## **Stanton Lecture 8: The Surprise of the Imagined**

## By John Milbank

In the 21<sup>st</sup> C era of renewed metaphysical speculation, we are confronted with three different families of thought, which have no longer much to do with the analytic/continental divide. In order to understand their rifts we need to invoke one of our most basic philosophical perplexities. This can be called the problem of the two totally coinciding circles which nevertheless never touch each other. The first circle is the whole of reality in which human beings are included. The philosophy of this circle is ontological and seeks to explain human existence in terms of the existence of everything else. And it seems indeed clear that this is where human beings belong. But the second circle is that in which everything that we know about is included within human mental or else cultural apprehension. The philosophy of this circle is epistemological, and it calls into question the human belonging which the first circle took for granted. For how can we be sure in what way the world situates us if the only world that we know of is the one which, as Fichte put it, is given to us and which we must then subjectively posit if it is to have for us any reality? Just what license do we have to speak of another reality? In the philosophy of the last 200 years or so this has often been seen as the modern, critical position, and yet it would appear to be at odds with the perspective of modern physical science itself, which on the whole resolutely occupies the first circle.

A further weakness of the second position is that it seems tacitly to depend upon an elevated view of human existence, human knowledge and human culture, even though it has itself seemingly compromised the cosmic context which would situate

this elevation. Denying the latter and yet remaining within the second circle seems to imply an intolerable ethnocentrism, issuing in an almost complete scepticism. Moreover, as we saw in the previous lecture, we know only as feeling bodies in reciprocal interaction with other bodies. Why distort this picture into one in which we do not really interact but only receive, from an irreducibly subjective perspective, all that happens to us and all our seemingly spontaneous actions in response.

Yet if someone resolutely wishes to think this way, then it is difficult to gainsay her. For this point of view, as Quentin Meillassoux puts it, there is an obscure and as it were preestablished 'correlation' between the unfolding of human thought on the one hand and the way in which reality appears to us or is given to us, on the other. Since this phenomenon was named by Meillassoux it appears, as he intends, somewhat absurd, and yet he himself thinks it is either not escapable or else only escapable from within.

And this fundamental dilemma is not just philosophical, it is also, and more primarily, existential and theological. "Tell me good Brutus, can you see your face?" asks Cassius in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. "No, Cassius", Brutus replies, "for the eye sees not itself by reflection, but some other things". In one sense we can know how other people look and sound, how their characters come across in a way that we can but vaguely intimate about ourselves, as in those shocking moments when we catch ourselves unawares in a mirror or hear our own recorded voice and are confronted with a stranger whom we may not even much like. Yet in another sense we know what it feels like to be me and how our own minds are working in a way that remains baffling when it comes to others. These two rival intimacies are, it would

seem, equally strong and yet incommensurable. They entirely overlap and yet never meet. It was Plato who provided the hinge between this existential dilemma and the philosophical one in the *Republic*, by asking whether our reflections on justice should begin with the soul, the city or the cosmos. This, of course, converts the dilemma into a trilemma: but either the city is in continuity with the *physis* of the cosmos and belongs to the first circle, or it is cut-off from *physis* by human *nomos* and belongs to the second circle of anthropocentric closure.

The theological version of this dilemma was first provided by Philo, invoking the classical myth of Epimetheus. Element 1 of this myth, as invoked by Philo, asks whether the cosmos without human beings would be lacking, because there would be no one present to be fully aware of it, to praise it, poetically to make something of it. Element 2 of this myth, as invoked by Gregory of Nyssa, and much later Pico della Mirandola and Pierre Bérulle and yet later still G.K. Chesterton, asks whether human beings themselves are lacking as they are weak, defenceless animals with no special physical skill, no known job description or fixed address. Of course the theological answer to the indigency of the cosmos is that the creation of humans was required to complete it with worship and the theological answer to the indigency of human beings is that they can escape the clutches of daemonic social security by poetically making themselves into all and everything, while transfiguring the earth in the process.

These theological answers effectively say that we can live in both worlds at once – both the given real world and the more ideal world of our own devising. They do not resolve the existential dilemma, but they escape it by outflanking and trumping the philosophical one. Since the world of the human spirit is at once for now substantially

within the material world and yet by status of dignity exceeds it, we can migrate from one world to another, as though passing across a magic threshold. This double existence and reversible hierarchy between substance and spirit is possible because there is a divine creative source of both matter and mind which is itself the coincidence of spirit with substance.

In this escapist sense theology resolves the dilemma of the two worlds. The two questions at issue in this lecture are first, can there be an alternative immanentist and purely philosophical resolution of this dilemma, and second, how and to what extent can the theological resolution be given philosophical – which is to say both ontological and epistemological coherence.

So what are the three contemporary families, who mostly live in Paris or London, or else are regularly tuned-in to this new academic tale of two cities, and how are they situated with respect to the dilemma of the two circles?

The first family is revived speculative idealism, even if it nominally materialist in character, which in the end looks to Hegel: one can name here Badiou, Meillassoux and Zizek, plus Priest, Dummett and McDowell in far more tentative 'analytic' modes which are actually less coherent than the bolder and more vividly expressed. formulations. (Indeed without the vivid, as Graham Harman -- no friend to wilful 'continental' obscurity -- has validly asked, can one really have clarity? The latter should not be confused with the prosaic or the cautious, nor with an attention to detail that can conceal a deficient sense of *relevancy*, and an overly-narrowly focus which obscures precisely by leaving vague the more general location of a problematic issue.)

In its bold form this philosophy variously claims that correlation becomes through time a total translucency, such that mind grasps the material randomness of reality, in such a fashion that it can, nevertheless, sometimes exotically allow for the possibility of alternative accidentally arising worlds which might even include gods and immortal human life.

The second family comprises advocates of a more hardcore speculative materialism. This includes Laruelle, Ray Brassier plus many Deleuzian epigones, plus again in a paler idiom, Richard Rorty and the various epigones of Quine and Davidson, not to mention those who reduce all philosophy to physics like Dennett, Hawkings and Dawkins. In this case the harder men are more or less prepared to pay the price of the loss of the reality of mind and reason.

The third family, whom we have not so far encountered, are the genuine 'speculative realists' who wish to do justice to the reality of both matter and mind, the life without and the life within. I am thinking here primarily of Bruno Latour and of Graham Harman – while again in less vivid mode one could add the name of Jonathan Lowe. However, in part because their perspective is more or less secular and immanentist (though there is a twist here, which I will come to shortly) they do not seek to sustain both worlds, so much as to situate the human spirit entirely within the first world of the real external cosmos. In doing so, they dispense altogether with correlationism, and embrace instead a series of mediating links between matter and mind, many of which we have already dealt with: fixity of habit, prehensive feeling as ontologically universal (after Whitehead), numbers and geometric shapes as real constituents of matter (as for Aristotle), hermeneutic processes of deciphering and

translating signs as commencing in the pre-human, and all causal linkage as depending upon perspectival abstraction – as, for example, when the red billiard ball ignores the greenness of another ball in order more effectively to hit it, or a wave crashes equally over some jagged besides some rounded rocks.

As we saw in the last lecture, it now surprisingly turns out that David Hume is more the long term ancestor of this third family than of the other two, even if few if any of the current members of this family would acknowledge this. Although his perspective was naturalistic, it doubles back upon itself by arguing that, if human nature is natural, then we need an account of nature adequate to explaining how human nature could arise, while it is also reasonable to assume that what goes on inside the 'second' human world could be a clue as to how the first, non-human world works. Hence as we saw, Hume favours not matter or mind, but rather the mediating categories of feeling and imagination. By seemingly 'reducing' reason to these, he in fact elevates nature, saves realism on the grounds of commonsense faith and even augments the mystery of thought as something 'surprising', as a connected process that we are not really in command of and which may even arrive from a transcendent elsewhere.

