

To Want Nothing:
A Badiouian Reading of Radical Orthodoxy

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Abstract

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This thesis argues that Alain Badiou presents a challenge to Radically Orthodox thinkers by claiming that theological discourse on being can only articulate a description of a structured presentation of an inconsistent multiplicity; a situation referred to throughout the thesis as “a Badiouian thinking of the One.” The argument begins by explaining how in the contemporary context Badiou identifies two forms of thinking the One: positivism and theology. It follows that if positivism and theology are two forms of the same thinking then there must be common elements or logics at work in their separate discourses. Three elements shared by both discourses are shown to be at work in both a positivist project—Daniel Dennett’s philosophy of consciousness—and a theological project—Radical Orthodoxy. Ultimately, in establishing how the three elements are common to both discourses Radical Orthodoxy is identified as an example of a Badiouian thinking of the One.

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Introduction: 0

In very general terms Alain Badiou's seminal text, *Being and Event*, describes philosophy as a movement to establish new possibilities in thinking. The inscription of this movement is defined in general by the formula, $\emptyset \rightarrow \omega$, and in the particular case by the formula, $0 \rightarrow 1$. From these formulae the movement of philosophy is understood to begin from a nihilist position, "0" or the void, and move into an affirmative position, "1" or the multiple; however, philosophy is not reducible to either of these two separate positions. If thought only resides on the side of the void it assumes a nihilist position claiming that all there *is* is negativity. Likewise, if thought only resides on the side of the multiple it assumes either a positivist or theological position claiming that all there *is* is the One; I will refer to this position throughout this thesis as "a Badiouian thinking of the One." Interestingly, in a 2010 lecture delivered at the European Graduate School in Saas-Fee, Switzerland, Badiou named a fourth position—in addition to the philosophical, the nihilist, and the positivist/theological—which thought may assume: the mystical.¹ In this lecture Badiou explored the intriguing view that philosophy is not opposed to mysticism to the same degree in which it is opposed to nihilism or positivism/theology. This is because for Badiou both philosophy and mysticism in some sense describe the same type of movement. More specifically, in contrast to nihilism and positivism/theology, philosophy and mysticism share two fundamental points: first that the experience of nothingness is a necessity and second that we can go beyond nothingness. In both fields of thought, the

¹ Alain Badiou, "Mysticism and Philosophy," 2010, video clip, accessed January 16, 2013, YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=owZstU4aegg>.

beginning point is an experience of negativity followed by a transformation into the subjective.

Where philosophy and mysticism differ is in how they regard this movement from nothing to something to transpire. In philosophy the movement is of a systematic nature. Badiou identifies philosophy's movement as a series of steps or as a construction. Within this process there is the production of difference by means of a process of sameness. Badiou illustrates this process through a description of the set of natural numbers: there are infinite natural numbers, each different from the other, and yet they are constructed via the same process, $n = n + 1$. Although this process, $n = n + 1$, is oriented towards the infinite, the infinite as such is not produced by the process. In philosophy, Badiou observes this form of repetitive operation or process in such examples as the metaphysics of Descartes or the Hegelian dialectic. Mysticism on the other hand considers an instantaneous movement. In submitting to one's own nothingness the individual opens herself up to accessing the infinite in a closed and intimate relationship. Unlike philosophy, the expression of the mystical experience is poetical; as found in the writings of Julian of Norwich or Saint John of the Cross.

The purpose of this thesis is to present an example of a contemporary positivist ontology, Daniel Dennett's philosophy of consciousness, and an example of a contemporary theological ontology, Radical Orthodoxy's *analogia entis*, with the intention of demonstrating how both discourses on being ultimately belong to what I refer to as a Badiouian thinking of the One. To do so I argue that both the discourse of Dennett and the discourse Radical Orthodoxy use the same logic by which to articulate their separate ontologies. It is important to note that in making this argument I am not

implying that such logic is intrinsic to all forms of signification. On the contrary, with Badiou I argue there is an alternative logic, based upon a Cantorian understanding of number, by which one may think differently; namely, in terms of what he describes as the philosophical or the mystical.

In Section 1.0 of this thesis, I present Daniel Dennett's philosophy of an evolutionary consciousness, what I refer to as a "naturalized ontology,"² with the intention of using it as an example of a positivist ontology belonging to the Badiouian category of a thinking of the One. I use Dennett as an example not with the intention of renouncing his work, but rather because of how well it operates in accordance with Badiou's categorization. To demonstrate its fittingness I first establish two fundamental points: first, in Section 1.01, "Evolutionary progression," that an evolutionary model of consciousness needs to be understood as natural progression, and second in Section 1.02, "Positing an abstraction: Dennett's Universal Acid," that an evolutionary model of consciousness requires the positing an abstraction (a True-reality or True-exception) by which to engage with reality. After doing so, in Section 1.03, "Number: A closed whole," I describe, apropos Alain Badiou, the understanding of number that governs the elements described in Section 1.01 and 1.02 and furthermore how it is this notion of number that governs any Badiouian thinking of the One.

After establishing how Dennett's philosophy serves as an example of a positivist ontology belonging to the Badiouian category of a thinking of the One, in Section 1.1, I

² This is to say, "a thoroughly naturalized ontology, one that explains all entities on a single model, as assemblages of 'dynamic quanta,' the incessant change and transformation of which is the result of successful and unsuccessful attempts by each assemblage to extend its control over enviroing assemblages." Christoph Cox, *Nietzsche: Naturalism and Interpretation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 79.

make a similar argument in regards to the theological project of Radical Orthodoxy. Again, like in regards to the work of Dennett, I choose Radical Orthodoxy not with the intent of renouncing the movement in general, but rather because of how well it operates in accordance with the Badiouian category of a thinking of the One. Like the work of Dennett, Radical Orthodoxy has given great attention to the question of what *is*, striving to posit a true ontological discourse, the Thomistic *analogia entis*, in response to what it understands as the dominant and erroneous ontological discourse in late modernity, Duns Scotus's univocity of being. To establish Radical Orthodoxy as an example of a Badiouian thinking of the One, like in the first section of this thesis, in Sections 1.11, 1.12 and 1.13, I establish how Radical Orthodoxy posits an abstraction which is evolutionary in nature (even if it has perhaps over the last 700 years or so been devolving) and as a consequence operates in accordance with a specific form of number (that which was described in Section 1.03). Ultimately, my considerations of the work of Dennett and Radical Orthodoxy intend to suggest that in the contemporary context, what I will refer to as late modernity, Badiou's categories of philosophy and mysticism are better prepared to address that which *is* then either theology or positivism.

1.0 Thinking the One: A Positivist Example

In the first six months of 2012 the North American popular science magazine³ with the greatest number of copies in paid and verified circulation in North America was *Popular Science*. With 1 350 685 copies in circulation, *Popular Science* had more than twice as many copies in circulation as the second place magazine, *Discover*, which still had an impressive 599 196 copies in paid circulation. In a close third place was *Scientific American* with 486 293 copies in paid circulation.⁴ To put these numbers into context, out of the five hundred and eighty nine North American magazines examined, *Popular Science* placed just behind *Playboy* with the fifty seventh most magazines in circulation. *Discover* came in one hundred and twenty sixth place and *Scientific American* came in one hundred and fiftieth place.⁵ Such data clearly establishes there to be an interest in popular science within contemporary culture; a fact which is not surprising given the fascinating research presently taking place in such fields as neuroscience and technology.

For example, consider Rebecca Boyle's August 2011 article published on the *Popular Science* website entitled, "New Computer Chip Modeled on a Living Brain Can

³ To be specific, by "popular science magazine" I mean periodical publications with columns featuring news, opinions and reports on scientific topics aimed at being accessible a non-academic audience. For example, *Scientific American* or *Discover*. This form of science magazine would be contrasted to a peer-reviewed scientific journal in which professional scientists would strive to publish within based upon their particular field of expertise. For example, the *Journal of the American Chemical Society* or *Nuclear Instruments and Methods in Physics Research*.

⁴ Audit Bureau of Circulations. 2012. <http://abcas3.accessabc.com/ecirc/magtitlesearch.asp> (accessed September 1, 2012).

⁵ Audit Bureau of Circulations. 2012. <http://abcas3.accessabc.com/ecirc/magtitlesearch.asp>. Accessed September 1, 2012.

Learn and Remember.”⁶ In the article Boyle describes IBM’s recent invention of a computer chip based on the neurological circuitry map of a macaque monkey. By reverse-engineering the neural networks of the monkey’s brain the chip intends to pave the way for future cognitive computer systems that can think as efficiently as the human brain. These “neurosynaptic chips” exceed the traditional ability of computers to simply do yes-or-no tasks in that they now have the ability to remember and learn from their own actions. Dharmendra Modha, the project leader for IBM Research, is quoted as saying, “[The chip] integrates memory with processors, and it is fundamentally massively parallel and distributed as well as event-driven, so it begins to rival the brain’s function, power and space.” According to IBM the new technology resulting from the development of such brain-based chips is not intended to replace traditional computers, rather, they will work together with traditional computers to “serve humanity.” For example, consider how if a human grabs a piece of rotten fruit the senses of touch, smell, and sight instantly work together to determine the fruit is bad. Traditional computers cannot handle that amount of detail from so many different inputs; however, with the development of brain-based chips it becomes possible. In this way, for example, a cognitive computer in the future could monitor numerous unique variables in the ocean via a network of different inputs and determine whether or not a major weather event such as a tsunami is going to occur. The research is continuing to develop as IBM scientists study more monkey brains and even cat brains, but as Boyle says, “it will be quite some time before computer chips can truly match the ultra-efficient computational powerhouses that nature gave us.”

⁶ Rebecca Boyle. 2011. <http://www.popsci.com/technology/article/2011-08/first-generation-cognitive-chips-based-brain-architecture-will-revolutionize-computing-ibm-says> (accessed September 8, 2012).

In July 2012, Ian Chant reported on the *Popular Science* website that two Cornell University students, Charles Moyes and Mengxiang Jiang, built a version of the classic video game “Pong” in which players control the onscreen paddle with their minds.⁷ An electroencephalography (EEG) machine connected to a player’s head reads the faint electrical signals in the brain. These signals, which come in the form of waves, are then run through an amplification circuit where they are then filtered and boosted. It is then possible to digitize the amplified information and send it through a USB to a computer which determines the behavior of an onscreen paddle. Intensifying one’s concentration moves the paddle one way, while relaxing one’s concentration moves the paddle the other way.

And popular science magazines are only one example of how the brain is linked to computer technology in contemporary culture. Science fiction movies like the *Terminator* series (1984, 1991, and 2003), *AI* (2001) or *Wall-E* (2008), all imagine a world in which there are computer-based robots with the ability to “think” and, at least to some extent, experience emotion. *The Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (2011) tells the story of how a pharmaceutical company develops a drug which allows ape brains to evolve at a much faster rate than usual. Best-selling authors such as Raymond Kurzweil have in some cases very accurately predicted the development of technologies and their integration with humanity.⁸ Such a vast array of examples demonstrate how visualizing the brain as a computer is fascinating in that there are practical aspects in regards to

⁷ Ian Chant. 2012. <http://www.popsci.com/technology/article/2012-07/brainwave-controlled-version-pong> (accessed September 8, 2012).

