trans-Ontology: The Postmodern Narrative of History and a Trans-Theological Ludic Transhumanism." As we live in a post-modern world, a world of parallel meanings in which the revelatory power of speech cannot be separated from its inherent push to conceal, one can abandon both the idea that we pursue truth or accept any message from the past as true. The Transhumanist perspective Smyrnaios brings forth is one of reconstruction after deconstruction. This reconstruction boldly embraces

fiction and creation out of meanings as replacement for the pursuit of truth. This makes any message, from the past, or about the *eschata*, vain. In such a scheme eschatology is brought forth by technology which will re-create humans as a new Trans-human reality, while making it possible for its members to live in their own fictive worlds.

A question can be raised about that, and it is one Jüngel, discussed by Casewell, would raise. How can we make sense of suffering in such a world? Can we remove it by an act of fictional creation? Can we read it out of our life by giving it conflicting names and by erasing the sense of the very word “suffering”? How can we make sense of that which is larger than us, of an irrational reality, be it one of war, or one of the irrevocable laws governing the universe? Eugene Thacker, in the Preface to his recent book *In the Dust of This Planet*, warns that we cannot tame with the games of words the irrational whose mere size horrifies us.³ But it is precisely at this point that Jüngel’s account of the experience of the Cross, described by Casewell, needs to be brought forward. Jüngel stresses that the experience of the Cross cannot be reduced to nonsense. Neither can it be reduced to a sea of fluid and evanescent senses. This is because the Cross is the actual and not the declarative death of God, and the latter, as one could say, is the ultimate non-sense. Such non-sense is also an experience re-lived individually and collectively, as the fictional world—a world that we created for ourselves out of the meanings of our language—and its institutions succumb to senseless violence and war, mirroring the collapse of Europe under the Nazi fiction.

Most importantly—a reader of Casewell’s text might say, looking at it through the context of the other essays published in this issue of *Forum*—relieving the experience of the Cross does not consist in reading and interpreting a text of the past. Neither does it consist in looking for sense in the historicity of religious experiences. Participation in the Cross is given to us in the events of our individual and communal life. It has to be accepted or rejected. It cannot be made sense of, as pain and horror are just senseless. As Jüngel emphasizes, accepting the Cross means also becoming passive in respect to God. The Christian life is the way of receptivity—“be it done unto me according to your word”—and it is only in this way, this posture of openness and receptivity, that we hear His voice. In receiving He who is, was, and will be we rest in the Goodness who overcomes the tyranny of choice. We might add that this is how faith is given birth, as we

3. Cf. Eugene Thacker, *In the Dust of This Planet*, vol. 1 of *Horror of Philosophy* (Winchester; Washington, DC: Zero Books, 2011), 4–9.

allow the words written down in the past to soak through our experience and finally make sense. Such faith frees us from the tyranny of meanings we create. In fact, belief is just that; it is trusting in something that one has not made—and it is only by standing on something other than the self that meaning becomes possible.