

Stanton Lecture 1: The Return of Metaphysics in the 21st Century

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This series of lectures will not be concerned with either the philosophy of religion or philosophical theology. Instead, they will be about the relationship between philosophy and theology. In terms of this relationship, the initial practical question, from the point of view of theology, is this: if theologians wish to invoke the aid of philosophy, in whatever manner this might be, to which sort of philosophy should they turn? Should they turn to the philosophies that enjoy good repute in their own culture, on the assumption that they are admired exercises of human reason, procedurally neutral from a religious perspective?

This question is usually answered in the affirmative, whether deliberately or by default. Thus today, much theology, doctrinal as well as philosophical, tries to relate itself either to the ‘analytic’ tradition, or to the unfortunately-named ‘continental’ tradition.

The alternative approach is for theology to continue to relate itself to what one some writers, with good reason, have termed the ‘perennial philosophy’, the legacy of Plato and Aristotle, with which Christian theology has been intertwined almost from the outset. Those who adopt this approach do not do so because they have come to the conclusion that this tradition embodies the finest exercise of an undeniably objective rational method. Rather they do so for two reasons: first, because they regard this philosophy not as the repository of the brilliant theoretical wheezes of one man and his followers, but rather as the gradually accumulating result of a tried and tested traditional wisdom. They also regard this as a peculiarly Western wisdom which binds together thought about nature, about personal love, about art, about goodness and about divine transcendence. In that combination, they consider, there lies a peculiar key to truth and the good life which has been entrusted to us by our own specific past.

Secondly, those who favour this approach also hold that the Socratic theoretical synthesis of the cosmological, the political, the emotive, the artistic and the religious is in harmony with the wisdom of the Bible, even though the latter raises its insights

to an altogether different spiritual pitch which entailed a radical rupture in western history and in western theoretical reflection. Despite this rupture it is held, in continuity with the views of those men and women who first formulated Christian doctrine, that this enterprise involved a taking forwards of the philosophical legacy and that this was indispensable for the elaboration of Christian theology, however much the latter transcended the insights and perspectives of the people of pagan classical times.

One problem with the first approach to the relationship between theology and philosophy is that it assumes the agnostic neutrality, as regards religious belief, of the reason exercised within modern philosophy, which is 'secular' in the sense of being supposedly independent of such belief, though not necessarily in the sense of hostility towards it. But in reality, many seemingly innocent 'rational' assumptions of secular philosophy bear traces of theologies that we might, but also might not want, for specifically theological reasons, to embrace. Or else they bare traces of an explicitly atheistic or overly dogmatic agnostic rejection of all theology and all modes of religious belief.

A second problem with the first approach is that it tends to encourage a certain dualism as between the content of faith and the form of philosophical expression. This dualism is just as rationalist as it is fideistic: it sees faith as essentially complete without the reflections of reason and it sees reasoning as but a kind of instrumentally convenient mode of apologetic exposition. It will not allow that all faith is already a kind of reasoning, or that the embrace of a certain philosophy necessarily refracts the very content of faith.

It is for these two reasons that in these lectures I will be recommending the second approach as the only valid one from a theological viewpoint. For here we find just the opposite case, in both respects. First, Christian tradition has for long centuries proved the marriage between Greek Socratic reason and Biblical faith. It trusts both its ways and its ends. Secondly, the Christianising of Greek philosophy has ensured a mutual permeation which ensures a certain sort of organic harmony between the interiority of belief and the exteriority of cognitive articulation.

Where are we most to locate this marriage? One can suggest, in the thought of Thomas Aquinas, not because he should be treated like a self-contained initiating authority, a sort of Catholic Luther or Calvin, nor even because he is necessarily the greatest theologian, for Augustine may well be considered the bigger genius. Instead, Aquinas is central because through him seem to flow the most crucial currents: a neoplatonic fusion of Aristotle with Plato, the Biblical narratives, Augustine, Dionysius and the Byzantine tradition. To read Aquinas and grasp his spirit one must read back into these sources themselves and also one must read his later true legacy – which may well lie in the current of German Dominican mysticism and its Renaissance heirs rather in that of those who later called themselves Thomists. Finally, we can only today develop this spirit by engaging after all, but in a theologically critical and not naive spirit, with secular philosophies which may point in the wrong direction in the main and yet still offer us much guidance in their side-currents.