⁸ Raymond Kurzweil, *The Age of Intelligent Machines* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992).

science and technology, and yet at the same time, such examples are terrifying insofar as they present a strange philosophy of being.

Daniel Dennett has gone to great lengths over the past forty years to develop a philosophy of consciousness that coherently describes how and why the human mind is in essence a computer. In what follows I present a summary of the story Dennett composes to arrive at his hypothesis that “conscious human minds are more-or-less serial virtual machines implemented—inefficiently—on the parallel hardware that evolution has provided for us.”⁹ In presenting Dennett’s philosophy I aim to neither critique nor promote his ideas, but rather to establish how such an understanding of the mind can be derived. Dennett is a fitting thinker to engage given the fact that he has enjoyed immense popularity over the last twenty years or so, particularly since the publication of his best-selling books, *Consciousness Explained*, in 1991 and, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, in 1995. After engaging Dennett’s positivist philosophy as a Badiouian example of a thinking of the One, I can then proceed to examine the extent to which such elements are also at work within the theological project of Radical Orthodoxy.

In his book, *Consciousness Explained*, Daniel Dennett argues that because it is possible to scientifically posit a time in which there was no human consciousness, then consciousness itself must have developed from prior phenomena which were not in themselves instances of human consciousness.¹⁰ It follows that through an examination of the various speculative possibilities in regards to how the transitions from (a) no consciousness to (b) consciousness to (c) rationally developed human consciousness

⁹ Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991), 218.

¹⁰ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 171.

occurred, it is possible to gain insight into the true nature of consciousness in-itself. The strategy behind this approach is evolutionary insofar as it hopes to learn about the nature of consciousness by describing the mechanisms governing its fundamental behavioral advancement. Dennett distinguishes an evolutionary approach from an approach wherein one first assumes the behavior of consciousness as a given and then proceeds to reason *a priori* to determine the mechanisms at work in the brain. In contrast, an evolutionary approach to explaining consciousness is done through the use of narrative. As such, and rather than surveying the numerous narratives dedicated to explaining the evolution of consciousness, Dennett elects to borrow freely from numerous theorists in composing a single story describing what he deems to be the best guide to understanding what consciousness *is*.¹¹

Dennett begins his story by imagining a world in which there were no material objects that could be said to have interests of any kind. A world void of objects with interests implies a world void of reasons. In this strange world there are only causes. In accordance with the thought of Richard Dawkins, Dennett then imagines the emergence of simple replicators which, although unaware of their interests, contain the primitive interest of self-replication. In a very simple way it could be said that such interests can be classified as “good” if they allow for replication and on the other hand “bad” if they do not allow for replication: a process which Dennett refers to as “the business of self-preservation.”¹² Within this business it is important to construct boundaries between the self and the external world. As Dennett describes, “this distinction between everything on

¹¹ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 172.

¹² Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 174.

the inside of a closed boundary and everything in the external world — is at the heart of all biological processes, not just ingestion and excretion, respiration and transpiration.”¹³ Thus, for Dennett, and this will be a significant point in later sections of this thesis when questioning such concepts as good-ness, we see the beginnings of a mind which is by design a self-sustained closed whole.

As the simple replicators evolved into more and more developed creatures they formed the need to cultivate new and better ways to “produce future”: what Dennett refers to as the fundamental purpose of the brain.¹⁴ To understand what Dennett means here by producing future, one must first understand that for Dennett the brain is essentially an anticipating machine. For example, when a baby experiences a sense of falling, regardless of whether or not she is really falling, her body will immediately become stiff as a board. In this way, if the baby really does fall, having locked her body up tightly she is less likely to hurt her back and neck upon impact. This reaction or anticipation, commonly referred to as the startle reflex, is genetically hard-wired into a baby’s nervous system. Such a trait makes the baby a better anticipator, and consequently babies with this gene have generally had a better chance of survival. Having a better chance of survival means these babies had a better chance of passing on this gene, and as such most if not all babies today have the startle reflex. Another example is the ability to recognize a vertical axis of symmetry. Virtually the only things in the wild that showed vertical axis symmetry were the faces of other animals, thus in recognizing vertical axis

¹³ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 174.

¹⁴ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 177.

symmetry animals were able to anticipate the presence of enemies and flee before being eaten.

Dennett explains how orienting responses such as these developed into more risky and engaged forms of exploration and as a result new behavioral strategies began to evolve. Animals began to acquire information for its own sake, Dennett refers to this phenomenon as the birth of curiosity. Animals become what George Miller refers to as “*informavores*: organisms hungry for further information about the world they inhabited (and about themselves).”¹⁵ This leads into the evolution of two specialized areas in the brain: the dorsal and the ventral. On the one hand, the dorsal became the auto-pilot portion of the brain, always on the look-out for any sign of danger. On the other hand, the ventral became the special part of the brain which was able to focus on specifics without having to worry about who was looking out for immediate danger. Fascinatingly, this single strand in the evolutionary history of the nervous system reveals the most basic evolutionary mechanism, that is, that a selection of particular *genotypes*, or gene combinations, can prove to yield better adapted individuals, or *phenotypes*, than the alternative genotypes.¹⁶ This idea implies that we can now imagine the emergence of individual phenotypes whose innards are not entirely hard-wired, but are variable or plastic, and as such, can learn during their own lifetimes. This phenomenon allows for two new conditions under which evolution occurs: (1) greater speeds than unaided genetic evolution and (2) natural selection.

¹⁵ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 181.

¹⁶ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, p. 182.

Referencing Hume's problem, Dennett continues his story of the evolution of human consciousness by stating that we must make two assumptions: (1) that nature stays what it is¹⁷ (for example, the laws governing gravitational forces, electromagnetic forces, the elements of the periodic table, the startle reflex, vertical axis recognition), and citing Dawkins, (2) that there are other processes in nature which are chaotic. The fact that this is the case leads to evolutionary redesign via learning *or* development. Dennett readily admits that the distinction between these two categories is gray: for example, do babies learn to walk or do they develop the skill of walking? Because placing a dividing line between the two categories is so difficult, Dennett decides to refer to anything from learning to focus one's eyes to learning quantum mechanics as postnatal design fixing. He then describes how the process of postnatal design fixing can be accomplished because "the plastic brain is capable of reorganizing itself adaptively in response to the particular novelties encountered in the organism's environment."¹⁸ Some of these postnatal design fixings are what Dennett refers to extensively as a Good Trick: "a behavioral talent that protects [a particular species'] or enhances [a particular species'] chances dramatically."¹⁹ Through a process called the Baldwin Effect, Good Tricks are capable of being passed on genetically. For example, suppose that in an animal's brain there are five spaces which compose its wiring, each of which can be wired in one of two

¹⁷ It is significant to note that the recent philosophical movement referred to as "Speculative Realism" challenges this idea. See, for example, Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* (New York: Continuum, 2008). In this fascinating text Meillassoux argues that Hume's problem can be transformed into an opportunity for contemporary philosophy. See also Ian Hamilton Grant's paper, "Does Nature Stay What-it-is?: Dynamics and the Antecedence Criterion" in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism* edited by Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek and Graham Harman (Melbourne: re.press, 2011).

¹⁸ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 184.

¹⁹ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 184.

ways (obviously an over-simplified example, but only because it intends to clarify the idea). If we call those two ways of being wired 0 and 1, then an example of a single specific wiring could be any combination of zeros and ones: for example, 00011, 11110 or 10101. If the combination, 01110 represents a Good Trick, then those animals with wirings closest to 01110—say 01111 or 01100, but definitely not 10001—will be the most likely to “learn” the proper wiring in their lifetime and thus pass on their genes. Eventually the whole species of animal will move toward the wiring of the Good Trick. All animals with phenotypic plasticity, even the “lowly toad”²⁰, operate in accordance with the Baldwin Effect; however, the human brain has evolved as the best brain capable of honing these Good Tricks.

To answer the question of how humans achieved this feat, Dennett describes how his story thus far brings us to higher level primates whose brains are regularly flooded with multimedia information. This stage in the evolution of human consciousness presents a new issue, that is, the problem of higher level control, however, this problem opens up “a new portion of design space.”²¹ Up to this point in the history of the conscious mind the nervous system dealt with the question, “What to do now?”, to which it was only capable of responding with a limited selection of actions; what Dennett playfully refers to as a modest elaboration of the four F’s: fight, flee, feed or mate.²² At this point however, with the increased availability to information the question became, “What to think about next?” In accordance with Odmar Neumann’s idea “that maintaining reactions, originally driven by novelty in the environment, came to be

²⁰ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 187.

²¹ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 188.

²² Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 188.

initiated endogenously (from the inside), one may hypothesize that there was pressure to develop a more endogenous way of solving the meta-problem of what to think about next.”²³ It is onto this image of a primitive and yet to some degree well-developed nervous system one can begin to imagine a stream of consciousness. Here Dennett estimates that between ten thousand and a hundred and fifty thousand years ago brain development began to move at an astounding pace which was never seen before. Out of this remarkable period of time emerged new hominids that further harnessed the plasticity of their brains and created an unheard of number of changes and developments in mental powers. The evidence of these powers is the artifacts of past civilizations: things like cooking, agriculture, and art. As Dennett writes, “In short, our ancestors must have learned some Good Tricks they could do with their adjustable hardware, which our species has only just begun to move, via the Baldwin effect, into the genome.”²⁴

At this point in the story Dennett introduces a central phenomenon belonging to an evolutionary model of consciousness which will be of great significance at a later point in this thesis when I compare the logic of an evolutionary model of consciousness with the logic of masculine side of Jacques Lacan’s “formulae of sexuation”: that is, the phenomenon of “representation.”²⁵ To understand what Dennett means by “representation” consider how a sunflower will follow the path of the sun during the day in order to receive a maximum amount of sunlight, however, if the sunlight is temporarily obscured the sunflower cannot project the new trajectory and adjust itself accordingly. This is to say, “the mechanism that is sensitive to the sun’s passage does not represent the

²³ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 189.

²⁴ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 190.

²⁵ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 191.

sun's passage in this extended sense."²⁶ Conversely, after seeing a lion on the horizon, a zebra will still have a representation of the lion in its mind as it begins to run. Humans have an incredible capacity to represent, some of which require training (are learned) while others are hard-wired (are innately fixed). Dennett suggests that the sharing of information with the intent to learn (what he refers to as "soft-ware sharing"²⁷) began with the development of language, or more specifically, proto-language. Through exchanges of grunts and squawks useful information could be shared: for example, "Run away!" or "Don't eat those berries." As members of the early groups of hominids communicated ideas the group recognized the benefits of sharing ideas as outweighing the costs and as a result communicative habits became established as normative amongst the community. Dennett imagines a case within the group, which he calls "autostimulation,"²⁸ in which an individual member of the group asks for information when there is no one around to answer. In such an event, it is possible that the individual may innately have a Good Trick ready to respond to his own question, and as such, she learns she is capable of solving her own problems. In the same way it is possible that the same mental process could take place with drawing or acting. Dennett imagines an early hominid randomly sketching two parallel lines in the dirt of a cave; the image triggers something in his brain which reminds him that he needs to cross a river to get to where he wants to go later that day. Thus the image inspires him bring a rope when he leaves that afternoon. Had he not drawn the image he would not have taken the rope and having to have gone back to the cave for the rope when he got to the actual river he would have

²⁶ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 191.

