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**THEOLOGY AS  
DIALOGUE AND FRAGMENT:  
SAYING GOD WITH DAVID TRACY**

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## **SHORT ABSTRACT**

This thesis concerns the ideas of ‘dialogue’ and ‘fragment’ in the work of the American liberal Roman Catholic theologian David Tracy (bn. 1939). Dialogue (or ‘conversation’) established itself as a dominant idea for Tracy in the 1980s, whereas the centrality of fragments first emerged for Tracy in the late 1990s, to complicate and refine his earlier thinking. Despite this historical sequence, however, the organisation of this thesis is thematic rather than essentially chronological.

The first three chapters focus on how in the later 1970s and 1980s Tracy adapted his ideas of conversation-dialogue from the thought of the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer. Chapter Four examines some serious objections to Tracy’s concept of dialogic reason, before defending his basic choices and gesturing towards his more recent work as perhaps resolving real previous difficulties.

Chapter Five explores the ‘ontological’ thinking of Martin Heidegger, valuable for evaluating Tracy despite the latter’s determination to put his own thinking on a more empirical and pluralistic footing. Chapter Six tackles this theme of Tracy’s ongoingly ‘empirical’ sensibility, as well as the importance he has attached to the experiencing human ‘self.’ Tracy’s ideas of human experience and selfhood owe much to William James and to Bernard Lonergan.

Chapter Seven examines ‘correlational’ concepts that Tracy has forged to facilitate Christian theology over the course of his career since *Blessed Rage for Order* (1975). As Tracy became philosophically and theologically uncomfortable with theism as the

supposed essential horizon for theology (around 1990), so the idea of the ‘mystical-prophetic’ emerged to open a door into new horizons of thinking. Chapter Eight highlights an easily overlooked antecedent of the hermeneutical negativity that Tracy’s recent ideas of ‘fragments’ imply: in Gadamer’s sense of the Christian negative ‘sign’ of the *Ecce Homo*. Chapter Nine then focuses on Tracy’s ideas of thinking through fragments: their adequacy and possible consequences.

## LONG ABSTRACT

This thesis concerns the ideas of ‘dialogue’ and ‘fragment’ in the work of the American liberal Catholic theologian David Tracy (bn. 1939). These ideas of Tracy’s can be used to focus his wide-ranging explorations in Christian faith and reason. Dialogue (or ‘conversation’) established itself as a dominant idea for Tracy in the 1980s, whereas the centrality of fragments only first emerged for Tracy in the late 1990s, as a complication and refinement of his earlier thinking. Granted the chronological sequence of these two themes in Tracy’s thinking, however, the organisation of this thesis is thematic rather than chronological.

Chapter One considers the background to Tracy’s idea of conversation-dialogue in the thought of the German hermeneutical philosopher (and interpreter and one-time pupil of Martin Heidegger), Hans-Georg Gadamer. Tracy’s engagements with Gadamer were not particularly concerted in *Blessed Rage for Order* (1975), but by the time of *The Analogical Imagination* (1980), adaptive appropriations of Gadamer’s thinking had become a central feature of Tracy’s thinking. The first chapter examines the elements of Gadamer’s thinking that most influenced and appealed to Tracy, while also noting Tracy’s significant differences from Gadamer in how Tracy continued to incorporate methodological and transcendental reflection into his interpretation theory, as a partner to the phenomenology of language that Gadamer found sufficient.

The first section of Chapter Two examines Tracy’s theory of theological conversation as first advanced in *Imagination*, focussing on the ways in which Tracy transformed Gadamer-like ideas to his own contrastingly ‘empirical’ and religious-theological ends.

In particular, this section considers Tracy's claims concerning 'the phenomenon of the classic,' and the way these claims worked their ways out in Tracy's theological thinking. The second half of the chapter then critically assesses the process-pantentheistic horizon that Tracy favoured for theology and thinking up until the late 1980s. This includes discussion of trenchant criticisms of the process theological tradition advanced by the English Dominican theologian, Herbert McCabe.

Chapter 3 presents Tracy account of 'conversation with texts' in *Plurality and Ambiguity* (1986). The chapter focuses first on Tracy's notion the 'manifestation' that he said occurs in the to-and-fro of questioning conversation, and second on the ways in which conversation is interrupted by a radical plurality that breeds in all language and interpretation, on the one hand, and the cognitive, moral and even religious 'ambiguity' attached to all human tradition and interpretation, on the other. For Tracy at this time, it was by uncovering and staying vigilant with respect to ambiguity that one may hope to live intelligibly despite the inextirpable plurality of one's discursive world. In *Plurality*, Tracy also identified *religion* as a crucial resource of 'resistance and hope' for the enterprise of dialogic reason. However, the chapter concludes by arguing that Tracy may have imagined conversation too much along the lines of an ideally co-operative game, whereas the image of competitive sport might be more helpful. In sport one requires a worthy *opponent* for the goods of many games to emerge, and, likewise, there is perhaps a proper ambiguity that is always present in any attempt at conversation, to the very extent that the conversation actually locates a real other who is not already contracted in advance to the Same.

Chapter Four considers objections to Tracy's model of conversational reason from three

contrasting Roman Catholic thinkers. Gerard Loughlin complained that Tracy's approach in *Plurality* enthroned a bookish and disembodied notion of reason, while Tracy's account of 'religion' in that work struck Loughlin as being not so much pluralistic as instead an attempted reduction of religious plurality to a basically unreal abstract and denatured 'essence.' Granting that there may have been grains of truth in these allegations, this chapter argues nevertheless, first, that Tracy's more recent thinking is more immune to these difficulties, and, second, that Tracy only ever intended his model of conversation to serve (rather than displace) embodied practices of justice and solidarity. By contrast, the ecclesial 'syllogisms of the body' that Loughlin apparently would prefer seem to represent dangerously unexamined (or un-examinable) alternatives, not to be trusted ahead of the kinds of attentive conversational practice that *Plurality* seeks to commend.

A rather different, and recent, objection to Tracy's approach to conversation-dialogue comes from Werner Jeanrond, who thinks that a 'hermeneutics of love' should be accorded first place ahead of 'the hermeneutics of conversation and tradition.' 'Traditions cannot love,' Jeanrond declares, and Christian theory, at least, should model love rather than understanding as primary. In this chapter, Jeanrond's objection is coordinated with Martin Poulson's parallel objection to the effect that, by insisting on seeking the essential nature of thinking within the arena of hermeneutical theory, Tracy hands himself over to inescapable dilemmas of having to privilege *either* an analogical similarity between things *or else* a regime of difference that dissolves any positive horizon of reality. The latter option would enthrone Derridean *différance* in a manner Tracy has resisted, and so Tracy has tended to opt instead for an essential sameness in things (including an essential sameness between Christian faith and human culture in

general.)

Poulsom suggests that Tracy would have been wise instead to follow his older contemporary, the Dutch Roman Catholic theologian, Edward Schillebeeckx, in crafting a notion of ‘praxis’ to relate theory with practice (rather than leaving theory on its own with its dilemma). Jeanrond likewise talks of love as a ‘praxis.’ However, the latter parts of this chapter argue that despite problems that Poulsom was correct to identify in Tracy’s thought in the 1980s, Tracy has always been right to refuse to cede hermeneutical questions to supposedly more essential extra-discursive dynamics. Even love is not other than a *word* that informs and becomes flesh.

Chapter Five explores the ‘ontological’ thinking of Heidegger, as standing behind Gadamer. This background is valuable also in order to understand and evaluate Tracy’s thinking, despite Tracy’s determination to put his own thinking on a more ‘Anglo-American’ empirical and pluralistic footing. In the course of a brief reading of *Being and Time*, this chapter highlights obscurities in how Heidegger’s analysis of human ‘existence’ in *Being and Time* was supposed to relate itself to human ‘experience.’ Later Heidegger turned instead to the phenomenon of language (or ‘Saying’) as the proper focus of thinking and questioning. Inheriting Heidegger’s thinking, Gadamer innovated a concept of what he called ‘hermeneutic experience,’ which the chapter concludes by comparing with Tracy’s parallel concept.

Chapter Six tackles directly the theme of Tracy ongoingly ‘empirical’ sensibility, as well as the importance that he has attached to the experiencing ‘self’ in human thinking and living. The chapter shows that Tracy’s evolving ideas of human experience and

selfhood owe much to William James, on the one hand, and Bernard Lonergan on the other. A first section – entitled ‘A Jamesian among the Nietzscheans’ – examines examples of Nietzschean-style *disbelief* in any Jamesian humanistic model of human subjectivity. Short sub-sections on Richard Rorty and Paul Tillich lead to a more extended discussion of Michel Foucault’s critique of the ‘empirico-transcendental reduplication’ in much modern thinking, whereby empirical observations are, by a sleight of hand, concocted into transcendental conclusions. Alan Ray applied this Foucaultian criticism with effect to *Blessed Rage* and *Imagination*. However, this chapter also seeks to partly deflect Ray’s attack by highlighting the poetic resonance of Tracy’s thought (as suggested by the title of *Blessed Rage*, which is a quotation from Wallace Stevens’s poem, *The Idea of Order at Key West*.)

The second section of this chapter (Chapter Six) then outlines the religious philosophy of Bernard Lonergan. It is suggested that Tracy may today finally be coming round to something like Lonergan’s sense of human selves that persist as profoundly imperilled, religiously ecstatic subjectivities. A short Coda to the chapter notes how Tracy prefers William James’s pluralistic account of human subjectivity, ahead of alternative contemporary retrievals of the virtue tradition after Aristotle.

Chapter Seven turns to Christian theology and to Tracy’s evolving notion of its systemically ‘correlative’ task. Tracy has regarded theology fundamentally as a labour of correlating received tradition with contemporary society, on the one hand, and these together with contemporary possibilities for transcendental reflection, on the other. Today, however, this task does not translate into a clear methodical schema (as apparently in the 1980s) so much as invite contemplation of the theologian’s ‘nearly

impossible task of correlating *theos* and *logos*.’

Chapter Seven continues by examining the various correlative categories that Tracy has proposed over the course of his career to act as the critical enablers of theological conversation: from ‘common human experience’ and ‘authentic secularity’ in *Blessed Rage*, to ‘the phenomenon of the classic’ and ‘analogical imagination’ in *Imagination*, to the emergence of the ‘mystical-prophetic’ as a key interpretative theological category at the end of the 1980s and into the 1990s. The chapter then argues that the arrival of this idea of the mystical-prophetic opens a door to a more nuanced understanding of the self-possession (or lack thereof) of human reason, and potential new possibilities for imagining the relation between reason and religious faith. However, it may well be that Tracy would resist these suggestions, as tending too much to dethrone the autonomously ‘self-correcting power’ of human reason.

Chapter Eight highlights an easily overlooked Gadamerian antecedent of the hermeneutical negativity that Tracy gives a central place to in his ideas of ‘fragment’ (or ‘frag-event’). Gadamer identified the doctrine of the Incarnation of the Word as a central Christian innovation on the road to a hermeneutic consciousness, but at the same time he also saw at the heart of Christianity the sign of an absolute contradiction and negation of human hermeneutic possibility in the figure of the *Ecce Homo*. The chapter concludes that the seemingly sunny humanism of Gadamer’s thought, forged in the aftermath of Western Christianity, knew as its twin and foil a devastating existential shadow falling across the individual in his or her mutely aghast privacy. In Tracy case, by contrast, the negativity inherent in the thought of ‘fragments’ will appear not in the guise of a private *fascinans et tremendum*, but rather on the plane, and at the heart, of

hermeneutic experience as such.

Finally, Chapter Nine introduces Tracy's idea of 'fragment' (or, as he now prefers, 'frag-event') as the particular way, above all, that Tracy commends us to *pay attention* to the world. Tracy now sees the practice of attention as central to every kind of thinking and living (a thought echoed in the later Lonergan and in Simone Weil). Specifically, the idea of 'fragment' expresses for Tracy the kind of intelligible 'form' that he believes is most available to theology and thinking today: fragments are the forms able to resist modern closure without attempting to drag thinking back into pre-critical syntheses. Our traditions have always subsisted in fragments, says Tracy, even though we may not always have realised it. Read a great Christian writer like Augustine, for example, and the fragmentary character of a genuine classic becomes clear.

This final chapter goes on to explore the fundamental character of fragments as entities and events that shatter 'totality systems' of thinking. Totality systems can be conscious (as in some Christian ideologies of Church, for example), or they can be unconscious, as generally in the examples of racism or sexism, or the *Gestell* of technicity that Heidegger saw as enframing modern existence. The German Romantics first invented fragments as a means to shatter the totality system of Enlightenment thought, but Tracy finds more exemplary for us today the fragments that nineteenth- and twentieth-century Black American writers discovered and forged – both religious and nonreligious – to shatter and subvert the reigning totality systems of 'whiteness' and normatively 'white' interpretations of culture and modernity.

When Tracy gave a paper on his idea of fragments before Jacques Derrida in 1997, Derrida complained that the metaphor ‘fragment’ implies a piece taken off a whole that one recalls by way of the fragment, probably with nostalgia (as in the original example of the Romantics). Thus the figure of the fragment fails to escape the control of a supposed totality. Since Derrida’s criticism, Tracy has invented the neologism ‘frag-event’ to specify more accurately what he means by a fragment, which he insisted was something quite different. Talk of *frag-event* recapitulates the original construction of ‘the classic’ in *Imagination* as being ultimately a function of an *event*: paradigmatically, there, the ‘event of Jesus Christ’ that is at once in the past (Palestine two-thousand years ago) *and* an ongoing event of tradition that still occurs over and again today.

The middle part of Chapter Nine explores whether or not the Tracean frag-event can really be thought through without it collapsing into either a self-dissolving *frisson* of *différance*, on the one hand, or else a Derridean fragment of a lamented totality, on the other. Unless a third way exists, Tracy’s recent thinking will be simply repeating in a new way the dilemma of identity or difference that Poulson identified earlier. The thesis argues, however, that the metaphor ‘frag-event’ *can* plausibly avoid this dilemma, especially once it joins forces with Tracy’s other metaphor of ‘gathering’ fragments into (frag-eventary) coherences. Tracy spies this possibility in fact in Christian theologies of the Trinity, for example, but also, too, in the work of major modern poets who laboured to gather fragmentary visions of the world (such as Elliott, Yeats and Dickinson).

A thinker whom Tracy cites as close to his idea on fragments is the Walter Benjamin. Benjamin sought to ‘blast’ ‘dialectical images’ from the past, such as might possess a power to interrupt the catastrophe of history and the inhumane ideologies of progress

that accompany it in the modern period. Benjamin yearned to see the victims of history and their sufferings redeemed by our memory of their suffering, rather than forgotten, as those remembered sufferings become focussed into moments of newness, where phenomena apprehended in the past (for example, for Benjamin, the nineteenth-century arcades of Paris) garner a power to jolt our historical perception and usher in something new: a messianic re-envisioning of the present in its memory of the past. Tracy, too, must hope to find ways to think within history that do not unconsciously contribute to the totality systems that have become our second nature. Tracy calls his idea of fragment above all ‘a Benjaminian-like notion.’

The concluding sections to the last chapter of the thesis recall some of its key arguments, to help show how the idea of fragment triangulates Tracy at an equal distance from Gadamer and Derrida (of John Caputo) in a space that is made possible by Tracy’s insistently pluralistic empirico-religious sensibility as his distinctive mode of paying attention to the world. A concluding section wonders whether Tracy may nevertheless still be a little too keen always to be routing thinking *via* the particular *towards* the universal, as if the horizon of universality (or God) were a more unambiguous target than perhaps his recent thinking implies. Either way, however, Tracy remains a serious theological thinker of our time.



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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis concerns the ideas of ‘dialogue’ and ‘fragment’ in the work of the American liberal Catholic theologian David Tracy. These two notions focus much of his wide-ranging explorations in Christian faith and reason over the past half-century and still ongoing today. Given the predominantly thematic arrangement of the thesis as a whole, it will be helpful first to give a chronological sketch of Tracy’s biography and career to date.

David Tracy was born in 1939 to a family of Irish background in the city of Yonkers near New York City. In 1952 he began attending the Catholic Cathedral School in Manhattan, where Bernard McGinn – also from Yonkers – was in the year above. Tracy followed McGinn to the Gregorian University in Rome in 1960,<sup>1</sup> where one of his lecturers was the Jesuit philosopher-theologian Bernard Lonergan, on whose work and under whose supervision he would later submit a doctoral dissertation in 1969.<sup>2</sup> In 1963 Tracy was ordained a Roman Catholic priest, serving one year in a parish before returning to the Gregorian to study under Lonergan.

In 1967 Tracy took his first lecturing job at the Catholic University of America (once again alongside McGinn). However, in 1968 he and McGinn were among a group of academics at the Catholic University who openly rejected the teaching of Pope Paul VI’s encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. All were sacked, and while legal disputes were still in progress he and McGinn were recruited to the Divinity School at the University of

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<sup>1</sup> See David Tracy, ‘Tribute to Bernard McGinn,’ *Criterion* 42/3 (2003), 41-42.

<sup>2</sup> For an account of this meeting and his relation to Lonergan, then and since, see Tracy, ‘Interview with David Tracy,’ unpublished private interview, Oxford, 25/26 October 2009 (printed as an Appendix to this thesis), line number 135 ff.

Chicago,<sup>3</sup> where Tracy would remain in post until his retirement in 2006.<sup>4</sup>

In 1970 Tracy published his first book-length work, *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan*, arising from his doctoral dissertation. The same year, he was one of the directors of the International Lonergan Congress held in Florida, which brought scholars together from round the world to discuss Lonergan's work. At the Congress, Tracy delivered a paper critical of emergent aspects of his teacher's thinking.<sup>5</sup>

In 1975, Tracy published his first major work of constructive theology, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology*.<sup>6</sup> He intended this as the first in a series that would treat 'fundamental,' 'systematic' and 'practical' theology in turn. The second volume, on systematic theology, appeared in 1980 as *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*.<sup>7</sup> In this work Tracy first fully committed himself to a 'hermeneutical' orientation that treats the linguistic discursivity of thinking and experience as an inescapable and primary phenomenon. In the service of this orientation, Tracy adapted the thought of the German hermeneutical philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer to his own more empirically minded religious and theological outlook. At this time, Tracy was also projecting a third volume on practical theology that has never appeared, seemingly lost to the requirement Tracy found for theology

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<sup>3</sup> See Tracy, 'Tribute to Bernard McGinn,' 42. McGinn retired from Chicago in 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Tracy became the inaugural holder of the Andrew Thomas Greeley and Grace McNichols Greeley Professorship in Roman Catholic Studies (in 1984), also serving for many years on the cross-University 'Committee on the Analysis of Ideas and Methods.'

<sup>5</sup> For the published form of this paper, see Tracy, 'Lonergan's Foundational Theology: An Interpretation and Critique' in Philip McShane, ed., *Foundations of Theology: Papers from the International Lonergan Congress, 1970* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1971), 197-222. For discussion of Tracy's argument in this piece, see Chapter 7 section II.i., below here. Today Tracy indicates that he regrets the overly rationalistic tone and content of his presentation at the Congress (see Tracy, 'Interview,' ln. 190-217).

<sup>6</sup> Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* [1975] (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (London: SCM Press, 1981).

always to be returning to rethink its bases.

In 1983, Tracy contributed half the chapters to a book co-authored with the process theologian John Cobb, entitled *Talking About God: Doing Theology in the Context of Modern Pluralism*.<sup>8</sup> Tracy outlined here a dialogue that he hoped could take place between Whiteheadian process panentheism and transcendental Thomism. Tracy's enthusiasm for process theology made him an unusual Catholic theologian, and when *Blessed Rage* was published in 1975, the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith wrote to him to ask him to describe and defend this part of his understanding. Tracy wrote back as requested but heard nothing more.<sup>9</sup>

It is now over a quarter of a century since Tracy's last major monograph publication, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope*.<sup>10</sup> Tellingly, perhaps, Tracy felt he needed to turn aside temporarily in this work from his theological programme, in order to concentrate on articulating the parameters of an ethical and religious hope for dialogic reason (or 'conversation') as a practice of building a shareable world alongside others.<sup>11</sup> In *Plurality*, Tracy advanced his hope for dialogic reason in the acknowledged face of the radical plurality of language and interpretation, on the one hand, and the pervasive cognitive, moral and even religious 'ambiguity' of all human traditions, on

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<sup>8</sup> David Tracy and John B. Cobb, Jr., *Talking About God: Doing Theology in the Context of Modern Pluralism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1983). This book was based on lectures that the two had originally delivered at John Carroll (Jesuit) University in Ohio back in 1976-7. For an exploration of the significance of process (or 'panentheist') theism for Tracy in the 1970s and 1980s, see Chapter 2 section II, below.

<sup>9</sup> David Gibson, 'God-obsessed: David Tracy's Theological Quest,' *Commonweal* 137/2 (January 29, 2010). Tracy told Gibson, "I never heard back again. I don't know what that means" (*ibid.*).

<sup>10</sup> Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (London: SCM Press, 1987).

<sup>11</sup> 'What the "essence of Christianity" might be after Christians seriously acknowledge first, the plurality within their own traditions, second, the import of the many other religious traditions for Christian self-understanding and third, the profound cognitive, moral, and religious ambiguity of Christianity itself is, to put it mildly, a very difficult question [and] another task for another time, and one helpfully analyzed only in a separate volume' (Tracy, *Plurality*, x).

the other. *Plurality* stands as Tracy's gathered 1980s presentation of the skilled practice of 'dialogue' that he located at the heart of all genuine thinking, including theology.

Tracy returned more explicitly to theological questions in *Dialogue with the Other: the Interreligious Dialogue*, published in 1990,<sup>12</sup> where he first intimated a turn in his thinking towards interpreting 'God' in a religious manner that would break with theistic propositions.<sup>13</sup> In 1994 was published – under the title *On Naming the Present: God, Hermeneutics, Church* – a collection of Tracy's essays originally written for the international ecumenically minded Catholic theological journal *Concilium* (on the editorial board of which Tracy served for many years).<sup>14</sup> In the Preface to *On Naming the Present*, Tracy referred to a book entitled 'On Naming God' that he was then in the process of writing.<sup>15</sup> This work also never appeared, although around this time Tracy produced important articles on the role played by 'form' in theology,<sup>16</sup> as well as, slightly later, proposals regarding the exemplariness of 'fragments' as the kind of forms available to theology today.<sup>17</sup> In 1999/2000, Tracy gave the Gifford lectures in Edinburgh, under the title 'This side of God,' since which time his readership has been awaiting a promised follow-up multi-volume publication.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-religious Dialogue* (Louvain: Peeters Uitgeverij, 1991). *Dialogue* was the write-up of a loosely cumulative sequence of lectures delivered at the University of Louvain in 1988 (see *ibid.*, xi).

<sup>13</sup> See especially Chapter 7 section V, below.

<sup>14</sup> Tracy, *On Naming the Present: Reflections on God, Hermeneutics, and Church* (London: SCM Press, 1994).

<sup>15</sup> Tracy, *On Naming the Present*, x.

<sup>16</sup> For example, Tracy, 'Literary Theory and Return of the Forms for Naming and Thinking God in Theology,' *Journal of Religion*, 74/3 (1994), 302-319; and Tracy, 'Trinitarian Speculation and the Forms of Divine Disclosure' in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall and Gerald O'Collins, eds., *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 273-293.

<sup>17</sup> See Tracy, 'African American Thought: The Discovery of Fragments' in Dwight N. Hopkins, ed., *Black Faith and Public Talk: Critical Essays on James H. Cone's Back Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 29-38; and Tracy, 'Fragments: The Spiritual Situation of our Times' in John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, eds., *God, The Gift, and Postmodernism* (Indiana University Press, 1999), 170-180; with 'Response by Jacques Derrida,' *ibid.*, 181-184.

<sup>18</sup> Tracy laid out the themes of this upcoming publication – namely, Christian theological 'fragments' and their 'gathering' – in Tracy, 'Form and Fragment: The Recovery of the Hidden and Incomprehensible

During the first decade of this century, Tracy has survived serious illness and the death of his mother (to whom he was very close). However, he has nevertheless been publishing a steady trickle of substantial articles since the time of his Gifford Lectures, in journals and edited volumes, suggesting his directions of travel.

The themes of ‘dialogue’ and ‘fragment’ occupy a historical sequence in Tracy’s career: conversation-dialogue established itself as a dominant idea in the 1980s, whereas the centrality of fragments first emerged for Tracy in the late 1990s as a complication and refinement of his earlier thinking. After the development of ‘dialogue’ but before the advent of ‘fragment,’ meanwhile, lay a period in the late 1980s and early 1990s when Tracy was busy breaking out of the hitherto defining theistic horizon of his thinking, using his new notion of Jewish and Christian theology as ‘mystical-prophetic’ discourses.<sup>19</sup>

The historical sequence of Tracy’s thought through the ‘80s and into the ‘90s will be an important organisational motif for this thesis. Nevertheless this thesis will be arranged thematically rather than essentially chronologically. For example, there was also an earlier, pre-Gadamerian period in Tracy’s thinking – represented by *Blessed Rage* – which will come into view here not so much at the beginning of the thesis as at various later points for particular thematic reasons (such as when discussing the enduring role of transcendental reflection in Tracy’s characteristically ‘empirical’ outlook, or in relation to his notions of the human ‘self,’ or in the course of tracing the evolving

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God’ in Werner G. Jeanrond and Aasulv Lande, eds., *The Concept of God in Global Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 98-114. For more on the expectation of this ‘big book,’ see David Gibson, ‘God-obsessed: David Tracy’s Theological Quest,’ *Commonweal* 137/2 (January 29, 2010).

<sup>19</sup> See Chapter 7 section V, below.

trajectory of Tracy's theological understanding).<sup>20</sup>

The first three chapters of the thesis launch the discussion by focussing on the way in which Tracy adapted his ideas of conversation-dialogue in *Imagination* and *Plurality* from the work of the German philosopher, Hans-Georg Gadamer. In Chapter Four, I examine some serious objections to Tracy's concept of conversation-dialogue, and then defend Tracy's basic choices while gesturing towards his more recent work as potentially resolving some of its real difficulties. Chapter Five then explores the 'ontological' hermeneutical thinking of Martin Heidegger: so essential in Gadamer and valuable, too, for evaluating Tracy (despite the latter's determination to put his own thinking on a more 'Anglo-American' empirical and pluralistic footing). One of Gadamer's key innovations in relation to Heidegger was his concept of 'hermeneutic experience,' which can profitably be compared to Tracy's rather different parallel concept.

Chapter Six tackles the theme of Tracy's ongoingly 'empirical' sensibility head-on, as well as the importance that he has attached to the experiencing 'self' in human thinking and living. Tracy's philosophical and religious commitments contrast here with what we find in Heidegger and Gadamer. As I show, Tracy's evolving ideas of human experience and selfhood continue to owe much to William James, on the one hand, and Bernard Lonergan on the other.

Chapter Seven examines the series of 'correlational' concepts that Tracy has forged to facilitate Christian theology over the course of his career since *Blessed Rage*. As Tracy

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<sup>20</sup> In Chapter 2 section II, Chapter 6 section I.iv and Chapter 7 section III, respectively.

became philosophically and theologically uncomfortable with theism as the supposed essential horizon for theology, so the notion of the ‘mystical-prophetic’ emerged in the late 1980s to open a door into new horizons of thinking. He has been exploring these horizons ever since. Chapter Eight highlights an easily overlooked antecedent of the hermeneutical negativity implied in Tracy’s recent ideas of ‘fragment’ (or ‘frag-event’), which can be found in the negative ‘sign’ of Christ as the *Ecce Homo*, which Gadamer identified at the particular heart of Christian faith. Finally, Chapter Nine concludes with a focus on Tracy’s idea of thinking through fragments: its adequacy and its possible consequences.

In the final chapters, I propose one or two ways in which I would like to see Tracy take his own thought further, drawing out what seem to me to be implications that are not yet fully clarified. More broadly, however, I seek to show that Tracy’s recent thinking can carry forward the strengths of his earlier work in increasingly creative and adequate ways.

I acknowledge at the outset that, in all of this, this thesis will ignore significant tracks of Tracy’s thinking. One particularly glaring omission, for example, will be any treatment of the importance of the form of *tragedy* for Tracy.<sup>21</sup> Another omission will be the general silence of this thesis on Tracy’s compendious references to and evaluations of fellow theologians – Catholic and Protestant – especially in *The Analogical Imagination*. Neither have I sought to locate Tracy more broadly within the Roman Catholic theological firmament. Instead, I have restricted myself to the comparably thin exercise of tracing Tracy’s evolving conception of theological reason. Also missing

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<sup>21</sup> See ‘Interview,’ ln. 45-54. Also see Wendy Doniger’s description of how tragedy has been ‘the world-view that has, more than anything else, driven David’s intellectual and spiritual life’ (Wendy Doniger, ‘Tribute to David Tracy,’ *Criterion* 46/1 (2008), 2-5: 4).

from this thesis will be examinations of Tracy's debts to some major thinkers who have clearly influenced him: Mircea Eliade, Paul Tillich and Karl Rahner are three who come to mind.

What is more, there will not be space in what follows to consider the many and varied artistic influences that impinge powerfully on Tracy's thinking: from modernist and existentialist novelists, playwrights and (especially) poets, to the ancient tragedians (again). Just as damagingly, perhaps, I will give rather little attention to the sense of the Void and the felt absence of God in both our culture specifically and in human suffering and lamentation more generally. These have been crucial features in Tracy's recent thinking.<sup>22</sup> As for the philosophers whom Tracy particularly celebrates today, while I *shall* discuss Walter Benjamin in Chapter Nine, I shall be virtually silent on Simone Weil, mention Emmanuel Levinas only in a rather general way, and scarcely mention Franz Rosenzweig at all.

My excuse for these omissions is that thematic selection is necessarily at a premium when one writes about a thinker who has been described by a friend and colleague – admittedly at his retirement party – as having ‘a head [...] chock full of everything written in Greek, Latin, German, French, Italian, or English, all the philosophers from Plato to Derrida and beyond, as well as everything written in *The New Yorker*, the *New York Review of Books*, *The New York Times*, *The London Review of Books*, *The T. L. S.*, and about two dozen weird catholic publications.’<sup>23</sup> The themes of dialogue and

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<sup>22</sup> See Tracy, ‘On Longing: The Void, The Open, God’ in Stephan van Erp and Lea Verstricht, eds., *Longing in a Culture of Cynicism* (Zürich & Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2008), 15-32; and also Joseph Komonchak's observation that Tracy's current God Book hopes to be a contribution to the struggle for faith in a modern culture where God seems absent, giving particular ‘attention to the experience of absence, of a void’ (Gibson, ‘God-obsessed: David Tracy's Theological Quest’).

<sup>23</sup> Doniger, ‘Tribute to David Tracy,’ *Criterion* 46/1 (2008), 2-5: 5.

fragment in this thesis are intended to reach into the heart of Tracy's thinking. The challenge that arises consequently is to prevent such a project of prospective 'reach' from denaturing or trivialising the breadth and richness of Tracy's intellectual engagements.

At that same function for Tracy's retirement in March 2007, Bernard McGinn observed that Tracy emerged onto the theological scene just as the 'great systematic theologies of the twentieth century [...] gestated and produced in the half-century between ca. 1930 and ca. 1980' were about to seem 'no longer totally adequate in the midst of the challenges' about to erupt 'from so many directions.'<sup>24</sup> (This situation receives reflection in the repeated references to 'plurality' and 'pluralism' in the titles of Tracy's books during the 1970s and '80s.) McGinn notes that '[i]n this confusing maelstrom, theology has been called upon to re-imagine itself in many and often conflicting ways.' Some would like to see theology 'jettisoning the past and boldly setting out in new directions,' while others would prefer to see to theology 'declaring its independence as a unique form of discourse open only to believers.'<sup>25</sup> McGinn notes, however, that Tracy has consistently preferred a different track. For Tracy, the central task of theology is consistently the task of 'trying to rethink [theology's] roots in dialogue with these contemporary challenges [...] difficult as it may be.'<sup>26</sup>

Karl Rahner once asked rhetorically: 'How can we do theology today except in as wide as possible a confrontation with the enormous variety of contemporary anthropological

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<sup>24</sup> Bernard McGinn, 'Tribute to David Tracy,' *Criterion* 46/1 (2008), 7-9: 8.

<sup>25</sup> McGinn, 'Tribute to David Tracy,' 8.

<sup>26</sup> McGinn, 'Tribute to David Tracy,' 8.

sciences?<sup>27</sup> Bernard Lonergan's ambitions in these regards were certainly no less far-reaching.<sup>28</sup> In a world that will appear to many to be even more obviously plural and complicated than it appeared to these giants of an earlier generation, Tracy is a theologian who has stayed faithful to the task.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Karl Rahner, 'Experiences of a Catholic Theologian,' in Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), 306; quoted in McGinn, 'Tribute to David Tracy,' 8.

<sup>28</sup> See, the discussion of Lonergan in Chapter 6 section II, below; and also Tracy in 'Interview,' ln. 146-151.

<sup>29</sup> (On a wholly different note, I owe a debt of warmth and gratitude to my supervisor George Pattison for his patience, generosity and support. Also, many thanks to my brother for proof reading and suggestions. And huge thanks and love to Mira.)

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Hans-Georg Gadamer and the Idea of Dialogue**

Tracy considers dialogue (or ‘conversation’) a primary dimension of the reason needed by theology and general thinking alike. Pursuing the practical and theoretical implications of this commitment will be a major focus of this thesis. The specific focus of this first chapter will be to introduce some central ideas of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), whose account of what takes place when we set about interpreting the world strongly influenced the theory of dialogue that Tracy developed in the 1980s. I will try to show why Gadamer’s hermeneutic philosophy was attractive to Tracy the theologian, while also noting core differences in outlook between Tracy and Gadamer.

Before launching into questions concerning reason-as-dialogue, we should note that in recent years the idea of conversation-dialogue has lost some of the unchallenged primacy which it had for Tracy in the mid-1980s. Since around 1990, Tracy has been recognising a greater ‘brokenness’ in interpretation and reason, amid our fragmenting traditions.<sup>30</sup> More recently still, Tracy has also begun to draw upon Martin Heidegger to suggest our need to attend to the world and to each other in ways which go ‘beyond’ dialogue (that is, beyond any self-complete model of reason-as-conversation).<sup>31</sup> In a lecture delivered at Loyola University in Chicago in 2011, Tracy reflected on four

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<sup>30</sup> In 1990 Tracy wrote that a Christian hermeneutic today ‘must endure as not merely unfinished but as broken’ (*Dialogue with the Other*, 121). The judgment applies equally to any more general hermeneutic of reason. Regarding our fragmentary contemporary situation, Tracy now likes to cite T. S. Eliot’s line about assembling ‘fragments to shore up against our ruin,’ only Tracy refuses Eliot’s negative assessment of a situation in which ‘all we have left in all the traditions, cultural and religious etc., are fragments’ (Tracy). As Tracy continues: ‘But that’s true, in fact it was always true, and it’s certainly true now. And I don’t find this such a terrible thought – at all – if you can discern which of them are really right, now’ (Tracy, ‘Interview with David Tracy,’ Oxford, 25/26 October 2009, Appendix to this thesis, lines 93-6 (hereafter, ‘Interview’ followed by relevant line-numbers)).

<sup>31</sup> See Tracy, ‘Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue’ in Catherine Cornille and Christopher Conway, eds., *Interreligious Hermeneutics* (Eugene, Or.: Cascade Books, 2010), 1-43; 19.

distinct ‘forms’ of reason he saw available to theology today. One of these he called the ‘dialogic’ form, while the other three were ‘dialectical-rhetorical,’ ‘social-critical’ and ‘contemplative-meditative’ forms of reason.<sup>32</sup> That is, today Tracy can list forms of reason alongside each other, no longer counting all subsidiary to one supreme form of reason-as-dialogue. His registering of the ‘contemplative-meditative’ is particularly significant, representing new retrievals from both Martin Heidegger and older aspects of the religious and philosophical tradition

And yet the ‘form’ of dialogue is still today for Tracy the most clearly *manifest* dimension of reason, across which all other forms must work their various infra- and extra-dialogic paths. Even what lies ‘beyond dialogue’ remains in contact with practices of humane dialogue and collaborative action, for ‘everyone must eventually return to the cave where discursive reason, dialogue and responsible action thrive.’<sup>33</sup> As Tracy’s thought has continued to develop, the essential elements within his insistence on dialogue as the most basic hope of reason have been finessed and extended rather than overturned. The later developments can in large part be traced back to tensions and possibilities already incipient in Tracy’s theory of the mid-1980s, as will hopefully become clear. So in exploring the roots of conversation-dialogue in Tracy, I do so with an eye to his more recent complications of the concept.

What most appealed to Tracy in Gadamer was the latter’s root description of the everyday hermeneutical situation: that is, the everyday situation of our needing to interpret other people, ourselves and the world. Before we turn to enumerate the salient

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<sup>32</sup> Tracy, ‘The Necessity and Character of Fundamental Theology,’ unpublished lecture presented at Loyola University, Chicago, April 8, 2011.

<sup>33</sup> Tracy, ‘Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue,’ 43. In ‘ordinary life after all, we all – finitely, historically, thankfully – interact with each other in efforts to try to live lives worthy of a human being’ (*ibid.*).

elements of Gadamer's description (in section III below), it will be helpful to sketch briefly the more general character of twentieth-century 'hermeneutical thinking.' Gadamer made hermeneutics explicit as philosophical commentary on the conversation of human understanding in tradition. His construction of conversation-dialogue had roots in Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, and relied more proximately on the seminal work of Heidegger, under whom Gadamer studied in the 1920s.

Tracy's thought has drawn upon the Heidegger-Gadamer tradition as background as well as through direct appropriation. But, as will become clear, Tracy has also been keen to maintain in various ways a distance between his own American 'empirical' attitude – which honours the positive and constitutive plurality of a world in which a person is always yet to comprehend the different experiences of others – and what Tracy regards as a characteristically European tendency to grasp precipitately after the essential horizon of everything (or, alternatively, to exhibit the definitive absence of any such horizon).<sup>34</sup> Gadamer himself forged towards an equation of intelligible 'being' with *language*, towards which equation Tracy has retained considerable reservation. Yet despite this coolness towards equating being with language, some grasp of the phenomenological and implicitly ontological pole of Tracy's hermeneutical thinking will be valuable if we are to understand its roots and trajectory.

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<sup>34</sup> As Tracy pointed out in an early note in *Plurality and Ambiguity* (1987), 'the analysis I give of interpretation-as-conversation, although clearly indebted to Gadamer's pioneering work, is less directed than his to an ontology of understanding and more to developing an empirical (Anglo-American?) model for the interpretation of texts' (*Plurality*, 115-6 n. 6). Referring to his ongoing affinity with the work of his one-time mentor and doctoral subject, the Canadian philosopher-theologian Bernard Lonergan, Tracy told me recently, 'Yes I do phenomenology, but it is always with this empirical sense' (Tracy, 'Interview with David Tracy,' ln. 264-5).

## I. Hermeneutical thinking

### I. i. Plurality, ambiguity, language

In large part, Tracy's emphasis on dialogue has stemmed directly from his keen sense of the plurality of human experience in all its traditions and interpretations, alongside its cognitive and moral ambiguity.<sup>35</sup> We seek to interpret and understand a world that is rich with variety, and this alone should make us wary of asserting the authority of one single viewpoint. As Tracy remarks in a recent interview, this emphasis on plurality is distinctively American as opposed to European: 'can you be American and not be for plurality?'<sup>36</sup> What is more, none of our traditions of wisdom and understanding are themselves innocent of bloodshed and terror, either directly or indirectly; 'even our great works of civilization are also works of Barbarism,' as Tracy likes to quote Walter Benjamin.<sup>37</sup> If we are to think and speak with any level of cognitive depth and moral responsibility, it follows, we must attend to the really different experiences and perspectives of others. And far from religion being an exception to this rule of reason, according to Tracy, a religious tradition will generally be among the most plural and contested – not to mention the most cognitively and morally ambiguous – of all the occasions of interpretation with which we may deal. This is just one reason for Tracy why *theology*, above all, must conduct itself as an exemplary case of the conversation-

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<sup>35</sup> This perspective achieved its developed expression in Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (London: SCM Press, 1987).

<sup>36</sup> Tracy, 'Interviewed by Christian Sheppard – God: the Possible/Impossible' in John Panteleimon Manoussakis, ed., *After God: Richard Kearney and the Religious Turn in Continental Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 351. Tracy draws attention again here to the influence of William James, who propounded an explicitly pluralistic outlook on the world (see James, William, *A Pluralistic Universe: Hibbert Lectures at Manchester College on the Present Situation in Philosophy* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909).

<sup>37</sup> For example, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, 68-9.

dialogue of reason.<sup>38</sup>

At the same time, through the 1970s and into the '80s, Tracy developed an increasingly 'hermeneutical' colouring to his emphasis on worldly plurality (and latterly, ambiguity). Increasingly, his thinking revolved around the recognition that 'experience,' in any full sense, is always already discursive.<sup>39</sup> This is to say, the experience of things that appear to us cannot be disentangled from the language (rudimentary or sophisticated) that lets those things appear *as* the things which they appear to be. Empiricist concepts that would wrest 'experience' from its discursive-linguistic entanglement, meanwhile, are on this view at best secondary abstractions from the phenomena that actually appear. A salient example of this would be a concept of animal experience (or consciousness): a concept of animal 'experience' will have some uses, but until one can clarify the relation of animal experience to human discursive experience, as the primary meaning of that word, the concept remains systematically opaque. For, in the fullness of *human* experience, language goes "all the way down."

Famously, in his early epochal work, *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger described a mutually constituting 'circle' between one's Being-in-the-world-as-a-project-of-understanding, on the one hand, and one's explicit linguistic interpreting of the world, on the other.<sup>40</sup> This mutual implication of existence and linguistic interpretation is the

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<sup>38</sup> The other reason is expressed forcefully in *The Analogical Imagination*: in speaking about *God*, argues Tracy, Christians speak about the most universal of all, and so any retreat from the 'public' conversation of reason into the walled privacies of sectarian particularism, on the one hand, or ineffable subjective feeling, on the other, is to cease to speak seriously of God (see *Imagination*, 47-52).

<sup>39</sup> Tracy writes in 1985 of his 'own explicitly hermeneutical turn in *The Analogical Imagination* [1981] in contrast to the hermeneutically informed but underdeveloped position on "common human experience" in *Blessed Rage for Order* [1975]' (Tracy, 'Lindbeck's New Program for Theology: A Reflection,' *Thomist* 49/3 (1985), 460-472; 464). For more on Tracy's approach in *Blessed Rage*, see Chapter 7 section III, below. Tracy would elaborate his hermeneutical 'turn' further in *Plurality and Ambiguity* [1987].

<sup>40</sup> See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), 194-5.

always-already “there” circle of human temporal possibility, which can never be escaped. And yet, Heidegger suggested, just possibly, albeit paradoxically, one could hope ever and again to ‘come into [the circle] in the right way’ – in a way that intensifies human possibility – as one attends authentically to an unconcealment (*aletheia*) of truth in discourse (talk, *logos*, *Rede*).<sup>41</sup>

Hermeneutical insight insists that human experience ought not to be misrepresented as either a set of de-linguisticisable objects (sense-data) *or* a similarly de-linguisticisable subject (immediate ego-consciousness). Nor, crucially, ought human experience be imagined as some kind of combinatorial process that shuttles between these two isolated notions, somehow blurring subject and object into fruitful interaction.

In relegating subject and object to the status of secondary abstractions, hermeneutical thinking exhibits its background in European ‘phenomenology,’ a philosophical programme first developed in early Twentieth-Century Germany by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938).

#### I. ii. From phenomenology to linguistic ontology

Husserl inaugurated phenomenology as a programme to exhibit the wellspring of human intentional experience, and so establish the integrity and coherence of human consciousness as a secure foundation for all kinds of science and understanding.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> See *Being and Time*, 203-10.

<sup>42</sup> See *inter alia*, Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorian Cairns (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960); and Husserl, *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970).

Husserl proposed to return thought to *den Sachen selbst* ('the things themselves') – which that Kant had counted transcendently unknowable – as these actually exhibit themselves to consciousness, and in this way to resolve modern philosophical dilemmas of empiricism (as an 'object'-centred attitude) and idealism (as a 'subject'-centred attitude). In a task that Husserl eventually realised would be endless, phenomenology would strive to bring to light a unified ground for the natural and human sciences in their proper relations to each other.

In pursuit of these goals, Husserl attempted a series of 'reductions' (*epochés*) of experience to its descriptively essential elements and conditions, which he was sure lie back behind the rich confusions and confused notions that reign in everyday consciousness (including the notions of 'subject' and 'object').<sup>43</sup> Husserl's first and most fundamental 'transcendental reduction' involved learning to interrogate experience only from within the point-like circle of human consciousness itself, as the one self-evident and potentially self-interpreting phenomenon: as the life of an 'I' that exists independently of any further hypothecations of reality.<sup>44</sup>

Ultimately, Husserl sought to pursue transcendental ego-experience 'to my own transcendental sphere of peculiar ownness or to my transcendental concrete I-myself,' in complete 'abstraction from everything that transcendental constitution gives me as

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An elegantly clear summary and critical outline of Husserl can be found in Hugh Rayment-Pickard, *Impossible God: Derrida's Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 28-40. An accessible summary of Husserl's mature position from Husserl himself can be found in Edmund Husserl, "'Phenomenology,'" Edmund Husserl's Article for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1927), rev. trans. by Richard E. Palmer in Peter McCormick and Frederick A. Elliston, eds., *Husserl: Shorter Works* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 21-35.

<sup>43</sup> See Rayment-Pickard, *Impossible God*, 29-30.

<sup>44</sup> '[T]he momentous fact is that I, with my life, remain untouched in my existential status, regardless of whether or not the world exists and regardless of what my eventual decision concerning its being or non-being might be' (Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorian Cairns (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), 25); quoted in Rayment-Packard, *Impossible God*, 30). See also Rayment-Packard, *Impossible God*, 30-2.

Other.’<sup>45</sup> As Rayment-Packard observes, this ‘abstractive’ reduction sought to ‘strip[] away everything that is alien to the essential consciousness of transcendental life,’ to uncover ‘the pure substrate upon which all consciousness depends’ (a substrate to which Husserl sometimes gave the theological-sounding name, ‘the living present’).<sup>46</sup>

Hermeneutical phenomenology would differ from Husserl’s version, therefore, in calling phenomena back, not to Husserl’s conscious living self-presence, but instead to a circling existing and speaking that never finally coincide. In hermeneutical thinking after Heidegger, the identity of thinking experience will be simultaneously also its difference from itself and, thereby, an endless relation to an otherness that thought will never master.<sup>47</sup> The names of this otherness vary for different hermeneutical thinkers at different points in this tradition. Heidegger first set out with the name ‘Being’ (hence ‘ontological hermeneutics’), but later he would often prefer to focus on language itself – or as he preferred, ‘Saying’ – as naming the mystery at work in the essential human possibility of ‘bearing a message.’<sup>48</sup>

For Heidegger and the hermeneutical tradition after him, the heart of thoughtful experience lies not in acts of rational judgment or intelligent concept-formation –

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<sup>45</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 93; quoted in Rayment-Pickard, *Impossible God*, 31.

<sup>46</sup> Rayment-Packard, *Impossible God*, 31 (see Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 102). It was the guiding notion of a ‘living present’ in Husserl that Derrida seized upon and criticised (see Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs*, tr. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973)).

<sup>47</sup> Viewed in this way, Jacques Derrida can be viewed as representing a certain ‘radical’ or ‘negative’ hermeneutics, which insists to Heidegger that the endless self-difference of linguistic thinking be fully explored and respected. (In this regard, see John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutical Project* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), especially Chapters VI and VII.)

<sup>48</sup> See Martin Heidegger, ‘A Dialogue on Language between a Japanese and an Inquirer’ in Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language* [1959], trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper Collins, 1971), 1-54; esp. 47-52. The Heidegger character suggests to his Japanese companion earlier in the Dialogue that the Greek verb *hermeneuein* refers to ‘the name of the god Hermes [...] the divine messenger [who] brings the message of destiny’; and that, in line with this, ‘hermeneutics means not just the interpretation but, even before it, the bearing of message and tidings’ (‘A Dialogue on Language,’ 29).

Kantian or Thomistic<sup>49</sup> – but rather in a truthful ‘unconcealing’ (*aletheia*) which is ‘in play’ (as Gadamer would later say)<sup>50</sup> in *logos*-discourse. Accordingly, it follows that developed concepts of reason and reality need to discover themselves continually in *logos*-experience that is linguistic but not necessarily conceptual. In Heidegger’s epochal early work, *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger suggested interpreting *logos* (discourse, talk) as that which essentially ‘lets something be seen’: which ‘lets us see something *from* the very thing which the discourse is about.’<sup>51</sup> It followed from this that *logos* signifies ‘reason’ only ‘because the function of *logos* lies in merely letting something be seen, in *letting* entities be *perceived*.’<sup>52</sup>

Whereas Heidegger was the origin, Hans-Georg Gadamer was the thinker in Heidegger’s wake around whom hermeneutical philosophy coalesced as such. Where early Heidegger disparaged the superficiality of ‘publicness’ in discourse,<sup>53</sup> and later Heidegger wrote about a ‘dialogue *of* language’ permitted mainly through silence,<sup>54</sup> Gadamer was a convinced advocate of the humanistic ‘conversation’ of tradition, as we will see. And yet for all this, Gadamer was also very much an interpreter of Heidegger. He brought together Heidegger’s discourse about Being with key aspects of

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<sup>49</sup> This may be helpfully contrasted with the approach on this point of Tracy’s early teacher, the transcendental thomist philosopher Bernard Lonergan. From the time of his early work *Insight* (1957), Lonergan stressed the centrality of the human subject’s powers of abstractive insight and consequent concept-formation and rational judgment (see Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* [1957], rev. ed. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1958)). Lonergan criticised phenomenology in both Husserl and Heidegger for these thinkers’ lack of sufficient regard for the operation of intellectual mind (see Lonergan, *Phenomenology and Logic: The Boston Lectures on Mathematical Logic and Existentialism*, ed. Philip J. McShane (Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, vol. 15) (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 274-9 and 187ff.) For more on Lonergan and his continuing significance for Tracy, see Chapter 6 section II below.

<sup>50</sup> See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 102ff.

<sup>51</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 56; the emphasis is the translators’.

<sup>52</sup> *Being and Time*, 58.

<sup>53</sup> See *Being and Time*, 165: ‘Publicness proximally controls every way in which the world and Dasein get interpreted, and it is always right [...] because it is insensitive to every difference of level and of genuineness and thus never gets to the “heart of the matter.” By publicness everything gets obscured, and what has thus been covered up gets passed off as something familiar and accessible to everyone.’

<sup>54</sup> See Heidegger, ‘A Dialogue on Language,’ 50-54.

Heidegger's later meditations on the being of language. For Gadamer, the phenomenon of language itself makes present our encompassing experience of ever-finite yet never-exhausted understanding. Amid our unending embroilment in the coming-to-be-in-dialogue of meaning and truth, for Gadamer, famously, 'being that can be understood is language.'<sup>55</sup>

This is as far as we need go for now as regards the background to hermeneutical thinking in general. In Chapter Five I will explore more fully the background of resurgent talk of 'being' in Heidegger and then Gadamer. The sections to follow here will deal first with Tracy's limited engagements with Gadamer in the 1970s, and then with the salient elements of Gadamer's characterisation of 'the conversation of tradition,' which so impressed Tracy in the late 1970s and through the 1980s.

## **II. Tracy's early engagements with Gadamer and hermeneutical philosophy**

The Gadamerian concept of conversation-dialogue first appeared at the heart of Tracy's thinking in *The Analogical Imagination* (1981). However, even before then, back in *Blessed Rage* (1975), Tracy was already noting Gadamer's contributions to debates on the nature of truth and the reception of historical texts. Without entirely committing himself to Gadamer's position, Tracy also noted Gadamer's trenchant rejection of approaches to texts organised around reconstructing their authors' original intentions.<sup>56</sup> Tracy also highlighted how Gadamer emphasised the element of practical *application* as

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<sup>55</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 470.

<sup>56</sup> See *Blessed Rage*, 73f.

being integral to all events of interpretation,<sup>57</sup> as well as how Gadamer opposed the Enlightenment blanket denigrations of tradition.<sup>58</sup>

For all this, however, *Blessed Rage* constructed its argument around an unGadamerian notion of ideal ‘meanings’ present within the linguistic fabric of texts. Tracy sought to ground human knowing in a simple and essential experience of subjective consciousness, pregnant with meaning, corresponding with these ideal meanings. Instead of directly appropriating Gadamer’s model, *Blessed Rage* employed technical borrowings from Paul Ricoeur in the service of Tracy’s own distinct phenomenological and transcendental (and ultimately metaphysical-theistic) argument concerning ‘common human experience and language.’ In this early work, Tracy argued that the essential human phenomena of selfhood and meaning – helpfully clarified by contemporary secular culture, Tracy thought – are everywhere sustained by their own encompassing and empowering ‘religious dimension.’ According to *Blessed Rage*, an immanent-transcendent religious dimension of experienced reality manifests itself throughout human existence as a ‘basic human faith’ in the meaningfulness and worthwhileness of existence. This faith, common to authentic Christianity and secularity alike, makes itself explicit, Tracy thought, at the constitutional limits of our everyday and scientific experience and language: in fundamental moral or scientific questioning; in deep experiences of anxiety or joy; and via the ‘limit’-metaphors, -narratives, -symbols and -parables that accompany and interpret our cognitive and existential experience. Tracy identified these latter ‘limit-language’ phenomena as coming into their own in religious (and Christian) discourse.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *Blessed Rage*, 224 n. 10.

<sup>58</sup> *Blessed Rage*, 12.

<sup>59</sup> See chapter five of *Blessed Rage*, entitled ‘The Religious Dimension of Common Human Experience and Language,’ which examined ‘limit-questions’ in science and moral inquiry, as well as ‘limit-

Broadly speaking, therefore, *Blessed Rage* still reckoned language and discourse subsidiary to primal phenomena of self- and God-experience. Tracy would later admit that *Blessed Rage* had not yet taken full stock of the ‘hermeneutical turn’ in thinking after Martin Heidegger.<sup>60</sup> Tracy has never abandoned the search for serviceable forms of transcendental reflection about God and the true ends of reason. But by the time he wrote *Plurality*, he would have come to see a ‘clear and difficult’ ‘need to reformulate all earlier transcendental analyses which are based on a philosophy of consciousness’ (such as his own in *Blessed Rage*).<sup>61</sup>

Adapting its elements of hermeneutical theory more from Ricoeur than Gadamer,<sup>62</sup> *Blessed Rage* lacked the Gadamerian concept of the encompassing ‘game’ of ‘conversation’ that would become very important for Tracy in *Imagination* and since. Tracy would appropriate and adapt Gadamer far more directly in *Imagination* and again in *Plurality*, albeit on Tracy’s distinctively ‘empirical’ terms (as I will argue). It would also retain from Ricoeur a greater critical interrogation of tradition than Gadamer

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experiences’ in everyday life (*Blessed Rage*, 91-118). Chapter six went on to argue that the religious language of the New Testament constitutes a plausible ‘limit-language’ able to ‘re-present’ our essential condition to us. In his 1995 Preface to the reprinting of *Blessed Rage*, Tracy singled out his analyses of religious limit in these chapters as ‘needed even more in our present, post-modern situation in theology and religious studies than they were twenty years ago’ (*ibid.*, xiii).

<sup>60</sup> In his 1995 Preface to the reprinting of *Blessed Rage*, Tracy wrote that while “‘hermeneutics” [was] crucially present in the book,” it was at that time ‘not yet the heart of my concept of theology.’ In 1985, Tracy wrote of his ‘own explicitly hermeneutical turn in *The Analogical Imagination* in contrast to the hermeneutically informed but underdeveloped position on ‘common human experience’ in *Blessed Rage for Order*’ (Tracy, ‘Lindbeck’s New Program for Theology: A Reflection,’ *Thomist* 49/3 (1985), 460-472: 464).

<sup>61</sup> *Plurality*, 134 n. 40. See also Tracy’s reflections in the main text at this point on the false confidence of modern consciousness: ‘The moderns were relatively untroubled by reflection upon the indissoluble relationships between knowledge and language. [... D]espite all its transcendental “turns to the subject,” modern consciousness remained a relatively stable and manageable affair’ (*Plurality*, 77).

<sup>62</sup> See *Blessed Rage*, 72-9. See Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976); see also Ricoeur’s emphasis on the role of the interpreter’s ‘productive imagination’ in Ricoeur, ‘The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling’ in Sheldon Sacks, ed., *On Metaphor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) and also *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language* [1995/7] (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003).

allowed, alongside a more distinct role for the interpreter-subject as the agent of interpretation. And yet despite these differences, Tracy found something compelling at the heart of Gadamer's account of the conversation of tradition. It is now time to examine this in more detail.

### **III. Gadamer: interpretation as the conversation of tradition**

#### III. i. Elements of hermeneutic experience

Tracy's direct commentary upon Gadamer has tended to focus on the 'elements of a theory of hermeneutic experience' that Gadamer outlined in the penultimate chapter of his defining work, *Truth and Method* [1960],<sup>63</sup> concerning the essential elements that Gadamer thought govern the interpretation of a text or a work of art. These include (i) the necessary role of fore-understanding in all interpretation (such that our previously held fore-judgements of the world are an integral element in our interpretations of it);<sup>64</sup> (ii) the consequent inevitability of our standing within tradition, given that understanding can occur only as an event that mediates renewed understanding across history;<sup>65</sup> (iii) the exemplary significance of the concept of 'the classical' as regards those occasions when a text or artwork is found to possess a 'power to speak directly' persisting for a 'fundamentally unlimited' historical duration;<sup>66</sup> and (iv) the practical dimension of 'application' to the individual and communal life-world within all

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<sup>63</sup> Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Truth and Method*, second revised edition & trans. (London: Continuum, 2004), 268-382.

<sup>64</sup> *Truth and Method*, 268-273.

<sup>65</sup> *Truth and Method*, 278-291. 'Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act that as participating in an event of tradition' (*ibid.*, 291; I have de-italicised this sentence).

<sup>66</sup> *Truth and Method*, 290.

interpretation, according to Gadamer, after the example of a judge interpreting the law in passing specific judgment.<sup>67</sup>

Gadamer summed up these elements of experience in his notion of the ‘historically effected’ (*wirkungsgeschichtliches*) character of human discursive consciousness (*Bewußte*).<sup>68</sup> By ‘historically effected consciousness,’ Gadamer intended to convey the condition of all human consciousness as everywhere ‘effected in the course of history and determined by history.’<sup>69</sup> This is to say, according to Gadamer, we become understandingly conscious of our world only on the back of past ‘fusions of horizons’ that have already occurred between living human consciousness and its artistic, religious, philosophical, scientific and literary heritage.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, we ourselves exist humanly, for Gadamer, precisely *as* movements of understanding within a world that has previously become intelligible and which goes on becoming intelligible in new ways. According to Gadamer, the recurring ‘process’ or ‘event’ (*Geschehen*) of understanding – virtually a synonym for ‘tradition’ in Gadamer – is what bears us along in our human mode of being. Gadamer thought that this was the situation that his own *Western* heritage, in particular, impressed upon its heirs.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> *Truth and Method*, 306-336. ‘When a judge regards himself as entitled to supplement the original meaning of a text of law, he is doing exactly what takes place in all other understanding’ (*ibid.*, 336). Even the historian whose basic approach to historical texts is different from those of the jurist, theologian, philologist or literary critic, cannot evade the encompassing question, beyond all judgements of historical fact, of how best she may participate in understanding history (*ibid.*, 330-336).

<sup>68</sup> *Truth and Method*, 341ff.: ‘The old unity of the hermeneutical disciplines comes into its own again if we realize that historically effected consciousness is at work in all hermeneutical activity, that of a philologist as well as of the historian’ (*ibid.*, 336).

<sup>69</sup> *Truth and Method*, xxx.

<sup>70</sup> *Truth and Method*, 304-5.

<sup>71</sup> In brief opening comments in his essay ‘Aesthetic and Religious Experience,’ Gadamer sees that the kinds of questions he wants to raise there, concerning the relations between poetic, religious and philosophical speech, cannot be ‘thematize[d ...] in an abstract and ahistorical sense,’ but only ‘from within the Christian tradition of the West,’ because that is the tradition from which they gain their specific sense (Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful; and Other Essays*, trans. Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 140-153; 140). On the specifically Western Christian background to Gadamer’s thinking, see Chapter 8 below.

In as much as someone discovers their existence really to be like this, it follows that the essence of their thoughtful human living will consist in maintaining for themselves, in every particular situation, the hermeneutical horizon necessary for asking appropriate questions of the past and its cultural products. By such questioning, Gadamer thought, one can hope to feed upon, anticipate, and live thoughtfully within concrete processes of handing-down and handing-around of meaning and truth. For according to Gadamer, it is the very character of human consciousness, as historically effected, that we mediate the past to the living present of tradition. Thus we do not manufacture the tradition that we mediate, but are rather channels of it. This tradition has life and augmentation in becoming again contemporary within the living experience of each us, insofar as we allow this to happen. As a consequence Gadamer commended above all, in effect, and rather like Heidegger, an ethic of attentiveness to that which will break over us and renew our historical identity. Unlike Heidegger, however, Gadamer stressed what he saw as the essential *continuity* of experience that had become apparent in Western history, through which human understanding is both mediated and made possible. Gadamer distrusted the late Heidegger's perspective upon history as something distributed into disjunctive epochs of Being and human belonging.<sup>72</sup> In particular, Gadamer distrusted Heidegger's notion of the present time being a time of abandonment and retreat, in which we are to wait for an unknown that may yet be given. For Gadamer, by way of contrast, the perspective that is given in western tradition allows us to see human finitude and historicity as a seamless and endless being-in-play (*Spiel*) of understanding, meaning and selfhood: before artworks in their presentation (*Darstellung*); before texts in their strangeness and questionability; and before other and different people with whom we converse about our world.

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<sup>72</sup> On the later Heidegger, see George Pattison, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to the Later Heidegger* (London: Routledge, 2000).

Gadamer commended the development of a hermeneutical consciousness in life and thought, alive to the reality and possibilities of tradition. As well as seeking to exhibit the historically-effected character of human consciousness as a manifest fact, Gadamer also hoped to effect in his reader a definite ‘consciousness of being thus effected and determined.’<sup>73</sup> Gadamer thought that in his time (and, no doubt, ours still) it was worthwhile for a philosopher to work at promoting the cause and task of hermeneutic consciousness: on the one hand, as an essential ‘corrective’ to the modern technological will to make, produce and construct, and, on the other hand, as a similar corrective to the modern reflective will to criticise ‘what has gone before to the point of becoming a utopian or eschatological consciousness.’<sup>74</sup> Without denying the proper secondary value of such exercises of the human will, Gadamer concluded his foreword to the second edition of *Truth and Method* with by asserting that ‘the hermeneutic consciousness seeks to confront that will with something of the truth of remembrance: with what is still and ever again real.’<sup>75</sup>

### III. ii. Gadamer’s conservative humanism

Gadamer’s critics have frequently been suspicious of a perceived over-optimism and conservatism implied by Gadamer’s over-arching philosophical interpretation of historical experience. For example, Jürgen Habermas has insisted on giving theoretical and practical priority to reflection on the inter-subjective conditions that are necessary for really rational dialogue, as well as to diagnosing the concrete distortions of

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<sup>73</sup> See Gadamer’s foreword to the second edition of *Truth and Method* (xxx).

<sup>74</sup> *Truth and Method*, xxxiv.

<sup>75</sup> *Truth and Method*, xxxiv.

rationality in play in all our traditions should be prior to all trust in tradition. In Gadamer's eyes, however, even the theorising of social-critical theorists like Habermas cannot claim authority outside of the 'universality' of the hermeneutical phenomenon (that is, insofar as understanding manifests itself at all).<sup>76</sup>

At the same time, rather different objections to Gadamerian thinking have been raised by various neo-Nietzschean thinkers whose interests have lain less in renewing the theory and practice of modern rationality (as Habermas) than in destabilising Gadamer's grounding faith that 'being' and 'truth' manifest themselves at the heart of linguistic experience. Michel Foucault, for example, has sought radically to undermine all such humanistic philosophical discourses, counting them masks for social domination.<sup>77</sup> And while Jacques Derrida or John Caputo might prefer Gadamer's side against Habermas, they would each seek to pull the rug out from under Gadamer's confidence in tradition.<sup>78</sup> Caputo spies a negative or 'cold' hermeneutics at work in Derrida, one that is close to his own preference for a hermeneutics more attentive than Gadamer to the deconstructive side of Heidegger.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> See the famous exchange between Gadamer and Habermas (in Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, ed., *The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 274-319). Gadamer's essential point can also be put in more practical terms, as it is in the way Tracy characterised to me Gadamer's response to Habermas: '[Gadamer] said, "Alright, I'm willing to admit that some are even psychotic in language, and in that sense we need a critical theorist, an analyst." "But," he said, "who's going to be that for the whole society, the whole culture. Who's pure enough?"' ('Interview,' in. 355-358).

<sup>77</sup> See, *inter alia*, Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London & New York: Routledge Classics, 2002).

<sup>78</sup> In the case of Jacques Derrida, an early programme 'deconstructing' linguistic presence, itself partly inspired by Nietzsche, later fused with an emergent explicitly ethical orientation of his thinking towards 'the other' of language and experience, after Emmanuel Levinas (see Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978); *The Gift of Death* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995)). For documents from and commentary upon Derrida and Gadamer's famously inconclusive encounter – or, perhaps, non-encounter – in Paris in 1981, see Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer, eds., *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989).

<sup>79</sup> See John D. Caputo, 'Cold Hermeneutics: Heidegger/Derrida' in Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutical Project* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 187-206.

Regarding his relation to his philosophical mentor, Gadamer has noted that where Heidegger stressed the projective ‘futurity’ of the human being in *Being and Time*, he himself instead ‘emphasized the assimilation of what is past and of tradition.’ Gadamer admitted that ‘[l]ike many of my critics, Heidegger too would probably feel a lack of ultimate radicality in the conclusions I draw.’<sup>80</sup> In his own defence, however, Gadamer here recalled the philosopher’s properly limited position (in the modern world, especially) as more than justifying a certain modesty. And he added one further barbed observation: ‘However much [the philosopher] may be called to draw radical inferences from everything, the role of prophet, of Cassandra, of preacher, or of know-it-all does not suit him.’ Instead, Gadamer contended, the philosopher lives more within his or her means when he or she turns towards ‘what is feasible, what is possible, what is correct, here and now.’<sup>81</sup>

Gadamer did not pretend to be a prophet of the future but wished instead to be received as a philosopher directing our attention towards essential and real dimensions of contemporary experience. He would be one who perceives essential modes of attention that have become both possible and acutely needed.

#### **IV. Manifest ‘truth’ versus transcendental argument in Gadamer and Tracy**

For all that his philosophy attempted a certain practical intervention in the world, Gadamer wrote in his foreword to the second edition of *Truth and Method* that

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<sup>80</sup> *Truth and Method*, xxxiv.

<sup>81</sup> *Truth and Method*, xxxiv. ‘The philosopher, of all people, must, I think, be aware of the tension between what he claims to achieve and the reality in which he finds himself’ (*ibid.*).

nevertheless he did not want his work interpreted as essentially to do with ‘what we do or what we ought to do’ in our active knowing and doing.<sup>82</sup> He insisted that his work simply aimed instead at drawing people’s attention to a recurring event and process (*Geschehen*) of understanding-in-tradition, which, as he wrote here, simply ‘happens to us over and above our wanting and doing.’<sup>83</sup> For, indeed, our wantings and doings will surely confound themselves if they fail to acknowledge what is most essentially going on. At the same time, in claiming to draw our attention to essential hermeneutical experience, Gadamer also claimed to be withholding judgement upon every specific method that may be employed as an aid within human understanding.<sup>84</sup> For all that specific methods can be useful rules-of-thumb for disambiguating specific objects and objectives within specific fields of humanistic understanding and action (say, law, history or politics), Gadamer thought that such methods overreach themselves the moment they project themselves to the centre in misguided imitation of the empirical and natural sciences. Correspondingly, Gadamer sought to keep his own ontological discourse aloof not only from specific methods, but also from any kind of generalised interpretative method that perhaps his ontology might imply.<sup>85</sup> He also felt no necessity of projecting further transcendental or meta-interpretative concepts to supplement his attempt to trace in phenomenological description that which he saw to be historically self-manifest within western interpretative experience.

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<sup>82</sup> *Truth and Method*, xxvi.

<sup>83</sup> *Truth and Method*, xxvi.

<sup>84</sup> Gadamer insisted that his philosophical ‘reflection about practice’ was ‘not methodology’ (‘Afterword,’ *Truth and Method*, 559).

<sup>85</sup> Werner Jeanrond contends, however, that despite Gadamer’s own rhetoric, Gadamer’s thought served some all-to-narrow practical commitments: ‘in spite of his antimethodological bias, Gadamer’s concept of conversation was too much involved in the objective challenges of particular conversation-plays.’ Jeanrond wants to undercut the hermeneutics of *conversation* with a more religiously fundamental theoretical and practical ‘hermeneutics of love’ that ‘starts earlier’ (Jeanrond, ‘Towards an Interreligious Hermeneutics of Love’ in Catherine Cornille and Christopher Conway, eds., *Interreligious Hermeneutics* (Eugene, OR.: Cascade Books, 2010), 44-60: 54) (for Jeanrond’s proposal here, Chapter 4 section III, below).

Here, Gadamer's phenomenological-ontological approach differed significantly from the approach Tracy has followed. Tracy has consistently sought to integrate phenomenological-ontological elements (after Gadamer and Heidegger) with pluralistic pragmatic and empirical considerations, on the one hand, and compensatory unifying transcendental conceptions (after Lonergan, Rahner, Whitehead and James), on the other.<sup>86</sup> The precise mix of all these has differed at different times for Tracy, as have the strategies by which he has sought to bring them together.<sup>87</sup> However, Tracy has never followed Gadamer in conceiving truth as a process or event that occurs above and beyond empirical-cultural plurality or, indeed, the clarificatory practices of methodical reason. Tracy continues today to hypothesise in constructive mode various transcendental concepts and names – 'the Impossible,' 'the Void,' 'the Open,' 'God' – such as he thinks can function as helpful explanations of, and guides to, our pluralized cultural and religious situation.<sup>88</sup> In this he follows lines of thinking that Gadamer considered unnecessary.

Another way to appreciate the simultaneous closeness and distance between Tracy and Gadamer here will involve anticipating some of the more detailed discussion of *Plurality and Ambiguity* to come later.<sup>89</sup> For in *Plurality*, Tracy characterised hermeneutical theory as an attempt to enrich hermeneutical practice by abstracting

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<sup>86</sup> Another influence evident in Tracy's transcendental reflection in *Blessed Rage* was the German Catholic transcendental Thomist, Emerich Coreth (see his *Metaphysics*, abridged English edition (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968) [full German version: *Metaphysik: eine methodisch-systematische Grundlegung* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1964)]).

<sup>87</sup> Tracy began with strong transcendental-cum-theistic emphases in *Blessed Rage*, which he incorporated into his horizon of the conversation of reason in *Imagination*; these gave way to a more tentative practice in *Plurality*, and then a renewed recovery of a rhetoric of *theos* beyond theological *logos* in the 1990s (for which see Chapter 7 section V, below).

<sup>88</sup> See Tracy, 'On Longing: The Void, The Open, God' in Stephan van Erp and Lea Verstricht, eds., *Longing in a Culture of Cynicism* (Zürich & Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2008), 15-32.

<sup>89</sup> In Chapter 3 section II below.

‘certain salient, sometimes essential, but never exhaustive features of that practice.’<sup>90</sup> Thus, where Gadamer counted self-elaborating *logos* to be most fundamental in its disclosure of being and truth, *Plurality* concentrated on elaborating a more essentially practical philosophy, focussed on the means of fostering ‘skill and understanding in concrete situations.’<sup>91</sup>

According to Tracy in *Plurality*, all good hermeneutical theories participate in core human practice, in as much as the theories themselves become ‘helpful skills forged on behalf of thought and life.’<sup>92</sup> At the heart of Tracy’s conversation in *Plurality*, therefore, lay the articulation of a hope for humane reason as mediated through practices of skilled understanding, understood as a core human possibility. The influence of Gadamer here emerges in Tracy effective wager that the experience of skill in understanding, when it occurs, is more essential and more universal than any explanations or arguments that we might construct about it (be these sceptical or supportive, empirical or transcendental). On the other hand, and at the same time, this wager was for Tracy ultimately *religious* and, as such, also implicitly transcendental-metaphysical (as the long last chapter of *Plurality* makes clear).<sup>93</sup> With his empirical focus on ‘what we do,’ his moral focus on ‘what we ought to do,’ and in his religious-humanistic rhetoric,<sup>94</sup> Tracy distinguished himself from Gadamer’s fundamentally serene theoretical confidence in the mutually participatory deliverances of being (*ontos*) and word (*logos*). Yet even so, *Plurality* still presents itself as a genuine phenomenology of the hermeneutical experience that precedes and outstrips every transcendental and metaphysical argument.

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<sup>90</sup> *Plurality*, 9.

<sup>91</sup> *Plurality*, 10. Tracy’s emphasis echoes Gadamer’s defence of ‘the concept of practice’ against counter-ideals of theoretical certainty, which latter modern ideals Gadamer judged as basically tools of a displacement of reason by technology (Gadamer, ‘Afterword,’ *Truth and Method*, 560).

<sup>92</sup> *Plurality*, 10.

<sup>93</sup> See Chapter five in *Plurality*, entitled ‘Resistance and Hope: The Question of Religion’ (*ibid.*, 82ff.).

<sup>94</sup> For this rhetorical appeal in *Plurality*, see the closing pages of the book, *ibid.* 110ff.

