



Chapter 5

Towards a Decolonial Philosophical Theology

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Introduction to the Problem Field

The conversation between theology and philosophy in Africa, and more specifically South Africa, can be interpreted from different points of view, either ideally or realistically. Realistically, in the sense that South Africa is part of a global world, so global trends, for various reasons, have an impact on the local conversation, which should ideally be a lot more local and focused on the local philosophical and theological traditions. In this chapter, I will focus on a specific global trend, view this trend critically from a philosophical and theological perspective, and thereby propose a relationship between theology and philosophy that might be relevant to the decolonial South African perspective. The trend that I will focus on, which I will argue is a specifically Western trend, has an impact on South African academia.

Robert Tally, in his recent book, identifies and criticises this global trend, namely the growing negative attitude towards critical theory, in the tradition of the Frankfurt School within the humanities of North American universities. Philosophy cannot be equated with critical theory and theology cannot be equated with literary studies, yet the tendency to move away from theory towards surface reading of contexts, phenomena and texts has certainly crept into theological academia as well. This might be specifically relevant in Public and Practical Theology, as these are the disciplines that directly engage with contemporary public discourses and surface phenomena. These public discourses and phenomena appear within a particular world; the world of late capitalism. It is in such a world that the relationship between

philosophy and theology needs to be considered, and maybe the perspective of the southern part of this global world might offer unique insights.

The relationship between philosophy and theology has a long and beautiful tradition, but with the Enlightenment, this relationship became strained, and later with the Left-Hegelians, it became basically impossible. Yet, the re-emergence of interest in Christianity within Continental philosophy (e.g., Agamben, Badiou, Laruelle, Latour, Nancy, and Žižek) is not completely disassociated from those influenced by the Left-Hegelians. A new site has emerged where theology and philosophy can once again engage with each other. This site will be explored in this chapter, but in the context of the dominant world of late capitalism.

The biggest temptation for Public Theology in this late capitalist world, in my view, lies within the social-justice tracks. If social-justice issues are read only as surface phenomena, there is a real danger that the prophets (unknown even to themselves) are revealed as the priests of Capital. It is with this danger in mind that this chapter will argue that theology and philosophy need each other.

Theology and Philosophy

The relationship between theology and philosophy is a long and intense relationship, which has had its ups and downs, but of late it has come under greater strain. The strain is not only on the relationship; each discipline, individually, is struggling to survive in academic institutions, specifically in South Africa where Reformed Theology faculties in the past had a privileged and secure place in the old South Africa. In the New Democratic South Africa, denominational theological faculties have the option to leave the university and continue as a church seminary, but philosophy does not have such alternatives, although Western Philosophy, it is said, was born in exactly such a seminary, namely a school outside the influence and power of the city in the school gathered around Socrates. In this context of constant financial and output pressure exerted on tertiary institutions, and the financial constraints of the state, these two disciplines

need to prove themselves and justify their existence. In other words, the necessity and relevance of philosophy are questioned as much as the necessity and relevance of theology, but at least religion has made a comeback of late, specifically in the context of radicalisation and fundamentalism, and therefore has gained a certain amount of relevance – and therefore theology has found its justification. In such a competitive atmosphere it makes sense that theology has abandoned its traditional partner and rather sought more lucrative partners, such as the natural and social sciences.

A lot of these shifts in the humanities have to do with the phenomenon that theory, and specifically critical theory, has become old-fashioned, as academia has entered a post-theory period. In such a post-theory time, to be a true liberal, or to be a politically correct academic, one should not concern oneself with too much theory, but rather jump on one or other current bandwagon. In the age of the spectacle or in a time of continuous crises there should not be a lack of bandwagons: from climate catastrophe to a newly identified victim, or Covid-19, and now, at least for Europe and USA, the war with Russia, which could be presented as a war between BRICS and a monopolar world with the USA at its centre. These are all hot topics, as they say in the research industry, that can win one research grants and awards. Such funding and positions might create the impression and even the belief that by following these trends, it clearly proves that theology is indeed a relevant, and even necessary, conversational partner.