But an immediate objection can be raised to my stated preference. Do not these cards which I have already laid on the table condemn me to a surrender of all apologetic trumps in the cultural game? For a supposedly neutral philosophical reason is a public property and Christianity needs to be able to speak this language if it hopes to persuade reflective people. To this objection I would offer the following slightly devious response.

Secular reason is like secularity itself: it is a historical product of Christianity. The latter desacralised pagan political power which thenceforwards could no longer claim direct divine approval, even though it still required divine and ecclesial legitimation. Eventually, this new space of the *saeculum* sloughed off this requirement and announced its own immanent autonomy. Once it has done so, to claim Christian paternity sounds like a feeble apologetic gesture, in league with the genetic fallacy. But all recent history gives the lie to that: for we have seen Hitler, Stalin, Thatcher and Bush absolutising strictly secular perspectives as if they were indeed religious. In this way, the autonomously secular always threatens to revert to the pagan. So never mind the implications of genesis: it would seem that without an openness to transcendent critique, the secular will tend to idolise its own critical impulse and become blind to its own presumptions and limitations.

But something similar applies to secular reason, which was initially philosophical reason. Pagan philosophy, even pagan materialism, was mostly religious: it involved asceticism, moral codes and training, sacred ablutions and sometimes ritual sacrifices. Christianity decided, for obvious reasons, to try to siphon off pagan philosophy from pagan belief and practice, though unlike Islam it also decided to siphon off pagan literature, and just for this reason had to integrate far more of pagan belief than one might imagine. Yet even if the pagan gods never quite died till about 1810 or so, when Wordsworth bemoaned the death of Triton, philosophy had long been secularised by Christianity. However, by this gesture Christianity at first partially consigned philosophy to the past. Aquinas *commented* on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*: he didn't write his own: that didn't happen till the year 1600 or under the authorship of Francisco Suarez amongst others, at the same time that the word *ontologia* was coined. And back in the Patristic period Augustine had been quite happy to speak of theology itself as a *philosophia christianis*, subsuming and surpassing the pagan theoretical product.

So how *did* the good Jesuit Suarez come to do anything so neo-pagan as write a 'metaphysics'. It takes historians of thought at least 500 pages to explain that one, but they usually mention as one decisive factor the growth of a *theological* separation between nature and grace and so concomitantly between reason and faith. As Charles Taylor has explained in the case of secularity in general, it was just not the case that secular autonomy arose because secular forces rebelled against sacred ones, leaving the secular behind as a 'natural' residue, once a whole lot of weird stuff had been at last 'subtracted'. Instead, in the case of the secular in general, but also in the case of secular reason, the 'natural' was constructed by some theologians as a kind of desacralised backdrop which would all the better secure the absoluteness of the divine will, the futility and vanity of death-haunted life on earth, the direct orientation of the mind to the spiritual unmediated by the material and finally the total, out-of-the-dark-blue gratuity of the shining light of grace. (The Oxford colouring here is historically accurate.) If nature and human society were now so drained of symbolic participation in the divine life, then they could be suitably studied by a philosophical reason equally drained of that participatory 'illumination' by the light of the divine *Logos* that had been taught by both Augustine and Aquinas.

This is part of the reason why Suarez could now write his own metaphysics. Philosophy had become autonomous, not because pipe-smoking men in tweed had rebelled against men in clerical gowns, but because the men in clerical gowns had opened up that space for their own peculiar religious reasons. So the question becomes, were these reasons good ones and does an autonomous philosophy start to lack the very thing that once preserved its sober rational modesty when it is no longer *ancilla theologiae*, no longer ultimately orientated towards the service of revelation, but now works only for itself? But again one might here want to call the foul of genetic fallaciousness. And once more, leaving that issue in suspense, I would retort that we do not lack recent evidence that an autonomous philosophy will dangerously assume for itself an oracular mantle: one can name at least Comte, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud and.....I was going to add Dawkins, but he is no such august and in many ways admirable villain.