Gadamer's thinking had no use for the kinds of supplementary transcendental explanations and empirical-anthropological generalisations that Tracy's hermeneutics introduced along the way of opening itself to a religious horizon. This has a consequence also as regards the 'universality' Gadamer claimed for hermeneutical experience as such. When *Gadamer* talks about an event of truth 'that happens to us,' it follows, the 'us' in question is not in the first instance a general transcultural or transhistorical anthropological reference, as it tends to be for Tracy. Rather, Gadamer intends a resolutely historical 'us,' addressed to all who happen to stand with him within a ('western') historical tradition: a tradition which, Gadamer contends, now manifests this happening-to-us *as* happening-to-us in the manner he describes. This is to say, Gadamer includes within his 'us' all those who, by historical accident, are able to hear him, all who stand sufficiently 'within' the western tradition as to be able to hear its voice and recognise its self-witness. For this reason, Gadamer has no interest in transcendental and anthropological arguments to supplement (or as he would suspect, supplant) his phenomenology of western discourse. For him, that kind of reflective attitude can be only ever a secondary moment within the self-unfurling of a tradition.<sup>95</sup>

### **Conclusion: Tracy's use of Gadamer**

Making oneself understood in language, Gadamer will say, is a matter of 'hold[ing] together what is said with an infinity of what is not said in one unified meaning,' so that

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<sup>95</sup> In Chapter 8 below, I shall examine this resolutely phenomenological-ontological accent of Gadamer in relation to Gadamer's own relation to Christian religion.

our ‘words do not reflect beings, but express a relation to the whole of being.’<sup>96</sup> John Caputo has criticised this way in which Gadamer restricts linguistic play to ‘the bounds of sense,’ which is to say, meaning. Caputo sees no justification for holding back the hermeneutical impulse from Derrida’s deconstructive play of *différance* and *écriture*.<sup>97</sup> In other words, for Caputo, we need not assume with Gadamer that the surface of language corresponds to a secure structure of meaning and the passing on of understanding. Caputo notes the difficult time Gadamer had assimilating any more radicalised modern and contemporary art-forms to his conservative schema, because of how he always sought some ‘fixed sense’ in given works as putative new windows onto the assumed identity of Tradition.<sup>98</sup> For Caputo, by contrast, a radicalised and freewheeling hermeneutics would cease to assume that thinking necessarily serves such a pre-assumed unity. As a consequence, he would say, we might attend better to both artworks and other people.

We have seen that Tracy has never followed Gadamer in simply equating intelligible being (‘being that can be understood’) with a shining forth of language. Even so, however, during the 1980s, at least, Tracy did model the surface phenomena of language as cohering in service to an underlying operation of meaning and truth. Specifically, Tracy imagined a gracious power at the heart of human tradition and language that radiates through the discursive practices of history. Tracy presented this vision most clearly in *The Analogical Imagination* (1981), and it still helped inform his

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<sup>96</sup> *Truth and Method*, 464.

<sup>97</sup> See Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutical Project* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 138-152.

<sup>98</sup> See Caputo, ‘How to Prepare for the Coming of the Other’ in John D. Caputo, *More Radical Hermeneutics: On Not Knowing Who We Are* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000). Caputo notes Gadamer’s likening of the artwork to the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and Gadamer’s claim that by learning to tarry before the work, we may, in some sense, experience relation to eternity (*ibid.*, 49-50; see also Hans-Georg Gadamer, ‘The Relevance of the Beautiful: Art as Play, Symbol and Festival’ in Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful; and Other Essays*, trans. Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3-53).

more chastened hope for reason-through-conversation in *Plurality and Ambiguity* (1987). According to *Imagination*, the gracious potential of human discourse manifests itself in subjectivity as the grace of ‘an analogical imagination,’ which is able to conjure a world of meaning and truth amid multiplicity and difference.<sup>99</sup> This grace sets up its home in the human subject, although Tracy also located its ultimate source in person-like and loving transcendent Divine Reality.<sup>100</sup>

For all Tracy’s departures from Gadamer, Caputo has noted that Tracy and other theologians have been attracted to what Caputo termed Gadamer’s ‘fundamentally conservative, traditionalist, essentialist idea,’ because of how it offered to help these theologians ‘develop moderate theories of theological traditions.’<sup>101</sup> A more or less ‘Gadamerian’ theology promises an escape from archaic dogmatic propositions (and, we might add, from modern deisms and existentialisms) without theologians being ‘forced to throw the dogmatic baby (a terror of a child!) out with the historical bath.’<sup>102</sup> Gadamerian ‘tradition’ can be put to work to prove the genius of dogma. In Tracy’s case in *Imagination* (which a footnote indicates Caputo had especially in mind here),<sup>103</sup> an adaptive appropriation of the Gadamerian idea allowed him to craft a notion of the conversation-religion of Jesus-of-Israel-as-the-Christ: a living and critical *traditio* that

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<sup>99</sup> See *Imagination*, 421-456; also Chapter 7 section IV, below.

<sup>100</sup> See Chapter 2 section II, below, for an analysis of the supposedly more realistically person-like process-theistic concept, which Tracy preferred over classical theism in *Blessed Rage*. In *Imagination*, see, too, the concluding sentence to the main part of the book, according to which the ‘final power with which both self and world must deal is none other than the harsh, demanding, healing power of the ultimate reality affecting and affected by all, the Love who is God’ (*Imagination*, 438).

<sup>101</sup> John D. Caputo, ‘Gadamer’s Closet Essentialism: A Derridean Critique’ in Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer, eds., *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, eds. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 258-264: 261.

<sup>102</sup> Caputo, ‘Gadamer’s Closet Essentialism,’ 261.

<sup>103</sup> Michelfelder and Palmer, eds., *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, 315 n. 4. Caputo also notes here Tracy’s ‘more recent attempt’ in *Plurality* ‘to make use of deconstruction within a basically hermeneutical standpoint’ (*ibid.*); in which regard, see Tracy’s analysis of Derridean ‘dissemination’ under the rubric of ‘radical plurality’ in *Plurality* (pp. 55-60).

continually ‘critically translates’ itself anew into an indefinite future.<sup>104</sup>

Tracy’s theological-hermeneutical theory of the 1980s possessed two complementary aspects that distinguished him from Gadamer: an emphasis on empirical plurality and an active commitment to Christian religion. As the next chapter will explore in further detail, Tracy has always stressed more than did Gadamer the manner in which our understandings of the world emerge from diverse and distinct human perceptions, perspectives and histories. During the 1980s, in particular, Tracy modelled this in terms of our hermeneutical dependence upon ‘classic’ events, works and traditions that enable and renew our intersecting histories in myriad ways.<sup>105</sup> On this view, the classics – and the traditions which they focus – are our shareable, ever-plural and ever-ambiguous guides through the thickets of historical experience, and our best hopes for a human future together. *Imagination* found the tradition of Jesus of Israel as the Christ to be just such a classic: also possessing a specifically religious power to manifest the horizon of ‘the Whole’ which conditions all historical parts.<sup>106</sup>

The second difference of Tracy from Gadamer concerns Tracy as an explicitly Christian thinker. Gadamer’s thought gathered itself around the presence and possibility of language itself, and as such was effectively a theory of generally revealed Word, with

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<sup>104</sup> The ‘hermeneutical task’ of systematic theology assumes that that one is ‘faithful to the tradition to which one belongs [not] by repeating its *tradita* [but] by critically translating its *traditio*’ (*Imagination*, 100). For a fuller presentation of these aspects of *Imagination*, see section I of the next chapter here, below.

<sup>105</sup> See Chapter 2 section I, subsections i. and ii., and Chapter 7 section IV, below. As Tracy writes in the Preface to *Imagination*, ‘the heart of the argument of the entire book may be found in the argument on the phenomenon of the classic’ (*Imagination*, x).

<sup>106</sup> ‘Unlike the classics of art, morality, science and politics, explicitly religious classic expressions will involve a claim to truth as the event of a disclosure-concealment of the whole of reality *by the power of the whole* – as, in some sense, a radical and finally gracious mystery’ (*Imagination*, 163). See also the end of Chapter 2 section II. i., and Chapter 7 section IV, below in this thesis.

all the theological overtones this implies.<sup>107</sup> However, Tracy is explicitly a theologian where Gadamer was not, and part of what this has meant for Tracy is that he has sought to indicate a person-like Other-Power at work in our discursive experiences. Tracy has modelled this power as corresponding to its own latent presence in human thinkers and speakers themselves, such that it calls and answers to itself across human life and thought (for grace constitutes and completes nature). Tracy continues to read European phenomenological and hermeneutical philosophy through this kind of theological lens.

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<sup>107</sup> See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 418-436; see also Chapter 8 below for an analysis of the relation of Gadamer's thought to religion and to Christianity in particular.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Adapting Gadamer for Empirico-Realist Theology**

This chapter will examine Tracy's theory of the conversation-dialogue of reason as an adaptation of Gadamer into Tracy's own empirically-minded, broadly pluralistic and realistically theological horizon. The first of its two sections will examine the notion of 'the phenomenon of the classic' first developed by Tracy in *The Analogical Imagination* (1981) as an adaptation of a similar but subtly different idea in Gadamer. We will begin to see how this idea of 'the classic' helped to structure Tracy's interpretation of Christianity and human reason alike. From the start, Tracy's idea was more theological and more 'empirical' than Gadamer's, and intended thereby to articulate a *more* adequate description of human experience than Gadamer himself achieved.

A second section will then examine Tracy's theistic horizon developed earlier in *Blessed Rage* (1975), thereby taking a brief excursus into strictly theological questions (in an advance of the broader examination of Tracy's theological approach to come in Chapter Seven). I shall argue that there were serious problems with Tracy's attempts in the 1970s and subsequently to steady our conversations by way of a phenomenology and philosophical theology of human subjectivity. At the same time, however, this second section will also applaud Tracy's ongoing commitment to a 'hermeneutical' thinking that has consistently refused to use hallowed religious doctrine as a means to gloss over cracks and impossibilities in theological thinking.

## **I. *The Analogical Imagination: an ‘empirical’ phenomenology***

In contrast to Gadamer’s broad disinterest in God, Tracy proposed in *Imagination* an account of reason-as-conversation that was explicitly religious, Christologically-shaped and theistic. This section is about the theory of conversation-dialogue that emerges within that account.

### I. i. The existence of classics

From the late 1970s through the 1980s, Tracy worked to insinuate ‘Anglo-American,’ ‘empirical’ philosophical and religious sensibilities – from James and Whitehead, as well as Lonergan – into his reception of Gadamer,<sup>108</sup> celebrating the wider notions of human experience found in these thinkers (which contrasted with British empiricism, on the one hand, and Gadamer’s theory of linguistic-ontological experience, on the other).<sup>109</sup> Tracy also valued the various receptivities of James, Whitehead and Lonergan to distinctively religious contours of experience. At the end of the 1980s, Tracy went as far as to re-work William James’s criteria for interpreting religious experiences (advanced in James’s *The Varieties of Religious Experience*) for a global hermeneutical

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<sup>108</sup> As Tracy would explain in *Plurality*, ‘the analysis I give of interpretation-as-conversation, although clearly indebted to Gadamer’s pioneering work, is less directed than his to an ontology of understanding and more to developing an empirical (Anglo-American?) model for the interpretation of texts; these two enterprises are not, I believe, divisive, but they are clearly distinct’ (115-6 n. 6). As we will see, Tracy believed, and continues to believe, in his broad continuity with Gadamer, despite the differences. Regarding Tracy’s relations to James and Lonergan, see Chapter 6 section I and Coda, below.

<sup>109</sup> ‘[T]he major accomplishment of the *American* philosophical tradition from James through Dewey has been to challenge the British empiricist traditions’ narrow understanding of experience as sense experience alone’ (Tracy, ‘Lindbeck’s New Program for Theology: A Reflection,’ *Thomist* 49/3 (1985), 460-472: 466). See also *Blessed Rage*, 173.

theory that could bring James and Gadamer together.<sup>110</sup>

An early emblem of the ‘empirical’ modification that Tracy visited upon Gadamer, once he began to make use of his ideas in *Imagination*, may be found in that work’s central basic argument concerning ‘our common human experience of any classic.’<sup>111</sup> By ‘classics’ here Tracy meant ‘texts, events, images, persons, rituals and symbols’ that we experience as offering ‘permanent possibilities of meaning and truth.’<sup>112</sup> His whole argument in *Imagination* was, he conceded, ‘dependent upon the assumption’ that classics, so defined, ‘actually exist.’<sup>113</sup>

According to Tracy, the presence of the classics in our lives is ‘undeniable,’ for ‘their memory haunts us’ and ‘[t]heir actual effects in our lives endure and await ever new appropriations, constantly new interpretations.’ Meanwhile, the passage of time only confirms their existence, as ‘the generations of capable readers and inquirers [...] check our enthusiasms and ensure the emergence of some sense of the importance of certain texts, images, persons, events, symbols.’<sup>114</sup>

This argument concerning classics owed much to Gadamer in *Truth and Method*. There, Gadamer had pointed to the live concept of ‘the classical’ in western culture as particularly exemplifying his general hermeneutical rule that the present is everywhere

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<sup>110</sup> James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 32. Tracy adapted James’s criterion of ‘immediate luminousness’ to mean, in Tracy’s preferred terms, the ‘manifestation’ of ‘suggestive possibility’; Jamesian ‘philosophical reasonableness’ had become for Tracy, coherence with other things one thinks one knows; ‘moral helpfulness,’ meanwhile, had become for Tracy, the criterion of argued and evidenced ethical-political value. See the chapter entitled ‘The Question of Criteria For Inter-religious Dialogue: On Revisiting William James’ in Tracy, *Dialogue*, 27-47; also Tracy, ‘An Uneasy Alliance Reconceived: Catholic Theological Method, Modernity, and Postmodernity,’ *Theological Studies* 50 (1989), 458-570: 560-570.

<sup>111</sup> *Imagination*, x.

<sup>112</sup> *Imagination*, 68.

<sup>113</sup> *Imagination*, 68.

<sup>114</sup> *Imagination*, 109.

constituted through mediations of the past in tradition.<sup>115</sup> But what Tracy argued in *Imagination* was subtly different from Gadamer's presentation. For, Tracy was not merely interested in 'classics' as paradigm examples of a general phenomenon. Instead Tracy constructed 'classics' – major or minor, artistic, philosophical, scientific or religious – as *the* crucial phenomena that actually mediate and sustain culture. We could say for Tracy in *Imagination* that a culture that lost access to its classics would die and cease to be. He was claiming that in every culture there exist discrete cultural entities which participants in the culture, in actual fact, assume to 'disclose permanent possibilities of meaning and truth.'<sup>116</sup> These entities – the classics – both enable and evidence distinctively human experience.

Proceeding from this basic claim, *Imagination* then developed a corresponding theory of a general human experience of – and general human possibility for – an 'analogical imagination,' as the skill of uncovering genuine 'similarities-in-difference' between the many things of human experience and interpretation. Such an imagination can knit a world of meaning and truth from the world's and human beings' plurality and multiplicity. In fact, for Tracy, this power of rational imagination is what underlies all of our language, cultural institutions and activities. It is the essential wit and grace of human existence.<sup>117</sup>

In Tracy's account of analogical imagination, there comes into its own, therefore, a

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<sup>115</sup> For Gadamer's interest in 'the example of the classical,' see Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Truth and Method*, second revised edition & trans., eds. and revised trans. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004), 286ff.

<sup>116</sup> *Imagination*, 68. 'A major assertion of this book may now be stated as a claim: If any human being [...] produces some classical expression of the human spirit on a particular journey in a particular tradition, that person discloses permanent possibilities for human existence both personal and communal' (*ibid.*, 14).

<sup>117</sup> For Tracy's concept of analogical imagination see Chapter ten of *Imagination* and its Epilogue. For a fuller discussion of Tracy on analogical imagination, see Chapter 7 section IV, below here.

dimension of transcendental claim that was in fact already embryonic within Tracy's basic generalisation that every culture contains 'classics.'<sup>118</sup> For insofar as Tracy imagined classics to function as the channels and sustainers of cultures, his claim about the classic was already implied that our discursive experience depends and draws upon some transcendental power which classics channel. For, Tracy's claim that classics exist was never simply an empirical generalization about our tendency to elevate certain cultural entities as sources of wisdom and inspiration. Tracy clearly taught that we are not deceived in seeming to expect real disclosures of 'truth' from classics, and his argument also implied that every *really* classic text, event, image, person, ritual or symbol remains humanly relevant for *all* future cultures that can discover or retain a capacity to interpret it. This is more than an immediate empirical claim. For, while a particular time and place may experience enthusiasm or a lack of enthusiasm for a particular text, for example, only the totality of time could finally prove whether it was a classic and not merely a more or less successful mere 'period-piece.'<sup>119</sup>

The metaphysical horizon of the Tracean classic is further confirmed by a set of additional claims that Tracy made following on from his first positing of it in *Imagination*. These concerned the special existence and attributes of *religious* classics, which Tracy argued are experienced as 'disclosing the whole by the power of the whole.'<sup>120</sup> Here Tracy brought his phenomenology of the classic-in-general in contact

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<sup>118</sup> This implied transcendental claim already had become more explicit when Tracy developed his initial idea of the classic (see *Imagination*, chapter nine) by way of the specific paradigmatic example of the 'religious classic' (*ibid.*). For more discussion of 'the religious classic' according to *Imagination*, see below here and also Chapter 7 section IV, below.

<sup>119</sup> On the mistaking of 'period-pieces' for classics, see *Imagination*, 116. Of course, we might always be mistaking for a classic something that is in reality not one, or vice-versa. But such uncertainty – ever-present, but more often than not, negligible in fact – ought not to distract us, Tracy would have said, from the fact that real classics do exist and that they are the essential media of cultural meaning.

<sup>120</sup> *Imagination*, 183 n. 22. See also *Imagination*, 163: 'Unlike the classics of art, morality, science and politics, explicitly religious classic expressions will involve a claim to truth as the event of a disclosure-

with a previous analysis he completed back in *Blessed Rage* concerning a religious ‘limit’-dimension to reality.<sup>121</sup> Tracy also cited various phenomenologies of distinctively religious experience proposed by Friedrich Schleiermacher, Rudolf Otto, Paul Tillich, Mircea Eliade and others.<sup>122</sup> By supplementing his account of classics-in-general with the alleged special (and paradigmatic) existence of *religious* classics, Tracy underlined the metaphysical and religious dimensions latent in ‘the classic’ as such. The idea of the religious classic also laid the basis for Tracy’s notion of ‘the Christian classic,’ which it was the job of systematic theology to interpret.

#### I. ii. The significance of particular past events

Just as fundamental as the shift from Gadamer’s example of the classical to Tracy’s phenomenon of the classic, however, was the way in which *Imagination* grafted a new dimension onto the central Gadamerian concept of the hermeneutical ‘event’ or ‘process’ (*Geschehen*) of understanding. Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* had spied an event of truth wherever interpretation is well joined, and this basic phenomenon appeared in Gadamer as our sum hope for understanding and wisdom.

For his part, Tracy was just as committed as Gadamer to a world of meaning and truth in which we may participate. However, in *Imagination* Tracy proposed, in effect (and in quite unGadamerian fashion), that the specific historical ‘event of Jesus Christ’ could act as a paradigm revealing the universal truth-event potential of human discourse. This

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concealment of the whole of reality *by the power of the whole* – as, in some sense, a radical and finally gracious mystery.’

<sup>121</sup> See *Imagination*, 160-2.

<sup>122</sup> See *Imagination*, 167-178.

is to say, Tracy proposed to grasp Gadamer's universal hermeneutical event-in-tradition in terms of a particular past event (of Jesus of Israel as the Christ) beheld according to a particular tradition (Christianity) that comes down to us from that past event.<sup>123</sup> And what Tracy proposed for the Christian classic as a paradigm case he also applied in general terms to all occasions of interpretation. For Tracy in *Imagination*, the universal hermeneutical event is everywhere and in each instance constituted by and through particular relations to particular past events, which relations are themselves achieved along interpretative pathways that stretch towards us from these events. According to Tracy's theory, therefore, our relations to discrete past events and traditions govern the possibilities of each attempted conversation. Tracy later exemplified this at the beginning of his subsequent 'book about conversation'<sup>124</sup> – *Plurality and Ambiguity* (1987) – which he got under way discussing the example of the past event (or 'palimpsest of events') known to us as the French Revolution. Here, Tracy introduced the general nature of conversation via reflection on the different paths that our history has constructed for us to interpret that event of the past.<sup>125</sup>

Gadamer himself would have shared with Tracy the conviction that our entry into the truth-horizon of experience depends upon our steadfast attention to historical experience in all its contingent plurality. But, in effect, Gadamer limited the scope of this imperative to a practical side of his philosophy, which he kept at a distance from a grander speculative level on which he articulated his theory of a general truth-in-words that he thought western experience, had revealed. This to say, Gadamer's phenomenological interpretation of the historical stream in which he stood mounted up

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<sup>123</sup> By contrast, when Gadamer privileged a Great Tradition come down to us from the Greeks, he did so on account of the truth-disclosing humanism of which he found himself an heir, not for any founding event in history.

<sup>124</sup> Tracy begins his Preface to *Plurality*: 'The theme of this small book is conversation' (ix).

<sup>125</sup> *Plurality*, 1ff.

to speculative vision about the nature of language (or, at least, western language). For Gadamer, this general phenomenology is what must be kept in view to govern every particular occasion of interpretation.<sup>126</sup> By contrast, Tracy deferred to a plurality of classics, some of which will be more or less paradigmatic exemplifications of the class of classics as a whole. Thus Tracy rather muddied Gadamer's clear distinction of fundamental phenomenological-hermeneutical vision from the manifold occasions of particular interpretation.

At the same time, Tracy's hermeneutics of 'the classic' also resisted Gadamer's sense that 'hermeneutic experience' is an immediate simplicity.<sup>127</sup> On Gadamer's telling, a language-phenomenon shines down all the paths of human history, enabling its occasions of understanding. For Gadamer, therefore, the perennial human task consists in learning to allow the light of this phenomenon to shine upon our concrete human strivings, such as to allow them to participate in language's mediation of meaning and truth. Gadamer knew that genuine conversation-dialogue is arduous and costly in practice, but the theoretical backdrop was for him wholly serene. In contrast to this reading of the fundamental hermeneutical situation, meanwhile, the consistent drift of Tracy's reception of Gadamer has been to doubt that it is ever plausible or desirable to raise the prospect of such immediate and unquestionable participation in experience-as-such. In this respect following Paul Ricoeur, Tracy has consistently placed a premium on taking seriously the immanently conflicting plurality of human experiences, resisting

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<sup>126</sup> For Gadamer on this speculative moment appearing within hermeneutical philosophy, see the closing pages of *Truth and Method* (pp. 453-469).

<sup>127</sup> For more on Gadamer's concept of 'hermeneutic experience,' in comparison with Heidegger on the one hand and Tracy on the other, see Chapter 5 section II, below; also *Truth and Method* pp. 53-5, and the Translators' Introduction by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall.

what Ricoeur called the Heidegger-Gadamer ‘short route to linguistic ontology.’<sup>128</sup>

There is also a further, more specifically theological, dimension to Tracy’s desire not to insulate hermeneutical theory from the plurality of experience. As has already been noted, it was the founding feature of Tracy’s Christian theological hermeneutics that it sought universal theory in – and *as* – faithful attention to one particular historical event and tradition, namely the events and tradition associated with Jesus Christ and his God. Tracy dethroned Gadamer’s confidence in linguistic participation, while he sought also to make up for this loss by recovering an articulated Christological and theological horizon. More generally, we may say that Tracy’s hermeneutical theory looked to special revelations occurring in history, over and above the Gadamerian general revelation of human discourse and tradition-as-such. Already philosophical critiques like those advanced by Habermas had registered their suspicion concerning Gadamer’s blanket affirmation of tradition, and Tracy welcomed these suspicions into his own empirical and ethical framework.<sup>129</sup> But where Habermasian critical social theory seemed doomed to defer Gadamerian conversation indefinitely, Tracy proposed a religious and Christian-inspired route to the reinstatement of a Gadamer-like account of dialogic practice.<sup>130</sup>

At the inception of Tracy’s hermeneutical theory of the 1980s, therefore, lay the claim advanced in *Imagination* that we may plausibly experience Jesus Christ as the event of a

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<sup>128</sup> Paul Ricoeur, ‘Existence and Hermeneutics’ in Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde (London: Continuum, 2004), 3-24: 6.

<sup>129</sup> See the exchange between Gadamer and Habermas in Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, ed., *The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 274-319.

<sup>130</sup> Gadamer saw Habermas as displacing the hermeneutical phenomenon altogether by insisting on prior ideology-critique. In *Imagination* (p. 137 n. 16), Tracy judged that Gadamer’s response to Habermas’s challenge ‘is substantially appropriate yet still insufficiently sensitive to the radical ambiguity of all traditions including the possibility of “systematically distorted communication” in every tradition.’

person which (and who) is at once the focus for a particular gifted religious tradition bearing his name *and also* a sufficient name to give to the dynamic of truth-disclosure that sustains all authentic human life and conversation. Indeed, Tracy's argument in *Imagination* probably required, of philosophical necessity, that at least one particular gifted tradition should provide a true pathway into the fullness of reason itself. Tracy held that the tradition of Jesus Christ was able to play such a role, and in this way Tracy presented a theory of the practice of truth comparable to Gadamer's, yet set on unGadamerian 'empirical' and theological bases.

### I. iii. The division and unity of interpretative reason

We should note at this point also one additional significant aspect to Tracy's deviation from Gadamer, which relates to the augmented roles that Tracy accorded to *explanation* and *argument* within interpretation.

Gadamer's masterwork *Truth and Method* was really a defence of truth *against* method.<sup>131</sup> Gadamer wished to retrieve a hermeneutic practice that could enfold the moment of explication of particular contents (*explicare*) within a process or event (*Geschehen*) that would be rooted in intelligent language-use (*intellegere*) at the same time as this event/process came to fruition in practical contextual application (*applicare*). Gadamer seems to have derived this integrated scheme of *intellegere-explicare-applicare* from the Pietist writer J. J. Rambach's *Institutiones Hermeneuticae Sacrae* (1723).<sup>132</sup> This tightly enfolded scheme excluded any distinct place for the kinds

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<sup>131</sup> See Chapter 1 section IV above.

<sup>132</sup> See *Truth and Method*, 306f.

of reflective questioning that Tracy wished to uphold. Indeed, the temporal processes of historical understanding possessed such close-knit integrity for Gadamer that it became possible for him to imagine them as all occurring together under the rubric of an immanent 'event.' This event was essentially prior to and independent of all secondary metaphysical or epistemological wranglings, which he tended to regard as merely subsidiary attempts at calculative and technological mastery of an environment.

In technical terms, Gadamer claimed the priority of hermeneutic 'understanding' by reincorporating the moment of practical application into the horizon of interpretation itself. This reincorporation was one of Gadamer's chief innovations with regard to modern hermeneutical theory since Schleiermacher. Gadamer would have the hermeneutical thinker no longer seek after the complementary discourses of ethics or metaphysics, as if these discourses themselves somehow lay outside the hermeneutical horizon. By highlighting the return to concrete living in interpretation-as-application, Gadamer could also style his hermeneutical philosophy as a practical philosophy that was suited to forming integrated human living-in-tradition into something like Aristotelian practical wisdom (*phronesis*).<sup>133</sup>

Tracy claimed essential fidelity to Gadamer's innovations on the universality of hermeneutic practice, while at the same time refusing Gadamer's insistence on the fully concrete nature of application in all genuine interpretation. Gadamer had held that it is the genius of all interpretation that it should resolve itself seamlessly – as simultaneously both articulable process and unitary event – into some or other concrete application of lived understanding and understood living. Gadamer's own favoured

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<sup>133</sup> See Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy' in Gadamer, *Reason in the Age of Science*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge Mass., MIT, 1981), 88-112.

examples of this process/event were the preacher who interprets the biblical text to specific others in preaching, and the judge who interprets circumstance and law in delivering legal judgments.<sup>134</sup> But in *Imagination*, Tracy disputed the adequacy of these two examples as purported global paradigms of interpretative application in general. While preacherly interpretation quite properly culminates in ‘fully concrete’ here-and-now application, he argued, ‘the theologian, in principle, need show only that the world of meaning and truth is a genuinely *possible* one for human beings (and thus “applicable” to the human situation).’<sup>135</sup> The more generalising and reflectively distanced interpretative work of the theologian – including the systematic theologian – seemed to Tracy properly different from that of the preacher. Tracy also argued for a similar distinction between the task of a legal philosopher and that of a judge delivering concrete judgments in court.<sup>136</sup>

Alongside this determination to complicate Gadamer’s notion of interpretative application, Tracy also sought to distinguish a more distinct and active operation of *explanation* (and not merely explication) within the arc of dialogic reason.<sup>137</sup> Here he cited Paul Ricoeur’s model of ‘understanding-explanation-understanding,’ wherein, Tracy explained, ‘understanding “envelops” the entire process of interpretation, whereas explanation “develops” the initial understanding and illuminates the final understanding of appropriation.’<sup>138</sup> In the event, Tracy himself proposed to make even more room than

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<sup>134</sup> *Truth and Method*, 321-327.

<sup>135</sup> *Imagination*, 136 n. 8.

<sup>136</sup> See *Plurality*, 140 n. 51: ‘although [...] both the theologian and the legal philosopher, like all interpreters, will need some application in order to understand, they will not need the same kind of application as the preacher and the judge.’

<sup>137</sup> ‘Explanation’ here includes historical, sociological and linguistic explanations of a cultural object. For an excellent example of Ricoeur’s ideal of collaboration between historical-critical exegete and philosophical hermeneute, see André Lacocque and Paul Ricoeur, *Thinking Biblically: Exegetical and hermeneutical studies*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

<sup>138</sup> *Imagination*, 118; Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 71-89. In following Ricoeur’s ‘post-Gadamer’ moves

this Ricoeurian model implied for a sense in which explanatory discourses may not only ‘develop’ but also ‘challenge, correct, refine, complicate and confront’ the readers’ initial understanding of the semantic sense and world-reference of a text.<sup>139</sup>

#### I. iv. The role of the interpreter-subject in interpretation

For Gadamer, the event and process of the fundamental world-and-subject-constituting phenomenon – which breaks over and upon one, so as to constitute one’s selfhood – is everything to the language-user. For the Gadamerian subject the ministrations of language and tradition are everything. By contrast, Tracy’s outlook has been simultaneously more sceptical and more pragmatic. Tracy has always required that interpretations be allowed to become vulnerable to explanatory critique and suspicion, but without imagining that this need bring experience or the self all at once into crisis or breakdown. As Tracy writes in *Imagination*, even the interpreter who despises the tradition that he encounters ‘must still interpret that tradition in the hope, and with the ethical demand, of exposing its fraudulence, suspecting its claims, denouncing its injustice.’<sup>140</sup>

But Tracy was clear that we should also need the renewal offered by classics, if we are to possess any hope or resistance to dehumanising forces. For according to *Imagination*, there will always be certain works in a given culture that especially go on offering

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here, Tracy omits various aspects of Ricoeur’s analysis which seem to him ‘to obscure rather than clarify Ricoeur’s position, given his fundamental agreement with Gadamer [...] on the nature of interpretation theory’ (*Imagination*, 143 n. 58).

<sup>139</sup> *Imagination*, 118. Tracy notes that Ricoeur’s own word ‘develop’ sits easiest with the idea that explanation is always enveloped within understanding. But he still finds ‘develop’ to be inadequate on its own, as tending ‘to lessen the power of Ricoeur’s own creative development of the Heidegger-Gadamer tradition’ (*ibid.*, 143 n. 59).

<sup>140</sup> *Imagination*, 119.

renewed possibilities of meaning across time, and by concentrating her attention upon these the interpreter will open herself to the kind of happening, demand and provocation that alone gives genuine human possibility in history. The traditions that shape us ‘live in every act of interpretation,’ for good and ill, but in the classics, which are the roots of all traditions, lies ‘the one finite hope of liberation to the essential.’<sup>141</sup>

Following on from such an initial poetic ‘realized experience of the classic,’ however, Tracy suggested in *Imagination* that the interpreter must proceed into ‘the larger conversation of the entire community of inquirers,’ wherein conflicts are to be thrashed out and due attention and justice paid to all conflicting readings.<sup>142</sup> And finally, once the genuine possibilities for integral ‘modes of being in the world’ disclosed by engagement with the classic have been clarified, Tracy considered there will also lie a ‘*further* ethical task’ for members of ethical (and, ‘at limit, religious’) communities, in ‘adjudicating this conflict of possible worlds, forms of life, visions of the whole.’<sup>143</sup>

It is this final ethical-adjudicatory stage that best betrays a bifurcation that still haunted Tracy’s thinking in *Imagination*. Tracy supposed at that time that the conversational exploration of human life-possibilities must give way to subsequent argued adjudications of the relative truth or falsity, goodness or badness, wisdom or folly of these possibilities, in judgments made according to argued criteria and warrants. In a significant footnote, *Imagination* even refers approvingly (after Ricoeur, but contrary to Gadamer, on my reading) to the manner in which Friedrich Schleiermacher

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<sup>141</sup> *Imagination*, 119.

<sup>142</sup> *Imagination*, 120-2.

<sup>143</sup> *Imagination*, 123.

distinguished the ‘hermeneutical’ from the ‘ethical’ moments in thinking.<sup>144</sup>

Tracy has never wanted to collapse the moments of understanding, explanation and adjudication into each other, as Gadamer tended to do. Yet in *Imagination*, the distinction that Tracy sought seemed in danger of pulling asunder Gadamer’s globally ‘hermeneutical’ approach by reinstating a crowning non-hermeneutical moment of ethical and metaphysical argument. Such arguments appeared to rest not on the hermeneutical events of supposed classics, but rather on trans-historical reflective powers supposedly possessed by the rational subject. While *Imagination* clearly wanted to ascribe a hermeneutical quality to the whole arc of thinking, from one’s personal being-provoked through to public adjudication, it was not wholly clear in *Imagination* how these elements were to fit together within a hermeneutical paradigm. Half a decade later, in *Plurality*, Tracy brought clarity to his approach when he clearly assigned ‘argument’ to a subsidiary role *within* the wider phenomenon of conversation-dialogue.<sup>145</sup>

With the maturing of Tracy’s hermeneutical thinking during the 1980s and since, he developed a strategy that imagines the human subject as neither completely immersed within tradition nor functionally independent of it. In the mid-1980s Tracy brought to the centre a certain pragmatic inertia as proper to the human self, such that it persists as an intellectual, moral and religious entity even through periods of perplexity, failure and doubt, when its positive relation to tradition is really occluded. In large part, this streak

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<sup>144</sup> Tracy suggests that the ‘ethical task’ proper ‘to literary criticism itself’ ‘should not be confused with rendering ethical judgments on the vision of the world of the work as part of the interpretation of the work’: ‘Ethical judgments seem far more hermeneutically appropriate *after* the interpretation of the “world” of the work as a *possible-mode-of-being-in-the-world*’ (*Imagination*, 145 n. 75). Tracy cites Paul Ricoeur concerning this (Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 82-88), and then also Stephen Toulmin as regards the ‘religious’ character of ethical ‘limit-questions’ (Stephen Toulmin, *An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 202-22).

<sup>145</sup> ‘Arguments belong within conversation and not vice-versa’ (*Plurality*, 24).

of pragmatism has also been a pragmatism of religious faith – of ‘hope and resistance,’ as we shall see him put it in *Plurality*.

#### I. v. The example of theology

I have argued that Tracy’s account of the supposed division-in-unity of hermeneutical conversation in *Imagination* drew an uncomfortably sharp distinction between the work of imaginative understanding, on the one hand, and subsequent necessary works of rational and ethical adjudication, on the other. However, what Tracy proposed for interpretation-in-general he also worked out in *Imagination* specifically for the paradigm case of theology, so that his proposals for theology can provide a lens through which to read his general hermeneutical theory. By reading Tracy’s theory of conversation-dialogue through his explicit proposals in theology, we can gain a fuller understanding of what is at stake.

At this time, Tracy insisted on clearly distinguishing the philosophical contentions of what he called ‘fundamental theology,’ from the ethical and social-political exhortations and prescriptions pronounced in ‘practical theology’ – and each of these, again, from the more overtly hermeneutical ‘systematic theology’ that was *Imagination*’s main concern.<sup>146</sup> According to *Imagination*, the pivotal labour of *systematic* theology is to attend to the world-possibilities and life-possibilities disclosed by the distinctively Christian materials. Thus the first and most enduring task of the systematic theologian, *qua* systematic theologian, according to Tracy, is to retrieve the possible ways of being

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<sup>146</sup> See chapter two (‘A Theological Portrait of the Theologian’) in *Imagination* (pp. 47-98); and *ibid.*, 97-8 n. 114 for a succinct summary. Tracy still holds to the relevance of these distinctions today, although he no longer articulates them in quite the same kind of programmatic fashion.

in the world that the Christian classic and its tradition can disclose.

And yet, even with such an apparently restricted mission, Tracean systematic theology would clearly always also be replete with intimations of theoretical truth, on the one side, and practical wisdom on the other. Such intimations are inherent to the wagers and choices of any attempt to articulate human possibility as such by means of a body of traditional materials honoured as forming a coherent whole. Even the systematic theologian's very interest in expounding the Christian classic *as* a meaningful unity, already implies a host of incipient truth-claims. Furthermore, to the extent that the Tracean systematic theologian possesses insight into her own task, she will also necessarily already anticipate, methodologically, the theoretical and practical value of that task within theology's three-fold unity. In this manner, therefore, Tracy's three-fold distinction of fundamental, systematic and practical theology never really indicated separation. The three sub-disciplines were *theology* because they formed an integrated unity, a theological identity implied within each of the three sub-disciplines.

This unity of theology provides clues to the coherence of Tracy's wider hermeneutical theory in *Imagination*. Tracy concluded *Imagination* by proposing his master-concept of 'an analogical imagination' for both Christian systematic theology and general thinking alike. Tracy believed this concept adequately represented the jointly theoretical and practical – in a word, hermeneutical – character of Christian systematic theology and every conversation of reason. As I have suggested already, this imagination was for Tracy the wit and grace of human history, knitting a world of meaning and truth from plurality and multiplicity.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> See section I. i. in this present chapter, above; and Chapter 7 section IV, below; and *Imagination*, 421-456.

Tracy's three-fold description of theology in *Imagination* as a jointly interpretative ('systematic'), critically reflective ('fundamental') and ethical-political ('practical') discipline, gave exemplary form to his wariness of Gadamer's unguarded celebration of tradition. Tracy has all along wished to ensure that our immersion in tradition be at every point as self-consciously critical and distanced as possible, short of actually cutting the legitimating threads of tradition itself.<sup>148</sup> Tracy has looked (and still looks) for models of conversation-in-tradition that owe much to Gadamer, but his ideal of conversational practice has always been more interested in empirical-scientific, moral and metaphysical arguments about the nature of reality than was Gadamer's. This is a concern that has continued for Tracy beyond the definitive demise (around 1990) of theistic metaphysics as the frame for his theological thinking.<sup>149</sup>

## II. Tracy's process panentheism of the 1970's and early '80s

The theism that Tracy himself began to relinquish at the end of the 1980s was already of a quite particular kind, however, and this horizon also fed into his hermeneutical ideas about reason as conversation or dialogue. Since *Blessed Rage*, Tracy had professed – though never without caveat – the value and merits of a 'process' metaphysics that ascribes temporality, change and dependence to the reality of God. In place of the immutable and aseous 'Wholly Absolute One' of classical theism,<sup>150</sup> Tracy preferred the process concept of God, which he thought was better related to human experience as

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<sup>148</sup> Tracy's stress today on the *fragmentary* nature of tradition (see Chapter 9 below) adds a further, even more integral dimension to Tracy's reworking of the idea and practice of tradition.

<sup>149</sup> For an account of the significance for Tracy of the 'mystical-prophetic' character of Christian religion in displacing theism from theology, see Chapter 7 section V, below.

<sup>150</sup> See *Blessed Rage*, 183.

well as to scriptural witness to a passionate and loving God.

Process theology arose from the cosmological philosophy developed by Alfred North Whitehead at Harvard in the 1920s.<sup>151</sup> Whitehead interpreted human consciousness as an advanced case of a broader cosmological category of ‘feeling’ (or ‘prehension’), by which, he proposed, entities of all kinds exist as a complex of internal relations and relations with other entities.<sup>152</sup> In this way applying an analogy of experiential concepts to unconscious and conscious entities alike, Whitehead enabled process thinkers to treat the human experience of consciousness as a higher specification of a universal infra-personal phenomenon.<sup>153</sup> Thereby, to use Tracy’s words from *Blessed Rage*, ‘the self’s full range of unconscious, conscious and knowing experiences of the self’ becomes for the process thinker ‘the paradigm case for reality.’<sup>154</sup> Indeed, reality as a whole turns out to be a process that exhibits its personal character in God.<sup>155</sup>

For his part, Tracy has shown little interest in the cosmological side of Whiteheadian thought.<sup>156</sup> In line with his transcendental Thomist inheritance (Lonergan, Rahner, Coreth), and in the wake of his own phenomenology of the ‘religious dimension’ of

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<sup>151</sup> Whitehead’s classic work is his *Process and Reality*, published in 1929 (A. N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (Cambridge: CUP, 1929)).

<sup>152</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 311. According to Whitehead, an entity achieves its own ‘concrescence’ as a ‘complex unity of feeling’ (*ibid.*).

<sup>153</sup> See *Process and Reality*, Part III, Chapter V, ‘The Higher Phases of Experience,’ 376-400.

<sup>154</sup> *Blessed Rage*, 173.

<sup>155</sup> See *Process and Reality*, Part V, Chapter II, ‘God and the World,’ 484-500.

<sup>156</sup> Although see Tracy’s part of the essay co-authored with Nicholas Lash for *Concilium* 1983 no.6, reprinted in Tracy, *On Naming the Present: Reflections on God, Hermeneutics, and Church* (London: SCM Press, 1994), as ‘Cosmology and Christian Hope’ (*On Naming the Present*, 73-81). Tracy observes here that ‘the collapse of earlier mechanistic, materialist, and positivist models has freed science itself to a sense of the ultimate mystery of reality and to a chastened but real willingness to dialogue with any plausible philosophical and theological cosmological hypotheses’ (*ibid.*, 74-5). He continues: ‘The dialogue with process philosophers and theologians (including, in the wider sense of process thought, the followers of Teilhard de Chardin) is merely one well-known instance of this increasingly fruitful relationship’ (*ibid.*, 75).

subjective experience (in *Blessed Rage*),<sup>157</sup> Tracy engaged process thought instead solely at the level of its conceptual analogy of human and divine subjectivity. This had been worked out, above all, by the key Whiteheadian theological philosopher, Charles Hartshorne (1897-2000), who was interested in Whiteheadian cosmology alongside his work on the logic of theism. As well as Hartshorne, however, Tracy also had close at hand an example in the Protestant theologian Schubert Ogden (prominent in *Blessed Rage*) of a fellow process theologian who largely ignored the cosmological side of process thinking.<sup>158</sup>

Process theism is also sometimes called ‘panentheism’ (literally, ‘all-*in*-God’), which distinguishes it from classical theism, on the one side (according to which God exists independently of the world which depends utterly on God), and pantheistic identifications of God and the phenomenal world, on the other. The term ‘panentheism’ can also be associated with aspects of Hegelian philosophy and theology, in addition to Whiteheadian thought.

In *Blessed Rage*, Tracy made clear his dissatisfaction with classical theism, against which he laid three charges. First, he found it *incoherent* in its explication of the reality

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<sup>157</sup> See, especially, Tracy’s argument regarding ‘the religious dimension of common human experience and language’ in chapter five of *Blessed Rage* (pp. 91-118); on which see also Chapter 6 section I. iv., and Chapter 7 section III. ii., below. In *Blessed Rage*, process thought appears as such only in Chapter nine, which concerns an appropriate concept of God (*ibid.*, 172-203).

<sup>158</sup> See Schubert Ogden, *The Reality of God, and Other Essays* (London: SCM, 1967) (first published in 1963). Ogden married Bultmannian existentialist demythologising to Hartshornian process theological categories. By contrast, the process theological thinking that has enjoyed appeal and influence in more recent years has tended to ally itself explicitly with ecological-cosmological concerns. For example, see Catherine Keller’s ecofeminist *The Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London: Routledge, 2003), which may have broken new ground in mediating process religious ideas to a postmodern, intentionally ‘post-metaphysical’ thought-world. Works of process theology from the previous decade less successful in this regard include Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (London: SCM, 1992) and Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

of God in relation to the reality of the world we experience.<sup>159</sup> The complaint here is that classical theism severs explanatory or intelligible connection between our experience of being constituted in temporality, mutability and interdependent relations, on the one hand, and God's supposedly paradigmatic existence in immutability and aseity, on the other. Second, and relatedly, Tracy argued that classical theism is *existentially meaningless* – or worse, an 'intolerable burden for humanity' – because it teaches that 'our ultimate commitment' must be to an alienating 'super-natural' mode of divine existing that bears no identifiable relation to our own.<sup>160</sup> Third, Tracy suggested that classical theism *is unable to make meaningful sense of the Scriptures* insofar as these are full of 'assertions of a God really affected by the actions of humanity.'<sup>161</sup>

As we have seen, process thinkers start from the principle that, in Tracy's words, our 'experience as experiencing selves' provides 'the fundamental experiential and, thereby, metaphysical ground of all basic concepts.'<sup>162</sup> As a consequence, as Tracy explained, upon finding that 'the self's own experience [is] intrinsically social and temporal,' they determine that 'God too – precisely as *real* – is to be understood as social and temporal.'<sup>163</sup> This led Hartshorne to propose a 'dipolar' theistic logic, according to which God remains the uniquely necessary idea and existent,<sup>164</sup> at the same time as God is also eminently social and temporal. According to process theism, as Tracy explained, 'God is both absolute (as the one whose *existence* depends upon no other being) and

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<sup>159</sup> See *Blessed Rage*, 180.

<sup>160</sup> *Blessed Rage*, 180.

<sup>161</sup> *Blessed Rage*, 180. 'My own suspicion is that all authentic Christians live and pray and speak as if God were really affected by their action' (*ibid.*).

<sup>162</sup> *Blessed Rage*, 173. That is, they assume that 'the basic metaphysical analogy for reality is the self' (*ibid.*, 181).

<sup>163</sup> *Blessed Rage*, 181.

<sup>164</sup> See Hartshorne, *Anselm's Discovery: A Re-Examination of the Ontological Proof for God's Existence* (Illinois: Open Court, 1966); also *Blessed Rage* 184-7.

relative (as the one whose *actuality* is relative to all other beings).<sup>165</sup> This is to say, God is eternally in process, and coming to be more and more in actuality, in maximal relationship with the totality of everything that emerges within the world.

Indeed, here, God's very sociality and temporality also comprises his perfection. 'Precisely as unsurpassably temporal and social – and, in that revised sense, as changeless – God alone is God.'<sup>166</sup> 'God's eminent relativity – a relationship to *all* reality – is relative to nothing,' and so it can be 'the absolute ground of all relationships, ours and the divine.'<sup>167</sup> In *Talking About God* (1983), Tracy noted that where Thomists have conceived God as eminently good, wise, just and holy, Hartshorne added to these also 'aesthetic' perfection-terms such as 'sociability, temporality, creative change, enjoyment of beauty etc.' In these latter respects God is just as 'unsurpassable by others' as in the more traditional moral perfections, although God continually self-surpasses in 'genuine self-enrichment.'<sup>168</sup>

However, *Blessed Rage* also expressed an extended 'caveat' about process theism as it stood at that time. Tracy noted that there was as yet no secure consensus regarding the being of God in process circles: is God 'a single actual entity' (William Christian) or 'a personally ordered society of actual entities' (John Cobb)?<sup>169</sup> At the same time, he found that ahistorical misreadings of the Thomistic tradition tended to restrict these thinkers' theological horizons and options.<sup>170</sup> Tracy also found the process tradition generally lacking in an anthropology sufficiently 'cognizant with and articulate of the

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<sup>165</sup> For Hartshorne on this 'law of polarity,' see 'Introduction: The Standpoint of Panentheism' in Hartshorne and Reese, eds., *Philosophers Speak of God*, 1-25.

<sup>166</sup> *Blessed Rage*, 181.

<sup>167</sup> *Blessed Rage*, 182.

<sup>168</sup> David Tracy and John B. Cobb, Jr., *Talking About God: Doing Theology in the Context of Modern Pluralism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1983), 33.

<sup>169</sup> *Blessed Rage*, 188.

<sup>170</sup> See *Blessed Rage*, 188.

ambiguity, the tragedy, the sin' involved in human existence.<sup>171</sup> Finally, Tracy related all of these difficulties to one key difficulty that the process tradition still needed to address. This was that process thinkers seemed not to know how they might relate their metaphysical concepts to correspondingly meaningful religious and existential symbols.<sup>172</sup> Tracy observed that few seemed to have got very much further than Whitehead's valuable but limited symbolism of God's 'persuasive, non-coercive love' (beyond which Whitehead himself only managed to subside into the 'vaguely Edwardian image of God as a "fellow-sufferer who understands."').<sup>173</sup>

Even in *Blessed Rage*, therefore, Tracy was already expressing some concerns about the coherence, breadth and meaningfulness of process thinking. Yet Tracy clearly hoped that his own mixed phenomenological, hermeneutical,<sup>174</sup> transcendental and process approach to theology could help bring theological conceptuality and symbolism – especially within process thought – into greater mutual enrichment.<sup>175</sup> For while he continued to prefer process theistic concepts in *Talking About God*, Tracy there also commended dialogue between process thought and transcendental Thomism, specifically in recognition of what Tracy saw as the latter's superior achievements in enabling mutual enrichments between concept and metaphor (especially in 'the explicitly linguistic interpretations of Rahner and Lonergan in recent years by Victor

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<sup>171</sup> *Blessed Rage*, 188.

<sup>172</sup> See *Blessed Rage*, 188.

<sup>173</sup> *Blessed Rage*, 190 (and see Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 532). Rather like 'a member of the Bloomsbury circle,' Tracy suggested, Whitehead's God – as symbolised by Whitehead – inhabits an 'admirably moral and aesthetic world' some distance from the predominant tonalities of the Scriptures (*ibid.*), though perhaps rather closer to the "warm deism" that Don Browning told Tracy he found in Whitehead (see *Blessed Rage* 190 and 203 n. 110).

<sup>174</sup> On the 'hermeneutical' element in *Blessed Rage*, see Tracy's own judgement in his 1995 Preface that "'hermeneutics" [was] crucially present in the book but [was] not yet the very heart of my concept of theology,' as it would be from *Imagination* onwards (*Blessed Rage*, xiv).

<sup>175</sup> See *Blessed Rage*, 191.

Preller and David Burrell').<sup>176</sup> As Tracy put it in *Imagination*, process theologies needed to learn how 'to develop and be corrected by the symbolic (and, therefore, radical mystery) side of the tradition.'<sup>177</sup> If it seems that *via eminentiae* overcomes *via negationis* in the theological analogies of the process theists, Tracy wanted to bring about, more generally, 'a profounder sense of the negative in their developments of analogical language.'<sup>178</sup>

According to *Imagination*, in sum, 'the symbolic, the negative and the sense of radical mystery (incomprehensibility, hidden and revealed God etc.) need more dialectical incorporation into a process *systematic theological* understanding of God.'<sup>179</sup> Here, movements back and forth between concept and symbol map broadly onto movements between 'fundamental' and 'systematic' theology in Tracy's theological model. Only by means of such a back and forth, Tracy suggests, will process theology be assured that its 'use of process concepts is a genuinely theological use, in the sense that the tensive character of the originating religious language is maintained in the clarity of the concepts used in the second-order theological analogical language.'<sup>180</sup>

What Tracy wanted seems clear enough, and in *Imagination* he did make advances upon the received process idea by, in effect, saturating it with elements from transcendental

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<sup>176</sup> See *Talking About God*, 23-28. In these interpreters of the classic transcendental Thomists, Tracy believed one could note a newly emergent sense in which 'the logic of analogy bears striking resemblances to the more familiar logic of metaphor' (*ibid.*, 24). That is, it emerges that the 'more familiar studies of the logic of metaphorical usage in religious language [e.g., in Ricoeur] parallel the linguistic studies of the logic of analogical usage in properly theological language' (*ibid.*, 24). For Burrell on the necessarily imaginative and exploratory character of analogical predication, see David Burrell, *Exercises in Religious Understanding* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1974), 80-137, esp. 86-91.

<sup>177</sup> *Imagination*, 439 n. 7.

<sup>178</sup> *Imagination*, 439 n. 7. See also *ibid.*, 408: 'the *via eminentiae* is possible only on condition of its constant fidelity to the *via negationis*.'

<sup>179</sup> *Imagination*, 439 n. 7.

<sup>180</sup> *Imagination*, 439 n. 7.

Thomism, just as he would recommend in *Talking About God*.<sup>181</sup> It seems possible that, in *Imagination*, hermeneutical and systematic-theological form was now even more important to Tracy – philosophically and theologically – than was determining a precise stand-alone theistic concept. As Mike Higton has observed, fundamental theology was increasingly coming to consist for Tracy in arguing ‘for the truth of systematic theology itself.’<sup>182</sup> But it would be premature to imagine that Tracy was now wholly uninterested in clarity and public intelligibility of theistic concept, despite the way in which clarity of theistic concept had now become secondary for Tracy to the clarity he sought and believed he had found in his governing concept of ‘analogical imagination.’ His concept of analogical imagination has theistic implications, and in the very last line of *Imagination* (prior to the Epilogue) Tracy returns his reader to the explicitly theistic thought that, in the end, everyone must deal with ‘the harsh, demanding, healing power of the ultimate reality affecting and affected by all, the Love who is God.’<sup>183</sup>

Nevertheless, we may wonder whether *Imagination* yet advanced a promising route towards an adequate integration of ‘the symbolic, the negative and the sense of radical mystery’ within Tracy’s theology. For Tracy appears to have sought to ‘maintain’ (should we say, contain?) this symbolism, negativity and mystery *within* the ‘clarity of the concepts used in the second-order theological analogical language.’<sup>184</sup> Whether it is process metaphysics or hermeneutical theory to the fore, therefore, it seems that Tracy

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<sup>181</sup> See note 176 above. The claim that *Imagination* made advances in these areas will be justified more fully in the final paragraphs of section IV of Chapter 7, here below. In brief summary: First, in *Imagination* the analogical concept depended upon the plausibility of historically particular symbols, with the specificity of ‘the Christian classic’ made integral to that work’s identification and justification of the classic-in-general; second, *Imagination* incorporated negativity into the heart of analogy by viewing the confrontational and dangerous memory of Jesus of Nazareth *integral* to the symbolic-conceptual ‘Christ-event’; third, the transcendent unforeseeability of the hermeneutical ‘event’ itself intimated God’s incomprehensibility as transcendent Mystery.

<sup>182</sup> Higton, ‘Hans Frei and David Tracy on the Ordinary and the Extraordinary in Christianity,’ 579-80.

<sup>183</sup> *Imagination*, 438. This assertion concludes the final chapter to the book prior to the Epilogue (a chapter entitled ‘A Christian Systematic Analogical Imagination’).

<sup>184</sup> *Imagination*, 439 n. 7.

was still seeking for a clear concept that could discipline everything.

Before we turn to think more about the strengths and weaknesses of Tracy's positions regarding the relations of symbol and concept in *Blessed Rage* and *Imagination*, there seems to be something more to be said against the process theists in a purely philosophical regard. For it is remarkable that in the context of the process thinkers' determination to furnish a philosophical analogy of human and divine subjectivity, they should have omitted 'mortality' in their lists of attributes essentially constitutive of human experience. Our dissolutions in death, it appears, are experientially and metaphysically incidental, presumably because the personal experience and order of the cosmos continues undeterred. But surely, whatever cosmology one entertains, this is an implausible account of human experience.<sup>185</sup>

Furthermore, the metaphysically incidental character of our own deaths in this process account entails that what is really *real* within our temporal, mutable and interdependent experience is the experience of particular consciousness – of 'being a self' – considered as clearly and distinctly transcendent of the particular disintegrating body that occasions it. In turn, this implication runs the further danger that it might be taken up and repeated paradigmatically in the process God, whose transcendence as 'personal' is then associated primarily with this dualistic principle.<sup>186</sup> Probably, dualistic tendencies are

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<sup>185</sup> Indeed, it does not seem to have been an account that Tracy himself ever entertained, as can be seen from his reflections on the significance of everyday 'negative' limit-experiences (including anxiety and facing death) in *Blessed Rage* (pp. 107-8).

<sup>186</sup> This may be a good reason for process theologians to stress the cosmological side of things and not to style God a personal entity but instead 'a personally ordered society of [...] entities' (John Cobb; see *Blessed Rage*, 188). Alternatively, however, Schubert Ogden opts to be explicit that 'the interaction between God and the world must be understood analogously to [the] interaction between our own minds and bodies – with the difference that the former interaction takes place, not between God and a selected portion of the world [...] but between God and the whole world of his creatures' (Ogden, *The Reality of God*, 178). For his part, Tracy was not interested in a mind-body analogy, but with his transcendental Thomist background, he has been keen on styling God as like a 'self.'

inevitable in any philosophy that treats consciousness as the primary phenomenon inviting analysis, but nevertheless this is an ironic conclusion for a philosophical tradition that many have regarded as recuperating theology and religious thinking from destructive mind-body and spirit-matter dualisms.<sup>187</sup>

So far, however, I have said little about the assertion that Tracy made most consistently on behalf of process over classical theism: namely, that it better interprets the passionate and loving God of the Scriptures. In *Blessed Rage*, it seemed ‘fairly obvious’ to Tracy that ‘the interpreter of the Hebrew and Christian texts seems on far more solid ground in appealing to the dipolar concept of God as more in harmony with scriptural meanings than any concept informed by the monopolar outlook.’<sup>188</sup> In a similar vein, Tracy wrote in *Imagination* of his ongoing conviction of ‘the greater adequacy of the process tradition for interpreting the central Christian understanding that “God is love.”’<sup>189</sup> And then, in *Plurality*, we find him again commending the process theologians for ‘their helpful clarifications of what Christians mean by their central metaphor “God is love.”’<sup>190</sup> Given these commendations, it would seem likely that even beyond the demise of theism-as-such in Tracy’s thinking, Tracy continues to admire these contributions of process theology.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> See the works by Reuther, McFague and Keller cited in note 158 above. True, process metaphysics refuses to contemplate any *separate existence* of a mind without its body, but the price of this achievement would seem to have been, nevertheless, to entrench an insidious residual dualism.

<sup>188</sup> *Blessed Rage*, 184.

<sup>189</sup> *Imagination*, 439 n. 7. See also Hartshorne’s iteration of this point: ‘It is my conviction that in Whitehead western metaphysics moved appreciably closer than ever before to a technical language capable of formulating without inconsistency the content of the ancient saying, “God is love”’ (Charles Hartshorne, ‘Whitehead’s Novel Intuition’ in George L. Kline, ed., *Alfred North Whitehead: Essays on His Philosophy* (Eaglewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 18-26: 24).

<sup>190</sup> *Plurality*, 108. Whitehead’s own partly symbolic conception of ‘the love of God for the world’ was that ‘[w]hat is done in the world is transformed into a reality in heaven, and the reality in heaven passes back into the world,’ so that ‘the love in the world passes into the love in heaven, and floods back again into the world’ (Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 532; quoted by Tracy in *Blessed Rage*, 197 n. 56).

<sup>191</sup> For example, in his 1994 essay ‘The Return of God in Contemporary Theology’ (in Tracy *On Naming the Present* (London: SCM, 1994), Tracy labels insights into ‘the relationality of God and all reality’ as ‘modern theology’s greatest achievement in understanding God’ (Tracy, ‘The Return of God,’ 41).

To help evaluate the claim that process concepts better illuminate the God named in Christianity and the Scriptures, it will be useful to consider a counter-argument against process and other so-called ‘panentheist’ theologians, on just this point, advanced by Herbert McCabe (1926-2001). McCabe fundamentally disputed the idea that the process God was more impressively ‘involved’ in the world than was God in traditional accounts.<sup>192</sup> Firstly, on the one hand, McCabe invoked the advantages of the classical view of the creator’s intrinsic relationship to the creature. According to this understanding, ‘the creator is never *outside* the sufferer.’<sup>193</sup> This means, McCabe explains, that when we have compassion for another person, for example, ‘we, in our feeble way, are seeking to be what God is all the time: united with and within the life of our friend.’<sup>194</sup> For, ‘in his creative act, God is “closer to the sufferer than she is to herself.”’<sup>195</sup>

Secondly, on the other hand, McCabe understood that there was a demand abroad that God should suffer with and alongside creatures: if, that is, God truly loves them. Yet people are tempted to demand this, McCabe suspects, only once they have ‘a weakening hold on the traditional doctrine of the incarnation,’<sup>196</sup> which latter allows us to ‘say quite literally that God suffered hunger and thirst and torture and death [...] because the Son of God assumed a human nature in which it makes sense to predicate these things of him.’<sup>197</sup> In McCabe’s view the traditional doctrine of the Incarnation here significantly augments the understanding of the creator-God. God may not suffer *as such*, but nevertheless, God, closer to all sufferers than they are to themselves, enters

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<sup>192</sup> See Herbert McCabe, ‘The Involvement of God’ in McCabe, *God Matters* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1987), 39-51.

<sup>193</sup> McCabe, ‘The Involvement of God,’ 44.

<sup>194</sup> ‘The Involvement of God,’ 44-5.

<sup>195</sup> ‘The Involvement of God,’ 45.

<sup>196</sup> ‘The Involvement of God,’ 46.

<sup>197</sup> ‘The Involvement of God,’ 46.

eternal identification with a particular creature, who suffers ‘in a perfectly ordinary sense, the sense in which you and I suffer.’<sup>198</sup>

What is more, insofar as the doctrines of the Incarnation and Trinity provide Christians with a kind of sketch of their living God’s ‘life-story,’ McCabe continues, ‘[t]here is no story of God “before” the story of Jesus.’ Thus, the life, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is ‘in the traditional view [...] the mystery that we affirm when we speak of God,’<sup>199</sup> and not something added to a more fundamental divine identity. The sum doctrine is that ‘that God is involved in the whole human condition not simply as creator but as having a created nature.’<sup>200</sup>

McCabe presents the church’s traditional doctrine and concepts as being enough to translate the scriptures and gospel, on the one hand, and to relate God to our everyday possibilities of living and loving, on the other. Whether McCabe convinces may perhaps turn on the extent to which his hearers are prepared wholeheartedly to trust the shape of emotional life that these traditional concepts propose and seek to safeguard. Can such talk be trusted to carry us ever deeper into our humanity, in spite of – or even because of – the ways these traditional concepts propose to gather God’s inhuman otherness (as God) into a supposedly unbroken master-idea to inform human living?<sup>201</sup> Above all, perhaps, will those who hear this rhetoric be prepared to trust without reservation the true humanity of the tradition and institution that pronounces it?

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<sup>198</sup> ‘The Involvement of God,’ 46.

<sup>199</sup> ‘The Involvement of God,’ 48.

<sup>200</sup> ‘The Involvement of God,’ 48.

<sup>201</sup> As we will see later on, in Chapter 7 section III. i., below, Tracy broke from his teacher Bernard Lonergan on the question of whether religious emotion, as such, could be trusted to mediate a higher intellectual authority of religious institutions and tradition (see Tracy, ‘Lonergan’s Foundational Theology: An Interpretation and Critique’ in Philip McShane, ed., *Foundations of Theology: Papers from the International Lonergan Congress, 1970* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1971), 197-222).

However one judges McCabe's presentation of the traditional position, I think his argument against the process alternative is pretty devastating. Those theologians who affirm that Jesus is not *literally* divine, he suggested, find that because 'it is a profound Christian instinct that the gospel has to do with the suffering of God, [they] are constrained to say that since God did not literally suffer with Jesus, God must suffer in some other way': for example, 'as he surveys the suffering of Jesus and the rest of mankind' or via 'a kind of mental anguish at the follies and sins of creatures.'<sup>202</sup> McCabe contrasts these anaemic affirmations with the ability of a traditional Christian to 'say that God suffered a horrible pain in his hands when he was nailed to the cross.'<sup>203</sup>

Of course, the process thinker will suspect here that God's 'literal suffering with Jesus' in McCabe's traditional account is a verbal sleight of hand and a false rhetoric, since God is emphatically said *not* to suffer as such. And yet, I believe, McCabe does succeed in highlighting the central philosophical difficulty of process theism, namely, its persistent dualism. For, the outcome of McCabe's analysis is to show that insofar as the process God *is* – and is not *just* another name for everything-as-a-whole – this God does not suffer as the psychosomatic unity that each of *us* actually is, but instead as some kind of consciousness that floats above the cosmos. We could even go as far as to suggest that the process God is precisely *unreal* because she or he is from the start a projection of a falsely dualistic anthropology.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> McCabe, 'The Involvement of God,' 46.

<sup>203</sup> 'The Involvement of God,' 46.

<sup>204</sup> It may or may not be possible to rescue process religious thought by stressing its cosmological elements (see note 186, above), but it is hard to see how the rhetoric about God that could emerge from such a move might then be able to respond adequately to the God-rhetoric of Scripture and tradition. In her *The Face of the Deep* (2003), however, Catherine Keller attempts a powerful postmodern process-religious cosmological ecotheology.

McCabe attacks process theism as something that enthrones an attempt to be literal about the Christian God while being nonliteral about the incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God. In place of this, McCabe proposes a version of literalness about both that avoids sliding into what he successfully (I think) portrays as the pallid theological nonsense of the process alternative. Placed against his characterisation of the latter, furthermore, he succeeds in making the traditional doctrines of Creation, Incarnation and Trinity sparkle by comparison. Nevertheless, to Tracean eyes, as I have also tried to suggest, McCabe's restatement of the traditional solution – for all its acuity and *brio* – purchases some of its philosophical-theological confidence by eliding needful hermeneutical questions. How can McCabe's concept of the *literally* living, loving, and yet impassable God prove itself coherent and meaningful except at the price of hustling certain puzzled kinds of questions out of court? In what way is it meaningful to regard God as an exemplary being for us, if, as such, God is the negation of everything we must deal with? And, furthermore, how is one supposed to *conceive* the literal reality of this man, Jesus of Nazareth, as God, except at the price of closing down similarly needful questions about what such a claimed divine particularity might *mean*, how it might possibly be *understood*?

Adapting a principle from Lonergan, I take it that a 'literal' statement is one for which every relevant question about that statement's meaning, in context, is presumed to have been both asked and answered (at least, by someone).<sup>205</sup> To call statements literal when relevant questions of meaning have *not* been answered – as seems inevitable in the case of statements about God and Christology – seems to reduce those statements, as *literal*, merely to stating the privileged authority of the tradition or institution that issues them.

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<sup>205</sup> For Lonergan's idea that one grasps a 'virtually unconditioned' once one has asked and answered every relevant question about a portion of reality, see chapter ten of Lonergan's *Insight*, as well as Tracy's invocation of the idea in *Plurality*, 121 n. 4.

Without ever departing from an essential theological realism, Tracy's eventual answer to an objection like McCabe's has been (I believe) to cease today to claim any wholly *gathered* literalness for anything to do with God's reality (or Christ's).<sup>206</sup> Tracy has never abandoned the need and expectation of Christian religion for realistic metaphysical hypotheses and theological symbols by which to think and name God and Christ. But by 1994, Tracy would be writing of a pressing need in theology 'to rethink [this] relationship of *thinking* God to *naming* God,' explaining that he means by this that it is time to revisit 'the elusive and intricate relationship of *form* and *content*' within theology.<sup>207</sup> For, Tracy suggested, modern theology had been too obsessed with defining some or other primary form of theological rationality – some or other 'ism': 'deism, theism, pantheism, agnosticism, panentheism' – at the risk of 'squandering the classical heritage of plural and possibly polyphonic forms for naming and thinking God.'<sup>208</sup>

According to Tracy, modern theology – by implication, including his own previous process panentheist variety – was always liable to mutilate the richness of its sources in its search for 'some singular meaning which, however valuable for its limited function' (and we've raised some queries there), was characteristically 'too narrow in its naming and too confined in its thinking to allow the full range of premodern forms to find a postcritical life of second naïveté for the once confident, now troubled modern

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<sup>206</sup> As Tracy would write in 1994, this 'is not the time to rush out new propositions on the reality of God' (Tracy, 'The Return of God in Contemporary Theology,' 45).

<sup>207</sup> Tracy, 'Literary Theory and Return of the Forms for Naming and Thinking God in Theology,' *Journal of Religion*, 74/3 (1994), 302-319: 302 (emphases mine). Tracy would also write in 1999 of a 'fatal separation' (as opposed to helpful distinction) of form from content in modern thinking more generally (Tracy, 'Trinitarian Speculation and the Forms of Divine Disclosure' in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall and Gerald O'Collins, eds., *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 273-293: 273-4). (See also Tracy, 'Form and Fragment: The Recovery of the Hidden and Incomprehensible God,' eds. Werner G. Jeanron and Aasulv Lande, *The Concept of God in Global Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 98-114: 100.) For more on the relation of form and content in theology according to Tracy, see Chapter 9 section II, below.

<sup>208</sup> Tracy, 'Literary Theory,' 307.

thinker.’<sup>209</sup> As modern certainties imploded under the belated self-criticisms of postmodernity, this poverty was left especially exposed.

In the wake of this exposure of modern theology, meanwhile, we can hazard some of the choices that remain. One option would be to admit religiously authorised ‘black-box’ hypotheses, after all, and cease to object to their angel-guarded impenetrabilities (that is, return to the way of classical theism). Or, we might instead abandon any requirement to explicitly correlate religious doctrine with sharable empirical reality (the way of ‘anti-correlational’ or ‘unapologetic’ theology).<sup>210</sup> Or, alternatively, perhaps we could reckon to correlate religious doctrine instead purely with the spiritual and moral challenges of subjectivity and intersubjectivity (the way of the subjective idealisms of a Tillich or a Ricoeur, for example).<sup>211</sup> There are probably many other possible responses, and it would also be quite possible to mix parts of these together.

Tracy’s own response, however, has been a little different. He has continued to require hypotheses about reality as an integral dimension of theological thinking, while at the same time he has also moved to pluralise and historicise every such hypothesis. Just possibly, he has also ceased to identify any *hypothesis* with the highest religious name, ‘God’ (although this is a question we shall return to in Chapter Nine).<sup>212</sup> Tracy would eventually innovate a theological category of the ‘mystical-prophetic’ as a conceptuality to replace analogical imagination, and this seems to have allowed him to explore

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<sup>209</sup> ‘Literary Theory,’ 309.

<sup>210</sup> For Tracy’s argument against Protestant ‘anticorrelationist’ theologians who particularly fit this description, see Tracy, ‘An Uneasy Alliance,’ 555ff; also see Chapter Seven section I, below. Despite his reservations about this movement, Tracy nevertheless has commended as a ‘helpful study,’ William C. Placher’s *Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989) (Tracy, ‘On Naming the Present’ in *On Naming the Present*, 3-24: 23 n. 6).

<sup>211</sup> See Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (London: Collins, 1962). Also, see Paul Ricoeur’s *Oneself as Another* (trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1992)).

<sup>212</sup> See Chapter 9 section IV, below.

thoughtful namings of God that are realistic in essence while prescinding from theism as such.<sup>213</sup> The new category of the mystical-prophetic, and the associated ‘turn’ in his thinking and naming God around 1990, would help ease both his theology *and also* his theory of dialogic reason beyond the metaphysical-theistic horizon that both informed and also hamstrung his theology and hermeneutics during the 1980s.

Tracy’s more recent theology and thinking has sought to carry forward the related strengths of Tracy’s early process theism and his subsequent concept of analogical imagination, while also exceeding their philosophical and theological shortcomings. By consistently demanding that religious thinkers hypothesise religious reality in ways that are coherent, meaningful and do not seek to evade needful questions, Tracy arguably sets an appropriately high bar. The issue which has arisen here between Tracy and McCabe has concerned what standards of hypothesis concerning reality are required where in realistic Christian theological thinking, and to what extent it is or is not satisfactory for these hypotheses to fuse themselves with mythological figures (something Tracy is wary of).

In the next chapter, I shall turn to explore and evaluate Tracy’s most fully developed and first really mature exploration of conversation-dialogue, in *Plurality and Ambiguity*.

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<sup>213</sup> On the category ‘mystical-prophetic’ see Chapter 7 section V, below.

## CHAPTER 3

### *Plurality and Ambiguity: Conversations with Texts*

This short chapter will take up the nuts and bolts of Tracy's mature theory of conversation-dialogue as he presented it in *Plurality and Ambiguity* (1987).

As we saw in the last chapter, *Imagination's* confident account of a meaningful pluralism of human reason was rooted in the claimed exemplary nature of 'the Christian classic,' on the one hand, and in transcendental conclusions, on the other. However, by the time of *Plurality and Ambiguity* (1987), these assurances were already ceding ground to an apparently more chastened hope and longing for conversations of reason and human solidarity. Less theologically ambitious than what had gone before, *Plurality* also offered a more finely wrought adaptation of Gadamer on dialogue.

'The theme of this small book is conversation,' announces the opening line of the Preface. *Plurality* describes this practice by which human beings may hope to pass on and pass around reason and truth. 'To conduct a conversation,' wrote Gadamer, 'means to allow oneself to be conducted by the subject matter to which the partners in the dialogue are orientated.'<sup>214</sup> In broadly Gadamerian spirit, *Plurality* reproduces the basic Gadamerian image of conversation (or dialogue) as 'a game where we learn to give in to the movement required by questions worth exploring.'<sup>215</sup> In conversation, as Tracy puts it, 'neither my present opinions on the question, nor the text's original response to the

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<sup>214</sup> *Truth and Method*, 360-361.