²⁷ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 194.

²⁸ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 199.

taken longer to get where he needed to go. This process of saving time fuels new habits, and evolves into the ability to do “*private* diagram-drawing ‘in one’s mind’s eye.’”²⁹

This image of early hominids learning to invent new paths of internal communication brings Dennett to the final phase of his story in the description of the evolution of consciousness: meme theory and cultural evolution. For Dennett, the development of language was one of the best Good Tricks to have ever evolved; however, once our brains developed the ability to use language they literally became parasitized by “entities that have evolved to thrive in just such a niche: memes.”³⁰ Fundamental to understanding meme theory is the fact that memes by their very nature obey the laws of evolution. Dennett explains that this strange idea is possible because the very definition of evolutionary theory “though drawn from biology, says nothing specific about organic molecules, nutrition, or even life.”³¹ Memes are the ideas or cultural units with which humans constantly engage. The wheel, a 90° triangle, indie rock, 100%, the electric car, corn fed livestock, scrabble, Catholicism, existentialism, Halifax, differential calculus; these are all memes. However, b%gdo# is not a meme because it does not hold the ability to replicate itself with reliability and fruitfulness. Perhaps, if I were to construct some form of value for the cultural unit b%gdo# it could become a meme, but insofar as I know, as of right now b%gdo# has no value, no meaning, and thus no ability to replicate itself. Catholicism on the other hand is very capable of replicating itself and has been capable to do so for many years. In fact, under some circumstances Dennett would understand Catholicism to be quite a dangerous meme, because in some parts of

²⁹ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 197.

³⁰ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 200.

³¹ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 200.

the world today, to utilize this meme may result in your persecution (in one way or another). In this sense, human survival is dependent to a certain extent on choosing memes that help us.

Memes travel and reproduce extremely fast. They replicate far faster than any genes can, and yet like genes they require certain conditions to be able to replicate. Things like books and monuments allow for memes to sustain themselves and grow, but the most ideal medium in which memes flourish is the human mind. Dennett describes the human mind as a “meme nest”³² and “the haven that all memes depend on reaching.”³³ However, for Dennett, minds (like computers) are in limited supply and have a limited capacity (this is another important point which will be addressed in Section 1.03 when I investigate the notion of number inherent within Dennett’s naturalized ontology). Thus, just like it is in the biosphere, competition for space is vicious in the memosphere. Furthermore, like genes, all memes “have in common the property of having phenotypic expressions that tend to make their own replication more likely by disabling or preempting the environmental forces that would tend to extinguish them.”³⁴ For example, Dennett describes how the meme for religious faith discourages the sort of critical thinking which would allow for faith to be considered a dangerous idea. Or how a conspiracy theory meme has an inherent objection to questioning the validity of the meme, that is, that the conspiracy is so powerful that it wants you to think there is no conspiracy. In this way memes like religious faith and conspiracy theories are able to invade and inhabit human minds for as long as possible. From this perspective, although

³² Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 206.

³³ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 207.

³⁴ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 206.

it is true that there is a biological foundation of genes, human consciousness is to a great degree the creation of the interplay and effects of memes.³⁵

It is only through the rigorous development of meme theory that Dennett can then put forth his final hypothesis:

Human consciousness is *itself* a huge complex of memes (or more exactly, meme-effects in brains) that can best be understood as the operation of a “von Neumannesque” virtual machine *implemented* in the *parallel architecture* of a brain that was not designed for any such activities. The powers of this *virtual machine* vastly enhance the underlying powers of the organic *hardware* on which it runs, but at the same time many of its most curious features, and especially its limitations, can be explained as the byproducts of the *kludges* that make possible this curious but effective reuse of an existing organ for novel purposes.³⁶

To explain his hypothesis, Dennett provides an historical introduction into the development of the computer. Two of the key inventors involved in the development of the computer were Alan Turing and John Von Neumann. Despite being an accomplished designer and builder of electronic code-breaking machines during the Second World War, Turing can be considered for the most part the brains behind the Computer Age. Turing provided the purely abstract theoretical work that has come to be known as the Von Neumann Architecture, and, at least in 1991 when Dennett was writing, this structure was found in almost every computer in the world.

³⁵ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 207.

³⁶ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 210.

When Turing came up with the theoretical structure of the computer he was not striving to invent a word processor or video game, he was trying to think through the process of thinking. More specifically, he was examining the mental steps his mind underwent when solving mathematical problems. As Dennett explains, “[Turing] was thinking, self-consciously and introspectively, about just how he, a mathematician, went about solving mathematical problems or performing *computations*, and he took the important steps of trying to break down the *sequence* of his *mental acts* into their primitive components.”³⁷ The result of this thought experiment yielded five basic components: “(1) a *serial* process (events happening at one time), in (2) a severely restricted *workplace*, to which (3) both *data* and *instructions* are brought (4) from an inert but super-reliable *memory*, (5) there to be operated on by a finite set of *primitive operations*.”³⁸ The basic structure underlying all computer systems (again at least at the time when Dennett was writing *Consciousness Explained*, today there are alternative structures to Von Neumann machines³⁹) owes itself to Turing. Very simply, data is entered into a computer’s random access memory (RAM) as binary code. Data can then be brought from this storage space to a place where it is accumulated, essentially waiting for future instruction. Using a set of primitive operations the place of instruction can then dictate what happens to this accumulated data: for example, it may make the instruction to “clear the accumulator,” or, “multiply all data by 2.” The basic primitive operations are the arithmetical operations (add, subtract, multiply, and divide); the data-moving

³⁷ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 212.

³⁸ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 212.

³⁹ For example the Harvard Architecture or the Modified Harvard Architecture are alternatives to the Von Neumann Architecture.

operations (fetch, store, output, input); and the conditional instructions (if/then statements). Depending on the complexity of the computer there can be as few as sixteen primitive operations or there may be hundreds.⁴⁰

Although far more efficient and far more complex than this description, Dennett argues that in principle the sequence of actions resulting from this architecture can be elaborated into all rational thought, and perhaps all irrational thought as well.⁴¹ Dennett is very confident in this claim, he writes, “We know there is something at least *remotely* like a von Neumann machine in the brain, because we know we have conscious minds ‘by introspection’ and the minds we thereby discover are at least this much like von Neumann machines: they were the inspiration for von Neumann machines!”⁴² In light of this discovery, Dennett argues, when programming a von Neumann machine computer scientists have “direct access to”⁴³ the process at work in the brain simply by asking, “What would I do if I were the machine, trying to solve this problem?”⁴⁴ Because of this innate connection between the mind and the von Neumann machine, Dennett believes it follows that “if the brain is a massive parallel process machine, it too can be perfectly imitated by a von Neumann machine.”⁴⁵ Dennett then takes these radical ideas to his final point, that “conscious human minds are more-or-less serial virtual machines

⁴⁰ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 212 – 213.

⁴¹ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 214.

⁴² Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 215.

⁴³ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 215.

⁴⁴ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 215.

⁴⁵ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 217.

implemented—inefficiently—on the parallel hardware that evolution has provided for us.”⁴⁶

Although it is true that Dennett’s description of an evolutionary model of consciousness was written some twenty years ago, and even in light of the sharp criticism that he received and continues to receive,⁴⁷ he remains adamant that a universal theory of consciousness is possible. Such struggles for universality are not out of the ordinary in science; for example, one need only consider the sheer magnitude of the research currently taking place at the CERN lab in Switzerland where contemporary physicists strive to, among other things, establish a theory that unifies the four fundamental forces of physics. In the preface to his 2005 book, *Sweet Dreams*, Dennett admits to not getting everything right in *Consciousness Explained* and as such he sees his new book as a chance for some “revision and renewal”;⁴⁸ however, despite requiring some modifications, Dennett maintains that overall the theory of consciousness he presented in *Consciousness Explained* is holding up well. He writes that he is “quite certain that a naturalistic, mechanistic explanation of consciousness is not just possible; it is fast becoming actual. It will just take a lot of hard work of the sort that has been going on in biology all century, and in cognitive science for the last half century.”⁴⁹

In 1995, four years after the publication of *Consciousness Explained*, Dennett published another bestselling book entitled *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life*. If one considers *Consciousness Explained* to be Dennett’s universal

⁴⁶ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 218.

⁴⁷ In the Preface to *Sweet Dreams* Dennett acknowledges this criticism and provides a link to a website outlining some of his responses. See Daniel C. Dennett, *Sweet Dreams* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), ix.

⁴⁸ Dennett, *Sweet Dreams*, ix.

⁴⁹ Dennett, *Sweet Dreams*, 7.

account of consciousness, then *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* can be understood, at least to some degree, as an attempt to establish Darwin's theory of evolution as what he terms a "universal acid" for dissolving all other forms of intellectual and philosophical issues.⁵⁰ For example, a significant section of *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* is dedicated to explaining how the various conundrums philosophers face when engaging questions of ethics are clearly dissolved in the acid of evolutionary theory.⁵¹ To understand what Dennett means by this, consider how an evolutionary theory of consciousness determines "the good." For Dennett, the story of the evolution of human consciousness directly corresponds to the many other evolutionary stories that biology tells. Dennett gives the example of how the mechanisms governing the evolution of sex operate in the same way as the mechanisms governing the evolution of consciousness. In other words, in the same way one can recognize the same processes at work in both the "joyless routines of reproduction" in oysters and the "much more exciting world of sex" in humans, one can recognize that although "there is nothing particularly *selfy*" about the consciousness of the primitive humans, such mechanisms "lay the foundations for our particularly human innovations and complications."⁵² It follows that the fundamental nature of what humans recognize as good first emerges when simple primitive replicators, in order to continue to replicate, "hope and strive for various things."⁵³ This is to say, "they should avoid the 'bad' things and seek the 'good' things. When an entity arrives on the scene capable of behavior that

⁵⁰ Andrew Brook and Don Ross, "Dennett's Position in the Intellectual World," in *Daniel Dennett* edited by Andrew Brook and Don Ross (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 9.

⁵¹ Daniel C Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 61 – 84.

⁵² Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 173.

⁵³ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 173 – 174.

staves off, however primitively, its own dissolution and decomposition, it brings with it into the world its ‘good.’”⁵⁴ However, in contrast to the rules of say mathematics or physics—which Dennett accepts as being the same throughout the entire universe, a point that will be significant in Section 1.12 when I examine the notion of number at work in Dennett’s philosophy—that which is good and that which is not good do not obey universal laws. This is to say, for Dennett, the difficulty with the various philosophical fields which aim to address ethics is that there is no “*feasible algorithm* for the sort of global cost-benefit analysis that utilitarianism (or any other ‘consequentialist’ theory) require.”⁵⁵ In this sense, because there is no feasible algorithm from which to derive a universal notion of the good it is possible to re-evaluate and alter how that which is good is categorized.

Interestingly however, in *Consciousness Explained* Dennett argued that memes can be categorized into one of three categories: “good”, “controversial/ tolerable”, and “unquestionably pernicious,” for each of which he provided examples. For instance, graffiti was categorized as “unquestionably pernicious” and fast food and malls were categorized as “tolerable.”⁵⁶ However, in light of Dennett’s argument in *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea* that there is no universal algorithm with which to catalog various memes, I am confident that today he would take no offense to a review of his claim that something like graffiti is “unquestionably pernicious.”⁵⁷ Consider for example the work of the British spray paint artist Banksy. There is no doubt that some people consider

⁵⁴ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 173 – 174.