It seems, however, that the issues of genesis will not so easily go away. For now we face a really startling realisation: the history of modern philosophy since the beginning of the emergence of its autonomy -- roughly since 1300 [(though there were intimations earlier and development thereafter was gradual)] -- can only be narrated in one of three ways. *Either* it is a history of neutral rational progress, assisted by its gradual assumption of autonomy, *or* it is the story of the fortunate triumph of cognitive atheism, *or else yet again*, it mainly rests (for all its perverse accumulation of insight) upon what is, from a theological point of view, a mistake -- not primarily of reason, but of reason and faith taken together and *more primarily* one of faith.

And the third conclusion *has* to be arrived at by those theologians who select as their cognitive partner the *philosophia perennis*. For from their point of view, the autonomy of philosophy, just like the autonomy of modern, secular politics, is only opened up by faith-perspectives which, with no adequate or even false theological *reasons*, denied the inherited Patristic view that all human life, including the life of the mind, is paradoxically orientated by nature to the reception of a totally gratuitous gift which nonetheless alone allows human beings to reach their one true end, their only defining beatitude. Equally, this faith-perspective tended to deny or to play down

the idea that there are intrinsic and actually necessary structures in the created realm which could not entirely be otherwise because they participate-in and show forth by remote analogy the very nature of the triune god. Was this a matter of rational progress? It was surely rather the ousting of a more festive and cosmos-inhabiting mode of religiosity by a far more austere one.

Despite all that, the overwhelming view of modern philosophers is that the post-1300 tale is one of the neutral progress of reason, not one of either theological deviation or outright atheism. Certainly an *emancipation* from religion is involved, but the tonality is agnostic, even respectfully so. This tale of progress gets narrated in two different variants by analytic and continental philosophers. But, remarkably or not, the two variants are entirely compatible: indeed they are but two halves of the same story, which has the same time-line, the same hero and the same – not villains, but patronisable if respectable devotees of the perennial path.

It is of course notoriously true that, with the exception of the likes of Wilfred Sellars, Richard Rorty and Bernard Williams, analytic philosophers are proud of their total ignorance of the history of ideas, or the history of anything else save things like playing cards and voting practices. So it is not surprising that the analytic take on the history of modern philosophy comes mainly from Finns and a Frenchman, Frédéric Nef, plus one German philosophical hybrid, Ludger Honnefelder. Their story of progress centres on the question of *modality*. The hero of this story is no longer Kant, who is now demoted to next most important character in the supporting cast, but Duns Scotus. It was he who most of all is deemed to have shifted the focus of metaphysics away from the primacy of the actual, as in Aristotle, towards the primacy of the *possible*.

To explain this properly would require another 500 pages, but briefly: Scotus, unlike Aquinas, no longer thought of ‘contingency’ as simply the dependency of creatures upon God, but thought that in order for something to be contingent, something else must always be equally possible, tracking the real like an uneasy shadow. Furthermore, by a curious inversion Scotus made this lurking shadow of the possible more primary than the actuality whose light one might have supposed to have cast this shadow in the first place.

To explain this drastic change one must first understand Scotus's attitude towards metaphysics as a whole. He no longer thought that metaphysics should be problematically divided, as for Aristotle – or at least for the student record of his lectures given the title *Metaphysica* -- between the height of God and the generality of being, but should be only about the latter, yet with God as the 'transcendent' height of infinite being himself thereby included within the field of being which is 'transcendental' to all the categories of finite being. Being is for Scotus only not a genus insofar as it is initially split between the infinite and the finite, before finite being is then univocally, and no longer analogically distributed amongst the finite categories as a shared property along with the unified, true, good, thingy (*res* or *quid*) and somethingy (*aliquid*), to name the other usual medieval transcendental terms.