Thus in terms of this perhaps rather Edinburgh cult of fated sensibility, it is clear that the question for a speculative realism must be, what is the ontological status of consciously *imagined* things which the human mind feels -- given that universal prehended feelings can more or less readily be understood in unconscious terms? Equally, what is the ontological status of cultural artefacts, given that, as Hume rightly argued, these alone fix and habitually secure our internal imaginings?

Beyond Hume then, how are we to understand this double human necessity both for the imagined and for art or *poesis*, taken in the broadest possible sense? For if it is true that we cannot really escape the second world, then, as much of German Romanticism and even Idealism in some phases taught (as is well described by Douglas Hedley in his book *Living Forms of the Imagination*), this world *is* the world of art and imagination, or equally of inward art and externally projected imaginings.

First, the imagination. The main point is that we can never escape it and are doomed to remain always either lost or secured within our imaginings. This was grasped with a new radicalism by Augustine, and he communicated this grasp to Aguinas. Augustine points out that we can never see a real house, for example, without at the same time imagining a phantom house, and he says that he finds this stranger than the idea of ghosts – no doubt with the implication that the hauntedness of every ordinary perception renders the existence also of haunted houses all too likely. Aquinas develops this insight by arguing that every actualised thought can only complete itself and render itself thinkable through a conversio ad phantasmata. Even though this comes at the end of the process of transmission of form in things through their transmutation into sensible and then intellectual species in the passive intellect, followed by their actualisation through the judgement of the active intellect, the conversion is still but the penultimate stage in the process of knowledge that effects an instant circle: for the inner generation of the actively-shaped cognitive form as the verbum mentis points intentionally back through the phantasm towards the hylomorphic known thing in reality.

Much later in intellectual history, S.T. Coleridge will refer to this process as the operation of the 'primary imagination'. Why does it have to occur? The first answer is that our senses are not in themselves intellectual or conscious: it is the mind that sees things, and in order to do this it seems to have to cross a border region between the sensory and cognitive. We can experimentally prove this by the fact that we would not know that we had just seen, say, a banker's desklamp before us, if we were not able to remember seeing it in imagination immediately after we had turned our eyes away towards the printer ensconced on the other side of the desk. And even whilst still watching the lamp, we can picture its shade to ourselves in another colour than the regulation green, or the entire lamp as being the size of a particularly surreal street-lamp in Las Vegas and so forth. So we can only see an object through the phantom of that object, and only see an object insofar as we grasp how it might be modified and how its form might be differently instantiated in matter while remaining the same form. This means, as Augustine, Aquinas and Coleridge all recognised, that we cannot exercise the primary imagination without being able also potentially to exercise what Coleridge called 'the secondary imagination': namely an ability to imagine things that are not really there: not just differently coloured and sized lamps, but lamps hybridised with umbrellas, talking lamps, lamps that suddenly look back at you and so forth.

The second answer is that, as Plato and Aristotle both taught, the animal soul is capable of blending together the diverse sensory inputs through a mysterious alchemy called the *sensus communis*. We cannot understand how the different senses become commensurable with each other so as to be thought all to refer to the same thing or set of things, but just this obscure feeling of finding a common synaesthesic measure is

the beginning of all thought. And normally we would be thoroughly disorientated if sight or sound or touch were to occur alone: hence the imagined image through which we see has to return to this common sensing in order to enable even single sensing – for example to compose the distant church tower with the far sound of bells, the ground we stand on and the scent of rain in the air. Of course 'common image' and 'imagination' are therefore misnomers: we do not just inwardly image sights, but inwardly echo sounds, inwardly rehearse touches, hunger after tastes and most obscurely of all recall lost odours. 'Imagination' for want of a better word blends all these in the course of either returning us to the real or opening us upon the fictional.

Notice also that for Augustine, Aquinas, Hume and Coleridge in his more romantic moods, imagination is not simply a site of mediation between unmediated thoughts and sensations as it is for Kant, because we have no access to ideas *at all* outside the *conversion*, and so not real rational control over its operation. This is the reason why especially British empirical reflection on the mysteries of mental *association*, as Hans Aarsleff and others have argued, is at least as much the source of Romantic ideas of the imagination as idealist notion of a sheerly internal spontaneously mental shaping.

Secondly, the nature of art. Fully to comprehend the twilight zone where we are perpetually situated, we need to realise not only that matter invades mind as the imaginary, but also that mind invades matter as artifice. The intentional reach of the inner word back through the phantasm to the known thing is not quite the end of the cognitive journey after all, because even in the case of theoretical knowledge, the mind is always, as Nicolas of Cusa realised, beyond Aquinas, shaping a product in

some fashion or other. This goes back to the very beginning of the rapid circle of understanding in sensation. In order to be touched by anything in a specific or a generic sense, we must, as both Aristotle and Merleau-Ponty taught, ourselves touch and so alter in however minuscule a manner our environment. In order to be vulnerable to experience we have ourselves to inscribe new circles in the world; in order to let reality invade us we have to advance into that reality and slightly alter it. And here the order of passivity and activity is even reversed as compared with the case of the imagination. To receive at all we must act and shape: turn our gaze, cock our ear, stretch out our hand. In doing all these things we already, as it were, sketch out small human cathedrals, but from then on we discover in our own shapings unexpected things and through these shapings as our extended *organa* we start to know more of reality. It is just the same here with cathedrals, with cars, with libraries, with hammers, words, numbers, haylofts, organlofts and steam engines.

So given that art and imagination combined constitute our only human home, it would seem to be important to know their exact ontological status. And yet that can appear very puzzling, as we shall shortly see.

It turns out that the three different contemporary philosophical families give contrasting accounts of this ontological status. And that these contrasting accounts are crucial in understanding what is at stake for speculative realism and whether it is viable in terms of secular immanence.

In the case of speculative idealism, Graham Priest has revived and defended the views of the 19<sup>th</sup> C Austrian tradition for which, in various ways, 'objectivity' can

exceed the actuality of being and even reality. All these views, as I have already intimated, are rooted in the Scotist notion of ens objectivum, transmitted via Suarez and others to Catholic philosophical tradition. This view abandons the Augustinian and Thomist view of human understanding as a participation in the life of the Divine Trinity, and so substitutes for the intentionality of the inner word towards external reality the intentionality of a thought for a purely inner known object, rendering the latter in some sense autonomous. The purely epistemological status of this object was compounded in Austria by the influence of Kant from Bernard Bolzano to Paul Natorp, while more Catholic speculatively metaphysical yearnings tended to revive a late scholastic quest for theories of the object or the thing that would be more allinclusive even than ontologies or theories of existing things. Thus with Bolzano one had the theory of a free-floating representation without even objectivity; with the Polish thinker Kazimierz Twardowski the search for a metaphysics that would encompass all real and known objects on the same level, and finally with Alexius Meinong the idea of known objects that are completely non-existent, even though they retain objectivity. Meinong searched for a comprehensive theory of all objects that would have a bigger scope than metaphysics. It is clear that Husserl's attempt to replace both being and thought with *phenomena* that must be intuitively imagined as well as cognitively intended in excess of imagination also belongs within this lineage. Thus 'Phenomenology' newly conceived as a first philosophy having more primacy even than metaphysics, the science of being, is another comprehensive theory of the object as 'that which presents itself'.