⁵⁵ Dennett, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, 498.

⁵⁶ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 203.

⁵⁷ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 203.

Banksy's work to be unquestionably pernicious;⁵⁸ however, there are also many people who consider Banksy to be an exciting and talented artist. For example, Banksy has sold a great deal of work, sometimes for large amounts of money,⁵⁹ he has had numerous books and articles written in regards to his work,⁶⁰ he directed an Oscar nominated documentary about street art,⁶¹ and he has often used art in the public spaces to address such difficult issues as the wall between Palestine and Israel.⁶² Clearly such accolades make it difficult to categorize Banksy's work, which is clearly a form of graffiti art, as unquestionably pernicious.

The idea of charity is another example of a meme which is difficult to categorize. Many people would consider charity to be categorized as good; however, Slavoj Žižek has made some interesting analyses of acts of charity which question the extent to which charity can be classified as good. One famous example is Žižek's critique of the trend in contemporary culture for companies to donate a percentage of the cost of their item to a charity. Žižek's prime example of this trend is a recent campaign on the part of the multinational corporation Starbucks. A few years ago, upon entering a Starbucks coffee shop, customers were greeted with posters informing them that a portion of the corporation's profits went into health-care for sick children in Guatemala (the country

⁵⁸ Charlie Brooker. 2006. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2006/sep/22/arts.visualarts> (accessed October 16, 2012).

⁵⁹ BBC News. 2006. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/6069384.stm> (accessed October 16, 2012).

⁶⁰ See, for example, Martin Bull, *Banksy Locations and Tours: A Collection of Graffiti Locations and Photographs in London, England* (Oakland: PM Press, 2009), Paul Gough (ed.) *Banksy: The Bristol Legacy* (Bristol: Redcliffe Press Limited, 2012), and Will Ellsworth-Jones, *Banksy: The Man Behind the Wall* (London: Aurum Press, 2012).

⁶¹ Although the validity of the information portrayed in the documentary itself is questioned, the fact remains that the film was nominated for an Oscar. IMDb. 2012. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1587707/> (accessed October 16, 2012).

⁶² Nigel Parry. 2005. <http://electronicintifada.net/content/well-known-uk-graffiti-artist-banksy-hacks-wall/5733> (accessed October 16, 2012).

which was the source of Starbucks' coffee). Of course the inference to be drawn from this poster was that every cup of coffee one drank helped in saving a child's life.⁶³ Now, one may say, what is wrong with this campaign? Is it not a good thing to help children in need by giving some profits to charity? But for Žižek the issue here is how the ideology of the campaign itself constructs a fake sense of urgency. And as Žižek notes, "There is a fundamental anti-theoretical edge to these urgent injunctions. There is no time to reflect: we have to *act now*. Through this fake sense of urgency, the post-industrial rich, living in their secluded virtual world, not only do not deny or ignore the harsh reality outside their area—they actively refer to it all the time."⁶⁴ In donating a percentage of what one pays to consume some product to some charitable cause, a wealthy Westerner can feel a sense of justice being served and as such can continue to consume believing he or she is actively doing something about the problem when in actuality such acts are simply maintaining the system itself.

Interestingly however, Dennett does not despair in the seemingly unavoidable relativism at work in categorizing the good, and as such in ethical deliberation. His solution to this predicament begins in first recognizing (as Žižek observes in the ideology at work in the campaign on the part of Starbucks) that decision making, as it takes place in the human agent, is inherently constrained by time: "time pressured decision making is *all the way down*."⁶⁵ For Dennett, this quality is simply because decision making, like everything else, is explained through the universal acid known as the process of evolution. Given these circumstances, Dennett then rightly asks, if such is the case,

⁶³ Slavoj Žižek, *Violence* (New York: Macmillan, 2008), 6.

⁶⁴ Žižek, *Violence*, 6 – 7.

⁶⁵ Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, 503.

“How, then, can we hope to regulate, or at least improve, our ethical decision making, if it is irremediably heuristic, time-pressured, and myopic?”⁶⁶ Dennett’s solution for regulation is to posit what he terms a “conversation-stopper” within ethical deliberation.⁶⁷ Conversation-stoppers represent points that will terminate the possibility of philosophy “endlessly calling us back to first principles and demanding a justification for these apparently (and actually) quite arbitrary principles.”⁶⁸ Dennett describes how conversation-stoppers are analogous to what we today call human rights. Referencing John Locke, Dennett acknowledges that “[perhaps] talk of rights *is* nonsense upon stilts, but *good* nonsense—and good only because it is on stilts, only because it happens to have the ‘political’ power to keep rising above the meta-reflections—not indefinitely, but usually ‘high enough’—to reassert itself as a compelling—that is, conversation-stopping—‘first principle.’”⁶⁹ It follows that “‘rule worship’ of a certain kind is a good thing, at least for agents designed like us.”⁷⁰ Dennett imagines the good rules, the conversation-stoppers, being composed in a metaphorical Moral First Aid Manual, of which different cultures may have different manuals all depending on the audience for which they are intended.⁷¹

In a world in which there are infinite memes competing for our attention, Dennett clearly recognizes the difficulty of composing such a manual. He writes, “Our prior problem, it seems, is that every day, while trying desperately to mind our own business,

⁶⁶ Dennett, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, 505.

⁶⁷ Dennett, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, 506.

⁶⁸ Dennett, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, 506.

⁶⁹ Dennett, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, 507.

⁷⁰ Dennett, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, 507.

⁷¹ Dennett, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, 508.

we hear a thousand cries for help, complete with volumes of information on how we might oblige. How on Earth could anyone prioritize that cacophony? Not by any systematic process of considering all things, weighing expected utilities, and attempting to maximize. Nor by any systematic generation and testing of Kantian maxims—there are too many to consider.”⁷² Not surprisingly, Dennett responds to this genuine and difficult question by appealing to his universal acid: in accordance with the process of evolutionary theory we have the mind-tools required to continually redesign ourselves, always progressing in our search for new and better solutions to the problems we create for ourselves and others.⁷³ This is to say, as Andrew Brook and Don Ross write, “the theory of evolution leaves one perfectly satisfactory approach to morality and political philosophy untouched, namely, traditional Western liberalism.”⁷⁴

In this section I explained how in starting from the perspective of primitive forms of life acting as self-sufficient closed wholes an evolutionary model of consciousness puts forth a perspective of the good as the ability to replicate, essentially to *be* what Dennett referred to as a Good Trick. In expanding upon this starting point Dennett logically composes a theory describing a somewhat recent period in history in which there was the extremely rapid development of the human mind’s ability to represent. Within this period a revolutionary new media which Dennett refers to as memes emerges and in the same way one can inherently determine the genetic perspective of the good, one can also determine a memetic perspective of the good. Interestingly, Dennett argues that one can “rely, as a general, crude rule of thumb, on the coincidence of the two

⁷² Dennett, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, 509.

⁷³ Dennett, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, 510.

⁷⁴ Brook and Ross, “Dennett’s Position in the Intellectual World,” 9.

perspectives: by and large, the good memes are the ones that are also the good replicators.”⁷⁵ From an evolutionary perspective, this coincidence must be understood as the natural inherent character of that which is good. As I explained, this is indeed how Dennett understands the task of contemporary ethics, for in accordance with the process of evolutionary theory humanity has evolved the mind-tools required to continually redesign itself, always progressing in its search for solutions to the problems it creates for itself and other forms of living things.⁷⁶ From this perspective, not only is the good reduced to a result of material processes, but it also rejects the notion of an independently existing self. As strange and as frightening as Dennett realizes this sounds, he sums it up as follows: “The ‘independent’ mind struggling to protect itself from alien and dangerous memes is a myth; there is, in the basement, a persisting tension between the biological imperative of the genes and the imperatives of the memes, but we would be foolish to ‘side with’ our genes—that is to commit the most egregious error of pop sociobiology.”⁷⁷ Dennett proceeds by asking the necessary and critical questions to follow such a naturalist view of the world, “What foundation, then, can we stand on as we struggle to keep our feet in the memestorm in which we are engulfed? If replicative might does not make it right, what is to be the eternal ideal relative to which ‘we’ will judge the value of memes?”⁷⁸ Interestingly, he provides but a one sentence response to these most complicated questions: “We should note that the memes for normative concepts—for *ought* and *good* and *truth* and *beauty*—are among the most entrenched denizens of our

⁷⁵ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 205.

⁷⁶ Dennett, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, 510.

⁷⁷ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 207.

⁷⁸ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 207.

minds, and that among the memes that constitute us, they play a central role. Our existence as us, as what we as thinkers are—not as what we as organisms are—is not independent of these memes.”⁷⁹ Human rights, or conversation-stoppers, are indeed memes, but they are also inherently that which is good in the world right now.

Whether or not one agrees with Dennett that the good is some-thing located deep down in the mind, a natural altruistic sense, is not the point I am intending to argue in this thesis. As I have noted, in the years following the publications of *Consciousness Explained* and *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea* many critiques of Dennett’s philosophy have been made and continue to be made. The critiques have come from many different perspectives; for example, from Paul Churchland—who critiques Dennett, but not with the intention of denying the computer structure of the brain, but rather to argue that a different structure than the von Neumann machine is necessary for its description and subsequent construction⁸⁰—to the recent work by Conor Cunningham—who critiques Dennett with the intention of, among other things, exposing how Dennett has no understanding of the nature of belief, and that ultimately, it is nihilistic to turn evolutionary theory into a theory of everything.⁸¹ This being said, not only is it beyond the scope of this thesis to get into the depths of these various critiques, it is not the interest of this thesis either. Rather, in this thesis I present Dennett’s position with the intention of establishing how it fits within the Badiouian category of a thinking of the One. To do so, in what follows I describe two fundamental elements necessary for

⁷⁹ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 207 – 208.

⁸⁰ See Paul M. Churchland, “Catching Consciousness in a Recurrent Net,” in *Daniel Dennett* edited by Andrew Brook and Don Ross (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 64 – 82.

⁸¹ Conor Cunningham, *Darwin’s Pious Idea: Why the Ultra-Darwinists and Creationists Both Get It Wrong* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010).

Dennett's positivist ontology to operate. Specifically, in Section 1.01 I explain how, like Western liberal democratic capitalism, Dennett's positivist philosophy needs to be understood as a natural progression, and then in Section 1.02 I explain how, again like Western liberal democratic capitalism, Dennett's philosophy requires the necessity of positing an abstraction by which to engage with real world societal relations. After doing so I then, in Section 1.03, move into a discussion of the understanding of number which underlies these two fundamental logical elements; the form of number which Badiou identifies as belonging to the reign of Capital, "the unthought slavery of numericality itself."⁸² After having established these two fundamental logical elements at work in Dennett's philosophy and the underlying notion of number within which they operate, I am then in a position to describe how Radical Orthodoxy, a movement which clearly aims to confirm a true Christian ontology, operates in accordance with the same two logical elements I identified in the philosophy of Dennett and as such, like Dennett's philosophy, how the theological project of Radical Orthodoxy is also representative a Badiouian thinking of the One.