<sup>215</sup> Tracy's notion of the interpretation of a work of art or a text as being like a *game* has its roots in a famous section in Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method*: 'The players are not the subjects of play; instead play merely reaches presentation (Darstellung) through the players' (*Truth and Method*, 103); 'it is well founded for us to use the same concept of play for the hermeneutical phenomenon as for the experience of the beautiful. When we understand a text, what is meaningful in it captivates us just as the beautiful captivates us [...] What we encounter in the experience of the beautiful and in understanding the meaning of a tradition really has something of the truth of play about it' (*ibid.*, 484).

question, but the question itself, must control' what goes on.<sup>216</sup>

According to *Plurality*, the purpose of practising and undergoing such conversation-dialogue, is that we may mediate the many conflicts of interpretation and the many languages of understanding that make up our lives with one another. Tracy sought in this work to model a contemporary modulation of the Platonic ideal of intellectual practice, in which conversation must return ever and again to shared human tasks of imaginative exploration and critical adjudication of the manifestations of possible truth which arise in historical discourse. For '[t]here is no intellectual, cultural, political, or religious tradition of interpretation that does not ultimately live by the quality of its conversation.'<sup>217</sup>

Furthermore, Tracy affirms that '[o]ur theories and our conversations *can* become ... what they in fact always were: limited, fragile, necessary exercises in reaching relatively adequate knowledge of language and history alike.'<sup>218</sup>

## **I. Conversation and 'manifestation'**

In *Plurality*, Tracy expects conversation to give birth to discrete 'manifestations' of truthful possibility, to stand in contrast to the endlessly breeding pluralities and ambiguities of our lives and our world. So proposed, this expectation of truth may seem

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<sup>216</sup> *Plurality*, 18. Here, Tracy already is assuming that it is the *text* that is the paradigmatic conversation-partner, even though it is only on the succeeding page that Tracy formally introduces this idea: 'We converse with one another. We can also converse with texts. If we read well, then we are conversing with the text. [...] In conversation we find ourselves by losing ourselves in the questioning provoked by the text' (*ibid.*, 19).

<sup>217</sup> *Plurality*, ix. Equally for Tracy, as we will see shortly, 'there is also no tradition that does not eventually have to acknowledge its own plurality and ambiguity.'

<sup>218</sup> *Plurality*, 81 (my emphasis).

over-optimistic or even romantic. But for *Plurality* such experiences are the *sine qua non* of all realistic hopes for thoughtful human solidarity.

Tracy extols the power and reality of truth-as-manifestation in and for human life. ‘The discovery of truth as manifestation is the first fruit of any dialogical life.’<sup>219</sup> Openness to conversation (or dialogue) is the same thing as openness to manifestation, he continues, for without events of manifestation no dialogue is possible. Through conversation and manifestation we are freed ‘from epistemological solipsism for a dialogical life, with others and with all the classics.’<sup>220</sup> Dialogue is thus both a certain ‘mode of human life’ and also itself ‘a manifestation of the dialogical reality of all human life.’<sup>221</sup> For, Tracy continues, ‘we belong to history and language’ rather than vice-versa, and to ‘belong to them well’ means that we question history and language and thereby ourselves.<sup>222</sup> ‘Through that questioning we participate in the conversation of all human kind, the living and the dead.’<sup>223</sup> In the course of such conversation, ‘we experience those truths made manifest by our willingness to dialogue and by the classics’ power to disclose.’<sup>224</sup> ‘Anyone who has experienced even one such moment – in watching a film, in listening to music, in looking at a painting, in participating in a religious ritual, in reading a classic text, in conversation with friends, or in finding oneself in love – knows that truth as manifestation is real.’<sup>225</sup> At the same time, such truth also *suffices for life*, says Tracy, whereas ‘[w]ithout such a truth, life is indeed nasty, brutish, and short.’ ‘Without manifestation, truth is too thin’ to sustain us.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> *Plurality*, 28.

<sup>220</sup> *Plurality*, 28.

<sup>221</sup> *Plurality*, 28.

<sup>222</sup> *Plurality*, 28-29.

<sup>223</sup> *Plurality*, 29.

<sup>224</sup> *Plurality*, 29.

<sup>225</sup> *Plurality*, 29.

<sup>226</sup> *Plurality*, 29.

The implications of all this are inevitably religious, even theological. Truth-as-manifestation *suffices* for life, and so promises the resources that religion characteristically promises. Indeed, as Tracy notes, his preferred word ‘manifestation’ (which is not Heidegger’s nor Gadamer’s) has roots in Mircea Eliade’s notion of ‘cosmic manifestation’ as that which constitutes the heart of religion: Tracy’s own use of the term is strongly influenced by Paul Ricoeur’s use of Eliade’s concept.<sup>227</sup>

As things are proposed in *Plurality*, at each point the hope for conversational reason may seem either possible or impossible to maintain practically. The hope may seem dashed, for example, by an honest account of the splintering plurality of interpretation and language itself; or, even more seriously, by the injustice and cruelty that resides in even the best of human history and society. *Plurality* will take a measure of just these ‘interruptions’ while yet arguing that reason *can* fight against all odds for its own hope.<sup>228</sup> This hope never subsists simply in taking the impress of the world as it is, but will rather always be a practice of ‘resistance’ to dominatory and dehumanising habits and techniques of our lives together.<sup>229</sup>

## II. Manifestation as the ‘disclosure-concealment-recognition’ of truth

Tracy presented dialogue as a manifestly valuable and possible mode of human

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<sup>227</sup> *Plurality*, 121 n. 3. See Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961) and Paul Ricoeur, ‘Manifestation and Proclamation’ in Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, narrative and imagination*, trans. David Pellauer, ed. Mark I. Wallace (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 48-67. Tracy developed Ricoeur’s theme with his own self-professedly ‘Catholic’ emphases in *Imagination*, 193-229.

<sup>228</sup> See *Plurality*, 45-81.

<sup>229</sup> Resistance, of course, discovers its own techniques – social critical theories, and other disciplined suspicions of dominatory power – which Tracy advocates (see esp., *Plurality*, 72-74). Even so, resistance is a passion as well as a method.

existence, whose alternatives leave merely the thinnest gruel to an examined life. He claimed it is evident that conversation and dialogue do occur, and that when they do the latent power of manifestation is uncovered, a power to which each can attest. More technically, *Plurality* develops its own definition of truth-as-manifestation as an event of ‘disclosure-concealment-recognition,’ in which there occurs both a ‘power of disclosure and concealment in the object itself’ and ‘an experience of recognition on the side of the subject.’<sup>230</sup> Here, ‘power’ refers to an (ultimately religious) element in things, not required in Gadamer, which presses together subject and object within the event of manifestation.<sup>231</sup>

By highlighting the dimension of recognition within manifestation, Tracy was partly recalling a passing theme of Gadamer’s in *Truth and Method*, to the effect that the play of art (and hence also conversation) can lead to the ‘joy of recognition’ when something ‘is known as something.’<sup>232</sup> Joyful recognition was for Gadamer the residual truth of the Platonic doctrine of the recollection of eternal forms. But in *Plurality* Tracy means to emphasise more than simply this vestige of Plato, for it is of the essence for Tracy there that discrete ‘objects’ impinge upon conscious subjects with powers that awaken discrete experiences of recognition from that subject. Neither Gadamer nor Heidegger could admit to the essential, phenomenological level of investigation any equivalent sense of discrete objects and discrete subjective experiences. In this way, Tracean ‘manifestation’ involves not only linguistic events of disclosure-concealment, but also

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<sup>230</sup> *Plurality*, 28. Tracy continues: ‘There is, in every true manifestation, an intrinsic, that is dialogical, interaction between the object’s disclosure and concealment and the subject’s recognition. That interaction is conversation’ (*ibid.*).

<sup>231</sup> Tracy notes with approval the importance of the category of ‘power’ for many reformed theologies, in particular that of his fellow-Chicagoan, James M. Gustafson (*Plurality*, 137, n. 22). Recall Paul Tillich on ‘the power of Being-itself’ that helps enable us to be (see Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Combined Volume (Wlwyn, Herts: James Nesbit & Co., 1968), vol. 1: 261 and ff.).

<sup>232</sup> *Truth and Method*, 113.

empirical subjects who respond to empirical-cultural phenomena.<sup>233</sup>

### III. Interpersonal relations and intellectual conversation: Gadamer and Tracy

The exemplary foci for intellectual conversation, Tracy thought, were those classic texts in which possibilities of human living and thinking find enduring and communicable expression. Indeed, central to Tracy's notion of conversation in *Plurality* lay his notion of 'conversation with texts.' Once fully underway, *Plurality*'s discussion becomes all about the potential of classic *texts* – in effect, books – for the project of reason.

When Tracy writes of 'texts' in *Plurality*, he appears to mean in the first instance written texts, although presumably other cultural artefacts could be thought of as texts by analogical extension. It may well be that he also assumes that things spoken become in some sense oral texts in the memory. However, Tracy nowhere spells out an explicit theory of texts or a definition of what he intends by 'a text.'<sup>234</sup> Back in *Imagination*, Tracy listed 'texts, events, images, persons, rituals and symbols' as distinct kinds of entities that could be classics.<sup>235</sup> Of these, images and symbols fall easily into the class of text-like cultural artefacts, while rituals (and performances) might qualify as texts owing to a combination of their scripts or scores, on the one hand, and their being beheld in memory by participants and spectators, on the other.

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<sup>233</sup> Regarding 'concealment,' Tracy notes 'the radicality of Heidegger's insistence that every disclosure involves concealment, in contrast to Gadamer's emphasis on truth as an event of disclosure' (*Plurality*, 121 n. 1). However, Tracy does not develop explicitly any consequences of this disagreement for his own argument in *Plurality*.

<sup>234</sup> In an otherwise generally positive account of the philosophical and theological potential of Tracy's hermeneutical theory, Werner Jeanrond has complained that Tracy has advanced no theory of the text (see Werner Jeanrond, *Text and Interpretation as Categories of Theological Interpretation* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1988)).

<sup>235</sup> *Imagination*, 68.

By contrast, it would seem that *persons* and *historical events* are not containable under Tracy's essentially empirical-realistic notion of 'a text': at least, not without significant loss in Tracy's own terms. We have already seen how Tracy's hermeneutical theory retained a sense of the multi-experiencing subject. As for historical events, Tracy opens the argument in *Plurality* discussing the many ways in which people have interpreted the famous event (or 'palimpsest of events') known to us as the French Revolution. But despite the opportunity to do so, he makes no attempt there to assimilate 'historical event' to 'text.'

This not to suggest, however, that Tracy would deny that every person or historical event is irredeemably textual (insofar as they appear *as* a person or event). It would be a virtual hermeneutical truism to say that we can know nothing of people or historical events except through the texts they cause of themselves. But while it is one thing to observe that nothing escapes textuality – *il n'y a pas de hors texte*<sup>236</sup> – it would have been another thing if Tracy had assimilated every entity to the category of a text.

Nevertheless, Tracy describes his 'analysis of interpretation-as-conversation' in *Plurality* as an 'empirical [...] model for the interpretation of texts.'<sup>237</sup> As 'empirical,' Tracy's focus is rather different from a Gadamerian or Derridean accounts of linguistic-textual being or, alternatively, *différance*. When Tracy writes of 'texts,' he means to indicate first of all an empirical class of cultural objects, and only secondarily does 'text' imply an essential feature of understanding or existence.

In taking his rather different tack from Gadamer (in *Plurality* and since), Tracy has

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<sup>236</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* [1967] (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), 158.

<sup>237</sup> *Plurality*, 115-6 n. 6.

apparently sought to avoid the European phenomenological-hermeneutical fate of having simply to *choose between* incompatible Gadamerian-ontological or Derridean-deconstructive perspectives.<sup>238</sup> This desire to mediate was already evident in *Plurality*, where Tracy sought to incorporate Derridean deconstruction into his account of conversation-dialogue, via an acknowledgement of a ‘radical plurality’ inherent to language.<sup>239</sup> As we will see in the final chapter of this thesis, Tracy’s mediating perspective has since become more fundamentally even-handed between the two, as he has re-conceived tradition in terms of its fragments, fragmentariness and fragmentation. All along, however, Tracy has held that the European approach, although profound, was in the end too restricting and potentially less illuminating than his own more pluralistic approach to experience and its possible (and possibly religious) horizons.

Gadamer had acknowledged in *Truth and Method* that ‘[e]verything *written* is, in fact, the paradigmatic object of hermeneutics.’<sup>240</sup> And he found ‘dialogue proper’ between an ‘I’ and a ‘Thou’ to be everywhere analogous to that ‘other form of dialogue that is the understanding of texts.’<sup>241</sup> According to Gadamer, properly relating oneself to the past is *like* properly relating oneself to another person, while improper interactions with others have their parallels in improper interactions with history as tradition.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> For a helpful characterisation of Derrida’s thought as a kind of ‘super-phenomenology,’ which ‘reinforces the phenomenological gesture’ at the same time as it ‘rejects the phenomenological [Husserlian] quest for certain foundations,’ see Hugh Rayment-Pickard, *Impossible God: Derrida’s Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), esp. 60f.

<sup>239</sup> See *Plurality*, chapter 3: ‘Radical Plurality: the Question of Language,’ 47ff., esp. 54-60; and the next section (IV) below here, headed ‘Conversation interrupted: plurality and ambiguity.’

<sup>240</sup> *Truth and Method*, 396, emphasis mine. However, note Jeanrond’s assertion that the German word *bevorzugter* in this sentence would be more accurately translated in English by the softer term ‘preferred,’ ahead of the more profound implications suggested by the English word ‘paradigmatic’ (Werner Jeanrond, ‘Towards an Interreligious Hermeneutics of Love’ in Catherine Cornille and Christopher Conway, eds., *Interreligious Hermeneutics* (Eugene, OR.: Cascade Books, 2010), 44-60: 52 n. 25).

<sup>241</sup> *Truth and Method*, 371.

<sup>242</sup> ‘[T]radition is a genuine partner in dialogue, as we belong to it, as does the I with a Thou’ (*Truth and Method*, 352). As for improper interactions with others, Gadamer suggested that one form of this occurs when people seek in others only those regularities that would render those others predictable and calculable. Gadamer suggested that this found analogy in a sub-hermeneutical approach that sought only

Gadamer judged that the self-evidently desirable achievement of human ‘belonging together’ found hermeneutical parallel – and by implication, fitting continuation – in the hermeneutical attitude of ‘openness to tradition.’<sup>243</sup> Such an attitude corresponds to the essence of linguistic existence, according to Gadamer, insofar as every speaker is dependent upon tradition and lives by tradition’s manifestations of historically effected consciousness. As a consequence, according to Gadamer it is not merely *good* that one should maintain oneself in a hermeneutical consciousness open to tradition, it is also quite simply a matter of authenticity to one’s own linguistic existence. True openness to one another also ‘allows genuine human bond,’ and ‘means being able to listen to one another,’<sup>244</sup> and being ready to ‘accept some things that are against me, even though no one else forces me to do so.’<sup>245</sup>

Something of an optimist, Gadamer apparently believed in the general availability to human beings of a good-will-to-understand that supports the hermeneutical exercise. This in turn appears to have been based on what he assumed to be a generally available sense of immediate and effective relationship between human beings. Jacques Derrida targeted Gadamer’s assumptions about human good will in a short critical paper delivered before Gadamer in Paris in 1981.<sup>246</sup>

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to master human history and tradition by methods of analysis designed to extract objectifying accounts of it (*ibid.*, 352-3). Meanwhile, a more subtle retreat from the mutual indeterminacy entailed in true other-relation can be found, according to Gadamer, in that slyly competitive attitude whereby a person attempts to account for the others, reflectively once-and-for-all, as stable mirrors for his or her own distinct self-relation. Gadamer found hermeneutical analogy for this relational disorder in the historicist form of historical consciousness, which reckons it can ‘reflect itself out of living tradition’ in order to knowingly master the past (*ibid.*, 353-4).

<sup>243</sup> Alongside this spiritual attitude, Gadamer also identified the phenomenon of *the question* as being the specifically intellectual ingredient that sustains dialogue in the openness required (see the section ‘The hermeneutical priority of the question,’ which concludes the chapter, ‘Elements of a Theory of Hermeneutic Experience’ in *Truth and Method*, 355-371).

<sup>244</sup> *Truth and Method*, 355.

<sup>245</sup> *Truth and Method*, 355.

<sup>246</sup> See Jacques Derrida, ‘Three Questions to Hans-Georg Gadamer’ in Michelfelder, Diane P., and Palmer, Richard E., eds., *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 52-54.

Tracy took over the sum results of this Gadamerian parallel between personal relations and intellectual conversation, as well as Gadamer's orientation towards written texts as the paradigmatic objects of interpretation. Although Tracy allowed that '[i]n its original sense, a conversation is of course modeled on the interaction between two or more individuals,'<sup>247</sup> the textual paradigm for genuine conversation can be seen (Tracy suggested) in 'Aristotle's dictum' that 'friendship must yield' to the pursuit of truth.<sup>248</sup> The subject matter in question takes over as personality and particular personal relationships retire. As we will see in the next chapter, this move of Tracy's has not impressed all his theological commentators.<sup>249</sup>

Following Gadamer, *Plurality* characterised conversation as game-like immersion in a to-and-fro of question-and-answer,<sup>250</sup> and Tracy implies that such immersion is also essential to thoughtful personhood. 'In conversation we find ourselves by losing ourselves in the questions provoked by the text.'<sup>251</sup> As Tracy put it in summary: 'To understand is to interpret. To interpret is to converse. To converse with any classic text is to find oneself caught up in the questions and answers worthy of a free mind.'<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> *Plurality*, 18. Tracy notes how less frequently this occurs in an academic seminar than in late night conversations with friends.

<sup>248</sup> *Plurality*, 19.

<sup>249</sup> See the criticisms presented by Gerard Loughlin discussed in Chapter 4 section I, below.

<sup>250</sup> See *Plurality*, 17-19. For Gadamer on *play* as the key to the ontological presentation (*Darstellung*) (here, particularly as regards the work of art), see *Truth and Method*, 102-109; for 'the hermeneutical priority of the question' in conversation, see *ibid.*, 356-371.

<sup>251</sup> *Plurality*, 20.

<sup>252</sup> *Plurality*, 20.

#### IV. Conversation interrupted: plurality and ambiguity

But genuine conversation is rare even for Socrates, Tracy notes.<sup>253</sup> Even where good will is in supply, the hope of rational dialogue must overcome seemingly overwhelming negations of ‘plurality’ and ‘ambiguity.’ A radical plurality pulses through all language, dispersing and deferring our illusions of meaning. But even more calamitous, to Tracy, is the way that radical cognitive and moral ambiguity pervades all our histories and associated traditions of interpretation.

Pervasive plurality and ambiguity means that genuine conversation is not for Tracy something everywhere already latent in language-as-discourse and history-as-tradition, as it is for Gadamer. Rather, for Tracy in *Plurality*, conversation is a possibility that must be hoped for against hope, striven for in resistance against false ideologies, and experienced, ultimately, as a grace seemingly against the odds. And yet, Tracy insists that real dialogue can and has occurred, rather as he argues that manifestation really happens to us. But dialogue can emerge genuinely, for Tracy, only amid clear-sighted acknowledgement of the extent of our self-dispersal in language, as well as of our perplexity and requisite horror in the face of history. These ‘interruptions’ are not so much intermittent as constant, announcing themselves in new ways for each succeeding instance: conversation with the texts of human heritage requires constant attention to these interruptive claims.

Of these two classes of interruption, the interruption of plurality is salutary for Tracy, but nevertheless the easier to deal with. It finds its focus especially in twentieth-century

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<sup>253</sup> *Plurality*, 18.

philosophical analysis of language, where we encounter a dispersal of the sometime certitude and self-presence that rational consciousness once assumed. Wittgenstein began a trend when he pointed out that language-use involves contingent acts that serve contingent forms of life, rather than being the targeted expression of a controlling consciousness. Heidegger, meanwhile, located truth and untruth, alike, within all appropriation of meaning, counting discourse as an occasion of leadings down multiple and incalculable winding paths.<sup>254</sup>

But as Tracy explains, it was Saussure's insight that 'in the linguistic system there are only differences' (later radicalised in the Derridean deferral of any self-enclosed system) that opened up the most radical visions of the disseminating plurality of language. For Derrida, indeed, 'in the linguistic system there are *only differences*' and no similarity that surmounts them.<sup>255</sup> Lacking direct external reference, and considered as differentials in an ever-dispersing 'system,' words 'begin to dissolve into their signifiers, and the signifiers disperse all meaning. All is difference and all difference is always already a deferral of meaning. Difference has become *différance*.'<sup>256</sup> As with the Venetian ambassador in Elizabethan drama, writes Tracy, conversation stops when Derrida arrives: 'With his brilliant rococo theories, he seems to insinuate himself into all conversations.'<sup>257</sup>

Yet Venice had its aims and so also does Derrida, Tracy suggests. For, Derrida's

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<sup>254</sup> 'We are not like a sturdy oak in the great forest of being [according to Heidegger], but an aimless winding path or an open glade' (Jonathan Rée, *Heidegger* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 66). See also Tracy, *Plurality*, 50-52.

<sup>255</sup> *Plurality*, 56. 'Where Saussure placed his hopes on the unitary sign, Lévi-Strauss placed his on a unitary structure. But the same nonreducible play of differences, ruptures, traces of absent signifiers, the same radical dissemination of all signifiers also interrupts this hope for a self-enclosed system' (*Plurality*, 57).

<sup>256</sup> *Plurality*, 58.

<sup>257</sup> *Plurality*, 59.

intervention was essentially therapeutic in intent. It makes no sense, thinks Tracy, to treat the rhetoric of deconstruction as if it is supposed simply to replace persuasive argument and conversation:

If we are not to retreat from [...] the inevitability of the realities of history and society in all language [...] then we must at some point turn from interpretation of language-as-object back to an interpretation of language-as-use. We must turn from the deconstruction of words to a chastened interpretation of texts.<sup>258</sup>

We need to enter history again, but to enter it alert to all that those students of language have to teach us.<sup>259</sup>

Tracy saw no good reason for allowing deconstruction to stamp out conversation, any more than he will find Foucaultian discourse-analysis a good reason to abandon the particularly human hope for dialogue and related solidarity.<sup>260</sup> What Tracy proposed to learn from the students of language-as-object, however, was that illusions of immediate rational self-presence provide no ports from the storms of history. Even the vestiges of such illusions must be disowned. In this way, the plurality of language tips one without reserve into the ambiguities of history, out of the midst of which Tracy will have to prescribe, as much as describe, his hope for reason. As a neutral fact of linguistic life, plurality gingers one up to respond without evasion to the full force of the moral ambiguities of our historical existence: both one's own particular ambiguities and ambiguities shared variously with manifold others. 'Not all are guilty but all are responsible,' said Abraham Joshua Heschel, and Tracy translates: all are capable of

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<sup>258</sup> *Plurality*, 62. 'The favourite illusion of some deconstructionist thinkers is that they have so freed themselves from history and society that they alone can enjoy the energizing experience of language deconstructing itself. But this is at least as familiar an illusion of Western intellectuals as any claim to full self-presence.' (*ibid.*)

<sup>259</sup> *Plurality*, 63.

<sup>260</sup> See 'Interview,' 360-6.

responding.<sup>261</sup>

To be responsible in history, according to Tracy, requires that one face the interruptions that history announces upon all human elaborations of the good, the true, the holy, and the beautiful. As we discard all scenarios of innocent triumph in understanding and action, responsibility in history requires we not forget those who have suffered and who continue to suffer in all our works of civilisation – works of civilization that are all, as Walter Benjamin said (and Tracy likes to repeat), simultaneously works of barbarism.<sup>262</sup> The ambiguities that actual history prosecutes mercilessly against our seeming traditions and understanding are at once *cognitive* (concerning the entanglement of our truth in falsehood) and *moral* (concerning the entanglement of our goodness in evil). And Tracy thought we should also think of the *religious* dimensions of these ambiguities: the entanglement of human holiness with the demonic.<sup>263</sup>

In response to this cumulative pitch of individual and collective ambiguity, Tracy suggests we need neither optimism nor pessimism, but rather practices of resistance, attention and hope.<sup>264</sup> And here he notes that the word ‘ambiguity’ cuts both ways, implying good as well as bad. Tracy insists that ‘the good, the true, the beautiful, and the holy *are* present in our history’ and need ‘continual retrieval by unrelenting conversation with all the great classics.’<sup>265</sup> Yet still, today more than ever, ‘we are in dire need of new strategies for facing the interruptions of radical evil in our history.’<sup>266</sup>

Chief among these strategies, Tracy finds, are critical social theories such as those

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<sup>261</sup> *Plurality*, 69.

<sup>262</sup> *Plurality*, 68-69.

<sup>263</sup> *Plurality*, 131 n. 15.

<sup>264</sup> *Plurality*, 72.

<sup>265</sup> *Plurality*, 71.

<sup>266</sup> *Plurality*, 71 (emphasis mine). Thus we must recover a positive (implicitly, a more than merely conservative) notion of ‘tradition,’ says Tracy (*Plurality* 132 n. 24). Tracy cites here the ‘magisterial work’ of Edward Shils, *Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

advanced by Habermas, theories that bring to conscious reflection the power-relations and resultant ideologies that distort rational communication. Such theories seek to partly heal rational dialogue.

Habermas was research assistant to Max Horkheimer in the 1950s, but in place of Horkheimer's and Theodor Adorno's gloomy diagnosis and prognosis concerning modern society in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947),<sup>267</sup> Habermas came to model modernity more optimistically as an 'unfinished project,' the historical shortcomings and blind alleys of which may yet be ameliorated by social-critical reflection and praxis.<sup>268</sup> To this end, Habermas sought to recast Kant's theory of rationality, which Habermas called 'monologic,' into a theory of 'dialogic' and 'communicative' rationality, as something that proceeds towards argued consensus concerning what it is valid to say and do. The difficulty that arises, on Habermas's view, is that ideologically supported social power relations everywhere condition the exercise of communicative rationality. According to Habermas, it follows that we require social critical theories - analogous to those of psychoanalytic therapy on the individual level, by which we may unmask and partly heal ideological distortions that pervade human attempts at rational communication. In this way, thinks Habermas, we can hope to build and maintain progress in public reason and justice.

According to Tracy in *Plurality*, these critical theories become the 'arguments' needed in post-modernity: 'fragile but essential tools' of partial enlightenment and limited emancipation that are themselves subject to 'the plural and ambiguous reality of all

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<sup>267</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London and New York: Verso, 1997).

<sup>268</sup> At a time when Nietzschean deconstructions of modern reason were ascendant, Habermas entitled his public lecture upon receipt of the Adorno Prize in 1980, 'Modernity—an Unfinished Project.'

discourse.’ Through their deployment within our conversation, Aristotelian phronesis (such as Gadamer recovers in his hermeneutical philosophy) can become, Tracy thought, ‘a genuinely new strategy of attention, resistance and hope.’<sup>269</sup>

## V. The question of religion

We will need all our alert strategies and perceptive arguments if we are to keep alive the possibility of genuine conversation. In large part, *Plurality* can be read as an intended contribution to developing these. But the deployment of skilful analyses and arguments will not succeed on its own. Like the Christian confronted by ‘sin,’ which is more than mere error, so according to *Plurality* we all require the advent of some *power*, some grace, to enable humane life.<sup>270</sup> The hope of dialogue demands nothing less than this.

Continuing along this line, the final quarter of *Plurality* suggests that *religious* questioning contributes a particularly necessary augmentation of human conversation. In the concluding chapter, entitled ‘Resistance and Hope: the Question of Religion,’ Tracy suggests that religious conversation offers something that exceeds the scope of other modes of conversational questioning taken alone, because religious questions take us beyond solely philosophical-scientific question-and-answer. In religious conversation, people ask about ‘the meaning and truth of Ultimate Reality not only as it is in itself but as it is existentially related to *us*.’<sup>271</sup> It follows for Tracy in *Plurality* that

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<sup>269</sup> *Plurality*, 80. Tracy footnotes approvingly here the ‘important retrievals of phronesis in the contemporary context’ of the contemporary American pragmatist philosopher, Richard Bernstein (in particular, Richard Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1983)) (*Plurality*, 135, n. 52).

<sup>270</sup> ‘No interpreter can understand what Christians mean without using the language of power; a power that comes as both gift and threat to judge and heal [...] sin itself’ (*Plurality*, 75). Tracy notes that Buddhist *avidya* (primal innocence) is similarly profound, with some Buddhists (e.g. Pure Land) looking to Other Power and others to self-power (Zen) for its overcoming (*ibid.*, 94).

<sup>271</sup> *Plurality*, 87 (my italics).

religious selfhood, forged in acts of resistance and hope, possesses special resources to guide dialogue towards its goals.

Tracy notes that religious classics offer ‘classic’ witness from those who have asked about the meaning and truth of Ultimate Reality ‘and believe they have received a response from Ultimate Reality itself.’<sup>272</sup> Of course, Tracy has to admit that these languages of belief will not be persuasive to all interpreters. What is more, they will also be maximally ambiguous: true *and* false, good *and* evil, holy *and* demonic.<sup>273</sup> (‘The religions, in fact, are even more intensely pluralistic and ambiguous than art, morality, philosophy, and politics.’)<sup>274</sup> But nevertheless, Tracy argued, sceptical interpreters ‘can and should’ ‘develop their own responses to these logically odd religious questions,’<sup>275</sup> for they occupy an irreplaceable position within the practices of dialogic knowing.

So, rather as *Imagination* once presented the Christian religious classic as a peculiarly essential kind of classic, *Plurality* now presents explicitly religious conversation as a peculiarly essential and potent form of conversation. Above all, it is because religions can be such powerful foci of ‘resistance, attention, and hope’ – beyond either facile optimism or facile pessimism, Tracy argued – they become especially ‘plausible strategies’ for approaching our intertwining, plural and ambiguous histories.<sup>276</sup>

Tracy’s sense of the structural significance of religious conversation also cohered with

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<sup>272</sup> *Plurality*, 87.

<sup>273</sup> For, ‘[a]mbiguity can mean, cognitively, the true and the false; morally, the good and the evil; religiously, the holy and the demonic’ (*Plurality* 131 n. 15).

<sup>274</sup> *Plurality*, 86.

<sup>275</sup> *Plurality*, 88. For the notion that religious language is ‘logically odd,’ lying at the boundaries of everyday language use, see Ian Ramsey, *Religious Language: An Empirical Placing of Theological Phrases* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), and Tracy’s account and use of Ramsey in *Blessed Rage*, 120-123.

<sup>276</sup> See *Plurality*, 72.

his sense that conversation in general is both a listening to linguistic possibility and an interrogation of empirical reality in the widest sense. For Tracy, religion is a phenomenon that above all posits and incites our entanglements with – our strivings for, and experiences of dependence upon – *reality*, all the way up to Ultimate Reality.<sup>277</sup> In sum, therefore, Tracy swapped his previous attempt (in *Imagination*) to secure hermeneutical reason on the basis of the Christian classic and panentheist metaphysics,<sup>278</sup> for a more modest attempt in *Plurality* to commend religious conversation as an exemplary source of orientation, value and motivation that supports the strivings and questions of dialogic reason.

## **VI. The ambiguity of Tracean ‘conversation’**

By the time of *Plurality*, Tracy was intent on reformulating his previous accounts of panentheism and the analogical unity of thoughtful experience in a manner focussed more intently on the central Gadamerian logic of conversation. Tracy’s redoubled attention to the Gadamer-Heidegger tradition, then and since, has increasingly perforated his empirico-realist and transcendental sensibilities, which latter also continue, in turn, to perforate his phenomenologies of hermeneutical experience. In this trajectory of Tracy’s, *Plurality* remains a key text modelling the manifestation of rational possibility within our fragile conversations with texts.

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<sup>277</sup> This orientation towards reality is a significant part of the spiritual therapy that religions offer, for Tracy. As he writes in *Plurality*, ‘[t]hrough their fundamental beliefs in Ultimate Reality, the religions resist the ego’s compulsive refusal to dace the always already power of that Ultimate Reality that bears down upon us’ (*Plurality*, 84). Theological reflection, meanwhile, is ‘reflection on Ultimate Reality, and thereby on the limit questions of our existence’ (*ibid.*). For more on ‘limit questions’ in Tracy’s thinking since *Blessed Rage*, see Chapter 7 section III, below.

<sup>278</sup> See Chapter 2, above.

Radical plurality and ambiguity threaten the whole enterprise, but genuine strategies emerge according to Tracy in *Plurality*: from Habermasian argument within conversation to distinctively religious styles of attention, resistance and hope. Tracy constructs conversation-dialogue as a game of exacting imperatives that requires our most effective strategies to ensure we are not played off the park.

So, then, are we to conclude that the ‘game’ of conversation is essentially some kind of competition? When Gadamer wrote in *Truth and Method* about entering the present through ‘the mode of being of play,’ he does not seem to have had in mind games of competitive sport, of contest.<sup>279</sup> However, in a recent article, Tracy references both theatre and competitive sport in this connection. He even resolves upon an expression from sports coaching, suggesting that when ‘one experiences the ontological reality of being-played [...] we say in sports games that we are “in the zone.”’<sup>280</sup>

Perhaps this sporting image is a happy one to receive from Tracy because it hints at a proper ambiguity within the endeavour of dialogue itself. In a game of tennis, for example, my opponent may be successful in ‘preventing me from playing my own game,’ as commentators say, by putting the ball where I am unable to hit it as I would like. But, even so, I also *need* the opponent with and against whom I play, if I or my opponent, or a spectator, are to experience ‘the to and fro movement of the game,’ which is its internal good.

In *Plurality* it rather seems as if Tracy conceived hermeneutical ‘ambiguity’ in conversation as signifying simply and only a lamentable fall from a formal ideal of true

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<sup>279</sup> See *Truth and Method*, 102-110.

<sup>280</sup> Tracy, ‘Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue’ in Catherine Cornille and Christopher Conway, eds., *Interreligious Hermeneutics* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2010), 1-43: 2

and good human tradition. But might there not also be a more positive and essential ambiguity within human tradition? Perhaps there is an ambiguity that simply witnesses to otherness at the heart of oneself: an ambiguity that also fundamentally challenges the propriety of any formal ideal of uninterrupted self-filling and self-filled conversation or tradition. As I have noted, without the resistance of another to my playing the good of many games cannot arise. A discomforting sense of one's own ambiguity might well be owed to how one is always informed by historical barbarisms as well as glories, as *Plurality* suggests. But at the same time, this sense might also mean simply that there is 'game on' and that a real 'other' has been located. It might just mean that genuine dialogue has now begun with a genuine other who has not been assumed from the start to be a latent partner in the Same. The many cruelties of history are real cognitive and moral evils – or tragedies. But should one accept *Plurality's* apparent assumption that conversational ambiguity is *simply* a matter for regret, as if one ought to wish, however vainly, that one's discourse were or could be made *unambiguous*?

On the face of it, *Plurality* acknowledges no intellectual objective higher than just such an achievement of good and holy truthful conversation with tradition, achieved on the other side of interruptions that have been sufficiently overcome. And yet, perhaps the ruling Truth-regime associated with the exemplary being of 'the classic' was already showing itself in *Plurality* as ripe for some weakening or decomposition. For if I want to attend to the classics in their power, then *Plurality* is just as clear that I must attend also, and at least as much, to the pressing realities of my own internal otherness and dividedness, as well as to the realities of others who are divided from me and from my narratives. Tracy already was adverting in principle to all of these things in *Plurality*:

All the victims of our discourses and our history have begun to discover their own discourses in ways that our discourse finds difficult to hear, much less listen to. Their voices can seem strident and uncivil – in a word, other. [...] We have all just begun to sense the terror of that otherness. But only by beginning to listen to those other voices may we begin to hear the otherness within our own discourse and within ourselves. What we might then begin to hear, above our own chatter, are possibilities we had never dared to dream.<sup>281</sup>

The classics of the others are strange and seemingly uncivil. If we will attend to them, they will expose ‘the otherness within our own discourse and within ourselves,’ and also promise possibilities we had not dared to dream. These voices will be fundamentally contestatory, even when they are not like the rain that simply stops play. And meanwhile, what we are to resist, above all, according to *Plurality*, turns out not to be *simply* falsehood, evil and ugliness, but also, as Foucault says, whatever ‘goes without saying’ in regimes of ‘more of the same,’ whether those regimes be either active traditions or deadening bureaucracies.

In such an ethic of attention and resistance, will it still be appropriate to imagine that, ideally, ‘analogical imagination’ is always successful? *Plurality* did seem to suggest that as we ‘attend to the other as other, the different as different,’ always and everywhere we can come to ‘understand the different *as possible*’ and hence understand its ‘similarity to what we have already experienced or understood.’<sup>282</sup> But, we may ask: should it be the ideal of ‘dialogue’ to insist in advance that all paths necessarily lead, however torturously, towards shared understanding and ultimate consensus? Would it not be more appropriate to shatter this projected totality-horizon? It might be better if dialogue could find itself everywhere becoming fractured internally by the strangeness of other people and texts that continue to insinuate appropriate senses of ambiguity into

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<sup>281</sup> *Plurality*, 79.

<sup>282</sup> *Plurality*, 20.

every conversation and every apparent consensus.

Today, indeed, Tracy explicitly admits the need to disagree with Gadamer (and apparently his former self) on this question of shared understanding and ultimate consensus: ‘Textual meaning may, in fact, never unify; horizons may not fuse; consensus may not arrive. And yet dialogue still happens.’<sup>283</sup> And his recent idea of ‘the fragment’ as a part-replacement for the classic (which I will discuss in Chapter Nine) is part of a shift in Tracy’s thinking since *Plurality* that might well be in line with the criticism I have voiced here.

In the next chapter, we will consider some philosophical-theological objections brought against Tracy’s hermeneutical ideal in *Plurality* and since: objections clustered around what some critics allege are his inadequate accounts of embodiment and love.

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<sup>283</sup> Tracy, ‘Western Hermeneutics and Inter-Religious Dialogue,’ 9.

## CHAPTER 4

### Discursive Understanding or Embodied Love? Objections to Tracy

Not all of Tracy's theological critics have been convinced by his attempts, in *Plurality* and since, to anchor religious thinking and living in the interpretation of texts confronting intelligent selves. In this chapter I shall articulate four objections to Tracy's model of conversation-dialogue from contrasting Roman Catholic philosophical and theological perspectives.

In his review of *Plurality*, Gerard Loughlin complained that Tracy's model of conversation obscured the concreteness of human embodiment, and second, that Tracy's scheme reduced plurality to 'pluralism and thus monism.'<sup>284</sup> On a different tack, Werner Jeanrond has recently objected to Tracy that 'traditions cannot love,' and that it is the ways and manifestations of love that demand hermeneutical first priority, ahead of all 'conversation of understanding.'<sup>285</sup> Following on from this objection of Jeanrond's, we shall also consider Martin Poulson's recent suggestion that Tracy's thinking might have avoided crippling metaphysical-hermeneutical dilemmas concerning the ultimacy of either identity *or* difference (presence *or* absence) within interpretation, had he followed Edward Schillebeeckx (1914-2009) in placing a notion of *praxis* centre-stage within theological thinking.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> See Gerard Loughlin, 'Review: *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope*,' *Modern Theology* 7/5 (October 1991), 483-487; and see sections I and II in this chapter, below.

<sup>285</sup> See Werner Jeanrond, 'Towards an Interreligious Hermeneutics of Love' in Catherine Cornille and Christopher Conway, eds., *Interreligious Hermeneutics* (Eugene, Or.: Cascade Books, 2010), 44-60; and see section III below. For Jeanrond's broad and attractive theology of love, see Werner Jeanrond, *A Theology of Love* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2010).

<sup>286</sup> See Martin Poulson, 'The Place of Praxis in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx' in James Sweeney, Gemma Simmonds and David Lonsdale, eds., *Keeping Faith in Practice: Aspects of Catholic Pastoral Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2010), 131-42; and see section IV below.

My responses to these objections, in this chapter, will be broadly to defend the value and appropriateness of Tracy's approach and direction of travel. I will argue that the dilemmas that Poulson astutely articulates were real for Tracy in the 1980s, but that his thinking since then has escaped them. Similarly, the accusation that Tracean plurality reduces to a totalistic monism is no longer relevant today, even if it were once. And again, I will suggest that Tracy's recent thinking promises greater scope for exploring the fully concrete and embodied nature of experience (even if Tracy himself may not be the one to deliver on this promise). At the same time, I will be suspicious of Loughlin's own appeals to concrete ecclesial embodiments that are apparently shielded from sustained critical reflection.

Finally, it may well be that Tracy has not found a convincing voice on love.<sup>287</sup> But I will argue against Jeanrond that Tracy would be right not to abandon the conjointly philosophical and Christian insight that love, too, is a word-event, having at its heart an advent of language and related questions of understanding.

## **I. What about the body?**

In his review of *Plurality* in the journal *Modern Theology* in 1991, Gerard Loughlin

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<sup>287</sup> In *Imagination*, Tracy refers to the 'central Christian understanding' that 'God is Love' (*Imagination*, 44 n. 7), and again this as the Christian's 'central metaphor' for God (*Plurality*, 108). In *Blessed Rage* he referred approvingly to a process conception of God as 'Pure Unbounded Love,' an expression taken from Schubert Ogden, but said very little about this abstract-seeming notion (see *Blessed Rage*, 179). Previously, Tracy had reacted against the appeal of his teacher, Bernard Lonergan, to religious loving as a purported 'foundation' for Christian theology (see David Tracy, 'Lonergan's Foundational Theology: An Interpretation and Critique' in Philip McShane, S.J., ed., *Foundations of Theology: Papers from the International Lonergan Congress, 1970* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1971), 197-222; and also Chapter 6 section II and Chapter 7 section III.i., below, as well as Tracy's present-day partial regret at his earlier criticisms of Lonergan (see 'Interview,' ln. 190-212)).

complained that Tracy's claim that 'we can converse with texts'<sup>288</sup> was part of the work's general reduction of 'world' into 'book,'<sup>289</sup> and hence an attempted academic domestication of the world. Loughlin complained that Tracy sought to reduce the 'untold sufferings and tremendous enormities' of history to a pale concept of 'ambiguity,' finding this reduction 'symptomatic of the radical textualizing of reality that his enterprise involves, the assimilation of the past to *our* history (books).'<sup>290</sup>

Loughlin worried generally that *Plurality* awarded undue privilege to academic modes of living. Back in the opening chapter of *Imagination*, Tracy had modelled the practice of theology in relation to three distinct 'publics' of society, academy and church.<sup>291</sup> Loughlin noted another reviewer's observation that, in terms of these, *Plurality* was 'patently the product of the academy and addressed to it.'<sup>292</sup> But even after allowance has been made for this primary orientation, Loughlin feared that *Plurality*'s resulting 'concepts of theory [...] may be too gentle, general and abstract, for the sort of attention that the sickness of our condition requires.'<sup>293</sup>

In place of Tracy's exercise in too-genteel abstraction, Loughlin instead wanted modes of understanding that would be 'a *going out from* not a *retreat into* the literal' and the bookish. Loughlin suggested that such alternative modes would be 'a "practical syllogism," a movement of the body,'<sup>294</sup> and not the achievement of a cognitively separated 'self' (as Tracy's modifications of Gadamer arguably implied). Such thinking and acting would be more powerfully concrete and particular (and bodily), for

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<sup>288</sup> *Plurality*, 19.

<sup>289</sup> Gerard Loughlin, 'Review: *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope*,' *Modern Theology* 7/5 (October 1991), 483-487: 484.

<sup>290</sup> 'Review: *Plurality*,' 486.

<sup>291</sup> See *Imagination*, chapter one.

<sup>292</sup> Paul Avis, *Theology* 92 (1989), 446-7); cited in Loughlin, 'Review: *Plurality*,' 487

<sup>293</sup> 'Review: *Plurality*,' 487.

<sup>294</sup> 'Review: *Plurality*,' 484.

Loughlin, than anything within the purview of *Plurality*'s conversational ideal.

Had he responded directly to Loughlin's criticisms here, Tracy might have done so in a number of ways. He could, for example, have replied that no matter how fully embodied and concretely particular one's understanding must always be, it would be a serious mistake to seek this by denigrating or seeking to circumvent abstractive discursive reason. For once we begin to disabuse ourselves of the dignity and burden of intellectual conversation then we are left only able to resign ourselves instead to hopeless conflicts of interpretation and power, or else to seductive longings for the authoritarianisms (and incipient violence) of unquestionable 'practical syllogisms' and authorised 'movements of the body,' to recall Loughlin's counter-proposals.

By at least the mid-1990s, however, Tracy, too, was also beginning to sense that *Plurality*'s commentary on reason might have been too sanguine about the situation it faced. Tracy reflected that the 'earlier great liberals – like William James with his generous call to a radical pluralism, like John Dewey with his persuasive account of the democratic ethos implied in nonpositivistically construed scientific inquiry – now seem as helpless in the face of a reigning technocracy as their neoconservative opponents.'<sup>295</sup> Tracy allowed that 'recent intellectual alliances in Europe and North America between a revised pragmatism and a revised hermeneutics offer a genuine hope for reason,' but he noted that 'even that hope can be made a hope of reason alone – a reason not related to the social realities of a dominant scientific and technocratic culture.'<sup>296</sup> Tracy did not include himself in the footnote list of philosophers that he had in mind here (partly justifiably, given his own longstanding greater theological and Gadamerian

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<sup>295</sup> See, in particular, 'Literary Theory and Return of the Forms for Naming and Thinking God in Theology,' *Journal of Religion*, 74/3 (1994), 302-319: 303.

<sup>296</sup> 'Literary Theory,' 303-4.

commitments),<sup>297</sup> but even so, his judgment carried implied consequences for alliances with pragmatism that had helped support *Plurality*'s avowedly 'empirical' reception of Gadamer.

From this point on, it had become clear that Tracy's instinct for a pluralistic humanism would require a greater remove from Jamesian empiricism than is seen in *Plurality*. As regards the broad charge that Tracy's thought unduly privileges disembodied reflection, however, this problem perhaps remains relevant. Through its focus on a core phenomenon of discursive practice *as* practice *Plurality* did at least begin to lay aside the dualisms and idealisms implicit in process metaphysics.<sup>298</sup> But an overly abstract-ideal 'self' still seemed to haunt *Plurality* as the price of its partial halfway house between Gadamer and James. And still today, Tracy remains rather silent on crucial issues to do with human embodiment, whether these have to do with the habituating and interlacing of individual body-selves or else to do with the membering and re-membering of social or cosmic 'bodies.' It is worth remembering, however, that it was never *Plurality*'s proposal to *substitute* intellectual dialogue for wider concrete practices of social justice or embodied love. Intellectual dialogue with, of and over texts was only ever for Tracy one crucial and integral dimension of the 'attention that the sickness of our condition requires.'<sup>299</sup>

Equally, Loughlin's preferred 'practical syllogism' of bodily movement need not imply anything essentially nondiscursive, for language would evidently be one singularly

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<sup>297</sup> 'These alliances include, in philosophy, the otherwise quite different work of Richard Rorty, Charles Taylor, Martha Nussbaum, Karl-Otto Apel, and Stephen Toulmin' (Tracy, 'Literary Theory,' 303 n. 3).

<sup>298</sup> See these criticisms of process dualism in Chapter 2 section II, above.

<sup>299</sup> Here religion has especially extra resources, perhaps: for '[w]hen it is active, religious love frees us from the illusion that to be a human being means to become an ego attempting mastery and control of all others' (*Plurality*, 107).

essential movement in the interconnection of human individual and social bodies. Loughlin objected to the ways Gadamer (and Tracy) counted literate practices as paradigmatic, ahead of, for example, meaning-laden practices of eating or sex or worship.<sup>300</sup> Yet Loughlin's idea is actually broadly compatible with the Gadamerian concept of discursive practice.

For his part, Tracy still holds out today for treating *texts* as paradigmatic, to the extent that it is in actually speaking (and perforce in writing) that maximal discursive openness, including openness to transcendence, becomes possible. By contrast, Loughlin condemns himself to be bound to one supposedly fully concrete, identifiable and extant complex of ecclesial embodiment – however much he may also argue against what he sees as this ecclesial body's misinterpretation and mis-practice (on some issues around sex, for example).<sup>301</sup> For only such a fundamental bodily identification can hope to protect Loughlin from Foucaultian counter-analyses, for example, that would reduce human embodiment anti-hermeneutically to our 'capillary-level' dominations of each other.<sup>302</sup>

Tracy refuses to follow an approach like Loughlin's that would withdraw theology in this way from an infinitely and impossibly exposed hermeneutical stage. As he explained to Lois Malcolm in *The Christian Century* in 2002, his theology is now

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<sup>300</sup> The figure of the text becoming food appears in Loughlin's *Telling God's Story: Bible, Church and Narrative Theology* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999); meanwhile, his *Alien Sex* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004) explored analogies between sex, cinema and church around themes of bodily desire.

<sup>301</sup> In *Alien Sex*, for example, Loughlin criticizes Hans Urs von Balthasar's discourse on gender and sexual desire as being determined by an ancient masculinist biology which assumes the man is the initiator and the woman the receiver made whole in reception (*Alien Sex*, 159-60). Loughlin proposes that were we to 'start [instead] with the same-sex couple it becomes possible to think of a genuine reciprocity, constituted by the desire that at one and the same time unites and differentiates couples. Theology can think heterosexual love *for the first time*' (*ibid.*, 161).

<sup>302</sup> See Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings (1972-77)*, ed. C. Gordon (New York: Pantheon Press, 1980).

seeking to begin thinking no longer with panentheism or any other modern reason, but rather with two ‘categories of faith’: sheer *void* and simultaneous *open* come together in conjointly salutary and gracious experience.<sup>303</sup> Noting that both Lucretius and Nietzsche speak of the void, Tracy nevertheless finds ‘no one better on the subject than Luther,’ for whom history and nature are ‘apocalyptic [...] a series of openings into the abyss.’ And yet at the same time, Tracy continues, the mystic in Luther, and even more clearly in the apophatic theologians, finds God also as the open that invites us to ‘let go.’<sup>304</sup>

## **II. *Plurality*’s inarticulate faith reduces plurality to ‘pluralism and thus monism’**

Loughlin was especially unconvinced by the role played in *Plurality* by the ‘self’ that negotiates the plurality and ambiguity of individual experience. As Loughlin asked sceptically: ‘what is this “self” and where does it come from?’<sup>305</sup> Tracy’s essential answer to Loughlin in *Plurality* would have been that the individual’s self is a reflexive awareness that comes most fully and concretely to itself in religious awareness, as the individual becomes aware of the one to whom religious believers pray as ‘the Ultimate Reality, the origin and end of all reality [...] the ultimate power with which we all must deal.’<sup>306</sup> It is ‘through such religious understanding,’ Tracy suggested, that ‘we may also come to sense the pluralistic and ambiguous reality of the self, at once finite,

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<sup>303</sup> Malcolm, Lois, ‘An Interview with David Tracy,’ *The Christian Century*, February 13-20, 2002, 24-30

<sup>304</sup> ‘That’s why Buddhism is such an attraction to so many contemporary people, including postmodern thinkers. It’s the “let-go” aspect of faith. Even Aristotle speaks of the mystery of religion as a genuine experience’ (Tracy, in Malcolm, ‘An Interview with David Tracy’). Tracy elaborated in this interview on his understanding of the contrasting experiences of the void and the open: ‘The “void” has to do with experiences of extreme suffering, injustice, terror, despair or alienation [...] The “open” has to do with experiences of the sheer giftedness of life – the sense of awe and wonder one might have about the beauty of the natural world or the sheer happiness one might find in human relationships’ (*ibid.*).

<sup>305</sup> ‘Review: *Plurality*,’ 485.

<sup>306</sup> *Plurality*, 89.

estranged, and in need of liberation by a power not its own.<sup>307</sup>

Yet, if ‘the self’ becomes manifest above all in religion, for Tracy, then it is also in this very field of religion that Loughlin complained most of *Plurality*’s reduction of plurality to ‘pluralis[m] and thus monis[m].’<sup>308</sup> Loughlin’s criticism contained extra bite to the extent that Tracy himself admitted in *Plurality* his desire to distance himself from some over-confident unifying parameters of ‘pluralism’ which he had outlined previously in *Blessed Rage* and *Imagination*.<sup>309</sup>

On this crucial question of religious pluralism and particular conviction, *Plurality* sought to have it both ways. Tracy confessed that ‘a pluralistic attitude [in] response to the fact of religious plurality [...] is an attitude I fundamentally trust.’<sup>310</sup> But at the same time, he also insisted that a pluralistic attitude will need to learn from ‘the great monistic interpreters of religion’ who brook no such thing. Tracy asked, ‘Does anyone really wish that Luther, instead of simply stating, “Here I stand; I can do no other,” had added *sotto voce*, “But if it really bother you, I will move.”’<sup>311</sup> Indeed, Tracy continued: ‘Any pluralist who cannot learn from Luther’s classic interpretation of Christianity can hardly learn from any interpretation of religion at all.’ For ‘[e]ven the pluralist – usually

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<sup>307</sup> *Plurality*, 89. Tracy notes in a footnote to this page that ‘[a]n insistence on the use of the category “power” is one of the many strengths of the Reformed tradition of Christianity’ (*ibid.*, 137 n. 22). Tracy commends here, in particular, James M. Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective, Volume 1: Theology and Ethics* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981).

<sup>308</sup> ‘Review: *Plurality*,’ 484; for *Plurality* on ‘the plurality among the religions,’ see *Plurality*, 89-98.

<sup>309</sup> The subtitle to *Blessed Rage* referred to a ‘new pluralism in theology,’ the essence of which the work sought to resolve by analysing ‘common human experience’ on the one hand, and interpreting a ‘faith of secularity’ found common to contemporary Christians and non-Christians on the other (see Chapter 7 section III, subsections ii. and iii., below). Meanwhile, *Imagination*’s subtitle referred to a ‘culture of pluralism,’ for which, as we have seen, Tracy promised the strategy and gift of an analogical imagination as learned from ‘the Christian classic’ in its coherence with pantheist metaphysics. Tracy wrote in *Plurality* of a need as yet unmet in his earlier works to take fully seriously the situation of radical plurality – in fact, ‘to examine both plurality and ambiguity and those together’ – so as to better understand both the Christian tradition and the situation it must inhabit (*Plurality*, 130 n. 2).

<sup>310</sup> *Plurality*, 90.

<sup>311</sup> *Plurality*, 91.

more tentatively but no less firmly – must one day speak her or his “Here I stand” or prove unfaithful to the demands for critical assessment.’<sup>312</sup>

Note, however, that the principal reason Tracy gives here for one’s making one’s stand look rather different from that given by Luther. At least in part, the pluralist’s ‘here I stand’ is a function or by-product of her general rational commitment to adjudicating human possibilities and corresponding senses of ultimate reality. In other words, the critical and rational individual that Tracy outlined in *Plurality* was one who strives to know the whole pluralistic range of genuine human possibilities, while at the same time especially developing the critical rationality implicit in those particular traditions that actually most sustain her. This is an attractive vision in many respects.

But do concrete religious traditions really fit into *Plurality’s* model of a religious questioning that, via classic religious witness, becomes a virtual dialogue with Ultimate Reality (as described in the concluding section of *Plurality’s* last chapter)? It is not clear why religious traditions should welcome being seconded to the occasioning of metaphysical-cum-existential question-and-answer. For if there really is transcendence to contend with, in whatever form, why should we assume that its main effect need be to sponsor knowing ‘public’ conversation about itself and thereby the rest of reality? And if an Ultimate Other *is* somehow present to human existence, why should we assume that this Other makes itself present as a human possibility programmatically available to self-transcendence-in-dialogue? One may indeed hope that somehow human beings will and do find powers to incarnate truthful understanding and ethical selfhood, from out of their splintering and deeply ambiguous traditions. And, quite

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<sup>312</sup> *Plurality*, 91-2.

possibly, religions can play special roles in this, alongside the many less attractive things they also tend to incite. But it would not follow that such powers of truth and goodness need appear as confirmations of the reflexive self *as such*, as seems to be implied by *Plurality*'s model of our somewhat too direct and conversational relationship with Ultimate Reality.

More recently, Tracy's stress on the 'impossibility' of direct communication with God has been in some contrast to *Plurality* on this point.<sup>313</sup> What Richard Kearney has called the 'possibilizing' power of God has become, for Tracy, the power of an Impossible Real which, while it gives itself to human powers, Tracy believes, never programmatically seconds itself *to* those powers.<sup>314</sup>

Another criticism of Tracy's approach to religion in *Plurality* might be that he was at that time still too committed to a separation of methodological form (including the form of 'hermeneutics' itself) from particular content, and particularly so when it came to religion.<sup>315</sup> In part, this separation was simply a matter of Tracy defending the generality of the hermeneutical and theological tasks from their being commandeered by exclusive religious conviction. 'The belief among many theologians that without

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<sup>313</sup> Tracy, with Lois Malcolm, 'An Interview with David Tracy,' *The Christian Century*, February 13-20, 2002, 24-30.

<sup>314</sup> See Richard Kearney, *The God Who May Be: a Hermeneutics of Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001). For Tracy's commendation of Kearney's retrieval of the centrality of the category of 'possibility' for theology, as well as his own interest in simultaneous theological exploration of the category of the Impossible, see David Tracy interviewed by Christian Shepherd in 'God: The Possible/Impossible' in John Panteleimon Manoussakis, ed., *After God: Richard Kearney and the Religious Turn in Continental Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 340-354. For another recent work that also advocates concentrating on 'possibility' rather than 'actuality' in considering the 'being' of God, see George Pattison, *God and Being: An Enquiry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). As Tracy says, 'empirical or process theologies stress what is actual, and hermeneutic theologies deal with the possible' ('An Interview with David Tracy,' 24).

<sup>315</sup> For a lament by Tracy concerning the 'fatal' modern 'separations' of thought from feeling, theory from practice, and form from content, see Tracy, 'Trinitarian Speculation and the Forms of Divine Disclosure' in eds. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins, *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 273-293: 273-7.

“faith” and “belief” one cannot be a theologian remains as unpersuasive hermeneutically as it does theologically,’ wrote Tracy in a significant footnote in *Plurality*. For as Tracy went on, ‘faith is properly understood as gift, theology as task.’<sup>316</sup>

Tracy’s point here relates to what he formulated back in *Imagination* as the drive to authentic *publicness* which impels theological discourse. As he wrote, ‘the theocentric character of any genuinely theological statement ... drives every theologian to claims to truth which demand publicness and, at the limit, universality.’<sup>317</sup> Tracy’s enduring position has always been that to say and mean ‘God’ is to presume to utter a name that impinges upon all speakers, and that therefore such speaking needs to relate itself to the questioning of all and not retreat into personal or sectarian ‘privacy’ on pain of confounding itself. In this way, theology must be an exemplary attempt to talk through the reality of the world with all other speakers and not only with speakers of one’s own faith community. The logic of avoiding this latter trap is what propels *Plurality*’s sharp distinction of the task of theology from the gift of faith.

But perhaps *Plurality* distinguished just a little too sharply here between public task and personal gift. For the formulation as it stands seems confidently to consign Christian faith (the ‘gift’ in question) to the status of a purely incidental orientation and motivation – presumably one amongst many possible orientations and motivations – which acts as a vital adjunct to a common human task. Again, Tracy’s negative motivation was clear and, I contend, laudable: he wanted to keep faith and theology

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<sup>316</sup> *Plurality*, 140 n. 49.

<sup>317</sup> *Imagination*, 80.

away from the brittle self-assertions of take-it-or-leave-it confessionalism.<sup>318</sup> But what he propounded in *Plurality* was perhaps too neat a division between incidental faith-content and universal religious form. At the point where so much in *Plurality* came down crucially to religion, conversational ‘skill’ suddenly morphed into a method that feeds off faith while keeping the unruly bodies of faith (both words and flesh) at bay.

In sum: Tracy’s phenomenology of conversational practice in *Plurality* tended to give way at the last to a paean to religious motivation that closed the gates of interpretation, plurality, ambiguity and gift. Instead, Tracy repaired to the transcendental hope of an unambiguous and all-embracing ‘Ultimate Reality,’ an ultimately trustworthy Other who effectively secures the ideal of unambiguous conversation by its formal overtrumping of the everyday otherness of other people.<sup>319</sup> For as it seems in *Plurality*, and even also later in *Dialogue with the Other*, no mere everyday difference can possibly hold a candle to our ultimately world-orientating commerce with ‘the Other: Being, the cosmos, the sacred’ in religion.<sup>320</sup>

*Plurality*’s silence on the nature of the gift of faith lay at the heart of these difficulties. A recent article by David Gibson in the US Catholic magazine *Commonweal* cites Tracy as regarding one particular review of *Plurality* as a ‘Damascus moment’ for him in this regard:

The reviewer, [Tracy] recalled, wrote that after reading Tracy’s book, he understood what its author meant by such terms as ‘plurality,’ ‘ambiguity,’ ‘hermeneutics,’ and ‘religion.’ Tracy can still recite the rest: “‘But I don’t know

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<sup>318</sup> Tracy defended ‘correlational’ and partly apologetic theology against the criticisms of ‘Yale school’ theologians in the 1980s (see Chapter 7 section I, below).

<sup>319</sup> For questions raised above *à propos* this seeming conversational ideal in *Plurality*, questions possibly still relevant today, see the concluding section to the preceding chapter here.

<sup>320</sup> *Dialogue*, 59.

why he has hope,” wrote the reviewer. “All he says is one line near the end: ‘I hope because I believe in God.’ But what does that mean?” Tracy was chastened. ‘The reviewer was right,’ he told me. ‘I had to articulate what that means and why I have hope, because of that belief in God, through Christ, and in Christ through Jesus.’<sup>321</sup>

As has been alluded to already, and as the final chapters of this thesis will explore in greater detail, Tracy’s more recent work on thinking and saying ‘God,’ from the late ’80s forwards, has attempted to bring his Christian religious and theological conversation into greater hermeneutical light. For this he looks (as we shall see) to the fragmentary forms of an impossible and broken hermeneutics that endlessly must exceed any single intelligible form.<sup>322</sup>

### III. ‘Traditions cannot love’

Loughlin’s criticisms of Tracy came from a Christian theological direction that generally mistrusts what it sees as abstract and blandly generalising ideals of thinking, living and religion. His implication was that the one who elevates such ideals displaces and denatures the divine-human actuality and possibility revealed in specific community and tradition.

Another and very different criticism of Tracy’s concept of dialogue comes from a

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<sup>321</sup> Gibson, David, ‘God-obsessed: David Tracy’s Theological Quest,’ *Commonweal* 137/2 (January 29, 2010).

<sup>322</sup> On an explosion of many competing rhetorical and rational forms to challenge modern pretences to locate *the* singular and sufficient form for all reason and theology, see ‘Literary Theory and Return of the Forms for Naming and Thinking God in Theology,’ *Journal of Religion*, 74/3 (1994), 302-319. For Tracy’s assertion that ‘[e]very Christian hermeneutic today [...] must endure as not merely unfinished but as broken [...] in order to allow for some new beginning of a retrieval of hope,’ see Tracy, *Dialogue With the Other*, 121.

theological direction much closer to Tracy's own, and from a theologian who has written very appreciatively of Tracy in the past, and co-edited a volume of essays about Tracy's work.<sup>323</sup> The objections of Werner Jeanrond (bn. 1955) – as framed in his contribution to a recent edited volume on interreligious dialogue<sup>324</sup> – are not antagonistic to the broadly liberal-Catholic tenor of Tracy's approach. For Jeanrond, too, is abidingly interested in universalising and inclusive theological perspectives.<sup>325</sup> Rather, Jeanrond objects to what he perceives as an alienation of the humanly essential core of religious and Christian experience (especially that of the church and of community) in Tracy's Gadamerian focus on the event of understanding and tradition as the core phenomena requiring our attention.

'Traditions cannot love,' objects Jeanrond flatly.<sup>326</sup> Place the hermeneutics of tradition and conversation at the centre, he suggests, and practices of love are thereby dislocated from their proper first place. For '[o]nly human persons, men, women and children, are able to love and thus to enter into and co-constitute larger bodies of love.'<sup>327</sup> Jeanrond's article is ostensibly a critique of Gadamer, but he clearly has Tracy (who contributed the opening essay to the same collection) in his sights.<sup>328</sup>

And indeed, we might well follow Jeanrond in asking quite why an explicitly religious

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<sup>323</sup> For Jeanrond's positive appreciation of Tracy, see the final chapter of Werner G. Jeanrond, *Text and Interpretation as Categories of Theological Interpretation* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1988) (German original, 1986); also Werner G. Jeanrond and Jennifer L. Rike, eds., *Radical Pluralism and Truth: David Tracy and the Hermeneutics of Religion* (New York: Crossroad, 1991).

<sup>324</sup> Werner Jeanrond, 'Towards an Interreligious Hermeneutics of Love' in Catherine Cornille and Christopher Conway, eds., *Interreligious Hermeneutics*, 44-60: 58-9. Tracy contributed the opening essay of this volume, entitled 'Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue' (*ibid.*, 1-43).

<sup>325</sup> For Jeanrond's argument that a religious tradition must follow Schleiermacher, Bultmann and Tracy – and *not* Barth, Ebeling or Fuchs – in seeking a 'general' hermeneutics for theology able to house every 'special' religious hermeneutic developed internally to facilitate religious identity and devotion, see Werner G. Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics: Development and Significance* (London: SCM, 1994).

<sup>326</sup> Jeanrond, 'Towards an Interreligious Hermeneutics of Love,' 57.

<sup>327</sup> 'Towards an Interreligious Hermeneutics of Love,' 57.

<sup>328</sup> See Tracy, 'Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue' in *Interreligious Hermeneutics*, 1-43.

thinking should follow Gadamer (and Heidegger before him) in counting *understanding* as the primary phenomenon of human existence. ‘Heidegger’s temporal analytics of Dasein,’ wrote Gadamer, has ‘shown convincingly that understanding is not just one of the various possible behaviours of the subject but the mode of being of Dasein itself.’<sup>329</sup> But, as we have seen, Tracy’s adaptations of Gadamer have otherwise relativised and complicated the simple priority that Heidegger (and Gadamer, following Heidegger) accorded to ‘the question of Being.’ Therefore, it is perhaps less than wholly clear why Tracy should not assume that the conversation of understanding is of merely relative importance, rather than religiously and existentially fundamental.

Jeanrond suggests we need ‘a critical hermeneutics of love,’ in advance of all Gadamer-style philosophies of conversation-dialogue that would focus thoughtful attention, before all else, on events of human relationship. According to Jeanrond, before we get down to considering processes of shared understanding we need to be thinking about and shepherding what Rowan Williams has named ‘the social miracle [of] charity.’<sup>330</sup> This latter is the more essential phenomenon, for Jeanrond (following Williams), for, as Williams writes, this miracle includes a recognition of others that is definitely ‘*prior* to any agreement about what we have in common.’<sup>331</sup> As Williams summarises: ‘Social joy rejoices in the surprise of recognition, not in the establishing of a spuriously objective ground for fellowship outside the present “miracle” of converse.’<sup>332</sup>

The principal internal failing of the Gadamerian approach, according to Jeanrond, is that it ‘is concerned primarily with the manifestation of truth, [but] not with the

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<sup>329</sup> *Truth and Method*, xxvii; see also Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 184.

<sup>330</sup> Rowan Williams, *Lost Icons: Reflections of Cultural Bereavement* (London: Continuum, 2003), 98; cited in Jeanrond, ‘Towards an Interreligious Hermeneutics of Love,’ 54.

<sup>331</sup> Williams, *Lost Icons*, 98; cited in ‘Towards an Interreligious Hermeneutics of Love,’ 54.

<sup>332</sup> *Lost Icons*, 98; cited in ‘Towards an Interreligious Hermeneutics of Love,’ 54-55.

manifestation of difference and its particular demands in this process of disclosure.<sup>333</sup>

Love, on the other hand, lives off difference and needs difference in order to flourish.<sup>334</sup>

Indeed, ‘in love the emergence of a new body of truth and the recognition of difference, and possibility of radical difference, go hand in hand.’<sup>335</sup>

It is clear that Gadamer’s horizon of thinking counted social encounter meaningful and thinkable only to the extent that it propels its participants towards consensual understanding. But then, of course, Gadamer’s particular concept of language assured him of the always-already possibility of consensus, so that every human social encounter is *thereby* to some extent meaningful. Gadamer gave every practical indication of assuming that all human ways of living are fundamentally translatable to each other (even if he found this revealed specifically in and to the Western tradition). Human mutual recognition, for Gadamer, lives by this event and process of translation.

It seems probable that Gadamer assumed an ever-present task and possibility of loving *within* hermeneutical experience itself. We may recall that he particularly highlighted ‘the experience of the Thou’ as exemplary for hermeneutical experience, writing that ‘tradition is a genuine partner in dialogue, and we belong to it as does the I with a Thou.’<sup>336</sup> This assurance of the availability of love corresponds to the assured ‘good will’ that Derrida found so oddly presumed by Gadamer.<sup>337</sup> Yet, Jeanrond insists against Gadamer that the social miracle is distinct and fragile, in need of specific attention and

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<sup>333</sup> Jeanrond, ‘Towards an Interreligious Hermeneutics of Love,’ 54.

<sup>334</sup> ‘Towards an Interreligious Hermeneutics of Love,’ 52.

<sup>335</sup> ‘Towards an Interreligious Hermeneutics of Love,’ 54.

<sup>336</sup> *Truth and Method*, 352; see also Gadamer’s description of this ‘experience of the Thou’ as ‘decisive for all self-understanding’ (*Truth and Method*, xxxii), as well as the discussion in Chapter 3 section III, above.

<sup>337</sup> See Jacques Derrida, ‘Three Questions to Hans-Georg Gadamer’ in Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer, eds., *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 52-54.

commentary. For, love is easily discarded or else distorted by ideology, Jeanrond suggests: for example, when particular religious traditions and groups suggest that only they have been given true access to it.<sup>338</sup>

As we saw in the conclusion to the preceding chapter here, however, Tracy now clearly distances himself from Gadamer's emphasis on 'a necessary drive in dialogue to an achievement of "mutual understanding" and "fusion of horizons."' <sup>339</sup> Even on Gadamer's own terms this seems like a 'mistake,' Tracy notes, for genuine dialogue may end in *aporias* or fall well short of a full fusion of horizons or mutual understanding. Dialogues which break off incomplete, or which only positively establish relatively inessential markers for further discussion, may still have been real dialogues.<sup>340</sup> And with renewed attention to Heidegger, Tracy also now suggests that each dialogue must be alert to its own fully positive cessation at the point where it has reached its own proper 'limit.' At the limit-impasse of dialogue, where no way forward seems possible, dialogue partners must now learn to wait individually – or, 'very rarely,' together<sup>341</sup> – 'beyond dialogue,' awaiting some new experience of an

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<sup>338</sup> Jeanrond censures a whole squadron of Protestant theologians for appearing to distinguish "true," Christian, love from the possibilities available to non-Christians, singling out especially Martin Luther, Søren Kierkegaard, Anders Nygren, Karl Barth and Eberhard Jüngel in this regard ('Towards an Interreligious Hermeneutics of Love,' 57). Jeanrond poses the question: 'How can a process of humanization, of deification, and of shared concern for the protection of the universe promoted within any particular religious tradition develop as long as the identity of that tradition is constructed on the basis of excluding other men, women and children from the social and communicative miracle of love?' (*ibid.*, 58).

<sup>339</sup> Tracy, 'Western Hermeneutics,' 8. 'Textual meaning may, in fact, never unify; horizons may not fuse; consensus may not arrive. And yet dialogue still happens' (Tracy, 'Western Hermeneutics,' 9). For Gadamer's account of fusing horizons, see *Truth and Method*, 304-6.

<sup>340</sup> 'Western Hermeneutics,' 8. Tracy's examples here are Plato's 'early' dialogues, which often break off unresolved, as well as recent Catholic-Lutheran dialogues in Germany and elsewhere, which some Lutheran theologians, in particular, have felt did not really get to the heart of the matter. For an account of the Lutheran difference from Catholicism that informs much of my understanding of these latter issues, see Daphne Hampson, *Christian Contradictions: the Structures of Lutheran and Catholic Thought* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001).

<sup>341</sup> Tracy wonders if 'perhaps' Monica and Augustine experienced the Impossible together at Ostia' ('Western Hermeneutics,' 43).

‘Impassable’ reality: of the Infinite, the Incomprehensible, the Impossible.<sup>342</sup> One must become open to ‘being played at the limit,’ learning to wait un-busily ‘as if on a shore, waiting for the tide to come in.’<sup>343</sup> (The image is from Plotinus, Tracy notes.) ‘The tide may rise. The Impossible may happen. Or it may not.’<sup>344</sup>

These Heideggerian emendations of Gadamer would in no way assuage Jeanrond, however, who would almost certainly spy in this lonely Plotinian ‘waiting upon the shore’ only augmented confirmation that the quest for understanding is essentially non-relational and so should be relegated from hermeneutical pole position. Tracy does not identify any overarchingly relational or loving essence to this waiting, nor even does he for the ‘discursive reason, dialogue and responsible action’ to which all must return.<sup>345</sup>

Jeanrond argues that the Gadamerian focus on linguistic understanding ‘needs to be complemented by the insight that all understanding involves some level of encounter and relationship and that human forms of relationship all involve some form of communicative or symbolic action.’<sup>346</sup> In other words, one ought not to focus primarily on events of language but even more fundamentally on the human encounters and relationships that genuinely searching language-use always presuppose, alongside the symbolic-communicative impulses that are able to connect human encounter and intellectual dialogue to each other. In this context, no concept other than love is *as* appropriate, Jeanrond thinks, for emphasizing ‘the promise, potential and implications of the network of dynamic and transformative relationships in which any human being

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<sup>342</sup> ‘Western Hermeneutics,’ 20-1.

<sup>343</sup> ‘Western Hermeneutics,’ 21.

<sup>344</sup> ‘Western Hermeneutics,’ 22.

<sup>345</sup> ‘Western Hermeneutics,’ 43.