This doctrine of the transcendentals was common currency for the scholastics, but Duns Scotus thereby made *transcendens* as transcendental commonness *prior to* and *cognitively independent of*, *transcendens* as divine height. The transcendental has replaced the transcendent as the polar point of cognitive reference. For Aquinas, by contrast, although metaphysics was about being, finite being was not completely in existence of itself and pointed to God as the participated cause of all 'common being'. For this reason Aquinas explained the limited actuality of finite things by their causal derivation from God who is 'fully in act'. So for Aquinas what is transcendentially common has ultimately to be explained by transcendent sublimity. But for Scotus the common, though caused indeed by the infinite God, is cognitively self-explicative. And this means that what is 'transcendental' to all finite beings is no longer a shared actuality which participates in the *actus purus* of God, but is rather all the conditions of possibility for their actual instantiation – their being, coherence, distinctness and so forth must all be first possible before they can be realised in existence.

The Kantian phraseology of 'condition of possibility' is historically justified, because an entire double current of both possibilism and transcendentalism flows from Scotus through Suarez through Wolff to Kant himself. As Honnfelder remarks, the point is not that Kant rejected metaphysics, but that an autonomous metaphysics was *already* the name of the critical current that had begun to emancipate itself from theology. So Kant did not overturn Aquinas or Aristotle or Plato, none of whose ideas

he either really knew about or considered; he merely elaborated Scotus. Kant's critical turn was not then any less, but *still more* metaphysical, and he continued to define ontology in terms of 'things' which are possible. The only new twist here added – though it proved fateful -- was that the conditions of possibility are now the conditions of the possibility of knowledge for the knowing subject. But even this twist was merely the consummation of a drift inaugurated by the Scotist univocity of being, for once finite being had been included in the fully knowable (as something which 'is' equally with the infinite God) then it had been already equated with the 'representable, such that the turn to the subject was now latent. Kant merely consummates the complete transformation of metaphysics into epistemology. But by this transformation it has not stopped being also metaphysics.

If the analytic story pivots about modality, the continental one pivots about ontology. Although the same hero, Duns Scotus, has now sometimes become an anti-hero, he is still really the hero, as I will try to explain.

For this story, which is a drastic retiming of the story first told by Heidegger, Duns Scotus (and not Plato, Aristotle and Aquinas etc) first inaugurates 'onto-theology', or 'metaphysics' in the modern sense, because he at once places God within the prior transcendental field of being and yet makes being fully comprehensible in terms of infinite being that must now be regarded as but an ontic 'instance' of being and no longer as ontological being itself or *esse ipsum*, as Aquinas has it. This story appears to render Scotus the villain, and yet its narrators for the most part in their own philosophies still in effect see Scotus as the liberator of being, because later, with Spinoza and then Heidegger, transcendental being itself gets construed as the ontological rather than as an abstracted generalisation of the ontic, and being is identified with immanence, without reference a transcendent deity. Even those philosophers who believe in transcendence, like Jean-Luc Marion, accept this *schema*, but now identify God with a unilateral and non-participated gift 'beyond being'. This move is itself sometimes seen as anticipated by Scotus's prioritisation of will and charity over the understanding.

The two stories are but one, if one grasps that the point of linkage lies in the shifts in usage of the word *transcendens*. If this now denotes spatial scope before height and

eventually scope without height, then this implies at once a flattened ‘univocity of being’ and a construal of being in terms of ‘its own’ possibility, without any initial reference to God. A thing now exists or it does not; there are no longer any analogical degrees of being and a thing exists first of all because it is possible to exist – though that must always mean that something else was possible. Since to change one circumstance of course means that one must change everything else, this eventually gave rise in the late 17th C, with Leibniz, to the theory of possible worlds, allied to the view that things within these worlds transit from possibility to actualisation entirely by virtue of ‘sufficient reason’ – or, one might say, with so powerful a degree of virtuality, that the possible, as once for Avicenna, ‘insists itself’ into being.