In the humanities, specifically in literary studies (a field that was in the past closely aligned to philosophy), Robert Tally¹ identifies this trend and the conscious turning away from critical theory, which once characterised tertiary education and specifically the humanities, and formed the heart of a critical university. One can identify this same trend within theology and the turn towards practise and empirical research. The litmus test seems to have become: what does it practically mean, what is the use-value, or what does it imply for the ordinary person

1 See Robert Tally, *For a Ruthless Critique of All that Exists: Literature in an Era of Capitalist Realism*. (Washington USA: Zero Books, 2022).

on the street? The ordinary person on the street has become the norm of understanding – this indeed sounds like a wonderful principle and certainly laudable, as it would be, in theory, highly democratic. The idea that the ordinary people on the street have become the critical measure would indeed be democratic and convey a sense of justice incarnate. The problem is that the people on the street are not natural humanity and are not real, yet remain a social construct and in the dominant global discourse, they are constructed as consumers created by capital – where algorithms determine taste in films, music, and even food, just as the media and social media determines thoughts, opinions and the democratic vote. This person on the street is not the adult or child from an informal settlement, or those living on the street or in shelters. The “ordinary-person-on-the-street” is the modern individual who is connected to the world wide web so that via feedback mechanisms, as Vilem Flusser² argues, the image and the subject can begin to reflect each other and eventually perfectly mirror each other. Jean Baudrillard, in conversation with Bataille,³ also warns against this deadening and growing homogeneity. Thanks to ever-growing mobile connectivity, these feedback loops function to homogenise the dreams and desires of humanity, even of those who are not the typical wage-labouring consumer.

There are those who remain excluded; the heterogeneous, the remnant, or, one could argue, Hegel’s *Pöbel*,⁴ who cannot be completely absorbed into the same; but there is no lack of trying. One could convincingly argue that the vast majority of the world’s population is still excluded from this standard measure – which makes them second-class citizens, which again has become blatantly clear in the last year, where only those refugees who look like the same, the norm, are truly welcome within the borders of Europe and deserve the little Ukrainian flags on Facebook profiles.

2 Vilem Flusser, *Ins Universum der technischen Bilder* (Berlin: European Photography, 2018).

3 See William Pawlett, “Baudrillard’s Duality: Manichaeism and The Principle of Evil.” *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies* 11.1 (January 2014), accessed April 22 2024 from <https://baudrillardstudies.ubishops.ca/baudrillards-duality-manichaeism-and-the-principle-of-evil/>

4 See Frank Ruda, *Hegel’s Rabble: An Investigation into Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* (London: Continuum 2011).

There are victims and then there is collateral damage, as not all victims are equal.

Philosophy needs to accept its co-responsibility for this turn towards the surface reading of texts and context as Tally describes it, and thereby accept responsibility for this turn towards the ordinary man or woman “on the street.” Philosophy, and specifically somebody whom I highly respect, is in a strange twist of fate co-responsible for this turn towards the surface reading and ordinary man, namely Derrida⁵ and his infamous statement, *there is nothing outside text*, or rather *There is no outside-text*. All there is, is text, surfaces with no access to any transcendental. This can easily be interpreted as: there is nothing deeper – all there is, is what appears on the surface. This would make everything a surface, a mirage, an image, with no possibility of accessing anything beyond this surface of the image, text, or mirage. There are only technical images that together create a universe of technical images (Flusser): an ever-expanding homogeneity.

Critical Theory and Philosophy

Critical theory within Continental philosophy, and thus also in European Theology, determined much of academic philosophy and theology post-World War II and more importantly the thinking of the sixties. The attitude towards critical theory has changed, as there is currently a condescending, or maybe even resigned, attitude towards critical thinking.⁶ Critical thinking is understood as the idea that one needs to unpack what is behind the text, interpret and analyse the context, and try to get behind the surface so as to delve deeper into the construction of phenomena. This lack of engagement with critical theory might also explain the lethargic or resigned acceptance of the heightened bureaucracy of a control society⁷ that has entered academia and