What sort of objects are involved here? The list includes references to past and future events, lies and fictions. Graham Priest follows Meinong in arguing that such

things indeed do not exist and yet are clearly objects can clearly be thought about. He exults in giving an explicitly oriental flavour to this notion by declaring that it follows that *non-being* must be real. But this is to take subjective idealism to a certain extreme of asserting the independence of thought from reality on account of its very nullity. The historian of Medieval thought Alain de Libera rightly protests against any confusion of such post-Kantian notions with the position that one finds in the Muslim thinker Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and in many Latin thinkers, including Aquinas in his wake, according to which all thoughts, including fictions, do indeed have some ontological status. For the point here is that thoughts *exist* insofar as they belong to the real *intellectual being* of the mind. This makes less contradictory sense than speaking of representations of nothing, objects that are not there and so forth. Yet the question remains as to whether this greater commonsense is really thinkable outside a metaphysics of participated transcendence.

In the case of the ontology of art, all forms of idealism more generally have always tended to split the artificial between its real, material component and its irreal, ideal or meaningful component which is seen as all that matters. Such an attitude has of course tended in practice towards a disparagement of mere craft in favour of the religion of pure art. One can see most though not all modes of 'conceptual art' as the very *acme* of this idealist art-snobbery.

The second family of speculative materialists tends to embrace what one can describe as a 'minimalist actualism' with respect to all non-material mental conceptions: memories, intentions, lies, fictions and so forth. W.V.O Quine is a good example here: against Meinong and Husserl he simply asserted that only the actual

and the embodied is sufficiently identifiable to count as an object and that our words immediately open upon such things, without enjoying any independent objective status whatsoever. But as Graham Priest contends, this seemed to involve Quine in denying that we can readily talk about imagined things whose properties are very undetermined, without such talk obviously lapsing into nonsense. A story about an infinity of drunken rabbits, for example, is perfectly followable, and not just by a small child. But then one suspects that the rightwing libertarian Quine was probably filling-in tax-exemption forms at children's bedtime.

When it comes to art, materialists usually break the integrity of artifice in the same way as idealists. But their bias runs the other way: what matters is the material side of culture and reliable technological, if not craft products are taken to be serious and lucrative, while the meaning built into things can be siphoned-off for light entertainment.

Finally and crucially, we come to the theories of the speculative realists. They can be described as offering a 'maximalist actualism'. The most extreme representative of this position is the great French philosopher of science and much else besides, Bruno Latour. His essay *Irreductions*, obscurely appended to his now classic historical work, *The Pasteurisation of France*, can be regarded as the boldest attempt at a stark metaphysics set out in ordered paragraphs since Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Within that work and in later elaborations, Latour puts forward an ontology of extreme democracy. All that exists are Leibnizian monads or entelechies or in Latourian terminology *actants*, which he sometimes alternatively describes as 'black boxes'. An 'actor' is any collection of anything that holds together. Therefore a

thought is an actor just as much as a physical thing and an artefact just as much as an organism or an inorganic physical reality. Stones, trees, novels, the characters within novels, the fantasies inside my head, Michelangelo's 'David', Fairy Liquid bottles, electrons, quarks, robots, fairies, angels, gods and even God are all fully real in exactly the same way. One could say that Latour agrees with the *Tractatus* that 'the world is everything that is the case' – it is just that 'is the case' has been given a drastically new latitude.

Nevertheless, not everything has the same degree of reality. For a thing strongly to insist its presence it must gather to itself more and more allies which may be natural or human. Both natural and social forces have caused electricity, once merely rumoured, to become abstracted and common on planet earth. On the other hand, creeping suburbs and dreadful disbelieving children have caused more and more fairies to perish or hide. But in this trial of strength nevertheless, the physical and the imagined, the natural and the artificial all have equal chances. This equalised agon results from Latour's overriding principle of 'irreducibility' which declares that there is never any logical or experimental warrant for reducing something to something else, even though equally there is no warrant against doing so - reduction or irreduction are also the results of alliances of forces. Everything is what it is, unless compelled to become either less or more. But Latour tends to press for the cosmic democratic rights of the presently given: thus the holding-together of an object is holistically in excess of its components and should not be materialistically reduced downwards, yet it is also in a quantum-excess of any idealist attempt to reduce it upwards by dissolving it in a sea of the total set of internal relations of a single reality which would thereby, as with F.H. Bradley, cease to be relations at all.

But this results in several problematic cruxes for Latour's ontology. First, the irreducibility of the acting object means that all things are fundamentally isolated, as Graham Harman has rightly pointed out. All relations are drastically external, because for Latour any internality of relationship would risk the reduction of domination or dependency. And yet at the same time, there is no category of substance for Latour and so nothing exists, nothing *is* an *actant*, except contingent bundles of solidary forces. Relation is everything and yet it is not fundamental.

Closely linked to this is the second crux. If reality consists most fundamentally in irreducible actors, then there are no links between them, nor any possibilities of causal connections between them. Thus action at a distance is always a myth for Latour's perhaps ultimately Cartesian perspective, and he considers that it is always the preferred myth of politically reigning powerful forces. His entire work in the history and philosophy of science consists in showing that there are always overlooked mediators, whether these be natural or cultural, who may seem perfectly trivial in the story of any scientific success and yet without which scientific success and so scientific truth could not be built. This is *not* a theory of the pure social construction of science as David Bloor finally realised, with some annoyance. For Latour's point is rather that a fully *realist* theory of science has to see that nature as much constructs science as science manipulates nature. The airborne microbes supposed to cause both disease and fermentation are co-produced by natural forces and experimenters plus Louis Pasteur's test-tubes and the theoretical interpretations of what happen within those tubes. It is too much to say that they were already there in nature before Pasteur discovered them, because we do not have any access to them outside our work on nature extending that of Pasteur, and nature's work on us in Pasteur's time and since. Certainly an actor, the microbe, has here been both isolated and brought about, but we cannot dogmatically say that its fundamental role will not be superseded by a more crucial actor brought about through other interactions in the future – natural science alone cannot establish a transtemporal ontology.

In ontological terms this means that no acting object can interact with any other save through the offices of a third, mediating party. As Harman has well said, this amounts to a doctrine of 'secular occasionalism'. But the arising problematic crux, of course, is that that such mediation must then continue to the infinite. Harman himself tries to mend this situation through his own theory of unmediated contact at some points, yet it seems incredible that Latour should not be fully aware of it. It is assumed by Harman that Latour cannot possibly be invoking in the end a divine occasionalism as the resolution and yet this is perhaps not so clear after all, since the French philosopher enigmatically speaks in *Irreductions* of the equally preserving mystery of grace at work in every actant, as the universal presence either of nothingness or of God. Latour is known to be a devout Catholic, and even though he never makes the theological implications of his work entirely clear, there are indications that he wishes like Whitehead (and in my view dubiously) to render God another ontic actor, able to intervene on the same causal plane as everything else, since his radically democratic ontology admits only the reality of the ontic and denies any ontological difference, whether in a Heideggerean or a Thomist variant. It is at least clear that Latour is a thoroughly postsecular thinker who wishes to level the playing field between magic, religion and science.

The third crux concerns Latour's denial of the reality of all *potency*, which is closely linked to his denial of substance or the idea of any obscure factor making for constant persistence, beneath the surface holding-together of a specific actor. This means that the latter is purely an *event* and, it would seem, that actors succeed actors down to an infinitesimal division, even if some more generally abstracted and universal actors hold in position for a long period. Or rather, we should say, *create* a long period, since Latour's very extreme monadology claims that both time and space are merely 'effects' of the holding-together of his acting entelechies. He fears that to admit potency is to admit a power of latent domination which is always in league with a principle of reduction, whether this be material reduction downwards, or idealist reduction upwards. Only an ontology restricted to the category of action permits everything to remain exactly as it is.