<sup>346</sup> ‘Towards an Interreligious Hermeneutics of Love,’ 53.

may be constructively involved.<sup>347</sup> By comparison, Gadamer's central notion of conversation seems to Jeanrond 'too restricted, too tame, too idealistic, because it remains so unambiguously oriented towards truth without difference and without embracing the desire to tackle it, and toward union without the energy to sustain difference.'<sup>348</sup>

A similar kind of criticism could almost certainly have been ranged at Tracy's one-time doctrine of cosmic-discursive analogy and creativity in *Imagination*. There, analogical imagination seemed to promise our ever-ready access to a world internally similar to itself over and above all 'real' internal differences. On occasions, at least, the frequently beautiful strategy of an analogical imagination will be too presumptuous in its kindly appropriations of difference. Since *Imagination*, Tracy has striven to describe greater scope for a real plurality that would simultaneously avoid the relativising that only makes everything again uniform (or uniformly null). However, to the extent that in his recent commentary on Gadamer Tracy has now succeeded in unearthing a greater ethical and theoretical 'energy to sustain difference' (as Jeanrond puts it), could it be that he has bought this at the price of a clearer hermeneutical *demotion* of central Christian and human practices of community and relationship (all that Plotinian imagery)?

Jeanrond suggests that instead of Gadamerian fascinations with 'autodynamical play-like conversations,' we would do better to look instead towards Paul Ricoeur for a 'broadening' of 'hermeneutical perspective.'<sup>349</sup> Regarding the Gadamer-Heidegger tradition as (in part at least) the secular philosophical kin of a Karl-Barth-style

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<sup>347</sup> 'Towards an Interreligious Hermeneutics of Love,' 52.

<sup>348</sup> 'Towards an Interreligious Hermeneutics of Love,' 54.

<sup>349</sup> 'Towards an Interreligious Hermeneutics of Love,' 56.

‘hermeneutics of revelation,’ Jeanrond strongly prefers instead what he calls Ricoeur’s ‘hermeneutics of signification,’ with its ‘long route of critical deciphering of all communicative expressions and emerging relational bodies.’<sup>350</sup> According to Jeanrond, this Ricoeurian mode of hermeneutics – in which ethics are ‘more fundamental than any norm, doctrine, or tradition’<sup>351</sup> – is the one that is able to support a hermeneutics of love committed to ‘human possibilities of meeting self and other.’<sup>352</sup>

Jeanrond excoriates religions of revelation when they succumb to the temptation to construe love as their own sacred and exclusive possession. He concedes that the ‘human potential to love and to communicate can only be explored and shaped in particular traditions and situations,’ but precisely this is why, Jeanrond thinks, religions need to open themselves to critical and interdisciplinary hermeneutical tasks of ‘explor[ing] the basic commonality of communication as love.’<sup>353</sup> Only by reference to such a ‘horizon’ can religious traditions truly ‘be encountered, understood, explored, assessed, and transformed,’ according to Jeanrond.<sup>354</sup> And it is here that a Ricoeurian centring upon the ethical dimensions of hermeneutical subjectivity is more appropriate, thinks Jeanrond, than Tracy’s Gadamerian enthusiasms.

For Jeanrond’s part, his explicitly theological interest in what he terms ‘the praxis of love’ is also explicitly ecclesiological, as when he writes, across several metaphorical registers, about the ‘body-building’ works of love.<sup>355</sup> By contrast, Tracy’s reluctance to

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<sup>350</sup> ‘Towards an Interreligious Hermeneutics of Love,’ 58-9.

<sup>351</sup> ‘Towards an Interreligious Hermeneutics of Love,’ 59. Jeanrond cites Ricoeur’s *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>352</sup> ‘Towards an Interreligious Hermeneutics of Love,’ 51.

<sup>353</sup> ‘Towards an Interreligious Hermeneutics of Love,’ 59-60.

<sup>354</sup> ‘Towards an Interreligious Hermeneutics of Love,’ 60.

<sup>355</sup> For Jeanrond’s use of the word *praxis* for love, to draw combined attention ‘to the actual encounter with the other and ongoing critical and self-critical reflection,’ see Jeanrond, *A Theology of Love*, 5-6: ‘we need an approach that is attentive both to the phenomenon [i.e., of encounter] and to the critical and

build his theology around experiences of love can be seen as running in parallel with his comparable reluctance to articulate his theology in close relation to theorized practices of church.<sup>356</sup>

So, we may ask, why ought not Tracy make special place for the relational, personal and communal practices of love, as we have seen Jeanrond suggest? Why should he not make different choices as regards what are the most essential phenomena, and promote ‘love’ ahead of ‘religion,’ ‘hope,’ ‘gift’ or ‘the Impossible’? Why does he not make more of ‘church’ and ‘community’? Could it be that Tracy is too much in thrall to a restricted and restricting set of highly intellectualistic questions and obsessions? (As Mike Higton has noted, Tracy is ‘used to asking large-scale ontological and metaphysical questions, to dancing with Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur.’)<sup>357</sup>

I shall argue, however, that there is something more at stake for Tracy here than merely one-sided intellectual habit or ecclesial fright. The section that follows assumes for its starting-point Jeanrond’s helpful identification of love as a ‘praxis,’ as Jeanrond has expounded this in his *A Theology of Love* (2010).<sup>358</sup> In this work, Jeanrond identifies love as uniting ‘actual encounter with the other’ with ‘ongoing critical and self-critical reflection.’<sup>359</sup> Love is thus for Jeanrond at once attention to a ‘phenomenon’ (to a

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self-critical reflection on its different and shifting manifestations in human life’ (*ibid.*, 5). Concerning the bodily nature of love, Jeanrond writes the need to consider in love ‘our bodies and their nature as well as their possible extensions into larger bodies opened by love ... such as [for example] the body of Christ’ (*ibid.*, 10-11).

<sup>356</sup> The subtitle to Tracy’s 1994 collection of essays *On Naming the Present* is ‘God, Hermeneutics, and Church,’ but the last of these gets least attention, with the exception of one essay on ‘Roman Catholic Identity amid the Ecumenical Dialogues’ (*On Naming the Present*, 85-93). Meanwhile, Tracy recently lists ‘Love’ as the apparently mainly pre-modern ‘route’ of three routes for thinking God (in Tracy, ‘On Longing: The Void, The Open, God’ in Stephan van Erp and Lea Verstricht, eds., *Longing in a Culture of Cynicism* (Zürich & Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2008), 15-32); but he has nothing to say about it there.

<sup>357</sup> Higton, ‘Hans Frei and David Tracy on the Ordinary and the Extraordinary in Christianity,’ 590.

<sup>358</sup> See Jeanrond, *A Theology of Love*, 5-6.

<sup>359</sup> Jeanrond, *A Theology of Love*, 5.

miraculous gift appearing within interpersonal encounter, as we have seen) and ‘reflection on [that phenomenon’s] different and shifting manifestations in human life.’<sup>360</sup> Perhaps we could say after Jeanrond that love is the deepest possibility and brilliance of our critically and self-critically reflective experience of others.

Granting this as one plausible basic account of love, I will try to suggest nevertheless why Tracy may be resistant to promoting love’s praxis to the general hermeneutical role that Jeanrond proposes for it.

#### **IV. A focus on praxis is needed to resolve Tracy’s dilemma of identity *versus* difference**

In *Plurality*, Tracy very deliberately prefers notions of skilled discursive practice over against a fundamental emphasis on ‘praxis.’ Tracy had already expressed concern in *Imagination* that projects of transformative personal and political ‘praxis’ ought not to omit to schedule distinct attention to aesthetic-cognitive issues of interpretation. Fail to make proper and distinct place for the latter, Tracy suggested, and one risks sliding, despite one’s intentions, into patterns of ‘critically unmediated [“mere”] practice.’<sup>361</sup> This point has become increasingly structural for Tracy, in as much as he has come more and more to hold dear the irreducible centrality of *logos* (and hence, understanding) for wider human acting and suffering.

However, this choice of Tracy’s is not universally applauded by his critics. Roman

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<sup>360</sup> Jeanrond, *A Theology of Love*, 5.

<sup>361</sup> *Imagination*, 78.

Catholic philosophical and pastoral theologian Martin Poulson has argued in a recent essay that the thinking of the Dutch Catholic theologian Edward Schillebeeckx enjoyed one crucial advantage over Tracy. This was that Schillebeeckx gave central place to the term ‘praxis’ to indicate the concrete character of Christian living and thinking. According to Poulson, praxis entailed for Schillebeeckx a ‘mutual co-constitution’ of theory and practice that arises from an ‘inner drive [of each] towards the other.’<sup>362</sup> Poulson believes that such a shift of focus would have saved Tracy from an enduring theoretical dilemma that dogs Tracy’s thought. In Poulson’s view, Schillebeeckx’s emphasis on concrete praxis as the context of all theologising freed the Dutch theologian’s thinking from having to choose hermeneutical identity *or* difference – metaphysics or *différance* – whereas, in Poulson’s view, this choice dogged the concept of analogical ‘similarity-in-difference’ that was so important to Tracy during the 1980s. For according to Poulson, Tracy continually finds himself having to choose essentially – or else veer incoherently – between two ultimately incompatible hermeneutical-theological principles: namely, fundamental identity (as an underlying stasis of overt metaphysical presence) or fundamental difference (as freewheeling deconstructive absence).<sup>363</sup>

In what follows of this section I shall try to lay out: first, why Poulson’s criticism seems to me plausible as regards Tracy’s position in the 1980s; second, how, since then, Tracy seems to have moved beyond the difficulties that Poulson identifies; and third,

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<sup>362</sup> Martin Poulson, ‘The Place of Praxis in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx,’ in James Sweeney, Gemma Simmonds and David Lonsdale, eds., *Keeping Faith in Practice: Aspects of Catholic Pastoral Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2010), 131-42: 136.

<sup>363</sup> Martin Poulson, ‘The Place of Praxis in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx,’ 133-4. Here Poulson focuses his criticism on Tracy’s adoption of what Tracy presents as a Schillebeeckxian notion of theological ‘correlation’ between interpretations of contemporary situation and Christian tradition. Poulson suggests that Tracy’s idea is not a faithful reading of Schillebeeckx, and lands itself in problems that Schillebeeckx avoided. As I shall discuss Tracean theological ‘correlation’ only later on, in Chapter 7, I shall cast the issue here more in terms of Tracy’s largely equivalent core concept of analogy and analogical imagination.

why Tracy may have been right to have stuck to his hermeneutical guns, whatever shortcomings this led him into for a while, rather than to accede to ‘praxis’ as a salve for theological-hermeneutical ills.

#### IV. i. Similarity and difference in Tracy’s thought during the 1980s

Before we consider the merits of Poulson’s counter-proposal concerning praxis, we need to ask whether the charge that he lays against Tracy is a genuine one. Has Tracean theological correlation and analogy landed him in the dilemma that Poulson suggests, of being condemned to choose or veer between fundamental identity and fundamental difference (between Christianity and culture, or, again, between particular cultures)? Tracy has always protested that his method of theologically ‘correlating’ an interpretation of the contemporary situation with corresponding interpretation of historical Christian tradition did not tie itself to any necessary ‘belief in harmony, convergence, or sameness’ between these elements.<sup>364</sup> And Tracy contended the same thing with regard to the practice of ‘analogical imagination,’ which he described as a matter of spying similarity-*in-difference*, and never some deadening reduction of everything to simple similarity.<sup>365</sup> Since we have already encountered the concept of analogical imagination (and will only take up discussion of theological ‘correlation’ in

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<sup>364</sup> Tracy, ‘An Uneasy Alliance Reconceived: Catholic Theological Method, Modernity, and Postmodernity,’ *Theological Studies* 50 (1989), 458-570: 562. For an analysis of Tracy’s method of correlation, see the discussion in Chapter 7 sections I and II, below, and also Tracy, ‘Some Concluding Reflections on the Conference: Unity Amidst Diversity and Conflict?’ in Hans Küng and David Tracy, eds., *Paradigm Change in Theology: A Symposium for the Future*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 461-471: 462); see also Tracy, ‘An Uneasy Alliance,’ 550. For the perception that Tracy’s approach was biased towards sameness, see Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, *Foundational Theology: Jesus and the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), esp. 276-84, and also Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon, 1985), as cited by Tracy in ‘An Uneasy Alliance,’ 562 n. 56.

<sup>365</sup> We must speak ‘not of analogies simply as similarities, but as always already similarities-*in-difference*’ (Tracy, ‘An Uneasy Alliance,’ 562); see also *Plurality*, 21.

Chapter Seven below), I shall concentrate here on Tracy's notion of analogy as similarity-in-difference, asking essentially the same question as the one concerning correlation that Poulsom raised.

During the 1980s, Tracy employed an idea of 'analogy' to exhibit not only the nature of thinking in general (as he thought), but also to identify a characteristic Roman Catholic approach to theology.<sup>366</sup> But what kind of 'analogy' was it that Tracy hoped this imagination could serve? Tracy was not primarily concerned with peculiar difficulties of theological reference, that is, with how our language may or may not speak of the unspeakable: perhaps because he trusted 'first-order' religious metaphor to do so much of the work.<sup>367</sup> Rather, Tracy's philosophical-theological interest was much more about uncovering the ways in which an inherent potential for cosmic and hermeneutical unity could manifest itself within and through the variegated experiences and processes of ourselves and our world.<sup>368</sup>

This represented a rather different focus from traditional theological analogy-talk. Medieval theological analogy had been largely able to assume the timeless metaphysical unity and identity of the cosmos, before moving on from this to worry about how to speak of a God that created it.<sup>369</sup> But in Tracy's peculiarly modern twist to the analogical tradition, God comes into focus as the inferred source of a remarkable

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<sup>366</sup> 'An Uneasy Alliance,' 562.

<sup>367</sup> On the possibility of 'first-order' religious metaphorical 'limit-language,' such as one finds in the New Testament, see *Blessed Rage*, 126ff.

<sup>368</sup> For analysis of analogical imagination as a world-binding gift and practice, see chapter ten of *Imagination* and the Epilogue (especially), as well as Chapter 7 section IV, here below.

<sup>369</sup> For an introduction to theological receptions of Thomas Aquinas, including on analogy, see Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002). For an excellent modern exploration of Thomistic analogy, see Cornelius Ernst, 'Metaphor and Ontology in *Sacra Doctrina*' in Cornelius Ernst, *Multiple Echo: Explorations in Theology*, ed. Fergus Kerr O.P. and Timothy Radcliffe O.P. (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1979), 57-75. For a sustainedly intelligent approach to the question, see also David Burrell, *Exercises in Religious Understanding* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1974).

alleged potential within immanent world- and self-processes for manifesting their own analogical unities and person-like identities (in spite of all the seemingly conflictual plurality of experience). As Tracy emphasised in *Imagination*, a Christian analogical imagination uncovers interrelated realities of self, world and God.<sup>370</sup>

In this markedly horizontal account of theological analogy, ‘difference’ remains in play in the ever-‘uncanny’ newness of the hermeneutical event itself, on the one hand,<sup>371</sup> and as the ultimate condition of our continual becoming and the ever-incompleteness (the ‘not-yet’) of the world’s realization of its (and our) relation to transcendent-immanent Love, on the other.<sup>372</sup> As such, I wish to argue, difference was here always subsidiary to the essential similarity that Tracy perceived manifesting itself everywhere to gather the world together. And yet, at the same time, Tracy did strive hard, also, to remain alert to ‘how easily claims to analogy or similarity can become subtle evasions of the other and the different.’<sup>373</sup> Analogies are not simply similarities, he insisted, but ‘always already similarities-in-difference.’<sup>374</sup> But what does this mean for the kinds of theological and other attention that we must pay to the world?

Whenever analogy neglects to submit itself to enduring negation and difference, Tracy

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<sup>370</sup> ‘It is impossible to separate these realities God-self-world. It remains possible to distinguish them, to understand them distinctly in order to unite these mutually reinforcing realities into the similarities-in-difference, the ordered relationships of a systematic theology’ (*Imagination*, 430).

<sup>371</sup> Thus for the Christian – that is, for the paradigmatic interpreter, the figure whose essential discursive experience is the key to the account of the classic and of analogical imagination in *Imagination* – ‘[t]he sense of the uncanny in the Christ event mediated through the tradition [...] discloses the explicitly religious, the Christian experience of the uncanny as pure power, gift and command from the God’ (*Imagination*, 374).

<sup>372</sup> As noted earlier, Tracy concludes *Imagination* with perhaps his fullest reference to God, as such, in the whole work, as ‘the ultimate reality affecting and affected by all, the Love who is God’ (*Imagination*, 438).

<sup>373</sup> Tracy, ‘An Uneasy Alliance,’ 562. See also *Imagination*, 413: ‘Where analogical theologies lose that sense for the negative, that dialectical sense within analogy itself, they produce not a believable harmony among various likenesses in all reality but the theological equivalent of “cheap grace”: boredom, sterility and an atheological vision of a deadening univocity.’

<sup>374</sup> ‘An Uneasy Alliance,’ 562.

argued, thinking subsides into a fundamentally ‘atheological vision of a deadening univocity.’<sup>375</sup> Here, Tracy calls as witnesses the Protestant theologians of dialectical negation – Kierkegaard, Barth, Bultmann, Gogarten, Brunner, Niebuhr, Tillich – for their determination to unmask ‘too easy continuities and relaxed similarities between Christianity and culture, between God and the human, God and world.’<sup>376</sup> And yet, according to Tracy in *Imagination*, even these dialectical theologies eventually circle round to some or other world-forming analogical language: even when, as exemplarily in Paul Tillich, these ‘analogies are [...] intrinsically dialectical, the negations [...] present in the very expression of the equally real affirmations.’<sup>377</sup>

But as I see it, Tracy’s notion of ‘similarity-in-difference’ was not terribly satisfactory here. Whereas Tillich had perhaps equipped himself to revel in existential paradox – as in his own way had Rahner<sup>378</sup> – it is harder to see how the extrovertly realistic panentheism that played backstop to Tracy’s hermeneutical-theological theory in this period could wholly avoid the charge of having inserted the thought of similarity at a deeper level than the thought of difference. True, there still remained for Tracy a certain Rahnerian gesture towards the Mystery of God to augment his process-panentheistic commitments,<sup>379</sup> but it is not clear that his affirmations at this time were looking to traverse the kinds of hiddenness and incomprehensibility entailed by a more radical

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<sup>375</sup> See note 373. Tracy observed, also, that the Catholic political theology of Johann Baptist Metz had performed the function of submitting theological analogy to negation, with its stress on apocalyptic ‘interruption,’ as also had liberation theologies (*Imagination*, 416).

<sup>376</sup> *Imagination*, 417.

<sup>377</sup> *Imagination*, 419.

<sup>378</sup> For Karl Rahner, philosophical-theological analogy ‘is a tension which is not produced by us at a logically subsequent midpoint between a univocal “yes” and an equivocal “no,”” but rather ‘a tension which we ourselves as spiritual subjects originally are in our self-realization’ (Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* [1976], trans. William V. Dych (New York: Crossroads, 1978), 72).

<sup>379</sup> See, again, Tracy’s chapters in *Talking about God*. For an argument that by means of his increasing concentration on Mystery, Rahner inaugurated a powerfully theocentric theological approach that has found valuable continuations in the work of Johann Baptist Metz, Gustavo Gutiérrez and David Tracy, see Gaspar Martinez, *Confronting the Mystery of God: Political, Liberation and Public Theologies* (New York and London: Continuum, 2001).

thought of God (or, indeed, of this-worldly difference).<sup>380</sup>

IV. ii. Tracy's subsequent self-rehabilitation from the difficulty Poulson identified

Since *Plurality*, however, Tracy has progressively abandoned his previous employment of higher metaphysical assurance to play backstop to his thinking. Clearly, he no longer intends to follow the pattern laid down in *Imagination*, where he conceived the world gathering itself together via religious 'manifestations' of analogical similarity (Tracy's version of Tillich's 'Catholic substance') that incorporate ongoing interruptive dialectical religious 'proclamations' of difference (Tracy's version of Tillich's 'Protestant principle').<sup>381</sup> Today, Tracy says, he no longer has that same 'sense that "manifestation" [...] takes over. No, because everything drives to fragmenting, and then it goes back again. Manifestation and proclamation, the mystical and the prophetic, the apophatic and the apocalyptic – both sides are equally important.'<sup>382</sup>

In Tracy's previous model, positive ontological substance suffered a cross of negative principle, which yet it also enfolded. A similar advance conclusion in favour of analogical identity seems to have haunted Tracy's model for the hermeneutical correlation of present situation and historical tradition for theology, which he proposed

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<sup>380</sup> Contrast here Tracy's more recent essay, 'Form and Fragment: The Recovery of the Hidden and Incomprehensible God' in Werner G. Jeanrond and Aasulv Lande, eds., *The Concept of God in Global Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 98-114.

<sup>381</sup> For Tracy on religion as manifestation and proclamation in *Imagination*, see *Imagination*, 202-218. For the essay by Paul Ricoeur that Tracy uses but admits adapting considerably to his own more 'Catholic' purposes (*Imagination*, 221 n. 26), see Ricoeur, 'Manifestation and Proclamation' [1974] in Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative and Imagination*, trans. David Pellauer, ed. Mark I. Wallace (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 48-67.

<sup>382</sup> Tracy, 'Interview,' ln. 456-459. For the import of the pairing of the mystical and the prophetic in Tracy's thought since 1990, see Chapter 7 section V, below.

during the 1980s.<sup>383</sup> Poulson was right to see the difficulties that Tracy got himself into. But as I have tried to suggest, Tracy's formulations of the 1980s no longer accurately state his current position. Neither does it follow in principle that Tracy should have abandoned the wholeheartedly hermeneutical focus of his fundamental theology for an alternative theological approach centred upon personal and ecclesial 'praxis.'

It is hard to be sure precisely how Tracy intends to frame his pluralistic realism today, seeing as he is yet to publish expansively on the subject. I will seek to unpack his recent category of fragment in Chapter Nine, below. But it does seem that he now posits a dynamic of fragmentation within the world as hermeneutically experienced: a dynamic in which the creative and the deconstructive co-inhere together. Manifestation, proclamation and all their religious cognates occur, therefore, on an even footing with each other within this fragmentation, at the same time as transcendental questions remain in play concerning how best to name the 'Impossible Real' that conditions their reality.<sup>384</sup> For his own part, Tracy now affirms 'God' as a primary *name* amongst some others – the Void, the Open, the Good – for this Impossible Real, insofar as he also spies the existence of ever fragmenting fragmentary traditions that actually do facilitate our individual and communal lives.<sup>385</sup>

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<sup>383</sup> See note 364 above. For Hans Frei's criticism that Tracean correlation was always a submission of biblical tradition to some advance philosophical conclusion, see Hans Frei, 'Five Types of Theology' in *Types of Christian Theology*, eds. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1992), 28-55.

<sup>384</sup> See Tracy 'On Longing: The Void, The Open, God' in Stephan van Erp and Lea Verstricht, eds., *Longing in a Culture of Cynicism* (Zürich & Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2008), 15-32.

<sup>385</sup> See 'On Longing' and also 'Augustine's Christomorphic Theocentrism' in Aristotle Papanikolaou and George E. Demacopoulos, eds., *Orthodox Readings of Augustine* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008), 263-289: esp. 267-71.

#### IV. iii. Reasons to resist according centrality to ‘praxis’

We may seem to have wandered a long way from questions of love or praxis. But it has been important to admit the reality of the problem that Poulsom highlights in Tracy’s thought of the 1980s (though that I have focussed here on the parallel case of analogy, rather than the method of theological ‘correlation’ that Poulsom discussed). We have also seen that Tracy has since made moves which may have taken him beyond a problem that back in the 1980s might have seemed to have necessitated a turn from hermeneutical thinking to ‘praxis.’

The purpose of this sub-section, however, is to introduce rather more directly some reasons why Tracy may have been right in sticking to his hermeneutical guns, refusing to surrender theology and thinking too centrally to the ministrations of ‘praxis.’

As I read Tracy, his complications with regards to religion since 1990 have been about leaving behind theism and extending his hermeneutical phenomenology fully to include religious phenomena and the name ‘God.’ In this he has been constantly building upon (and revising) *Plurality*’s concept of conversational *practice*. What is more, in extolling the primacy of practice in *Plurality*, Tracy pointedly deprecated the word ‘praxis’ as a word that merely ‘reminds us that every worthwhile practice is informed by some theory’ and ‘that theoretical activity is itself a praxis – and one to be tested by the practice it serves.’<sup>386</sup> Tracy went on in *Plurality* to express his hope that ‘[o]ne day, the preferable words *practice* and *skill* will return to our language use, for then they will return freed of current prejudice.’<sup>387</sup>

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<sup>386</sup> *Plurality*, 10.

<sup>387</sup> *Plurality*, 10.

*Plurality* therefore sought to be a phenomenology of the practice of conversation, including religious conversation (although I will soon suggest Tracy rather failed as regards this latter in *Plurality*). Reflective theory would seek here only to be ‘helpful skills forged on behalf of thought and life.’<sup>388</sup> As Gadamer put it in his rather different vocabulary, hermeneutical philosophy ‘does not mean that the one who understands has an absolute mastery over being but, on the contrary, that being is not experienced where something is constructed by us and is to that extent conceived.’<sup>389</sup> Instead, according to Gadamer, being ‘is experienced where what is happening can merely be understood.’<sup>390</sup> In similar fashion, *Plurality* sought to submit thinking to *skilled practice*, rather than submit this practice to reflective distance. Thus, to the extent that *Plurality* distinguishes the skill (or art) within practice from the encompassing phenomenon of artful practice itself, this distinction is itself simply another attempt at a skilful practice.

One way to illustrate this is to see that Tracy was refusing any kind of clear fundamental distinction between *reflection* and *action*.<sup>391</sup> Instead, the shining forth of the phenomenon of the skilful practice of conversation itself was to be what occasioned every mutual co-inherence of practice and theory. For this reason, Tracy found no occasion to project a *further* category of ‘praxis,’ as if somehow the categories of skill and practice required supplement, and reflection and action required some further

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<sup>388</sup> *Plurality*, 10.

<sup>389</sup> Gadamer, ‘Foreword to the Second Edition,’ *Truth and Method*, xxxii.

<sup>390</sup> Gadamer, ‘Foreword to the Second Edition,’ *Truth and Method*, xxxii.

<sup>391</sup> The practical-spiritual dangers that breed alongside reflective schisms of mind/body and subject/object were apparent to Tracy in *Imagination*: ‘We all know the truth in Kierkegaard’s description of the modern intellectual as one become “pathologically reflective” or, for the theologian the harsh realities in E. M. Cioran’s description of many modern intellectuals as “religious minds ... without religion”’ (*Imagination*, 6). More recently, Tracy has lamented three related ‘fatal separations of modernity,’ namely, of feeling and thought, theory and practice, form and content (see Tracy, ‘Trinitarian Speculation and the Forms of Divine Disclosure’ in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins, eds., *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 273-293: 273-7).

mediation.

It is especially significant for the debate with Jeanrond that *Plurality*'s account of skill and practice cannot be extrapolated so as to elaborate a distinction between thinking and speaking on one side (as 'theory'), and an encompassing more-than-simply-discursive phenomenon of lived experience on the other (as 'practice'). Then and since, and with increasing insistence, Tracy has refused to submerge hermeneutical questions, about which rational debates may be had, within larger, supposedly primary extra-discursive phenomena that admit of no comparable access.<sup>392</sup> Jeanrond's 'praxis of love' and Williams's 'miracle of charity' look like such supposed phenomena. It may indeed be perfectly plausible and rational, therefore, to imagine that thoughtful speaking is but one essential artistry within a broader phenomenon of human acting-and-suffering. But even if this were so, Tracy would find little real value for rigorous thinking in such imaginings, given that one is simply not in any position to take one's bearings from phenomenologies of more-than-discursive human lived experience.<sup>393</sup>

This shortcoming inherent to attempts to make cognitive use of philosophical-anthropological or cosmological imaginings, so as to locate language within wider encompassing human experience can be illustrated more concretely. Let us take the idea that human beings possess 'consciousness.' We might all agree that we are to some extent 'conscious' in our waking hours (and even perhaps in our sleeping ones). But this tells us nothing about what this might mean. Is consciousness an occult or otherworldly

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<sup>392</sup> This refusal of Tracy's to sidestep the task of interpretation/conversation for the sake of any essentially nondiscursive phenomena informs some of Tracy's reserve about the way in which Jean-Luc Marion has developed a phenomenology of the religiously 'saturated' phenomenon (see Tracy, 'Jean-Luc Marion: Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Theology' in ed. Kevin Hart, *Counter Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 57-65).

<sup>393</sup> Back in *Blessed Rage*, on the other hand, Tracy *did* attempt to do just this, in what was at bottom a transcendental theology of consciousness.

phenomenon, either wholly present or wholly absent, or is it instead something somehow distributed, more or less intelligibly, into differentiated qualitative or quantitative patterns across the animal and (perhaps) non-animate world? The sheer unchecked profusion of anthropological and cosmological models on offer – from Descartes to Gurdjieff, from Singer to Whitehead and thousands more besides – suggests we possess no very useful phenomenology of ‘consciousness,’ despite the apparent human ubiquity of the phenomenon. Tracy is therefore wise not to attempt to take his cognitive bearings from such more-than-discursive phenomena, even when these phenomena are as elemental as love.

By the mid-1980s, indeed, Tracy was no longer seeking to articulate any anthropologically and cosmologically self-manifesting phenomenon on behalf of which language would play just one essential but limited role. He was no longer the philosopher theologian of subjective consciousness that he had still been in *Blessed Rage*. In sum, since this time, Tracy has valued the practice of *logos* – of word, discourse – as a phenomenon that remains irreducible (by our modes of knowing, at any rate) to any other anthropic or cosmic reality.<sup>394</sup> It is this commitment to the practice of language that maintains Tracy’s abiding interest in meaning – which is to say, understanding – as a matter of irreplaceable importance.

A good example of Tracy’s reluctance to relinquish theology’s irreducible hermeneutical task to the siren call of some or other broader ‘praxis,’ can, I believe, be seen in his preference (from around 1990 and since) for the term ‘mystical-prophetic’ to

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<sup>394</sup> Even were it to be objected that *Plurality* was still inclined to conceive religious experience (its seeming other pivotal phenomenon, apart from linguistic *logos*) in less than fully linguistic terms, there can be no ambiguity today. The religious limit-phenomena of which Tracy speaks today – the Infinite, the Impossible, etc. – are limit-phenomena of conversation-dialogue, not consciousness as such.

describe the theological task. Tracy opted for this ahead of the term ‘mystical-political’ commonly employed by liberation and political theologians.<sup>395</sup> As we shall see later, the opening essay of his *Dialogue With the Other* (1990) would expand upon the mystical-prophetic character and predicament of theological address.<sup>396</sup> But in the final essay of this sequence, Tracy also admitted the existence of a seemingly broader ‘mystico-political sense of Christian practice and thought.’<sup>397</sup> However, Tracy was perfectly precise in his distinction here, I believe. For he was seeking to preserve systematic theology as a conjointly mystical and *prophetic* rhetoric and task, distinct from a wider but hermeneutically vaguer general sense of Christian living.<sup>398</sup> ‘Mystico-political sense’ here signifies general intuition and orientation more than any very definite meaning. The Christian mystico-political sense is actually pressingly real and concrete for the Christian and for Tracy; but as ‘sense’ it is also not yet any specific rhetoric or task. And neither is it a ‘praxis’ in Poulsom’s sense of an internally driven mutual co-constitution of theory and practice.

Learning from the Protestant and Lutheran roots of hermeneutical philosophy, I suggest, Tracy has come to hold fast to the irreducibility of *the word* in relation to the mystery of the cosmos. Rather as Heidegger suggests in a famous lecture entitled ‘The Principle of

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<sup>395</sup> For the origins of the term ‘mystical-political,’ Tracy cites Claude Geffré and Gustavo Gutiérrez, eds., *The Mystical and Political Dimensions of Christian Faith, Concilium* 96 (Edinburgh: 1974). Regarding his own preference for the term ‘mystical-prophetic,’ see Tracy, ‘On Naming the Present’ in Tracy, *On Naming the Present: Reflections on God, Hermeneutics, and Church* (London: SCM Press, 1994), 24 n. 11: ‘Many issues of *Concilium* [... since 1974] may be read as developing [a] mystical-political (or, as I prefer, mystical-prophetic) option [in theology].’ In this note, Tracy also draws attention to the development of the term ‘mystical-political’ in the work of Edward Schillebeeckx.

<sup>396</sup> See *Dialogue*, 9-26; and Chapter 7 section V, below.

<sup>397</sup> *Dialogue*, 122.

<sup>398</sup> On the mystical-prophetic character of systematic theology see also, for example, Tracy, ‘Approaching the Christian Understanding of God’ in Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin, eds. *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, Vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 133-147: 146; and my discussion in Chapter 7 section V, below.

Identity,<sup>399</sup> Tracy treats human discourse and the truth of things as ‘belonging together,’ but in such a way that our knowing never thereby renders discourse merely a transparent medium for some grander self-evidence that belongs in some more straightforward manner to existence or the cosmos – or ‘love,’ for that matter.

In a recent essay, Tracy has contrasted favourably the position of Gregory of Nyssa against that of his own teacher Bernard Lonergan (going back to Augustine) on the point of whether we ought say that ‘love’ (Lonergan) or ‘faith’ (Gregory) marks the beginning of saving grace.<sup>400</sup> Tracy prefers Gregory, for ‘Faith is about more than love. Faith is logically, psychologically and theologically prior to love.’<sup>401</sup> According to Tracy, Gregory can teach us that it is faith, and faith alone, that opens the mind to new understanding.<sup>402</sup> Faith implies belief, trust and union with God,<sup>403</sup> at the same time as it wears its relation to discourse more overtly than does love.

Having decided against following his teacher Bernard Lonergan’s recourse to alleged immediate experiences of cosmic affection (see Chapter Six, Section II below), I think Tracy has good reasons for resisting subcontracting hermeneutical tasks to allegedly more fundamental (as-if-) extra-linguistic relational phenomena on the one hand, or, again, to partly attractive and partly serviceable blandishments of ‘praxis’ (even a praxis of love) on the other.

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<sup>399</sup> See Martin Heidegger (‘The Principle of Identity’ in *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 23-41).

<sup>400</sup> Tracy, ‘Foi et Raison: Union, Contemplation, Critique,’ trans. Georges Chevallier, in *Transversalities* 110, *Revue de l’Institut Catholique Paris* (April-June 2009), 53-74.

<sup>401</sup> ‘La foi agit alors par l’amour. La foi est logiquement, psychologiquement et théologiquement antérieure à l’amour’ (Tracy, ‘Foi et Raison,’ 56).

<sup>402</sup> ‘Grégoire apporte au théologien d’aujourd’hui son herméneutique de la redécouverte de la foi, et la foi seule, somme ouverte à une nouvelle connaissance’ (Tracy, ‘Foi et Raison,’ 74).

<sup>403</sup> As Finnish Lutheran scholars have demonstrated, for Luther ‘faith produces not only trust, but also union with Christ through the indwelling of God in the one who believes’ (‘la foi produit pas seulement la confiance, mais aussi l’union avec le Christ par l’inhabitation de Dieu en celui qui croit’) (‘Foi et Raison,’ 56).

## Conclusion: Defending Tracy

Were my defences of Tracy's hermeneutical focus in this chapter to be accepted, two broad concerns from Loughlin's and Jeanrond's combined objections to Tracy would still remain live.

The first regards whether Tracy's approach is capable of adequately registering the bodiliness of human existence. This question of the body is both 'literal' in terms of our individual body-selves, and also 'metaphorical' in terms of human social and, perhaps, cosmic bodies. (It is not necessary that a hermeneutical thinker must consider the latter any less 'real.')

Tracy's religious thinking appears strangely disinclined towards any explicit commentary on embodiment, although presumably one could explore the yearning and rhetorical bodies of the mystic and the prophet.

The second concern is like the first, although it focuses specifically on whether it is plausible for Tracy as a Christian theologian to be *this* silent on love and *this* apparently wary of community. If Tracy has found a greater energy than Gadamer to 'sustain difference,' in Jeanrond's expression, it seems he may have achieved this at the cost of a further alienation of our human recourse to relationship and community.

Tracy is certainly no longer committed to the essentially supra-bodily self and God of process cosmology and embodiment-theory. (Perhaps Tracy was never even very interested in the cosmological and bodily side of process metaphysics, but only in Charles Hartshorne's more strictly theo-logical conclusions.)<sup>404</sup> But as panentheism has

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<sup>404</sup> As noted before (see n. 156), a part-exception to Tracy's relative lack of interest in process or other cosmological foci can be found in Tracy's essay (originally part of a larger essay co-authored with

receded from view, Tracy seems to have invested in little by way of replacement in terms of social or cosmic sympathy. There is his general hope for conversation, of course, but even his one-time confidence in classic texts and bodies seems to have given way to a celebration of dis-membering fragmentation. It might seem as if Tracy is reluctant to concede that a Christian theologian must find his or her way to the Christological thought of the body of Christ and the pneumatological thought of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.<sup>405</sup>

Tracy may have given a tantalising glimpse of where he could go in this direction in his essay from 2010, at a point where he juxtaposes religion as *religare* ('to bind together') with religion as *relegere* (the ever new and renewed interpretation of sacred texts).<sup>406</sup> Tracy notes that 'the Romans could never unite their civic, political religion with their attraction to various cults of religious excess.'<sup>407</sup> Tracy wonders whether Christianity may have been instrumental in resolving this cleavage, at least for a while. For Christianity promised 'excess, the Unexpected Impossible as the God who is Love and, therefore, Trinity as well as community,' on the one hand, and also 'a sacred text' on the other.<sup>408</sup> *Religare* and *relegere* together: perhaps Tracy will find new ways to interrelate these in his own work.

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Nicholas Lash) entitled 'Cosmology and Christian Hope' [1983], included in *On Naming the Present: Reflections on God, Hermeneutics, and Church* (London: SCM Press, 1994), 73-81. For Hartshorne, see Charles Hartshorne, 'Epilogue: The Logic of Panentheism' in Charles Hartshorne and William L. Reese, eds., *Philosophers Speak of God* (New York: Humanity Books, 2000), 499-514; for Tracy's use of Hartshorne and other process thinkers in *Blessed Rage*, see *Blessed Rage*, 172-191; and see Chapter 2 section II, above here.

<sup>405</sup> On the other hand, Tracy told me in 2010 that he kept finding himself stumbling across the Trinity towards the ends of his thinking (he thought this was probably the best way round).

<sup>406</sup> Tracy, 'Western Hermeneutics,' 23.

<sup>407</sup> 'Western Hermeneutics,' 24.

<sup>408</sup> 'Western Hermeneutics,' 24. (N.B., I have rearranged the punctuation in this quotation to repair sense which appears to have become corrupted in the published version, which reads: 'Perhaps Christianity (which promises both excess, the Unexpected Impossible as the God who is Love and, therefore, Trinity as well as community) and a sacred text (*religare* and *relegere*) may have resolved, for a while, the Roman problem' (*ibid.*). In this context, it is hard to imagine what Tracy would mean by '[p]erhaps Christianity [...] and a sacred text [...] may have resolved [...] the Roman problem.')

Perhaps Tracy may yet circle around to meditate on social love and fellowship, perhaps through stumbling upon Trinitarian or pneumatological themes. Perhaps, in Jeanrond's words, he will enunciate more clearly than he has to date that love 'cannot wait until the *eschaton* when all differences are overcome,' but is rather 'the eschatological force that encourages us to face real difference without fear.'<sup>409</sup> In the meantime, Jeanrond is also quite right to insist on how ethically unsavoury it is when interpretations – explicitly religious or otherwise: of love or of anything else – presume to bar other human beings from sacred identities that I and my tribe are claiming to possess by exclusive gift. Ultimately, there is no dispute between Jeanrond and Tracy that religion must entail some 'ethics of the other' that goes all the way down.

However, I have tried to suggest that Tracy may have good reasons to stay unmoved by Jeanrond's confidence in the universal and immediate meaningfulness of love as a supra-verbal praxis that outstrips the revelations of words. Jeanrond castigates Protestant theologians whose attention to the Word has led them to pit practices of love against each other, thereby allowing their thinking to stray into exclusive claims. Jeanrond's indignation is not without reason, but Tracy might still argue with justification that love suffered and given is really not other than a *word*, a word that forms and becomes flesh.

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<sup>409</sup> Jeanrond, 'Towards an Interreligious Hermeneutics of Love,' 60.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Being, Language and Experience**

The next chapter after this one (Chapter Six) will focus squarely on the ‘empirical’ character of Tracy’s hermeneutical thinking. Tracy’s empirical attitude has been consistently uninterested in reproducing the side of Gadamer that came to equate language with intelligible being.

Before that next chapter, however, the purpose of this chapter will be to examine the background to the ‘ontological’ dimension in Gadamer’s philosophy of conversation-dialogue, about which Tracy has shown so much reservation. This background is to be found predominantly in the seminal thought of Martin Heidegger. The discussion of this chapter will therefore operate temporarily at a certain double remove from Tracy: examining the background to a dimension of Gadamer that Tracy has himself sidelined.

And yet, I will suggest, Heidegger’s ideas remain a crucial lineage for Tracy’s thinking, which cannot itself be wholly divorced from the ontological hermeneutical tradition. Without an understanding of Gadamer as a student of Martin Heidegger, ideas adapted from Gadamer that have been important to Tracy will remain partly inexplicable. For example, it will be hard to understand Tracy’s notion of language as a ‘manifestatory’ phenomenon, or the ‘event’ quality he accords to interpretation. Furthermore, without an understanding of the streams of thought that informed Gadamer, it will also not be possible to critically evaluate Tracy’s concept of the *experience* of conversation-dialogue, is related to and yet distinct from that of Gadamer.

At the heart of this chapter, therefore, lies an exploration of the inaugural references to ‘being’ and ‘ontology’ for hermeneutical phenomenology in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*.<sup>410</sup> I noted in Chapter One how Heidegger’s hermeneutical phenomenology shared in Husserl’s concern to relativise the categories of subject and object for the sake of some more primordial phenomenon: and some more essential interrogation of thinking experience.<sup>411</sup> But where Husserl had conceived the more essential phenomenon in terms of a transcendental consciousness abiding in its ‘living present,’ hermeneutical thinkers following Heidegger would focus instead on the phenomenon of *talk* (discourse, *logos*) as showing forth speakers and their worlds.

The epochal text in which this all first comes to light is Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, a vast unfinished project of ‘fundamental ontology’ that Heidegger constructed around an analytic of human discursive and mortal ‘existence.’ Part of my argument will be that Heidegger’s analysis of human existence in *Being and Time* possessed a damagingly opaque relationship to questions of what kinds of *experiences* might correspond favourably with his analysis. Perhaps partly for this reason, later Heidegger would turn away from analysing human discursive ‘existence’ and focus squarely instead on the nature of language (or ‘Saying’), itself, in this way pushing further into the foreground what *Being and Time* had already begun to say about the centrality of discourse. It is possible, therefore, that later Heidegger successfully moved beyond some of the enduring uncertainty in *Being and Time* about how one should relate ontological talk of ‘existence’ to the interpretation of one’s actual experience.

For his part, however, as the final section in this chapter will explore, Gadamer forged a

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<sup>410</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962).

<sup>411</sup> See Chapter 1 section I.ii., above.

simultaneously ontological *and* practical notion of ‘hermeneutic experience,’ in the wake of (and in preference to) Heidegger’s construals of existence and language. It is Gadamer’s idea of hermeneutical experience that then requires comparing to Tracy’s.

The purpose of this chapter is not to introduce Heidegger in the round, but instead to explore the Heideggerian background to Tracy’s thinking. Until recently, Tracy himself has shown relatively little interest in the more insistently ‘ontological’ and Heideggerian aspects of the hermeneutical tradition. Only in more recent essays and lectures has Tracy begun to draw upon Heidegger much more directly and explicitly, framing ideas about ‘contemplative reason’<sup>412</sup> and our need sometimes to go ‘beyond dialogue.’<sup>413</sup> And yet, as I mentioned earlier, elements that are essential Heideggerian have always been present in Tracy’s idea of conversation-dialogue, even when at one remove: especially, the ‘event’-quality that Tracy accords to all interpretation in *Imagination*, and his notion of truth-as-manifestation in *Plurality*.<sup>414</sup>

Not only has the later Heidegger become more important for Tracy in recent years, therefore, but also it will be instructive to explore further the roots of the hermeneutical thinking that Tracy has adapted via Gadamer. In particular, an understanding of Heidegger’s hermeneutical analysis of ‘existence’ in *Being and Time* can help place in relief Gadamer’s contrasting notion of ‘hermeneutic experience’ in *Truth and Method* (as well as Tracy’s own distinctive ideas about experience, which will be examined more fully in the chapter after this one). One outcome of this chapter, as a consequence, will be to have clarified some issues between the phenomenological-ontological

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<sup>412</sup> Unpublished lecture delivered at Loyola University, Chicago, on April 8, 2011, entitled ‘The Necessity and Character of Fundamental Theology’; see also the opening of Chapter 1, above.

<sup>413</sup> See ‘On Longing: The Void, The Open, God’ in Stephan van Erp and Lea Verstricht, eds., *Longing in a Culture of Cynicism* (Zürich & Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2008), 15-32.

<sup>414</sup> See Chapter 2 section I. ii., and Chapter 3 sections I and II, above.

(‘European’) tradition and Tracy’s ongoing (‘American’) instincts for a more pluralistic and perhaps ‘empirical’ religious-hermeneutical outlook.

## **I. The roots of hermeneutical thinking: Martin Heidegger**

### **I. i. Hermeneutical thinking and Heidegger’s ‘Being’**

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger identified a ‘question of the meaning of Being’ languishing neglected beneath post-Kantian inquiries into the nature and limits of human knowledge.<sup>415</sup> He found this question similarly forgotten in speculative philosophies and theologies, before and since Kant, which pronounced their concepts, cosmologies and world-views without paying adequate attention to the difference between *beings* (*Seiendes*: entities) and the *Being* (*Sein*) of beings.<sup>416</sup>

Of course, the traditions of the Greek and monotheistic West had for very long given great prominence to the name ‘Being’: from Parmenides to the great theological syntheses of the high Middle Ages.<sup>417</sup> But from the time when Immanuel Kant perceived himself awakened from the philosophical sleep of Christian Wolff’s ontology of pure essences, modern thought has by and large pursued other philosophical paths with other names. The remains of the medieval and early modern onto-cosmologies were subjected to Kant’s turn to the knowing subject, while the modern empiricist’s

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<sup>415</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 1.

<sup>416</sup> For Heidegger’s ontological rather than epistemological interpretation of Kant himself as the crucial modern philosopher, see Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1997). For Heidegger on the ontological difference of Being from beings, see *Being and Time*, 25-6.

<sup>417</sup> For a lively presentation, see Étienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952).

sense of reality has felt little need for the wispy concept ‘Being.’

The prestige that Heidegger gave to the name Being had much to do with his attempt to re-interpret and re-appropriate the Western philosophical patrimony. But at the same time, it also had to do with the way that Being stands so immediately nearby to everyday thinking and speaking, at the same time as it is also so far away from it. For we cannot get away from saying ‘is’; and yet, Heidegger suggested, the issue of Being is simultaneously obscured everywhere by the skein of knowledgeable answers into which (and through which) our languages elaborate their powers. As Heidegger would later put it, the very centrality of the verb ‘to be’ in Western European languages seems to predispose these cultures to metaphysical ‘enframings’ of the world, which render Being (*Sein*) only in terms of the systematic coherence of beings (*Seiendes*) in their consequent manipulability.<sup>418</sup> One way to see what such an attitude ignores, but which *Being and Time* explored, is to note that our knowing is first of all caught up in an altogether prior – interpretative and circular – care of our *own* non-objectifiable Being-in-the-world.<sup>419</sup>

Another way to put Heidegger’s argument might be to say that our languages tend to obscure the enigma of *questioning*, as such, which underpins all thinking and

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<sup>418</sup> On the ‘metaphysical’ character of Western language, see, inter alia, Heidegger, ‘The Onto-theological Constitution of Metaphysics’ in Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans Joan Stambaugh [1969] (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 42-76: 73-4. At the conclusion of Heidegger’s ‘A Dialogue on Language,’ the Heidegger-character in the dialogue looks towards ‘the farewell of all “It is”’ that should come to pass in Saying (‘A Dialogue on Language,’ 54). On the role of the ‘frame’ (*Gestell*) in Western thinking according to Heidegger, see George Pattison, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to the Later Heidegger* (London: Routledge, 2000), 2-5.

<sup>419</sup> ‘As ways in which man behaves, sciences have the manner of Being which this entity – man himself – possesses. This entity we denote by the term “*Dasein*.” [...] *Dasein* is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it’ (*Being and Time*, 32). On *Dasein*’s ‘care,’ see *ibid.*, 235ff. and section I. iv. of this chapter here, below.

speaking.<sup>420</sup> Heidegger sought to draw attention to the condition and undying possibility of *the question* in thought and language, even during a time when, as Heidegger thought, the gods have fled before the powerful world-objectifying ministrations of modern science and technology.<sup>421</sup>

Heidegger's Being is therefore not to be identified with any entity that might be the object of possible knowledge of appearances. It is other and different from all that can be conceived and known. If it intimates itself, still it remains the name of an openness and attentiveness which claims priority over concepts and propositions. Heidegger himself experimented with a sequence of related names to indicate this impossible presence and possibility: Being (*Sein*), 'Beying' (*Seyn*: an archaism), '~~Being~~' (crossed out) and 'the Open.' A further name, *Ereignis* ('event of appropriation'), in Heidegger's later thought would begin to take some of the emphasis away from positive and negative variations on 'Being,' orienting his thought rather directly towards language and the origin and destiny of meaning.<sup>422</sup>

In first raising the name Being, as well as in all his later developments, Heidegger trusted his thinking to an elusive presence which was also a graciousness-from-nowhere-and-nothing which he would also name '*es gibt*' ('there is': but literally, 'it gives').<sup>423</sup> In Heidegger's phenomenology, the self-dedication of thinking outstrips every empirical and transcendental science because it attends to a present-absent-Same-

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<sup>420</sup> For a post-Heideggerian meditation on the status of the question for thinking see Jacques Derrida, 'Violence and Metaphysics: an Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas' [1964] in Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 97-192: 97-100.

<sup>421</sup> On Heidegger and technology, see Pattison, *The Later Heidegger*, 47-74.

<sup>422</sup> See here Thomas Sheehan, 'Facticity and Ereignis,' ed. Daniel Dahlstrom, *Interpreting Heidegger: New Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Sheehan argues that 'meaning' can be used as a good gloss for 'Being' in Heidegger.

<sup>423</sup> See Levinas's objection to this idea of Heidegger's in Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), in the extract entitled 'There Is: Existence without Existents' in Seán Hand, ed., *The Levinas Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 29-36.

Other-Being-Nothing that plays (more or less keenly) across every act of interpretation. Here Gadamer differed from Heidegger, in that Gadamer always filed hermeneutical accounts that were structurally more positive: permanently “in the black,” as it were. Gadamer exudes confidence that tradition will be found ready and willing to show us which ways next to turn. It may be that the event of understanding always arrives, for Gadamer, as a ‘blow’ to our current mindset,<sup>424</sup> but nevertheless the event of tradition was for Gadamer a manifestly productive process, as opposed to Heidegger’s darkly discontinuous sense of the ‘destining’ of Being-as-understanding.<sup>425</sup>

#### I. ii. Heidegger’s *Being and Time*: the analytic of Dasein

*Being and Time* drew attention to the fundamentally hermeneutical quality of human discursive experience, situating this experience within a wider ‘ontological’ account of human existence as such: within its peculiar possibility for disclosing its own Being. Heidegger proposed that we could each recognise ourselves as a singular kind of entity for which ‘in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it.’<sup>426</sup> He designated this ontologically-involved entity with the name ‘*Da-sein*’ (‘there-being’), finding it ‘peculiar to this entity that with and through its Being, this Being is disclosed to it.’<sup>427</sup> The circular implication of Dasein in Being (as Being-there) appears as Dasein’s distinctive mark, in association with the essential self-disclosedness of Dasein as discursive Being-in-the-world. Dasein *exists* hermeneutically: *as* this or that project of

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<sup>424</sup> See Tracy, ‘Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue,’ 9.

<sup>425</sup> See Pattison, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to the Later Heidegger* (London: Routledge, 2000), 129-131. In Chapter 8, I will suggest that hermeneutical negativity resurfaces powerfully, albeit marginally, for Gadamer in his account of Christian faith.

<sup>426</sup> *Being and Time*, 32.

<sup>427</sup> *Being and Time*, 32.

always partly implicit understanding of itself.<sup>428</sup> Therefore, a thorough analysis of Dasein, Heidegger suggested, could re-open the philosophical tradition and bring the forgotten issue of ‘the meaning of Being’ to be thought.<sup>429</sup>

‘Proximally and for the most part,’<sup>430</sup> however, Heidegger found Dasein caught up in everyday ‘chatter’ or ‘idle-talk’ (*Gerede*).<sup>431</sup> In ‘average everydayness’ and the ‘average intelligibility’ associated with Dasein’s linguistic inheritance, Dasein ‘does not communicate in such a way as to let [what is being talked about] be appropriated in a primordial manner, but communicates rather by following the route of *gossiping* and *passing the word along*.’<sup>432</sup>

Whereas Gadamer, following Heidegger, would treat the passing on and passing round of truth as a much less fraught affair than his teacher, for Heidegger in *Being and Time*, it is of the essence that truth must always be ‘drawn from primordial sources with a struggle,’ as much against the grain of human discourse as along with it. In effect, all ‘genuine understanding, interpreting, and communicating’ must be performed *against* as well as in and out of this ‘everyday way in which things have been interpreted [...] into which Dasein has grown in the first instance, with never a possibility of extrication.’<sup>433</sup> For in *Gerede*, Dasein is ‘absorbed’ and ‘lost’ in ‘the publicness of the

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<sup>428</sup> ‘Understanding of Being is itself a definitive characteristic of Dasein’s Being. Dasein is ontically distinctive in that it is ontological [ontologisch]’ (or: ‘[...] is ontologically’) (*Being and Time*, 32; and *ibid.* n. 3).

<sup>429</sup> See *Being and Time*, 32-5.

<sup>430</sup> In order for the entity Dasein to ‘show itself and from itself,’ Heidegger determines, it must first of all ‘be shown as it is proximally and for the most part – in its average everydayness’ (*Being and Time*, 37-8).

<sup>431</sup> *Gerede* is a modification of *Rede*, discourse. For Heidegger’s presentation of *Gerede*, see *Being and Time*, 211-4.

<sup>432</sup> *Being and Time*, 212. Heidegger finds this process also reinforced in written ‘scribbling’ (*das ‘Geschreibe’*) (*ibid.*).

<sup>433</sup> *Being and Time*, 213. Later Heidegger would also retain a pervasive sense of paradoxically impossible aspects to our hermeneutical possibility. Where Gadamer stressed an event of truth-disclosure available in genuine conversation, Heidegger emphasised a corresponding withdrawal and concealment of truth that accompanies every event of *aletheia* (on this latter, see Heidegger, ‘On the Essence of Truth’;

“they” (*das Man*).<sup>434</sup>

According to Heidegger, this condition of everyday Dasein is not merely happenstance, as if it might somehow be educated out of Dasein.<sup>435</sup> Rather, it is Dasein’s standing ontological-existential state that it should be simultaneously maintained and blunted by its absorption in the world. Along with this absorption, furthermore, there emerges in Dasein an attitude of spectatorly curiosity (*Neugier*) that ‘discloses everything and anything’<sup>436</sup> in such a way that everyday Dasein regards the world as an arena of complacent existential ambiguity (*Zweideutigkeit*).<sup>437</sup> Dulling Dasein’s proper sense of itself, *Zweideutigkeit* ‘hides nothing from Dasein’s understanding, but only in order that [Dasein’s] Being-in-the-world should be suppressed in [an] uprooted “everywhere and nowhere”’.<sup>438</sup> As Heidegger explained, *Gerede*, *Neugier* and *Zweideutigkeit* simply ‘characterize the way in which, in an everyday manner, Dasein is its “there”’.<sup>439</sup> For, ‘Dasein has, in the first instance fallen away [*abgefallen*] from itself as an authentic potentiality for Being its Self.’<sup>440</sup> As thus falling and fallen in the face of its ‘world,’<sup>441</sup>

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as noted earlier, in *Plurality* Tracy notes ‘the radicality of Heidegger’s insistence that every disclosure involves concealment, in contrast to Gadamer’s emphasis on truth as an event of disclosure’ (*Plurality*, 121 n. 1).

<sup>434</sup> See *Being and Time*, 220.

<sup>435</sup> ‘We would [...] misunderstand the ontologico-existential structure of falling if we were to ascribe to it the sense of a bad and deplorable ontic property of which, perhaps, more advanced stages of human culture might be able to rid themselves’ (*Being and Time*, 220).

<sup>436</sup> *Being and Time*, 221.

<sup>437</sup> For Heidegger’s presentation of this pervasive ‘ambiguity,’ see *Being and Time*, 214-219. Macquarrie and Robinson translate *Zweideutigkeit* as ‘ambiguity,’ meaning by this something very different in tone and rather different in substance from the crucial sense that Tracy’s thought has given to this word (see Chapter 3 section IV, above). For Tracy in the 1980s, ‘ambiguity’ named a double-sidedness to human tradition and interpretation, in which there is always irredeemably mixed ‘cognitively, the true and the false; morally, the good and the evil; [and] religiously, the holy and the demonic’ (*Plurality*, 131 n. 15). Partly, the different senses of ‘ambiguity’ between Tracy and Heidegger have to do with a specific difficulty in translating Heidegger’s *Zweideutigkeit*; partly it also has to do with Heidegger’s general dismissal of the world of ‘public’ conversation as a background inauthenticity into which Dasein falls. (For Paul Tillich’s rather intermediate notion of the world’s pervasive ambiguity, see Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Combined Volume (Wlwyn, Herts: James Nesbit & Co., 1968), especially vols. 2 and 3.)

<sup>438</sup> *Being and Time*, 221.

<sup>439</sup> *Being and Time*, 219.

<sup>440</sup> *Being and Time*, 220.

Dasein ‘loses’ itself in the affairs of ‘Being-with-one-another.’<sup>442</sup> It is the pull of the ‘there’ in *Da-sein* that prepares for it ‘a constant temptation for falling.’<sup>443</sup>

One clear concomitant of this phenomenology of Dasein is Heidegger’s repudiation of the ego’s dream of a transcendently sure and certain representation of self and world. Instead, Dasein must always discover itself as an opaque entity that exists within this or that historical and physical ‘facticity.’<sup>444</sup> Each Dasein finds itself always already involved and thoroughly implicated in its world: already designated and delineated, already falling. Its possibilities can be worked out only from within the parameters of this factual existence. Dasein is destined to find itself always and again as ‘*there*,’ and, as such, as originally disclosed to itself via its various pre-reflective forms of ‘state-of-mind’ (*Befindlichkeit*) and their associated understanding.<sup>445</sup>

Here, however, the understanding already implied in Dasein’s state-of-mind prompts Heidegger to add *discourse* (or ‘talk’: *Rede*) as a third, equally ‘primordial *existential* of [Dasein’s] disclosedness’ (that is, alongside state-of-mind and understanding).<sup>446</sup> For, ‘[t]he intelligibility of Being-in-the-world – an intelligibility which goes with a state-of-mind – *expresses itself as discourse*.’<sup>447</sup> Furthermore, just as Heidegger presents Dasein’s state-of-mind as its ‘disclosive submission to the world,’<sup>448</sup> so now he presents

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<sup>441</sup> *Being and Time*, 220. Macquarrie and Robinson suggest that Heidegger’s ‘an die “Welt”’ means in this context not so much a falling *into* its world as ‘falling *at* the world or collapsing *against* it’ (*ibid.*, n.1).

<sup>442</sup> *Being and Time*, 220. ‘Publicness’ (*Öffentlichkeit*) has negative connotations for Heidegger, for whom it is the arena of idle talk, curiosity and ambivalence.

<sup>443</sup> *Being and Time*, 221.

<sup>444</sup> For Heidegger’s notion of ‘facticity,’ see *Being and Time*, 82ff.

<sup>445</sup> See *Being and Time*, 203. See also the section on ‘Being there as State-of-mind,’ *Being and Time*, 172ff.

<sup>446</sup> *Being and Time*, 204. ‘Discourse is existentially equiprimordial with state-of-mind and understanding’ (*ibid.*, 203). On *Rede* as both ‘discourse’ and ‘talk,’ see Macquarrie and Robinson’s translators’ footnote, *Being and Time*, 203 n. 1. Note also their translation of *Gerede* as ‘idle talk.’

<sup>447</sup> *Being and Time*, 204.

<sup>448</sup> See *Being and Time*, 177.

discourse as similarly ‘worldly’ to the extent that it ‘gets expressed as language’ (*Sprache*): ‘a totality of words [...] which we may come across as ready-at-hand’ (i.e., manipulable like a tool).<sup>449</sup>

In Heidegger’s later work, this whole theme of discourse-language would break the bounds of being considered as just one of Dasein’s fundamental *existentialia*, even the most signal one. Famously, Heidegger would call language ‘the house of Being’ in which the human being dwells,<sup>450</sup> an expression he would recall with affection near the beginning of his later ‘A Dialogue on Language between a Japanese and an Inquirer’ (of which more in the next section).<sup>451</sup>

In *Being and Time*, this consideration of discourse and language carries the discussion of Dasein’s potentiality-for-Being beyond the confines of Dasein’s everydayness (Heidegger’s ostensible main focus at this point). Heidegger straightaway sketches how, possibly, Dasein may ‘hearken’ to discourse while also ‘keeping silent authentically’ in a ‘reticence’ that ‘does away with “idle talk”.’<sup>452</sup> What is more, Heidegger also concludes in this section that ‘[i]n the last resort, philosophical research must resolve to ask what kind of Being goes with language in general.’ In the terminology of *Being and Time*, Heidegger asks: is language really ‘a kind of equipment ready-to-hand within-the-world’ (as the ‘totality of words’ mentioned above) ‘or has it Dasein’s kind of Being, or is it neither of these?’<sup>453</sup> This question, unanswered in *Being and Time*, would occupy

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<sup>449</sup> *Being and Time*, 204.

<sup>450</sup> See Martin Heidegger, ‘Letter on “Humanism”’ [1946] in Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, ed. Wiliam McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 239-276: 254.

<sup>451</sup> See Martin Heidegger, ‘A Dialogue on Language between a Japanese and an Inquirer’ in Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language* [1959], trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper Collins, 1971), 1-54: 22.

<sup>452</sup> *Being and Time*, 207, 208.

<sup>453</sup> *Being and Time*, 209.

much of Heidegger's later thinking.<sup>454</sup>

Despite the possibilities of language, however, the circulating opinions of the “they” are continually at work in its inescapable everydayness ‘tranquilizing’ falling Dasein into believing that ‘one is leading and sustaining a full and genuine “life”.’<sup>455</sup> Learning to compare itself with everything that it sees, and in this way to “understand” everything, Dasein ‘drifts along towards an alienation (*Entfremdung*) in which its ownmost potentiality-for-Being is hidden from it.’<sup>456</sup>

And yet, it remains that this alienation never means that Dasein becomes simply determined by its environment. As Heidegger writes, ‘[t]hrownness is neither a “fact that is finished” nor a Fact that is settled.’<sup>457</sup> For ‘Dasein’s facticity is such that *as long as* it is what it is, Dasein remains in the throw,’ and the ‘existentiality’ of Dasein does not cease.<sup>458</sup> This is to say, for Heidegger, fallen Dasein *remains* the ‘ontically distinctive entity’ that ‘*is* ontologically (*ontologisch*).’<sup>459</sup> For as Heidegger explains, Dasein is not some isolated ‘I’ – a ‘subject’ – which, in becoming alienated, might approximate to the object-hood of a world interpreted (equally *contra* Heidegger) as essentially ‘an Object.’<sup>460</sup> Rather, ‘even in the mode of inauthenticity,’ Dasein still exists in a state of Being-in-the-world that is distinct from the ‘Being-present-at-hand’ of every other entity. As Heidegger concludes: ‘Dasein *can* fall only *because* Being-in-

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<sup>454</sup> In Heidegger’s ‘A Dialogue on Language between an Inquirer and a Japanese’ (*op. cit.*, 42), the ‘Inquirer’ (who is Heidegger) suggests to his Japanese companion that ‘after our dialogue you may want to read section 34 of *Being and Time* [i.e., this section we have been discussing here] more closely.’ The Japanese replies, ‘I have read it many times and each time regretted that you kept it so short.’

<sup>455</sup> *Being and Time*, 222.

<sup>456</sup> *Being and Time*, 222.

<sup>457</sup> *Being and Time*, 223.

<sup>458</sup> *Being and Time*, 223.

<sup>459</sup> *Being and Time*, 32; and see the main text around note 428 above.

<sup>460</sup> *Being and Time*, 223.

the-world understandingly with a state-of-mind is an issue for it.’<sup>461</sup>

But if everyday Dasein is unable to fall except through its wider Being-as-possibility, then correspondingly, neither can authentic Dasein appear independently of its everyday ‘lostness’ (from which Dasein and its possibility cannot be extricated). Heidegger explains that ‘*authentic* existence is not something which floats above falling everydayness; existentially, it is only a modified way in which such everydayness is seized upon.’<sup>462</sup> Heidegger will argue that only in the midst of its everyday lostness may Dasein yet hear the ‘call’ of its ownmost possibility. Such a call of ‘conscience’ resounds silently from and to Dasein, and so across its essential meaning and structure as Being-in-the-world.<sup>463</sup> Heidegger sketches this more fundamental meaning and structure of Dasein under the name of ‘care’ (*Sorge*).<sup>464</sup> According to Heidegger, the ontological-existential structure of ‘care’ informs every mode, mood, involvement and attitude of Dasein.

However, Heidegger then went on to note how the unity and identity of everyday Dasein’s care remains concealed.<sup>465</sup> On the one hand, Dasein is always ‘in-the-world’ and ‘alongside’ things that concern it; on the other hand, Dasein simultaneously exists ‘ahead-of-itself’ as a possibility or potentiality-for-Being contracted to what it-is-not-yet: in ‘projection’ (*Entwurf*) of itself.<sup>466</sup> Within everyday inauthentic Dasein the

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<sup>461</sup> *Being and Time*, 224.

<sup>462</sup> *Being and Time*, 224.

<sup>463</sup> For Heidegger’s introducing of the notion of ‘conscience,’ see *Being and Time*, 313ff.

<sup>464</sup> For Heidegger’s introductory sketch of ‘the structural manifoldness of care,’ as spied first in human future-oriented ‘Being-ahead-of-oneself’ that is also a ‘Being-already-in’-and-‘alongside’ the world and its concerns, see *Being and Time*, 235-241.

<sup>465</sup> *Being and Time*, 241.

<sup>466</sup> See *Being and Time*, 235-241. Regarding Heidegger’s notion of ‘projection,’ Macquarrie and Robinson note that *Entwurf* retains senses of ““throwing” something “off” or “away” from one,” alongside the more familiar English senses of projection as ““designing” or “sketching” some “project”” (*Being and Time*, 185 n. 1). Heidegger will later exploit the former sense of *Entwurf* when he describes

tension implied in these two sides of Dasein resolves itself via a ‘levelling off of Dasein’s possibilities’ and a ‘dimming down of the possible’ within Dasein’s pursuit of the ready-made interpretations offered by the “they.”<sup>467</sup> In such a case, inauthentic Dasein’s ahead-of-itself potentiality-for-Being is diverted into a mere ineffectual ‘wishing’ and ‘hankering after’ possibility.<sup>468</sup>

However, *Being and Time* also sketched Dasein’s alternative existentiell possibility of *authenticity*, which Heidegger supposed reveals Dasein’s decisive unity and identity. Heidegger proposed two essential elements to this authenticity: an awakening of silence and renewed discourse (already sketched), on the one hand, and a further awakening of Dasein’s identity as possibility, on the other.

Authentic Dasein is Dasein that resolves to have a conscience and to hearken to its silent ‘call,’ which is the call of care itself.<sup>469</sup> Conscience presses upon Dasein the ineradicable ontological ‘guilt’ that attaches to its ‘null’ (*nichtig*) existence as a ‘thrown projection.’<sup>470</sup> Authentic Dasein never forgets this. The most salient outcome of the call of conscience is to interrupt the busy chatter of *Gerede*. Conscience calls Dasein away

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Dasein’s projective ‘Being-free for its existentiell possibilities’ as itself ‘null’ (*nichtig*), on the grounds that freedom achieves itself only after some possibility has been chosen and thus consists ‘in tolerating one’s not having chosen the others and one’s not being able to choose them’ (*ibid.*, 331; and see Macquarrie and Robinson, *ibid.*, n. 1). In this way, the nullity of Dasein’s existential projection coincides with the existential nullity of its factual ‘thrownness’ (*ibid.*, 330). As potentiality-for-Being, Heidegger explains, Dasein ‘always stands in one possibility or another: it constantly is *not* other possibilities, and it has waived these in its existentiell projection’ (*ibid.*). Heidegger is determined never to explain Dasein in terms of some underlying positive subjectivity. We might perhaps say here that Dasein throws itself away in its potentiality-for-Being, just as much as it is also thrown away from itself in facticity. However, what I am interpreting here as Dasein’s self-cancellation ‘does not mean that it has the ontical property of “inconsequentiality” or “worthlessness”,’ according to Heidegger, for ‘what we have here is rather something existentially constitutive for the structure of the Being of projection’ (*ibid.*). Ontological nullity, it appears, can fund ontic consequence and worth.

<sup>467</sup> *Being and Time*, 239.

<sup>468</sup> *Being and Time*, 239-40.

<sup>469</sup> See ‘The Character of Conscience as a Call’ and ‘Conscience as the Call of Care’ (*Being and Time*, 317-325).

<sup>470</sup> See note 463 above.

from what “they” already understand and confidently regurgitate, into an existentiell ‘reticence’ able to punctuate (and even perhaps marinade) new truthful discursive possibilities.<sup>471</sup>

At the same time, according to Heidegger, authentic Dasein also ‘anticipates’ and ‘runs ahead’ with its own potentiality-for-Being, which it understands as ‘Being-towards-death.’<sup>472</sup> For, future-oriented Dasein is able to understand its death as its most essential, eventual and individuating possibility (no-one can die my own death for me).<sup>473</sup> Yet the exploratory anticipation of this possibility also presents Dasein with its own vertiginous *impossibility*, for Heidegger observes that Dasein cannot *be* dead. For this reason, Dasein finds its mortal possibility cast upon a limitless (non-) horizon, seeing as its ultimate possibility ‘gives Dasein nothing to be “actualized,” nothing that Dasein, as actual, could itself *be*.’<sup>474</sup> Consequently, Dasein’s possibility can reveal itself only as ““greater and greater” [...] such that it knows no measure at all, no more or less, but signifies the possibility of the measureless impossibility of existence.”<sup>475</sup> In Heidegger’s paradoxical thinking, authentic Dasein seizes upon its own constitutive possibility as *the* possibility that belongs peerlessly to its own impossibility and powerlessness. Put in a more positive-sounding way, Dasein’s mortal possibility ‘offers no support for [...] “picturing” to oneself the actuality which is possible, and so forgetting its possibility’; and as a consequence, the existentiell anticipation of Dasein’s possibility as a Being-towards-death ‘*makes this possibility possible*’ for Dasein, ‘and sets it free as possibility.’<sup>476</sup>

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<sup>471</sup> See *Being and Time*, 342ff.

<sup>472</sup> See *Being and Time*, 304-311.

<sup>473</sup> See *Being and Time*, 284.

<sup>474</sup> *Being and Time*, 307.

<sup>475</sup> *Being and Time*, 307.

<sup>476</sup> *Being and Time*, 307.

To conclude this stage in his presentation, Heidegger then sketched how in Dasein's existentiell authenticity, the anticipation of death works to provoke conscientious resoluteness, within which resoluteness, in turn, mortal anticipation is itself enfolded. Authentic Dasein thus holds itself in an attitude of 'anticipatory resoluteness.'<sup>477</sup>

### I. iii. On the Way to Language

Heidegger's account of existentiell authenticity in *Being and Time* was always oriented towards ontology and philosophical understanding, rather than any immediately practical programme. Existentiell authenticity reveals the Being of Dasein in the full condition of its "there." This revelation of Dasein, in turn, would open the path into a simultaneous deconstruction and retrieval of the philosophical tradition, Heidegger believed. In the self-redemption of authentic Dasein, however, Dasein is in no way saved from its enduring ontological conditions associated with everydayness, such as its falling, guilt and nullity. Neither is it saved from existing in simultaneous truth and untruth, but instead, Heidegger's claim is merely that authentic Dasein is able to hold open its understanding under these conditions.<sup>478</sup> Anticipatory resoluteness 'springs from a sober understanding of what are factually the basic possibilities of Dasein.'<sup>479</sup> The final chapters of *Being and Time* build upon this possibility for authentic (self-) interpretation to explore the temporality inherent to Dasein's existence and

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<sup>477</sup> See *Being and Time*, 349-358.

<sup>478</sup> 'In anticipatory resoluteness, Dasein *holds* itself open for its constant lostness in the irresoluteness of the "they" [...] As a constant possibility of Dasein, irresoluteness is *co-certain*.' Authentic Dasein perceives its own essential '*indefiniteness*': for 'Dasein is equiprimordially in the untruth' (*Being and Time*, 356).

<sup>479</sup> *Being and Time*, 358.

understanding, in its everydayness and in the ‘historicality’ that authenticity embraces.<sup>480</sup>

In this way, Heidegger’s focus in *Being and Time* was on interpreting the meaning of Dasein as a gateway to the meaning of Being, rather than on the existentiell quality of human authenticity for its own sake. Nevertheless, in a brief moment that follows his account of anticipatory resoluteness, Heidegger did venture to report to his readers that ‘the sober anxiety which brings us face to face with our individualized potentiality-for-Being’ brings with it ‘an unshakeable joy in this possibility.’<sup>481</sup> Almost immediately, however, he drew back from analysing any such ‘basic mood,’ citing as his reason ‘the limits which we have drawn for the present Interpretation by aiming towards fundamental ontology.’<sup>482</sup> But even this much seems to allow that *Being and Time*’s ontological conclusions might be linked to a class of correlative (and perhaps corroborative) personal and historical experiences, both in the past and to come. If so – and perhaps it can hardly be otherwise – then much focus will surely turn towards what kinds of personal and political experiences might correlate with this event of ontological disclosure. We know that Heidegger was drawn into Nazi politics in the early 1930s, for example.<sup>483</sup> On the other hand, he also would oppose Sartre’s existentialist theory and rhetoric as being fundamentally at odds with *Being and Time* and his intentions.<sup>484</sup> Questions about the kinds of experiences that authentic Dasein implies are also pressed upon us by the specific difficulty of determining how one should recognise cases of ‘anticipating’ or ‘running ahead’ with one’s own death, in practical and existentiell

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<sup>480</sup> See Division Two, Chapters IV, V and VI of *Being and Time*.