Possibilism, univocity of being and transcendentalism are therefore generally regarded as a threefold objective progress in reason by modern secular thought. To this triad we must add a fourth: the idea of ‘objective being’. For Aristotle and Aquinas, to know something was to receive into one’s mind as *species* an *eidos* or ‘form’ that first exists in combination with matter. But once the analogical links of fittingness or *conveniens* and the inner actual necessities of reality have been undone, all that we can directly know is no longer the external world but that which Scotus called *ens objectivum*, a mere ‘object’ of knowledge in our minds, which may or may not accurately ‘picture’, like a detached Kodak snapshot, the world ‘out there’.

But are these four things certainly the marks of progress? Or are they not the traces of specific theological preference which has evolved into anti-theological prejudice? Could one not suggest in each of these cases that the opposite view is either equally or else more plausible?

For do not our ideas of the possible merely limp after the constantly new disclosures of the actual? And can one rationally rule out the idea that finite things, which can never be responsible for their own being, merely ‘participate’ in varying degrees, in a real fullness of being which is self-subsistent? Or, in other words, how can we be sure that the ‘that’ of existence is separable from the ‘why’ of existence? Similarly, how can we be sure whether the ‘that’ of transcendental commonality is really separable from a height of transcendent derivation, given that this commonality, along with the specified categories of being like substance, accident and relation,

exceeds anything measurable by natural science? As we shall later see, a prior ‘possibility’ has its own conundra which may not be any greater than the Thomist linkage of the metaphysical as the transcendently general with the literally metaphysical as transcendent height – the realm of God, angels and immortal souls. Without that dimension of metaphysics, the dimension of height, Aristotle himself had declared that the other dimension of metaphysics, the dimension of categorial breadth, could simply be hived off to Physics. Presumably he meant that without any reference to God and separate spirit, the categories could potentially be naturalised as indicating the broadest scope and character of material habits and forces.

Finally, the only salve against a counter-intuitive cognitive scepticism, as analytic philosophers like Putnam and McDowell now half-suggest, may prove to be the idea that the meanings of things are initially out there in the shapes and patterns of the world before they migrate and develop inside our *psyches*. But such an idea, when fully-fledged, must inevitably tend to imply that intelligent spirit and formed matter are orientated towards each other within a designed and teleological cosmos.

For these reasons one might want to argue that the perennial philosophy retains today an equal rational viability. But this is not to appeal nostalgically back to a lost past. Rather it is to suggest that our present has been constructed more by one type of faith than it has been by reason. In short, we still live within a Franciscan Middle Ages, and this can be shown to be as true of our politics as it is of our philosophy. The question is whether an alternative, Dominican Middle Ages can yet be revived in order to shape, in the 21st Century, an alternative modernity.

But what happened to the evolution of the post-Franciscan current after Kant? Do both analytic and continental philosophy still really stand within its slip-stream? The answer is indubitably yes. And if these two philosophies tell similar stories about the genesis of modern philosophy then it turns out that their own origins are but continuations of this story in varying ways that are not so different as is sometimes imagined. This is the conclusion of the Australian analytic philosopher Graham Priest, who also points out the strong parallel between the initial confidence of both these philosophies before roughly 1950 and the crisis into which both traditions gradually

lapsed after the mid-century. Again it turns out that that this was fundamentally the same confidence which collapsed for parallel reasons.

Exactly how is all this the case? Well, to sum up a 1,000 page book in a few sentences, it goes like this. Metaphysics as epistemology proved unstable after Kant. It could veer towards sensory empiricism, favouring ontological naturalism. The *a priori* categories shaping empirical information might be viewed psychologically rather than noumenally, again favouring naturalism. Or, to the contrary, epistemology could be construed as a transcendental idealism, as by Kant himself, which might readily evolve, as quickly indeed proved to be the case with Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, into absolute, ontological idealism. Thus the 19th C proved to be a battleground between naturalistic and spiritualising philosophies with a certain classicism that echoed traditional battles all the way back to the ancient Greeks. Nor was Britain on one side and the continent on another: idealism was dominant in Britain and positivism, a French invention, was increasingly important in Germany.