Now at the outset of this sequence of lectures I noted that the perennial philosophy favours the priority of act, while modern philosophy favours the priority of potential. Later I observed a recent twist in this contrast, by which really extreme immanentists like Badiou or Laruelle again favour the priority of act, because they wish to deny any 'divinity' of virtuality. But in both cases, as with Latour, there is also a denial of the category of potential altogether, which of course does not concur with the thinking of Plato, Aristotle, neoplatonism or Aquinas. In Aristotelian terms, as again Harman points out, Latour is a 'Megarian', to whom Aristotle objected that they could not explain how a seated man was later able to stand up. Latour's *riposte* here would perhaps be an Arab occasionalist or Malebranchian one: nor does the seated man know this; it is rather a matter of the unconscious mediation of muscles and nerves

with external reality, the brain and the mind. And since this mediation is infinitesimal, it remains a mystery.

How, more precisely, does this ontology and its cruxes relate to Latour's treatment of imagination and art? In the case of intentions and imaginings, their ideal formations render them, for Latour, as real as anything else, because for him 'matter' is essentially inexistent, being but a relative term insofar as any acting formation can become the mere 'material' for another, insofar as it choses to abstract from all its specific details, like a tornado levelling both cathedrals and *Wallmarts*. But 'Peter Rabbit' in the mind of Beatrix Potter assumes more reality the more he migrates from her imagination to her art and then gets reproduced in uniquely-designed books, placed on a thousand mugs that now rarely emanate from his native Cumbria and even danced on the stage at Covent Garden, such that finally he is more real than all those rabbits who have very few allies and many enemies, such as late night tipsy drivers.

As for art, the crucial thing here is Latour's double denial of the distinction between nature and culture on the one hand and of the natural and the artificial on the other. Though intimately linked, these denials also need to be kept distinct. In the first case Latour, as Simon Oliver has well described, considers that the Western Scientific Revolution introduced a new and absolute distinction between nature as our given but dead, meaningless master and culture as a totally free construction, productive of all meanings and values. But this duality left it entirely unclear as to whether *all* was in the end natural and given, or *all* was in the end artificial and constructed. And because, in reality, there is no nature or culture, but only an endless mediating hybridisation of different actors, modernity only exists in theory, and in reality 'we

have never been modern'. This reality impinges, according to Latour, in a bizarre way. By denying hybridisation, by denying that trees can talk and pictures address us, while thoughts have magical power over things, this hybridisation ceases to be confined to a particular neighbourhood whose members are humans, animals, plants and things all bound together in a local culture that is also a cosmos, and becomes both universal and anarchic. Hence technology, which is the work of *both* humans and natural forces -- such that we cannot say whether we have released electricity or electricity has emerged like a god to reside in the temple of every house in order benignly to enlighten and yet sometimes revengefully to electrocute – produces a proliferation of hybrids which tends to ensure both that *nature* becomes more and more the spontaneous actor – for example bringing about drastic climate changes -- while *culture* is more and more a fixed, given system which human beings are powerless to alter.

As for the distinction between natural and artificial things, this is rejected by Latour because he denies that there exists either substance or a reserve of potency holding anything together. Everything then, one would have to say (and again one sees the echo of Descartes here) is artificial in the sense of contrived, while on the other hand all contrivances are entirely natural and most of them not consciously willed. This entails also a rejection of the Leibnizian view that life is to be distinguished from the dead and the artificial by virtue of a holistic organisation that holds down to the infinitesimal level and is true of the monadic structure of physical reality as such.

A final remark concerning Latour's ontology should invoke his interest in the question of iconoclasm, which he equates with the destructive will to reduce, such that for him scientism is a kind of continuation of this perverse religious impulse. He rightly says that all iconoclasts tend to caricature the beliefs people hold about the icons which they smash. Thus for example, no supposed idolater exactly believes that the god literally resides in the idol, anymore than a scientist thinks that genes or microbes have a literal existence that exactly corresponds to the way that they are modelled. However, this can lead one to think that Latour is defending the existence of all hidden forces, religious or scientific. Yet as we have seen, the entire bias of his ontology is to deny hidden potencies, the reality of energies or of constitutive relations. So, if anything, what he would seem to be saying about the idol or the icon is that humans need this mediation in order to render the divine real for them and yet that there is no participation involved here, because all power is reserved, if anywhere, to the one God alone. Equivalently, in equating science with magic, Latour is *not* defending magic, but rather, in a somewhat neo-positivist, as well as perhaps an austerely monotheistic fashion, apparently wishing to purge science also of its belief in the reality of hidden entities rather than the reality of surface connections.

And there is seemingly a concealed reversion to Comte also in the small print of Latour's account of history: the modern illusory separation of nature and culture was still good and perhaps necessary because it freed us from local hybridised tyrannies and unleashed human freedom. It is simply in effect that, like Comte, Latour wishes to inaugurate a third 'positive' era where we realise that we have never left the premodern realm of fetishised hybrids and therefore can take democratic control of their production in the future, thereby returning culture to its liberty, but now with

ecological attentiveness to the promptings of nature in order to produce a new cosmic democracy.

How should we assess first Latour's ontology and secondly its implications for the nature of art and imagination?

In terms of the above three cruxes of no substance, no constitutive relation and no potency, one can venture the following comments. It would seem that, in order to avoid divine occasionalism, one needs to be able to think both substance and constitutive relation together, whereas Latour is stuck in an aporetic shuttle between the fundamental character of random isolated things and the equally fundamental character of accidental, external relations. Harman tries to rescue substance without relation and without potency, but he can only do so at the price of endorsing a Heideggerean nihilism of central disclosive nullities at the heart of emerging realities like Heidegger's famous krug or jug, whose reality as both poetically made and theoretically gazed at he denies against Aristotle, in favour of its supposed empty heart of pouring out an empty temporality instead of nourishing milk. But to favour this dunkelmilsch of the Schwarzwald entails with Harman a distinction of substance as conferring a reality on physical things now withheld from mere objects of intention or imagination which are 'less' than their attributes, just as the real substance is supposedly 'more'. And this in turn simply undoes Latour's ontological democracy, and restores in a new way a sharp contrast between basically non-existent meaningful objects on the one hand and existent but meaningless physical facts or circumstances on the other. At this point Harman slides back from speculative realism to speculative materialism.

Instead, we need to restore all three categories of substance, relation and potential, if we are to understand both how things hold together, how they can connect and how they can alter. But this needs to be done, beyond simply Aristotle, in terms of a metaphysics of participated transcendence which also involves, against Latour, an ontological hierarchy – though I will argue that this is paradoxically necessary in order to secure after all an ontological democracy.

It is incorrect to say that for Aristotle, and still more for Aquinas substance does not change, or that it is always easy distinction between substance and accidents and between both and those 'proper accidents' which are not essential to an essence and yet always accompany it, or even lend to it an indelible but borrowed higher characterisation, as in the case of the thinking power of the soul. It is rather that the word 'substance' records our awareness that there is persistence and holding together of a thing despite change, such that some properties prove more essential to a thing than others. Without this circumstance the world would simply be incoherent, because there would be no points of stability for the mind to latch onto. Yet the 'bond of substance', as Leibniz put it, the real source and nature of this stability, remains a mystery. Moreover, in terms of Aquinas's neoplatonic revision of Aristotle's ontology, it is possible for an existing event to exceed the generally given pattern of physical and biological substances in reality and persistency, thereby becoming as it were 'super hypostatic' – else Christ would be subordinate to the cosmos, whereas he exceeds it from within.