<sup>481</sup> *Being and Time*, 358.

<sup>482</sup> *Being and Time*, 358.

<sup>483</sup> For a discussion of Heidegger’s brief Rectorship of the University of Freiburg in 1933, including his infamous rectoral address in that year, see George Pattison, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to the Later Heidegger* (London: Routledge, 2000), 25-46.

<sup>484</sup> See Heidegger, ‘Letter on “Humanism”’ (1946) in Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 239-276.

terms.

Alternatively, on the other hand, perhaps we should play down Heidegger's seemingly revelatory report, and treat his passing invocation of joy as a rogue note within his impassive ontological 'Interpretation.' But would this be wholly coherent? Dispense with corroboration via exceptional experience, and might not Heidegger's central and defining analysis of 'authentic' Dasein be rather too cut off from hermeneutical facticity and lived experience? Would it reduce towards merely deductive argument? The fore-mentioned analysis of death and possibility provides a signal case in point: there, the singularity of Dasein's potentiality-for-Being appears to be deduced in logical fashion from its mortality. Can Heidegger's ontological account of *existence* really exist independently of some corresponding ontic account of *experience*?<sup>485</sup>

As it happens, *Being and Time* complemented the aspects of its account that might perhaps seem deductive with a presentation of 'care' that stressed a particular quality of ontic experience. Nowhere does the latter impinge more nearly or saliently upon *Being and Time*'s ontological discussion than in that work's analysis of *anxiety*, as the 'basic' existential 'state-of-mind' (*Befindlichkeit*) of Dasein through which Dasein is disclosed to itself as care.<sup>486</sup> Heidegger explains that the *ontological* concept, 'state-of-mind', 'is *ontically* the most familiar and everyday sort of thing; our mood [*Stimmung*], our Being-attuned [*Gestimmtsein*].'<sup>487</sup> And indeed, it is this intimate connection between

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<sup>485</sup> As we will explore in section II below, *Being and Time* rather deprecated discussion of *experience* in favour of his governing discourse concerning Dasein's *existence*. By contrast, Gadamer fashioned his own account of hermeneutic experience in opposition to various prevalent notions of experience.

<sup>486</sup> 'As one of Dasein's possibilities of Being [– i.e., one of Dasein's existential characteristics –], anxiety – together with Dasein itself as disclosed in it – provides the phenomenal basis for explicitly grasping Dasein's primordial totality of being. Dasein's Being reveals itself as *care*' (*Being and Time*, 227). See also section 40 of *Being and Time*, entitled 'The Basic State-of-mind of Anxiety as a Distinctive Way in which Dasein is Disclosed' (*ibid.*, 228-235).

<sup>487</sup> *Being and Time*, 172.

existential *Befindlichkeit* and the latter's more or less authentic manifestations in existentiell *Stimmungen* and *Gestimmtsein* that seeks to ground Heidegger's analytic of Dasein in Dasein's facticity. Above all, it is as Dasein discovers itself constitutionally *anxious* in the face of the uncanniness of its Being-in-the-world, that the wall between experience and existential ontology appears permeable in Heidegger's account. This permeability briefly comes into its own at the point where, as we have seen, Heidegger is prepared to correlate properly appropriated existential anxiety with (strangely enough) existentiell 'unshakeable joy.'<sup>488</sup>

Nevertheless, by focussing its analysis squarely on Dasein's ontological potentiality-for-Being – and, eventually, on Dasein's alleged existentiell possibility of being 'authentic' in the face of factual thrownness – *Being and Time* risked consorting with artificial constructions removed from facticity and corroborative self-evidencing experiences alike. Either way, one may ask, on inner-Heideggerian grounds, quite how phenomenologically and hermeneutically attentive *Being and Time* is itself. According to the work's internal logic, we are presumably intended to credit *Being and Time* as paradigmatically 'authentic' discourse. But is authenticity assured by either argumentative brilliance or declamatory tone? As the Heidegger character ('An Inquirer') remarks to his Japanese companion in Heidegger's later 'A Dialogue on Language,' '[t]he fundamental flaw of the book *Being and Time* is perhaps that I ventured forth too far and too early.'<sup>489</sup>

The Japanese here replies that the same cannot be said of his companion's thoughts on language (about which *Being and Time* offered little more than hints). This is a good

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<sup>488</sup> 'Along with the sober anxiety which brings us face to face with our individualized potentiality-for-Being, there goes an unshakeable joy in this possibility' (*Being and Time*, 358).

<sup>489</sup> Heidegger, 'A Dialogue on Language,' 7.

juncture, therefore, to turn away from *Being and Time* to ‘A Dialogue on Language.’ The Inquirer and the Japanese in this dialogue go on to explore together the nature of language. They acknowledge an extreme distance to be observed between their respective European and East Asian traditions, but the observance of this distance only instils a searching reserve that is presented as being entirely appropriate to the question at hand. At each point, the dialogue partners haltingly and reticently anticipate the possibility that their dialogue on language might be, or become, a genuine one. (Yet: ‘Are we not attempting the impossible?’ asks the Japanese near the end.)<sup>490</sup>

Both participants remain haunted by the ‘danger’ of speaking anything at all on this question. However, eventually, the Japanese trusts himself and the dialogue enough to put forward a Japanese word (“*Koto ba*”) that he believes may hint at the nature of language.<sup>491</sup> Pronouncing this Japanese word, once interpreted, ‘wondrous’ and ‘inexhaustible to our thinking,’ the Inquirer further notes that he himself has long ‘been loath to use the word “language” when thinking on its nature.’<sup>492</sup> Instead, he suggests ‘Saying’ as a name for ‘that essential being which your Japanese word *Koto ba* hints and beckons.’<sup>493</sup> But as regards this ‘mystery of Saying,’ as the Japanese soon corroborates, ‘we are surrounded by the danger’ of either ‘talking too loudly about the mystery’ or else ‘missing its working.’<sup>494</sup> The Inquirer agrees: ‘To guard the purity of the mystery’s wellspring seems to me hardest of all.’<sup>495</sup>

As to the manner of practical approach that the companions require here, the Inquirer

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<sup>490</sup> ‘A Dialogue on Language,’ 53.

<sup>491</sup> The Japanese explains *Koto ba* as ‘the petals’ (*ba*) that stem from ‘the happening of the lightning message of the graciousness that brings forth [...] holding sway over that which needs the shelter of all that flourishes and flowers’ (*Koto*) (‘A Dialogue on Language,’ 47).

<sup>492</sup> ‘A Dialogue on Language,’ 47.

<sup>493</sup> ‘A Dialogue on Language,’ 47.

<sup>494</sup> ‘A Dialogue on Language,’ 50.

<sup>495</sup> ‘A Dialogue on Language,’ 50.

determines that they must seek after a dialogue *of* language that will avoid basically speaking *about* language.<sup>496</sup> Nor will this dialogue be furthered by new presentations of *Being and Time*'s famous 'circle' between interpretation and human existence-as-understanding: such presentations too are 'superficial.'<sup>497</sup> Instead, as the Japanese observes, in this dialogue 'called for from out of language's reality'<sup>498</sup> (that is, out of the mystery of Saying and of *Koto ba*) 'everything would hinge on reaching a corresponding [human] saying of language.'<sup>499</sup> The Inquirer replies: 'Only a dialogue could be such a saying correspondence.'<sup>500</sup>

In this very singular kind of human dialogue, however, silence will predominate. 'Keeping silent [out of] silence' will here say more authentically than any words, and form a 'constant prologue to the authentic dialogue of language.'<sup>501</sup> If such a dialogue were to occur, the companions concur, none 'would find in all this a serviceable clarification of the nature of language.' ('That nature will never be found as long as we demand information in the form of theorems and cue words.')502 Yet, still, the Inquirer expresses his hope that 'many a man could be drawn into the prologue' of such an happening, 'once he keeps himself ready for a dialogue of language.' And indeed, it seems to the Japanese 'as though even we, now, instead of speaking about language,

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<sup>496</sup> *Inquirer*: Speaking about language turns language almost inevitably into an object. *Japanese*: And then its reality vanishes' (A Dialogue on Language,' 50). As the Japanese has observed earlier: 'We Japanese do not think it strange if a dialogue leaves unidentified what is really intended, or even restores it back to the keeping of the undefinable.' His companion agrees that only in allowing for such undefinition does a dialogue 'take care that that undefinable something not only does not slip away, but displays its gathering force ever more luminously' (*ibid.*, 13).

<sup>497</sup> See *Being and Time*, 194-5 for the famous image of the hermeneutical circle (and section I. i., above here). Here in the 'Dialogue,' however, the Heidegger-Inquirer avoids returning to this image to function as a touchstone for thinking: the 'necessary acceptance of the hermeneutic circle does not mean that the notion of the accepted circle gives us an originary experience of the hermeneutic relation [...] and in that respect, that talk of a circle always remains superficial' ('A Dialogue on Language,' 51).

<sup>498</sup> 'A Dialogue on Language,' 51.

<sup>499</sup> 'A Dialogue on Language,' 52.

<sup>500</sup> 'A Dialogue on Language,' 52.

<sup>501</sup> 'A Dialogue on Language,' 53.

<sup>502</sup> 'A Dialogue on Language,' 54.

had tried to take some steps along a course which entrusts itself to the nature of Saying.<sup>503</sup>

Arguably, *Being and Time* remained, despite itself, vestigially in thrall to something like a transcendentalist's dream of casting a meta-interpretative net over Dasein and its world. By comparison, late Heidegger's later thought pursued the hermeneutical issue at the heart of *Being and Time* beyond all attempted definitive accounts of Dasein's existential structures, into a meditation on the endless mystery of language.

## II. Concepts of hermeneutic experience

In this last section to this chapter, I shall turn attention to the concepts of 'experience' entertained in the hermeneutical tradition in the wake of Heidegger, and offer some observations concerning Tracy's self-styled 'empirical' hermeneutical thinking in this connection.

### II. i. Heidegger and Gadamer on 'experience': *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*

In section 10 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger considers how 'the analytic of Dasein is to be distinguished from anthropology, psychology, and biology.'<sup>504</sup> Already before Husserl, Heidegger notes, philosophies of life and personalisms had attempted to recover and retain the distinctive character of human experience as an essential issue

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<sup>503</sup> 'A Dialogue on Language,' 54.

<sup>504</sup> *Being and Time*, 71.

that requires to be thought in the face of the empirical sciences.<sup>505</sup> In this regard, Heidegger proposes to view the work of Wilhelm Dilthey as exemplary in both its value and its inherent limitations. For Heidegger notes how Dilthey organised his thought around ‘the perennial question of “life” [*Leben*],’ both ‘as a whole’ and in terms of its ‘Experiences’ (*Erlebnisse*).<sup>506</sup> In a translators’ note here, Macquarrie and Robinson observe that for Heidegger, ‘[a]n “*Erlebnis*” is not just *any* “experience” (“*Erfahrung*”), but one which we deeply feel and ‘live through.’<sup>507</sup> Heidegger goes on at this point to cite with at least some approval Max Scheler’s contention that a *person* is ‘the *unity* of living-through [*Er-lebens*] which is immediately experienced in and with our Experiences [*Erlebnisse*].’<sup>508</sup>

In actuality, however, *Being and Time* found philosophical analyses of *Erleben* wanting, as their analyses of life failed to grasp the essence of the phenomenon they put in question. To achieve their proper ends, Heidegger suggested, the various analyses of life and personality needed an analysis of personal *Being*, such as would be accomplished within the analytic of *Dasein*.<sup>509</sup> Only this kind of ontological-existential analysis, Heidegger thought, could truly succeed in illuminating the essence of human (ontic) experience. I have argued earlier in this chapter that *Being and Time*’s attempt at having the question about *Existenz* swallow every question about experience resulted in difficulties over quite how Heidegger intended to include or recover the latter within the former.

The irony in Heidegger’s translators comparing the concept of *Erlebnis*-experience

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<sup>505</sup> See *Being and Time*, 72-3.

<sup>506</sup> *Being and Time*, 72.

<sup>507</sup> Translators’ footnote, *Being and Time*, 72 n. 1.

<sup>508</sup> *Being and Time*, 73.

<sup>509</sup> *Being and Time*, 73.

favourably to mere *Erfahrung* is that Heidegger celebrated the former only insofar as this concept pointed towards questions that, even so, it and the philosophy of *Erleben* could not raise properly. In *Being and Time*, at least, Heidegger deprecated ‘experience’ as a merely ontic category in comparison to the ontological categories of Being and existence. Apparently mindful of the obscurities of *Being and Time*’s ontic-ontological opposition, however, Gadamer would complete the irony noted in the previous sentence by developing his own idea of hermeneutic *Erfahrung*, specifically as a counter to modern notions of *Erlebnis*.

Gadamer told how *Erlebnis*-experience emerged as an idea in the nineteenth century, partly in association with the rise of German biography.<sup>510</sup> *Erlebnis*-experience served a notion of personal cultivation (*Bildung*) that one achieves by living through and marshalling experiences (*Erlebnisse*) that expand one’s essential self-awareness.<sup>511</sup> Thus, according to Gadamer, Dilthey conceived human experience as a series of distinct occasions that attain to meaning and unity by way of a cosmic power that resides within subjectivity, which the *Erlebnisse* serve to develop and reiterate. Gadamer consequently viewed the category of *Erlebnis*-experience as, in essence, a flawed attempt to weld the empiricist mindset to elements of Romantic subjectivism and pantheism. As Gadamer wrote: ‘Dilthey’s concept of *Erlebnis* clearly contains two elements, the pantheist and the positivist, the experience (*Erlebnis*) and still more its result [...] This is not an accident, but the result of his own intermediate position between speculation and empiricism.’<sup>512</sup>

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<sup>510</sup> The noun *Erlebnis* arose from the older verb *erleben*, apparently in the second half of the nineteenth century. For an account of this history, see *Truth and Method*, 53-55.

<sup>511</sup> See *Truth and Method*, 56-61.

<sup>512</sup> *Truth and Method*, 56.

Gadamer came to see the concept of *Erlebnis* as emblematic of a whole class of doomed nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century attempts (culminating in Dilthey) to defend human historical and moral existence as an independent object of study, in the face of the power of the natural sciences. The major problem with the human science of *Erlebnis*-experience, as Gadamer saw it, was that it submits itself to the methodical paradigm of the natural sciences from the moment it conceives ‘experiences’ (*Erlebnisse*) for its objects of inquiry. In Gadamer’s view, every attempt to posit these *Erlebnisse* as distinctively *human* objects inevitably invokes some sort of ahistorical cosmic subjectivity supposedly given along with them, and so misrepresents the thoroughly historical nature of human experience.

To illustrate this last point, Gadamer began *Truth and Method* by considering the case of art, which he found presented as an exemplary instance of *Erlebnis* in much of nineteenth century aesthetic theory after Kant. As *Erlebniskunst*, art was understood to perform a priestly role in revealing to us the immediate truth of our individual subjective lives as participations in an infinite whole.<sup>513</sup> In *Erlebniskunst*, furthermore, our subjectivity was thought to become present to us through a symbolic function that fundamentally outstrips all the artwork’s specific historical contents and any related dimensions of allegorical commentary.<sup>514</sup> Against this Romantic reading, Gadamer insisted that the meanings carried by artworks – like those carried by texts or people – lie in their belonging to history and not their imagined transcendence of it. Attempts to tear the significance of art-works away from their historical contexts make for strained and unlikely art-theory. But even more fundamentally, Gadamer thought, they falsify human experience by their appeals to ‘immediacy, to the instantaneous flash of genius,

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<sup>513</sup> *Truth and Method*, 61.

<sup>514</sup> See *Truth and Method*, 62-70.

to the significance of “experiences,”” ahead of ‘the hermeneutic continuity which constitutes our being.’<sup>515</sup>

In opposition to this idea of experience as *Erlebnis*, therefore, Gadamer pursued his own concept of ‘hermeneutic experience’ (*Erfahrung*). *Erfahrung* here names the way in which understanding – as historical and, above all, as *tradition*, for Gadamer – takes place on a plane that is altogether more fundamental than that of all secondary distinctions between objects known or felt and subjects who witness reflectively to their knowledge or feeling of those objects. Hermeneutic *Erfahrung* is the tradition and language that, according to Gadamer, actually bears us along in history: in fact, for Gadamer, this *Erfahrung* constitutes history insofar as history appears for us at all.

As Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall summarise in their Translators’ Introduction to the Continuum edition of *Truth and Method*, for Gadamer ‘*Erlebnis* is something you have, and thus is connected with a subject.’ *Erfahrung*, on the other hand, ‘is something you undergo, so that subjectivity is overcome and drawn into an “event” (*Geschehen*) of meaning.’ *Erfahrung* names the ‘ongoing integrative process in which what we encounter widens our horizon.’<sup>516</sup> *Erfahrung* is thereby ‘the basis in our actual lives’ for our playful immersions in artistic presentation (*Darstellung*) and in the intellectual ‘dialogue of question and answer.’<sup>517</sup> It is by these immersions, according to Gadamer, that we participate in the living presence of artworks, texts and language.

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<sup>515</sup> *Truth and Method*, 83-4. ‘Since we meet the artwork in the world and encounter a world in an individual artwork, the work of art is not some alien universe into which we are magically transported for a time. Rather, we learn to understand ourselves in and through it, and this means that we sublimate (*aufheben*) the discontinuity and atomism of isolated experiences in the continuity of our own existence’ (*ibid.*, 83).

<sup>516</sup> *Truth and Method*, xi-xxiv: xiii-xiv.

<sup>517</sup> ‘Translator’s Preface,’ xiii.

## II. ii. Tracy's account of experience

In some respects, Tracy's account of experience has often looked more Diltheyan than Gadamerian, consistently highlighting a sense of the original radical plurality of experience – its 'buzzing, blooming confusion,' to quote William James<sup>518</sup> – which, nevertheless, language and subjectivity together somehow engage. For a period during the 1970s and '80s, indeed, Tracy reckoned to anchor every meaningful unity of experience in an immediately given unity of subjectivity, according to the latter's analogy to God as cosmic subject.<sup>519</sup> However, as the possibilities and difficulties of discursive tradition came increasingly to dominate Tracy's thought, displacing such Diltheyan echoes, so Tracy moved towards a recognisably hermeneutical account of experience. Although his approach has remained more Jamesian and 'piecemeal'<sup>520</sup> than anything we find in Gadamer, Tracy's thinking came to reflect Gadamer's sense that 'experience' is always predicated upon occasions of historical-linguistic understanding.

And yet Tracy's comparably pluralistic and piecemeal approach needs highlighting. Tracy has consistently tended to think of different bodies of discursive experience and different kinds of experience as being really distinct from each other, in ways that need to be thought. In a recent essay, he finds it a problem, for example, that 'Gadamer unfortunately usually speaks of "the tradition"' rather than of plural "traditions."<sup>521</sup> Furthermore, from his early work forwards, Tracy has also tended to treat the various cognitive, moral, existential and explicitly religious aspects of human lives as

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<sup>518</sup> See notes 523 and 524 below.

<sup>519</sup> See Chapter 2 section II, above.

<sup>520</sup> Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-religious Dialogue* (Louvain: Peeters Uitgeverij, 1991), 31. A good introduction to James's philosophical world-view can be found in William James, *A Pluralistic Universe: Hibbert Lectures at Manchester College on the Present Situation in Philosophy* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909).

<sup>521</sup> 'Western Hermeneutics,' 7.

comprising relevantly distinct fields of experience, even as he has also tended to locate similarities between these in their similar encounters with transcendent-immanent 'limit'-reality.<sup>522</sup>

Characteristically, Tracy has sought to project the plurality of human experiences onto an active hope, fragmentarily rewarded, that a transcendent-immanent power is present on our behalf to fabricate liveable analogies of identity and solidarity for us amid the buzzing, blooming confusion that remains one primary and enduring truth of human experience. Related to this, Tracy has been very much more reluctant than Gadamer to model fully human (linguistic) experience as if its identity as 'historical' rendered it wholly discrete from non-linguistic (animal or infant) experience. Gadamer's idea tends to imply that distinctively human, linguistic, experience proceeds entirely within and according to its own circle of historical tradition, conditioned at most only externally and in wholly general terms by the material processes and happenings that support and inform animal life. In the late 1980s, by contrast, as we have seen, Tracy quoted James's invocation of 'buzzing, blooming confusion' as a description of 'experience itself': that is, the experience that we are always seeking to understand.<sup>523</sup> James himself had employed this expression with specific reference to the human baby's first pre-linguistic impression of the world.<sup>524</sup> With this in mind, it may help interpret Tracy's position to say that, for him, human 'linguistic' and 'non-linguistic' experience

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<sup>522</sup> See the chapter on 'the religious dimension of common human experience and language' in *Blessed Rage* [1975], pp. 91-118, which proposes that common experiences of 'limits-to' human experience lead to disclosures of an encompassing 'limit-of' reality as a 'religious dimension' of experience. See also Tracy's recent essay on hermeneutics, in which he argues that 'experiencing a limit to hermeneutical-dialogical understanding' can 'open dialogue to new nondialogical ways of thinking in the transcendent-immanent realm of the Infinite, the Incomprehensible, the Impassable, and [...] the Impossible' ('Western Hermeneutics,' 1). These latter are Tracy's new expressions for what he once termed the 'religious dimension' of existence.

<sup>523</sup> Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other: the Inter-Religious Dialogue Dialogue* (Louvain: Peeters Uitgeverij, 1991), 28.

<sup>524</sup> William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 462

affect each other internally and at every point, in ways that must always contaminate the competing alleged purities of both Gadamerian linguistic understanding and empiricist explanation alike.<sup>525</sup> For Tracy affirms intelligibility in things and language on neither the sole basis of inexhaustible historical-linguistic ‘spirit’ (as Gadamer), nor the sole basis of a material causal system (as in Humean naturalism).

In effect, I suggest, Tracy has taken as his starting assumption a jointly material and spiritual-linguistic reality of consequently unforeseeable plurality. In the midst of such experience, he has sought plausible philosophical and theological routes for intimating and invoking (or naming) a gracious power for reason – simultaneously ‘person-like’ and yet also disproportionate to us – such as religious people, in particular, tend to experience in distinct and pervasive ways as giving itself to sustain them and the world.<sup>526</sup> Tracy has pursued increasingly pluralizing meditations upon the forms of historical reason that might plausibly be available today, never conceding that the rational, moral and religious subject need be disavowed or wholly dispersed.

The next chapter will examine in greater detail this pluralistic and ‘empirical’ side of Tracy’s hermeneutical thinking.

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<sup>525</sup> In a recently published essay, Tracy writes that the infant human being before language ‘certainly experiences the ocean,’ although she ‘has very little intelligible understanding of that powerful experience.’ Tracy also writes that ‘insofar as we understand reality at all,’ we do so through language (‘Western Hermeneutics,’ 7).

<sup>526</sup> Labelling God ‘person-like,’ Tracy has written recently that the ‘Impossible Real’ named as ‘God’ is also ‘meta-personal: an individual energy-event distinct from but related to the whole that reveals Himself-Herself as origin, sustenance, and end of all reality’ (‘On Longing: The Void, The Open, God,’ eds. Stephan van Erp and Lea Verstricht, *Longing in a Culture of Cynicism* (Zürich & Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2008), 15-32: 29).

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **'The Self' in Tracy's 'Empirical' Hermeneutics**

I'm Anglo-American; so was Lonergan. We're empirical. Yes I do phenomenology, but it is always with this empirical sense.<sup>527</sup>

As we saw in Chapter Three, Tracy's phenomenology in *Plurality* located an event and process of truth-as-'manifestation' (or 'disclosure-concealment-recognition') at the heart of conversation-dialogue, through which distinct things and selves become intimate and permeable to each other by means of a transcendent-immanent cosmic-discursive power.<sup>528</sup>

Tracy's 'empirical' modification of Gadamer helped to protect his theory at that time from two contrasting unwanted consequences of the Heidegger-Gadamer 'short route' to ontological conclusions. First, Tracy distanced himself from Gadamer's ontology of language and tradition which denied first-rank importance to empirical inquiry or to critical-suspicious theory. Second, this concept of disclosure-concealment-recognition carried with it a heightened sense of the empirical subject, and this sense helped to counter any slide into a Heideggerian self-cancelling play of disclosure and concealment that would dissolve the identity of conversation altogether.

Underpinning Tracy's modification of a continental philosophical tradition lay a humanistic notion of 'experience' that had been developed mostly in America. William James, in particular, had helped to forge and defend a 'radical empiricism' that

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<sup>527</sup> Tracy, 'Interview,' ln. 264-5.

<sup>528</sup> See *Plurality*, 28-30, and Chapter 3 sections I and II, above here.

considered itself deeper and richer than British sense-empiricism.<sup>529</sup> However, in this chapter we will review some thinkers who have suspected that James and related American liberal and process traditions have incorporated too many unexamined blandly humanistic (even theistic) assumptions. For all of James's own marked interest in imagination and affect, these philosophies seem to have excluded from the start any suspicion that we might be deluded when we presume our own essentially rational identities as human individuals. In this chapter we will encounter Paul Tillich, Michel Foucault and Richard Rorty each in their various ways recovering the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) to question key assumptions of the American humanist tradition.

In contrast to Tracy, for example, Richard Rorty was developing during the 1980s a linguisticised anti-realist version of the Jamesian tradition. Rorty was happy to reduce our experiences of knowing to ungrounded experiences of linguistic play, with the riches of human experience being more generally reduced to a private good.<sup>530</sup>

The tenor of Tracy's own response to Rorty's proposals in the 1980s is aptly reflected in the title 'Halting the Post-Modern Slide' that Jeffrey Stout gives to his chapter on Tracy in Stout's *Ethics After Babel* (1988).<sup>531</sup> At the same time as attempting to hold lines against Neo-Nietzscheans, Tracy has also been consistently convinced that

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<sup>529</sup> James's 'revisionary notion of experience,' writes Tracy, refused to limit itself merely 'to sense experience (as in British empiricism), but includes feelings, mood, and what Whitehead (here influenced by James) named non-sensuous perception' (Tracy, 'The Question of Criteria for Interreligious Dialogue: On Revisiting William James' in Tracy, *Dialogue With the Other* (Leuven: Peeters Uitgeverij, 1990), 27-47, 36-7). See also William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (Lincoln, Ne.: University of Nebraska Press, 1996).

<sup>530</sup> See Richard Rorty, *Philosophy in the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); also Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and I. ii. below in this chapter.

<sup>531</sup> See Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics after Babel: the Languages of Morals and their Discontents* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988).

Christian theology and thinking requires explicit theological reason in, amongst other things, an empirical-realist register. Even since around 1990 and his abandonment of theism as the ground for theology, Tracy has not looked towards the legacy of positively anti-theistic existentialist idealism for theology, as did Paul Tillich for example. And neither has Tracy been satisfied with Paul Ricoeur's marked Kantian circumspection about transcendental knowledge. Tracy thinks that the religious saying of 'God' needs more robust interpretation and explanation. And for all his deepening engagements with phenomenology, from the 1970s to the present day, Tracy's philosophical, religious and theological commitments have retained an enduringly empirico-realist aspect.

In the case of *Plurality*, what perhaps most stood out – at least for Tracy's critic Gerard Loughlin, as we have seen<sup>532</sup> – was the figure of the rationally and morally aware self, as an apparently unassailable principle that confronts the discursive world. This self appeared to be fundamentally capable of truth and goodness, according to Tracy, confident in its possession of the measure of every kind of question and challenge. In all its experiences, this self is always on its way to really knowing the reality of things.<sup>533</sup>

In part, *Plurality's* stress on the cognitive and religious self is a legacy of Tracy's teacher, Bernard Lonergan, whose influence on him will also be reviewed in this chapter. But as will become apparent, the wholly unassailable self apparently theorized in *Plurality* owed more to the Jamesian tradition than to Lonergan, for whom the dogmatically attested reality of sin inaugurates a genuine crisis in selfhood. My

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<sup>532</sup> See Chapter 4 section I, above.

<sup>533</sup> Here John Dewey can serve as an original example of the pragmatic empirical attitude. According to Dewey, the search for metaphysics-like levels of knowledge fit to secure general human understanding and to guide human conduct 'is a *practical* exercise, made possible by [empirical] knowledge of the recurrent and stable, of facts and laws' (*Experience and Nature*, xi).

argument here will be that Tracy's current ethical emphasis on 'approaching the self through the other'<sup>534</sup> in fact reincorporates more of that Lonerganian approach. The sinful and closed-off self has become, for Tracy today, an absurd, imprisoned and distorting perspective upon the world: a less-than-self that keeps needing to be shattered so that something better can come to be.

A key question that Loughlin posed to *Plurality* was 'what is this "self" and where does it come from?'<sup>535</sup> This chapter will explore the force in this question, and its relation to the continuing but shifting 'empirical' and pluralistic aspects of Tracy's thinking. For one key challenge for Tracy in the past and now has been how to think rigorously and theologically while still honouring human experiential plurality. In a recent interview, Tracy himself does not hesitate to associate this concern with a characteristically American outlook:

I am American [...] Unlike Europeans, I am much more likely, after William James, to want to allow greater variety and to celebrate plurality. How can you be American and not be for plurality?<sup>536</sup>

## **I. A Jamesian amongst the Nietzscheans**

### **I. i. Relating William James to the hermeneutical self**

In the late 1980s, Tracy turned to William James to enrich his hermeneutical theory

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<sup>534</sup> Tracy, 'Interview,' ln. 318-9.

<sup>535</sup> Loughlin, 'Review: *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope*,' 485; and see Chapter 4 section II, above.

<sup>536</sup> Tracy, 'Interviewed by Christian Sheppard – God: the Possible/Impossible' in John Panteleimon Manoussakis, ed., *After God: Richard Kearney and the Religious Turn in Continental Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 351

further. In an echo of what James called his ‘piecemeal supernaturalism’ in interpreting religious experience, Tracy proposed that his own thinking amounted to a ‘piecemeal interpretation’ of the truth of religion and, hence also, experience in general.<sup>537</sup>

Tracy’s adaptation of James focused on three criteria for the rigorous interpretation and evaluation of religious experience which James articulated in his *The Varieties of Religious Experience*: namely, ‘immediate luminousness,’ ‘philosophical reasonableness’ and ‘moral helpfulness.’<sup>538</sup> ‘Immediate luminousness’ suggested to Tracy his own concept of truth as beginning in the manifestation of what James himself had called ‘suggestive possibility’;<sup>539</sup> ‘philosophical reasonableness’ meanwhile suggested to Tracy his sense that these illumined possibilities must be measured against the other things one has good reason to think one knows,<sup>540</sup> and, finally, Jamesian ‘moral helpfulness’ suggested to Tracy his own requirement that one should argue and evidence the ethical and political value of one’s proposed interpretations of the truths of things.<sup>541</sup>

These criteria, Tracy noted, were formulated for the ‘outsider’ interpretation and evaluation of religious experiences. But Tracy noted that James also elsewhere defended the reasonableness and morality of ‘insider’ perspectives and convictions of religious believers themselves.<sup>542</sup> In a controversial essay, *The Will to Believe*, James had defended the rationality of religious belief on the grounds that the believer

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<sup>537</sup> *Dialogue*, 31.

<sup>538</sup> ‘An Uneasy Alliance Reconciled: Catholic Theological Method, Modernity, and Postmodernity,’ *Theological Studies* 50 (1989), 548-570: 560f.; and the chapter, ‘The Question of Criteria for Interreligious Dialogue: On Revisiting William James’ in *Dialogue With the Other* (Leuven: Peeters Uitgeverij, 1990), 27-47: 37ff. See William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: The New American Library of World Literature, 1958), 32.

<sup>539</sup> *Dialogue*, 40ff.

<sup>540</sup> *Dialogue* 44ff.

<sup>541</sup> *Dialogue* 46-7.

<sup>542</sup> *Dialogue*, 35f.

encounters a ‘live’ religious option experienced as possessing a power to ‘force’ her into ‘momentous’ personal decisions to either accept or reject it.<sup>543</sup> The burden of James’s argument was that even if a believer is unable to provide overwhelming rational evidence to others, her belief need not be therefore judged either foolish or immoral.

Thus James propounded an individual’s moral and intellectual licence to believe religion on the basis of irreducible personal experience. Tracy seems happy to echo this licence with a certain caution, for he records the prominent complaint of James’s critics – ‘from Royce to Russell, and even frustrated allies like Pierce’ – that James underplayed the requirement for the believer to show how her beliefs cohere with other everyday warranted beliefs that she shares (or ought to share) with her peers.<sup>544</sup> Even so, argued Tracy, the Jamesian expanded notion of experience invited thought about more than simply the individual, in this way opening itself upon these questions. For, once ‘experience’ has ceased to be reducible to the senses, one is forced to think about ‘experiences of relationships; the relation of self with itself, others, and with the whole.’<sup>545</sup> In Whiteheadian hands, in particular, this expansion would become the basis for a return to cosmology, to metaphysics, even philosophical theology (as especially in Hartshorne). It was in a time of metaphysical reticence, however, that Tracy made a renewed return to James for help in articulating the kind of piecemeal interpretative reason for which Tracy still hoped in the face of our ‘buzzing, blooming confusion’ of experience.

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<sup>543</sup> *Dialogue*, 35-6; see William James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983). James later conceded that his essay might have attracted fewer charges of irrationalism had it been titled more accurately, ‘The Right to Believe’ (*Dialogue*, 35).

<sup>544</sup> *Dialogue*, 37.

<sup>545</sup> *Dialogue*, 37.

I. ii. NeoNietzschean disbelief: Richard Rorty

Tracy's re-appropriations of William James at the end of the 1980s have much to commend them in their openness to the plurality of human experiences. But their flaw might seem to be Tracy's presumption that the rationally and morally conscious human individual is everywhere a primary meaning and referent of these experiences. Why should we not imagine instead, with Nietzsche, that confusions and profusions of experience overwhelm the supposedly 'rational' and 'moral' human self of metaphysical fantasy?

In other words, if we are to inherit James today, it might be that we should give fuller Nietzschean reign to James's high valuation of personal experience. With Richard Rorty, perhaps, we ought not to be seeking a rational self to determine the 'truth' of things, so much as celebrating instead an ironised and purely private enjoyment of human self-experience as the very highest human good. Could it be that this is just the good that needs to be defended *against* all normalizing authoritarianisms that try to prescribe this or that public 'truth' about what it is to be human?

Rorty accepted wholeheartedly the Jamesian tethering of philosophy to subjective experience, but in this experience he found neither meaning nor truth, nor objective norms nor criteria. In truth's dangerous and delusory stead, Rorty proposed to cultivate a discourse of public liberality and justice devoted to promoting and maintaining for all people that meaningless but rich and happy sphere of the language-user's private enthusiasms.<sup>546</sup> According to Rorty, it was the job of public liberality to defend this

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<sup>546</sup> See Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), *passim*.

good for everyone equally, while maintaining a resolutely ironising attitude towards all the particular contents and enthusiasms of people's experience. Thus Rorty embraced the utter contingency and non-universality (non-'truth') of all our words and existential commitments, save alone the public ethic that pronounces a consistent 'yes' to those private worlds. Registering language as, in effect, an encompassing surd that informs our experience, Rorty turned the cultural empiricism (or empirical humanism) of classical American pragmatists such as Dewey and James into an equally anti-positivistic empiricism of *language*. For Rorty, language was the mirror of human experience in which the Nietzschean void makes itself manifest.

Rorty commended keeping one's public liberality insulated from one's private enthusiasms and commitments, which latter one should learn to treat with irony for their own (and everyone's) good. By strong contrast, back in *Imagination*, Tracy had railed against the privatization of art and religion as a great sickness within modern culture and politics. Rorty, we might say, proposed a general privatization of meaning as the very constitution of a healthy public liberality. When religion crops up, furthermore, the liberal Rorty proposed simply to 'change the subject.'<sup>547</sup> This latter tack of Rorty's invited a caustic response from Tracy, who suggested that Rorty was 'here an elegant spokesperson for the leisured classes,' one filled with 'the complacency of modern empiricist culture' in which the 'only form of resistance is to change the subject.'<sup>548</sup> And as the subject is changed, Tracy continued, 'an already-embattled human subject' is only 'further impoverished,' ready all the more to submit to 'the unrelenting enforcers of more of the same' amidst 'yet another superfluous vote in the endless plebiscite' of

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<sup>547</sup> See Rorty, *Philosophy in the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 266-67.

<sup>548</sup> *Plurality*, 85.

contemporary electoral politics.<sup>549</sup>

I. iii. Older Nietzschean disbelief: Paul Tillich

Rorty sought to expose American traditions of humanistic empiricism to a more radical logic. In this regard, Paul Tillich's critique of the American tradition in *The Courage to Be* (1952) also proves uncannily prescient. For Tillich suggested there that the American empirical tradition only saved itself from the incipiently Nietzschean logic secreted within its empirical-naturalistic accounts of culture and value because of a peculiarly American 'happy inconsistency,' through which it avoided the 'self-destruction' prevalent in European naturalistic philosophies.<sup>550</sup> What Tillich had in mind probably applied also to Whitehead (and Tillich elsewhere offered criticism of process theology on more strictly theological grounds),<sup>551</sup> but he directed his critique here more immediately against the 'empirical naturalism' of the American philosopher John Dewey (1859-1952), who belongs with James within the family of American humanistic empiricism.

Dewey had sought to affirm intelligible continuity between the process of nature and human experience, teaching that 'the foundation for value and the striving to realize it is found in nature.'<sup>552</sup> For his part, Tracy's own empirical emphasis has never quite made *this* claim, or, at least, he has never made it without interpreting 'nature' much more broadly (that is, via a mix of transcendental-religious (Lonergan), personal-

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<sup>549</sup> *Plurality*, 111.

<sup>550</sup> Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (London: Collins, 1962), 121

<sup>551</sup> See Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall, eds., *The Theology of Paul Tillich* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 339-340.

<sup>552</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, xi-xii (Preface to the 2nd edition).

cosmological (Whitehead) and linguistic-ontological (Heidegger-Gadamer) analyses). Tillich, meanwhile, associated the general ‘inconsistency’ in American empiricism with an optimistic and conformist ‘courage to be as a part of the productive process,’ which he perceived as pervading American culture and to which he contrasted the European existentialist ‘courage to be as oneself’.<sup>553</sup>

The pragmatist philosophers are not always aware of the fact that courage to create implies the courage to replace the old by the new – the new for which there are no norms and criteria [...] They do not realize that pragmatism in its logical consequences (if not restricted by Christian or humanistic conformity) leads to that courage to be as oneself which is proclaimed by the radical Existentialists.<sup>554</sup>

Tillich’s observations anticipate Rorty’s later post-modern announcement of the Nietzschean consequences of American humanistic empiricism.<sup>555</sup>

It is easy to see how America, as a country founded upon extraordinary and potent ideals regarding individuals’ political rights and liberties, might find those political ideals entering also its traditions of moral philosophy and epistemology. Perhaps it has been inevitable for the United States to engender the idea that individuals command personal territories over which they possess not merely political rights but also inviolable moral and intellectual rights. And where else would such rights function more potently than in religion, that most personal of realms? In the land of the theologian George Lindbeck<sup>556</sup> and the anti-theologian Richard Rorty, the prestige of

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<sup>553</sup> See the sections entitled ‘Courage and Participation (The Courage to be as a Part),’ 89-113, and ‘Courage and Individualization (The Courage to Be as Oneself),’ 114ff. in *The Courage to Be*.

<sup>554</sup> Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 120.

<sup>555</sup> As it happens, Rorty’s post-modern pragmatism also proposes a certain optimism through liberal conformity (‘nihilism with a happy ending,’ someone has quipped), which is perhaps partly reminiscent of what Tillich saw as the genius of American pragmatism.

<sup>556</sup> For Tracy’s controversy with this proponent of a relativising confessionalism in religious thinking, see Tracy, ‘Lindbeck’s New Program for Theology: a Reflection’ (*Thomist* 49/3 (1985), 460-472: 464. For

the sectarian and the private runs high.

Back in *Imagination*, Tracy waged a theological polemic against what he perceived as his society's widespread removal of religious existence onto private sectarian and/or personal-sentimental 'reservations of the spirit.'<sup>557</sup> The full 'publicness' that Tracy went on to insist was needed in religious thinking was partly his way of formulating his Catholic orientation towards the whole creation, for which faith and revelation are the perfecting of universal reason. However, Tracy's call was also spoken very much into a particular national-cultural milieu in which professedly private or separatist religion claims uncommon practical and theoretical plausibility.

#### I. iv. More neoNietzschean disbelief: Michel Foucault's scorn

According to Michel Foucault, on the other hand, the phenomenological tradition has been a dead loss, an incoherent and self-deceiving melding of empiricism and idealism given to mistaking itself for an analysis somehow more primordial than its confused ingredients. In *The Order of Things (Les Mots et les Choses, 1966)*, Foucault depicted phenomenology as standing in the line of modern philosophy's illusory attempts to abstract transcendental doctrines of 'Man' from historically passing contingent structures arisen to organize experience. Its confused and ultimately fraudulent mix of empiricism and idealism gives rise, Foucault said, to that 'empirico-transcendental reduplication' whereby empirical inquiry into human living and thinking kids itself into

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Tracy's critical engagement with Hans Frei, the original theologian inspiring the so-called 'Yale School' of theology from the 1970s onwards (of which Lindbeck was a pupil), see Chapter 7 section I, below, in this thesis.

<sup>557</sup> See *Imagination*, 12-13; the phrase recalls the experience of reservations for Native Americans in the United States.

pronouncing transcendental results.<sup>558</sup>

According to Foucault, a slumbering modern philosophy of ‘Man’ has continually secured itself since Kant by a kind of thinking in which ‘what is given in experience and what renders experience possible correspond to each other in an endless oscillation.’<sup>559</sup> When this oscillation is encouraged, Foucault claimed, some ‘pre-critical analysis of what man is in his essence’ – perhaps, here, Tracy’s notion of human rational selfhood – is always made ‘the analytic of everything that can, in general, be presented to man’s experience.’<sup>560</sup> This pre-critical ‘what man is’ is then made the analytic of what ‘man’ may experience. Of course, such a procedure is only as strong as its concealed premises, which is Foucault’s point.

Having emphasised the philosophical-anthropological grounding of his theology in various ways ever since *Blessed Rage*, Tracy would seem a prime object of Foucault’s scathing pen. For Foucault derided the philosophical interpretation of Man ‘that has governed and controlled the path of philosophical thought from Kant until our own day.’ He saw this edifice now ‘disintegrating before our eyes, since we are beginning to recognize and denounce in it, in a critical mode, both a forgetfulness of the opening that made it possible and a stubborn obstacle standing obstinately in the way of an immanent new form of thought.’<sup>561</sup> Foucault expresses his scorn of those who try to cling to such thinking:

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<sup>558</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London & New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), 366

<sup>559</sup> *The Order of Things*, 366. According to modern philosophy as Anthropology, ‘[a]ll empirical knowledge, provided it concerns man, can serve as a possible philosophical field in which the foundation of knowledge, the definition of its limits, and, in the end, the truth of all truth must be discoverable’ (*ibid.*, 372).

<sup>560</sup> *The Order of Things*, 372.

<sup>561</sup> *The Order of Things*, 373.

To all those who still wish to talk about man, about his reign or his liberation, to all those who still ask themselves questions about what man is in his essence, to all who wish to take him as their starting-point in their attempts to reach the truth, to all who, on the other hand, refer all knowledge back to the truths of man himself, to all those who refuse to formalize without anthropologizing, who refuse to mythologize without demystifying, who refuse to think without immediately thinking that it is man who is thinking, to all these warped and twisted forms of reflection we can answer only with a philosophical laugh – which means, to a certain extent, a silent one.<sup>562</sup>

My recourse to Foucault as a critic of Tracy here is indebted to Alan Ray, who has argued penetratingly that Tracy's *Blessed Rage*, in particular, was an egregious theological variant of the very modern anthropologizing that Foucault spied disintegrating before him.<sup>563</sup> In particular, Ray criticised *Blessed Rage* in Foucaultian terms for a theological 'positivism' that founded theological discourse upon some supposed original 'manifestation' of God's reality in human experience and reflection as such, at the very same time as theism is also supposed to be revealed as the object of that theology's transcendental argument.<sup>564</sup> By this cunning circularity, according to Ray, the phenomenological analysis of common human experience in *Blessed Rage* covered over the logical fault-line that remains between particular (allegedly self-authenticating) experiences, on the one hand, and transcendental argument concerning experience-as-such, on the other.

Ray noted that by the early 1980's, however, Tracy was no longer certain that actual experience and transcendental argument must coincide so easily. In particular, Tracy

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<sup>562</sup> *The Order of Things*, 373.

<sup>563</sup> S. Alan Ray, *The Modern Soul: Michel Foucault and the Theological Discourse of Gordon Kaufman and David Tracy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987). Ray compares Tracy's early theological work unfavourably with Gordon Kaufman on Foucaultian grounds.

<sup>564</sup> Ray, *The Modern Soul*, 142. Foucault describes philosophical anthropological positivism thus: 'this [allegedly] true discourse finds its foundation and model in the empirical truth whose genesis in nature and history it retraces, so that one has an analysis of the positivist type (the truth of the object determines the truth of the discourse that describes its formation)' (Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 349).

was admitting that ‘negative’ limit-experiences – such as anxiety, injustice, sickness, or facing death – might not necessarily manifest the encompassing religious limit-horizon of human authenticity which *Blessed Rage* had claimed manifest itself in all our limit-situations.<sup>565</sup> With this admission, Tracy at this point became ‘hermeneutical’ and turned his thinking instead towards what *could* be, towards what remains *possible* on the other side of our real experiences of negativity. But for Ray this only had Tracy playing into the hands of further Foucaultian critique, for then it came to be that ‘the truth of [Tracy’s] discourse is gradually established in the course of an *eschatological* “theological journey” towards its object.’<sup>566</sup> In Foucault’s own terms on this point, ‘eschatological discourse’ is that discourse which ‘anticipates the truth whose nature and history it defines; it sketches it out in advance and foments it from a distance.’<sup>567</sup> In what Foucault himself called ‘eschatological discourse,’ therefore, objective truth proceeds ‘from man’s discourse,’ in what is only *seeming* tension with the directly ‘positivist’ discourse of Man which proceeds on the basis of some prior supposedly empirical grasp of itself. Behind all Tracy’s concessions to deferral, suspicion and critique through the 1980’s, therefore, argued Ray, ‘Man’ still sat enthroned in Tracy’s theological anthropology.

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<sup>565</sup> Ray, *The Modern Soul*, 133. In *Blessed Rage*, 106-108, Tracy focused on anxiety, as analysed by Heidegger as the fear of No-thing, as the authentic element experienced in negative limit-situations. The recognition that we are ‘grounded or horizoned by no other thing in the universe, but rather by No-thing’ leads thinking quite properly into a search for adequate symbols, metaphors, and myths, according to Tracy, ‘to express that literally unspoken, and perhaps unspeakable, final dimension to the end of our lives.’ For Tracy, this means ‘a reality, however named and in whatever manner experienced, which functions as a final, now gracious, now frightening, now trustworthy, now absurd, always uncontrollable limit-of the very meaning of existence itself.’ (*ibid.*, 107-108). In an article published in 1981, Tracy announced his change of mind: ‘I no longer believe that the “route” of the negative realities (anxiety, responsible guilt, death, illness, bereavement, alienation and oppression) is correctly described as an alternative route [to the experience of fundamental trust] to the questions of religion and God’ (Tracy, ‘Defending the Public Character of Theology,’ (*Christian Century* 98 (1981), 350-356: 355).

<sup>566</sup> *The Modern Soul*, 141. ‘Tracy sees the authentic self progressively clarifying its unthought, representing its transcendental foundations, and, through transformative praxis, advancing toward the day when the self’s origin, present now as the world in front of classic texts and “glimpsed” in limit situations, will be the world of everyday experience’ (*ibid.*, 142).

<sup>567</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 349.

Indeed, Tracy's 'eschatological' model in *Imagination* can also be interpreted in explicitly theological terms. *Imagination* theorised an incarnational presence everywhere available to human culture in general, which defines the nature and history of truth and 'sketch[es] its history in advance,' 'fomenting it from a distance,' as Foucault put it. An 'always-already' live tradition and panentheistic process formed a backdrop in *Imagination* for all the interruptive "not yet" pronounced on human tradition by critical theory and sundry hermeneutics of suspicion. In explicitly Christian terms made paradigmatic in *Imagination*, the ever-renewed universal interpretative 'event of Christ' is always there first to play generous host to the particular interruptive 'dangerous memory of Jesus' – rather than ever the other way round.<sup>568</sup>

As Ray's study was published around the same time as *Plurality*, he had no opportunity in that work to assess whether Tracy there overcame these Foucaultian objections. It might seem that there is something similarly 'eschatological' in the way that *Plurality* outlines radical pluralities and ambiguities located in 'language' and 'history' as 'interruptions' *within* dialogue, in spite of which epistemic conversation still remains possible. And a Foucaultian might suspect, furthermore, that *Plurality*'s concept of 'religion,' as undergirding and justifying 'resistance and hope,' is just one more way in which Tracy 'secured in advance' the truth of human dialogic tradition, just one more way of 'fomenting truth' from an eschatological future of 'Man.'<sup>569</sup>

Yet perhaps – and Tracy himself certainly believes this – the early Foucault's contempt

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<sup>568</sup> See *Imagination*, esp. 275-281.

<sup>569</sup> Tracy himself has written since, in an essay published in 1999, of the need to disrupt 'the continuities, the similarities, the communalities of modern 'religion,' amidst a return instead to a new language of 'revelation' as 'the gift-event of the Other's self-manifestation' (Tracy, 'Trinitarian Speculation and the Forms of Divine Disclosure' in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall and Gerard O'Collins, eds., *Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 273-293: 277).

was overdone. Foucault's blanket attacks upon all searching questioning about what it is to be a humanly thinking being threw out the baby with the bath water. And it is with this thought in mind that we can perhaps return to *Blessed Rage* and, in particular, to Tracy's 1995 Preface to that work. In this Preface, written over twenty years after the original text itself, we find Tracy directing the reader to the work's epigraph, the poem 'The Idea of Order at Key West' by Wallace Stevens. For in the end, Tracy's purposes are rather better served by poetic intimation than by the harder forms of transcendental argument that he has sometimes employed.

The first stanza of 'The Idea of Order at Key West' relates, as if in a reverie, an experience of finding order where none was obvious:

Ramon Fernandez, tell me, if you know,  
Why, when the singing ended and we turned  
Towards the town, Tell me why the glassy lights,  
The lights in the fishing boats at anchor there,  
As the night descended, tilting in the air,  
Mastered the night and portioned out the sea,  
Fixing emblazoned zones and fiery poles,  
Arranging, deepening, enchanting night.<sup>570</sup>

In the second and final stanza, this human compulsion to find intelligible order appears to intimate some general 'blessed rage for order' ordering 'words of the sea':

Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,  
The maker's rage to order words of the sea,  
Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,  
And of ourselves and of our origins,  
In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds.

Piling sub-clauses upon each other in parataxis, in an effect of entranced wonder, the

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<sup>570</sup> Wallace Stevens, 'The Idea of Order at Key West' (*Blessed Rage*, epigraph)

poem suggest that perhaps these ‘words’ ordered ‘of the sea’ – which are at once ‘ghostlier demarcations’ and yet, for all that, ‘*keener* sounds’ – may actually concern our human selves and origins. In his 1995 Preface, Tracy repeated his hope that new and returning readers to *Blessed Rage* may likewise recognise in the work some similar words of themselves.<sup>571</sup>

The early Foucault’s blanket scorn would no doubt have extended also to this poem by Wallace Stevens. In 1995 Tracy was still hoping that readers might find in *Blessed Rage* ‘tentative orders’ arising within what he termed (after Lonergan) reason’s own ‘self-correcting power.’ Since that time, however, this supposed power has become at least a bit more complicated for Tracy, insofar as he has found the human hope for reason to depend ultimately not so much upon some inalienable human dialogic self-possibility, as upon transcendent-immanent events of an ‘Impossible Real.’<sup>572</sup> Today Tracy stresses an advent of the Impossible at and beyond the limit of dialogue, perhaps deflecting suspicions that he relies too much on an unassailable rationally reflective experiential subject. As I mentioned at the beginning of Chapter One, Tracy tends today to imagine an ecology of humane reason that consists in more than ‘dialogue’ on its own. Proposing that we place alongside each other the various ‘dialogical,’ ‘dialectical-rhetorical,’ ‘social-critical’ and ‘contemplative-meditative’ ‘forms of reason.’<sup>573</sup> Alongside these complications, Tracy’s emphasis on the significance of the Infinite and, especially, the Impossible in human thinking might be seen as wresting the ‘self-correcting power of reason’ away from being supposed to be the inalienable possession

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<sup>571</sup> *Blessed Rage*, xvi.

<sup>572</sup> Tracy, ‘Western Hermeneutics and Inter-Religious Dialogue,’ 19. For discussion of whether or not, or how, Tracy still extols (or should extol) the ‘self-correcting power of reason,’ see Chapter 7 section VI, below.

<sup>573</sup> Tracy, ‘The Necessity and Character of Fundamental Theology,’ unpublished lecture presented at Loyola University, Chicago, Friday April 8, 2011.

of an inalienable ‘self’ which belongs in each instance to ‘Man.’

Even so, just as in the mid-Seventies, Tracy’s thinking still wishes to relate itself to a general nature of common human experience, as illumined by specifically Christian experience. Only, today Tracy would maintain such thinking more explicitly within a tentative and ‘open’ region – rather closer to what Heidegger wished – rather than continue to provide categorical religious-as-metaphysical answers to questions about what human beings have in common. Foucault’s challenge demands at least something like this, and Stevens’s poem also prefers to inhabit such a region.

As Tracy has said about Foucault: ‘[A]t the end, he started to rethink the self and the care of the self. He didn’t become hermeneutical, but he certainly no longer believed that there was no such thing as a self.’ Tracy continues that he admires Foucault, but does not find it ‘overwhelmingly the case that one had to abandon all hope of hermeneutics – or phenomenology, which [Foucault] disliked even more.’<sup>574</sup>

#### I. v. With and beyond William James

Tracy has consistently sought to project a theological rhetoric and reason that would not falsely prejudge the plurality of human experience. In this, William James continues to be an inspiration for Tracy, even if Tracy has never followed James into a positively pluralistic metaphysics.<sup>575</sup>

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<sup>574</sup> Tracy, ‘Interview,’ ln. 370-372.

<sup>575</sup> For a sense of James’s positively pluralistic cosmology and metaphysics see James’s publication of his 1901-2 Hibbert Lectures: *A Pluralistic Universe: Hibbert Lectures at Manchester College on the Present Situation in Philosophy* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909).

During much of the 1980s, Tracy also sought to incorporate into his thinking Nietzschean-inspired criticisms of the phenomenological and empirical-humanist traditions – from Derrida, Foucault and (sometimes more impatiently, as we have seen) Rorty. Tracy’s approach to neoNietzscheanism was characterised by Jeffrey Stout with some justification as an attempt to ‘halt the post-modern slide.’ Since around 1990, however, Tracy has sought to give up aspects of this strategy and the American humanist tradition that possibly owe more to unthinking modern self-certainties than to positive experiences of human life and religious faith.

In a significant essay published in 1994, furthermore, Tracy announced himself particularly troubled at the seeming political impotence of the American empirical-humanist tradition to challenge a ‘new positivist technological culture’ that Tracy saw reigning around him. He wrote of how ‘modernity did not expect and could not anticipate that even reason might one day yield its communicative, emancipatory role to a merely technical reason in a culture increasingly dominated by techno-economic concerns.’ Today, Tracy continued, ‘our life-worlds, in all their rich difference [are] increasingly colonized by the forces of a techno-economic social system that does not hesitate to use its power to level all memory, all resistance, all difference, and all hope.’<sup>576</sup> Tracy’s response was not to lessen his hope for constructive reason and concomitant human selfhood, however, but rather to insist on the need for models of rationality and subjectivity more truly reflective of ‘historical subjects with memory, hope and resistance.’<sup>577</sup> In part, this simply repeated his argument in *Plurality*, only now with a greater emphasis on the fragility and necessity of ‘memory.’ Nevertheless, this 1994 essay also reflects Tracy’s newfound sense of limitations inherent in retrieving

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<sup>576</sup> Tracy, ‘Literary Theory and Return of the Forms for Naming and Thinking God in Theology,’ *Journal of Religion*, 74/3 (1994), 302-319, 304.

<sup>577</sup> Tracy, ‘Literary Theory,’ 305.

James as a guide to empirical-hermeneutical reason.

As the preceding chapter noted, Tracy ceased after around 1990 to distinguish as fundamentally as he had in *Plurality* between the ‘task’ of theological understanding on the one hand and the ‘gift’ of religious faith on the other.<sup>578</sup> He has become more explicit that unpredictable newness is the ongoing condition of any genuinely human possibility whatsoever. This new emphasis has allowed him better to live with the dilemmas of theology and plurality, allowing him not to need to resolve finally upon one or the other. At the same time, in more explicitly theological register, Tracy has also been exploring the convergent apophatic (incomprehensible God) and apocalyptic (hidden God) dimensions of theological tradition, thereby emphasising a route of lived faith which, while it continues to relate God to Reality, maintains an impassioned distance from positivistic or objectivising theistic propositions.

However, there is also one other particularly significant influence on Tracy who has received little attention in our discussion so far. The Canadian Jesuit Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984) was Tracy’s teacher in Rome in the mid-1960s and was the subject of Tracy’s doctorate at that time. Lonergan was also the subject of Tracy’s first book-length publication in 1970. It is to Lonergan that we will now turn in the second section of this chapter, in order to fill out another side of Tracy’s ‘empirical’ inheritance.<sup>579</sup>

Although Tracy has not generally resorted to Lonergan’s precise and highly individual

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<sup>578</sup> See *Plurality*, 140 n. 49.

<sup>579</sup> Tracy, *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970). In the same year, Tracy was one of three directors of an ‘International Lonergan Congress’ held in Florida to bring a host of scholars together to discuss Lonergan’s work to date. Tracy himself gave a paper at the Congress which was critical of his mentor’s ‘dogmatic’ founding of theological task (Tracy, ‘Lonergan’s Foundational Theology: An Interpretation and Critique’ in Philip McShane, ed., *Foundations of Theology: Papers from the International Lonergan Congress, 1970* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1971), 197-222). (As well as the volume of papers in which Tracy’s essay appeared, McShane also edited a further, second volume of papers from the Congress, which appeared two years later: *Language, Truth and Meaning: Papers from the Lonergan Congress, 1970* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd., 1972).)

angle of approach and terminology, preferring instead to forge own distinct paths in theology and thinking, still Tracy commends Lonergan in all of his major books to date and footnotes reveal Tracy's ongoing conversation with his mentor.<sup>580</sup>

Lonergan's remarkable constructive work in philosophy and philosophical theology articulated a 'general empirical method' for human knowledge of a world of manifold experiences, and for human decision on how to act within that world. This 'method' took its force from Lonergan's conviction that the reality of things becomes progressively illuminated and self-evident to the 'authentic' human subject, who thinks and lives from her truest intellectual and emotional interiority. Lonergan proposed a basic phenomenology and attendant 'method' of human embodied awareness, on the basis of what he took to be our self-evident dynamic capacities to inquire into the universe while also falling into gifted love with that universe, with others and with God.

## **II. The self-evidence of experience according to Bernard Lonergan**

This section will serve first to introduce the core elements of Lonergan's theological philosophy in its own right. Second, it will also prepare us to recognise ways in which Tracy has departed from his mentor, as well as at least one significant way in which Tracy's trajectory since 1990 has effectively returned to a Lonerganian theme he used to neglect.

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<sup>580</sup> Tracy says he is 'very happy to be able to have a section of [my new] book in which [Lonergan] is so much a part, because a lot of people think I've just abandoned him, which I haven't' (Tracy, 'Interview,' ln. 186-8).

## II. i. *Insight*: Cognitive method, world order and God

Bernard Lonergan believed he could characterise human consciousness and intentionality, so as to critically locate human endeavour within an empirical-realist and theological horizon. He held that people are fundamentally equipped to interpret their experiences within an intelligible reality that fundamentally reflects their experience of being intelligent.

In his initial monumental study published in 1957, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, Lonergan took a stand on the human individual's constitutional unrestricted 'desire to know,' which Lonergan found coincident with empirically evident native human powers for intelligent 'insight' into sensible experience.<sup>581</sup> Lonergan believed that the manifest power of human intellectual insight in everyday, mathematical and scientific experience heralds an unrestricted natural desire in the human mind to know the essential nature (or being) of things. Knowing the things of experience through inquiry and insight, and furthermore, knowing herself and human existence more generally in the context of such knowing, *Insight's* self-aware human subject also models the reality of value and strives to act accordingly.

Lonergan built his approach in *Insight* upon a reading of Thomas Aquinas that reversed the priority that most interpreters – in particular, contemporary neo-Thomists Étienne Gilson (1884-1978) and Jacques Maritain (1882-1973) – had accorded to the notion of

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<sup>581</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* [1957], rev. ed. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1958). On the human being's dynamic, disinterested and pure desire to know, according to Lonergan, see *Insight*, 348-350.

‘being’ (over and above ‘understanding’) in Aquinas.<sup>582</sup> As Lonergan wrote in his studies of Aquinas: ‘I think much less ink would be spilt on the concept of *esse*, were more attention paid to its origin in acts of understanding.’<sup>583</sup> Hence *Insight* built its inquiry upon analysis of the interior experience of coming to understanding things.

According to *Insight*, the essence of human acts of understanding lies first of all in the power of abstraction that intellectual insight exhibits. Lonergan gave as an example here the way that human beings can understand and communicate the idea of a circle – such as contemplation of a cartwheel might engender – in spite of the fact that no-one ever experiences the sensible imprint of a perfect circle.<sup>584</sup> A second thing that Lonergan also noted about insight was its empirical event-quality, its manner of bursting in as a discrete experience, something Lonergan illustrated by the fabled *Eureka!* moment of Archimedes in the bathhouse at Syracuse.<sup>585</sup>

Beyond the event-quality of insight, however, Lonergan also saw that insight sustains a process of inquiry in which insights accumulate and develop. This accumulation and development supports the formation and combination of better and more appropriate concepts, which lead, in turn, by paths of ongoing questioning towards authentic judgments about what *is* and what is not.<sup>586</sup> For Lonergan, all the things that our knowledge knows make up ‘being’ (the traditional object of metaphysics). To

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<sup>582</sup> See the collection of Lonergan’s essays on Aquinas originally published in *Gregorianum* during the 1940s and subsequently published as *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, ed. D. Burrell (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1968).

<sup>583</sup> *Verbum*, 43.

<sup>584</sup> See *Insight*, 7 ff.

<sup>585</sup> *Insight*, 3-6.

<sup>586</sup> In the example *Insight* gives, a man returns home to find the windows on his house broken in, the walls blackened, and a smell of smoke in the air. He thinks, “There has been a fire,” a conclusion he then confirms by exhausting relevant questioning to make sense of the scene (*Insight*, 281-3); see also Lonergan’s lectures on *Insight* given at Boston College in 1958 (Lonergan, *Understanding and Being: An Introduction and Companion to Insight*, eds. Elizabeth A. Morelli and Mark D. Morelli (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1980)).

paraphrase *Insight*, therefore, we can know beings in their being – in their cosmos and ground – because we can be confident that whatever exists is that which conforms to and can be unearthed by our remarkable power to *know*.

Furthermore, as I become aware of my own cognition in act, Lonergan believed, I can become aware with certainty that *I* am indeed a certain kind of thing ‘that senses, perceives, imagines, inquires, understands, conceives, reflects, grasps the unconditioned, and judges.’<sup>587</sup> The affirmation that ‘I am a knower’ amounted for Lonergan to a kind of gnoseological self-touching to inure my cognition against fundamental agnosticism or uncertainty.<sup>588</sup> Within my recognition that I am a knower there resides my potential to make all the particular judgements of world-knowledge towards which my experience is always climbing. *Insight* aimed to make explicit this knowledge about ourselves, which he thought could easily lie confused or merely implicit beneath everyday and scientific human cognition.

We can note here that Lonergan closed off all the paths that might lead towards Heidegger’s preferred sense that (human) Dasein’s existence is an ever newly and radically insistent question to itself.<sup>589</sup> Neither did *Insight* concede anything to Heidegger’s intimations of an ontological void or undecidability that opens beneath our claims to knowledge.<sup>590</sup> Instead, *Insight* described a ‘generalised empirical method’ of

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<sup>587</sup> Lonergan, *Understanding and Being*, 164; see also *Insight*, 319.

<sup>588</sup> ‘[C]ognitional theory reaches its thing-itself by understanding itself and affirming itself as concrete unity in a process that is conscious empirically, intelligently, and rationally. Moreover, since every other known becomes known through this process, no known could impugn the process without simultaneously impugning its own status as known.’ (*Insight*, 338-9)

<sup>589</sup> ‘Dasein [...] is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that being is an *issue* for it’; ‘the question of Being is nothing other than the radicalization of an essential tendency-of-Being which belongs to Dasein itself’ (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 32, 35).

<sup>590</sup> Indeed, Lonergan was critical of phenomenology in general – both Husserl and Heidegger – for failing to place their inquiries on what he considered to be a proper cognitional-theoretical footing (see Lonergan’s 1957 lectures on phenomenology and logic, delivered at Boston College, now published as

human living-as-knowing, which also foisted upon the empirical sciences a concomitant advance account of what Lonergan called ‘world order within the limits of empirical method.’<sup>591</sup> Lonergan appealed to the discoveries of evolutionary biology as support for his advance determination of the intelligible material world as an ordered progression of levels of increasing organisation – from lifeless matter to living plants and then animals – culminating in emergent human intelligence.<sup>592</sup>

*Insight* then pursued its logic to the further point of finding human intelligence transcended by (because necessarily grounded in) an absolute transcendence, whose ‘unrestricted act of understanding’ knows everything in its eternal and immediate act of self-knowledge. Divine unrestricted knowing was for *Insight* both the power of human personhood, and also the transcendent pattern of its surfeit over merely animal process. According to *Insight*, God is, without restriction, the act of knowing that human beings are by way of ‘unrestricted desire’ but only ‘limited attainment.’<sup>593</sup>

At the heart of *Insight*’s argument lay a sharply and categorically drawn distinction of intelligent human beings from the unintelligent remainder of our world. At the same time, however, this sharp distinction also led to a vision of our world’s analogical unity-in-hierarchy. In similar fashion, *Insight* sharply distinguished human intellect from human sensation and imagination, on the basis of which distinction, Lonergan also claimed to interpret the analogical unity of human embodied experience. And again,

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Bernard Lonergan, *Phenomenology and Logic: The Boston Lectures on Mathematical Logic and Existentialism*, ed. Philip J. McShane (Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, vol. 15) (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

<sup>591</sup> See *Insight*, 121-128. The principle underlying this ‘order,’ according to Lonergan, is the ‘emergent probability’ that pertains to ‘recurrent schemes’ of lower and higher orders within the experienced world.

<sup>592</sup> *Insight* outlined (pp. 259-267) a theory of how emergent higher and higher levels of statistical probability in the organisation of the happenings of the world correspond to a hierarchy of species and genera among intelligible ‘things,’ finally reaching up to the point where ‘[i]n man there occurs the transition from the intelligible to the intelligent’ (*ibid.*, 267).

<sup>593</sup> *Insight*, 668.

*Insight* also sharply distinguished the intelligible forms of experienced objects from their contingent ‘empirical residues,’ while giving rise to an account of the analogical unity of matter as a hierarchy of genera. More radically, and theologically, *Insight* distinguished from human experience a completely transcendent and unrestricted act of understanding (God) as being the very basis of the immanent-transcendent unity and identity of understanding and knowing experienced in the restrictedness of human cognition.

## II. ii. *Insight*: The occlusions of evil and bias

We should not be misled by *Insight*’s metaphysical results (or still less, its resultant ‘worldview’) into imagining, however, that these were Lonergan’s primary interests.<sup>594</sup> For the Introduction and Epilogue to *Insight* styled the work instead an ‘essay in aid of self-appropriation’; and Lonergan repeated this emphasis in lectures delivered shortly after *Insight* was published.<sup>595</sup> Lonergan intended that *Insight* should lead the reader into a rational and morally self-conscious awareness of herself, as a practical basis for living. As Lonergan explained, this self-appropriation is not primarily any kind of ‘ontological’ word or judgment about being; rather, it involves taking ‘one step backwards,’ into ‘the ontic, which is what one is.’<sup>596</sup> Self-appropriation is therefore a performance that steps back from ‘judgements, concepts, and words’ of knowledge, into

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<sup>594</sup> Lonergan records that *Insight* was finished in something of a hurry under external pressure (see Lonergan, *Philosophy of God, and Theology: The Relationship between Philosophy of God and the Functional Speciality, Systematics* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1973), 12).

<sup>595</sup> *Insight*, xxii; see also *ibid.*, 748; Lonergan, *Understanding and Being: An Introduction and Companion to Insight: the Halifax Lectures*, eds. Elizabeth A. Morelli and Mark D. Morelli, (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1980). The key term ‘self-appropriation’ appears in *Insight*’s Introduction and Epilogue, but is absent from the main body of the text. It is a key term for the lectures, whose first section is headed ‘Self-Appropriation’.

<sup>596</sup> Lonergan, *Understanding and Being*, 15.

their ground within the ‘pre-predicative, pre-conceptual, pre-judicial’ givenness of subjectivity.<sup>597</sup>

Lonergan’s whole approach intended to draw the reader by degrees into the circle of his own conviction: positively, by giving good concrete examples; and negatively, by exposing errors and confusions in rival positions. The affirmation that I am a knower was therefore for Lonergan not so much an objective inference as a fundamental affirmation that one must apprehend within the unity of one’s own experience. Lonergan sought to help this affirmation become self-evident to his readers as part of their own self-conscious rational self-appropriation.

The self-appropriative pedagogy that Lonergan offered in *Insight* began by invoking the supposed self-evidence of human intellectual insight. Nevertheless, Lonergan also went on in *Insight* to concede that human intellectual capacity is vulnerable, even at its best. In life, insight generally confronts its opposite, namely, a human non-self-salvageable *lack* of capacity for sure transcendence. The human desire to know is therefore always simultaneously a desire for liberation from this evil. Indeed, on the back of the historical persistence of learned cognitive ‘bias’ in ourselves and our cultures, the human subject is confronted everywhere with recalcitrant problems of habitual evil willing and ensuing moral impotence. Added to all this, the occasions and effects of bias and evil frequently get rationalised and amplified in the organisation of culture, politics and society. Enveloped in culture, therefore, humanity appears all the more impotent in the face of its task of becoming free for truth and goodness.<sup>598</sup> ‘How,’ *Insight* wonders, ‘is one to

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<sup>597</sup> *Understanding and Being*, 15.

<sup>598</sup> Though ‘essentially free,’ writes Lonergan, people attain ‘effective freedom’ only bit by bit, as from infancy they develop, unevenly, within cultures of mixed and ambiguous messages. What is more, the willful ‘second thoughts’ of rational self-consciousness frequently shy away from the intellectual and

be persuaded to genuineness and openness, when one is not yet open to persuasion?’<sup>599</sup>

The problem of liberation ‘is real,’ ‘and its dimensions are the dimensions of human history,’ ‘as large as human living.’<sup>600</sup>

In this way it became apparent in *Insight* that self-appropriation requires more than merely theoretical inference of one’s intellectual operations. Lonergan cautioned that the ‘expeditiousness’ of *Insight*’s journey through cognitional theory, epistemology, metaphysics and ethical theory ought not to mislead the reader into equating any such exhibition with the concrete performance that is required.<sup>601</sup> In fact, *Insight*’s Epilogue would contend that only a theological viewpoint could bring a necessarily supernatural solution to the problem of evil into fruitful interaction with human knowledge, and so allow for right practical understanding and policy in human affairs.<sup>602</sup> The highest value of such a theology would then lie in its contribution to the *critical and normative human science* needed to enlighten everyday individual and communal human behaviour.<sup>603</sup> Lonergan conceded that *Insight* itself could contribute relatively little to such science, because of how its primary points of reference – mathematics and natural science – possess their clarity at the price of their distance from the everyday human world of

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moral demands of genuine openness to experience (see the section, ‘The Problem of Liberation,’ *Insight*, 619ff.).

<sup>599</sup> *Insight*, 624.

<sup>600</sup> *Insight*, 632.

<sup>601</sup> ‘The problem is real. In the present work it has been reached in the compendious fashion that operates through the integral heuristic structure of proportionate being and the consequent ethics. But the expeditiousness of the procedure must not be allowed to engender the mistake that the problem resides in some theoretical realm. On the contrary, its dimensions are the dimensions of human history, and [...] Arnold Toynbee’s *Study of History* illustrate[s] abundantly and rather relevantly the failure of self-determination, the schism in the social body, and the schisms in the soul that follow from an incapacity for sustained development.’ (*Insight*, 632)

<sup>602</sup> ‘[E]mpirical human science can become practical only through theology, and the relentless modern drift to social engineering and totalitarian controls is the fruit of man’s effort to make human science practical though he prescind[s] from God and from the solution God provides for man’s problem’ (*Insight*, 745 & see ff.).

<sup>603</sup> *Insight*, 235-236. ‘[H]uman science cannot be merely empirical; it has to be critical; to reach a critical standpoint, it has to be normative’ (*ibid.*, 236).

culture and history.<sup>604</sup> Instead, ‘the desired summary and completion’ of *Insight*’s trajectory, which would take up explicitly the standpoint of theology and faith, he wrote, ‘would prove to be, not some brief appendage to the present work, but the inception of a far larger one’.<sup>605</sup> Lonergan’s career subsequent to *Insight* would be in the service of this ‘far larger’ task of exhibiting a normative shape to human personal and social life under a gracious God.