5 Jacques Derrida, *On Grammatology*, trans G.C. Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press 1997), 158.

6 See Tally, *Ruthless Critique*, 9.

7 See Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control (1990),” accessed April 16 2024 from <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/gilles-deleuze-postscript-on-the-societies-of-control>

education generally, where one is constantly involved in various feedback loops (Flusser).⁸ So much of one's time as an academic or educator is spent on anonymous student evaluations, external evaluations, peer evaluations, rating applications, and trying to fulfil ranking requirements that the institution has set as its goals. All this is expected and done, not in the name of control, God forbid, or even worse, the outmoded idea of discipline, but in the name of self-development and to ensure the highest possible quality of the consumer goods produced (education and research outputs). In such a control society, control is exercised via the idea that one is in constant need of further self-development – one more course to teach one to migrate all one's skills onto the virtual platform. The institution will even provide online yoga lessons and breathing lessons for their staff. They are really only looking out for their employees' best interests. One is constantly being sold goods for self-development, and the market is filled with opportunities and possibilities, as even breathing can now be sold to one as a self-development skill. Yet one constantly gets the feeling that quality is the last thing that is being upheld by these various bureaucratic mechanisms, and that there is a general downward spiral in the quality of students finishing their studies, as well as the research outputs flooding the digital research platforms. One cannot complain about the general lack of critical thinking in current politics and public discourses, for example, about vaccines, the war in Ukraine, or identity debates in South Africa, if critical thinking is no longer taught at universities. Critical theories are cancelled because thought is judged by the race and sex of the face of the author, and thus a module on Dostoevsky can be cancelled because the West is now at war with Russia. Or Lacan can no longer be taught at a prestige African university because he was male and white.

This demise in the relationship between theology and philosophy probably is related to the post-truth world one is living in. In a world, as Badiou⁹ argues, which is only made up of bodies and languages (democratic materialism) and where bodies

8 Flusser, *Ins Universum der technischen Bilder*, 55.

9 Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event*, 2, trans Alberto Toscano, (London: Continuum Books, 2009), 4.

are caught in feedback loops with languages, with images, one is truly caught in the ever-expanding rhizome of the homogeneous same as Guattari and Deleuze describe the world.¹⁰ In the context of democratic materialism, what is the task of theology? Theology with her hermeneutic skills has the ability to read languages and to read the bodies, but even in a post-truth world, there is still the need for a normative element in theology. The normative element could be understood that, while reading the bodies and languages of a specific context, there should be the passionate search for a more just language – a more just language that would include more diverse bodies within the unquestioned and accepted dominant language of democratic materialism. This conception of justice sees (reads) only the appearance of diverse bodies in the specific *Lichtung* without seeing (reading or analysing) or at least recognising the *Lichtung* in which the diverse bodies appear. So, theology, specifically public theology, has taken it upon herself, as her calling, to make the democratic materialist world a more inclusive world, with the conviction that this would make it a more just world, without questioning the world as such, or the light (*Lichtung*) of the world as such. The universal good is captured in the believed relationship between capitalism and freedom, democracy and universal rights, and this has become unquestionable, as if it is God's Law or the natural light. Mark Fisher¹¹ captures this idea of there being no alternatives in his book *Capitalist realism: Is there any alternative?* – all that one can hope for is a more inclusive capitalist world, but the world will remain *essentially* capitalist.

Theology, Philosophy and Truth

It might be useful for a moment to reflect on the relationship between theology and philosophy with regard to Truth (with a capital T). Humanity, for structural reasons, will always seek explanations for the default of being a barred subject, which is the

10 Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*, trans Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 3–26.

11 Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is there no alternative?* (Winchester, UK: John Hunt 2009).

reason why Lacan argued that religion will always triumph.¹² The barred subject needs, in other words cannot exist without, some form of explanation, traditionally taken up in the big existential questions. Throughout human history, these questions have been answered differently, and philosophy and theology (religion) have contributed their share of answers to these questions. Philosophy and psychoanalysis started shifting their focus when they no longer sought answers to these questions but rather started asking why these questions are asked in the first place. Why is the human being a questioning being? What does it mean to think, what does it mean to be a barred subject, and why is humanity such a restless creature?