1.01 Evolutionary progression

Very early in his book, *The Fragile Absolute*, Slavoj Žižek identifies the idea of a natural altruism inherent to human beings as a fundamental element of contemporary capitalist ideology. Žižek writes

⁸² Alain Badiou, *Number and Numbers* (Malden: Polity Press, 2008), 213.

we still silently assume that the liberal democratic capitalist global order is somehow the finally found ‘natural’ social regime; we still implicitly conceive of conflicts in Third World countries as a subspecies of natural catastrophes, as outbursts of quasi-natural violent passions, or as conflicts based on fanatical identification with ethnic roots (and what is ‘ethnic’ here if not again a codeword for nature?). And, again, the key point is that this all-pervasive renaturalization is strictly correlative to the global reflexivization of our daily lives.⁸³

At first Žižek’s statement here may seem exaggerated, however, read in parallel with what David Bentley Hart describes in his book, *The Atheist Delusions*, as the “simple and enchanting tale”⁸⁴ of human freedom which has come to achieve canonical status in Western culture it does not seem so inappropriate. Hart’s story (which is worth quoting in full) goes,

Once upon a time Western humanity was the cosseted and incurious ward of Mother Church; during this, the age of faith, culture stagnated, science languished, wars of religion were routinely waged, witches were burned by inquisitors, and Western humanity labored in brutish subjugation to dogma, superstition, and the unholy alliance of church and state.

Withering blasts of fanaticism and fideism had long since scorched away the last remnants of classical learning; inquiry was stifled; the literary remains of classical antiquity had long ago been consigned to the fires of

⁸³ Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute*, 10.

⁸⁴ David Bentley Hart, *The Atheist Delusions* (Ann Arbor: Sheridan Books, 2009), 33.

faith, and even the great achievements of 'Greek science' were forgotten until Islamic civilization restored them to the West. All was darkness. Then, in the wake of the 'wars of religion' that had torn Christendom apart, came the full flowering of the Enlightenment and with it the reign of reason and progress, the riches of scientific achievement and political liberty, and a new and revolutionary sense of human dignity. The secular nation-state arose, reduced religion to an establishment of the state, and thereby rescued Western humanity from the blood-steeped intolerance of religion. Now, at last, Western humanity has left its nonage and attained its majority, in science, politics, and ethics. The story of the travails of Galileo almost invariably occupies an honored place in this narrative, as exemplary of the natural relation between 'faith' and 'reason' and as an exquisite epitome of scientific reason's mighty struggle during the early modern period to free itself from the tyranny of religion.⁸⁵

The fact that Hart then goes to great lengths to prove this story wrong is not my point in quoting him here. Neither is it my point that the story *is*, but rather, that it is *the* story of how we came to arrive in late modernity.⁸⁶ For it is precisely this detail which Žižek is getting at when he writes, "we still silently assume that the liberal democratic capitalist

⁸⁵ Hart, *The Atheist Delusions*, 33.

⁸⁶ Of course there is going to be critics who will say this is not the case, and empirically demonstrating that Hart's story is the dominant narrative in late modernity is indeed impossible, but would not the person who argues for such evidence not prove Hart's point all the more, that, for a lot people and in the academy belief is contingent upon empirical proof, the "natural" progression to which we have arrived in history?

global order is somehow the finally found ‘natural’ social regime.’⁸⁷ In late modernity, altruism, like violent conflict, is understood to have emerged or evolved from the natural order of things (as described by Hart’s “simple and enchanting tale”), but for the person who ascribes to a liberal democratic way of life, altruism must be somehow *more* natural, *the* finally found way of life discovered by Westerners. Indeed, this is a remarkably controversial statement, one which most liberal Westerners (at least one would hope) would most likely shy away from considering too seriously. For how could anyone genuinely believe that the wars in the Congo⁸⁸ or the genocide in Rwanda⁸⁹ was a “subspecies” of the earthquake that destroyed Haiti⁹⁰ or the Tsunami that flattened Indonesia?⁹¹ And yet, this is precisely the logic by which an evolutionary description of consciousness portrays. Again, my intention here is not to critique such a description of reality, rather, in regards to Dennett’s evolutionary notion of consciousness Žižek rightly observes that if a good idea (a good meme) is a result of natural evolutionary processes that, as Dennett suggests, coincidentally coincides with the ability to replicate,⁹² then violence in the name of any movement (Dennett would call it a violent meme) must be by definition a subspecies of the violence that takes place during an earthquake or tsunami (violence that occurs in a world without consciousness, a world without reason, only causes). For in Dennett’s evolutionary model of consciousness, as I discussed at length in

⁸⁷ Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute*, 10.

⁸⁸ BBC News. 2012. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13283212> (accessed October 10, 2012).

⁸⁹ United Human Rights Council. 2012.

http://www.unitedhumanrights.org/genocide/genocide_in_rwanda.htm (accessed October 10, 2012).

⁹⁰ CNN. 2011. <http://edition.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2010/haiti.quake/> (accessed October 18, 2012).

⁹¹ National Geographic. 2005.

http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2004/12/1227_041226_tsunami.html (accessed October 18, 2012).

⁹² Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 205.

the previous section of this thesis, consciousness is understood to have emerged from a world in which there was no consciousness. In other words, the prime medium within which memes function, that is the human mind, is a subspecies of the medium in which natural disasters occur, that is the material world. In this way Dennett's philosophy corresponds perfectly with Hart's "simple and enchanting tale"—*the* dominant story of how we arrived in late modernity—and as such is in full agreement with Žižek's argument that contemporary capitalist ideology "still silently [assumes] that the liberal democratic capitalist global order is somehow the finally found 'natural' social regime",⁹³ and thus, both Western liberal democratic capitalism and an evolutionary model of consciousness need to be understood as "natural" progressions

1.02 Positing an abstraction: Dennett's Universal Acid

As discussed Section in 1.0, for Dennett, the means to weeding out the violent memes causing all the strife in the developing⁹⁴ world is to compose a list of conversation-stoppers in a metaphorical Moral First Aid Manual. In reality however this manual is not a metaphor insofar as groups such as the United Nations spend a great deal of time and energy composing large documents aiming to establish such conversation-stoppers; or, in other words, to establish something called human rights. Early in the first chapter of *Ethics* Alain Badiou observes precisely this when he writes: "In the political domain [...] many intellectuals, along with much of public opinion, have been won over to the logic

⁹³ Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute*, 10.

⁹⁴ A name which further supports Žižek's argument that liberal democratic capitalism is considered the finally found "natural" social regime.

of a capitalist economy and a parliamentary democracy. [...] Rather than seek out the terms of a new politics of collective liberation, they have, in sum, adopted as their own the principles of the established ‘Western’ order.”⁹⁵ For Badiou,⁹⁶ one of the founding elements of capitalist ideology in late modernity is the positing of “a universally recognizable human subject possessing ‘rights’ that are in some sense natural: the right to live, to avoid abusive treatment, to enjoy ‘fundamental’ liberties.”⁹⁷ This is to say, according to Badiou, capitalist logic contains an inherent image, or an idealized abstraction, of a “human.” This “human” has certain characteristics: she or he has shelter, food, love, etc. The further a person is from corresponding to this form, the more he or she is a victim. As discussed in Section 1.0, for Dennett the idea of human rights is the foundation for the mind’s ability to perform ethical discernment amongst the plurality of

⁹⁵ Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (New York: Verso, 2001), 4 – 5.

⁹⁶ Although it is not my intention to critique the capitalist framework described by Badiou, it is significant to note that Badiou himself is critical of identifying man as *the being who is capable of recognizing himself as a victim* for three reasons. First, identifying man with victimhood “equates man with his animal substructure.” (11) In addressing the equating of man and animal Badiou does not take issue with the idea that humans are animals, rather, Badiou takes issue with the explicit equating of man with animal: to be human is more than just “a set of functions that resist death.” (11) The person who identifies with the victim fails to acknowledge the very important notion “that Man *thinks*, that Man is the tissue of truths.” (12) The logic of victimization assigns one person the role of victim and the other the humanitarian. The both the victim and the humanitarian are not the ideal form “man”, however, he or she who is further from the ideal form “man” is the victim. As a result, “[e]very intervention [by the humanitarian on the part of the victim] in the name of a civilization *requires* an initial contempt for the situation as a whole, including its victims.” (13) Secondly, “if the ethical ‘consensus’ is founded on the recognition of Evil, it follows that every effort to unite people around a positive idea of the Good, let alone to identify Man with projects of this kind, becomes in fact the real source of evil itself.” (13 – 14) He asks: “If our only agenda is an ethical engagement against an Evil we recognize a priori, how are we to envisage any transformation of the way things are?” There is no space for new-ness or grace in this structure. Evil is a positive force, rather than a lack. And thirdly, prioritizing an a priori discernment of Evil prevents the thinking of the singularity of situations. This is to say, the collective responsibility to the rights of “man” trump singularity of a situation. Thus, for example, the doctor will conceive of the patient in the same way as the humanitarian conceives of the victim. The doctor is free to only face the one medical situation: the clinical situation. Those who for whatever reason (perhaps they have paid their taxes) have “rights” to medical attention, the system would crumble if the doctor acted otherwise: the doctor has a collective responsibility to discern accordingly. See Badiou, *Ethics*, 11 – 14.

⁹⁷ Badiou. *Ethics*, 4.

memes competing for our attention. In positing rights as first-principle humanity is capable of establishing a point in which endless philosophizing must cease and real-life decisions must be made, what Dennett refers to as the conversation-stopper. In this approach to ethical discernment Badiou rightly identifies an a priori ability to discern Evil.⁹⁸ By positing a universal human subject/abstraction—one whose central quality is “he who suffers” or “he who identifies suffering”—the good by definition must be derived from evil and not vice versa. As Badiou observes, “[h]uman rights’ are rights to non-Evil.”⁹⁹ As a result of this process, man becomes “*the being who is capable of recognizing himself as a victim.*”¹⁰⁰ And for Badiou, what is most impressive is that like Hart’s “simple and enchanting tale” the power of this doctrine rests, at first glance, in its self evidence.¹⁰¹ It is precisely this self-evidence that Dennett confirms when he describes the good memes as existing in the “entrenched denizens of our minds.”¹⁰²

Žižek puts a slight twist on Badiou’s recognition that in the contemporary context in order for the good to function the individual must posit a universal human abstraction. For Žižek it is not simply a human abstraction that comes to establish the good, but furthermore one must also posit an abstraction of a True-reality in which societal relations take place. To understand what Žižek means by this, first consider Karl Marx’s description of capitalist reality in *The Communist Manifesto*

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production and thereby the relations of production, and

⁹⁸ Badiou. *Ethics*, 8.

⁹⁹ Badiou. *Ethics*, 9.

¹⁰⁰ Badiou. *Ethics*, 10.

¹⁰¹ Badiou. *Ethics*, 9.

¹⁰² Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 208.

with them the whole relations of a society. [...] The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere.¹⁰³

In the contemporary context, what I have been referring to as late modernity, to be in relationship with the world is to be in relationship with capitalism.¹⁰⁴ Such a relationship is by no means optional, it is fundamental to being in-itself. This is to say, capitalism has the unique ability to be simultaneously everywhere and nowhere at the same time. As Levi Bryant points out, it is not possible to point at a particular site and be capable of identifying “capitalism” in the same way one could point to and identify an object such as “Barack Obama” or an “ice cream sandwich.” Bryant argues, capitalism “pervades every aspect of contemporary life, while nonetheless being absolutely non-localizable.”¹⁰⁵ For Bryant, contemporary capitalism is an example of what Tim Morton refers to as hyperobjects. As Morton describes,

hyperobjects are viscous—they adhere to you no matter how hard to try to pull away, rendering ironic distance obsolete. Now I’ll argue that they are also nonlocal. That is, hyperobjects are massively distributed in time and space such that any particular (local) manifestation never reveals the

¹⁰³ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Toronto: Penguin, 2004), 7.