By contrast, the 20th C opened in an austere mood of impatience with seemingly irresolvable arguments. Both analytic philosophy and phenomenology were born as moves to quell speculation and to knock metaphysics off its pedestal as first philosophy. Yet once more we see the same pattern that we saw with Kant: a criticism of metaphysics is yet *more* metaphysical in the modern sense, since it seeks yet more firmly to locate and stick with the supposedly given certainties of the possible and not to be misled by the vagaries of the actual, including any actuality of God.

But the problem with the possible is that it comes in three basic variants: the possibility of subjective understanding, of logic and of being – in which case it tends to be construed as some sort of vital force. In order to try to avoid the uncertainties of epistemology 20th C philosophy switched from the first modality of the possible itself to the second. It concentrated on *Logic*. Frege invented a new logical instrument, the predicate calculus, which could more easily accommodate complexities of predication without simply handing these over to empiricity. Husserl invented a new logical instrument, phenomenology, which was somewhat similarly intended to recoup all the details of ‘natural’ understanding of manifested things for a transcendental logical constitution of them within a bracketing of what might really be the case.

In either case again, these logical universes constituted a kind of middle kingdom where one could purportedly locate truth independently of *either* the externally empirical or the internally subjective. This involved a wholesale rejection of psychologism – whether J.S. Mill’s view that logic is ultimately an effect of physical laws, or Franz Brentano’s Aristotelian view that the truth of logic is inseparable from the ontological reality of the soul. Instead, for Husserl, a concept *intends* something else merely as a matter of logic – and not as primarily a matter of ontology as for Augustine and Aquinas. For them, a thought is a mental sign which refers to the real world; but for Husserl a thought intends directly a thing which is ‘objective’ in merely the Scotistic sense, as Jacques Maritain and André de Muralt have both pointed out. And indeed what one has here is a slight turn back from Kant towards Scotus, in an Austrian scholastic Catholic tradition inherited from Bernard Bolzano.

In the case of Frege, the distinction of indicating reference from entertained sense is equally seen as a matter of pure logic, or of *esse objectivum*, even if his leanings were more realist. And like Husserl he is above all anxious to insist that a thought is demonstrably different from sensing or from feeling. So in either case a kind of agnostic citadel had been erected here – supposedly impregnable from the assaults of naturalism and yet able to defend the masculine dignity of objective human thought without any sort of weak initial recourse to ideas of God or of an ontological soul. Yet a huge problem of the relationship of the logical ‘middle realm’ to both subjective thought and external reality here went unsolved. What the two new philosophies both tended to imply here, as Quentin Meillassoux has now famously pointed out, was that there is a kind of ‘correlation’ between our thinking and reality as it is presented to us. (Indeed Meillassoux derives the term ‘correlation’ from Husserl himself.) But just why there should be this correlation went totally unaccounted for.

Gradually, since the mid-twentieth century, both variants of this twin-headed neo-Scotism have been deconstructed. After Frege an empirical positivism was joined to his logicism. But then Sellars, Quine, Wittgenstein, Davidson, Kripke, Putnam and Dummett destroyed all the ‘myths of the given’ of this ‘logical positivism’ and even of Fregeanism, one by one. They variously concluded that there is no discretely prior empirical information just as there is no isolatably prior categorial contribution. As

for logic, it is pragmatically variable and may, after all, according to Quine, be rooted simply in our biology. Only sense picks out reference according to Kripke, Putnam and Dummett, and so the distinction seems viciously circular. It follows that, if we are to avoid Dummett's neo-idealism that we have to consider whether we can solve the correlation problem in terms of a continuity of meaning or form between matter and mind. Alternatively, if the distinction is to be restored in a new way then we need to postulate, after Kripke, obscurely blank referential realities which would be the same in all possible worlds.

At this point possibility shifts into its own *third* modal key: it becomes ontological, and David Lewis, the Hegel and Owl of Minerva of analysis, begins to speak as if all possibility as ontological is paradoxically actual, in his theory of modal realism. Thus today we have many new full-blooded analytic metaphysics raised on the ground of either the possibilities of logic or else the possibilities of mathematics, as already with Quine. It is extremely striking that Alain Badiou also offers an example of the latter approach within a continental tradition that is rapidly fusing with the analytic. The appropriate name for all this is the one already in common use: *speculative materialism*.