### II. iii. *Method in Theology*: method-in-love

In Lonergan’s second and last major constructive work, *Method in Theology* (1971), he came out from the narrowly scientific focus of *Insight* to reveal a broader perspective in which gifted emotion and love were seen as the deeper cosmic realities cradling intellect and science.<sup>606</sup>

In *Method*, evil and bias were presented mostly in terms of personal and cultural ‘unauthenticity’ and ‘decline.’ At the same time, however, Lonergan’s work in the 1960s had become increasingly occupied with the ways in which meaning and value are

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<sup>604</sup> ‘The serenity and surefootedness of the mathematician, the physicist, the chemist are not independent of the remoteness of these fields from human living.’ (*Insight*, 713)

<sup>605</sup> *Insight*, 731. A footnote indicates here Lonergan’s belief that ‘personal relations can be studied adequately only in this larger and more concrete context,’ and that ‘the skimpy treatment accorded them in the present world is not to be taken as a denial of their singular importance in human living.’

<sup>606</sup> This accords with the analysis of Gordon Rixon, who diagnoses the exercises of Ignatius behind Lonergan’s understanding of intellect and the religious life alike. Rixon suggests that Lonergan struggled practically and theoretically to integrate intellect and religious feeling over the course of his Jesuit life, achieving breakthroughs at various points. In the late 1960s, probably with the help of reading Rahner on Ignatius’ ‘consolation without a cause,’ Rixon suggests, Lonergan made a theoretical breakthrough to understanding that a person might actually ‘experience God.’ This enabled Lonergan to posit ‘intellectual’ and ‘religious’ conversion in one experiential continuum (Gordon Rixon, ‘Bernard Lonergan and Mysticism,’ *Theological Studies* 62 (2001), 479-497: 489-90).

always mediated to us via the plural and shifting sands of history and culture.<sup>607</sup> A greater treatment of the multi-dimensionality of the human person also prevented the Lonerganian subject of experience from simply resting his or her self-understanding on the relatively plausible self-certainty afforded by the examples of mathematics and empirical science. Lonergan's more developed later commentaries upon human experience were intended to help bring the practitioners of human existence to uncover in themselves ways of self-authenticating intellect, conscience and redemptive motivation and love – for their good and the good of human society.

Pitching the headquarters of the human subject, above all, on fields of interpersonal relations and humanistic understanding that remain relatively unbuttressed by specific empirical sciences and methods, therefore, *Method* unveiled the human-as-knower to be even more fundamentally a human-as-lover. According to *Method*, we are fulfilled, above all, in nurturing and receiving love for the world and for others; and we are repaired from evil and bias through gifts of implicit and explicit love received from and for the world, on the one hand, and specifically from and for God in 'religious' experiences of 'falling in love without restriction,' on the other. As Lonergan now modelled things, background human capacities for sympathy and love prepare us to receive unrestricted supernaturally gifted love as a 'prior word' and captain for our intellects. Lonergan wrote of how God speaks this 'word' into human hearts as a gifted 'unmediated experience of the mystery of love and awe.'<sup>608</sup>

It turned out for the later Lonergan, therefore, that the tasks of methodical cognition

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<sup>607</sup> See chapter nine of Tracy, *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), 206-231. Also see Tracy, 'Interview,' In. 154-8.

<sup>608</sup> 'Before it enters the world mediated [intellectually] by meaning, religion is the prior word God speaks to us by flooding our hearts with his love' (*Method*, 112).

which ascend from intelligent experience through rational knowing to moral responsibility, of which he wrote so much in *Insight*, are themselves always encircled and made possible by a spontaneous human capacity to love, a capacity apt to be fulfilled by a divine generosity to empower human authenticity.<sup>609</sup> According to Lonergan, every authentic rational and moral subject thinks out of gifted love, even if he or she has no explicit religious devotion to this gift, or theory of it. In a human world of moral evil and contagious intellectual bias, all objectivity in judgement, whether of fact or value, depends upon authentic subjectivity operating through what we might label ‘method-in-love.’<sup>610</sup> To the extent that *divine* love really organises a person’s loves, on Lonergan’s model, grace and nature interpenetrate each other so as to redeem and renew a person in her general task of attending to the world lovingly, conceiving it intelligently, judging it rationally, and deciding how to act in it responsibly and, when needed, self-sacrificially.<sup>611</sup>

#### II. iv. Claiming insight into the histories of insight and love

Lonergan’s model of method-in-love continued to the end to seek and to invoke a transcendent point of view that might penetrate with singular authority the confusions of experience. Lonergan sought to bring ‘control’ to moral and personal-existential questions via cognitive insight into the concrete histories and traditions of human intellect and loving.

Lonergan also came to believe he could objectify criteria for authentic thinking today

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<sup>609</sup> See here also Gordon Rixon’s article on Lonergan, ‘Transforming Mysticism: Adorning Pathways to Self-Transcendence,’ *Gregorianum* 85/4 (2004), 719-734.

<sup>610</sup> ‘Genuine objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity’ (*Method*, 292).

<sup>611</sup> See Lonergan on what he called the ‘transcendental precepts’ of all cognitive method: ‘Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable, Be responsible’ (*Method*, 231).

by differentiating various historical forms of consciousness: viz., ‘common sense,’ ‘theoretical,’ ‘interior,’ ‘scholarly,’ and ‘religious’ ‘differentiations of consciousness’ (to give the most basic version of the list).<sup>612</sup> He was guided in his reading of the history of consciousness by his sense that Christian history, in particular, is no mere contingency but rather a history of intellectual, moral and religious conversion at work within its surrounding culture.<sup>613</sup> He believed he could reconstruct the historical development of human cognitive possibility up to this day: running from a pre-Socratic rule of undifferentiated ‘common sense,’ through the Socratic call to ‘theory’ carried forward in metaphysical and then empirical science, up to Lonergan’s own recovery of philosophy from its modern exile by science (through the retrieval and appropriation of cognitive ‘interiority’ from Aquinas to *Insight* and foundational methodology). The resultant allocation of ‘common sense’ and ‘theoretical’ and ‘interior’ consciousness yields, for Lonergan, subsequent perspectives on ‘scholarly’ and ‘religious’ consciousness also. Taken together, these theorised differentiations allow for a complete dialectical perspective – in the dual light of historical and religious consciousness – on what it would be for consciousness to be differentiating itself in a manner fully adequate for given tasks of knowing and understanding.<sup>614</sup> Thus the later Lonergan retained the ambition of human insight, as being not merely some recognisable moment within the striving of human living and thinking, but as a real intellectual transcendence of the historical and material world.

Lonergan’s map of consciousness-as-it-actually-appears-in-history promised

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<sup>612</sup> See ‘Unity and Plurality: The Coherence of Christian Truth’ (1982) in *A Third Collection*, 239-250.

<sup>613</sup> For a sense of how Lonergan regarded the positive interaction of Christology and philosophy, for example, see Lonergan, ‘The Origins of Christian Realism’ [1961] in Lonergan, *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1958-1964* (Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan), eds. Robert C. Croken, Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), 80-93.

<sup>614</sup> See ‘Unity and Plurality,’ 239-243 and 247.

transcendent insight into the authenticity or otherwise of any given occasion of conscious thought, freeing a Lonerganian to determine through argument the extent to which any given programme of conscious thought is, in fact, applying itself in an appropriately differentiated and self-transcending fashion to the social, scientific, subjective, humanistic and religio-mystical aspects of human and worldly reality.

The labour of Lonergan's later thought sought to justify a fundamental power in the consciousness of a human individual to determine truth from experience. Lonergan came to see human 'meanings' as always partly dependent upon contingent history and culture, but even so, he continued to bank upon a fundamental human genius for abstracting the essences of true meanings from sensible experience, in excess of all cultural formation. The idea that religious experience imparts a further gift of immediately effective conscious experience only reinforces and repairs this view, amid the ravages of what Tracy would later term the plurality and ambiguity of language and history. A 'prior word' of love and implied intelligibility is spoken from on high into human hearts, and this announces absolute value and a power to revive and heal our everyday formulating of true values and meanings in intelligent and rational consciousness amid history.

Insight into the ordered differentiation of phenomenal consciousness constituted for Lonergan a foundational meta-interpretation capable of testing *all* particular interpretation of the world. Thus, when Lonergan characterised the human task as 'intellectual, moral and religious,' or when he proposed likewise the transcendental precepts 'be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible,' he was appealing for the discernment and exercise of transcendently originated order in the conscious

conduct of human affairs. Lonerganian methodological philosophy was in constant pursuit of meta-interpretative insight into the transcendent-immanent operation of intelligent consciousness, as the doorway leading towards collaborative human understanding of the real meaning and value of all actual things.

### **III. On Tracy's recent recovery of something like Lonergan's imperilled, religiously ecstatic, other-oriented subject**

Lonergan identified the power of reason with events and operations that he thought were proper to the interiority of the human subject experiencing her world. From the 1980s forwards, however, Tracy followed Gadamer (and Heidegger) in directing the attention of cognition towards language and discourse rather than 'consciousness' as such. Tracy proposed truth to arise within the phenomenon of dialogue-conversation rather than in accordance with some deep subjective method of self-knowledge and world foreknowledge, as in Lonergan. As Tracy says today, truth arises essentially as 'a blow to ordinary self-reflective consciousness.'<sup>615</sup> It follows from this that Tracy could not endorse any general 'method' of consciousness, because the text or person that is other and different can never be fully anticipated in advance.

On one point, however, Lonergan can be seen as having been ahead of Tracy. For Tracy has had to find his own way to saying something that Lonergan always insisted upon, but which Tracy for many years could not say.

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<sup>615</sup> Tracy, 'Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue,' 3.

Loneragan was very much prepared to doubt that all the experiences had by human beings exhibit the character of distinctively human experience and selfhood. These authentically human qualities were precisely missing, according to Lonergan, in the ‘unauthentic’ conscious experiences nursed by unauthentic subjects. On Lonergan’s telling, unauthentic and non-self-transcending human subjects, who neglect their own proper interior dynamism, fail to exhibit thereby their properly human subjectivity. Put briefly: for Lonergan, the experiences of cognitive bias and moral evil that are suffered by human beings are ‘surd’ experiences that have ceased to attest to human selfhood.<sup>616</sup> For Lonergan, it was only the continual work of God’s Spirit towards all people, as working alongside the concrete history of Jesus Christ and his Church (or, the part-authoritative histories of other established religions), which, together, could guarantee that the true image and potential of our human subjectivity never need be lost to us.

For his own part, Tracy early on reacted against Lonergan’s ‘dogmatic’ account of religion in philosophy and theology, on account of its seemingly blanket affirmation of received religious authority. I will discuss this in more detail in the next chapter.<sup>617</sup> However, one consequence of Tracy’s rejection of Lonergan was that Tracy sought instead for a wholly neutral description of religious reason and selfhood. Reneging on the primacy that Lonergan gave to self-appropriative practice and conversion, Tracy’s alternative approach lacked any essential reference to any dialectic of sin and grace. The descriptive neutrality that Tracy sought can be clearly seen in his argument concerning ‘common human experience’ in *Blessed Rage* (discussed above and further in the next chapter), for example. There, the common experience of all people supposedly

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<sup>616</sup> For Lonergan on the surdic, irrational nature of sin, see *Insight*, 666-7.

<sup>617</sup> See the section below in Chapter Six section II. i., below. Tracy presented his critique of Lonergan at the Lonergan Congress in 1970 (published as Tracy, ‘Lonergan’s Foundational Theology: An Interpretation and Critique’ in Philip McShane, ed., *Foundations of Theology: Papers from the International Lonergan Congress, 1970* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1971), 197-222).

exhibited an undeniable gracious ‘religious’ or ‘limit’ dimension to reality.

Only once Tracy began to pay greater attention in the 1990s to the demand of Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995) that ethics should be made first philosophy, has Tracy begun to recover a sense of religious selfhood that is in fact closer to Lonergan’s idea (although Tracy himself does not seem to have explicitly made this connection). In recent years Tracy has begun to conceive of human selves as more the *outcomes* of precious human exchanges of goods and gifts, rather than as simply the background preconditions of such exchanges. In this he is rather closer to Lonergan.

A strangely inert and unassailable character attached itself to the operative notion of the experiencing self in *Plurality*, where little seemed to echo the manner in which Lonergan had found rational reflection and subjectivity existentially threatened by the absurdity of cognitive ‘bias’ and moral evil. These latter experiences possessed such terrible force for Lonergan precisely because – theoretically, at least – they threatened wholesale ruin to apparent human experiences of meaning and selfhood. In the wake of pervasive bias and evil, Lonergan’s thought-project needed to show how the human subject might possibly find his or her way back into the kind of self-evidencing experiences and self-performances that *Insight* first glimpsed sight of within the rarefied fields of mathematics and empirical science. Lonergan’s whole later philosophy of religion was about theorising humanity’s route back to a general awareness that would be correspondingly self-authenticating.

Today, Tracy is more explicit about the way in which human flourishing depends upon transcendent ‘Impossible’ gifts which are able to release our thinking and acting from

its slavery to the *curvatus in se* of sin. Recently, Tracy has been advancing his concept of the ‘frag-event’ in thinking, whereby our understanding is not simply renewed and augmented (as a hermeneutics of the ‘classic’ rather tends to imply), but instead our reigning totality systems of understanding are shattered.<sup>618</sup> By ‘totality systems’ Tracy means those lenses of conscious or unconscious ideology through which we interpret the world according to a turning in upon ourselves and against both the transcendence of others and the otherness of ourselves. It follows that today, Tracy centres interpretative reason upon what is effectively a primordial confrontation between sin and grace: an echo of the moral and religious scene that Lonergan’s mature thought insisted was primal within all cognition.

Today, Tracy is closer to Lonergan – as well as to Simone Weil<sup>619</sup> – in insisting on the primacy of a generalised contemplative and ethical work of *paying attention*, lying at the root of all reason. The cognitive work of ‘attention’ was the first of Lonergan’s ‘transcendental imperatives,’ and the one that, according to Tracy, was emphasised by Lonergan himself towards the end of his life.<sup>620</sup> Tracy emphasises the orientation that the work of attention has towards what – and especially, whom – is other than ourselves. In particular, Tracy commends that we extend the practice of attention, above all, to the burdens and sufferings that others bear and have borne in history.

At the same time as stressing this work of attending to and remembering others, Tracy now also echoes the mature Lonerganian sense that an aboriginal confrontation takes place between sin and grace at the very spring of human cognition. Rather, as Lonergan

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<sup>618</sup> See Chapter 9, below.

<sup>619</sup> See Tracy, ‘Interview,’ ln. 469-70.

<sup>620</sup> See Tracy, ‘Interview,’ ln. 471-4: ‘Lonergan [said]: “Be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible, and if necessary change.” He [also] said, “When you get older, you’ll realise ‘be attentive’ is the most important.” You have to be silent, you have to be able to listen.’

once insisted that we need to have our values and motivations ‘healed from above,’ if our putative rationality is not to be stillborn,<sup>621</sup> so Tracy today seems to say something similar: he proposes that our works of attention must seek those ‘frag-events’ of judgment and grace in the midst of our apprehension of the world, such as are capable of empowering human thoughts and actions beyond their many and incorrigible disfigurements. The human self is still the irreplaceable site of humane value and reason for Tracy, only now as subsisting more clearly within an unremitting dialectic of sin and grace. If there is indeed a certain return to the Lonerganian subject in Tracy today – as I propose there is – then it is a return to the ecstatic and fundamentally other-oriented subject that Lonergan once spied in religion.

### **Coda: On preferring Jamesian selfhood to Aristotelean retrievals**

Tracy has not been alone in conceiving attention to the other as the proper core of selfhood. For example, in the 1980s Paul Ricoeur also produced an account of the human selfhood that counted it a vulnerable ethical achievement instead of an unassailable background datum. In *Oneself as Another* (the French original appeared in 1990, based on his 1986 Gifford Lectures delivered in English), Ricoeur distinguished a polarity operative at the heart of human self-identity: a running back-and-forth between what Ricoeur termed ‘*idem*’-identity, which corresponds to the question *What...?*, and

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<sup>621</sup> See Lonergan, ‘Healing and Creating in History’ in Lonergan, *A Third Collection: Papers by Bernard J.F. Lonergan, S.J.*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1985), 100-109.

'ipse'-identity that corresponds to the peculiarly human question *Who...?*.<sup>622</sup> Ricoeur proposed regarding the achievement of *ipseité* in the context of narrative identity (both *ipse* and *idem*) as depending upon attention, solidarity and love which human beings can perform in relation both to other people and, also, to a philosophically undecidable ontological Other perforating human identity. According to Ricoeur, the person who can witness to herself being herself an 'other' and also one who really enacts and suffers responsible relation to others, is the one who receives back in the process the genuine assurance of really being herself, of having become 'a figure of recognition' for herself and others.<sup>623</sup>

A short paragraph cannot begin to do justice to Ricoeur's profound and nuanced study, yet it is worth noting here how Ricoeur, too, was responding to the French Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas in plotting a pathway to 'oneself' by way of the journey towards others and an essential otherness of oneself. The theme of the primacy of the other was to permeate a great deal of French or French-inspired philosophical thinking throughout the 1990s (particularly as this was received in the Anglophone world), not least in the work of Jacques Derrida.<sup>624</sup> Tracy says today that what he most gratefully receives from postmodernity, especially in its appropriations of Levinas and Simone Weil, is this very 'shift to the other in relationship to the self – to approaching the self through the other.'<sup>625</sup>

But Tracy still prefers his own American 'empirical' sense of the self, to Ricoeur's

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<sup>622</sup> See Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* [1990], trans Kathleen Blamey (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), especially the Fifth Study entitled 'Personal Identity and Narrative Identity,' 113-139, as well as the Sixth Study entitled 'The Self and Narrative Identity'.

<sup>623</sup> See Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, especially pp. 163-168.

<sup>624</sup> See, *inter alia*, Derrida, *The Gift of Death* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995)

<sup>625</sup> Tracy, 'Interview,' ln. 318-9.

more characteristically European retrieval of a neo-Aristotelian virtue tradition to adjudicate the ethical possibilities of attesting to one's own selfhood. Tracy's reason for preferring James is that he shares with James a characteristically American commitment to the plurality of human experiences and self-experiences. In an interview conducted in 2004, Tracy applauds James's strong commitment 'to appreciat[ing] as much as possible of the various [human] possibilities' before then seeking general 'criteria for dealing with Others in all their variety.'<sup>626</sup> (For indeed, 'let's also admit that some of them can be sick, or evil, or, in [Richard] Kearney's language, monstrous.')<sup>627</sup> However, Tracy continued that he saw no particular advantage in going back to Aristotle – who, let us recall, 'is not much of a pluralist.'<sup>628</sup>

Altogether, Tracy explained, he much prefers the tenor of William James's commitment to plurality, which survives every subsequent attempt to 'sort things out fruitfully.' Tracy recalled how James grappled with the varieties of religious experiences, for example, by noticing differences between 'sick souls' and 'healthy minds,' and between mystics and nonmystics.<sup>629</sup> Like James, Tracy prefers to keep in the foreground the sense that we always stand before a plurality of experiences that may be equally human. Some of which we will recognise as being similar to our own experience, and some will seem more alien. Certainly, some experiences will be deceived or deceiving, while others will reflect evil will. But the plurality will also cover a gratuity that is more multifarious than we will ever fully know. To Tracy, the individual's task is always to

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<sup>626</sup> Tracy, 'Interviewed by Christian Sheppard – God: the Possible/Impossible' [conducted, 01/03/2004] in John Panteleimon Manoussakis, ed., *After God: Richard Kearney and the Religious Turn in Continental Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 340-354: 351-2.

<sup>627</sup> Tracy, 'Interviewed by Christian Sheppard – God: the Possible/Impossible,' 352. For Richard Kearney's objection against the likes of Derrida and Caputo that one needs hermeneutical criteria with regard to the Other, who may be monstrous, see Richard Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters: Ideas of Otherness* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>628</sup> 'Interviewed by Christian Sheppard – God: the Possible/Impossible,' 352.

<sup>629</sup> 'Interviewed by Christian Sheppard – God: the Possible/Impossible,' 352.

make some faltering sense of this plurality alongside other people.

As a consequence, Tracy continues to assign great value to the articulation of a fundamentally shared (essentially religious) situation, in which he spies an incalculable richness of real differences giving rise to shared cognitive and ethical tasks of our lives together. Tracy trusts this kind of practice and analysis far more than he trusts attempts to project some abstract final measure of human living (such as Ricoeur attempts, for example, in contrasting the human ethical performance of ‘who’-ness (ipseity) to subethical and subhuman lapses into grotesque mere ‘what’-ness). For all that Tracy is now similar to Lonergan in conceiving a struggle between sin and grace at the very heart of thinking and acting, Tracy remains less interested in modelling ontological judgement than he is in inviting us to remember and honour the virtually infinite plurality of human experience.

Nevertheless, it may seem that in leaving behind process traditions in theology, Tracy has entrusted himself to a discourse of the ‘possible,’ which can retain a strong notion of ‘self’ only by way of ontological-existential measures of the kind that Ricoeur proposes.<sup>630</sup> Put from another direction, in striving to become a truly hermeneutical theological thinker beyond theism, can Tracy retain the ‘empirical’ quality of his emphasis on plurality?

The answer would seem to be for Tracy that in his shift from process to hermeneutical thinking about God, there has also been a shift to ‘mystical and prophetic approaches’ to religion and God, ‘and therefore to notions of hiddenness and incomprehensibility.’

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<sup>630</sup> As Tracy puts it, ‘Empirical or process theologies stress what is actual, and hermeneutic theologies deal with the possible’ (Tracy, with Lois Malcolm, ‘An Interview with David Tracy’ *The Christian Century*, (February 13-20, 2002), 24-30: 24).

Ultimately, Tracy continues, this amounts also to a shift to the category of ‘impossibility,’ as being that which really informs all human possibility. For Tracy, James’s criteria of ‘immediate luminosity’ for an experience amounts to a putative ‘characterization of what we would call today the Impossible’ – although Tracy admits James ‘didn’t get too far thinking about it.’<sup>631</sup> It appears to Tracy that one must take this step through consideration of the possible to consideration of the Impossible.

By linking Jamesian immediate luminosity to the thought of the Impossible, Tracy gives flesh to his attempt to retrieve for his own post-Heideggerian thinking a sense that an Other comes to us bearing ‘surplus, excess, the Impossible’ for our possibility: precisely as a positive multiplier and pluraliser of human experience.<sup>632</sup> It is this engendering of plurality that gives rise to our specific ethical-religious tasks. Indeed, the announcement of ‘the Impossible Real’<sup>633</sup> brings about a ‘splitting [of] the self, not in the usual way but for the good.’<sup>634</sup>

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<sup>631</sup> ‘Interviewed by Christian Sheppard – God: the Possible/Impossible,’ 352.

<sup>632</sup> See also Tracy earlier in the interview in question: ‘if you can [agree with Heidegger on the priority of the possible over the actual] then you can develop something that Heidegger may have hinted at in his own struggles with the issue, but never fully developed: namely the fully positive category of the Impossible, the Impossible as what is desired and the Impossible that may, in some odd way, desire ... it comes upon us from the future’ (‘Interviewed by Christian Sheppard – God: the Possible/Impossible,’ 344).

<sup>633</sup> With regard to ‘the Impossible Real,’ see also Tracy, ‘On Longing: The Void, The Open, God’ in Stephan van Erp and Lea Verstricht, eds., *Longing in a Culture of Cynicism* (Zürich & Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2008), 15-32.

<sup>634</sup> Tracy, ‘Interviewed by Christian Sheppard – God: the Possible/Impossible,’ 352.

## CHAPTER 7

### Theological Correlations

This chapter is about Tracy the Christian theologian. So far, with the exception of some discussion in Chapter Two, this thesis has focused on Tracy's model of dialogic reason and its sources, with relatively little comment on Tracy's pursuit of Christian theology as such. This is despite Christian theology having been a key goal and criterion of Tracy's thinking from the beginning. Building on some of the Christian theological issues touched upon in that earlier chapter, therefore, this chapter will examine what kind of Christian theologian Tracy has been, and is today.

At the same time, this chapter will also act as a pivot within the discussion of Tracy's model of reason. I have often referred to ways in which Tracy's thought has changed since around 1990. But these later developments have so far generally remained at the margins of a discussion that has largely settled around *Plurality and Ambiguity*, which Tracy wrote in the mid-1980s and which is also his least explicitly theological book to date. We have seen David Gibson recount how Tracy was 'chastened' by a review of *Plurality* in which the reviewer wrote that, after reading *Plurality*, 'he understood what its author meant by such terms as "plurality," "ambiguity," "hermeneutics," and "religion,"' but not the character of Tracy's own Christian hope in God.<sup>635</sup> As will become clear in this chapter, the renewal of Tracy's explicitly Christian theological thinking since around 1990 also enabled Tracy's thinking to propel itself into new perspectives on reason and dialogue. As a consequence, a chapter charting Tracy's evolving conception of the Christian theological task will also shift the focus of this

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<sup>635</sup> David Gibson, 'God-obsessed: David Tracy's Theological Quest,' *Commonweal* 137/2 (January 29, 2010); and see Chapter 4 section II, above.

thesis squarely onto those later developments.

Consistently, Tracy has constructed Christian theology, in its fundamental mode, as a task and history of proposing ‘correlations’ between the inheritances of Christianity and given human situations, on the one hand, at the same time as between these interacting particularities and transcendental reflection, on the other. The opening two sections of this chapter will examine how this general idea about theology has progressed within Tracy’s thinking from the mid-1970s to today.

This chapter will then examine the sequence of sets of categories that Tracy has proposed during his career to facilitate his own attempts at theological correlation. For example, ‘common human experience’ and ‘authentic secularity’ were key theological categories in *Blessed Rage* (see section III below), largely eclipsed by subsequent categories of ‘tradition,’ ‘the classic’ and ‘analogical imagination’ in *Imagination* (see section IV). We shall see, furthermore, that since around 1990, Tracy has been enacting a significant ‘turn’ towards a new project for thinking and saying ‘God,’ focussed in the first instance through the religious-theological category of the ‘mystical-prophetic’ (see section V).<sup>636</sup> This last, explicitly theological development has helped pave Tracy’s way towards subsequent theological and philosophical categories of ‘fragment’ (or ‘fragment’) and ‘the Impossible Real.’<sup>637</sup>

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<sup>636</sup> For a summary of Tracy’s ‘turn’ to new ways of thinking and saying ‘God’ since 1990, see Tracy, ‘Interview,’ ln. 5-62.

<sup>637</sup> Tracy has published a series of significant articles of theological orientation since the late-1980s, including several before and after his Gifford Lectures in 2000, anticipating a forthcoming ‘Big Book on God’ anticipated for at least a decade (see David Gibson, ‘God-obsessed: David Tracy’s Theological Quest,’ *Commonweal* 137/2 (January 29, 2010)). Notable among the theological articles published since 1989 are: ‘An Uneasy Alliance Reconciled: Catholic Theological Method, Modernity and Postmodernity’ (*Theological Studies* 50 (1989), 458-570); ‘On Naming the Present’ (*Concilium*, 1990 / no. 1: *On the Threshold of the Third Millennium*) (republished in David Tracy, *On Naming the Present: God, Hermeneutics, and Church* (London: SCM, 1994), 3-24); ‘The Return of God in Contemporary Theology’ (*Concilium*, 1994 / no. 6: *Why Theology*) (also republished in *On Naming the Present*, 36-46);

The theological category of the ‘mystical-prophetic’ unlocked fundamental new possibilities for Tracy’s thinking, and it continues to teach him to locate a new tension and balance between analogical positivity and dialectical negativity within his accounts of reason, religion and theology. The final section of this chapter will argue that shortcomings within Tracy’s 1980s model of theological correlation can be ameliorated and perhaps resolved by seeking a more radically nuanced perspective on the nature and prospects of human reason. In this regard, the category of ‘fragment’ will come into view as one key means by which Tracy has begun to weave radical negation into the very heart of his realistic affirmations of theological reason and tradition.

But first, it falls to the next section to initially define and defend Tracy’s concept of theology as ‘correlation.’

## **I. The correlative task of theology**

Tracy’s conception of theology has consistently employed a correlational conception of theology, understanding Christian theology as an ongoing task of relating the Christian religious heritage (as apparent in a theologian’s given time and context) to the generality of human experience and possibility (as these likewise appear).<sup>638</sup> At the

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‘Literary Theory and Return of the Forms for Naming and Thinking God in Theology,’ *Journal of Religion*, 74/3 (1994), 302-319); and ‘Trinitarian Speculation and the Forms of Divine Disclosure’ in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins, eds., *Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 273-293. More recent articles include: ‘Form and Fragment: The Recovery of the Hidden and Incomprehensible God’ in Werner G. Jeanrond and Aasulv Lande, eds., *The Concept of God in Global Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005), 98-114; and ‘On Longing: The Void, the Open, God’ in Stephen van Erp and Lea Werstricht, eds., *Longing in a Culture of Cynicism* (Zurich & Berlin: Lit, 2008), 15-32.

<sup>638</sup> Already in *Blessed Rage*, Tracy was contrasting his own more collaborative approach to the correlative theological method first introduced by Paul Tillich, according to which human ontological questions provoke theological answers (see *Blessed Rage*, 45-6; and Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Combined Volume (Wlwyn, Herts: James Nesbit & Co., 1968), Vol. 1, pp. 67ff.).

heart of this correlation, furthermore, Tracy has discerned a labour of critical reflection mounting up towards ‘the strictly transcendental question, of the nature of ultimate reality.’<sup>639</sup> In this way, Tracean theological correlation requires both historical attentiveness and transcendental aspiration: the tradition must always rediscover itself in new social-historical contingencies *and* renewed transcendental inquiry.<sup>640</sup> This task of correlation and attendant transcendental reflection is at the heart of the dimension of theology that Tracy has labelled as ‘fundamental theology.’<sup>641</sup>

The responsibility laid upon theology to pursue transcendental questioning is what motivated Tracy to insist upon pursuing ‘systemic’ or ‘intrinsic’ theological correlation, when he entered controversy in the 1980s with Protestant theologian Hans Frei’s counter-insistence on merely occasional and ‘ad hoc’ correlations of Christianity with culture and philosophy.<sup>642</sup> Hans Frei (1922-1988) taught a generation of theologians at Yale Divinity School to seek, above all, the scriptural-ecclesial ‘identity’ of Christian living and thinking – indeed, the identity of *Jesus Christ* – in their own situation, and to reject any requirement to systemically correlate this identity with general philosophical interpretations of the world.<sup>643</sup> Frei was alert to how correlations between the Christian inheritance and the contemporary world were necessary to permit moments of intelligibility to the gospel, but his espousal of strictly *ad hoc* correlation was

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<sup>639</sup> Tracy, ‘An Uneasy Alliance,’ 568.

<sup>640</sup> Tracy has written that fundamental theologians, in particular, ‘must always be beginners,’ who always go ‘back again to rethink the beginnings’ of their inquiry (‘An Uneasy Alliance,’ 560).

<sup>641</sup> Tracy gives clear expression to how he saw this *Imagination*, p. 64: ‘In short, either the public character of the fundamental questions which religion addresses (from the side of the “situation”) or the fully public character of the responses that any major religious tradition articulates (from the side of the tradition) demand a theological discipline which will investigate and correlate, through mutually critical correlations, questions and responses in *both* situation and tradition. That discipline is here called fundamental theology.’

<sup>642</sup> ‘An Uneasy Alliance,’ 558-9.

<sup>643</sup> See Hans Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975); also a posthumous collection of Frei’s essays published as *Types of Christian Theology*, eds. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1992).

motivated, as Mike Higton observes, by the need to ensure that no one correlation could ‘overwhelm the particular shape of the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus of Nazareth’ as portrayed in the Gospels and supporting biblical texts.<sup>644</sup> Frei and similar theologians feared that the theological correlation that seeks to gather itself towards some concerted horizon – such as Tracy required – would inevitably result in the theologian replacing the concrete specificities of Christian existence with philosophical generality.<sup>645</sup>

Apparently influenced by some of Frei’s criticisms of his earlier work (*Blessed Rage*, in particular),<sup>646</sup> Tracy came to echo some of Frei’s own positive emphases in his own writing.<sup>647</sup> However, the fundamental problem that Tracy identified with Frei’s and like ‘anticorrelationist’ approaches was that by denying ‘any systemic (as distinct from *ad hoc*) role to apologetics,’ these theologians refused ‘any *critically* reflective role for theology.’<sup>648</sup> Tracy cannot be satisfied with Hans Frei’s ‘ad hoc’ correlations that borrow contemporary language opportunistically, while never using those correlations in a concerted way to interrogate the tradition critically. Only an intrinsically correlative approach saves theology from uncritical dogmatism.

At the same time, Tracy has also identified similarly anticorrelationist approaches in the

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<sup>644</sup> Higton, Mike A., ‘Hans Frei and David Tracy on the Ordinary and the Extraordinary in Christianity,’ *Journal of Religion*, 79 (1999), 566-591: 571-2.

<sup>645</sup> See Frei’s late essay, ‘Five Types of Theology’ (in Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 28-55); also William C. Placher, *Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989).

<sup>646</sup> Frei’s ‘Five Types of Theology’ (in Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 28-55) contains a sharp critique of the correlative and apologetic approach to theology that Tracy outlined in *Blessed Rage*.

<sup>647</sup> For example, Tracy echoes Frei’s emphasis on the narrative of Jesus Christ as the ground of Christian theology, when writes in 1995 that ‘the Christian understanding of the one God is grounded not in a general philosophical theory of monotheism but in this concrete passion-narrative history of God’s self-disclosure as Agent in the cross and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth’ (Tracy, ‘The Paradox of the Many Faces of God in Mono-Theism,’ *On Naming the Present*, 27-35: 32). Even here, however, the correlative and transcendental (as capitalized) category ‘Agent’ is an example of the kind of thing of which Frei would be suspicious.

<sup>648</sup> ‘An Uneasy Alliance,’ 559. (I follow Higton in adding the emphasis: it is the element of *critical* reflection that is lost in Frei’s merely descriptive reflections and elaborations of Christian identity.)

Roman Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, and the later Joseph Ratzinger, for whom, in analogous fashion, Catholic theology only needs to ‘clarify and affirm its own unique identity *as such* and not in correlation with the ever-shifting and dangerous contours of the contemporary situation.’<sup>649</sup> Fundamentally, such an attitude can make little sense according to Tracy’s outlook, given the way in which traditions form themselves through ongoing, plural and ambiguous interpretative exchanges with the wider culture or cultures in which they appear. We may say in the spirit of Tracy that even the tradition that imagines itself as carrying a distinct gift of God must acknowledge that the gift has at no point persevered or unfurled itself in simple self-identity. Likewise, the identity that a *living* tradition may gather for itself is never located simply in its deposit of authoritative texts or in its juridical organisation, even where these latter fulfil plausible normative functions.<sup>650</sup> Neither Scriptures nor Church are ports secure from the storms of history.

Tracy’s theological procedure for navigating these storms, meanwhile, has involved hazarding an evolving sequence of what may be termed ‘correlative categories,’ each imbued with varying degrees of transcendental confidence and designed to facilitate coordinated theological intelligibility to situation and tradition. In *Blessed Rage*, for example, Tracy employed categories of ‘common human experience’ and ‘authentic secularity.’ In *Imagination*, these ceded to the more hermeneutically responsive categories of ‘tradition,’ ‘the classic’ and ‘analogical imagination.’ Since 1990, Tracy has forged further categories of the ‘mystical-prophetic’ (for a while, at least, explicitly

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<sup>649</sup> Tracy, ‘An Uneasy Alliance,’ 554. Jean-Luc Marion is another essentially anti-correlational Roman Catholic philosopher-cum-theologian, whose work became influential in Anglophone theology in the 1990s (see Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being: Hors-Texte*, trans. Thomas A. Carson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), to which Tracy wrote the Foreword.

<sup>650</sup> See Tracy’s comment in *Plurality* concerning ‘the never-ending need to appropriate the undeniable goods and truths of our traditions as *traditio*, not mere *tradita*’ (*ibid.*, 130 n. 2).

as religious ‘rhetoric’), ‘the fragment’ (or ‘frag-event’), and ‘the Impossible Real,’ simply to facilitate Christian theology and cultural criticism. Each of these categories has striven in its time to grant some plausible frame to the rational potential of Christian faith. Each has been offered as a vehicle for aiding the interpretative and practical dilemmas of inheriting Christianity in the present. We will consider these categories in turn in later sections of this chapter.<sup>651</sup>

Critics of systemic theological correlation, meanwhile, will suspect that Tracy’s categories inexcusably submit Christianity to constructs of human culture and reasoning not subject to the authority of the revealed Word. For these Christian thinkers, the worldly criteria devised in systemic theological correlation deliver only fatal dissolutions of Christianity in capitulation to the spirits of the age. This chapter grants to the anticorrelationists that there were real weaknesses in Tracy’s theological model of the 1980s. However, as already noted, the concluding section will argue that nonetheless these should be ascribed not to intrinsic correlation as such, but instead to a one-sidedly ‘Catholic’ optimism about reason from which Tracy’s more recent thought has been to some extent recovering.

## **II. From an explicit method to an implicit principle**

### II. i. Correlation as an explicit theological method (in the 1970s and ‘80s)

What began as an explicit model and method of correlation in theology in the 1970s and

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<sup>651</sup> See sections III, IV and V, below.

'80s, has also become something more implicit and less prescriptive in Tracy's outlook since around 1990.

The essentially pre-Gadamerian presentation of theology-as-correlation that Tracy offered back in *Blessed Rage* conceived two distinct 'sources' of theology requiring quite distinct analyses. On the one hand, 'a phenomenology of the "religious dimension" present in everyday scientific experience and language' would exhibit the essential horizon of 'common human experience.'<sup>652</sup> On the other hand, 'an historical and hermeneutical investigation of classical Christian texts' would retrieve 'the Christian tradition.'<sup>653</sup> A 'critical correlation' of these two 'sources,' Tracy continued, will involve elaborating an evolving 'explicitly metaphysical mode of reflection' able 'to determine the truth status' of the 'meanings' uncovered in each of theology's two sources.<sup>654</sup>

Thus *Blessed Rage* proposed relating contemporary human possibility and received religious tradition under the gathering sway of transcendental and metaphysical conclusions. One of the things that distinguished the correlation modelled in *Blessed Rage* was that its analysis of 'common human experience' was universalising from the start (even though Tracy also offered parallel observations about the role of contemporary 'secularity,' which were interpretations of contingent historical circumstance.)<sup>655</sup> Since religious inheritances reflect contingent histories and cultural intuitions are subject to change, Tracy required that theology ground itself in philosophical-scientific argument concerning the fundamental nature of human

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<sup>652</sup> *Blessed Rage*, 47 and f.

<sup>653</sup> *Blessed Rage*, 49 and ff.

<sup>654</sup> *Blessed Rage*, 52 and ff.

<sup>655</sup> See sections III. ii. and III. iii., below, for comparison of these more strictly transcendental and more historically contingent aspects in *Blessed Rage*'s analysis of contemporary human possibility.

experience and meaning, on the one hand, and the claimed transcendent reality of God, on the other.

When Tracy came to restate his model of theological correlation in the 1980s, however, Tracy was by now identifying theological correlation squarely with his own newly developed hermeneutical outlook.<sup>656</sup> ‘Theology as hermeneutical,’ he explained, ‘can be described as the attempt to develop mutually critical correlations [...] between an interpretation of the Christian tradition and an interpretation of the contemporary situation.’<sup>657</sup> In this partly revised scheme, the analysis of the ‘situation’ would be less immediately dominated by philosophical argument, while the philosophical aspects of both interpretations would consist largely in hermeneutical theory about the nature of language and interpretation in general. The enterprise would now depend rather less obviously on a distinct axis of transcendental reflection and theistic construction.

Tracy hoped at this time that his hermeneutical model of ‘mutually critical correlation’ between tradition and situation could hold the ring for the full set of contrasting genuine theologies. To this end, he was at pains to insist that it was just as possible for a correlative theology to articulate confrontations between interpreted tradition and interpreted present, as it was for it to articulate basic agreement. To this end, he claimed that the ‘concept “correlation” in correlational theology does *not* entail belief in

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<sup>656</sup> See Tracy, ‘Hermeneutical Reflections in the New Paradigm’ in Hans Küng and David Tracy, eds., *Paradigm Change in Theology: A Symposium for the Future* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 34-62. This volume appeared after a German edition published in 1987, while the original conference at which the papers were first delivered took place in 1983.

<sup>657</sup> Tracy, ‘Some Concluding Reflections on the Conference: Unity Amidst Diversity and Conflict?’ in *Paradigm Change in Theology: A Symposium for the Future*, ed. by Hans Küng and David Tracy (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 461-471: 462. Tracy offered a similar formula in Tracy, ‘Hermeneutical Reflections in the New Paradigm’ in the same volume (*ibid.*, 34-62: 59), as likewise again in ‘Lindbeck’s New Program for Theology: A Reflection,’ *The Thomist*, 49 (1985), 460-472: 470; and also in Tracy, ‘An Uneasy Alliance Reconceived: Catholic Theological Method, Modernity and Postmodernity,’ *Theological Studies*, 50 (1989), 548-570: 550.

harmony, convergence or sameness' between culture and tradition, but merely 'that *some* relationship is involved' (which relationship could be 'identity or non-identity or identity-in-difference or similarity in difference').<sup>658</sup> In another essay around this time, he insisted that his model 'does not necessitate a capitulation of traditional religious beliefs to contemporary secular beliefs,' but rather invites 'all the rational and religious skills available [...] to discern the proper response here and now.'<sup>659</sup> Under correlation, therefore, the Christian gospel may negate orthodoxies of culture and society, just as much as culture and society may negate received interpretations of the gospel. Tracy appeared to imply that normally elements of both dynamics should be simultaneously in play.

Nonetheless, however, Tracy's model for correlational theology in the 1980s was probably not really as neutral as Tracy protested. For at its heart, it co-opted a 'critical' attitude towards religious authority, on the one hand,<sup>660</sup> in conjunction with his particular brand of ('Catholic') presumption in favour of metaphysics and analogy, on the other. The first of these denied the transcendence of religious institutions, while the second presumed the fundamental affinity of human culture for truth. Pressed together, they did indeed seem to affirm some underlying 'harmony, convergence or sameness' between the message of Christianity and human culture as such.<sup>661</sup>

In *Imagination*, we may recall, 'analogical imagination' represented to Tracy the transcendent-immanent grace and power by which language and interpretation conjure

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<sup>658</sup> Tracy, 'An Uneasy Alliance,' 563.

<sup>659</sup> 'Lindbeck's New Program for Theology,' 470.

<sup>660</sup> See section III. i., below, for Tracy's break from Lonergan on this point.

<sup>661</sup> Tracy noted what he regarded as the 'misconception' shared by Francis Schüssler-Fiorenza and Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza on this point ('An Uneasy Alliance,' 562 n. 56).

their convergent worlds of meaning and truth amid plurality.<sup>662</sup> The problem with this model, however, as we saw in Chapter Four, above, was that it was stacked in favour of metaphysical analogy (along with the panentheism that accompanied Tracy's version of analogy). Martin Poulson complained – rightly, I have suggested – that Tracy's model of theology at this time relied upon analogical sameness outstripping dialectical difference.<sup>663</sup>

Tracy himself has recognised this unsatisfactory aspect of his earlier thinking. Back in *Imagination*, hierarchies of 'manifestatory' over 'proclamatory' religion<sup>664</sup> – and 'analogical' over 'dialectical' God-language<sup>665</sup> – secured a theological metaphysics in which an analogically maintained polarity of nature-and-grace encompassed and surpassed every dialectical conflict between grace and sin.<sup>666</sup> Today, by contrast, Tracy no longer seeks to lead religious proclamation back to religious manifestation, nor dialectical God-talk back to analogical theism.<sup>667</sup> Instead, both parties in each pair are to sit side-by-side, rather as they do in Tracy's theological category of the 'mystical-prophetic,' employed since around 1990.<sup>668</sup> As Tracy says today: 'Manifestation and proclamation, the mystical and the prophetic, the apophatic and the apocalyptic – both sides are equally important.'<sup>669</sup> This fundamentally changes the correlative setting for

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<sup>662</sup> For discussion of Tracy's account of analogical imagination, see Chapter 2 section I. i. and Chapter 4 section IV. i., above, as well as section IV of this chapter, below.

<sup>663</sup> See Martin Poulson, 'The Place of Praxis in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx' in James Sweeney, Gemma Simmonds and David Lonsdale, eds., *Keeping Faith in Practice: Aspects of Catholic Pastoral Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2010), 131-42; and Chapter 4 section IV, above.

<sup>664</sup> See *Imagination*, 202-218; and Chapter 4 section IV. ii., above.

<sup>665</sup> See *Imagination*, 415-419; and Chapter 4 section IV. i., above.

<sup>666</sup> In a recent, as yet unpublished lecture ('The Necessity and Character of Fundamental Theology,' presented at Loyola University, Chicago, April 8, 2011), Tracy has contrasted the 'polarity' of grace and nature (in which grace completes nature) to the 'dialectic' of grace and sin (in which grace and sin do battle).

<sup>667</sup> See Chapter 4 section IV. ii., above; and also Tracy, 'Interview,' ln. 448-459.

<sup>668</sup> For the emergence of the category of the 'mystical-prophetic' for theology, see section V below in this chapter.

<sup>669</sup> 'Interview,' ln. 458-459; 'I would no longer have this sense that 'manifestation,' for example, takes over. No, because everything drives to fragmenting' (*ibid.*, ln. 456-7).

theology (as I will argue further in the concluding section of this chapter).

## II. ii. Correlation as implicit principle (since 1990)

Breaking with any all-surpassing metaphysical form of theism for theology, Tracy's more recent thought has also explicitly pluralised his continuing attempts at transcendental inquiry. Tracy has written recently of there being at least three 'routes' to thinking God available to us today, along which routes (of 'Love,' 'the Infinite,' and 'the Impossible,' suggests Tracy), there arise, likewise, a further variety of possible 'names' ('the Void,' 'the Open,' 'the Good,' 'God') for the transcendent-immanent Real that these routes conceive.<sup>670</sup> Here, the undimmed transcendental interest of the theologian becomes reconciled to achieving only ever partial and passing visions.<sup>671</sup>

Recall that Tracy once presented 'interpretation of the Christian tradition' and 'interpretation of the contemporary situation' as distinct tasks to be performed as prelude to their eventual 'mutually critical correlation' into a concerted theological position subtended to hermeneutical theory and theistic metaphysics. A pluralising of metaphysical reflection, however, undermines the extent to which Tracean 'correlation' can any longer present itself as a method or even an articulated model for theology. As Tracy wrote in 1990, '[e]very Christian hermeneutic today [...] must endure as not

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<sup>670</sup> See Tracy, 'On Longing: The Void, The Open, God' in Stephan van Erp and Lea Verstricht, eds., *Longing in a Culture of Cynicism* (Zürich & Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2008), 15-32. See also 'Interview,' In. 5-62), where Tracy adds a fourth 'route' to thinking God, 'Tragedy and Suffering.'

<sup>671</sup> Commenting on how, as he grows older, he 'much prefer[s] Whitehead to Hartshorne,' Tracy recalls with approval 'the famous image at the beginning of *Process and Reality*, in which [Whitehead] says metaphysics is like a plane trying to take off, and if it succeeds you have a certain vision' ('Interview,' In. 278-282). By contrast, Tracy observes critically: 'Hartshorne wants something much tougher. He wants the transcendental conditions of the possibility of experience itself!' (*ibid.*, In. 284-5).

merely unfinished but as broken.’<sup>672</sup> Tracy is unable today to claim any single assured method to pave the way of the theological task, any more than he can call upon theism to stage its contents.

No longer able to proclaim a method in which initial theological contents get taken up within ultimate theological form, Tracy wrote in 1994 of a pressing need to revisit ‘the elusive and intricate relationship of *form* and *content*’ within theology.<sup>673</sup> For, as Tracy explained, modern theology had been obsessed with defining and defending some or other primary form of theological rationality – some ‘ism’: ‘deism, theism, pantheism, agnosticism, panentheism’ – and in this it had risked ‘squandering the classical heritage of plural and possibly polyphonic forms for naming and thinking God.’<sup>674</sup> Thus, modern theology had been liable to mutilate the richness of its traditional sources in its search for ‘some singular meaning which, however valuable for its limited function,’ was characteristically ‘too narrow in its naming and too confined in its thinking to allow the full range of premodern forms to find a postcritical life of second naïveté for the once confident, now troubled modern thinker.’<sup>675</sup> As modern certainties retreated, this poverty was exposed as a hermeneutic failure.

In the wake of the retreat of those certainties, furthermore, as Tracy wrote in 1994, ‘[*t*]heos has returned to unsettle the dominance of the modern *logos*’ in contemporary

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<sup>672</sup> *Dialogue*, 121.

<sup>673</sup> Tracy, ‘Literary Theory and Return of the Forms for Naming and Thinking God in Theology,’ *Journal of Religion*, 74/3 (1994), 302-319: 302 (emphases mine). Tracy would also write in 1999 of a ‘fatal separation’ (as opposed to helpful distinction) of form from content in modern thinking more generally (Tracy, ‘Trinitarian Speculation and the Forms of Divine Disclosure’ in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall and Gerald O’Collins, eds., *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 273-293: 273-4). See also Tracy, ‘Form and Fragment: The Recovery of the Hidden and Incomprehensible God,’ eds. Werner G. Jeanrond and Aasulv Lande, *The Concept of God in Global Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 98-114: 100.

<sup>674</sup> Tracy, ‘Literary Theory,’ 307.

<sup>675</sup> ‘Literary Theory,’ 309.

theology. According to Tracy, a release of theological rhetoric beyond stable horizons of intelligibility has left the theologian to confront a ‘nearly impossible task of correlating *theos* and *logos*.’<sup>676</sup> In a time that lacks consensus on how to interpret (or ‘name’) itself,<sup>677</sup> when compelling transcendental supports appear fragmentary at best, Tracy imagined the theologian labouring at this ‘nearly impossible’ task of bringing thoughtful correlations to bear.

There is no doubt that Tracy’s theological thinking since 1990 has been much influenced by ‘postmodern’ philosophical and theological criticisms of theism and metaphysics, drawing upon Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida.<sup>678</sup> Yet for all this, as Tracy wrote in his Preface to the 1995 reprinting of *Blessed Rage*, ‘[a] thinker today can only go through modernity, never around it, to post-modernity.’<sup>679</sup> So it is to the distinctively modern argument of *Blessed Rage* that we shall turn next, beginning with Tracy’s partial break with his teacher Bernard Lonergan which informed that work.

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<sup>676</sup> Tracy, ‘The Return of God in Contemporary Theology’ in Tracy, *On Naming the Present: Reflections on God, Hermeneutics, and Church* (London: SCM Press, 1994), 36-46: 36

<sup>677</sup> ‘We live in an age that cannot name itself. For some, we are still in the age of modernity and the triumph of the bourgeois subject. For others, we are in a time of the levelling of all traditions and await the return of the repressed and communal subject. For yet others, we are in a postmodern moment where the death of the subject is now upon us as the last receding wave of the death of God’ (‘On Naming the Present’ in *On Naming the Present*, 3-24: 3).

<sup>678</sup> See, classically, Martin Heidegger, ‘The Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics’ [1956/7] in Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 42-76; also John D. Caputo and Gianni Vattimo, *After the Death of God*, ed. Jeffrey W. Robbins (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

<sup>679</sup> *Blessed Rage*, xv.

### III. *Blessed Rage for Order*: correlation with ‘common human experience’

#### III. i. The break with Lonergan

Tracy’s first book-length publication, back in 1970, was his *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan*, which followed from his doctorate about Lonergan (supervised by Lonergan in the mid-1960s).<sup>680</sup> Tracy was also a director at the 1970 Lonergan Congress in Florida, but by this time he was suspecting Lonergan of building uncritical and premature religious-dogmatic commitments into his conception of the theological task. In particular, Tracy distrusted Lonergan’s account of the intellectual significance of moral and religious ‘conversion’ for theology.<sup>681</sup> As a consequence, *Blessed Rage* would not follow Lonergan’s route into theology. When analysing *scientific* consciousness in *Blessed Rage*, Tracy was still content to declare himself ‘convinced that Lonergan’s method is sound’:<sup>682</sup> but the moment that moral and existential questions of personhood come into view, Tracy announces baldly that he will ‘now depart from a use of Lonergan’s transcendental method.’<sup>683</sup>

As we have seen, Lonergan’s general philosophical anthropology incorporated a religious theory of transcendent action visited upon us all from above: action that offers to effect human religious ‘conversion’ to restore and perfect our natural reason and morality.<sup>684</sup> According to Lonergan, the religious conversion of falling or being ‘in love without restriction’ preserves every intellectual and moral conversion within itself, and

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<sup>680</sup> Tracy, *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970).

<sup>681</sup> For Tracy’s critique of Lonergan’s ‘dogmatic’ account of theology, to be discussed here shortly, see Tracy, ‘Lonergan’s Foundational Theology: An Interpretation and Critique,’ *Foundations of Theology*, 197-222.

<sup>682</sup> *Blessed Rage*, 99.

<sup>683</sup> *Blessed Rage*, 101.

<sup>684</sup> See Chapter 6 section II. iii., above.

forms ‘the efficacious ground of all self-transcendence, whether in the pursuit of truth, or in the realization of human values, or in the orientation man adopts to the universe, its ground, and its goal.’<sup>685</sup>

Lonergan seems more to state than argue that this phenomenon of gifted religious loving really does shine forth unambiguously upon everyday human experience; that religious experience really is such a sure enlivener of our truthfulness and goodness; and that thereby we really do perceive and live up to a cosmic ground and purpose. Lonergan evidently assumes that this natural-supernatural dynamism is able to authenticate itself in experience. However, given that religious emotion alone scarcely seems to offer such an authentication, it is fair to presume that Lonergan assumed some additional means by which one’s alleged authenticity-in-loving may be reflected knowingly back to one. Indeed, for one to have confidence in one’s own synthesis of intellectual ‘method’ and religious ‘loving,’ one would seem to require the assurance of some pre-existing manifest standard of integrated intellectual, moral, and religious authenticity to measure oneself against. This is where religions come in. Probably, it is only *because* Lonergan assumes the prior intellectual, moral, and religious authenticity of Catholic tradition as a whole – as a (perhaps, *the*) paradigmatic instance of a supposed broader class of authoritative-because-‘authentic’ religions – that he is able to construe religious emotion as the incorporative sublation of our rational and moral endeavour (rather than, say, merely a complicating factor within, or even the chaotic derailing of, our reason and morals).<sup>686</sup>

In a close and technically argued dissection of Lonergan’s emerging ideas on the

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<sup>685</sup> *Method*, 241.

<sup>686</sup> On the Rahner-like ‘sublation’ of intellectual and moral conversions within religious conversion, see *Method*, 240.

differentiated task of collaborative theology, in a paper that Tracy delivered to the Lonergan Congress in Florida in 1970, Tracy raised related suspicions about the basis of Lonergan's philosophical-religious vision.<sup>687</sup> Tracy noted that of the eight cumulative 'functional specialities' that Lonergan had proposed as comprising the global task of theology (namely: research, interpretation, history, dialectic, foundations, dogmatics, systematics, and communications),<sup>688</sup> the fourth of these, 'dialectic,' consisted for Lonergan in 'dialectical reflection on the results of earlier historical theology.' By this means, Tracy continued, Lonergan was claiming that the theological functional speciality, 'dialectic,' could establish 'a scientific way of dealing with the moral and religious event called "conversion" from which alone [...] theology may authentically speak.'<sup>689</sup> From this, Tracy concluded that Lonergan's pivotal analysis of conversion and its role in Lonerganian theology was itself predicated upon '*assuming* (as a dogmatic assertion) the truth-value of the data (presumably religious) interpreted and critically investigated' in the previous functional speciality (i.e., history).<sup>690</sup> Thus, Lonergan established the scientific character of moral and religious conversion for theology on the basis of an already presumed authority of specific religious tradition. Tracy finds lacking in all this any '*critical* dialectical mediation of religious and theological meaning and language.'<sup>691</sup>

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<sup>687</sup> Lonergan, 'Functional Specialities in Theology,' *Gregorianum* 50 (1969), 485-505. This became chapter five of *Method*.

<sup>688</sup> See *Method*, 127-133: (1) 'Research' involved establishing the relevant texts; (2) 'Interpretation' involved uncovering the meanings of those texts in their contexts; (3) 'History' involved judging historical facts; (4) 'Dialectic' involved discerning basic philosophical positions, and finding the basic criteria for theology in integrated intellectual, moral, and religious 'conversion'; (5) 'Foundations' involved rendering ones own 'conversions' thematic and explicitly objectified; (6) 'Doctrines' involved determining the tradition's specific theological judgments of fact and value in the context of all the foregoing; (7) 'Systematics' involved systematising doctrinal statements into coherent and analogous understandings of 'spiritual matters' (*Method*, 132); and, finally, (8) 'Communications' involved formulating theology's external relations to other disciplines, to all various aspects of the culture, and to the available media of communication at any particular place and time.

<sup>689</sup> 'Lonergan's Foundational Theology,' 210.

<sup>690</sup> 'Lonergan's Foundational Theology,' 210.

<sup>691</sup> 'Lonergan's Foundational Theology,' 210.

Tracy found that the problem only solidified still further in the succeeding ‘functional speciality,’ ‘foundations,’ wherein the Lonerganian theologian attempts ‘to articulate the basic horizon within which a theologian operates’ by thematising his or her own conversions. For all that ‘foundations’ funnels everything back again through the ‘authenticity’ of an experiencing subject, it would nevertheless be perfectly logical, argues Tracy, were Lonergan to go on after this to develop positions in ‘systematics,’ that are simply ‘grounded in the dogmatic principle of Roman Catholicism emerging from dialectics and thematised as *the* dogmatic realist horizon in “foundations.”’<sup>692</sup> According to Tracy, to avoid being not simply uncritically subservient to the dogmatic principle of Roman Catholicism (albeit now in a ‘sophisticated [and] methodologically collaborative’ manner), Lonergan would need to find more convincing ways to differentiate properly critical theological ‘foundations’ from more properly doctrinal ‘systematics’ (and likewise ‘dialectics’ from ‘doctrines’).

Looking back of at his presentation at the 1970 Congress itself, Tracy expresses regret today that he presented there a ‘too rationalistic’ and ‘one-sided and hawkish’ critique of Lonergan, specifically on the nature of theology’s relation to religious love. Tracy tells of how, at the Congress, Lonergan privately challenged Tracy and Langdon Gilkey about their demands for a critical dissection of the ground of theology. Could Gilkey give a critical account of his love for his wife, Lonergan asked?<sup>693</sup> Today Tracy is happy to concede to Lonergan that ‘[y]ou don’t argue with love or for love’; ‘Like Freud says, you can’t argue with feelings, they’re there or they’re not there.’ However Tracy also adds, more critically, that ‘you can raise critical questions, and Lonergan

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<sup>692</sup> ‘Lonergan’s Foundational Theology,’ 215.

<sup>693</sup> See ‘Interview,’ ln. 205-9.

wouldn't even do that, I think.'<sup>694</sup>

For his part, in *Blessed Rage* Tracy believed no less than Lonergan that Christian theology must seek to be an authoritatively 'authentic' thinking, paradigmatic in its discernment and fostering of human self-transcendence. In *Blessed Rage*, however, this meant locating authenticity in a commitment to the 'purely secular standards for knowledge and action initiated by the Enlightenment.'<sup>695</sup> And so, despite adopting Lonergan's equation of authenticity with scientific and moral self-transcendence, *Blessed Rage* quietly undid Lonergan's weave of religious philosophy and privileged Catholic doctrine for the sake of the theologian's full membership of the community of scientific inquiry.<sup>696</sup> In the place of submission to religious heteronomy, *Blessed Rage* made it a central task of theology to establish, as best it may, case by case, and by engaging in after-the-(Christian)-fact critical argument, whether (and if so, how) Christian materials bear cognitive, moral and existential value.

In *Blessed Rage*, therefore, Tracy sought to conceive the crucial concept of human 'authenticity' for theology in a 'critical' rather than religiously dogmatic manner. However, there were two simultaneous sides to Tracy's account of authenticity in *Blessed Rage*. On the one hand, as we will see in the next subsection, he developed a purely philosophical argument concerning 'common human experience' as the criterion for human authenticity. On the other hand, as the subsection after that will explore, he also looked to interpret theological authenticity for his own time as an 'authentic

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<sup>694</sup> 'Interview,' ln. 210-213.

<sup>695</sup> Tracy notes here Lionel Trilling's diagnosis of a shift from modern 'sincerity' to post-modern 'authenticity' within secular commitment (*Blessed Rage*, 8; Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972)).

<sup>696</sup> Tracy declares in *Blessed Rage* that the fundamental loyalty of the theologian as a *theologian* must be 'to that community of scientific inquiry whose province logically includes whatever issue is under discussion' (*Blessed Rage*, 7).

secularity.’

### III. ii. Christianity as authentic fidelity to essential self-experience

Rather than rooting authenticity in ‘conversions’ that begin and end in appropriations of transcendently gifted loving, *Blessed Rage* aimed to root the unchanging essence of human authenticity in nothing more tendentious than commonly discoverable basic self-experience. In this depth of human experience Tracy proposed to exhibit the essential ‘experience of the self as an authentic self.’<sup>697</sup> According to *Blessed Rage*, human experience always gives itself, underneath all else, as an immediately reflexive experience of the givenness of experience: such that one is always experiencing within everyday experience also a reflexive *self* that experience gives.<sup>698</sup> This experience of self is therefore what is proper (or ‘authentic’) to experience as such. And so it follows that this primary, pre-linguistic experience of the self, being itself the inexpressible heart of authentic experience, is also by the same token the experience of an ‘authentic self’: that is, of a self that is showing forth itself properly from itself.<sup>699</sup> Such a self is the basic phenomenon of experience. In this way, *Blessed Rage* sought to establish the entire horizon of human experience in relation to this fixed locus of our ‘non-sensuous experience’ that pervades ‘what phenomenologists call our “lived experience.”’<sup>700</sup> In sum, according to Tracy in *Blessed Rage* there exists a common basic self-experience that summons to authenticity all human reflection, imagination, and decision in history.

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<sup>697</sup> *Blessed Rage*, 66.

<sup>698</sup> *Blessed Rage*, 64-66.

<sup>699</sup> Recall here Heidegger’s definition of phenomenology in terms of *phainomenon* as ‘showing-itself-in-itself’ and *logos* as ‘letting-something-be-seen.’ Here, Heidegger gives ‘phenomenology’ the meaning: ‘to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself.’ This is a restatement of Husserl’s maxim, “To the things themselves!” (*Being and Time*, 58).

<sup>700</sup> *Blessed Rage*, 66.

Of itself, however, the evidence for this kind of essentially meaningful but utterly pre-linguistic self-experience is necessarily hard to come by. As pre-linguistic, it is available for inspection, if at all, only by inference at a remove. Hence, Tracy argued simultaneously that this constant (non-evident) self-experience is also evidenced indirectly itself by incessant historical experiences of a ‘religious dimension’ of reality, manifest at the ‘limits’ of human scientific, moral and personal finitude.<sup>701</sup> In this way, *Blessed Rage* linked its claim concerning pre-linguistic ahistorical self-experience with a claim concerning trans-historical common experience of an encompassing religious dimension – a ‘limit-of’ reality – which supposedly makes itself unfailingly manifest (to the ‘authentic,’ at least) at the limits of human scientific and moral questioning and in both positive and negative existential limit-situations (of, e.g., joy, love, illness, anxiety, grief, oppression, or impending death).<sup>702</sup>

In effect, *Blessed Rage* presented these limit-experiences of religious living and thinking as the mediated and manifest counterparts of our non-manifest but immediate experience of self. The immediate experience of self, in turn, he imagined as undergirding our experience of *meaning*. The undergirding of meaning in basic self-experience was important to *Blessed Rage*, which proposed to conceive fundamental theology for its day as ‘philosophical reflection upon the meanings present in common human experience and language, and upon meanings in the Christian fact.’<sup>703</sup> Here ‘meanings’ are modes-of-being-in-the-world that modulate the incipiently meaningful

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<sup>701</sup> See *Blessed Rage*, 98-109.

<sup>702</sup> See *Blessed Rage*, 105-109. Tracy himself later came to doubt the self-evidence of the claim that always and everywhere there is disclosed a gracious ‘religious dimension’ in all the ‘limit-questions’ and ‘limit-experiences’ of human finitude (see Chapter 6 section I. iv., above, and note 565; and Tracy, ‘Defending the Public Character of Theology,’ (*Christian Century* 98 (1981), 350-356: 355)).

<sup>703</sup> *Blessed Rage*, 43.

phenomenon of immediate self-experience.<sup>704</sup> Furthermore, at the same time as basic self-experience was said to ground every differentiated experience of meaning, Tracy also suggested in *Blessed Rage* that the historical limit-questions and limit-experiences of everyday human living could be said to disclose the essential trustworthiness (and hence ‘meaningfulness’) of existence.<sup>705</sup>

The intricately interwoven argument of *Blessed Rage* shuttled in this way between transcendental supposition and empirical generalisation, in a manner very much vulnerable to Alan Ray’s Foucaultian criticisms of ‘empirical-transcendental reduplication.’<sup>706</sup> In a related vein, Hans Frei also put his finger on the basic problem with this kind of argument when he wrote of ‘Tracy’s tortuous procedure [in *Blessed Rage*] for making publicly and universally accessible supposed human realities that remain elusive and in doubt, except for those already persuaded.’<sup>707</sup>

### III. iii. Christianity as authentic secularity

Alongside this philosophical analysis of human experience, *Blessed Rage* also pursued a bold ‘revisioning’ of contemporary Christian existence in terms of ‘authentic secularity’ as a key category for contemporary Christian faith and life.

*Blessed Rage* opens by asserting that the reality of ‘the contemporary theological

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<sup>704</sup> Here I follow Hans Frei: “‘Meanings’” then are [for *Blessed Rage*] modes-of-being-in-the-world that are essences, or constant and identifiable characteristics, of the experiencing self” (Hans Frei, ‘Five Types of Theology’ in Hans Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, eds. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1992), 28-55: 32).

<sup>705</sup> See chapter five of *Blessed Rage*, entitled ‘The Religious Dimension of Common Human Experience and Language’ (pp. 91-118).

<sup>706</sup> See Chapter 6 section I. iv., above.

<sup>707</sup> Frei, ‘Five Types of Theology,’ 34.

situation' is that there exists a 'common secular faith' shared, in fact, by everyone who genuinely inhabits the modern world. Tracy describes this shared 'secular faith' as a 'commitment' and an 'attitude' that acknowledges 'the ultimate significance and final worth of our lives, our thoughts, and actions, here and now, in nature and in history.' Tracy continues that '[a]n explicit and full recognition of this faith as, in fact, *the* common faith shared by secularist and modern Christian is perhaps the most important insight needed to understand the contemporary theological situation in its full dimensions and its real possibilities.'<sup>708</sup>

This is, of course, a bold interpretative claim, to which, no doubt, the analysis of common human experience was intended to lend plausibility. *Blessed Rage* wove together its global interpretation of its historical context ("nowadays, to be humanly authentic is to be genuinely secular") with its phenomenological-philosophical argument ("always, humanly authenticity has been an elaboration of essential human self-experience").

Tracy argued that the situation of that time presented 'real possibilities' for a 'revisionist' theology committed to jointly reinterpreting contemporary experience and 'the Christian fact.' The 'fundamental claim' of the revisionist theologian, he insisted, is that

nothing less than a proper understanding of [Christian] beliefs – in 'revelation,' in 'God,' in 'Jesus Christ' – can provide an adequate understanding, a correct 'reflective inventory,' or an existentially appropriate symbolic representation of the fundamental faith of secularity.<sup>709</sup>

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<sup>708</sup> *Blessed Rage*, 8.

<sup>709</sup> *Blessed Rage*, 9. In a footnote, Tracy notes a contrasting 'seeming inability' of nonreligious secularists 'to articulate a powerful symbol-system' (*ibid.*, 19 n. 43).

Nothing *less* than the Christian symbols, Tracy suggested, can adequately reflect cognitively or appropriately represent existentially the truth of contemporary human existence.

The idea that ‘the secular’ could be the primary source of self-authenticating theological norms was hardly unknown among liberal Protestant theologians by the 1970s, but few Roman Catholic theologians have worked this theme. A sensitive Catholic critic, Avery Dulles, found the ‘secular’ stance and affirmation of *Blessed Rage* theologically and religiously alienating.<sup>710</sup> Yet, Tracy was surely at least right to refuse to associate God with another world of existence that makes itself apparent to the one world that we share with all interlocutors only through some supposedly privileged institution. Tracy has had no time for the combined and contradictory nullities of communitarian authoritarianism and Gnostic-style esotericism.

However, by expanding of the term ‘secularity’ to be, in effect, a synonym of the wider notion of ‘authenticity,’ *Blessed Rage* did tend to elevate this-worldly belonging as the undisputed highest human possibility. Imagining that in our rational self-transcendence we should strive towards ever-new elaborations of our essential human experience and language of reason, *Blessed Rage* also confidently assumed that human beings are essential hermeneutical ‘insiders,’ who possess in themselves the keys to all understanding. Here we may ask: what if we are instead constitutional hermeneutical *outsiders* in all our most essential interpretative tasks, in spite of all our local adaptation to intelligent conception and rational judgment? Perhaps, in our fascinated attention to the secrets that both form us and remain hidden from us, we are always striving to

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<sup>710</sup> Avery Dulles, ‘Method in Fundamental Theology: Reflections on David Tracy’s *Blessed Rage for Order*,’ *Theological Studies* 37/2 (1976), 304-316.

attend to some *other* in our hopes for deeper understanding, and to an otherness more fundamental than our supposed essential ‘selves.’ Something more like this latter path seems to have been the direction adopted in Tracy’s more recent hermeneutics of the fragment.

#### **IV. *The Analogical Imagination*: correlation through hermeneutical theory**

By the time of *Imagination*, however, the centre of gravity in Tracean fundamental theology had shifted from hard-to-substantiate claims about common human experience to a more malleable project of theological hermeneutics centred around the idea of tradition. This section will be about this modified approach.<sup>711</sup>

*Imagination* set before its readers the seemingly concrete and empirical ‘phenomenon of the classic’ to bear the weight of theological correlation. As we have seen, Tracy presented ‘classics’ as the fundamental enduring entities that undergird human culture and tradition.<sup>712</sup> His claim was that all cultures possess certain images, texts, symbols, rituals, or historical persons, to which that culture returns again and again so as to interpret them anew and prompt from them new manifestations of meaning and possible truth.<sup>713</sup> Their existence ‘may be trusted to time,’ wrote Tracy, as ‘generations of capable readers and inquirers [...] check our enthusiasms and ensure the emergence of

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<sup>711</sup> There will not be space in this section (or in the thesis as a whole) for an in-depth reading of the manifold fine-grain systematic theological judgements that populate Tracy’s text and footnotes in *Imagination* (in the fields of contemporary Christology, for example), or, again, the alliances that he makes there with other theologians. These would all richly reward examination in their own right, but their retrieval would reward most after one has first appreciated the basic ways in which Tracy’s theological project *today* is in both continuity and discontinuity with his enterprise in *Imagination*. This chapter operates on that broader level.

<sup>712</sup> See Chapter 2 section I above.

<sup>713</sup> ‘The presence of classics in every culture is undeniable. Their memory haunts us. Their actual effects in our lives endure and await ever new appropriations, constantly new interpretations’ (*Imagination*, 109).

some sense of the importance of certain texts, images, persons, events, symbols.<sup>714</sup>

It certainly sounds plausible to claim that cultures rely on tradition, and that traditions rely on cultural products inherited as something like ‘classics.’<sup>715</sup> After all, we rely upon human creations of the past (for example, words) in order to think effectively in the present. It was only a short step for Tracy to extend this expectation to other historical human artefacts, memories and remains.

What is less clear, however, is why we should view any of these as quite the permanent enablers and organisers of human culture that *Imagination* imagined. For it does not follow from the *de facto* existence of tradition that time will deal kindly with any of a culture’s supposed resources of truth. It is possible the generations to come will be as fooled by our classics as we have been, but it is equally as possible that they will discard them as passing illusions or unmask them as the plays of dominatory power. Or, perhaps ‘tradition’ is just a name for part of how we muddle through, and we would be best not to elevate it into a supposed gateway to Truth.

Yet, clearly, Tracy intended the ‘phenomenon of the classic’ to entail more than mere general empirical observation. He saw it as part of a much grander theoretical claim, which he sought to make explicit through a journey of supplement and clarification with respect to the experiences, first, of ‘religion’ in general,<sup>716</sup> and, second (and just as

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<sup>714</sup> *Imagination*, 109.

<sup>715</sup> Tracy insisted that his ‘defense of the category “classic”’ was *not* ‘a defense of classicism or even of pure retrieval, disallowing explanatory theories and suspicion (as in most of Gadamer’s uses of the notion)’ (*Plurality*, 116 n. 8). Instead, it had more in common with Aristotle’s recognition of the importance of ‘exemplary examples’ (*ibid.*). Both here and in *Imagination* (p. 139 n. 39), Tracy cites Frank Kermode’s *The Classic* (New York: Viking, 1975) for a defence of the notion of the classic against the charge of classicism.

<sup>716</sup> See the chapters of *Imagination* on ‘the religious classic,’ especially chapter five (pp. 193-229).

crucially) Christianity in particular.<sup>717</sup> In this way, Tracy sought to present the phenomenon of the classic as neither a bland empirical commonplace, on the one hand, nor yet a mere veil for untestable philosophical intuitions, on the other.