In this shift from what is *the* Truth, to why is the human in need of truth, Truth became relativised and lost its capital T status. With this loss, it also became difficult for theology or the church “to go and make disciples of all nations.” With this Great Commission, theology (church) has consciously or unconsciously participated in colonialism. Theology rightly became very self-conscious of her global role in colonising countries and people, and thereby subjecting others to her Truth. Therefore, liberal theology tried to avoid proclaiming universal truths, and placed its hope in the fact that theology, or at least the Bible, has had such a tremendous impact on European values that in a sense, if one proclaims and protects European values: democracy, freedom, and universal human rights, one is more or less protecting and promoting Christian values. Thus, colonialism takes on a new face, this time not in the name of a metaphysical or transcendental Truth, but in the name of a universal ethical (moral good) good, which not only justifies neo-colonialism, but also enables once again the idea of a just war. These justifications are not in the name of a God or Truth, but in the name of a universal (Western) ethical idea of what is right, or the correct thing to do.

This is the danger that every theologian, and likewise every academic, is critically aware of, namely that theory colonises human experiences and colonises life-worlds, practices and languages, unless it is done in the name of democracy, freedom

12 Jacques Lacan, *The triumph of religion, preceded by Discourse to Catholics*, trans. Bruce Fink (Cambridge: Polity 2013).

and universal human rights. In the name of these three universal goods, other peoples' religions, cultures and traditions may be criticised.

The Value of Being Critical of Critical Theory for Theology

Theology and academia have come a long way from a linear approach of applying theory (truths) to contexts, and have developed towards a hermeneutic spiral where creative and critical interaction between theory-laden-practice and practice-laden-theory is sought. In this hermeneutic conversation, theory or Truth is not imposed on the context, but theory and context enter into a creative and critical correlational conversation. It is in this shift towards hermeneutic sensitivity that the central question has become: How to study human phenomena, texts, and context without colonising their worlds, actions, practices, and words? With this colonial concern in mind, it is of utmost importance to be highly critical of theory, and especially critical of critical theory, and also harbour a healthy suspicion towards Western Philosophy and Western Theology, as theory colonises and imposes itself on ordinary readers, texts, spaces and places. Considering that too many of these theories were written by European white males, the issue is even more problematic. The bias for the voice of the outsider, the marginal, the other, is a bias that should not be lost. This hermeneutic sensitivity, together with the bias for the marginalised other, is an important contribution that came from the global South in the thoughts of someone like Enrique Dussel¹³ (philosophy) and Gustavo Gutiérrez¹⁴ (theology). Dussel has had a tremendous influence on decolonial thinking in Latin America and, via Latin America, on decolonial thinking in South Africa, while Gutiérrez has influenced liberation, contextual and black theology in Southern Africa. The “suspicion” of critical theories is thus important, yet

13 Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. Aquilina Martinez and Christine Morkovsky (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1985).

14 Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Theologie der Befreiung*, trans. Horst Goldstein (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1980).

the belief that subjects can speak *for themselves*, that the subaltern can speak, and more importantly can speak in their own language and voice, and that the phenomena need to be given the necessary space to appear *for themselves* without being forced into specific theoretical categories, is naïve. As subjects, phenomena, words – even my own words in this chapter – always appear within certain contexts, within a certain world, and these worlds in turn appear within a specific light (*Lichtung*). A light in which things are revealed, always presents what is revealed within a certain logic or theory (*logos*). In the writing of these words, they are already carrying out a specific world of a *Geviert* (fourfold: divine and morals, earth and sky)¹⁵ and thereby already convey a certain sense of what the author and/or reader believes is good and right. This light, *Lichtung*, in which things appear, and are already judged in their appearance, is seldom thought of, because this light is not thought of and is therefore believed to be the natural light in which things appear *all by themselves* and *as they truly are* – totally unconscious of the ideological or religious or metaphysical light (*Lichtung*) in which these things appear. Empirical realism, one could argue, is a dominant light in the contemporary world, with the belief that things are in themselves as they are presented to one. To not reflect and question this light (*Lichtung*) is problematic when the light (*Lichtung*), always unreflected, also reflects power and certain interests of particular powerful groups, who might benefit from things appearing in a certain light.