¹⁰⁴ This is of course at odds with a Christian notion of right relationship, which is formed through the preparation which Lewis Ayres describes as a ‘dual-focus’ anthropology “where problems with unsanctified human thinking and action—and the cure for these problems—are described by exploring how human beings should possess a trained soul that animates the body and attends to their joint *τέλος* in the divine presence through contemplation of God.” See Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 326. This will be examined further in the second section of this thesis.

¹⁰⁵ Levi Bryant. 2012. <http://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/2012/08/04/mckenzie-wark-how-do-you-occupy-an-abstraction/> (accessed October 18, 2012).

totality of the hyperobject. When you feel raindrops falling on your head, you are experiencing climate, in some sense. In particular you are experiencing the climate change known as global warming. But you are never directly experiencing global warming as such. Nowhere in the long list of catastrophic weather events—which will increase as global warming takes off—will you find global warming.¹⁰⁶

If capitalism by its very nature¹⁰⁷ forces society to function in relationship with it—that is in terms of being *qua* Capital—then a new reality results. Marx aptly describes the consequences of this shift in reality: “All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are all swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real condition in life, and his relations with his kind.”¹⁰⁸ It is for precisely this same line of reasoning that when asked what advice he had for those involved in the Occupy movement who were looking for new tactics, McKenzie Wark replied, “There is power in the image of people together. And of course people who do these things learn a lot and some will become comrades for life. (Some of course, will never speak to each other again!) But the problem is: How can you occupy an abstraction?”¹⁰⁹ ¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Tim Morton. 2012. <http://ecologywithoutnature.blogspot.ca/2010/11/hyperobjects-are-nonlocal.html> (accessed October 18, 2012).

¹⁰⁷ Gilles Deleuze has made the very convincing argument that under capitalism “politics precedes being.” The organization of desire participating in the infrastructure of capitalism is always-already formed by the practices and relations of the structure. See Jason Read, “The Age of Cynicism” in *Deleuze and Politics*, edited by Ian Buchanan and Nicholas Thoburn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 143 – 149.

¹⁰⁸ Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 7.

¹⁰⁹ McKenzie Wark. 2012. <http://theoccupiedtimes.co.uk/?p=6451> (accessed October 18, 2012).

To understand what Wark implies by the problem of how to occupy an abstraction, consider the following example: in late June 2011 a multitude of diverse individuals descended upon the city of Toronto, Canada. The event motivating the crowd's arrival in the city was the same, a meeting of the world's top twenty industrial nations known as the G20. World leaders met in a heavily fortified section of downtown Toronto. Behind barricades their discussions revealed a lack of consensus in regards to a means of recovery from the global recession.¹¹¹ Police officers armed in riot gear rode horses and bicycles about the streets. Vocal protestors shouted slogans of resistance while being photographed by news stations and fellow revolutionaries. A violent few broke windows and burned cars. It was estimated that by the end of the weekend over nine hundred protestors had been arrested by the police.¹¹² It would seem obvious to suggest that there were conflicting beliefs among those gathered in Toronto; however, in essence

¹¹⁰ Again, although it is not my intention to critique capitalism, it is important to note that Žižek argues that the secular "reality" of relations within capitalism must be supplemented with its inherent dialectical opposite: "the *'spiritualization' of the very material process of production.*" (11) Clearly, the dynamic nature of capitalism's *process of production* does not aim at maintaining a static structure common to all people within a particular nation. Capitalism is only interested in the production of capital; therefore, individuals are ruled not by individuals but by abstractions. These abstractions are the *spirits* of the capitalist *process of production*. Žižek warns against identifying these abstractions as merely ideological concerns: "one should never forget that behind this abstraction there are real people and natural objects on whose productive capacities and resources Capital's circulation is based, and on which it feeds like a gigantic parasite." (12) The fate of millions and millions of people, entire countries, are susceptible to these abstractions, spirits, or what Žižek skillfully terms the *'solipsistic' speculative dance of Capital.* (12) And these "spirits" engineer a most haunting form of violence: one which is incapable of being attributed to an individual or group and their "evil" intentions; this form of violence is anonymous. See Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute*, 11 – 12.

¹¹¹ Naomi Klein and Amy Goodman. 28 June 2010. http://www.democracynow.org/2010/6/28/naomi_klein_the_real_crime_scene (accessed October 18, 2012).

¹¹² Jill Mahoney and Ann Hui. 2010. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/g20-related-detentions-biggest-mass-arrests-in-canadian-history/article1621198/> (accessed June 28 2010).

this is not the case.¹¹³ In other words, the beliefs of those gathered in Toronto, from the poorest radical to the wealthiest world leader, were not in direct opposition to each other, rather, they shared a common foundation: the necessary obstacle, or abstraction, of capitalism, blocking all attendees from that which I have been referring to as True-reality.¹¹⁴

The obvious question here is how can two conflicting groups, such as the world leaders and the protestors, share a common foundation to their belief structures? Consider how on the one hand, both the protestors and the world leaders feel that reality (the way things presently *are*) is not as it should be, that there is an obstacle in the way of True-reality (the way things *should* be). Perhaps the protestors understood the obstacle to be such things as environmental policy or human rights. Perhaps the world leaders understood the obstacle to be a faltering economy or trade regulations. In both these cases, if one group could *achieve, possess and transmit*¹¹⁵ the correct knowledge (be it by means of science, economics, law, human rights or some other form of academic logic), then society could overcome the obstacle and achieve True-reality: be it economic stability, environmental stability, legal justice, or whatever. Both groups assumed there is

¹¹³ Once again, I recognize there are anomalies in each of the three groups to which I refer (the protestors, the world leaders and the police), however, in generalizing I am not taking away from the heart of my argument: that the beliefs of those gathered in Toronto were not in direct opposition to each other.

¹¹⁴ Of course there could have been exceptions (i.e. – those present who just want to cause trouble, those present in prayer) but their size in proportion to those to which I am referring here does not make them a concern for my argument.

¹¹⁵ Rowan Williams uses this language to describe the tendency in modern society to only value “scientific knowledge.” See Rowan Williams, “Trinity and Revelation,” *Modern Theology* 2:3 (1986): p. 199. And is “value” not the choice word here, for in contemporary capitalist culture everything, ideas, religion and even knowledge (because it can be possessed) become commodified. See Graham Ward, “The Commodification of Religion, or The Consummation of Capitalism,” in *Theology and the Political: The New Debate*, edited by Creston Davis, John Milbank and Slavoj Žižek (London: Duke University Press, 2005), 327 – 339.

a True-reality which should be possible if only one was to direct capital in the right way. As such, both the protestors and the leaders were operating in accordance with what Žižek describes as “a strictly *ideological* fantasy of maintaining the thrust towards productivity generated by capitalism, while getting rid of the ‘obstacles’ and antagonisms that were – as the sad experience of ‘actually existing capitalism’ demonstrates – *the only possible framework of the actual material existence of a society of permanent self-enhancing productivity.*”¹¹⁶

The basis of Žižek’s critique here comes from his understanding that for Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel the central issue of ontology is not that of reality, but rather that of appearance. This distinction is central to understanding how the logic involved in an evolutionary model of consciousness runs parallel to capitalist ideology in late modernity. Žižek argues that Hegel distinguished between the inquiry of (a) how it is possible to sift through the plethora of appearances to arrive at an underlying reality, and, (b) the mystery of how appearances are *able* to emerge.¹¹⁷ For Žižek, this distinction allowed Hegel to disregard what he interpreted as the fruitless search for a *single* unknown event to which all other events are measured relative to. This is to say, this distinction renders useless the task of speculating on the nature of primitive replicators in order to relatively measure the state of a contemporary good. Or, in the case of the protestors and the bankers, the uselessness of the task of speculating on the nature of how capital should be directed in order to obtain one’s understanding of a True-reality. Žižek argues that for Hegel, “Universality is not merely the universal core that animates a series of its

¹¹⁶ Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute*, 14 – 15.

¹¹⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2006), 29.

particular forms of appearance; it persists in the very irreducible tension, noncoincidence, between these different levels.”¹¹⁸ This noncoincidence between different forms of appearances, or representations, is in direct contrast to Dennett’s universal acid that is the evolutionary notion of the good, in which, as I described in Section 1.0, the good is founded upon the coincidence of the fact that the good memes are the also the memes that have a strong ability to replicate. Žižek insists that it is precisely this philosophy of universality, that which posits a universal abstraction to which all other ideas (or memes) are measure relative to, which maintains the capitalist order in late modernity.

Žižek utilizes Jacque Lacan’s “formulae of sexuation” to further explain this phenomenon.¹¹⁹ Lacan understands there to be two means by which one may engage the world, a masculine logic and a feminine logic. For example, Žižek argues both communism and capitalism operate within logic of the masculine side, as opposed to the feminine side, of the “formulae of sexuation” because both capitalism and communism enforce capital as the universal core necessary in order to establish their separate ideological structures. The universal core acts as an exception which constitutes the universal as transcendent universal and all other particulars are forced into the realm in which this operates. This has significant consequences, within the masculine side all that *is* must be knowable in relation to the universal core; therefore, for example, if capital is the universal core then all that *is* is that which can be known in relationship to capital. In this sense, like with the protestors and the bankers, at their root there is no difference between communism and capitalism insofar as they both understand being in relation to

¹¹⁸ Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 31.

¹¹⁹ Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham:Duke University Press, 1993), 250.

the universal core known as “capital.” The alternative to the masculine side is the feminine side; however, as Žižek maintains, the two sides are not symmetrical opposites, rather the feminine side has priority. The feminine side advocates a logic which refuses the notion of a closed system. All that *is*, only *is* insofar as it is revealed to the individual by way of the symbolic order, and because it is not everything that *is*, it is *pas-tout*. In establishing a *pas-tout*, a non-whole, there is understood to be an absence of a static exception or universal core. The *pas-tout* operates *within* the *what is* and reflects the logic of the *what is*, but society can never fully correspond to or overtake the *what is*, yet the *what is* is operative everywhere in society undermining and distorting it.¹²⁰ This distinction, between the masculine and feminine sides of the formulae of sexuation, will be essential in Section 1.12 when I engage the question of how Radical Orthodoxy addresses the logical demand that thought must posit a True-reality by which to engage the world.

1.03 Number: A closed whole

The title of the introductory chapter to Alain Badiou’s book, *Number and Numbers*, can in one sense be considered the foundational maxim for his entire philosophy: “Number Must Be Thought.”¹²¹ It is important to bear in mind that Badiou does not make this statement as a scientist, but as a philosopher. This is to say, in claiming that number must be thought Badiou is not implying that truth is that which can be empirically verified. On

¹²⁰ Adam Kotsko, *Žižek and Theology* (New York: T & T Clark, 2008), 48 – 49.