To interpret the classic-in-general by way of the ‘Christian classic,’ however, required first of Tracy a recourse to a half-way-house: namely, the peculiarly essential and revealing kind of classic that Tracy named the ‘religious classic.’ It is at this point that *Imagination* embroiled itself in some transcendental claims reminiscent of *Blessed Rage*. For, as noted earlier (in Chapter Two), in the religious classic, Tracy proposed finding reality as a whole (which is also reality *as such*) responding to our human limit-questions and corresponding to our limit-experiences, disclosing itself through religious classic-as-‘paradigmatic’ events, texts, rituals, symbols, and persons.<sup>718</sup> Thus Tracy’s original notion of the classic-in-general is now seen to have been all along anticipating this horizon of ‘the whole.’ For, as Tracy writes here, *all* major classics of culture ‘may bear a limit-to “religious dimension” as manifesting some essential aspect of the whole or some human response to that aspect.’<sup>719</sup> What nevertheless differentiates religious classics from other classics, however, according to *Imagination*, is that they ‘bear the further [...] claim to attention’ that ‘here the whole has manifested itself.’<sup>720</sup> Thus Tracy concludes that ‘the differentia of the religious classic can be described as some “manifestation (and concealment) of the whole by the power of the whole.”’<sup>721</sup>

What differentiates religious classics, it follows, is not that they are more intensely

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<sup>717</sup> See Part II of *Imagination*, subtitled ‘Interpreting the Christian Classic.’

<sup>718</sup> Concerning the ‘paradigmatic’ quality of religious phenomena for those who experience them, after Mircea Eliade, see *Imagination* on ‘the realized experience of truth in the religious classic’ (*ibid.*, 194-197).

<sup>719</sup> *Imagination*, 183 n. 22.

<sup>720</sup> *Imagination*, 183 n. 22.

<sup>721</sup> *Imagination*, 183 n. 22.

‘classic’ than other classics. Tracy’s argument is thus not akin to Gadamer’s claim, for example, that ‘poetic statements’ are more intensely and exemplarily linguistic than other occasions of language.<sup>722</sup> Instead, Tracy distinguishes religious classics because of their special relation to a distinct category of *religious* experience, as witnessed in ‘the great tradition of the interpretation of the *sui generis* nature of religion from Schleiermacher through Otto, Wach, von Hügel, Tillich and Eliade.’<sup>723</sup> Tracy’s claim about religious classics was thus a product of his confidence in a manifest ‘religious dimension’ of reality. He appeals in *Imagination* to theorists of the *sui generis* nature of religion to lend further phenomenological corroboration to an argument that we have seen he had first attempted in *Blessed Rage*. It must be a moot point as to whether or not *Imagination* empirical-phenomenological extension of his previous argument really advanced his case.

Either way, the fuller interplay of empirical observation and transcendental reflection that *Imagination* attempts comes into view not with the generality of the religious classic as such, but rather with exploration of the fully concrete and particular example of ‘the Christian classic’ in the second half of the book.<sup>724</sup> Tracy’s claim thus became that Christianity – as the ‘classic’ tradition of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ in his life, death and resurrection – can, in actual fact, exemplify the nature of tradition itself as a product of analogical imagination.

It is significant that Tracy brought his concept of ‘the classic’ to completion in *Imagination* not by philosophical analysis merely, but ultimately, by interpreting the

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<sup>722</sup> *Truth and Method*, 465-466.

<sup>723</sup> *Blessed Rage*, 168. As Tracy remarks, ‘[t]he closest analogue to this claim of the “religious classic” in aesthetic theories are the reflections on “the sublime” in Shaftesbury, Burke and Kant’ (*Blessed Rage*, 183 n. 22).

<sup>724</sup> *Imagination*, 233-455.

‘Christian classic’ of Jesus Christ. In this way, *Imagination* married fundamental and systematic theology in a way that he did not attempt in *Blessed Rage* with its distinct analyses of common human experience (as essential fundamental theology) and Christian authentic secularity (as proto-systematic theology).

In the attractive vision of theology and thinking that emerged, ‘an analogical imagination’ was revealed as the wit and grace that is able to understand similarity-in-difference, and so uncover meaning and truth in a world of multiplicity and difference. Tracy opened his Epilogue to *Imagination* with a striking poem by James Tate, conjuring a vision and a hope, which, it suddenly appears, has all along been casting its delight over Tracy’s vision:

#### Entries

When I think no thing is like any other thing  
I become speechless, cold, my body turns silver  
and water runs off me. There I am  
ten feet from myself, possessor of nothing,  
uncomprehending of even the simplest particle of dust.  
But when I say, You are like  
a swamp animal during an eclipse,  
I am happy, full of wisdom, loved by children  
and old men alike. I am sorry if this confuses you.  
During an eclipse the swamp animal  
acts as though day were night,  
drinking when he should be sleeping, etc.  
This is why men stay up all night  
writing to you.<sup>725</sup>

Here, the sheer joy in finding connections between things opens upon a fullness of world and life, ‘happy, full of wisdom, loved by children / and old men alike.’ And

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<sup>725</sup> ‘Entries’ by James Tate, from his *Absences: New Poems* (1970); *Imagination*, 446.

what is more, amid this joy there seems to be inaugurated, also, a certain indetermination of immanence and transcendence. Are the ‘men’ of the penultimate line writing their worship to a woman or to God, or both? Whichever it may be, in a reversal that culminates the poem, it turns out it is also *they* who now act like swamp animals who are deranged by an eclipse, and so stay up all night. In the power of a thing being *like* another thing, it seems, the Other begins to flow indiscernibly along with the same.

Not that an analogical imagination seeks to bypass the reality of conflict, however. Tracy’s hope was that a religiously engaged and so fully-functioning analogical imagination could ‘become a clearing wherein we may finally hear one another again,’ as people willing to face together the negation that lies ‘concealed in our present inhumanity in all its [...] deepening, encroaching darkness’ (which darkness, however, Tracy concludes, ‘even now, even here, discloses the encompassing light always-already with us.’)<sup>726</sup> Ultimately, an analogical imagination was for Tracy a hopeful strategy for facing up to the negative realities of injustice and ‘inhumanity’ in ourselves, our traditions and our ways of life, while yet discerning also, ‘even now, even here,’ the light of a more truly human possibility always-already sojourning with us.

It was (and remains) a beautiful vision. But it was also perhaps a vision with rather too much advance confidence in the resolution of the dialectical difference of things into their more fundamental analogical similarity. And the ‘order and, at limit, harmony’ of the world spied by analogical imagination intimated at its zenith a panentheistic analogical relationship between God and the world which likewise may have remained

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<sup>726</sup> *Imagination*, 455.

a little too clear and non-dialectical.<sup>727</sup>

We should acknowledge, however, that Tracean theological analogical imagination was a significant advance on the generality of the process panentheist inheritance. We have seen in Chapter Two (above here) that in *Imagination* Tracy demands a greater ‘dialectical incorporation’ of ‘the symbolic, the negative and the sense of radical mystery (incomprehensibility, hidden and revealed God etc.)’ within process theology.<sup>728</sup> And he does deliver on this to a significant extent in *Imagination*. For whereas his previous canon of ‘secularity-not-secularism’ for theology in *Blessed Rage* had appeared to present its case in advance of any actual consideration of the supposedly ‘re-presentational’ symbols of the historically particular ‘Christian fact,’ in *Imagination* there is a real sense in which – despite a certain reliance on interpolating the ‘religious classic’ – it is only with the plausible appearance of the concrete paradigmatic example of ‘the classic of Jesus Christ’ that the concept of the classic-in-general receives any complete presentation and defence.<sup>729</sup> In this way the ‘symbolic’ is at the heart of the emergence of the analogical concept in *Imagination* in a way it was definitely not in Hartshorne’s logic of theism.

Similarly, for *Imagination* there is no ‘Christ-event’ at the heart of a classic except via

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<sup>727</sup> Just perhaps, the reversal hinted at in the poem might be capable of sending the whole idea into a vertiginous apophatic mysticism. But Tracy did not seem ready for this move in *Imagination*, and at that time this would anyway have completely destroyed the element of prophetic proclamation that he was seeking to integrate into analogical imagination.

<sup>728</sup> *Imagination*, 439 n. 7. See Chapter 2 section II, above, and especially the main text to notes 177 and following.

<sup>729</sup> As Mike Hiton observes, ‘the reader of *The Analogical Imagination* is led through a series of concentric analyses towards systematic theology’: from classic to religious classic and from religious classic to Christian classic. Each time ‘something new’ is added: we do not deal here simply in ‘a regional application of the more general theory (as [Hans] Frei claimed)’ (Higton, ‘Hans Frei and David Tracy on the Ordinary and the Extraordinary in Christianity,’ 582).

the confrontational ‘memory of this dangerous and subversive Jesus of Nazareth.’<sup>730</sup> Thus dialectic becomes, even if subordinate, nevertheless wholly inherent to analogy, on Tracy’s model, in a way that would also be foreign within Hartshorne’s philosophical theology. A new note of fundamental incomprehensibility also now attaches itself to the process God, meanwhile, in a model in which God’s being and saving power would occur fundamentally in the constitutional hiddenness and unpredictability of an ‘event.’<sup>731</sup>

Yet for all this, Tracy’s account of general and theological interpretation in *Imagination* still sought an intellectually and spiritually limpid analogical concept, in a move that is directly parallel to the similar demands made in *Blessed Rage* on behalf of process theism (and followed up in *Talking About God*).<sup>732</sup> In resolving upon conjointly general-hermeneutical and systematic-theological ‘analogical imagination,’ *Imagination* also allowed the process-theistic concept – as such – to lapse into a certain amount of what we may regard as happy obscurity. It seems likely that, by this time, a precise theistic concept was no longer quite so centrally to the point for Tracy, for whom, as Mike Higton has observed, fundamental theology was increasingly consisting more in arguing ‘for the truth of systematic theology itself.’<sup>733</sup>

The interrogable transparency of one’s operative concept – theistic or hermeneutical – can, I believe, be contrasted to the ways in which traditional theistic analogy must gloss

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<sup>730</sup> *Imagination*, 281. Christian life and thought, Tracy writes, lives ‘by an event and a person – the event of Jesus Christ occurring now and grounded by none other than Jesus of Nazareth’: ‘What is that memory in the New Testament? It is the dangerous and subversive memory of Jesus – dangerous, above all, for the church which confesses it’ (*ibid.*, 427).

<sup>731</sup> In Christian thinking, Tracy informs us, ‘the Christ event is acknowledged as the radical mystery of the self-manifestation of God’ (*Imagination*, 409).

<sup>732</sup> See Chapter 2 section II, above.

<sup>733</sup> Mike A. Higton, ‘Hans Frei and David Tracy on the Ordinary and the Extraordinary in Christianity,’ 579-80.

its doctrinally-inspired literal propositions (creation and incarnation, as if facts) with categorical emotional-cognitive rhetoric and assurance (for example, McCabe's 'God suffered a horrible pain in his hands when he was nailed to the cross,' or Lonergan's gift from above of being-in-love-without-restriction). For his part, Tracy has been consistently determined not to surrender the full questionability of all interpretations to the un-plural and unambiguous operations of presumed authority. This determination applied also during the 1980s, when he still hoped, nevertheless, to stabilise the conversation fundamentally through integral transcendental inference.

However, when the more chastened meditation on human conversation followed *Imagination in Plurality*, and in Preface to that latter work, Tracy freely alluded to difficulties he saw arising for theology, which he would need to face in future theological work:

What the 'essence of Christianity' might be after Christians seriously acknowledge first, the plurality within their own traditions, second the import of the many other religious traditions for Christian self-understanding and third, the profound cognitive, moral and religious ambiguity of Christianity itself is, to put it mildly, a very difficult question.<sup>734</sup>

## **V. The prophet and the mystic**

'In the future,' continued Tracy in his Preface to *Plurality*, 'I hope to write a more strictly theological companion volume to this book that will assess the implications of these reflections on plurality, ambiguity, and hope for interpreting my own Christian

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<sup>734</sup> *Plurality*, x.

tradition.<sup>735</sup> In partial fulfilment of this promise, in 1990 Tracy published *Dialogue With the Other*, which opened by developing the category of the ‘mystical-prophetic’ (effectively, to supplement – and eventually supplant – ‘analogical imagination’ in Tracy’s theology and thinking).<sup>736</sup>

One distinct characteristic of the category ‘mystical-prophetic’ was its promise of an appeal to religion shorn of theisms. As Tracy wrote in 1994, ‘postmodern suspicions and retrievals’ in theology have displaced even the enduring achievements of modern panentheism, putting in its place ‘not a rival set of propositions [but] a search for entirely alternative forms [...] of language rendering excess, gift, desire, prayer.’<sup>737</sup>

In the remarkable essay that opens *Dialogue With the Other* (1990), entitled ‘Mystics, Prophets, Rhetorics: Religion and Psychoanalysis,’<sup>738</sup> Tracy set out ‘prophetic’ and ‘mystical’ as inter-relatable categories of rhetoric that are not only relevant to Christian (and other religious) thought, but applicable by analogy to the mixed scientific, clinical, literary, and philosophical discourses of Freud (as the ‘prophet’) and Lacan (as his ‘mystical’ interpreter). Like Tracy’s previous theological categories, therefore, the ‘mystical-prophetic’ would traverse the boundaries between specifically Christian theology and thinking more generally.

Tracy begins this essay with a theory concerning language found in Kenneth Burke’s

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<sup>735</sup> *Plurality*, x; see likewise *ibid.*, 130 n. 2, and 141 n. 53.

<sup>736</sup> Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-religious Dialogue* (Louvain: Peeters Uitgeverij, 1991). *Dialogue* has the form of a loosely cumulative sequence of essays – revised and expanded from lectures Tracy delivered at the University of Leuven in 1988 (see *Dialogue*, 1) – rather than a sustained monograph, and only parts of the book concern strictly theological questions.

<sup>737</sup> Tracy, ‘The Return of God in Contemporary Theology’ (1994), *On Naming the Present*, 36-46: 41

<sup>738</sup> *Dialogue*, 9-26.

*The Rhetoric of Religion* (1970).<sup>739</sup> According to Burke as cited by Tracy, there exists in language a ‘drive to perfection’ that is at once thought’s creativity and also its becoming rotten. Burke spies, writes Tracy, ‘the totalizing temptation’ that lurks in rationality, religion, science, and rhetoric itself: ‘the absolutisms endemic to religion; the scientism endemic to science; the imperialism endemic to rhetoric; the monomania endemic to most insights.’<sup>740</sup>

Burke modelled human beings as ‘symbolic animals’ who create a symbolic universe, but who, in this creation, as Tracy puts it, ‘cannot stop going to the end of the line – the line of the widest possible generalization, the most perfect language for the truly creative act, to God-terms (God as “Pure Act;” Genesis as Pure Act, as origin determining the whole cycle of terms).’<sup>741</sup> Subject to this compulsion towards totalising rhetoric, we find that all our creations of freedom as symbolic animals are destined to over-ripen and rot. Our very freedom reveals itself as determined and necessary in this, its inevitable end: history is returned to nature. Tracy sees here one ‘further meaning of Hegel’s or Hartshorne’s philosophical interpretations of God-language as perfection-language.’ Tracy’s argument is hugely compressed, but the first inference of this essay is clear: Burke’s concept of the ‘rotteness of perfection’ in all our thinking and speaking ‘suggests at best ambiguity and, at limit, over-determination in all our conscious “god-terms”.’<sup>742</sup>

Nevertheless, Tracy goes on to suggest in this essay that if we should be able to let go of Hegel and Hartshorne (the latter so important to Tracy in *Blessed Rage*), then we

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<sup>739</sup> Kenneth Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970).

<sup>740</sup> *Dialogue*, 13. On the monomania of insight, Tracy offers an example: ‘recall René Girard in *Violence and the Sacred* yielding to a kind of monomaniacal totalizing of a good insight’ (*ibid.*).

<sup>741</sup> *Dialogue*, 16.

<sup>742</sup> *Dialogue*, 17.

might begin to see that the religious perfection rhetoric of the Western monotheisms, at least, is split between the two poles of the mystic and the prophet, neither of which can outstrip the other. Burke himself remained a tragi-comic ‘analytic and moralizing therapist of the human mess’ (a neo-Stoic who commends we ‘dance with tears in our eyes’),<sup>743</sup> and did not spy the possibility and the release that this tension between prophet and mystic permits. Yet Tracy spied here in the religious case of the ‘mystical-prophetic’ a rupture in god-terms that could release us into a sober hope for responsible freedom.

First, there is the *prophet*. She receives a word that is not her own, but Other: and only on behalf of this Other may she speak her words of warning, prediction, promise or interruptive proclamation.<sup>744</sup> Those few who have ears to hear, hear in these words the Other in themselves such that they enter by them, at best, into a ‘continuous convalescence’: consolation from all sorrow being only possible where the Other is denied.<sup>745</sup> As for the prophets themselves, they frequently have good reasons to be discouraged, and may well become consumed with ‘fury at this Other who insists on speaking in them.’ At other times, however, ‘the prophets (or their successors) will yield to more reflective moods’:

They will face the fact that people seem to demand, not the word of the Other, but a consolation that cannot be given. They will note that the prophetic word is also “rotten with perfection.” *Ecclesiastes*, that oddest of biblical books, is, rhetorically, that kind of work; so is [Freud’s] *Civilization and Its Discontents*.<sup>746</sup>

For Freud, says Tracy, always had the rhetoric of a prophet. Despite Freud’s longing for

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<sup>743</sup> Tracy quotes from an unpublished seminar paper by David Smigelskis at Chicago in 1984 (see *Dialogue*, 12).

<sup>744</sup> *Dialogue*, 17.

<sup>745</sup> *Dialogue*, 18.

<sup>746</sup> *Dialogue*, 18-19.

a ‘scientific’ perfection language – invoking *Logos*, ‘not mystery, not Other, not law’ – his language was also – happily – polyvalent and strange, over-determined and disseminating. Freud’s ‘powerful prophetic rhetoric challenged the ordinary prose of science and humanism alike as surely as the classic prophets’ rhetoric, however clear and definite, smashed against the iconic proses, the idols, of the people.’<sup>747</sup> This is to say, whatever the science he hoped for, Freud also produced ‘a prophetic rhetoric of persuasion to the Other.’<sup>748</sup>

What Freud sometimes wanted – from his god-term, *Logos* – was a stabilizing rhetoric of the topics. What he received – from the Other in the unconscious – was a radically destabilizing prophetic rhetoric of the tropes.<sup>749</sup>

And – here comes the *coup de grace* – it took Jacques Lacan (the ‘mystic’) to really understand this:

Jacques Lacan spotted this secret of the prophet with all the self-confidence of a mystic assuming that only he could understand what the prophet really meant. For mystics, unlike prophets, have no hesitation in allowing the destabilizing discourse of the Other the fullest sway.<sup>750</sup>

Tracy notes that the prophet is ‘made a responsible self by the Other-as-Word,’ losing self in order to gain self.<sup>751</sup> To some Eastern traditions of mysticism, such as Zen Buddhism, prophetic discourse has consequently been regarded not as a solution but rather as a symptom of a deeper problem in the compulsion to affirm a God and one’s own ‘self.’ The apophatic mysticism of *Lacan*, by contrast, says Tracy, is like the

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<sup>747</sup> *Dialogue*, 19.

<sup>748</sup> *Dialogue*, 20.

<sup>749</sup> *Dialogue*, 21.

<sup>750</sup> *Dialogue*, 21.

<sup>751</sup> *Dialogue*, 22.

mysticism of the Western monotheisms, especially that of the love-mystics.<sup>752</sup> All apophatic mystics in the monotheistic prophetic traditions answer to their critics that in order to understand the prophets one needs a basic structural grammar (of God-world-soul) which the mystics will supply.<sup>753</sup> This is Lacan's relation to Freud.

Only, Tracy observes, some of these western mystics tend subsequently *also* to become *radically* apophatic, like Dionysus, Eruigena, and Eckhart. In this development, 'the basic structural elements themselves (God-world-soul) dissolve into one another as self-negating, self-dissolving': Eckhart's prayer to God to save him from God 'is far [...] from the responsible self of the prophets as well as far from the agapic-erotic self of the Christian love-mystics.'<sup>754</sup> Something very similar occurs, Tracy notes, when Lacan moves from the assertion that 'the unconscious is structured like a language' to his rejection of the unified sign because the signifiers and not the signifieds rule. At that point, 'we are far [...] from the "sign" of Saussure and the god *Logos* of the scientific side of Freud. We are somewhere else. Perhaps in the discourse of the Other? Perhaps in the apophatic excess of *jouissance*? Surely not in the ego.'<sup>755</sup>

At the same time, however, rather as when Eckhart appealed to the 'more orthodox analogical rhetoric for God-language' of Aquinas, his fellow Dominican, 'Lacan will also occasionally appeal to more orthodox visions of the Other': for example, to the dialectic of Hegel or to the 'language speaks' of Heidegger (each of which latter, Tracy notes, also 'wanted an end to "theism" and "atheism" alike in favour of the Other who

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<sup>752</sup> *Dialogue*, 23.

<sup>753</sup> *Dialogue*, 24.

<sup>754</sup> *Dialogue*, 25.

<sup>755</sup> *Dialogue*, 25.

is finally allowed to speak.’).<sup>756</sup> Meanwhile, even as the orthodox psychoanalytic institutions expelled Lacan, and the papal commission at Avignon condemned certain of Eckhart’s propositions, ‘both would continue to insist on their higher orthodoxy.’<sup>757</sup> For Eckhart and Lacan know that ‘only the mystic understands what the prophet really meant, for only the mystic knows the basic structure of the whole and its radically deconstructing actuality.’<sup>758</sup>

Thus Tracy finds the question, “Does Lacan interpret Freud accurately?” is remarkably like the question, “Does the apophatic mystic interpret the prophetic texts correctly?”<sup>759</sup>

Tracy concludes that

neither the theist nor the atheist, neither the scientific scientist nor the Romantic mythologist (Jung?) need enter this debate. The debate between the prophet and the mystic is elsewhere. It is beside itself. It is a rhetoric of the Other.<sup>760</sup>

The prophet and the mystic reside beyond the ken of either theism or atheism. In their intrinsic interdependence, Tracy spied a new apologetic and correlational category for theology.

It seems to me, however, that in *Dialogue* Tracy was still according a certain priority to the mystic. He still seemed to hope to consider religion, as a whole, in terms of a ‘dialogue with the Other,’ and, as such, in terms of its grounding in a mystical-manifestatory ‘religion of the Other, Being, the cosmos, the sacred that both reveals and

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<sup>756</sup> *Dialogue*, 25-26.

<sup>757</sup> *Dialogue*, 26.

<sup>758</sup> *Dialogue*, 26.

<sup>759</sup> *Dialogue*, 26.

<sup>760</sup> *Dialogue*, 26.

conceals itself in all the religions' (as he writes in a later essay in the collection).<sup>761</sup> Were this so (and I have no space to argue this at length here), it would make sense insofar as in *Dialogue* Tracy was still looking to 'the classic' for the essential aesthetic-hermeneutical phenomenon. The idea of the mystical-prophetic in reciprocal tension and balance could really come into its own only once Tracy developed the category of 'fragment' (explored in Chapter Nine below).

## **VI. Nature, grace and sin: an opportunity to rethink the self-possession of reason**

At this point, our attention can begin to turn to the consequences of these later theological developments in Tracy as regards his ideas of how to correlate reason and faith. In this final section to this chapter, I shall suggest that questions newly arise in Tracy's work about grace, sin and the self-possession of human reason. Tracy himself may or may not feel the force of these questions as keenly as I shall present them here, and Tracy might not be happy with all of the conclusions I shall draw. However, I hope to show at least that there is scope for some such discussions, and this section should be helpful background for appreciating what will be at stake when we shall turn to what Tracy has to say about fragments in Chapter Nine.

Tracy wrote in 1991 that for Catholic tradition, 'Jesus Christ is both the self-disclosure of God and God's quest for human beings.'<sup>762</sup> On this model, God's self-disclosure is oriented towards bringing about human beings who are fully human and related to God.

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<sup>761</sup> *Dialogue*, 59. This comes in the essay entitled 'The Challenge of the Archaic Other: The Hermeneutics of Dialogue' (pp. 48-67).

<sup>762</sup> Tracy, 'Approaching the Christian Understanding of God' in Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin, eds., *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, Vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 133-147:141.

A further corollary of this quest for human beings in Jesus Christ, according to Tracy here, is that Jesus Christ is also the fulfilment of the ‘quest of the human for God.’<sup>763</sup> Thus, God’s quest for human beings is correlated to the natural questing of human beings for God.

Not only are humans by nature interested in God (not a controversial claim for a theologian), therefore, but according to Tracy here, they also possess a natural capacity to quest fruitfully for God, such that God’s quest for us responds to our quest for God. This is potentially more controversial. The Gospel in one place imagines the disciples catching people for God’s Kingdom in the manner of fish, who, of course, do not quest for the net and the dinner table.<sup>764</sup> Here, the image that Tracy employs of God tracking down human beings for the sake of their humanity is a different one, and seems to imply God’s self-disclosure inherently responding to, and thereby partly depending upon, our home-grown attempts to become more fully human (which are simultaneously our ‘quest for God’).

In actual fact, Tracy was careful in this 1991 article not to over-emphasise his claim of natural theology, picturing the human quest for God as something that only really comes together in the wake of encounters with God’s self-disclosure. Thus, Tracy proceeds to equate ‘the quest of the human for God’ with ‘the question of how to correlate what we otherwise know or believe to be true with the strictly revelatory event of God’s self-disclosure.’<sup>765</sup> Thus, it is fundamentally as a *response* to the prior advent

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<sup>763</sup> ‘Approaching the Christian Understanding of God,’ 141.

<sup>764</sup> See Mark 1:17 and Mat. 4:19.

<sup>765</sup> ‘Approaching the Christian Understanding of God,’ 141. For the idea that experiences of hermeneutical disclosure call for mutually critical correlation with other things that we think we know, recall Tracy’s adaptation of William James’s second criterion for assessing religious experience

and announcements of nascent faith that Tracy here advises theology ‘to attempt to correlate the human quest for God (in all the limit-experiences and limit-questions of human beings as human) with God’s own self-disclosure in Jesus Christ.’<sup>766</sup>

Some Protestants, in particular, may be sceptical, preferring to doubt even this limited theology of the positive contribution made by the human quest for God. These sceptics may reckon, instead, that the best we can achieve within ourselves in this life is some suitable awareness of our impotence and nothingness, our ontological distance from God. Only alongside such a negative discipline, they may claim, can the true freedom of the Christian emerge in a life that knows itself hidden and sourced graciously elsewhere, in Christ.<sup>767</sup>

It is in considerable contrast to any such negativity, therefore, that in 1991 Tracy happily credited ‘the limit-experiences and limit-questions of human beings as human’ with, in effect, a positive (if secondary and dependent) role in constructing revelation. Tracy’s account of our existential and epistemological situation also suggested parallels with the characteristic Catholic sense that human beings are called to participate constructively in their own salvation: achieving and incarnating degrees of meritorious holiness (albeit within their all-encompassing dependence upon grace). Here we have a model in which grace works to perfect nature on a level more fundamental than its confrontation with sin.

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(‘philosophical reasonableness’) by comparison with other things one knows (James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 32; Tracy, ‘An Uneasy Alliance Re-conceived,’ 560-570; and *Dialogue*, 27-47).

<sup>766</sup> ‘Approaching the Christian Understanding of God,’ 141.

<sup>767</sup> Something like this would appear to be the classical Lutheran conclusion, at least as Daphne Hampson sketches it in her lively study of divergent Catholic and Lutheran thinking, *Christian Contradictions: the Structures of Lutheran and Catholic Thought* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001). ‘The Freedom of the Christian’ is of course an essay of Luther’s.

I am drawing attention here to Tracy's broadly Catholic assumptions in the article from 1991 because I wish to argue that since that time he has subjected these to searching question (albeit no simple overturning). His recent concerns with 'fragment' and with the 'hidden God' of Luther seem to give an altogether less clear priority to the (characteristically Catholic) 'polarity' of grace-and-nature over the (characteristically Protestant) 'dialectic' of grace-versus-sin.<sup>768</sup>

Indeed, it is worth recalling here two interwoven but distinguishable elements in Tracy's approach leading up to and including this 1991 article. On the one hand, there has been the intrinsically and systemically 'correlational' character of Tracy's thinking about God and Jesus; on the other hand, Tracy was also heavily invested in the pre-eminence of analogical over dialectical elements within theological (and other) thinking.<sup>769</sup> Tracy's Catholic conservative theological critics have tended also to opt for the same latter one-sidedness, while dismissing systemic correlation.<sup>770</sup> By contrast, Tracy's direction today is more oriented towards deepening his correlative engagement by somewhat upsetting the one-sidedness of his previous metaphysical assurance.

If I am right, then Tracy may no longer be as committed as he once was to leading every dialectic of sin/grace back to a surpassing polarity of nature-grace. This does not mean that Tracy has abandoned his faith in the grace that engages and perfects nature – without it, his hope for theological reason would surely disintegrate beyond useful repair – but it appears reasonable to suggest that he may now count this polarity

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<sup>768</sup> Regarding Tracy's recent emphasis on negativity in philosophy and theology with some explicit and implicit roots in Luther, see Chapters 8 and 9 below, and also Tracy, 'Form and Fragment: The Recovery of the Hidden and Incomprehensible God' in Werner G. Jeanrond and Aasulv Lande, eds., *The Concept of God in Global Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 98-114: esp., 108-114.

<sup>769</sup> See Chapter 4 section IV, above; and the end of section IV of this chapter, above.

<sup>770</sup> See Tracy, 'An Uneasy Alliance,' 554-5.

between nature and grace as no longer any *more* structurally fundamental than the confrontation of grace with sin.

One way to measure the change that I am suggesting here is to ask whether or in what ways Tracy could still say today what he declared back in 1995 (in his Preface to the reprinting of *Blessed Rage*): that he ‘still firmly believes in the self-correcting power of reason (as Bernard Lonergan nicely names it).’<sup>771</sup> For, just like ‘the human quest for God,’ reason’s self-correcting power suggests a natural capability that grace essentially heals and perfects.

Back in Chapter Six, I argued that by opposing ‘fragment’ and ‘totality-system,’ Tracy has re-ethicised his cognitional theory and epistemology, retrieving a dimension found in Lonergan that Tracy had previously excised.<sup>772</sup> But if what I have just argued here is right, then the structural negativity associated with fragments *also* propels Tracy outside of the more narrowly ‘Catholic’ purview of Lonergan’s theological correlations.<sup>773</sup> For Lonergan imagined grace as establishing the identity and wholeness of authentic human subjects, whose rationality has all along remained capable of the essential modes of self-correction required for true knowing.<sup>774</sup> Lonergan constructed a powerful account of the destructions wrought by evil, bias and cultural decline,<sup>775</sup> but he also retained unequivocal faith in the essential capacity of human cognition for truth (even though he needed, in effect, to invoke the programmatic authority of religious institutions to help

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<sup>771</sup> *Blessed Rage*, xiv.

<sup>772</sup> See Chapter 6 section III.

<sup>773</sup> For an initial sense of Lonergan as a correlational theologian, see the opening sentence of his *Method in Theology*, where Lonergan declares that ‘[a] theology mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion in that matrix’ (*Method in Theology*, xi). Tracy also labels Lonergan a correlational theologian (see Tracy, ‘An Uneasy Alliance,’ 553).

<sup>774</sup> See Chapter 6 section II, above; and recall specifically how the Lonerganian subject grasps a ‘virtually unconditioned’ by raising and answering every relevant question needed for a judgment (see *Plurality*, 121 n. 4; and Lonergan, *Insight*, 279-287).

<sup>775</sup> See Chapter 6 section II. ii., above.

rescue this capacity from incoherence and eclipse).<sup>776</sup>

When Tracy came to defend the correlative character of his theology back in 1989, he invoked Lonergan on precisely this point: ‘it is, above all, the self-correcting character of reason that needs careful defense.’<sup>777</sup> By affirming the ‘self-correcting’ ‘character’ (1989) and ‘power’ (1995) of reason, Tracy rather implied that human rational practices – in particular, as dialogue – possess a collective identity and sufficiency comparable to Lonergan’s claims for individual and collaborative rational ‘insight.’<sup>778</sup>

It seems to me, however, that recent shifts in Tracy’s thinking demand of him far greater equivocation over the autonomously self-correcting character and power of human reason, even while he continues to affirm and hope for that reason. A solution to this conundrum may perhaps be found in how Lonergan and Tracy have also sought, in different ways, to articulate our total dependence upon God for existence and salvation at the same time as they have affirmed our natural rational potential.

For Tracy, characteristically, modelling this dependence has meant modelling God as person-like Ultimate Reality – the ‘limit’-Reality that informs all reality – whose power makes itself available through words, events, things, others and ourselves, to enable us to live to our potential.<sup>779</sup> When Tracy expressed dismay in 1970 at emergent moves around this question by Lonergan, this was because Tracy felt that Lonergan was pulling the rug from under the critical account of reason he had mounted in *Insight*. It

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<sup>776</sup> See section III. i of this chapter, above.

<sup>777</sup> ‘An Uneasy Alliance,’ 566-7.

<sup>778</sup> See Chapter 6 section II, especially II. i..

<sup>779</sup> For the significance of the idea of ‘limit’ for Tracy, see chapter five of *Blessed Rage*; and also Chapter 1 section II, above, and section II of this chapter. For the significance of ‘power’ for Tracy’s hermeneutical theory and theology, see Chapter 2 section I. i. and Chapter 3 section II, including footnote 231, above.

seemed to Tracy that Lonergan was looking to contract human reason, at the last, to a religiously ‘dogmatic’ account of its basis and salvation.<sup>780</sup> Tracy was unhappy about Lonergan invoking the programmatic authority of religious traditions and institutions as a necessary underpinning of human rational operations. It is quite possible to read Tracy’s work in theology since this time as a progressive sequence of attempts to improve upon this unacceptable implication of the later Lonergan.

But perhaps we can hazard that today Tracy is beginning for the first time to tread a path beyond *both* Lonerganian improbables: that is, beyond the mirage of self-evident and unquestioned religious authority *and* the mirage of autonomously self-correcting reason. Tracy is not as yet actually on record as suggesting that Lonergan’s *Insight* was insufficiently equivocal about the nature of our participation in reason, or of our received ownership of that participation, and I am far from sure that Tracy would agree with what I am suggesting here. (In a lecture in 2011, he told the room that one thing he agreed with Pope Benedict about was our need to ‘have faith in reason.’)<sup>781</sup> But in the light of the negativity of the Tracean fragment, now placed at the heart of his thinking, it seems appropriate today to put former affirmations under question.

Ultimately, Lonergan secured his account of self-assured human reason on the presumption of programmatic religious authority. Tracy, by contrast, has tended to seek religious authority solely *within* self-possessed reason and strictly on the basis of this reason. But it is precisely the self-possession of reason that is now in question for Tracy: who appears to have undermined his previous metaphysical confidence in a nature-grace polarity that subsists over and above the dialectic of grace-versus-sin; who

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<sup>780</sup> See section II. i. of this chapter, above.

<sup>781</sup> Tracy, ‘The Necessity and Character of Fundamental Theology,’ unpublished lecture presented at Loyola University, Chicago, April 8, 2011.

proposes we attend to conjointly ‘apocalyptic’ and ‘apophatic’ fragments at the very heart of our thinking; and for whom the transcendent-immanent religious Real is now not only Infinite but also positively ‘Impossible.’

It may be that the theological and philosophical shortcomings of Tracy’s 1980s model of theological correlation are not overcome best by finally anti-hermeneutical restitutions of stand-alone religious authority (*à la* Balthasar and Ratzinger). Instead, one may hope to hold one’s hermeneutical nerve on an open terrain where the ever-broken aspiring universalities of our reason do vigil with particularities of scripture, church and tradition that are in their own ways no less aspirant and reticent.

This chapter has suggested that the role performed by theological religion within Tracy’s hermeneutical thinking today is one of differential yet mutually implicated affirmation *and* negation of human possibility as such. While this idea remains to be thought out further, it clearly contrasts with Tracy’s previous constructions of God as the unambiguous guarantor of our rational possibilities, in *Imagination* and *Plurality*.

But how does the newly Janus-like role that Tracy accords religion – both affirming and negating human rational capability – fit within the wider heritage of hermeneutical thinking? Is there any precedent in that tradition for theological religion that casts shadows as well as light across human possibility? The next chapter will find precisely this in the thinking of Hans-Georg Gadamer. It is a feature of Gadamer easily overlooked, since Gadamer himself pushed it to the scarcely registerable margins of his philosophy. But an appreciation of this potential of religion already within Gadamer will help set the scene for the form-and-event of ‘the fragment’ which Tracy now

locates at the heart of attentive thinking.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **Gadamer's Hermeneutics and Christian Religion**

This chapter turns from theology back to hermeneutical theory, as such, to examine Hans-Georg Gadamer's little-remarked interpretation of religion, and Christian religion in particular. This topic is too easily neglected in interpreting Gadamer, and Tracy himself gives no indication of having paid it attention. Yet Gadamer's interpretation of religion can gain new significance for us in relation to moves Tracy has been making in theology and thinking in recent years.

Whereas Tracy's thought remains decisively oriented towards potential and actual invocations of God, Gadamer's philosophy pushed theological rhetoric very much to the margins. But, as I will argue, much of Gadamer's thinking was, even so, a religious thinking haunted by the implications of Lutheran faith-experience. As Tracy begins to incorporate fundamental negativity into his account of interpretative reason, and as he also develops a keener Lutheran sense of theological negation of human horizons, so Gadamer's account of Christian religion becomes more relevant as a point of comparison.

#### **I. Gadamer and religion**

In his Foreword to the second edition of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer concurred with critics that he placed personal commitment at the heart of understanding.<sup>782</sup>

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<sup>782</sup> *Truth and Method*, xxv-xxvi.

Nevertheless, Gadamer insisted that the element of commitment he had in mind was not to the detriment of true science. On the contrary, he wrote of ‘the “scientific” integrity of acknowledging the commitment involved in all understanding.’<sup>783</sup> In this way, Gadamer echoed in some measure the traditional Christian insistence that understanding is bound up with faith (and vice-versa). In acquiescing to the charge of emphasising commitment, meanwhile, Gadamer was merely restating rather differently in a Foreword what the main text of *Truth and Method* had already argued by placing practices of immersive ‘play’ and performance in the foreground of interpretation, and when it had posited a moment of practical ‘application’ at the heart of all interpretation.<sup>784</sup> For Gadamer, there could be no disengaged, purely contemplative interpretation, but instead, to really interpret anything always means to commit oneself to some or other path of existence and self-understanding.

Gadamer’s adaptation of religious emphases within hermeneutical philosophy does not stop here, however. In a crucial passage of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer compares the proper reception of an artwork to the faithful reception of preaching as described by Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard held that for the work of Christ to be effective for us, Christ’s work and ourselves must become genuinely ‘contemporaneous.’<sup>785</sup> In parallel fashion, Gadamer held that people participate in the truth of an artwork when the temporal

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<sup>783</sup> *Truth and Method*, xxv.

<sup>784</sup> See *Truth and Method*, 306ff.; and Chapter 2 section I. iii., above.

<sup>785</sup> See, for example, Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments (Johannes Climacus)*, trans. and eds. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 55-71. Genuine contemporaneity with Christ, wrote Kierkegaard, never belonged to walking around with him in the first century, or to any analogously ‘immediate’ experience that a person might claim today. Instead, authentic contemporaneity has always belonged from the beginning to the present day to the ‘nonimmediate contemporary’ who has ‘received the condition from the teacher himself’ and who knows the teacher to the extent that the teacher knows him (*ibid.*, 68). Gadamer imagined our general contemporaneity with truth as taking place in an analogous fashion: from an ongoing historical act of tradition or an artwork, rather than through any retrieval of an original scene of immediacy, whether from the past or within oneself.

existences of the artwork and its beholder somehow coincide – or ‘fuse horizons’<sup>786</sup> – in an event of truth-disclosure.<sup>787</sup>

These Gadamerian themes of ‘contemporaneity,’ ‘application’ and ‘commitment’ easily recall religious (and Christian) ideas of communion, discipleship and faith. And yet, at the same time, Gadamer’s central vision of human temporal existence strained out from its appropriation of religion all the elements of particularity, paradox or a special relation to transcendence that are to be found in Christian and other religious devotions. The ‘religious’ attitude commended by Gadamer’s philosophy was a broadly secular one.

Clearly, there are other elements of religious devotions that do not easily fit within Gadamer’s hermeneutical philosophy, but I shall argue that he distilled these discordant elements into a separate – almost private, but never wholly absent – meditation on the peculiar religion of Christ crucified.<sup>788</sup> This Gadamerian meditation on Christian faith is all too easy for interpreters to ignore, so marginal can it seem; but it plays a crucial role within the structure and stability of his thought. In brief, the distinctiveness and relevance of *Christian* religion lay for Gadamer in its proclamation of Christ as a ‘sign’ that only faith can receive.<sup>789</sup> This sign-secret of Christian faith constituted a distinct category, for Gadamer, from the various symbolic mediations that art and the remainder of religion bring to the table. Furthermore, Gadamer understood the Christian message as being grounded in a salutary revelation to persons of faith of their radical *incapacity*

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<sup>786</sup> The language of ‘fusion’ comes from Gadamer’s later, related notion of a ‘fusion of horizons’ which occurs in all significant interpretation, when linguistic tradition and truth are appropriated and perpetuated (*Truth and Method*, 305f.).

<sup>787</sup> *Truth and Method*, 123f.

<sup>788</sup> See Gadamer, ‘Aesthetic and Religious Experience’ in *The Relevance of the Beautiful; and Other Essays*, trans. Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 140-153 (original first published in 1978).

<sup>789</sup> Gadamer, ‘Aesthetic and Religious Experience,’ 153.

and powerlessness. This contrasts with the self-affirming essence of art and religion in general.

According to Gadamer, in an essay we will consider more fully shortly, the *Ecce Homo* of Christ confronts believers with a negative-cum-salvific human experience that undercuts and overwhelms every sanguine confidence in language and tradition.<sup>790</sup> In clear contrast to the import of this Christian sign, however, Gadamer himself preached a gospel of hermeneutical reason which championed general human possibility and the immanent availability of meaning and truth. This Gadamerian gospel did not wait upon any secretive sign, but, on the contrary, claimed that its promise of meaning and truth had now become a sure promise everywhere manifest within, and to, the generality of western historical experience. And yet, at the very same time, Gadamer also emphasised the relevance of specifically Christian faith-experience *for* this emergent western hermeneutical experience. As we shall see, Gadamer viewed past and present western Christian experience as pivotal in enabling and bringing about the hermeneutic self-consciousness that his thinking celebrated. Thus, for all that Christianity may pronounce a negative proviso upon human hermeneutic possibility, for Gadamer it was just as surely one of that possibility's key progenitors and protectors.

In this way, Gadamer's thought presents a seeming paradox, since its hermeneutical attitude partially rests upon a Christian faith-experience that is actually antithetical to it. A solution of this seeming paradox can be found, I believe, in Gadamer's ambivalence about the status of Christian religion as a contemporary possibility. According to Gadamer, the purification of Christianity into its religious 'sign'-quality only occurred

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<sup>790</sup> 'Aesthetic and Religious Experience,' 151.

in fully developed Lutheranism, which coincided, Gadamer seemed to feel, with an effective reduction of living Christian devotion to a purely hypothetical status. Shorn of outmoded and inessential ('Catholic') trappings, Christianity had become for Gadamer, in effect, the extreme case of a word that admits no world but rather only the cold shiver that one experiences in contemplating the Cross.<sup>791</sup> As a consequence, Christianity is able to register its salutary negativity, for Gadamer, only within and in apposition to some wider affirmation of the immanent human world, such as Gadamer's core philosophy proposed.

Thus, Gadamer articulated a secular humanistic philosophy maintained at a respectful distance from the word of religious faith – a philosophy to highlight the real human possibilities and powers that he found manifest in our 'infinite process of making ourselves at home in the world'<sup>792</sup> – while yet he *also* regarded Christian religion as an ongoing and possibly still indispensable witness to Western hermeneutic experience. Christianity was for Gadamer both an irreplaceable example of tradition *and* an appropriate negative foil to the necessarily one-sided focus of hermeneutical philosophy.

Gadamer's somewhat Catholic-sounding celebration of 'tradition' ought not to blind interpreters to the thoroughly Lutheran tensions that play across his apparently serene humanism, and neither should the careful distance which Gadamer maintained from theology blind one to the considerable extent to which his thought was structured by its response to religion and faith. What follows in this chapter will turn first to a helpful

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<sup>791</sup> I am grateful to Werner Jeanrond for the report that Gadamer said that his response to Christianity was dominated by the shiver he experienced in contemplating the Cross.

<sup>792</sup> 'Aesthetic and Religious Experience,' 151. The reference here is specifically to the experience of art, but it can be applied for Gadamer to the whole of our hermeneutic experience.

summary of Gadamer's understanding of religion produced by Joel Weinsheimer (an English translator of Gadamer).<sup>793</sup> After that we shall consider a section in *Truth and Method* that discusses the contribution of Christian thinking to the idea of language in Western thought.<sup>794</sup> Finally our attention shall turn to the crucial 1978 essay of Gadamer's alluded to above – entitled 'Aesthetic and Religious Experience' – in which his sense of the distinctiveness of Christian (especially Lutheran) religion finds its most illuminating expression.

### I. i. Religion in Gadamer: the assurance of finite meaning

In proposing his own brief synopsis of Gadamer on religion, Joel Weinsheimer has highlighted three positive aspects to Gadamer's relation to religion. Firstly, Weinsheimer suggested that the claim to eternal, divine meanings in sacred texts was important to Gadamer, because Gadamer held that similar claims were in fact a presupposition of *all* meaningful interpretation of texts and works of art, whether sacred or secular. 'Gadamer shows,' writes Weinsheimer, 'that every kind of interpretation, and not just that informed by faith, must ineluctably posit the inviolability and self-sameness of meaning.'<sup>795</sup> Sacred texts were thus exemplary for Gadamer, because of the ways in which such texts advertise themselves to their readers as harbours of meaning.

In this way, religious attitudes and sacred texts manifest a crucial counterbalance to history's manufacturing of difference. Without something like the religious attitude

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<sup>793</sup> Joel Weinsheimer, 'Translators' Preface' in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hermeneutics, Religion and Ethics*, trans Joel Weinsheimer (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), vii-xiv

<sup>794</sup> *Truth and Method*, 418-436.

<sup>795</sup> Weinsheimer, 'Translator's Preface,' viii.

adapted and applied across the board we are left prey to a ‘hermeneutic nihilism’ (Gadamer) in which ‘every reading is a new creation.’<sup>796</sup> In place of such demoralisation of discourse, Gadamer’s hermeneutical philosophy interprets the religious situation as manifesting a truth that is relevant to language and interpretation in general. As Weinsheimer summarises, ‘[t]he real problem of hermeneutics [for Gadamer] is to think difference and sameness, the secular and the religious, together.’<sup>797</sup> Within this ‘thinking together,’ the religious interpretation of sacred texts enjoys an irreplaceable exemplariness.<sup>798</sup> Here, too, the bibliocentrism of Reformation Christianity is also exemplary for Gadamer.

Secondly, argues Weinsheimer, religion is exemplary in a further distinct sense for Gadamer, in that it delivers a counterblast to Enlightenment aspirations to rational self-foundation and to an ‘idealistic philosophy that enshrines human will and consciousness.’<sup>799</sup> Religion undermines rationalistic and idealistic delusions because it projects into the foreground ‘the boundary situations of guilt and death, where human Dasein finds through its own experience its powerlessness before the power of fate.’<sup>800</sup> To switch into terms that David Tracy employed for his own purposes in *Blessed Rage*, we might say that religion confronts us with the ‘limit’ to our cognition and existence, and reminds us of our mortality, finitude and non-innocence. As we have seen, Tracy argued in *Blessed Rage* that such negative experiences of ‘limits-to’ our endeavours, of themselves, lead us in the direction of more positive experiences of an encompassing

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<sup>796</sup> Weinsheimer, ‘Translator’s Preface,’ viii.

<sup>797</sup> Weinsheimer, ‘Translator’s Preface,’ viii.

<sup>798</sup> See the way in which *Truth and Method* gave space to the exemplary significance of religious-theological interpretation alongside the secular case of legal tradition and interpretation (*Truth and Method*, 321-336).

<sup>799</sup> ‘Translator’s Preface,’ viii.

<sup>800</sup> ‘Translator’s Preface,’ viii.

‘limit-of’ reality: of an aboriginal gracious ‘religious dimension’ to things.<sup>801</sup> And indeed, Weinsheimer’s third point about Gadamer on religion hints at a somewhat comparable theme, despite everything we have said about Gadamer’s rejection of transcendental thinking. For according to Weinsheimer, Gadamer viewed ‘the divine’ as a name for the ‘supra-individual being’ that exceeds, precedes and ‘situates’ every human consciousness.<sup>802</sup> (However, as Weinsheimer also points out, Gadamer thought less often of *God* in this regard, and more often of those concrete human institutions – in particular, language – which everywhere precede and situate an individual’s ‘life’ and ‘world.’)<sup>803</sup>

In short, according to Weinsheimer, Gadamer valued religion, first, for its insistence upon the presence and persistence of meaning within human history; second, for its dismissal of rationalist and idealist self-certainties; and third, for its practice of invoking something that fundamentally precedes us in making our humanity possible.

As I have already intimated, this three-fold summary of Weinsheimer’s nevertheless misses out something important with regard to the persistent value and difficulty that Gadamer found manifest in Lutheran Christianity specifically. Before turning to this in more detail, however, it will be helpful to turn briefly to Gadamer’s reflections in *Truth and Method* on what he considered to be the historical role of Christianity in the emergence and clarification of Western hermeneutical experience.

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<sup>801</sup> See *Blessed Rage*, 106-108; also Chapter 6 section I. iv, and esp. footnote 565, above.

<sup>802</sup> ‘Translator’s Preface,’ ix.

<sup>803</sup> ‘Translator’s Preface,’ ix. Tracy’s evocations of a ‘religious dimension’ to reality-as-experienced amount to conjointly existential, metaphysical and cosmological claims. By contrast, Gadamer’s interest in ‘the divine’ occurs – as in Heidegger – wholly within the all-encompassing horizon of human and linguistic temporality.

## I. ii. Religion in Gadamer: Incarnation and word

Towards the close of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer asserts that the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation handed Greek philosophy a crucial dimension that was foreign to it. By according centrality to the Incarnation of the Word, Christianity transformed the Greek *logos*, with its connotations of an immaterial and ahistorical ‘spirituality’ and *nous*. Whereas *logos* had previously connoted a background ‘cosmic potentiality,’ now ‘[t]he uniqueness of the redemptive event introduces the essence of history into Western thought [...] For in contrast to the Greek *logos*, the word is pure event.’ In this way, argued Gadamer, *the phenomenon of language* emerges ‘out of its immersion in the ideality of meaning, and offers itself to philosophical reflection.’<sup>804</sup> In Christianity, Christ’s ‘Incarnation’ means not the inessential embodiment of a soul but rather a casting of spirit into history. Even when Christianity goes on to emphasise the priority of the *inner* word over the one that is spoken externally, this inner word will still possess its character for Christian thinkers as a *word* (and hence the temporality of an ‘event’), argued Gadamer. This is so irrespective of whether this word is thought as proceeding eternally within the Divine Trinity, or as occurring in a creaturely and analogous fashion within human temporal experience.<sup>805</sup>

Gadamer notes, however, that Christianity’s insight into the centrality of language in understanding could only go so far towards a philosophy based upon the phenomenon of historical language. For Christian thought was limited by its (onto)theology of the Creator-God, which everywhere worked to distinguish and subordinate our historical

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<sup>804</sup> *Truth and Method*, 418.

<sup>805</sup> *Truth and Method*, 421f.. For a reading of Aquinas on the production of the inner word in human cognition, in its analogy to an eternal gratuitous procession of the Word within God, see Bernard Lonergan, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, ed. David Burrell (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1968).

world and words to a transcendent and eternal world and Word.<sup>806</sup> And yet, Gadamer notes, Christian thinkers never forgot the event- and process-like ‘word’ of which they spoke, which they counted as being ‘no less than the mind itself [and] not a diminished or weakened manifestation of it.’<sup>807</sup> Indeed, according to Gadamer, ‘[k]nowing this constitutes the superiority of the Christian philosopher over the Platonist.’<sup>808</sup>

The onto-theological limitations of Christian thinking, meanwhile, were also challenged internally, Gadamer argued, by the conviction that we encounter the transcendent Word-event via its being proclaimed ever-newly in preaching.<sup>809</sup> On a Lutheran reading, at least, the meaning of the Christian Word – which also represents language *par excellence* – can never be approached apart from events of proclamation. Thoroughly beyond Greek logic, wrote Gadamer, Christianity brings out ‘the *character of language as event*.’<sup>810</sup> ‘[W]hen the Greek idea of logic is penetrated by Christian theology something new is born: the medium of language, in which the mediation of the incarnation event reaches its full truth.’<sup>811</sup>

From *Truth and Method*, therefore, we can learn that Gadamer regarded Christianity – Patristic, medieval and Lutheran – as highly significant within the emergence of a robust account of historical and linguistic experience. It is now time to explore the distinctiveness that Gadamer accorded to Christian religion, especially in its Lutheran

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<sup>806</sup> In Christian doctrine, ‘human language [...] only indirectly becomes an object of reflection. The human word is used only as a counterpart to the theological problem of the Word [...] i.e., the unity of God the Father and God the Son’ (*Truth and Method*, 419). Ultimately, Gadamer concedes, ‘[b]ecause the doctrine of the inner word [in Christianity] is intended to undergird theological interpretation of the Trinity by analogy, the theological question as such can be of no further help to us’ (*Truth and Method*, 421).

<sup>807</sup> *Truth and Method*, 433.

<sup>808</sup> *Truth and Method*, 433.

<sup>809</sup> *Truth and Method*, 426.

<sup>810</sup> *Truth and Method*, 426.

<sup>811</sup> *Truth and Method*, 427, where this sentence is italicised.

form, through a closer reading of Gadamer's later essay, 'Aesthetic and Religious Experience' (1978).

### I. iii. Christianity as a religion of 'sign' beyond symbol

Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy understood contemporary art and tradition as making use of religious attitudes of both past and present. That is, Gadamer regarded contemporary Western art, literature and humanistic discourse as continuing in their own ways the symbolic and meaning-making functions that religion once claimed as its natural domain.<sup>812</sup> In Gadamer's view, these arts became especially important once symbolic religion had abolished itself in the West in the Protestant Reformation.

According to Gadamer's 1978 essay, Christianity, for its part, is not so much about general religiosity as it is about the revelation to individuals of their fundamental inability to achieve or maintain a world for themselves.<sup>813</sup> Thus, Lutheran-style Christianity emerged for Gadamer as a foil to what he treated as the essentially positive revelations of secular art, on the one hand, and survivals of ancient Greek art and religion, on the other. Gadamer acknowledges that literature and the arts, in their own ways, have always been capable of disturbing revelations of shock and terror ('that such things can befall human beings and that human beings can achieve such things'), and that these revelations that have rarely been emphasised more insistently than in the modern period.<sup>814</sup> However, in the message and faith that concerns Christ and the Cross,

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<sup>812</sup> See, especially, Gadamer, 'The Relevance of the Beautiful: Art as play, symbol and festival' in Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful; and Other Essays*, 1-53

<sup>813</sup> See 'Aesthetic and Religious Experience,' 151ff. and below here.

<sup>814</sup> 'Aesthetic and Religious Experience,' 153.

Gadamer spied a further, *altogether* negative proclamation that confronts the innumerable possibilities of human life that language, art and tradition hold forth. Those latter possibilities were always Gadamer's primary philosophical theme (and he understood contemporary art and literature as subsuming and mediating much of what we once received mainly via older functions of myth and religion), but at the same time he also perceived in Christianity a darker 'religion of the sign' addressed to the solitary individual, who is called not to attempt to live by shared symbolic tradition alone.

In order to show how this is so, we shall now follow the sequence of Gadamer's argument in 'Aesthetic and Religious Experience,' in which Gadamer offers another telling of his story of how the possibility of a hermeneutical consciousness has emerged in the West, different in emphasis from that in *Truth and Method*. This time, the story is told from the point of view of the relation of art and religion, and Gadamer begins by describing an original confluence of the aesthetic and the religious in the 'endless' social-cultural *process of myth-telling*, for which new characters and new elaborations are always possible.<sup>815</sup> So freewheeling is this process, however, that the specifically hermeneutical task is not yet apparent within it. In the pre-philosophical past this undifferentiated process was simply what took place. Nevertheless, Gadamer notes, particular invocations of a god or gods by name did arise, and these came to constitute specific loci of identity, which in turn enabled the emergence of epic stories. When these stories acquired fixed forms, and even come to written form in texts, then there emerged identifiable 'works.' The work of literature had been born. All works of literature exhibit an essential *untranslatability*, noted Gadamer, because they are themselves and nothing else can substitute for them.<sup>816</sup>

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<sup>815</sup> 'Aesthetic and Religious Experience,' 143.

<sup>816</sup> 'Aesthetic and Religious Experience,' 145.

However, Gadamer notes that the Bible is an odd sort of text in this story, because the Bible depends upon a strikingly different religious background. For '[t]he original history of the chosen people is not a story of a transcendent divine world like those we find in the mythical traditions of other religions.'<sup>817</sup> Whereas pantheons characteristically allow for indefinite multiplications of divine personalities, Hebrew religious culture demanded that all false gods but the one God be identified and radically rejected. To the extent that Biblical literature, too, has its ancestry in freewheeling myth-telling, this ancestry requires constant purification. As Gadamer saw things, this peculiarity of Hebrew religion later attained a further important elaboration in Christianity, since Christianity moved the Biblical tradition beyond the 'contractual faithfulness' of Hebrew religion and promulgated instead a 'message' to all which was also a 'promise' to be accepted in faith. In Christianity, what is at stake, therefore, is 'a promise from God which only exists insofar as the promise is accepted.'<sup>818</sup> It is a radically personal word that exceeds any easy sharing of symbols and language. And yet, once one accepts such a word, such a promise, one finds oneself mandated to proclaim it also to others. This mandate to proclaim, in turn, requires that the message be universally translated beyond the bounds of any original host culture. Following Gadamer, we might go so far as to say that the Christian Bible functions as a coherent literary work named 'Holy Scripture' – untranslatable, we would therefore think – to the precise extent that it inaugurates and incites a tradition of 'translating' a universal Divine word: a Word said to have been spoken within a particular salvation-history and yet able to become universal.<sup>819</sup> From this practical requirement that the Bible and its

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<sup>817</sup> 'Aesthetic and Religious Experience,' 147.

<sup>818</sup> 'Aesthetic and Religious Experience,' 148.

<sup>819</sup> From this inner-Biblical devotion to translation, it presumably follows, too, that a faithful translation of the Bible is not *essentially* any less 'Sacred Scripture' than is the 'original.'

message of faith be universally translatable, Gadamer suggests, there first arose for the West the sense of a universal hermeneutic task confronting thinking in general.<sup>820</sup>

Of course, as is implied here, the Biblical and Christian work of translation proves an infinitely demanding task. In principle, it is understood that this translation must be possible because the Christian message transcends all difference (from which Gadamer learns that, generally, meaning transcends difference). But people are not at all naturally inclined to accept the Christian's maximally universal message, a human disinclination that arises because this message 'represents a challenge that shatters all our natural expectations.'<sup>821</sup> Indeed, *so* strange is the Christian message to the human desire to be at home in the world that the Christian struggles to make this message humanly available at all. In this way, Gadamer presents Christianity as overshooting the very hermeneutical task that it uncovers: so challenging is the endless task of Christian translation and communication – even within outwardly prepared and hospitable cultures – that Christianity culminates 'in the idea that even faith is exclusively a gift of divine grace so that all our criteria of merit and worth lose their significance.'<sup>822</sup> Gadamer underlines the way in which the Christian message 'is directed against *any* natural understanding of human nature,' so that the best that Christian discourse can hope for is to offer 'aids' to this gift of faith.<sup>823</sup>

This Christian difficulty is paradigmatic for Gadamer because without it hermeneutic experience would never have been revealed as what it is. Christianity thus sharpens the manner in which all hermeneutical consciousness faces the challenge of overcoming an

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<sup>820</sup> 'Aesthetic and Religious Experience,' 148.

<sup>821</sup> 'Aesthetic and Religious Experience,' 149.

<sup>822</sup> 'Aesthetic and Religious Experience,' 149.

<sup>823</sup> 'Aesthetic and Religious Experience,' 149.

alien-ness of the past and of other people carried within language. Indeed, '[t]he genuine task of hermeneutics arises from the peculiar nature of Christian proclamation.'<sup>824</sup> And yet, this Christianity can illuminate this task only by propelling itself outside of and beyond the positive hermeneutical phenomenon that Gadamer preferred to dwell upon for the most part.

This is not to say, of course, that poetic-literary elements of a symbolic nature do not also survive (and even thrive) within Christian speech. It could not be otherwise. And furthermore, actual Christianity will also shelter confirmations of community similar to those found in ancient symbolic religion. Gadamer notes how much nineteenth-century German aesthetics celebrated precisely those symbolic elements that it found shared between art, religion and literature. These elements possessed the power to awaken people to what they shared in their humanity, precipitating revelatory events in which recipients were able to recognize themselves.<sup>825</sup> And Gadamer seemed happy to repeat a similar sentiment for our own time: 'The recognition that the work of art procures for us is always an expression of that infinite process of making ourselves at home in the world which is our human lot.'<sup>826</sup>

Alongside this (one-sided?) affirmation of art, however, Gadamer observed a quite different form of recognition at work in the Christian Gospel itself, something which contrasts sharply to these revelations of post-romantic art. Gadamer concluded that the basic Christian mode of "this is you" involves being convicted by a religious *sign* that contrasts with all modes of participation (however seemingly similar) that are available in aesthetic-religious symbols. Beyond assembling with others before shared symbols,

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<sup>824</sup> 'Aesthetic and Religious Experience,' 149.

<sup>825</sup> 'Aesthetic and Religious Experience,' 150.

<sup>826</sup> 'Aesthetic and Religious Experience,' 151.

the Christian is grasped by a religious sign that is only ever given *pro me*: ‘only given to one who is ready to accept it as such.’<sup>827</sup> In this way, the Biblical word of address advances beyond the various forms of literature and symbol to speak ‘to me as a sign rather than as a symbolic form of recognition.’<sup>828</sup> And the import of this sign, for Gadamer, is to turn me away from making myself at home in a world of manifold finite possibilities. Instead, the Christian sign directs me to ‘the extreme poverty of the *Ecce Homo*.’<sup>829</sup> The good news of Easter comes to the believer only on the back of such a withholding of happiness.<sup>830</sup> From the perspective of Christian faith, writes Gadamer, ‘all the sublime solemnity and festive transfiguration involved in the veneration of the dead that was cultivated by older religious cultures seems like one great flight from death.’<sup>831</sup>

While the artistic symbol lives on in a realm distinct from religion, frequently exploring its own critical and negative possibilities, its own ‘disturbing quality,’ the Christian sign points in an entirely negative direction, simply to ‘show what we cannot achieve.’<sup>832</sup> In fact, so insistently did Christianity come to insist on human non-achievement as the beginning of all truth that it provoked the outrage of the Enlightenment, which, as Gadamer notes in the final sentence of the essay, ‘denounced’ religion ‘as an act of betrayal or self-betrayal’ of humanity.<sup>833</sup>

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<sup>827</sup> ‘Aesthetic and Religious Experience,’ 151.

<sup>828</sup> ‘Aesthetic and Religious Experience,’ 153.

<sup>829</sup> ‘Aesthetic and Religious Experience,’ 151.

<sup>830</sup> ‘Aesthetic and Religious Experience,’ 151.

<sup>831</sup> ‘Aesthetic and Religious Experience,’ 151.

<sup>832</sup> ‘Aesthetic and Religious Experience,’ 153.

<sup>833</sup> ‘Aesthetic and Religious Experience,’ 153.

## II. The particularity and universality of Christianity in Gadamer

According to Gadamer, therefore, the self-manifestation of western hermeneutical experience has been the result of a collision between Greek religious and philosophical humanism, on the one hand, with a Christian revelation that is fundamentally alien and shocking to human existence, on the other. Greek humanism posited a human striving that partially succeeded in humanising the world. This humanisation was only partial, according to Gadamer, because of how Greek thinking tended to alienate the temporality, embodiment and linguisticity of human experience before supra-historical *Logos*. Christianity, on the other hand, made manifest for the first time the essentially historical character of *logos*, although at the same time as it also confounded all human inclinations by the way in which it extolled the figure of the destitute Christ. Where Greek experience had arisen as a brilliant unfurling of human possibility, an especially glorious constellation within the human firmament, Christian faith incorporated a quite contrary and unforeseen revelation, a scarcely conceivable word of contradiction. Gadamer spied the essential unfolding and condition of western experience in this collision of Greece and Christ.<sup>834</sup>

The role that Gadamer accorded to Christian faith in the coming-to-light of the hermeneutical phenomenon therefore appears to consecrate that ‘universal’ phenomenon at the same time as a particularly (even incommunicably) western European event and process (*Geschehen*). But here a caveat immediately arises. For Gadamer philosophised from *outside* of Christian faith, with an ontological faith that partly borrowed from but also tended fundamentally to displace Christian devotion.

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<sup>834</sup> As we have seen in the previous section, Gadamer recognised the definitively Jewish roots of Christianity, but he interpreted Christ as a further dimension of what Jewish religion had started.

Gadamer credits Christian faith with a parentage of hermeneutics that is altogether more surprising and categorically unique than the parentage accorded to the brilliant Greeks. But the Christian gospel that he contemplates also seems intent on purifying itself out of religious existence. This faith, shorn of metaphysical religious trappings, can find no proper home in the world, and Gadamer seems ambivalent about its status as a live option. Or, perhaps post-Lutheran Christianity has purified itself into a message that is so personally and privately communicated that the philosopher can no longer speak of it, except to note the trajectory it once blazed through a former, less transparent philosophical firmament.

From Gadamer's point of view, this purification of Christianity leads not to its incorporation into a higher philosophical synthesis (as in Hegel),<sup>835</sup> but instead gives way to an ontological hermeneutics that is in its own way a humanistic faith in history. This faith no longer looks beyond history-as-such to a Resurrection, but it does remain obscurely haunted by the *Ecce Homo* of Christ and his Cross. Gadamer in no way proposed that one should actually *believe* in the philosophically indigestible aspects of Christian religion – after all, he was a philosopher celebrating the trajectory of humanistic tradition begun in ancient Greece, not a theorist of that tradition's shipwreck – but rather Gadamer incorporated Christianity into his philosophy by separating out its hermeneutically positive and negative aspects. The hermeneutically positive elements he incorporated into his ontological philosophy, as a gospel of the unlimited translatability (and hence durability) of meaning (Weinsheimer's first point, above); the less digestible negative elements he preserved and neutralized by allocating them to a

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<sup>835</sup> The final pages of *Truth and Method* (which follow on from the argument concerning the revelation of word as event in Christianity) distinguish Gadamer's account of the properly 'speculative' character and competence of language, from Hegel's partly similar philosophy and theology of the self-realisation of infinite Spirit within concrete history (*Truth and Method*, 443-472).

wholly negative, personal-cum-private principle within hermeneutic experience. The shadow of the *Ecce Homo* falls across the hermeneutical subject's individuality and reflective consciousness, as her passions and strivings jibe at her mortal and hermeneutical limits,<sup>836</sup> but it is the linguistic-ontological phenomenon that shines forth as the world: always finite, always as tradition, always old and always new.

Unencumbered by religious devotion, then, the hermeneutical experience that Gadamer honoured arises *after* the passing of the extraordinary history of intelligible Christian faith. Indeed, a living and positive Christianity is no longer required (nor perhaps even possible) now that the other-than-human call of Christ has rendered itself so thoroughly without a human home, so fully purified of shareable religious-symbolic accretions. In this way, Christian devotion yields to the altogether more translatable and generally communicable experience of 'being that can be understood [as] language.'<sup>837</sup> It follows that the confusion of Christian faith and philosophy that once reigned in western Christendom was never really a new heavenly body for philosophy, on Gadamer's telling, but might be compared to a bright shooting star that burned itself out with the Reformation. The appearing and passing of this illusion, however, allowed everything else to become clear. And in this resultant clarity of hermeneutic consciousness, according to Gadamer, a figure of universality (truth) has been revealed in the

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<sup>836</sup> The revelation of the Resurrection, meanwhile, is presumably to be thought on this model as one part dark unknowing and mortal terror (the women are terrified, the others do not recognise Jesus) and one part the revelation of the possibility of meaningful history, of tradition itself. As Tracy himself has written: 'If resurrection is actual, history is real. If God raised Jesus of Nazareth from the dead, all is changed. Resurrection faith does not remove one from history but for it,' for '[t]he hope of human beings is not merely life after death but a hope for history itself' (Tracy, 'God of History, God of Psychology' [1993], *On Naming the Present: God, Hermeneutics, and Church* (London: SCM Press, 1994), 47-58: 47).

<sup>837</sup> One might perhaps wonder, a little whimsically, whether being that *cannot* be understood might be to do with God or Christ, for Gadamer; but of course, there is very little really to be *said* about what we *simply* cannot understand.

‘speculative structure’ of language itself.<sup>838</sup>

In this story, even so, the historic Christ continues to call in certain ways to the newly disclosed hermeneutical consciousness and conscience. For, it seems that the full clarity and rigour of Gadamerian hermeneutic experience will only announce itself to one who consciously participates in an ongoing aftermath of Christianity.<sup>839</sup> On the one hand, historic Christianity is finished, after succeeding in abolishing itself; on the other hand, Christianity never ends because it remains an irreducible condition of any really distinct Gadamerian apprehension of hermeneutic experience. For the two sides of Gadamer’s inheritance were not alike. While Gadamer’s Greeks were extraordinary humans, and Gadamer sought to prolong what they had begun, his Christians were humanly impossible and so Christianity remained for him a philosophically ungeneralisable world-historical occurrence.

### **III. Comparing Gadamer and Tracy on religion**

Religion plays an ambivalent, if crucial, role in Gadamer’s theory. By comparison, during the 1980s, at least, Tracy presented religion much more straightforwardly, as the crowning condition of dialogic reason, something already implicit within the

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<sup>838</sup> See *Truth and Method*, 453-469. Here, Gadamer pursued a different path to Heidegger for whom no speculative function could be expected to organize what is particular and what is universal into a pattern to stabilize the task of thinking. (See Martin Heidegger, ‘The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking’ in ed. David Farrell Krell, *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings: Nine Key Essays Plus the Introduction to Being and Time* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1978), 369-392. For a related argument that draws upon Heidegger to deprecate ‘the step up to the concept’ in philosophy, see Jacques Derrida, ‘White Mythology’ in Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

<sup>839</sup> Another hermeneutical philosopher whose thought also emphasises interpreting post-*Christian* culture, albeit in a different way, is Gianni Vattimo (for an accessible introduction, see John D. Caputo and Gianni Vattimo, *After the Death of God*, ed. Jeffrey W. Robbins (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

fundamental experience of the classic itself. He would see the profound plurality and ambiguity of all religion as finding counterpart in its even more profound powers for resistance and hope. As for Christianity specifically, *Imagination* presented it as an exemplary classic tradition that shows forth the general nature of hermeneutical possibility.<sup>840</sup> But this did not involve for Tracy any strong appeals to particular religious history comparable to what one finds in Gadamer.

Tracy's thinking may have changed on some of these fronts since 1990, however.<sup>841</sup> Furthermore, I believe we can discern some of the elements that we have identified in Gadamer's interpretation of Christian faith now appearing woven within Tracy's thought, albeit according to Tracy's ongoing desire to mediate between living Christian faith and philosophical thinking, which contrasts with Gadamer. I am not suggesting that Tracy has shared the particular interest in or interpretation of Gadamer on religion that I have outlined here.<sup>842</sup> But if Tracy's thought over the past twenty-plus years has entered deeper into its hermeneutical heritage, as I believe it has, then it should not surprise if previously neglected elements from that tradition should surface around his work in new ways.

Today, Tracy seems to be intent on integrating positive and negative sides to the hermeneutical situation, treating each as equally fundamental, no longer so clearly enclosing the negative within the positive. Perhaps he does this partly by withdrawing God *as such* from the hermeneutical scene. No longer does *theism* supply the shape of

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<sup>840</sup> See Chapter 2 section I, above.

<sup>841</sup> In 1999, for example, Tracy could write approvingly of how postmodern thinking in religion works to disrupt 'the continuities, the similarities, the communalities of modern "religion,"' amidst a return instead to a new language of 'revelation' as 'the gift-event of the Other's self-manifestation' (Tracy, 'Trinitarian Speculation and the Forms of Divine Disclosure' in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall and Gerard O'Collins, eds., *Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 273-293: 277).

<sup>842</sup> Probably not, in fact (see Tracy, 'Interview,' ln. 254-8).

reality for Tracy, even though he evidently counts reality as shot through with an often dark and demanding grace and reality of God. Where Gadamer maintained hermeneutical possibility by marginalising hermeneutical negativity within the personal-private realm of ‘sign’ as opposed to ‘symbol,’ Tracy’s notion of fragment (or ‘frag-event’) seeks to hold positive and negative *together* in the essential heart of thinking. His hermeneutics of fragment achieves this (to the extent that it does) in ways that his previous metaphysically complacent phenomenology of ‘the classic’ never did.

The Tracean ‘classic’ was in many ways a hermeneutical-theoretical extension of an earlier theological idea of ‘symbol.’ *Blessed Rage* lists Christian ‘symbols’ among the first-order religious phenomena able vividly to ‘re-present’ to our everyday living and thinking both commonalities of human experience and their transcendental horizon.<sup>843</sup> More generally, other theorists of religious symbols have likewise imagined symbols as the concretely particular mediators of some distinct, if not necessarily separable, universal horizon. For Tracy in *Blessed Rage*, first-order religious symbols ultimately reflected transcendent-immanent process theistic reality (which latter Tracy thought needed to expand its own too-limited symbolism).<sup>844</sup> In Paul Tillich’s idealist-existentialist scheme, by contrast, religious symbols mediate the power of transcendental Being-itself so as to enable people to genuinely *be* in the face of their impending non-being in death.<sup>845</sup> Or again, for early Paul Ricoeur symbols are our vehicles for coming face-to-face with the universal human moral-rational tasks of

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<sup>843</sup> See *Blessed Rage*, 218-223.