It is this naïveté that is concerning because it plays into the hands of the status quo (as things are believed to be) – which is confused with the natural light in which things are supposed to appear as they are. It is concerning because it so often presents the world without any alternatives. This belief then becomes the basis for the argument that all one can do in this world is to fight for a more just world, which becomes a matter of finding the correct inclusive language so that more diverse bodies can eventually appear equal in a democratic materialist world. The basic argument is: the more inclusive language, the more democracy and therefore the more egalitarian diverse bodies. This makes

15 Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Alfred Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 179.

sense in a world where all there is are bodies and languages. If only this was a move towards heterogeneity, but all the bodies and pronouns and languages enter the homogeneous Same as the other, as disturbance, as possible irruption, as the hope for alternatives is integrated into the same.

It might be relevant for this chapter to consider this believed natural light in which things and their world appear today, which opens the door to focus exclusively on surface reading.

Is There an Alternative to Surface Reading?

From the above, it is clear that to take things at face value is the basis for surface reading and this explains the heightened focus on empirical research, the collection of surface data. What is not considered is that this surface data appears to us in a certain light: that things, the collected data, carry out a certain world, and that this particular carried-out-world gives these things (the collected data) their allotted time-space. It becomes an enclosed system, without any alternatives – where the things carry out a world, and the world grants the things their correct place. These two mutually carry out and confirm the same world.

Two important authors in this context are Vilem Flusser, with his book *Ins Universum der Technischen Bilder*,¹⁶ and Guy Debord, with his book *The Society of the Spectacle*.¹⁷ They argue that in a world of information technology and digital images it actually makes sense to focus on surface readings, because the past and future are both virtually (digitally) present as they are only a keystroke or swipe away on a laptop or smartphone. In a modern Western world (*Lichtung*) not only do things (phenomena) appear in a certain light, but part of the collection of things of this particular modern Western world are the various past and present phenomenological and epistemological theories.

The various epistemological theories, the history of interpretations, the various hermeneutical theories, all form

16 Flusser, *Ins Universum der technischen bilder*.

17 Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Fredy Perlman, Detroit, 1970, and Ken Knabb, Berkeley, 2004-2014 (New York: Critical Editions, 2021).

part of the past that one can play with as one presents the digital present, and as there is nothing behind the text, this playfulness with past theories is possible, and therefore these theories do not need to be taken too seriously. Texts, phenomena, together with past theories are all digitally to hand and therefore can be combined at will or ignored altogether, as all that matters is: that all that is, is information, which is to hand, and therefore can be “creatively” combined at will to create different information. If being-in-the-world (*Lichtung*) is not considered, but the world-of-things is taken as empirically real-in-itself, in other words to hand, this opens the door to tremendous differentiation and supposed infinite possibilities. If one is liberated from onto-theology and the belief that there is something behind the text that can be captured more or less successfully in thoughts, then one is free to differentiate and combine at will, and this freedom is presented as infinite possibilities, which present themselves as hope.

For example, one could combine a Marxist analysis of society with a queer reading of power, whilst subscribing to a capitalist appreciation of the importance of a free “liberal” market. This is all possible because Marxist theory, queer theory and liberal economic theory are all equally to hand and all equal fictions¹⁸ free to be used, differentiated and combined at will so as to present an appearance of something novel. These infinite possibilities are possibilities for their own sake and change nothing. One important aspect of practical and public theology, as well as philosophy, was the idea of changing the world, the idea of transformation. Thinking (philosophy and/or theology) no longer changes the world; it at best adds data to the ever-growing stream of information that is at hand.