Moreover, within the general Christian revision of Greek ontology, relation tends to become just as fundamental as substance, as Adrian Pabst has argued. God himself is originally relational, all created things exist as related to God, and there is no uncreated matter that could compose any foundation for a non-derived element within reality. Yet at the same time, to reduce all to relation, the doctrine of so-called 'internal relations' after Bradley, would be to abolish relationship in favour of a single Parmenidean reality. For relations to be real and constitutive of things, there must, paradoxically, be a substantial surplus in things over and above relationship. Even in the case of the Divine Trinity, substance or hypostasis is not removed - rather substance and relation are held to infinitely and incomprehensibly coincide: thus the persons of the Trinity are 'substantive relationships' and each person is at once entirely its relation to the other person and yet in itself identical (though not outside this relationship) to the whole of the divine substance or rather essence – given that, as both Augustine and Aquinas say, nothing in God really 'underlies' any other aspect of God. But in the case of finite things there must always be an interplay of relative externality as between relation and substance, else the integrity of actors as singular integral events would be destroyed. On the other hand, were everything in a substance not connected to something else, it would be a mysterious finite god, the black torte without jam at the heart of Heidegger's forest, and really we have no reason to posit such a pagan sheerly material residue.

So how can everything be at once entirely interrelated, and yet in integral, reserved excess of relationship? Once more we need the model of participation as paradox which is the same paradox as the paradox of the gift. A substance is related as giving though sharing a capacity to be separately imitated only *by* retaining that which it

shares in order to remain a 'personal' giver. Inversely, a substance receives another substance in relation only by imitative sharing which reserves as mystery the very thing which it proffers as 'the rite of the mystery', so to speak.

One can agree here with Graham Harman that the direct connection into which we have the most degree of insight is the asymmetrical translation of a real thing into an image of that thing in our minds, and that any longterm coherent sequence seems to involve a constant back and forth between the real and the imagined, as if both needed to be anchored in the other: a brute chain of sheerly material events makes no sense and so can scarcely be comprehended, while a chain of unanchored images fades into a soon-forgotten dream. Again following Harman, Whitehead and remotely Hume, one can suggest that this then provides us with the most plausible model for causality in general. Each physical reality unconsciously 'prehends' another reality, and so is able to 'translate' it into its own terms: thus 'imagination' is a real property of every existing thing. However, in the case of Harman, he still considers prehensive relation, after Latour, as happening only within the bounds of an already established real physical contact. But in that case, what is the nature of that proximity, given that all essences are interally constituted of relations? One can agree with Latour, Whitehead and the great 20<sup>th</sup> C Basque Catholic philosopher, Xavier Zubiri, whose thought is in many ways close to theirs, that all reality is to be referred back to entities taken as actual complex states of affairs, or 'essences' in the extended Zubirian sense, which somehow adequately express themselves in all their moments or 'notes', as Zubiri expresses it. Yet this can seem to leave a gap that only occasionalism can fill: thus in Whitehead's case, prehensions are only real relations through an occasionalist detour round the influence of his 'eternal objects'.

But here Zubiri more promisingly argued that every reality also possesses a dynamis or active potential to give itself and to receive influences. On this basis one needs to connect the idea of relation with that of analogical mediation. A real constitutive relation, as understood by Plato, Augustine or Aquinas, is neither external, which leaves us with the occasionalist problematic, nor internal, which invites a collapse to monism. Rather it involves the participatory idea of poles only formed in relation to other poles and yet still preserving their integrity as poles or as dynamic sources of potential future modification. Understood this way, a relation is a mediator not, as for Latour, as simply the intervention of a wholly distinct third party, but as a Desmondian 'between' or erotic-agapeic metaxu that was there all along and is in some sense identical with both poles, and yet in another different from either of them as the field of interplay between them.

Zubiri's idea that the dynamic belongs to an essence, or I would say a substance actualised as a contingent event, requires us to restore the notion of potency. First, this is the sheerly passive potency of the mysterious negativity of matter – which does not, pace Latour, admit of relative compromises with form -- to be differently informed, which, again pace Latour, has nothing to do with any power of domination. But secondly it is the active potency or dynamis, as Plato put it (virtus in Thomist terms) of a thing already in act which can communicate itself through a further active development. This is indeed a power of command, yet not necessarily of domination if it establishes shared analogical linkages – or, in other words, if a gift is received and a new community of understanding is established. But once more we can only comprehend potency in terms of participated transcendence. It remains a mystery in

sheerly Aristotelian terms how there can be anything merely on its way to act. The only adequate *riposte* to the Megarians must be that what is on its way to act is always partially in act, but is impelled to further realisation through its share in what is already in act, which is ultimately the infinite God. In a sense then, passive potential, which is pure matter, does not exist, because it is only present as the privative and limiting factor within a dynamically ascending series of degrees of action. However, original action is in itself, as Nicholas of Cusa argued, the infinite power to act which, as in-finite, or unlimited and illimitable, is in a sense not exhausted even by the infinite act of its realisation, such that, in God actus purus and virtus entirely coincide, without any priority of the one to the other, rendering God the Possest. (Aquinas already says that 'properly speaking' the 'predicament of action' is no more present in God than the predicament of passion, since the divine action 'is his very substance', even though we are forced in human language to designate God's power an 'active power': De Pot. Dei, q. 2, a.1 ad 1) This is why the Trinitarian God, though fully in act, is a dynamic God who infinitely gives and communicates himself. (In the same passage Aquinas says that the divine power to communicate or generate, like God as such, is 'properly speaking' neither active nor passive, which seems to concur with the fact that the Trinitarian communication here under discussion is only active as received and only received as active.) It follows that the Creation in sharing in act shares also in *dynamis*, and for this reason it can be argued, following Zubiri, that the real is more fundamental than being, since it is both being and the power to be, and that participation in reality as both actual and dynamic – as the self-generative power that is at once life and art -- is more fundamental than participation in being. (For Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian ontology, dynamis was as fundamental as ousia. To suggest that 'reality' is being and yet 'more than being', as the 'power to be', is not to imply that God is *causa sui*, as with Descartes, since God is not self-doubled, but rather simply *is* an infinite dynamic flow. Nor is it to suggest that God is neoplatonically 'beyond' or 'without' being, since his unified and unifying power is not prior to his action.)

How then, do these critical considerations bear upon the status of art and imagination in Latour? They demand, I think, a supplementation of his ontological democracy with an affirmation also of ontological hierarchy. For if all substantial events are analogically connected by real relation, then we can see that all differences involve hierarchical difference, even if this is generally reversible for different respects, as when a tree is more elevated than the ground, but the ground is more secure. One can note that even colour-contrasts belong along a spectrum, and that this spectrum may be read in two different directions, according to the priority of either light or dark. And if the reversible hierarchies of most differences flatten to democratic equality for much of our ordinary perception, then that is only against the background of a more insistent reality, as Badiou points out. I see the boats on the Thames floating equally, only because I am aware of the common and more domninant background of the ever- widening and now tidal river as it passes through London. Ultimately, everything is radically flattened to democracy by the height beyond height of God who, unlike a river, is equally in everything, making all equally flow. But within this cosmic democracy there are only differences because there are multiple hierarchies, often reversible -- just as angels are above as pure spirit, yet we are above angels as microcosmic mediators of spirit with matter. Nor are any of these hierarchies fixed: rather they are always a matter of reaching down in order to elevate upwards -- and matter itself, for neoplatonic thought, is immediately by rebound on a journey of reversal to the One, travelling backwards and upwards through all the intermediate degrees. And without this educative descent from the higher to the temporarily lower, there would be no cosmic democracy of aspiration to the Good and the only equality would be an equal ability to capture ands prevail over other forces which would then restrict cosmic democracy for the future, and lead to an ever greater human and transhuman centralising control of ever-more abstracted and formalised forces. It is just this cosmically sophistic collapse which Latour's merely democratic ontology invites, for all his supposed suspicion of Foucauldian accounts of transcedental power. One has here a still postmodern ontology of violence after all.