Meanwhile, across the channel and increasingly the Atlantic, the game was up for pure phenomenology with the publication of Jacques Derrida's *La Voix et le Phénomène*. It is amazing proof that brilliance does not preclude the higher nerdiness that Willard van Orman Quine, in instigating the botched attempt to deny Derrida an honorary Cambridge degree, failed to notice that Derrida *was* the Quine of the continental tradition! Quite simply, Derrida pointed out that any since intended phenomena must be, as it was for Augustine, also a sign, that it therefore had to *read*, or interpreted through the proffering of other signs in an endless chain that never gave access to any indubitable 'presence. So the phenomenon was not, after all, simply given – and therefore the inner logical citadel had been breached.

The question then becomes, in the 21st C, where to go once the more rigorously metaphysical anti-metaphysical metaphysics of analysis and phenomenology has been deconstructed. One possibility is to try to elaborate a *yet more rigorous* transcendently logicist metaphysics, even if one misleadingly describes this as 'anti-

metaphysical'. Derrida attempted just this as a mode of linguistic scepticism and Rorty as a radicalised pragmatism which also rested on an extreme tolerance of verbal slippage, and denial of any absolute categorial distinctions, as Simon Blackburn has pointed out.

But the assumption of an infinite *semiosis* without issue is but another dogmatism of the given because it renders this process itself a transcendental condition by a decision which has no more ground than an alternative decision which would opt to privilege certain stabilisations of the signifying process. Such a decision has been stigmatised as 'humanist', yet the option for non-foreclosed interpretation, where every reading exists only to be destroyed by a subsequent one, remains itself a book-bound humanism which begs the issue of our relationship to nature in an obscurantist fashion. Equally pragmatism does not really escape the empiricist myth of the given, since the notion of working success as the criterion of truth simply projects an external givenness into the future. So neither Derrida nor Rorty can be the way forward.

Instead, it is already as if we have returned to the 19th C – but with a vengeance. The cognitive attempt to ban speculation, whether this attempt be made in dogmatic or sceptical mode, has turned out to be itself speculative. The critical era of Kant is therefore over, though not perhaps the era of Scotus, as we shall later discover. So what we are now left with seems to be once more unbounded speculation. This is witnessed in a new contestation between an extreme naturalism on the one hand and a new spiritualist metaphysics on the other. We have Daniel Dennett and we have the legacy of Emmanuel Levinas. And one can see this playing out even at the level of popular understanding.

Is this a good thing or a bad one? One could argue that 20th C philosophy sustained a kind of agnostic cognitive peace in contrast to the havoc wrought in that century by the continued influence of 19th C materialistic ideologies and religion-fuelled nationalisms. Yet now we face a new kind of havoc with which the legacy of this very agnosticism may have something to do, as Meillassoux has claimed. For left to its own devices and shorn of metaphysical support and tempering, too much religion has turned fanatical. Meanwhile, it quickly turned out, in the analytic work of Sellars and

others, that if you reduce thought to something without feeling, then it can be wholly cyberneticised and logic is reduced to materiality after all. And the legacy of this is arguably a yet more virulent naturalism, as with Richard Dawkins, no longer linked, as for Comteanism or Marxism, to even the simulacrum of any noble ideals.

Do we not then need in the future, as Pope Benedict has argued, a reason tempered by faith and a faith tempered by reason? And is this not offered by the Thomistic tradition, understood in the broad sense I have outlined as a perennial philosophy which linked knowledge to love, and contemplation of God to good citizenship? In the next three lectures I shall examine the new returned full-blooded metaphysics: first the new naturalism and then the new spiritual transcendence, but without participation. Then I shall turn to Aquinas's participatory ontology. But I shall argue that this needs to be extended, and extended in ways that take good account of what was valid after all in 20th C philosophy: ways that have to do with language, with phenomena, with mathematics and with life. But in each of these cases I shall re-appropriate the modern from the 'Franciscans' for the 'Dominicans' by construing language as actual words, phenomena as actual things, mathematics as actual numbers and life as actual transcendence, not virtual immanence.