¹²¹ Alain Badiou, *Number and Numbers*, 1.

the contrary, for Badiou mathematics, the notion of number which we are historically given, dictates the ability to speak of being *qua* being: summarized in the quasi-formula, “mathematics = ontology.”¹²² Indeed, this strange condition produces a fascinating paradox, as Badiou writes, “we live in the era of number’s despotism; thought yields to the law of denumerable multiplicities; and yet [...] we have at our disposal no recent, active idea of what number is.”¹²³ However, despite having no active idea of what number is, there is a notion of number which governs our conception of all things ontological: the political, the human-sciences, cultural representations, the economy, our souls.¹²⁴ Furthermore, similarly to how Phillip Goodchild remarks “There is but a single ontological problem, ‘What is money?’”¹²⁵ Badiou argues that the dominant understanding of number in late modernity, and as such the dominant ontological structure, is dictated by capital. For Badiou, capital’s ontological oppression can be challenged by first contemplating the dominant notion of number active in our minds and then subsequently striving to challenge that very understanding. Badiou writes,

In our situation, that of Capital, the reign of number is thus the reign of the unthought slavery of numericality itself. Number, which, so it is claimed, underlies everything of value, is in actual fact a proscription against any thinking of number itself. Number operates as that obscure point where the situation concentrates its law; obscure through its being at once sovereign

¹²² Alain Badiou, *Briefings on Existence: A Short Treatise on Transitory Ontology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 59.

¹²³ Badiou, *Number and Numbers*, 1.

¹²⁴ Badiou, *Number and Numbers*, 1 – 4.

¹²⁵ Goodchild, “Capital and Kingdom,” 130.

and subtracted from all thought, and even from every investigation that orients itself toward some truth.¹²⁶

This section of my thesis addresses both the form of number Badiou understands as governing capital—“the unthought slavery of numericality itself,” what I have been calling a thinking of the One—and the form of number that Badiou understands as providing the foundation for liberation from capitalist notions of number, namely, a Cantorian understanding of number. Furthermore, I will show how the form of number governing capital is the same form of number which governs Dennett’s naturalized ontology. After doing so I am then in a position to establish the extent to which Radical Orthodoxy also operates in accordance with this understanding of number in Section 1.13.

To begin to discern Badiou’s maxim “number must be thought,” consider how in his book, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, Badiou aims to expose the axioms at work in the thought governing a contemporary ethics of difference. The idea of difference is a key concept within Badiou’s philosophical system, one which he argues will operate differently depending on our understanding of number. In clarifying such axioms Badiou believes one can to a certain extent rationally discern and ultimately decide upon the orientation of one’s thought, and more specifically, the form of number operational in how one thinks difference. Such intentions do not imply that Badiou, like Dennett, believes the mind to be precisely like that of a computer—a self-contained whole capable of being completely reprogrammed at will—rather, in discerning the foundations of how we think of a concept like difference we can engage in a process

¹²⁶ Badiou, *Number and Numbers*, 213.

where self-transformation is possible. This is to say, in investigating and subsequently processing the ideas at work in our minds we are capable of discerning truth, what Badiou will call truth-procedures.¹²⁷

To begin his investigation of the thought governing a contemporary ethics of difference, Badiou locates in Emmanuel Levinas an approach to thinking “which has thrown off its ‘logical’ chains (the principle of identity) in favour of its prophetic submission to the Law of founding alterity.”¹²⁸ This is to say, the Greek notion that “adequate action presumes an initial theoretical mastery of experience, which ensures that the action is in conformity with the rationality of being”¹²⁹ is replaced by the Jewish notion that “everything is grounded in the immediacy of an opening to the Other which disarms the reflexive subject.”¹³⁰ In this philosophical framework, presence (or experience) takes precedence over reflexivity (or, rational reflection). For Levinas, the central way in which one is capable of opening one’s-self to the presence of the Other is through the face. This does not imply that one literally sees the Other in the face of another person, rather, through the face of the Other one sees one’s-self reflected. It is one’s adherence to this process of seeing one’s-self reflected in the face which makes manifest the Other. Badiou writes: “Through his fleshy epiphany [...] is that from which I experience myself ethically as ‘pledged’ to the appearing of the Other, and subordinated in my being to this pledge.”¹³¹ In other words, to look into a face and see the potential for how things could be for me (*I could be* the one who is starving in Haiti, *I could be* the

¹²⁷ Badiou, *Being and Event* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 211.

¹²⁸ Badiou, *Ethics*, 20.

¹²⁹ Badiou, *Ethics*, 19.

¹³⁰ Badiou, *Ethics*, 19.

¹³¹ Badiou, *Ethics*, 19 – 20.

one in the earthquake zone in Japan, *I could have been* born into the political strife in Libya) is essentially to see myself reflected in that face, or more specifically it is to objectify myself. But to think according to this logic “requires that the experience of alterity be ontologically ‘guaranteed’ as the experience of a distance, or of an essential non-identity, the *traversal* of which is the ethical experience itself.”¹³² To see myself in the face of a victim (the starving child in Haiti, the homeless mother in Japan, the murdered rebel in Libya) requires me to ground my being in the Being of an Altogether-Other (or, perhaps we could say to ground my being in the Being of a transcendent god). From these observations Badiou concludes that there is a principle of alterity which governs an ethics of difference: “a pious discourse without piety.”¹³³ And in this philosophical framework, ethics becomes the new name for thought.

At this point one may ask: What is the philosophical problem with grounding my being in the being of an Altogether-Other, or, with ethics becoming the new name for thought? For Badiou the problem is that this philosophical framework breeds an ideology founded upon the concept of tolerance. Thought based in tolerance inherently demands a competition between two opposites: “between ‘tolerance’ and ‘fanaticism’, between ‘the ethics of difference’ and ‘racism’, between ‘recognition of the other’ and ‘identitarian’ [(or, ‘ontological’)] fixity.”¹³⁴ Ironically, this idea of the respect for differences reduces to a violent demand of same-ness: I respect your difference only insofar as you are guided by the central axiom, True-reality, or abstraction: “Respect my difference.” As Badiou writes, “The problem is that the ‘respect for differences’ and the

¹³² Badiou, *Ethics*, 22.

¹³³ Badiou, *Ethics*, 23.

¹³⁴ Badiou, *Ethics*, 20.

ethics of human rights do seem to define an *identity*! And that as a result, the respect for differences applies only to those differences that are reasonably consistent with this identity.”¹³⁵ This identity is something that Dennett is both very well aware and very supportive of, as evidenced by the fact that one of the goals of *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea* was to establish that “the theory of evolution leaves one perfectly satisfactory approach to morality and political philosophy, namely, traditional Western liberalism.”¹³⁶

Badiou wants to challenge the reality of this identity—that is traditional Western liberalism as the normative philosophical position—by arguing that far from being a self-sustained closed whole brought into relationship with the other via the tolerance of difference, reality is rather inherently incomplete; and furthermore, that truth is given, from nothing, in the form of an event. He argues that it is challenging contemporary conceptions of number such a feat is possible. Badiou writes

genuine thought should affirm the following principle: since differences are what there is, and since every truth is the coming-to-be of that which is not yet, so differences are then precisely what truths depose, or render insignificant. No light is shed on any concrete situation by the notion of the ‘recognition of the other’. Every modern collective configuration involves people from everywhere, who have their different ways of eating and speaking, who wear different sorts of headgear, follow different

¹³⁵ Badiou, *Ethics*, 24.

¹³⁶ Brook and Ross, “Dennett’s Position in the Intellectual World,” 9.

religions, have complex and varied relations to sexuality, prefer authority or disorder, and such is the way of the world.¹³⁷

If difference is simply what there *is*, then the task of identifying with difference is useless. In this sense the true task is not “recognizing the other” but rather “recognizing the same.”¹³⁸ Here we see the beginnings of how Badiou characterizes truth, he writes, “I have already named that in regard to which only the advent of the Same occurs: it is a *truth*. Only a truth is, as such, *indifferent to differences*. This is something we have always known, even if sophists of every age have always attempted to obscure its certainty: a truth is *the same for all*.”¹³⁹

To understand what Badiou means by a truth being “*the same for all*” and “the coming-to-be of that which is not yet,” consider what Badiou says of difference in relation to love. Badiou argues that

In today’s world it is generally thought that individuals only pursue their own self-interest. Love is an antidote to that. Provided it isn’t conceived only as an exchange of mutual favours, or isn’t calculated way in advance as a profitable investment, love really is a unique trust placed in chance. It takes us into key areas of the experience of what is difference and, essentially, leads to the idea that you can experience the world from the perspective of difference. In this respect it has universal implications: it is

¹³⁷ Badiou, *Ethics*, 27.

¹³⁸ Badiou, *Ethics*, 25.

¹³⁹ Badiou, *Ethics*, 27.

an individual experience of potential universality, and is thus central to philosophy, as Plato was the first to intuit.¹⁴⁰

What Badiou refers to here as the “perspective of difference” is radically distinct from the “respect for difference” he critiques in *Ethics*. Love asks the question, what kind of world does one see when it is experienced from the point of view of the two and not one? What is the world like when it is experienced from the point of view of difference and not identity?¹⁴¹ Not merely thinking “I could be that victim, or that victim, or that victim...” but an incomprehensible devotion to a unique and individual process of saying “yes” to an event, a radical rupture, over and over again. In Meditation 31 of *Being and Event* Badiou describes this as “a generic procedure of fidelity,”¹⁴² science operates in similar way to love, but rather than being a procedure within the individual situation, “because [love] interests no-one apart from the individuals in question,”¹⁴³ science takes place in a mixed situation, “in which the means are *individual* but the transmission and the effects concern the collective.”¹⁴⁴

It is in this sense that Dennett understands his naturalized ontology as operating in accordance with the work of Friedrich Nietzsche. (Whether or not he is right to do so is not my concern, rather my concern is only in how Dennett reads Nietzsche.) This is to say, Dennett accepts that although Nietzsche’s philosophy has individual means, the transmission of the effects from his philosophy concern Darwinian Theory in general. It is for this reason that in *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea* Dennett places Nietzsche next to

¹⁴⁰ Alain Badiou, *In Praise of Love* (London: Serpent’s Tail Limited, 2012), 17.

¹⁴¹ Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, 22

¹⁴² Badiou, *Being and Event*, 339.

¹⁴³ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 340.

¹⁴⁴ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 340.

Thomas Hobbes as the second greatest sociobiologist to have every lived.¹⁴⁵ Despite not being convinced that Nietzsche ever really read any of Darwin's work, Dennett recognizes that many aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy, in particular his notion of eternal recurrence, has resonances with Darwinism. Dennett rightly celebrates Nietzsche's criticism of the Social Darwinists working in the late nineteenth century. For the Social Darwinists, "it is 'natural' for the strong to vanquish the weak, and for the rich to exploit the poor."¹⁴⁶ Dennett argues that this is an incorrect usage of Darwinian thought because it fails to distinguish between the biological genes and the cultural memes that compose human beings. Dennett writes,

We, unlike the cells that compose us, are not on ballistic trajectories; we are *guided* missiles, capable of altering course at any point, abandoning goals, switching allegiances, forming cabals and then betraying them, and so forth. For us, it is always decision time, and because we live in a world of memes, no consideration is alien to us, or a foregone conclusion.^[147] For this reason, we are constantly faced with social opportunities and dilemmas of the sort for which game theory provides the playing field and the rules of engagement but not the solutions. Any theory of the birth of ethics is going to have to integrate culture with biology.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, 461.