<sup>844</sup> For a sketch of Tracy’s adoption of process theistic and panentheistic categories in the 1970s and into the 1980s, see Chapter 2 section II., above. For Tracy’s reflections on the limited symbolic range of process thought to that date, see *Blessed Rage*, 188-191.

<sup>845</sup> See Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (London: Collins, 1962); also Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Combined Volume (Wlwyn, Herts: James Nesbit & Co., 1968), Vol. 1, 267-8: ‘Religious symbols [...] open the divine for the human and the human for the divine.’

selfhood that are philosophy's most fundamental concern.<sup>846</sup>

The Tracean phenomenology of the classic in *Imagination* represented a substantial Gadamerian makeover in comparison with such theologies and philosophies of the symbol. Now the experiences of conversation and tradition became central. But even so, Tracy's theory of the classic did tend to repeat rather closely the symbol-theorists' model of particular and concrete phenomena (here, 'classics') that bear charges from the horizon of everything ('the whole').<sup>847</sup> In the crucial paradigm case of the *religious* classic, we may recall in *Imagination*, the classic actually manifests the whole as such. At the same time, Tracy also presented this universal horizon as something that could be grasped abstractly and conceptually via the kinds of transcendental-cum-metaphysical reflection that naturally accompanied his hermeneutical theory at this time.

By comparison with his earlier hermeneutical thinking, Tracy's concept of fragment (or frag-event) tends to upset overly stable schemas of distinction and interaction between part and whole. The Tracean fragment is emphatically not intended as a Romantic revival of the ancient idea of the *symbolon* – whereby a fragment seeks reunification with the whole from which it has been broken – as Derrida once suggested to Tracy.<sup>848</sup> To a new extent for Tracy, his concept of fragment shares in the relativising of

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<sup>846</sup> As Ricoeur famously said, 'the symbol gives rise to thought, and thought returns to the symbol' (Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (London and New York: Harper Row, 1967), 101. For Ricoeur's classic mature exploration of moral selfhood, see Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* [1990], trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>847</sup> See, especially, *Imagination*, 160-163; also 193-202.

<sup>848</sup> See Tracy's published lecture and subsequent exchange with Jacques Derrida from the conference 'God, the Gift, and Postmodernism' at Villanova University in September 1997, published as 'Fragments: The Spiritual Situation of our Times' and 'Response by Jacques Derrida,' respectively, in John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, eds., *God, The Gift, and Postmodernism* (Indiana University Press, 1999), 170-180 & 181-184. See also Tracy's description of his non-Romantic notion of fragment as 'frag-event' in Tracy, 'Interview,' ln. 64-72.

metaphysics and existentialism pursued by Heidegger and Gadamer (as also seen in Derrida and Caputo). At the same time, the Tracean fragment also bears significant similarity to Gadamer's concept of the Hebraic 'sign,' to the extent that fragments work negatively to shatter our conscious or unconscious tendencies to reduce the world and others to our own grasp or control.

In the next, final chapter, we shall turn to Tracy's concept of fragment or 'frag-event,' towards which much of this thesis has been leading.

## CHAPTER 9

### Fragments

Since the late 1990s, Tracy has been using a category of ‘fragment’ (and latterly, ‘fragment’) to finesse his account of how to pay thoughtful attention to the world. He intends his image of thinking through fragments to be a renewal of, and improvement upon, the model of ‘conversation with classics’ that he advanced in *Plurality*.

It is also worth noting at this point how Tracy now highlights the activity of paying concerted *attention* to the world as the core practice of thoughtful living. Simone Weil, Pierre Hadot and Bernard Lonergan line up behind this thought for Tracy:

That’s also why I love Simone Weil. She believed that the most important spiritual practice for anyone is attention. She was like Hadot, recovering spiritual practice in thinking. Be attentive. Lonergan also said his transcendental precepts towards the end of his life: ‘Be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible, and if necessary change.’ He said, ‘When you get older, you’ll realise “be attentive” is the most important.’ You have to be silent, you have to be able to listen.<sup>849</sup>

Silence, listening, being attentive. Simone Weil once observed that ‘the kind of attention which is nothing else but attention is prayer.’<sup>850</sup> My initial suggestion is that Tracy’s theory of fragment proposes, above all, a certain way of paying attention to the world.

Tracy suggests that it is the person who would attend to unity-shattering fragments, above all – and who would gather these, and him or herself, on the basis of such

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<sup>849</sup> ‘Interview,’ In. 469-474

<sup>850</sup> Simone Weil, *The Notebooks of Simone Weil*, vol. 2., trans. Arthur Wills (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956), 527.

attention – that is best placed to gather a coherent expectation and vigilance in the world. It sounds paradoxical to imagine gathering on the basis of shattering, and this chapter will examine this question. A major part of this chapter will consist in attempting to identify the coherence of Tracy’s metaphor and category of fragment (or ‘frag-event’), and thereby the possibilities it hopes to serve. This will include exploring whether Tracy’s theory of fragments successfully shares in the manner of fragmentariness that it itself posits as the most essential mode of discourse and understanding (or whether it falls instead into other, less helpful potential connotations of ‘fragment’). In these discussions, what Tracy said of all hermeneutical theory in *Plurality* can also be applied to his theory of fragments: by abstracting ‘certain salient, sometimes essential, but never exhaustive features’<sup>851</sup> of life and thought, Tracy hopes to introduce a ‘helpful skill forged on behalf of thought and life.’<sup>852</sup>

The first section in what follows will recall some of the ground this thesis has already prepared for Tracy’s notion of fragment. This will include recalling some criticisms I have offered of some of Tracy’s older formulations, which may perhaps be answered in his newer thinking. Sections that follow will then outline and evaluate Tracy’s idea of fragment in its own right. After this, a penultimate section of this chapter (and the thesis) will trace a thread of arguments that have run through this thesis, with a view to framing a concluding perspective.

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<sup>851</sup> *Plurality*, 9.

<sup>852</sup> *Plurality*, 10.

## I. Towards the Tracean fragment

Tracy's evolving account of conversation-dialogue during the 1980s proposed maintaining hope in human practices of shareable imagination and adjudication. This hope in dialogic reason persisted for Tracy in the face of recognising the manifold cognitive falsehoods and moral evils that colonise human practice, on the one hand, and the endless mismatch between human intention and radical phenomenal plurality, on the other. The hope of conversation-dialogue was also for Tracy from the start a religious and incipiently theological one: anticipating, firstly, the animation of human tradition and discursive imagination by transcendent-immanent power, and secondly (and relatedly) an integrity-guaranteeing analogy between all aspects of discursive experience and gracious Reality-as-whole.

As a mode of analogical (and thus, theological-philosophical) thinking, Tracy's idea of conversation-dialogue has also been reluctant to surrender its basis to obscure reassurances offered by supposedly authoritative tradition. In this, Tracy's account of conversation-dialogue echoed his earlier process theistic objections to traditional theism.<sup>853</sup> At the same time, we have seen that Tracy's explorations in conversation-dialogue augmented his process-theistic perspective, in particular by highlighting the exemplary roles played by confrontational religious memories, symbols and experiences within the proposed analogy of reason. These additions significantly complicated any cut-and-dried process theological capture of the name 'God' for Tracy in the 1980s.<sup>854</sup>

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<sup>853</sup> See *Blessed Rage*, 180f.; also Chapter 2 section II, above. Theistic conceptuality rather retreated to the background of Tracy's concern in the 1980s, displaced from the foreground by his account of interpretative and dialogic reason.

<sup>854</sup> When Tracy wrote later, in 1994, of a 'return of God in contemporary theology,' his own theology would be a prime candidate for this 'return' (see Tracy, 'The Return of God in Contemporary Theology')

And yet Tracy still struggled in *Imagination* to make those memories, symbols and experiences more than moments folded into a broader and deeper analogical assurance.<sup>855</sup>

The logic of Tracy's subsequent affirmation of a 'mystical-prophetic' rhetoric of God, since the late 1980s, on the other hand, has been a return of *theos* – in transcendence of every gathered *logos* – which brought metaphysical theism positively into question. Tracy has also explicitly acknowledged – on one occasion, at least – that '[e]very Christian hermeneutic today [...] must endure as not merely unfinished but as broken.'<sup>856</sup> Given all this, I have suggested that Tracy's recent thinking may have been bringing into question any overly one-sided confidence in what Tracy has termed (after Lonergan) 'the self-correcting power of reason.' On my reading, mystical-prophetic affirmations entail significant complications of the autonomy of reason, and I read Tracy's concept of fragment as reinforcing a sense that human reason is less self-possessed than his earlier work implied. However, I will need to indicate ways in which this interpretation of mine may be in tension with Tracy's own preferred evaluation of his thought.

I suggested previously that this interweaving of affirmation and negation in Tracy's recent understanding of the power of human reason could be grasped in terms of the perforation of every analogical affirmation of nature-and-grace by dialectical confrontations between sin and grace. As we will see, fragments are for Tracy as much about dialectical confrontation as they are about analogical affirmation, in a way that

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in Tracy, *On Naming the Present: Reflections on God, Hermeneutics, and Church* (London: SCM Press, 1994), 36-46).

<sup>855</sup> See Chapter 4 section IV, above. Correspondingly, Tracy also struggled to avoid an impression of identifying religious tradition fundamentally with the natural genius of human culture.

<sup>856</sup> *Dialogue*, 121.

could not quite be said of Tracy's earlier formulations about classics. Perhaps this itself points towards a rethinking of the self-possession that Lonergan and Tracy each in their own ways have tended to claim for human reason.<sup>857</sup>

For its part, Lonergan's thought mediated a powerful sense of the destructive power of sin in human thinking. It was this sense of the crisis brought about by evil and bias in human thinking that also necessitated Lonergan's resort to axiomatic religious authority to repair the damage. As we have seen, Tracy found Lonergan's appeal to assumed authority unacceptable, even at the same time as Tracy continued to theorise a self-possession of human reason basically comparable to what Lonergan theorised in *Insight*. A mature example of this sense of the natural integrity of human reason in Tracy can be seen in his ideal of unambiguous conversation that stalks the argument in *Plurality*, which I have criticised.<sup>858</sup> I have suggested that it might make good sense of where Tracy has arrived today if one were instead to seek to lower *both* sides of Lonergan's symmetrically overloaded equation of essentially self-possessing human reason on the one hand and axiomatic religious authority on the other. In direct proportion to such a putting-into-question of human rational self-possession, perhaps, the particularities of religious tradition could become recognised as being in their own very different ways no *less* aspirant and reticent discourse – no less *attentive* in their own right – than the universal perspectives upon which they necessarily wait.

In such a case, I suggest, everything might be seen to turn less upon this or that rule of universalising reason, in itself, than upon the many different and complementary kinds of attention to the world and to others that might be possible.

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<sup>857</sup> For this argument see Chapter 7 section VI. ii., above.

<sup>858</sup> See Chapter 3 section VI, above.

As I indicated previously, however, I am uncertain that these would be formulations that Tracy himself would endorse, insofar as they tend to imply a breaking of human reason that robs it of some of its theoretical self-identity. In a recent lecture on ‘the necessity and character of fundamental theology,’ for example, Tracy identified Benedict XVI’s stress on ‘having faith in reason’ as one area in which he agreed with the pontiff.<sup>859</sup> But here I would want to ask, might it not be more accurate for a Christian to reckon on committing him or herself passionately to the pursuit of reason – in part, as an act of religious faithfulness – whilst yet reserving *God* as the proper object of *faith*?

In a recent essay on Gregory of Nyssa, Tracy suggests that we can learn from the fourth century Cappadocian that Christian faith (a particular content and occurrence) ‘opens access to a new knowledge’ (that is, universality of vision) by ‘liberating the unconscious divine energy located in the subconscious and unconscious dimensions of the self.’<sup>860</sup> The sense that Tracy gives here is still that one definitely *possesses* the resources of reason and knowledge within oneself, although these resources lie trapped in a hidden unconscious that awaits liberation by faith. This is a rather different image from the one I have just attempted to present. Using Tracy’s terms, it seems to me that human reason is not only enduringly hidden from the Infinity of its universe, but *also*,

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<sup>859</sup> Tracy, ‘The Necessity and Character of Fundamental Theology,’ unpublished lecture presented at Loyola University, Chicago, April 8, 2011.

<sup>860</sup> ‘Et si foi était, par exemple, le début de notre union même à Dieu qui ouvre l’accès à une nouvelle connaissance (infinie plutôt impossible) en libérant dans l’inconscient l’énergie divine qui se trouve dans les dimensions subconscientes ou même inconscientes du soi?’ (Tracy, ‘Foi et Raison: Union, Contemplation, Critique,’ trans. George Chavallier, *Transversalités* 110 (Avril-Jun 2009), 53-74: 53). While indeed finding this in Gregory, Tracy might seem to imply here that Gregory is more a thinker of the Infinite than of the Impossible, which in turn might seem to imply that we deal here with only one side of what Tracy would like to say about the role of Christian faith. But later, while repeating this theme of faith’s liberation of subconscious and unconscious energies, he suggests that, in Gregory’s hands, ‘[f]aith gives to the mind freedom to think more than it is capable of thinking’ in such a way as to make Gregory ‘a keen [*fin*] phenomenologist of the Impossible at the same time as a keen hermeneute of the Infinite’ (*ibid*, 69).

and equally, *lacks* its own essential self-possibility, in the Impossible.<sup>861</sup> In what will follow there will be opportunities to assess what, if anything, Tracy's idea of 'fragment' could contribute to thinking through the self-possession or otherwise of human rational possibility.

In the immediately preceding chapter, I explored how Gadamer's account of interpretative tradition, for all its humanism, was built upon religion and that religion was for him, in one of its parts, an unmastered moment of devastating contradiction and negation of human individual and collective self-possession and confidence. In this way, I sought to exhibit the Lutheran negative moment secreted within Tracy's primary teacher in dialogic reason. Yet Gadamer sequestered this unanswered and unassailable negativity into a silent private arena, as a mute existential shadow to the confident loquaciousness of hermeneutic experience. To this extent, Tracy's thought of fragments, by contrast, is more akin to John Caputo's attempts to model the positive and negative hermeneutical impulses alongside each other on the overt plane of interpretative practice itself.<sup>862</sup> At the same time, however, Tracy's pursuit of fragments (or, as he prefers, 'frag-events') also contrasts to Caputo in its voicing of a realistic and pluralistic religio-theological sensibility different from Caputo's 'weak theology' and 'religion

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<sup>861</sup> In her book *Christian Contradictions: The Structures of Lutheran and Catholic Thought* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), Daphne Hampson has highlighted the difficulties that humanistic and Catholic thought have had comprehending the nature of the Lutheran insistence that human life and justification lie not in renewed self-possession, but 'only through trusting in Christ in God, living extrinsically' (*ibid.*, 49). It seems to me that Tracy is coming very close to a genuine mediation of Catholic and Lutheran understanding, but that a conceptual reconciliation, as such, may not be possible.

<sup>862</sup> Caputo has emphasised common hermeneutical cause between Derridean deconstruction and the Heideggerian event of concealment-in-unconcealing in discourse (see John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutical Project* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), esp. 187-206). If late Heidegger's hermeneutical attitude can be seen *in nuce* in his assertion that the statement 'A is A' is not primarily a logical tautology, but instead an exemplary kind of linguistic event (Martin Heidegger, 'The Principle of Identity' [1957] in Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans Joan Stambaugh (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 23-41: 23), then Caputo's Derridean hermeneutics perhaps extends this thought to insist that the statement 'A is *not* A' is even more exemplary of the rich poverty of language.

without religion.’<sup>863</sup> The Tracean category ‘fragment’ is distinguishable from generalised quasi-transcendental *différance* by the empirical realism with which it imagines occasions and traditions of transcendent gift and demand. Like classics, Tracean fragments are discursive entities that are recognised in powerful experiences had by human ‘subjects-in-process-on-trial.’<sup>864</sup>

In what follows I shall attempt to suggest that Tracy’s idea of thinking via fragments (or frag-events) is a coherent and plausible alternative to the metaphysical (‘onto-theological’) commitments of his earlier work, on the one hand, and a Caputo-like ‘religion without religion’ on the other. The first step in this argument will be to see how a retrieval of the significance of ‘form’ in classical pre-modern thinking led Tracy to hypothesise the form of *fragments* as the one most available for thinking today.

## II. Form and fragment

Tracy hopes that ‘fragments can heal [...] the separation of form from content’ in modern thought, a separation (or non-mutuality) that Tracy allies with similarly ‘fatal’

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<sup>863</sup> Caputo, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (Bloomington, Ind.: University of Indiana Press, 2006); *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997). ‘I cannot share [Derrida’s] call for a “religion without religion,” i.e., an indeterminate “religion” without a determinate religion (e.g., messianism without a Messiah). I do not, of course, deny that Derrida’s religious option has now become what William James named a “living option”’ (Tracy, ‘Western Hermeneutics,’ 35-6).

<sup>864</sup> Taking this concept from Julia Kristeva, Tracy has written that ‘the metaphor of process in Kristeva’s thought is not merely another expression of a quietly modern evolutionary consciousness of unending process. Rather, it is ‘both the relational metaphor of process’ – i.e., that things exist only as in process with everything else – and ‘a legal metaphor of process as trial’: ‘We are all subjects-in-process-on-trial now’ (Tracy, ‘The Post-Modern Re-Naming of God as Incomprehensible and Hidden,’ *Cross Currents* 50 (Spring/Summer 2000), 240-247: 244).

modern separations of reason from passion, and theory from practice.<sup>865</sup>

One way to illustrate the problem that Tracy has hoped to address here would be to highlight the tendency of moderns to treat historical experiences as mere instances of an abstract immanent world-intelligibility. (Contrary assertions of world-absurdity, meanwhile, can be similarly abstract and total.) This tendency contrasts to the ways in which many pre-modern thinkers possessed sufficient political, cultural and theocosmological assurance to parse particular content ('matter') in more or less coherent hierarchies of plural forms ('genera'), all under the presumed super-intelligibility of God.<sup>866</sup> Shorn of religious assurances of divine super-intelligibility in particular, however, modern thinkers have tended instead to approach the contents of experience for evidence of universal laws. In the process they have treated particular contents and forms as indifferent fodder for graspings after immanently manifest universality.

Not wishing to return thought to pre-modernity, Tracy nevertheless wishes to retrieve what he believes was a previously held valuable distinction – not separation – of form and content. Particular contents should be encouraged to appear by ways of their own rediscovered fragments of intelligible form.

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<sup>865</sup> Tracy, 'Form and Fragment: The Recovery of the Hidden and Incomprehensible God' in Werner G Jeanrond and Aasulv Lande, eds., *The Concept of God in Global Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 98-114: 99-100.

<sup>866</sup> Striking recapitulations of this way of thinking can be found in the modern Thomisms of, say, Étienne Gilson (see Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IND.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994)), and early Bernard Lonergan in *Insight* (with his accounts of 'emergent probability' and 'world order with the limits of empirical method': see *Insight*, 121-128; also Chapter 6 section II. i., here above). These modern Thomisms were marked by a characteristically modern lack of emphasis on God's *super*-intelligibility, however. Gilson had polemically little time for Dionysius or Eckhart (see Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*). Bernard McGinn has suggested that *later* Lonergan, on the other hand, was in important respects closer to Bonaventure and Hugh of St. Victor than to Aquinas (see Bernard McGinn, 'Theological Reflections on "Philosophy and the Religious Phenomenon"' in *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 12/2 (1994), 205-13: 210-13).

While he is not otherwise in sympathy with their theological programmes, Tracy acknowledges a great advance that occurred in this regard in the theologies of Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar. For these theologians appreciated form ‘not as some extra aesthetic addition to content but as that which renders the content.’<sup>867</sup> According to these theologians, continues Tracy, ‘the search for the right theological form is at the very same time the search for the right theological content.’<sup>868</sup> Hans Frei is the interpreter of Karl Barth whom Tracy credits with having successfully traced Barth’s shifts of form: from Barth’s ‘early German expressionist, indeed fragmentary, form in the *Romans* commentary,’ to the emergence of ‘a more doctrinal realistic form’ in his work on Anselm, to ‘a history-like realistic narrative form for theology that became predominant as the *Church Dogmatics* unfolded.’<sup>869</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, meanwhile, has been the theologian who has insisted on Christian theology’s ‘need for the classical harmonizing forms [...] of the Greeks, the patristics and the medievals – the forms of harmony order and beauty.’<sup>870</sup>

Placed in comparison with these, modern theology (including Tracy’s own earlier work) has possessed almost an *anti-form*, Tracy implies, which has reduced its thinking and naming of God to ‘a series of seemingly endless debates on the correct ism, that is, the correct set of abstract propositions.’<sup>871</sup> As Tracy notes, these ‘modern isms – deism, theism, atheism, pantheism and the best of the list, panentheism – seem to have little to do with trying to understand God as a religious phenomenon, much less as a saturated

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<sup>867</sup> Tracy, ‘Form and Fragment,’ 100.

<sup>868</sup> ‘Form and Fragment,’ 100.

<sup>869</sup> ‘Form and Fragment,’ 100. See Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. from the sixth German edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), Barth, *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum. Anselm’s Proof of the Existence of God in the Context of his Theological Scheme* (London: SCM, 1960), and Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, multiple volumes (Edinburgh: T&T Clark).

<sup>870</sup> Tracy, ‘Form and Fragment,’ 101. See especially Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, Vol. 1, *Seeing the Form* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982).

<sup>871</sup> ‘Literary Theory and Return of the Forms,’ 307.

phenomenon disclosing the Impossible.<sup>872</sup> In this way modern theology denatured its discourse away from the many forms and contents of the religions themselves.

Nevertheless, to the extent that Barth eventually rested in a history-like realistic form for theology, Tracy finds unconvincing the way in which Barth (at least, as interpreted by Frei) treated this as *the* intelligible form of Christian theology. Such a form may chime somewhat with the form of Luke-Acts, for example, but it hardly interprets the gospel of Mark.<sup>873</sup> Meanwhile, Tracy notes that Balthasar's explicit eschewal of the fragment-form for classical forms 'turns out to be a neo-conservative way of protecting *the* tradition,' of keeping 'the present form not to be broken, not to be fragmented, when in fact it should be fragmented, it always needs to be.'<sup>874</sup> Balthasar produces a 'totality notion of church.'<sup>875</sup>

Against Balthasar and the later Barth, therefore, Tracy finds the form of the *fragment* to be the particular kind of form available to theology today. At the same time, fragments in art and thought are also the forms that are capable of resisting the totality systems of modernity, without retreating from modernity's unfinished emancipatory project (Habermas) into airlessly unreal or manipulative appeals to pre-modern forms of harmony and authority.

As Tracy notes, it was the ancient Greeks, above all, who discovered and extolled *form* as that which 'shows forth the real in harmonious appearance': 'in sensuous image as in

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<sup>872</sup> 'Form and Fragment,' 102. The term 'saturated phenomenon' comes from Jean-Luc Marion.

<sup>873</sup> The Markan narrative is 'marked by disruption and nonclosure, by a main character whose disturbed voice clarifies only how his own disciples seem to understand almost nothing while the marginal ones (the mad, the demons) do grasp the threatening meaning of this apocalyptic figure' ('Literary Theory,' 310-311).

<sup>874</sup> 'Interview,' ln. 111-114.

<sup>875</sup> See 'Interview,' ln. 106-114. Tracy applies a similar criticism to the alternative proposals of the so-called 'radical orthodox' theologians (see 'Interview,' ln. 116-120).

Greek sculpture; in mathematics as in Pythagoras; in the forms of tragedy which bring some aesthetic harmony to chaos and strife; above all, in the ancient philosophical turn to reflective form in the soul or mind.’<sup>876</sup> Philosophically, ‘form’ is that which shines forth within experience to make intelligible what is real. And yet, Tracy is clear that the visions of harmony of the Greeks are inaccessible to us today, who suspect that forms mask indeterminacy (Nietzsche) and that manifestation is ‘a strife involving both disclosure and concealment’ (Heidegger).<sup>877</sup>

Here, Gadamer’s development of Heidegger might be seen as a significant recent philosophical attempt to retrieve that Greek focus on radiance in a measured and believable manner for contemporary dialogic practice in the aftermath of Christianity.<sup>878</sup> Since the mid-1990s, however, Tracy has been exploring a more explicit concentration on forms that must complicate dreams of tethering practices of interpretation to stable constellations of notions and norms. Tracy’s recent thinking suggests rather that hermeneutical thinking stumbles into a world of positive and constructive multiplicity, which is rather different from the more generalised dynamic of plurality that he once hoped conversation could navigate through a focus on overcoming ambiguity.

### **III. The example of Augustine**

The essay in which Tracy has most clearly situated his concept of fragment in relation

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<sup>876</sup> ‘Trinitarian Speculation,’ 274.

<sup>877</sup> ‘Trinitarian Speculation,’ 274.

<sup>878</sup> According to Tracy, the ancient sense ‘that truth means participation in being [...] as manifested through form’ became the Reformed Christian hermeneutical philosopher Paul Ricoeur’s formulation ‘that truth is primordially manifestation, and only derivatively correspondence or even coherence’ (‘Trinitarian Speculation,’ 276) (see also *Plurality*, 28ff.). For the role of Christian religion in Gadamer’s thought, see the preceding chapter of this thesis.

to his previous ideas is an essay about Augustine published in 2008, in which Tracy celebrates the classic fragmentary nature of Augustine's writing.<sup>879</sup>

Augustine's texts, writes Tracy, are like a crowded ancient city, winding and full of the world's business.<sup>880</sup> As we explore this textual city, we find that the texts themselves 'have become fragmentary, sometimes complementing one another; sometimes merely stranded next to one another like sunken ruins; sometimes seeming to contradict one another' (as, for example, on free will).<sup>881</sup> More than this, sometimes the 'fragments in Augustine's texts [...] are more like verbs than nouns':<sup>882</sup> they actively fragment, in and of themselves, just as also they fragment the thought-worlds that they touch. They shatter every 'temptation of totality,' including the temptations of 'Augustinianism' and of 'some final once-for-all "true" interpretation.'<sup>883</sup> Augustinian fragments, claims Tracy, tend to 'dissolve, implode, or explode to manifest unforeseen new meanings not easily assimilable to other fragments.'<sup>884</sup>

Here, what Tracy means by 'fragment' is clearly in large part a recapitulation and further clarification of what he intended by 'classic.' As he writes: 'Only period-pieces yield to once-and-for-all interpretation – classics never.'<sup>885</sup> This is because '[c]lassic texts are fragmentary,' whereas '[p]eriod pieces are all too unitary.'<sup>886</sup>

Just as in *Imagination*, here once again it is the central realistic teaching of the church

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<sup>879</sup> Tracy, 'Augustine's Christomorphic Theocentrism' in Aristotle Papanikolaou and George E. Demacopolous, eds., *Orthodox Readings of Augustine* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008), 263-289.

<sup>880</sup> Tracy, 'Augustine's Christomorphic Theocentrism,' 263-4.

<sup>881</sup> 'Augustine's Christomorphic Theocentrism,' 267.

<sup>882</sup> 'Augustine's Christomorphic Theocentrism,' 267.

<sup>883</sup> 'Augustine's Christomorphic Theocentrism,' 267.

<sup>884</sup> 'Augustine's Christomorphic Theocentrism,' 267.

<sup>885</sup> 'Augustine's Christomorphic Theocentrism,' 267.

<sup>886</sup> 'Augustine's Christomorphic Theocentrism,' 271.

concerning Jesus of Nazareth as Christ and God that will exemplify the labour of thought for Tracy. Just as Christology was the paradigmatic classic in *Imagination*, so here Augustine's exemplary fragments likewise find their focus for Tracy in the African bishop's account of Jesus Christ. Only now, it is the inherently fragmentary and fragmenting quality of the doctrine of Christ that emerges into view, as Tracy charts the way in which the early dominance of the neoplatonic form of 'Jesus Christ the mediator' in Augustine eventually encountered a profusion of other, equally Nicene forms: 'Christ the Form of Forms, Christ the kenotic incarnate God, Christ the Fragmenting Cruciform, Christ the risen one.'<sup>887</sup> In all this, Tracy notes, the universal *Christum divinum* always emerges for Augustine through the particular afflicted, human Jesus: *per Christum hominem ad Christum divinum*.<sup>888</sup> In this emergence of Christological form, writes Tracy, it is the cruciform of Christ in Augustine that above all 'shatters and fragments all Christian complacency,' including that within Augustine's own 'earlier more sanguine mediator Christology.'<sup>889</sup>

#### **IV. Fragmenting totality systems**

But if Augustine wrote exemplary fragments, what does this mean a Tracean fragment *is*, exactly? Can we define the idea and its consequences more closely?

In a major essay from the middle of the last decade – 'Form and Fragment: The

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<sup>887</sup> 'Augustine's Christomorphic Theocentrism,' 275.

<sup>888</sup> 'Augustine's Christomorphic Theocentrism,' 284.

<sup>889</sup> 'Augustine's Christomorphic Theocentrism,' 284.

Recovery of the Hidden and Incomprehensible God<sup>890</sup> – Tracy writes of how the German romantics Schlegel and Novalis first ‘invented’ fragments ‘to disclose the “sparks” of the divine,’ which, as Tracy notes, ‘even Kant in a few brief places calls the intuitions of the divine.’<sup>891</sup> In part, they hoped with these ‘to break the totality of the Enlightenment and see infinity’: to once again ‘see that which could not close.’<sup>892</sup>

This breaking of ‘totality systems’ is a core work of fragments for Tracy. A totality system might be a conscious ideology, or it could equally be unconscious (as in much sexism or racism; or as in Heidegger’s ‘framework’ (*Gestell*) of technicity (*techne*)).<sup>893</sup> Either way, a totality system is for Tracy a way of thinking and living that closes itself off from otherness: a practical-cognitive *curvatus in se*, or sin. As Tracy observes, ‘eventually in every totality system we find a reduction of everything to more of the same and thereby an exclusion of anything that is genuinely other and different.’<sup>894</sup>

In an essay on African-American thought, Tracy offers the example of ‘whiteness’ and ‘the “white” understanding of modernity and culture’ as an example of a reigning totality system.<sup>895</sup> Tracy notes how black Americans have discovered and assembled fragments (both religious and nonreligious) to shatter this understanding and to perform ‘a break out of totality into infinity’ in discovering ‘one’s own routes and one’s own

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<sup>890</sup> Tracy, ‘Form and Fragment: The Recovery of the Hidden and Incomprehensible God’ in Werner G. Jeanrond and Aasulv Lande, eds., *The Concept of God in Global Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY.: Orbis Books, 2005), 98-114.

<sup>891</sup> Tracy, ‘Form and Fragment,’ 99. See Novalis, *The Disciples at Saïs and Other Fragments* (London: Neuthen, 1903) and Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

<sup>892</sup> Tracy, ‘Form and Fragment,’ 102.

<sup>893</sup> On Heidegger, *Gestell* and *techne*, see George Pattison, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to the Later Heidegger* (London: Routledge, 2000), esp. 1-5 and 47ff. Also see Tracy, ‘Interview,’ In. 86-7: ‘We are within it: we are in the framework – the *Gestell* – of *techne*. It’s true.’

<sup>894</sup> Tracy, ‘Form and Fragment,’ 101.

<sup>895</sup> Tracy, ‘African American Thought: The Discovery of Fragments’ in Dwight N. Hopkins, ed., *Black Faith and Public Talk: Critical Essays on James H. Cone’s Back Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 29-38: 30.

traditions.<sup>896</sup> Alongside examples from popular black American culture, including religious culture, Tracy mentions specifically Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* and W. E. B DuBois's, *The Souls of Black Folk*; and, more recently, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Cornell West's *Prophetic Fragments*.<sup>897</sup> In these and other discoveries of fragments, Tracy suggests, black American thought shows a way for all thinking and living. We all need to seek out the fragments that may yet contain a power to shatter the totality systems that oppress and possess us.<sup>898</sup>

However, crucially, Tracy has had to face down an accusation from Jacques Derrida that this talk of fragment necessarily refers to 'taking a piece' – *symbolon* – 'of a larger whole and recalling that larger whole, usually with nostalgia, like the German romantics or Wordsworth.'<sup>899</sup> Tracy agrees that in this way the romantic fragment 'never quite broke out of the modern totality.'<sup>900</sup> (He notes, too, that the romantics 'were largely panentheists or pantheists in naming God.')<sup>901</sup> It is in the context of needing to disambiguate his idea from that of the romantics that Tracy has invented the word 'fragment' to identify more accurately what he means.

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<sup>896</sup> Tracy, 'African American Thought,' 30.

<sup>897</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* [1845] (Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 2009); W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* [1903] (Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 2008); Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000); Cornell West, *Prophetic Fragments* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1988)

<sup>898</sup> What is more, suggests Tracy, fragments 'lurk as land mines in all the classical modern systems,' such as the radical evil 'that Kant's classical modern three critiques could not and did not contain' ('African-American Thought,' 37). In his later, 'very serious essays on history and the singularities of history and religion,' Kant 'rethinks the fragments that will not fit into his critical system' (*ibid.*).

<sup>899</sup> Tracy, 'Interview,' ln. 66-67. See Derrida, 'Response by Jacques Derrida' in John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, eds., *God, The Gift, and Postmodernism* (Indiana University Press, 1999), 181-184. Derrida was responding to a paper by Tracy published as 'Fragments: The Spiritual Situation of our Times' in *God, The Gift, and Postmodernism*, 170-80.

<sup>900</sup> 'African-American Thought,' 31.

<sup>901</sup> Tracy, 'Form and Fragment,' 102.

## V. Fragments as ‘frag-events’

I hate neologisms but I was forced to invent one for what I wanted to say.<sup>902</sup>

I now speak of [fragment] as ‘frag-event’: that is to say, any breaking of any totality that in the breaking also manifests the Infinite, the Impossible. It’s a valuable category I think.<sup>903</sup>

In September 1997, the Roman Catholic Villanova University in Pennsylvania hosted a conference entitled ‘Religion and Postmodernism,’ which brought together philosophers and theologians ‘in dialogue with Jacques Derrida in order to discuss the question of religion at the end of the millennium.’<sup>904</sup> Tracy was among those presenting, and his paper appears in the volume as ‘Fragments: The Spiritual Situation of Our Times’ and is followed by an exchange between Tracy and Derrida.<sup>905</sup>

In this exchange, Derrida complains that Tracy’s use of ‘the figure of fragment’ necessarily ‘implies a broken whole,’ whatever Tracy’s actual intentions: ‘Either the fragment is a piece, taken out of the whole, or it is a symbol, two broken pieces. In both cases, the fragments are pieces of the totality. That is the common use of the metaphor.’<sup>906</sup> In response, Tracy is adamant that by ‘fragment’ he means something different from recollection of a lost whole. But Derrida remains unmoved, observing that this is indeed the common meaning of the metaphor, even though he concedes at

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<sup>902</sup> Tracy, ‘Interview,’ ln. 64-5.

<sup>903</sup> Tracy, ‘Interview,’ ln. 70-2.

<sup>904</sup> John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, ‘Introduction. Apology for the Impossible: Religion and Postmodernism’ in John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, eds., *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 1-19: 1.

<sup>905</sup> Tracy, ‘Fragments: The Spiritual Situation of our Times’ in John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, eds., *God, The Gift, and Postmodernism* (Indiana University Press, 1999), 170-180; with ‘Response by Jacques Derrida,’ 181-184.

<sup>906</sup> ‘Response by Jacques Derrida,’ 184.

one point that '[p]erhaps it is only a question of your use of words.'<sup>907</sup>

'Frag-event' is thus designed to overcome the unwelcome connotations to which Derrida drew attention. In many conversations that Tracy will join, 'frag-event' will no doubt be too odd and ungainly a word to act as more than an adjunct or aside to more familiar talk of 'fragments,'<sup>908</sup> but nevertheless, 'frag-event' consolidates important features of what Tracy intends in thinking of fragments.

Initially, it can appear odd that Tracy should render 'fragment' as 'frag-event,' owing to the shift of categories seemingly involved. For if a fragment is paradigmatically a text, for Tracy – a finesse of *Plurality's* 'classic' – then why translate this as 'event'? In the absence of sustained publication on the notion by Tracy himself, I suggest that a coherent answer can be found in Tracy's earlier thinking. For if we trace 'the classic' in Tracy back to its original exploration in *Imagination*, we find that there the revelatory paradigm of a classic – the 'Christian classic' – entailed the classic's being a function of an *event*: 'the event of Jesus Christ.' As I argued earlier,<sup>909</sup> Tracy presented the hermeneutical 'event' in *Imagination* as incorporating at once *both* particular historical origin *and* an ongoing character of happening-again-now. 'Event' in this double sense was thus the essence of every classic according to *Imagination*, and we can say that both of these dimensions of event are likewise relevant for the frag-event: for the frag-event, too, is something that appears discursively in a culture. Like classics, therefore, frag-events exist discursively (if they exist at all) always-already as traditions.

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<sup>907</sup> 'Response by Jacques Derrida,' 183.

<sup>908</sup> A good example here is Tracy's discussion of Augustine's fragments. Denying that these mean 'fragments of a larger whole by means of which, as with the German Romantics, nostalgia is evoked from some lost whole,' Tracy refers only in passing to their being 'perhaps more accurately named frag-events,' and to how readers live with Augustine's 'sentences, metaphors, images, at times whole texts, as frag-events' ('Augustine's Christological Theocentrism,' 267).

<sup>909</sup> See Chapter 2 section I. ii., above.

But then, we may wonder by what logic a frag-event could possibly succeed in passing itself along and around (*traditio*) as any *discursively appearing thing*. Does not ‘frag-event’ imply something more akin to Derridean non-appearance? Tracy himself has emphasised how, for him, the noun ‘fragment’ also possesses a strong sense of a verb. Fragments fragment, transitively and intransitively. But then, what stops self-fragmentation from carrying fragments away altogether into mere *frissons* of *différance* and dissemination? Frag-events would seem to *fragment* at the very point where classics analogically imagine a world and pass that imagination on and around. Might it be that, in his determination to distance his thought of fragments from a romantic nostalgia ‘evoked from some lost whole,’<sup>910</sup> Tracy has inadvertently undone the classic-like-ness of his fragment and so driven himself instead into blanket deconstruction?

Tracy clearly does not think he has committed himself to any such logic. As he says: while it is true that ‘all we have left in all the traditions, cultural and religious etc., are fragments’ – ‘in fact it was always true, and it’s certainly true now’ – this is no reason to despair of these, ‘if you can discern which of [those fragments] are really right, now.’<sup>911</sup> Specifically, Tracy also claims that along with a frag-event’s ‘breaking of any totality,’ it also positively ‘manifests the Infinite, the Impossible.’<sup>912</sup> In asserting this, however, he might seem once again to be leading everything back to manifestation: even in negation, encompassing manifestation is renewed. Is this the kind of a claim that Tracy is making?

In part, I suggest, the affirmation that Tracy finds in the frag-event is a kind of empirical-religious hypothesis. This is to say, religious Christian experience and

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<sup>910</sup> ‘Augustine’s Christological Theocentrism,’ 267.

<sup>911</sup> ‘Interview,’ ln. 95-8.

<sup>912</sup> ‘Interview,’ ln. 70-71.

existence, at least, suggests to Tracy that we could understand what goes on in something like these terms. Tracy thinks that, like classics, we encounter frag-events empirically as actual fundamental discursive phenomena. Christians reckon on living their lives from the ground up in the wake of a gathering constellation of frag-events: events that have happened and continue to happen and fragment. According to the thesis of faith, frag-events have come into being in history – above all, in the cross and resurrection of Christ – just as they are also what make history into history. Like *Imagination's* classics (indeed, as their profoundest reality), therefore, frag-events occur and then keep on happening and giving, if we only can learn to pay proper attention to them. And even when we fail or cease to attend to them, they still hang about in their various textual latencies waiting to be rediscovered. This, at least, is what our Christian thinker believes.

It may be, however, that Tracy has been tempted to translate this essentially religious outlook slightly too hastily into philosophical terms when he speaks unequivocally – albeit ambiguously – of frag-events ‘manifesting the Infinite and the Impossible.’ Of course, it ought not to scandalise that religious practices bank on some kind of divine affirmation even in the depths of negation. This kind of hope is one of the stocks of prayer. The issue here is rather whether the theologian can succeed in adequately developing such hypotheses, coherently and plausibly, without jaggling back into kitsch or unreality – or totality.

## VI. The integrity of a frag-event

Tracy has said that he no longer wants to suggest that ‘manifestation’ takes over.<sup>913</sup> In a similar manner, frag-events are also meant to ‘break [the] framework’ of the horizon of analogical imagination that reigned in his earlier work.<sup>914</sup> Nevertheless, Tracy believes that frag-events really have come into being and do come into being in history, whereupon each continually goes on coming newly into being. Frag-events are thus classics; and every true classic is a frag-event. But how is Tracy to think frag-events that do not simply fragment themselves infinitely before ever they appear? And is it helpful for him to characterise their persistence philosophically in terms of some new kind of strangely ambiguous *über*-‘manifestation’ (of ‘the Infinite and the Impossible’)?

It may well be that the manifestation that Tracy invokes here is really of a different kind to the rather totalising horizons that the concept of manifestation projected in *Imagination* and even still in *Plurality*. ‘The Impossible,’ at least, does not seem to present us with the stable thought of an encompassing ‘religious dimension’ of things. But what kind of showing-forth would this be, which shows forth the Impossible, the never self-manifest and inconceivable? Paradox may well be the essence of existence, but it sits uncomfortably within a supposed *concept*, where it is apt to look like a ‘misty’ sleight of hand.<sup>915</sup> Perhaps one of the outcomes of Tracy’s retreat from theism-as-such ought to be a greater reticence from him in projecting conceptual horizons for

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<sup>913</sup> See ‘Interview,’ ln. 456.

<sup>914</sup> See ‘Interview,’ ln. 89-92

<sup>915</sup> See Chapter 2 section II, above. It is perhaps instructive to note how John Milbank, the founding light of ‘radical orthodox’ theology – no theological friend of Tracy’s (see Tracy, ‘Interview,’ ln. 116-129) – has explicitly proposed the idea of an authoritative ‘mistiness’ in the ‘paradoxical analogy’ that theology proposes (see the section entitled ‘Paradox: A Misty Conceit’ in John Milbank, ‘The Double Glory, or Paradox Versus Dialectic: On Not Quite Agreeing with Slavoj Žižek’ in Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?*, ed. Creston Davis (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2009), 110-233: 160-170ff.). For Milbank’s parallel argument that Meister Eckhart presents a heightening of Thomistic theological analogy rather than its undoing, see *ibid.*, 224-225, n. 102.

either theology or thinking. I shall try to explore this in what follows in this sub-section.

It is noticeable that sometimes Tracy seems still to be in search of conceptualisations of God-as-such, despite having ostensibly left theism behind. In a fairly recent essay, for example, he ventures to describe God as ‘meta-personal: an individual energy-event distinct from but related to the whole that reveals Himself-Herself as origin, sustenance, and end of all reality.’<sup>916</sup> To be sure, as a definition of God, this is intentionally partial and incomplete. But, we might ask what it means to relinquish theism if one does not also withdraw from literal concepts supposed to mediate parts of the essence of God? Here, for example, Tracy seems to be describing not merely a certain hypothesis about the nature of Reality, but actually giving a partial definition of the religious intention, ‘God’: it is *God* who is this meta-personal energy event, and this appellation applies not merely to some hypothesised ‘Impossible Real.’<sup>917</sup> But it is hard for me to see how literal concepts and hypotheses – even unsystematic pluralities of them – can properly be applied to the religious naming of God. Is it necessary to think that invoking God must be equivalent to making a defined hypothesis about reality? Religiously, any such equivalence would seem inevitably to result in an unacceptable reduction of the God to whom one prays. Philosophically, meanwhile, it is hard to see how concepts proposed for God could ever settle enough questions over their meanings to be genuinely *conceptual* (‘literal’),<sup>918</sup> without resort to mystificatory sleights of hand and (or) the reduction of God to a totality that our conceptual fragments are supposed to recall.

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<sup>916</sup> Tracy, ‘On Longing: The Void, The Open, God’ in Stephan van Erp and Lea Verstricht, eds., *Longing in a Culture of Cynicism* (Zürich & Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2008), 15-32: 29.

<sup>917</sup> See ‘On Longing: The Void, The Open, God,’ 29.

<sup>918</sup> To repeat the point adapted from Lonergan, a successfully ‘literal’ statement is surely one for which someone somewhere has answered every *relevant* question about that particular statement’s meaning (see chapter ten of Lonergan’s *Insight* and Tracy’s citing of this in *Plurality*, 121 n. 4).

My point here is not to deny that provisional literal hypotheses – indeed, of every kind – are integral to attempts to live in faith in God. Since Christian life and thought (for example) intrinsically involves attempts to interpret the world and personal and social existence, it will surely require systemically (‘critically’) arranged streams of provisional hypotheses at every turn, correlating to its namings of God.<sup>919</sup> But this does not imply that these hypotheses are able to mount up towards equivalence to a religious invocation of God. When a person names the Christian God (at least) in a religious manner, I suggest, their accompanying hypotheses about reality – piecemeal and provisional, even where intentionally systemic – play necessary yet secondary and supporting roles. On this view, the religious naming (or invoking) of God must supersede all hypotheses, and along with that all manifestation and even all interpretation.<sup>920</sup> Even to say the excellent name, ‘love,’ in all its inherent plurality, is still too much a *meaning* to be taken as simply equivalent to praying the name ‘God.’<sup>921</sup> Religious invocations of God in this sense could be said to lack systematisable meaning, even if they call upon an abundance of meaningful names. Nevertheless, to faith such invocations are also the events *par excellence* towards which all thinking ought to tend and by which all thinking must be discomfited.

My preference here, therefore, is for the notion of frag-event to be careful of how it

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<sup>919</sup> For the relation of ‘intrinsic’ or ‘systemic’ correlation to theology’s critically reflective role, see Chapter 7 section I, above.

<sup>920</sup> In his essay ‘Ad Hoc Correlation’ (in Hans Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, eds. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1992), 70-91), Hans Frei partly commends Friedrich Schleiermacher as an ‘ad hoc’ theological correlator who yet fell short, in Frei’s view, by not subordinating his ad hoc correlations to the identity of the Christian community and its story. Frei commends Karl Barth, on the other hand, as an ad hoc correlator who pursued not ‘correlation between equals but an unsystematic *ad hoc performance* of subordinating explanatory theory and philosophy more generally, as a tool in Christian communal self-description’ (*ibid.*, 81). What I am proposing here, as a development of Tracy, is instead a theological practice that insists upon systemic/systematic, intrinsic – critical – correlations within theology, but which also subordinates these correlative results to acts of invoking God.

<sup>921</sup> ‘God is love,’ asserts the New Testament letter-writer, in the context of urging readers to love each other. But this is not the same as, for example, attempting to define God as ‘Pure Unbounded Love,’ as Tracy quotes Ogden in *Blessed Rage* (p. 179).

recovers talk of universality-as-manifestation, keeping such talk to a consciously rhetorical rather than conceptual level, so as not to be caught solidifying a concept of reason that will claim an equivalence to theological invocation.

Alternatively, however, Tracy could choose to give substance to the coherence and integrity of his idea of frag-events by maintaining a properly limited and metaphorical sense of frag-eventary ‘manifestation,’ while also supplementing this with his other happy rhetoric of ‘gathering’ fragments. For it is surely plausible at first blush that frag-events might be gatherable into fragmentary (in Tracy’s sense: frag-eventary) coherences. Were such gatherings not possible, on the other hand, then this would indeed imply that frag-events do not extend to being the kinds of fragmentary classic phenomena in the world that Tracy holds them to be. Ungatherable frag-events would be a pure disappearing of thought into fragmentation. For his part, Tracy insists that, for example, the ‘classical fragmenting languages of Christianity’ (for Tracy, especially the apocalyptic and the apophatic), taken as such, *could* ‘encourage new reflection on the central Trinitarian naming of God for Christians,’ if only ‘theologians paid greater attention to non-totalizing attempts at gathering the fragments.’<sup>922</sup> As Tracy continues, the ‘general directions that a Christian systematic theology might take if it began with this category of fragments need not end with fragments,’ but ‘should end with the gathering of fragments.’<sup>923</sup>

Furthermore, it is not only Christians that find themselves gathering fragments in our day. As so often for Tracy, the poets are instructive for would-be religious thinkers. He writes: ‘Most major contemporary artists and thinkers build their final vision (if one

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<sup>922</sup> Tracy, ‘Form and Fragment,’ 107. The fragmenting forms of language that Tracy is particularly interested in here are those of apocalyptic and apophatic discourse.

<sup>923</sup> ‘Form and Fragment,’ 108.

emerges) by collating ever-changing fragments.<sup>924</sup> Dickinson, Yeats and Eliot are more representative here, Tracy notes, than ‘the more rare modern poetic visionaries of a single commanding vision: Blake, Rimbaud, Wordsworth, Whitman.’<sup>925</sup> The difference here is not of quality, Tracy explains, but ‘of temperament and a difference of historical context.’<sup>926</sup> Yet the non-fragmentary single-visioners seem badly adapted to modern times: ‘Rimbaud very early abandoned poetry altogether; Wordsworth and Whitman, in later life, kept adding to and revising their original vision until they almost ruined it.’<sup>927</sup> Dickinson, Yeats and Eliot, on the other hand, suggest to Tracy that he is right to hope that frag-events exist and can be gathered on the basis of the work of attention alluded to at the beginning of this chapter.

Returning specifically to theology, however, I am not wholly clear that Tracy would agree with my own preference for keeping analogical concepts and hypotheses distinct from religious invocations. I have been concerned to avoid an account of the fragment-as-frag-event, which, in responding to Derrida while yet resisting programmatic deconstruction, might end up veering contradictorily between the latter and recoveries of the very totality thinking to which Derrida objected. In such a case, the dilemma in Tracy’s thought of the 1980s that we saw Martin Poulson outline in Chapter Four would not have been overcome, and Tracy would still be left having ultimately to choose identity *or* difference, analogy *or* dialectic. It does not seem to me necessary that Tracy’s thinking should founder in this dilemma, but to prevent this, I would like to see ‘namings’ of God (religious invocations) distinguished more clearly than Tracy seems to want from the systemic ‘thinkings’ of reality that must accompany them.

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<sup>924</sup> ‘Augustine’s Christomorphic Theocentrism,’ 270.

<sup>925</sup> ‘Augustine’s Christomorphic Theocentrism,’ 270.

<sup>926</sup> ‘Augustine’s Christomorphic Theocentrism,’ 270.

<sup>927</sup> ‘Augustine’s Christomorphic Theocentrism,’ 270.

## VII. 'A Benjaminian-like notion'<sup>928</sup>

As a metaphor that acts up as a skilful theological and philosophical category, Tracy's 'frag-event' is a porous notion, always liable to discover more of its possibilities from differing thinkers. This becomes especially clear as one moves from the more immediately inner-theological resonances of frag-event to broader examples of thinking to which it can be related. Walter Benjamin, the pre-War German-Jewish philosopher and critical theorist, is one thinker whom Tracy cites as being a particularly valuable example for him in thinking fragments differently from the romantics.<sup>929</sup>

Benjamin's whole thinking was oriented, as Tracy puts it, towards breaking 'out of the usual ordinary historical events' and bringing back a 'passionate memory' of past suffering.<sup>930</sup> In his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History,' Benjamin pictured the Angel of History as one who looks back upon all history as a catastrophe 'which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet.'<sup>931</sup> Faced with the nightmarish procession of history's forgotten victims, Benjamin sought an alternative, messianic 'temporal core of history': a core manifest not in the ongoing flow, but rather in moments where, as Rolf Tiedermann puts it, 'evolution halts' and 'where the *dynamis* of what is happening coagulates into a *stasis*; where time itself is condensed into a differential' distinct from its process. At such a moment, Then and Now 'coincide' in a

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<sup>928</sup> Tracy, 'Interview,' ln. 69.

<sup>929</sup> 'I [do] not have a German romantic notion, I ha[ve] a Benjaminian-like notion'; '[m]y position is not the same as Benjamin's, but of all the others, on "fragment" it's closest to his' (Tracy, 'Interview,' ln. 69; 78-9).

<sup>930</sup> See 'Interview,' ln. 56-60.

<sup>931</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Fontana, 1973), 245-255: 249.

thought-image that is able to ‘arrest’ the flow of thinking.<sup>932</sup>

In Tracy’s terms, the totality system that Benjamin’s fragments sought to shatter, above all, was that of our usual concept of history and time. Benjamin demanded, in his own words, ‘a philosophy of history that at all points has overcome the ideology of progress.’<sup>933</sup> To this end, he sought ‘dialectical images’<sup>934</sup> present within the flow of presentation, which would possess capacities to interrupt and realign our perception of the historical world. Benjamin found one such image, for example, in the shopping arcades of nineteenth-century Paris. Much of his great, unfinished *Passagen-Werk* involved collating quotations from the time and since associated with this phenomenon.<sup>935</sup>

Pregnant with the ambiguities of their age, the arcades became for Benjamin something similar to a Tracean frag-event. More generally, Benjamin sought for those thought-events wherein, in Tiedermann’s summary, ‘thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions,’ so as to give ‘that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad’ – a singularity beyond process – able, in turn, to become ‘the sign of a messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past.’<sup>936</sup> Benjamin himself said that he wanted to ‘blast’ dialectical images – that is, figures of confrontation and truth – ‘out of the continuum of historical process.’<sup>937</sup>

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<sup>932</sup> Rolf Tiedermann, ‘Dialectics at a Standstill: Approaches to the *Passagen-Werk*,’ trans. Gary Smith and André Lefevre, in Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA., and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 929-945: 942-3.

<sup>933</sup> Quoted in Tiedermann, ‘Dialectics at a Standstill,’ 941.

<sup>934</sup> See Tiedermann, ‘Dialectics at a Standstill,’ 942.

<sup>935</sup> See Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

<sup>936</sup> ‘Dialectics at a Standstill,’ 943.

<sup>937</sup> Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (N10a), 475; cited in Tiedermann, ‘Dialectics at a Standstill,’ 944.

Benjamin's horror of the reigning ideologies of European historical consciousness made it necessary for him to oppose every positivist and idealist consciousness of history, because, in his words, these forget 'everything about history that, from the very beginning, has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful.'<sup>938</sup> As Tiedermann summarises for Benjamin, positivism in a historian fills out 'homogenous, empty time' with an undifferentiated 'mass of data,'<sup>939</sup> whereas historicist idealisms 'usurp the prospect of the future and posit in history the existence of the natural plan of a process.'<sup>940</sup> Positivism and idealism act here as two poles of collaborative oppression, in the face of which Benjamin demanded instead a 'Copernican revolution' of historical perception, in which '[p]ast history would be grounded in the present, analogous to Kant's epistemological grounding of objectivity in the depths of the subject' (Tiedermann).<sup>941</sup> Benjamin describes this reversal in historical perception as follows:

Formerly it was thought that a fixed point had been found in 'what has been,' and one saw the present engaged in tentatively concentrating the forces of knowledge on this ground. Now this relation is to be overturned, and what has been is to become the dialectical reversal – the flash of awakened consciousness.<sup>942</sup>

Commonly, we imagine ourselves focusing our powers of historical awareness upon the past. But to Benjamin this results always only in oppressive ideological repetitions. Instead, Benjamin demanded that we learn to allow unnoticed aspects of the past to concentrate *their* messianic powers and argument upon *us*, to awaken and renew our

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<sup>938</sup> Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* ('Origin of the German Tragedy (or Fiasco)'); cited in Tiedermann, 'Dialectics at a Standstill,' 942.

<sup>939</sup> 'Dialectics at a Standstill,' 942.

<sup>940</sup> 'Dialectics at a Standstill,' 942.

<sup>941</sup> 'Dialectics at a Standstill,' 941.

<sup>942</sup> *The Arcades Project* (K1, 2), 388-9 (this passage is also cited in Tiedermann, 'Dialectics at a Standstill,' 941).

perception. When this reversal occurs, '[p]olitics attains primacy over history'<sup>943</sup> in a moment when past and present are allowed to really *happen* for the first time, freed from ideological sleep. Then, as Benjamin continues, the 'facts become something that just now first happened to us, first struck us.'<sup>944</sup> This does not mean a collapsing of the past as fodder for the present, indifferent to the reality of what has been, but instead the very opposite. The facts that strike us are a reawakening of the past in memory: indeed, 'to establish them is the affair of memory.'<sup>945</sup>

Thus, the true temporal core of history must be accessed, for Benjamin, through acts of memory that attend to events of thought that are moments of political redemption and also, perhaps, akin to prayers. There was a kind of despairing hope in Benjamin that demanded such esoteric happenings as the very possibility of any tolerable thinking and action in time and history.

The coincidence of past and present that Benjamin sought was thus very different from the Gadamerian communion of tradition with its assurances of 'contemporaneity' with the past.<sup>946</sup> Benjamin had much more in common with the Tracean frag-event, however, by which reigning totality systems are to be overturned for alternative newness. At the same time, Tracy's idea names what he imagines to be a generally available demanding yet grace-filled hermeneutical possibility, in some contrast to Benjamin's more despairing search to make history thinkable and liveable. Yet the aspect of metaphorical generality in Tracy's idea demands that it be complemented by further concrete

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<sup>943</sup> *The Arcades Project* (K1, 2), 388-9.

<sup>944</sup> *The Arcades Project* (K1, 2), 389. Benjamin continues: 'There is a not-yet-conscious knowledge of what has been: its advancement has the structure of awakening' (*ibid.*).

<sup>945</sup> *The Arcades Project* (K1, 2), 389. Benjamin continues: 'There is a not-yet-conscious knowledge of what has been: its advancement has the structure of awakening' (*ibid.*).

<sup>946</sup> See *Truth and Method*, 123-4, where Gadamer cites Kierkegaard as one who first grasped the hermeneutic principle of becoming contemporaneous with the past.

proposals, such as Benjamin's, as something more than partly corroborative competitors.<sup>947</sup> For Tracy, just as much as Benjamin, will need to ask about how one may conceive history without participating in its oppressive totality systems. Tracy suggests that his 'position is not the same as Benjamin's, but of all the others, on "fragment" it's closest to his.'<sup>948</sup> The struggle of Benjamin's thought remains amongst the thinking of several twentieth-century thinkers of Jewish background, in particular (also including Franz Rosenzweig, Emmanuel Levinas and Simone Weil), who continue to influence Tracy.

### **VIII. Recollecting some arguments**

To help frame a concluding perspective on Tracy's ideas of dialogue and fragment in theology and thinking, I shall now recall briefly a thread of ideas and arguments already presented in this thesis which help to exhibit the interplay of linguistic, empirical, religious and theological elements in Tracy's thinking.<sup>949</sup>

The original significance of conversation-dialogue for Tracy sprang from his positive sense of the plurality of human experience, allied to a focus on language and discursivity learned from the tradition of hermeneutical phenomenology. Tracy recognises that human conscious 'experience,' as we name it, is discursively

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<sup>947</sup> In the second half of the twentieth century, in particular, a whole raft of French thinkers – e.g. Sartre, Althusser, Deleuze, Foucault, Derrida, Badiou – have commented extensively on the notion of 'event,' which Tracy has made central to his idea of fragment. I have no space to explore these here. A useful collection of readings can be found in Étienne Balibar, John Rajchman and Anne Boyman, eds., *French Philosophy Since 1945: Problems, Concepts, Inventions* (New York: The New Press, 2011), esp. Part IV entitled 'Event.'

<sup>948</sup> 'Interview,' In. 78-9.

<sup>949</sup> As these arguments will have been rehearsed clearly in the thesis above, footnote references will be at a minimum, at the ends of paragraphs, and will simply indicate where in the thesis these materials have already been introduced.

interpretative all the way down, and yet Tracy has never followed Gadamer in seeking after a linguistic process or event that takes place above and beyond empirical-cultural plurality. Instead, Tracy stresses our experience of plurality, even holding that our experience continues to be imprinted by the prelinguistic ‘buzzing, blooming confusion’ (James) that an infant first encounters.

In Tracy, therefore, the linguistic and the non-linguistic each contaminates the purity that the other might claim for itself: whether as Gadamerian linguistic understanding, on the one hand, or as empiricist explanation, on the other. As simultaneously material and spiritual-linguistic, reality is unforeseeably plural.<sup>950</sup>

In *Plurality*, Tracy confronted conversation-dialogue, first, with the plurality inherent in all tradition and language, and then, above all, with the cognitive and moral (and also religious) *ambiguity* of all our traditions. As he likes to quote Benjamin, ‘all our great works of civilization are at the same time great works of barbarism.’ Tracy found the religions to be especially plural and ambiguous, yet he also believed they were able to mediate a power of Ultimate Reality to help us resist injustice and the reign of ‘more of the same,’ inspiring the hope for a truly shareable world.

I argued, however, that *Plurality* idealised ‘the game of conversation’ as something that occurs ideally on serene uplands of co-operative to-and-fro in question and answer, on the supposed far side of every crippling ‘interruption’ of bitterly lamented falsehood and evil. I asked whether it can really be right to wish, even vainly, that one’s discourse were or could be made *unambiguous* in the manner for which Tracy seemed to yearn.

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<sup>950</sup> For these arguments regarding Tracy’s mixed linguistic-empirical way of thinking see Chapter 5 section II. ii..

Tracy's more recent image of our finding ourselves dialogically 'in the zone,' as sports coaches say, however, seems to me a happy new expression because it recalls competitive sport, wherein a worthy opponent is a necessary part of what goes on. It goes without saying that we should fight to heal our conversations from ambiguities of cognitive falsehood and moral evil (somewhat as a sportsperson fights to eliminate weaknesses in his or her game), but there may be other ambiguities and impediments suffered in conversation that are simply to do with there being 'game on,' and with a real other having been located.<sup>951</sup> At the same time, *Plurality's* religious hope in Ultimate Reality also tended to imply a too untroubled partnership between humans and the religious horizon, making Ultimate Reality a too-unambiguously self-manifesting reality superseding the everyday otherness of other people.<sup>952</sup>

Nevertheless, despite these shortcomings, I argued that Tracy's theory of conversation-dialogue of the 1980s learned well from the Lutheran roots of hermeneutical philosophy the true extent to which we cannot disentangle the mystery of the cosmos from the mystery of words. For this reason, I suggested, Tracy has been averse to calling upon extra-linguistic self-evidences – of, say, 'praxis' or 'love' – to resolve properly discursive questions. As regards Jeanrond's criticisms regarding the proper relation between love and understanding, it seems to me in accord with Tracy to insist that love suffered and given is not other than a *word*: a word (and hence a form of understanding) that forms and becomes flesh.<sup>953</sup>

A change of emphasis in Tracy's thinking since the 1980s has been his new insistence on 'approaching the self through the other,' as he puts it, and although I have not seen

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<sup>951</sup> For this criticism of *Plurality*, see Chapter 3 section VI.

<sup>952</sup> For this criticism, see Chapter 4 section II.

<sup>953</sup> For this argument, see Chapter 4 section IV.

Tracy remark on this, this new emphasis has been helped him to recover a Lonergan-like sense of imperilled and ecstatic religious selfhood (in contrast to the inert background reality Tracy seemed to entertain for ‘the self’ in *Plurality*). In objecting to Lonergan’s ‘dogmatic’ account of the religious salvation that Lonergan thought required to save human subjectivity (indeed, the cosmos) from absurd nullity, earlier Tracy rather lost sight of the imperilled nature of religious selfhood. Today, by contrast, the sinful and closed-off self of totality-thinking has become for Tracy (in somewhat similar manner to Lonergan) an absurd, imprisoned and distorting less-than-self which needs to be overcome to let something better come to be.<sup>954</sup> This seems to me a significant advance.

In this chapter we have seen how a retrieval of the idea of ‘form’ in its variety led Tracy to posit fragments as the kind of radiant form available for theology and thinking today. In fact, the classics have always been fragmentary, he suggests. Derrida objected that romantic recollections of lost or hidden totalities are inherent to the ‘fragment’ metaphor, but Tracy has insisted instead on the affinity of his notion with the ‘dialectical images’ that Walter Benjamin hoped to ‘blast’ from history to derail intolerable historical processes and ideologies of progress. I have suggested that by specifying his fragments as ‘frag-events,’ Tracy helpfully recapitulates the orientation of his original idea of classics to both a past event and an event that is happening newly now. Frag-events are thus true classics, for Tracy, and every true classic is a frag-event.

I have argued, however, that Tracy should be careful not to rehabilitate too categorically the trope of ‘manifestation’ for frag-events, even a manifestation as ambiguous as that

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<sup>954</sup> For this argument, see Chapter 6 section III.

of ‘the infinite and the impossible.’ If Tracy were to distinguish religious ‘namings’ of God a little more clearly from the systematic ‘thinkings’ of reality that must surely accompany them, then it may be that the metaphorical and fragmentary (frag-eventary) character of the theory of frag-event itself – as ‘a skill forged on behalf of life and thought’ – would be better preserved. The integrity of Tracean discursive frag-events could then be made to lean not so much on renewed part-conceptualisations of analogical reason – perilously fragmentary in *Derrida’s* sense, and perhaps a little misty, too – as on possibilities inferable from the ‘gatherings’ of fragments that are plausibly performed in humanity’s many fragmentary traditions.

In all this, it seems to me that Tracy’s idea of fragments as frag-events is equipped, first, to sustain and develop many of the pluralistic tensions at the heart of his thought, while also – second – opening his thought to new dimensions of ethics and religion, at the same time as, third, it gets him beyond dilemmas of identity and difference that dogged his earlier thinking. What Tracy is attempting philosophically can be read as a mediation between Gadamer and Derrida, carried out with the aid of his own distinctively empirical, pluralistic and religiously realistic outlook. At the same, in Christian theological terms, Tracy is also trying to mediate the contradiction between Catholic and Lutheran thought.

Tracy hopes that he is uncovering ways to inform the possibilities of practising appropriate attention – in thought and in prayer – within Christian theology and general thinking, such that thinking, praying and loving may find each other under the grace and burden of God.

### **A concluding perspective: Theological reason in suspension**

One of the remarkable characteristics of David Tracy, as a Roman Catholic theologian, has been his sustained determination *not* to found Christian life and thought – anywhere along the line – on axiomatic authority accorded to the institutional Church and its supposedly autonomous tradition. He finds such submission a conscious or unconscious ‘totality system’: a form of sin.

There certainly exist contrary approaches to theology that lean heavily upon Church-participation as an emotional and intellectual engine supposedly able to square theological, religious and existential circles (for example, those concerning the being of God and of creatures) and thereby mediate to God’s saving reality into a blind and disorderly world. According to this view, which Tracy has consistently opposed, the Church is the divine institution required to halt our hermeneutical and spiritual spinning and park us securely in blessed truth and salvation. For his part, Tracy evidently does not expect the circlings of life and thought to pause for any longer than those gracious moments wherein we may hope that our provisional possibilities will manifest.

At the same time, nonetheless, Tracy has also been as committed as many conservative Catholics to the idea that religious faith should lead a Christian firmly into the divine analogy of their reason. In this case, however, there is the difference that where some hold that this analogy necessarily involves a particular revelation of universal transcendent Authority to which one must submit, Tracy’s similarly high analogy of reason always reveals itself instead by leading the vividness of Christian faith back to practices and injunctions plausibly shared with all-comers. And where more

conservative Catholics tend to directly identify their historically particular religious institution with transcendent-immanent universality (albeit always with careful caveats), Tracy would instead preserve the precious significance of that institution by looking, at the last, to dissolve its significance within performances of universality that any church must exist to serve.

In Tracy, therefore, it has also generally appeared that one must be prepared to dissolve the preciousness of the particular within and on behalf of the universal, in order to protect against universality simply dissolving *itself* for the sake of some naked particularism or relativism (or, alternatively, as sheer *différance*). This is to conjure with images of solution and dissolution, but I wonder whether it might not be more helpful to build on Tracy's recent thought of fragments, instead, with an alternative image of temporary 'suspensions' of what we encounter as particular within what we moot as universal. Such 'suspensions' of the experienced-as-particular within the suggested-as-universal (rather as silt in a river) would be what can occur in the wake of frag-events that in their own way temporarily 'suspend' the very categories of 'part' and 'whole.'

This image of suspension is offered only as one to play with, and it may seem too much a play on words. Nevertheless, one illuminating concrete theological exemplification of the question at hand here can perhaps be found in Tracy's article on Augustine discussed earlier in this chapter (in section III). In this article – 'Augustine's Christomorphic Theocentrism' – Tracy celebrates the thorough 'theocentrism' of Augustine's thought, which he finds 'constituted in and through [an] emphatic christomorphism' in which 'the Form Christ gathers all other forms to name God: *per*

*Christum hominem ad Christum divinum.*<sup>955</sup>

Tracy highlights Augustine's determination to think by way of the human Christ to the divine Christ, and suggests that we may add to this the idea that Augustine then went on, in effect, to think '*per Christum divinum ad Deum Trinitatem.*' According to Tracy, therefore, Augustine's thought travelled by way of the human Christ to the divine Christ and then by way of the divine Christ to God as Trinity. Via this formula, Tracy suggests, we are able to 'grasp the meaning of Augustine's naming of the Real as the God who is Love and, as Love, the mutual loving relationships of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.'<sup>956</sup> In all this progression through the human Christ to the divine Christ, and then through the divine Christ to God as Trinity, Tracy applauds Augustine's insistent thinking of Christ as the increasingly fragmentary form through which life and thought may travel into the reality of God as Love.

There is much that I find rich and attractive in this reading of Augustine by Tracy (though I am not qualified to judge its exegetical accuracy). However, I am struck by how emphatically Tracy appears to keen to clinch the 'christomorphic' character of Augustine's theology at the expense of the alternative appellation 'christocentric.' In an article from 1994, Tracy described 'christomorphic' as 'a more accurate designation of the christological issue, I believe, than the more familiar but confusing word "christocentric." For theology is not christocentric but theocentric [...] by means of its christomorphism.'<sup>957</sup>

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<sup>955</sup> Tracy, 'Augustine's Christomorphic Theocentrism,' 273.

<sup>956</sup> 'Augustine's Christomorphic Theocentrism,' 274.

<sup>957</sup> Tracy, 'Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity,' *Theology Today* (Apr. 1994), 104-114: 111. On the 'theocentric' character of Christian theology, according to Tracy, see *Imagination*, 52. For a focussed account of Karl Rahner's conjunction of anthropocentrism *with* theocentrism, as well as the increasingly insistent meditation on the Mystery of God of his later work, see Gaspar Martinez,

Perhaps Tracy identifies something valuable here, for there would indeed seem to be an ideal sense in which the point of Christ is *God*, in a way that exceeds what can be said in the other direction. It makes sense to say that the doctrine of the Trinity attempts to be Christianity's fundamental and christomorphic (also, spirit-attentive) doctrine of God, for example. In turn, this Trinitarian God can be seen as what grounds the doctrine of the incarnate Christ. Saint Paul, too, provides another parallel theocentric echo early on in Christian theology, when he imagines Christ at the last handing his kingdom over to the Father so that 'God will be all in all.'<sup>958</sup>

But should we therefore deny that Christian theology *can* also be approached from an avowedly 'christocentric' direction? A vast array of actual historical Christian expression has been unabashedly christocentric, from Eastern Orthodox apse mosaics, to Julian of Norwich, to much Protestant reflection, to cite just a few examples. Yet Tracy implies that these expressions must always be disciplined into a thinking that travels always *via* the particular *towards* the universal. To insist on this approach as *the* model of Christian reflection seems to me to be still too intent on exercising rational control. Theocentrism may well enjoy a certain ideal primacy in theology, but it does not follow that theology need accord primacy to the ideal (that is, to *concepts*). Put another way, is it really necessary that a nature-grace polarity to express 'God' should always reign *above* our messily physical (also often sinful) concrete encounters with religious salvation?

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*Confronting the Mystery of God: Political, Liberation and Public Theologies* (New York and London: Continuum, 2001), 15-20. Martinez links these elements in Rahner to the political (Metz), liberation (Gutierrez) and public (Tracy) theologies that have emerged since.

<sup>958</sup> I Corinthians 15:28.

What is more, if we *could* allow that Christian thinking might at times be really and essentially christocentric, then we might discover in this an excellent opportunity to ponder the work that the name ‘God’ might then do in qualifying such moments of apparent particularism. For, while it may or may not make equal sense to say ‘theomorphic’ as to say ‘christomorphic,’ there are salient characteristics of talking about ‘God’ that could season and enable responsible christocentric reflection. To say ‘Christ’ is necessarily to say ‘God,’ and to say ‘God’ seems to involve, for example, simultaneously seeking a word of heteronomous authority *and* committing oneself to placing all human appropriations of authority in de-idolising question. Even just this quick thought might do interesting and appropriate things to an act of christocentric attention, things very much in accord with the idea of a frag-event. For, to use Tracy’s own terms, to say the name ‘God’ – for all its inherent universality – need not involve a claim to possess a grasp upon the horizon of everything (as has often been supposed), but instead be much more about living with and in expectation of a frag-event.

The point of rehabilitating christocentrism here would not be to displace the christomorphic theocentrism that Tracy outlines, but only to complement and complicate. Again, I am uncertain whether Tracy would welcome these friendly suggestions. He may find them too much a dethroning of the project of rational universality.

With all this said, it seems impertinent to conclude by seeming to try to supplement Tracy in his own thinking. For that thinking is vastly fertile, timely and broad, extending far beyond the very limited reference of this thesis, which has been narrowly focussed on the potential of Tracean notions ‘dialogue’ and ‘fragment’ to inform

Christian theology and thinking in general.

## **APPENDIX**

### **'Interview with David Tracy'**

**private interview, with Barnabas Palfrey, Oxford, 25/26 October 2009**

[PLEASE NOTE – THIS 11-PAGE INTERVIEW IS NOT AVAILABLE IN THE ELECTRONIC THESIS DEPOSIT]

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