In democratic terms we can agree with Latour that all is a matter of mere intensity of degree: that humans are only relatively distinguished from animals; that life involves artifice and artifice can mimic life, while what is imagined is truly real in some measure. Yet the hierarchical facts are not thereby undone. The human difference of degree is also a qualitative leap such that humans inhabit an ever-varying culture as their nature, without which complex *organon* they, uniquely amongst animals would not survive as animals. The self-moving and self-generative capacity of life, which one can attribute to physical reality as such, truly is infinitely divisible as Leibniz taught, such that artefacts are neither self-moving nor self-generating and replicating without the ultimate assistance of living forces; were such self-moving artefacts to be invented, then this would merely mean that a new mode of *life* has been invented, or rather that human would have succeeding in newly diverting the one current of life itself. This current is in some measure opaque as to significance in its infinitely self-sustaining tautegory, in contrast to artifice which gives birth to more explicit meaning precisely because the current of life can only be sustained after

death in the less substantial but still self-reproducing life of the intellect. Thus a dead thing continues only as form which must be given a meaning beyond itself if it is to be remembered. In this way culture is provisional resurrection: every artefact is a tombstone which remembers the past, projects the future and aspires after eternity and for this reason, as the ancient Egyptians realised, every city is first a temple because it is a graveyard. Nor are all monuments equal: Heidegger's jug really does command a greater intrinsic presence than the fairy-liquid bottle, not just because of the array of forces at its command, but because of the greater intrinsic coherence of the forces making for beauty, which ensure that not even the efforts of a Warhol can match the survival through the millennia of one particular finely-crafted pot, supremely embodying the eidos of 'potness', as opposed to the survival of the image of the mass-produced object in general, which identically repeats with numbing exactitude its pseudo-Platonic exemplar. And as to imagination: here again we have a reversible hierarchy -- physical reality is more real as more substantive; but imagined reality is more real as more aspiring upwards to a spiritual condition.

Here, finally, in the concluding passage of this entire lecture series, we need to adumbrate a realist and not idealist theory of the imagination, which will actually grant it a higher dignity. The mystery of the ontological status of supposedly unreal objects can be solved in a more convincing fashion if we allow that the merely imagined does not invoke possible worlds or some mode of *nirvana*, but rather belongs itself, as much Islamic philosophy has taught, to the *alam-al-mithal*, or the *mundus imaginalis*.

The thinking here is quite simple, though it leads to a seemingly exotic conclusion. Our mind is irreducible as mind only because it is native somewhere else: to the angelic sphere of spirit which we will one day rejoin. But imagination appears to be as irreducible as abstract thought, which indeed never escapes, save in intentional aspiration, the phantasmic. For as *phenomena* the things which we imagine are irreducible to the neurological. Hence must there not also be an *ontological* realm of the imagined, as well as a realm of spiritual thoughts? This fitted into the neoplatonic schema inherited by many of the Arab thinkers, whereby the descent from the One passes first through intellect and then through the moving power of soul and finally to matter. (Incidentally the Church Fathers mostly read the *Genesis* narrative in these terms of an initial creative descent from the angelic to the material and then human creation – a reading which the RSV dubiously, in linguistic terms, renders rather less possible than does the King James Version, by getting rid of the hypostatic connotation of the first day 'in which' God created and which could therefore denote an initial, purely intellectual realm of purely ideal light inhabited only by angels.)

But the Arabs, following neoplatonic leads, placed great stress upon a realm of the imagined, or the realm of subtle bodies, as mediating between soul and matter at a cosmic level. It was from *this* realm that lower angels communicated divine revelation to the *heart* of Mohammed, thus integrating the neoplatonic vision with the Biblical legacy of the primacy of the heart and explaining, in neoplatonic terms, just why, for human beings, *the imagination* must come first before reason, and why then a sacred text is prior to philosophy. It is as if, as Olivier-Thomas Venard OP has argued with respect to the Bible, this priority means that the tautegoric act of imagining the process of imagination itself within a reality that is pure imagination -- an act that can

only be a symbolic and narrative imaginative performance whereby we receive a sequence of images in constructing them, and so a sacred text is formed -- is the act that must first establish and guide human language and reason. It would then follow from Friedrich Schlegel's claim that 'the imagination is man's faculty for perceiving divinity' that it can be said of any genuinely sacred text, as Coleridge said of the Bible, that it presents us with 'the living educts of the imagination'. (Perhaps this would be the rationale of 'scriptural reasoning'?)

For this outlook, our ideas are real because they arrive to us from the higher angelic realm and one can point out here that this is true for Christian thinkers even if they rejected the Arabic theories of the single alienated intellectus agens, because our individual agent intellect still participates in the one divine illumination, mediated by angelic understandings. It is common to the entire Biblical and Classical legacy to recognise that, as Stephen R.L. Clark put it, 'our thoughts are not entirely made by us'. Thus sometimes in our thoughts we may be privileged, like St Paul ascended to the third heaven, to see divine visions. But equally for some of the Shi'ite and Sufi thinkers, all the contents of our imagination are real, and our fictions should be regarded as literal glimpses of a specific cosmic dimension. Most vividly this dimension includes actual living creatures, the *djinn* or *genies*, already located in the Hebrew Scriptures by Rabbinic readings of Isaiah and which appear in the Koran as obedient to the wisdom of Solomon. Once more the too demythologising RSV gets rid, in favour of mundane desert animals, of the 'satyrs' and 'dragons' of the Authorised version which validly translates the Zijiim jiim and Ochim' of Isaiah Chapter 13.

However, these reflections do have some Christian equivalents. Augustine in the *De Genesi ad Litteram* reads Augustne's ascent as passing through the mediating realm of 'spirit' or of the imagination, while for him the Pauline spiritual body of the resurrection as precisely a subtle body or a 'body of the imagination' – as if we will be eventually composed of the fabric of our dreams. And much later, in 17<sup>th</sup> C Scotland, the Highland Minister Robert Kirk, in his truly extraordinary defence of Celtic second sight, *The Secret Commonwealth* (which attracted the expeditionary attention of the Royal Society, in an early example of scientific attention to the paranormal) provided a sophisticated neoplatonic explanation of the fairy-beliefs which were rife in his parish around him. This explanation is precisely that fairies are the creatures who belong to the real realm of subtle bodies – or me might say the *mundus imaginalis*. And we may note that Augustine also allowed that the lower angels are ethereally material, to be followed in this respect by much Franciscan tradition and still later by John Milton.