Is a Marxist critique, as a philosophical basis for a liberation (black, queer, contextual) theological critique, just one of many possible tools for context analysis? Or does a Marxist critique and/or a psychoanalytical critique transcend these theories that are to hand, as it engages something structural about the very production of texts and contexts, the creation of subjects and

18 Johann-Albrecht Meylahn, “Fictional metaphysics of fiction: Metaphysics and imagination in the humanities.” *HTS Theological Studies* 73 (3) (2017); DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i3.4699>.

worlds, together with the production of the various theories of these constructions? Does it offer a structural interpretation of human creativity, externalisation, production, and imagination? If it does, it could immanently transcend all the theories that are to hand, which would be just bytes of information to be differentially played with and open a door to disruptive critique. In the context of surface readings being all there are, the challenge for theology and philosophy, specifically in the global South, with the added challenge of decolonial thinking, is to think from the deconstructive bias of the excluded or repressed so as to glimpse hope in alternatives to a world presented to one as a world without alternatives. It is exactly in this space that one finds oneself today between deconstruction and construction from the perspective of the repressed and excluded.

The most common response to this challenge is to believe oneself to be living in the only existing real world, to forget that this world is presented in a certain light. If this is the only possible world, then the only task left for philosophers and theologians – who seek to change the world – is to seek to create a neutral and respectful space for the phenomena or subjects to speak *for themselves* in their own language or voice, or allowing things to appear in their natural light. This desire to create a more just, that is, a more democratic world, for all the things at hand (including those hidden, marginalised, oppressed), is to be duped by ideology, duped by the *Lichtung* – a false consciousness and a false sense of reality. Yet critical theories that believe that they can liberate subjects, texts, and contexts from alienation, and from being duped (false consciousness), are the real ones who are duped, according to Lacan.¹⁹

Two thinkers who have tried to work creatively with this space between construction and deconstruction are Bruno Latour²⁰ and Flusser. They have explored the idea of a network society; a society where one accepts that there is no outside text, there is no way outside the rhizome, and where one seeks to establish

19 See Slavoj Žižek, *Less than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (New York: Verso Books, 2012), 971.

20 Bruno Latour, “Why has critique run out of steam? From matters of fact to matters of concern.” *Critical Inquiry*, 30, (2004): 225–248.

networks of creativity rather than repeating the eternal return of differentiation. In other words, consciously constructing, rather than just repeating the same.

There is another possibility. This idea can be translated into blatant surface reading without alternatives, or the acceptance that nobody has access to the beyond-the-text, that one is always in-the-world one is trying to understand, but one can appreciate that these worlds that one is always in are called forth,²¹ and that this call, calls thinking, and by implication world and human subjectivity, forth. There is a call, that which calls forth thinking, and this call of thought needs to be thought.

It is in this context that one can argue that critical thinking never stops, or, one could argue, it has never actually started, as it must “apply” its critique to itself, in other words, be aware of its own construction and being in-a-world, be aware that in seeking to un-dupe, it might be the most duped. It needs to be aware of its own light in which it appears, which is what Latour argues. One can debunk myths, but the greatest myth to debunk is the one that one can be free of myth. Latour’s insight can lead to two opposing consequences. The first is that one realises that one is always in myth and therefore it makes no sense to try and escape myth, the consequence of which is to resign to this fact. The direct consequence of this resignation is that the dominant myth is accepted without any alternatives. The second is, inspired by Tally’s book, a *continuous and ruthless* critique of all that exists. The challenge to critique all that exists would be a radical destruction and deconstruction of all constructions, or an infinite awareness that all is constructed. This is how I read Latour: an acute awareness that all is constructed and to embrace this constructedness of all that exists. To embrace the construction of all that exists, to embrace the textuality of all that exists, to embrace the fictionality of all that exists, could link up with the idea of the Utopian in Jameson.²² This approach would come

21 See Johann-Albrecht Meylahn, *[Call] – Responding and the worlds inbetween: Doing (non) philosophy in a time of democratic materialism* (Zürich: Lit Verlag 2021).

22 Tally, *Ruthless Critique*, 60ff.

very close to a *radical* democratic approach, as Laruelle²³ argues, where all things (thoughts) are equal in a democracy of thought. The difference between such a radical democracy of all thoughts and democratic materialism, where eventually more and more bodies find their appropriate language, is that a radical democracy is called forth by the repressed truth of the dominant world, and thus opens this world to alternative worlds and transformation. This radical democracy of thought is possible because it is equally called forth by that which haunts all thoughts, by that which haunts all constructions: the rabble or the refuse or the ghosts – the murdered and suppressed (repressed) truths of these worlds.

Critique of All That Exists from *Dasein*'s Being In-A-World, not from an apparent outside perspective; or the Challenge of Doing Philosophy and Theology from a Radically Immanent Posture

Critique, understanding, and thinking for both philosophy and theology, are no longer possible from an outside (transcendental) perspective. If this metaphysical or onto-theo-logical door has been shut, what is left for theology? Can a Marxist and Freudian critique offer a way of interpreting the task of thinking, i.e., of being human, that is fundamental whilst refusing any metaphysical transcendental explanations? Is there a future for theology and philosophy? The future might lie in thinking the light [*Lichtung*] (ideologies, religions, metaphysics) in which things appear, which is highly relevant to decolonial theologies and philosophies: to think and challenge the Western modern light in which the dominant and dominating world appears. This means to be acutely aware that theologies, philosophies, and theories appear in a certain *Lichtung*, that is, the world. This world is so often presented as a world without alternatives, thereby presenting the world as if it is the world as it is, ignoring thereby that it is a world presented to us in a modern Western light.

23 Francois Laruelle, *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, trans. Nicola Rubczak and Anthony Paul Smith (London: Bloomsbury, Kindle version, 2013) pos 1344 of 7408.

To reflect with Heidegger,²⁴ one could argue that Marxist and psychoanalytic theories have entered the call of thinking, and have discovered not the true essence of the Thing to be thought, but have paved the way to help one be aware of that what needs to be thought – *das Bedenklichste*, the THING of thought itself, namely how thought thinks. How the symbolic, imaginary and the real interact in the Borromean knot²⁵ in which human subjects find themselves. In the Lacanian theory, the subject in this Borromean knot is a barred subject, a divided subject, in other words, a subject that is not whole in itself. This not being whole is not due to a mistake, a false consciousness that can be healed or corrected, but is the universal structure of *Dasein* in-a-symbolic-imaginary-real world. The challenge of thinking is to think in this site (*Ortschaft*) and to be conscious of the fact that the subjects and their world are called forth from this site. In other words, this is the site of thinking and thus of the various constructions of worlds. The subjects and worlds constructed in response to that which called them forth, are always haunted constructs, as that which called them forth is never captured in the construct. That which calls is named in the response, but the name is always but a tomb of that which called it forth. This is not because of a lack of trying, but is a structural necessity of language, or the structural necessity of the interplay between the symbolic, real and imaginary.

A possible task for theology and philosophy and their interaction is to think in this site (*Ortschaft*) of the calling forth of thinking and the structural necessity of this hauntology. If theology and philosophy think this necessity and in this site, then there is more than just languages and bodies, as in Badiou's democratic materialism,²⁶ as there will also be Truth, which haunts the democratic materialist world. It is perhaps the task of philosophy to think this *Bedenklichste* – that which calls

24 Martin Heidegger, *Was heisst Denken? Zweite, unveränderte Auflage* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1961), 3.

25 Jacques Lacan developed his idea of the Borromean knot in Seminar XXII (1974) and Seminar XXIII (1975/6); see translations by Cormac Gallagher from unedited French manuscripts <http://www.lacaninireland.com>

26 Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event*, 2, trans. Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum 2009), 4.

thought forth – but not from outside of thought. It is not some transcendental; for Badiou²⁷ it is the multiple; for me it is from within thought (consciousness) itself (from the pharmakon-nature of thought) that it calls forth that to which one is called to respond, and to which one is responsible.²⁸

If it is philosophy's task to think in this site the structural necessity, it is also the temptation of philosophy, as it is the temptation of theology, to offer a cure for the barred subject, as well as offer peace and rest to the ghosts who haunt the worlds. It is in response to this temptation that I believe that Christian theology, specifically in the tradition of a *theologia crucis*, can offer a guiding, even confessional, narrative: a Christ *poiēsis*.²⁹ A confessional narrative that continuously deconstructs (crucifies) onto-theo-logy, or any attempt at metaphysics or transcendentalism. Philosophy offers theology the thinking of the site of thinking, the desire of thinking and structural impossibility of thought. The two disciplines complement each other in this site (*Ortschaft*) of thinking.