In more recent thought it is above all Stephen R. L. Clark who has grasped how the question of religious belief in supernatural entities – in gods, angels, *daemons* and fairies – is intrinsically bound up with the question of the ontological status of our thoughts and imaginings. He begins the highly nuanced and philosophically crucial reflections of his essay 'How to Believe in Fairies' with Yeats' (and Chesterton's) assumption that one should take seriously perennial folk-beliefs until one has serious reasons to doubt them. And today, he suggests, scepticism concerning the existence of fairies and the like is now on all-fours with scepticism concerning the existence of a mental reality: 'if desires and beliefs are not real causes, and neither are fairies, why should we not investigate fairies as convenient fictions? If, on the other hand, they are

real causes, maybe what we call "fairies" are so too'. He also cites W.Y. Evans Wentz's summation of Celtic fairy lore: 'the only verdict which seems reasonable is that the Fairy-Faith belongs to a doctrine of souls'. Clark then goes on to argue that if desires, feelings and beliefs are indeed real, then the phenomenological evidence is that they often tend 'to arrive' in our minds with surprisingly intrusive unpredictability and irregularity, as if we were indeed being 'possessed'. In addition, he points out that moods are readily found to be contagious – such that, one can add, we daily discover that the 'second world' of our imagination is *not* a solipsistic one, but rather one to some degree shareable (as Wittgenstein suggested) through proferred words and gestures which engender communities of feeling. If then, the mental as the imaginary is real at all, then it makes far more logical and evidential sense to treat is as a real ontological sphere rather than a reality somehow 'inside' our isolated subjectivities, or 'epiphenomenally' produced by bodies as a coating of spectral icing sugar whose metaphysical status is simply begged.

Drawing on variously marginal literature which most philosophers ignore on account of an unwisely arid snobbery, Clark then suggests that if the sighting of supernatural creatures seems to have retreated in modern times, then this is not because we have discovered, for example, that mermaids are 'really' manatees, on a 'Kripkean' view that a reality can be minimally designated and yet remain the same reality. Rather it is the case that confusions between physical and 'imaginary' realities have been minimised with the advance of systematic observation: thus on a 'Fregean' view demanding denser criteria for identification, it is seen that manatees, lacking the necessary properties of vanity -- the mirrors and combs -- besides a human torso, simply are not mermaids. Moreover, the less authentic and truly 'superstitious' aspect

of folk-belief, whereby it has generated into a kind of positivism, is thereby more clearly removed: mermaids, as could have been recalled, do not allow themselves to be captured or discerned unambiguously. For their element is rather the stuff of dreams – and yet, for Clark, in all rigour, they may still be 'made' out of something.

He then goes on to adumbrate a subtle and ethically acute analysis of the relationship between human emotions and reports and theories concerning fairies. Very often they appear as pagan gods put in their proper, subordinate place: thus they are creatures of unambivalent and abiding loves and hates, not entirely malicious, but completely given over to caprice and impulse, without any regard for ends, since their destiny is to live forever within time and they do not trouble themselves concerning eternal destiny. As Clark suggests, the temptation of 'new age thinking' as inaugurated by Yeats (and which Clark, as a Christian, discusses with a unique patience and degree of sympathy) as he himself half-knew, is for human beings wholly to give themselves over to these real influences, in reaction against a technocratic world in league with a falsely disenchanted (and so denatured) modern Christianity. We would then start to inhabit an amoral world of vivid, random emotions, beauty divorced from the good, and heroic, sacrificial violence, accompanied by startling symbols – since, as we saw Hume taught, feeling and image are always twinned. Clark appropriately cites William Blake's warning against returned Druidry in Britain: 'gods are visions of the eternal attributes, or divine names, which when erected into gods become destructive of humanity......For when separated from man or humanity, who is Jesus the saviour, the vine of eternity, they are thieves and rebels, they are destroyers'. Certainly, human beings need to be open to all 'influences', on pain of being the prisoners of a few 'material' ones; but this openness is dangerous unless we are supremely receptive to the unifying influence of God and of the Divine Humanity which (as Blake finally realised, with a developed orthodoxy that anticipates sophiology and is *not at all* gnostic) guards against the influence of a distorted and itself 'druidically' idolatrous monotheistic influence which would sacrifice the Creation to the Creator.

In this context Clark notes that, traditionally speaking, the fairy-realm has been associated not just with a carefree innocence and endless festival, but also with disillusionment, aridity and sterility. This concurs with the fact, that as the Irish scholar John Carey has noted, Celtic Christianity tended to locate the *sidhe* alternatively as unfallen human beings *or* as chastised pagan gods or yet again as half-fallen angels. In keeping, perhaps, with the first reading, Clark suggests in the conclusion of his essay that there can be 'third fairies', perhaps rather like Tolkien's elves, who combine joy with a tinge of sadness, and so point beyond earthly paradisal timelessness towards the real spiritual Good of eternity which is the active contemplation of infinite love.

Yeats's debate with G.E. Moore, conducted at second hand through Moore's brother Sturge, concerning what counts as 'real', including the status of fairies, is properly located by Clark with the Irish Berkeleyan tradition. As Clark says, in line with Berkeley and against the Moores, 'materiality is an element unabstractable from experience'. But is Clark right to see Berkeley's insight here as necessarily 'idealist'? After all, Aquinas did not think that a sheerly material cosmos without spirits was a rational possibility. It is arguable that Berkeley's *esse est percipi* is, just as it is literally presented, an ontological thesis, and not, as it is so often taken to be, a thesis

about the confinement of ontology within epistemology, the first world within the second. As with Plato (and as the more Platonic and Trinitarian ontology of light in Siris suggests), Berkeley is saying that all that exists gives itself to be perceived, and would not exist at all outside the 'dynamic' affecting of one thing by another which is in some sense the perception or 'registration' of one thing by another. A purely 'trapped' object, as advocated by Harman, has no attribute through which we might accord it existence and therefore there is no reason to credit its existence: 'to be' simply is to influence, to communicate, to give – and equally to be influenced and to receive with gratitude. Berkeley can be purged of the taint of idealism in his writings if we allow that this influence and reception can be often 'unconscious' in character. Yet a more realist reading of his thought is already suggested by the fact that he did not exactly teach that all reality existed only in our minds or in God's, but rather that the reality of the external world is the reality – without 'matter', as an autonomous underlying substance – of the divine language as spoken in finite terms and partially decipherable by human beings. Indeed, given Berkeley's specific anticipation in his notebooks of Hume's deconstruction of substantive human identity, one could say that for Berkeley humanity is newly located in the exterior of the divine language necessarily translated into human semiosis, rather than reality being newly located inside human subjectivity, as in the usual English empiricist/idealist misreadings of his work.

And it is Berkeley read as a 'linguistic realist' (in this singular sense) and not as an idealist, that makes the better sense of Clark's own trajectory and ultimate allegiance to the neoplatonic legacy, rather than that of modern German subjectivism. For by reading Berkeley and his own reflections (at least partially) as 'idealist', he is

confined to the position of saying that *at the very least* fairies, along with all other human imaginings, are fully real in the sense that the only possible test of reality, including material reality, is human experience of that reality. On the other hand, *it is possible* for Clark that they are also real in the sense that our real percepts are 'signals to us of other spirits, other centres of experience within the infinite and eternal'. However, his own insight that fairies are now on one fairy-footing with all other fantasies, including human thoughts as such, would rather suggest that 'the very least' is immediately also the more, that one not only 'can' but *must* believe in fairies (and so forth) in order to go on believing in the reality of the very thoughts that we think. For if thoughts are ireducibly real as thoughts, transcending all matter, then they must come from outside us and finally from above us. And if imaginings are real as imaginings, irreducible to physical motions, sensations or intentional abstractions, then they must belong in, and derive from a real dream-world like the one twice visited by Alice: the *mundus imaginalis* of the near-Orient.

But the mystical Islamic thinkers – most notably Ibn-el-Arabi and Mulla Sadra -went further still in their theories regarding the general ontological import of the
imagination. According to their neoplatonic logic, God, through angelic mediation,
must himself have *imagined* the material world. Hence it follows that the material
creation is itself a work of the divine imagination, the divine descending mediation
between soul and matter.