The Temptation of Theology

There is a difference between thinking this truth that haunts the various constructs and thinking justice in a democratic materialist world. Public theology very often rises to the occasion of seeking to make the democratic materialist world a more just world, by broadening the language so as to include more diverse bodies, whilst keeping the world of these bodies and languages unchallenged.

This is a fair task, because on what grounds would one challenge the world if there is no outside world? Hegel with

27 Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum Books, 2007).

28 Johann-Albrecht Meylahn, *[Call] – Responding and the worlds in between: Doing (non) philosophy in a time of democratic materialism* (Zürich: Lit Verlag, 2021).

29 See Johann-Albrecht Meylahn, “Non-philosophical Christ-poetics beyond the mystical turn in conversation with continental philosophy of religion.” *HTS Theological Studies* 72.3 (2016); DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i3.3542>.

his *Pöbel*³⁰ and later Marx with his proletariat³¹ identified the necessary consequence of the construction of a world, namely rabble: those that are structurally excluded and cannot be structurally included. The *Pöbel* in Hegel does not exist because of a lack of trying to include all in the *Bürgertum* of the state, but they are a logical consequence of the construction of *Bürgertum*. If one constructs a system, a state of free autonomous self-defining and self-sufficient citizens, there will be those who by the very definition, naming and differentiation of what a citizen is, are logically excluded. No amount of effort on the side of the state, via social services or police or charity, can change the fact that the *Pöbel* exists and will always be part of the state.³² It cannot be a matter of changing the language or changing a few laws that would solve the problem of the poor who become rabble and of the constant danger of becoming the proletariat. The rabble will always be present, perhaps similar to Jesus saying the poor will always be with us (Matthew 26:11). It is not a matter of democratic will or social justice or political correctness: it is a structural necessity, a structural universal. The proletariat, not as a specific class or identifiable group, but as structural necessity, namely as the repressed truth of a world or of a construct, as that which haunts that construct. In the previous section, I argued that this is the site of theological and philosophical thinking, because this is also the *Ortschaft* of a true political force, in Rancière's³³ sense of political. For Rancière, it is a force within society that can bring about transformation (Badiou's³⁴ sense of change, which is not just modification). The proletariat is not an identifiable oppressed identity; nor are they identifiable victims, but a political force that haunts the democratic materialist world, like the ghost of communism haunts Europe. It is a latently present universal

30 See Frank Ruda, *Hegel's Rabble: An Investigation into Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (London: Continuum 2011).

31 Ruda, *Hegel's Rabble*, 169–179.

32 See Frank Ruda, *Hegels Pöbel: Eine Untersuchung der Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (Konstanz: Konstanz University Press 2011), 37–59.

33 Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. & trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 44–45.

34 Badiou, *Logics of the Worlds*, 259.

category: of the unhuman or un-being – *Unwesen* (Marx³⁵), or in Agamben's³⁶ terms, *Homo Sacer*, namely that which is excluded by being included as the ground or base. In the alienation of production, the externalisation, something is alienated by being included as that which called the alienation forth,³⁷ but the alienated excluded is the ground or base of the alienated being. This alienation is structural and thus necessary, and therefore is universal and therefore the site of thinking, and the site of change.

If theology and philosophy can together think in this *Ortschaft* and complement each other, by dialectically responding to each other, then they become each other's *Aufhebung* – the *Aufhebung* of each other's desires. In this sense, they can offer the different worlds truth, transformation and hope. Theology could be philosophy's folly and philosophy theology's stumbling block, thereby preventing each from becoming colonial. In this sense, they can be decolonial as they will challenge the colonial essence of thought and dialectically prevent themselves from being and becoming colonial.

35 Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts (1844)," in *Early Writings* (London: Penguin 1972), 343.

36 Giorgio Agamben, "What is a destituent power?" *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, trans. Stephanie Wakefield 32 (2014): 65–74.

37 Johann-Albrecht Meylahn, *[Call] – Responding*, 36–58.