And if we think in this way, then perhaps we can make more sense of the ontological status of our own animal imaginings. In the first place, cannot one say that inorganic things always keep pace with their own imagination, by existing as

expressing themselves 'once only', as a rock is exhaustively a rock and a wave is exhaustively a crashing break on the shore. It is valid to describe all things as selfimaginings, because natural science can offer us no advance on the irreduced idea that things must exist precisely in order to express themselves. In the second place plants advance upon the inorganic because they communicate their imaginings within themselves and their own species through growth and procreation. By contrast, however, to rocks and waves and plants, in the third place animal existences split this imaginative self-expression in two opposing directions. In one direction they inscribe imaginary though real motions from which they preserve a substantive reserve: the cheetah returns to her lair from her prowlings. But in another, inward direction, the animal must anticipate and rehearse and phantasmically echo these prowlings, thereby becoming distanced from her substance within as well as without. But then, one can ask, following Latour's principle of irreduction, is the inner imagination really for the motion, or can one not equally say that the cheetah does not dream in order to wander, but also wanders in order to dream - or that the animal freedom to roam is for the sake of the beginnings of a spiritual migration? It would then follow that the animal real body that is imagined by God equally splits two ways: into a body in motion and into that subtle body of imaginings of which esotericists validly speak. In the case of the human animal, the prowlings and the dreamings escape the bounds of all regular courses, to advance endlessly into ever-further wonder and danger.

This ontology of the imagined can be common ground for all three monotheisms, and no doubt in a modified way for all other religions also. It allows us to see that all existence not only lives and feels, but relationally pictures the other and finally leaves

itself outwardly to shape the world in art which begins in the Cheetah's circlings and leaves itself inwardly in the imagination in a conjoined double parting.

However, Christianity adds three things. First of all, it sees in effect the divine as itself including the three no longer merely declining neoplatonic moments of unity, intellect and psyche or spirit. (This can be said, even though the main historical route to the emergence of the doctrine of the Trinity was not through the modification of neoplatonic doctrine.) Thereby, God becomes newly conceived as self-generative: as the living art which is both Son and Logos, and which is ever-renewed in the coproceeding Spirit of this generation. In this way Christian theology uniquely thinks the divine intelligence as also in an eminent sense imagination, because the Father only knows at all by interior 'making', by the formation of an image. (Though clearly this is not the 'shaping' of any pre-existent matter.) And it is in just this fashion, by thinking of thought as an infinite transition, that Christianity avoids the attribution to God of thought as a doubling reflexivity which would compromise his simplicity. Hence beyond both neoplatonism and the Jewish and Muslim withholding of all analogical attribution from the divine, Christianity is uniquely able, as Pope Benedict argued in his Regensburg address, to think God as reason, albeit as unknown reason. Indeed the thought of the Trinity is the only *coherent* thought of the ultimate reality of thought. The Trinitarian Logos saves the reality of reason by thinking of it as infinite imagination.

And through the same gesture monotheism is perfected rather than qualified, because one 'resolves' in a mystery the *aporia* whereby the Creation as the divinely imagined 'other' to God is and yet is not outside God, who is omnipresent. The

doctrine of the Trinity allows one to hold to both sides of the *aporia* with equal force: the art of Creation as externalised imagination possesses integrity outside God, and on this account it eventually returns to God; but equally, God is in himself the internalised art of the Creation (in its entire extent which is unknown to us) and the return of this inner Filial imagination to its Paternal fontal source by its ceaseless organic renewal of spousal Spiritual inspiration, through whose equally maternal 'excess' over its own imaginings it is generated in the first place.

The second thing is the arrival of the *Logos* in time as the divine person who executes, as the renowned Anglo-Catholic literary critic Stephen Medcalf put it (building on Tolkien and Lewis), the supreme exercise in word and deed, memory and anticipation of the human imagination, thereby ensuring that what the gospels record is not history, nor fiction, but the collapse of both into each other – into what one might describe, following Henri Corbin, as a 'metahistory' which is the apocalyptic assumption of a passage of time into the *mundus imaginalis*. This is just why the gospels are so bizarre, and why they constantly try to negotiate the impossible paradox that Jesus is within the world and yet cannot be contained by it, as the end of St John's gospel confirms. It follows that whenever the gospels appear to veer towards fiction, as with the birth or resurrection narratives, this is rather the *literal* recording of the turning of history inside out by the metahistorical which is not less, but more literally real, than the merely historical. This is also why the Bible *supremely* shows us 'the living educts of the imagination'.

But why should we need this assumption of history into the divine imagination? Certainly in order to re-imagine a world distorted by sin. But also we need it ontologically. Aquinas, following Seneca, says that one can only acknowledge a gift in gratitude by giving more, else one has merely paid back a debt. But in that case our worship of God, it would seem, could never be, as it should be in order to be authentic, a spontaneous gratitude, and so we should forever endure the burden of an ontological debt. It is just for this reason that we can see that Christ came, not merely to atone for sin, but also to make ontological atonement. Not that finite being is evil, but that it is only perfect because of the eternal fact of the Incarnation. Humans, in order to freely love God, and so in a sense to be free in relation to God and even free of God, as Eckhart might say, must give back to God more than he has given us. This is only possible because God himself becomes more than God by repairing the third metaphysical indigency whereby God lacks his own lack -- God lacks the worship of God, as Pierre Bérulle put it. But Christ as the divine-humanity is impossibly more than God and renders back to God more than God has given. In this way to the divine imagination is impossibly added also the human imagination of the divine. Of course under the conditions of sin this ontological atonement took the form of a suffering one - a passage through disaster perfectly endured and so integrated into the gift that is impossibly more than even the greatest imaginable gift.

It is, in the third place, this mystery which we re-receive and re-imagine in the Eucharistic liturgy and re-offer as an adequate praise of God which gives back to him more than he has given: the word made not just flesh, but the very self-giving and feeding body of the cosmos, brought to harvest as bread and wine. In every act of the secondary imagination we are surprised by our own inspirations -- overtaken and ledforth by our own actions beyond comprehension under the advance-lure of grace, as Maurice Blondel understood. But in the liturgy we are supremely surprised and so

entirely enter the world of the imagination that, following Romano Guardini, the normal gap between fiction and reality is closed. And at the heart of this mystery, as David Grummet after Blondel and Catherine Pickstock have variously suggested, lies the final answer to the enigma of essence, the enigma of the ens, of Latour's actant. What Leibniz called the *vinculum substantiale*, the holding together of a substantive thing that stabilises constitutive relations, seems to be an unanswerable mystery and must always in time remain so. Yet in the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ we are offered a further mystery that in some sense indicates a resolution of the everyday one. What holds together here is the divinehuman substance as identical with the being, or better, the reality of God. So in participatory consequence, all of nature is transubstantiated, and thereby restored to its original integrity. In a sense the transformation and inherence at the Mass is no more mysterious than any other transformation or inherence, and if it is imagined by us as taking place, then that is because it is real, and because all reality is most fundamentally imagined. Ordinarily, holding together and transformation occur through the mediated interaction of substance and relation, but we can now see that these things make no sense outside the divine presence to all things achieved through participation in the divine imaginative, creative act.

This quadruple summation of completed monotheism as divine and humanly imagined Creation, Trinity, Incarnation and Transubstantiation, consummates the vision and claim of these lectures. This is the view that, in order fully to perform the philosophic act of saving the appearances of the ordinary, we must invoke the seemingly strange and exotic teachings of theology, and the strangest of all, which are the teachings of Christian theology.