¹⁴⁶ Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, 461.

¹⁴⁷ The contradiction inherent to this quote is staggering, and although it is not my intention engage in a critique of Dennett's philosophy, how can he state that there is no meme which is a "forgone conclusion" without putting his entire project into jeopardy? This is to say, if all memes are capable of disintegrating, what about the meme that is "meme theory" itself?

¹⁴⁸ Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, 460.

Dennett rightly observes how Nietzsche too was working in accordance with the idea that any theory of the birth of ethics is going to have to integrate culture with biology. He quotes from the second of the three essays that make up Nietzsche's *Genealogy*: "To breed an animal *with the right to make promises*—is not this the paradoxical task that nature has set itself in the case of man? Is it not the real problem regarding man?"¹⁴⁹ By performing an imaginative investigation of what Dennett calls "the fossil record of human culture, in the form of ancient myths, surviving religious practices, archeological clues, and so forth"¹⁵⁰ Nietzsche composed a story of early humans in transition from a world in which there were no memetic alliances to a world in which there were. It is not the kind of story that most people would find pleasant: early humans had to literally torture each other into developing a special form of memory which would be capable of keeping track of credits and debts. In this way organizations and alliances were made; cheaters were remembered and punishments were held. Again quoting Nietzsche, "Its beginnings were, like the beginnings of everything great on earth, soaked in blood thoroughly and for a long time."¹⁵¹

The formation of these early societies did not immediately generate a moral world. According to Nietzsche's story, a second transition occurs: from a pre-moral world with alliances to a moral world. In the pre-moral societies the proto-citizens had notions of good and *bad*, but not good and *evil* or right and wrong.¹⁵² Fascinatingly,

¹⁴⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche referenced in Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, 463.

¹⁵⁰ Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, 463.

¹⁵¹ Nietzsche referenced in Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, 463.

¹⁵² Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, 463.

Nietzsche speculates that the birth of morals comes when the memes¹⁵³ for good and bad in the pre-moral world actually trade places: the good memes in the pre-moral world become the evil memes and the moral world, and the bad memes in the pre-moral world become the good memes in the moral world. For example, the lust that was once a “good” thing insofar as it encourages the proto-citizen to copulate and grow the population of the society becomes an “evil” thing that must be brought under control. As described in Matthew 20: 16, “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.” Thus begins the slave revolt inspired by the priests. Nietzsche writes,

For the priests *everything* becomes more dangerous, not only cures and remedies, but also arrogance, revenge, acuteness, profligacy, love, lust to rule, virtue, disease—but it is only fair to add that it was on the soil of this *essentially dangerous* form of human existence, the priestly form, that man first became *an interesting animal*, that only here did the human soul in a higher sense acquire *depth* and become *evil*—and these are the two basic respects in which man has hitherto been superior to other beasts!¹⁵⁴

In light of this vision of reality Dennett understands that, “The task facing us is still the task that faced Hobbes and Nietzsche: *somehow* we have to have evolved into beings that can have a conscience, as Nietzsche says (1885, epigram 98), that kisses us while it hurts us.”¹⁵⁵ This point inspires Dennett to imagine things such as an “*artificial* selector of

¹⁵³ Of course, Nietzsche never uses the word “meme,” Dennett uses it interchangeably with what Nietzsche would have referred to as an “idea” in this way Dennett absorbs Nietzsche into his Badiouian “truth-procedure.”

¹⁵⁴ Nietzsche referenced in Dennett, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, 464.

¹⁵⁵ Dennett, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, 477.

altruistic people”¹⁵⁶ not unlike a dog or cattle breeder who observes the herd and notes which ones were nice, and then goes to great lengths to make sure the nice ones breed. “In due course, you ought to be able to evolve a population of nice people—supposing that a tendency to niceness could be represented somehow in the genome.”¹⁵⁷ Amidst such controversial reasoning, Dennett concludes with yet another challenging question followed by yet another brief response: “Is something sacred? Yes, say I with Nietzsche. I could not pray to it, but I can stand in affirmation of its magnificence. This world is sacred.”¹⁵⁸ Or, equivalently, the world is *One*.

In contrast to Dennett’s Nietzsche, Badiou’s reading of Nietzschean thought begins with positing the figure of Nietzsche not as a scientist, historian or philosopher, but as an anti-philosopher. For Badiou, this is a move to be celebrated, in a sense, and not deemed unbecoming, for it identifies Nietzsche’s mission to make known “an act without precedent, an act that will in fact destroy philosophy.”¹⁵⁹ Badiou believes this type of act deserves our greatest attention. Nietzsche’s central impact is not, as Dennett argues, in announcing that the world is “sacred” or a “magnificent” thing, but rather in proclaiming an act, or event, which is announced before it is produced: Nietzsche deserves our attention in that he is his “own forerunner, [his] own cock-crow through dark lanes.”¹⁶⁰ Nietzsche is the greatest kind of criminal, and it is precisely this form of criminal, the

¹⁵⁶ Dennett, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, 477.

¹⁵⁷ Dennett, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, 477.

¹⁵⁸ Dennett, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, 520.

¹⁵⁹ Alain Badiou, “Who is Nietzsche?” *Pli* 11, 2001, 1.

¹⁶⁰ Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, quoted in Alain Badiou, “Who is Nietzsche?” 1.

anti-philosopher, that is central to Badiou's project:¹⁶¹ his rethinking of number in response to the conditioning of capitalist notions of number.

But how exactly does Badiou understand Nietzsche, the anti-philosopher, as offering a different perspective of number, distinct from Dennett's Nietzsche who affirms the world is One? In fact, to the Nietzschean scholar this claim would perhaps seem ridiculous, for it could be argued that Nietzschean semiotics are so radically against the existence of static meaning that even the notion of "number" is essentially empty, but one more way of attempting to implement stasis upon the world. In the first two chapters of his book, *Nietzsche and Theology*, David Deane illustrates how "Nietzschean interpreters, while attempting to straighten Nietzschean contradiction, manifest a different understanding of sign and self than that which frames Nietzsche's texts."¹⁶² As Deane explains, the notion of contradiction by its very nature requires a set understanding of the relationship between the self and sign. Thus the moment one indicates a contradiction one is already revealing the logic by which one's philosophical framework operates. With this clever observation Deane is then capable of describing "a semiotic understanding more in keeping with that held by Nietzsche and within which his contradiction comes to function. From illustrating this understanding of the relationship between self and sign,

¹⁶¹ "Bruno Bosteels' introduction shows that this encounter with Wittgenstein is central to Badiou's overall project—and that a continuing dialogue with the exemplar of anti-philosophy is crucial for contemporary philosophy." See Alain Badiou, *Wittgenstein's Anti-Philosophy* (New York: Verso, 2011), back cover.

¹⁶² David Deane, *Nietzsche and Theology: Nietzschean Thought in Christological Anthropology* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 25

the nature of Nietzsche's self contradiction can come into clearer focus."¹⁶³ What Deane argues

is not that Nietzsche is not guilty of contradiction, but that Nietzsche's understanding of logic, and the words that structure and mediate it, is different from ours, and that we must attempt to understand Nietzschean 'contradiction' in terms of this 'Nietzschean' logic too, in order to see it in a more comprehensive perspective. This perspective, [Deane argues], is vital, as only in this perspective can we reach a truly comprehensive understanding of Nietzschean thought.¹⁶⁴

Interestingly, the exact same failure Deane locates the work of such Nietzschean scholars as Danto and Schacht (through a grueling discussion of the "signature" apropos Derrida), Badiou locates in Deleuze: "What is lost in Deleuze's strong reading is this: it is through the opacity of the proper name that *Nietzsche constructs his own category of truth*. This is indeed what assigns the vital act to its nonsensical, or invaluable, dimension. Nietzsche's last word is not sense, but the invaluable."¹⁶⁵

But while Deane rightly notices that Nietzsche's interpreters fail to straighten Nietzsche's philosophy because operating within their own philosophical frameworks (founded upon the concept of non-contraction) they fall victim to Nietzschean critique of systems in general, Deane fails to acknowledge that Nietzsche's ontology—as according to Badiou any ontology must—*posits its very own presupposition into the nature of number*, namely, it posits the existence of the One only to then proclaim a future event

¹⁶³ Deane, *Nietzsche and Theology*, 25

¹⁶⁴ Deane, *Nietzsche and Theology*, 26.

¹⁶⁵ Badiou, "Who is Nietzsche?" 2.

which will “destroy philosophy” or destroy this particular One. To understand what I mean by this consider how for Badiou, “[to] enter into Nietzsche, one must [...] focus on the point where evaluation, values, and all sense all come to falter in the trial posed by the act. Thus where it is no longer a question of values or of sense, but of what actively surpasses them, what philosophy has always named ‘truth’.”¹⁶⁶ Nietzsche is not attempting to overcome anything. The anti-philosophical act is not an overcoming, rather the act is an event. An event which in its opacity is an absolute break without program or concept, but nonetheless known by the proper name, “Nietzsche.”¹⁶⁷ Badiou references two terrifying quotes: “I am strong enough to break up the history of man in two. (Letter to Strindberg of the 8th of December 1888)” and “I conceive the philosopher as a terrifying explosive that puts the entire world in danger. (Ecce Homo)”¹⁶⁸ But interestingly, in proclaiming the event prior to its arrival, Nietzsche becomes caught in a circle, an oscillation in which the announcement of the event (of which Badiou provides numerous examples¹⁶⁹) becomes indiscernible from the event itself. “Since [this circle] does not have the event as its condition, since it grasps it—or claims to grasp it—in the act of thought itself, it cannot discriminate between reality and its announcement.”¹⁷⁰ And this is where Badiou locates Nietzsche’s madness: Nietzsche “must come to think of himself as the creator of the same world in which he makes his silent declaration, and in which nothing proves the existence of a break in two. That in some way he is on both sides; that he is the name, not only of what announces the event, not only the name of the

¹⁶⁶ Badiou, “Who is Nietzsche?” 3.

¹⁶⁷ Badiou, “Who is Nietzsche?” 3.

¹⁶⁸ Badiou, “Who is Nietzsche?” 4.

¹⁶⁹ Badiou, “Who is Nietzsche?” 6 – 7.

¹⁷⁰ Badiou, “Who is Nietzsche?” 7.

rupture, but ultimately the name of the world itself.”¹⁷¹ The great anti-philosopher is left to declare that he, far from being “seized by its triumphal appearance”¹⁷², will be the one to create this *other* world: even though he would prefer to remain a professor in Basel, Nietzsche must in one sense become God.¹⁷³ It is precisely this madness which discloses the nature of the event to be one of chance and risk, not carefully rationalized decision as it is for Nietzsche.

This discussion suggests apropos Badiou that Nietzsche perhaps most dramatically demonstrates his need for a notion of number in the concept of his becoming a God, the *Übermensch*. From the Badiouian perspective the *Übermensch* represents the point from which we move from nothing to something, what Badiou will write in the particular case as $0 \rightarrow 1$, the break from one world to another. For Nietzsche, from the nothing-ness of fooling one’s-self with static notions of the world, to a point where one can overcome the otherworldliness of Christianity, where one can overcome the death of God: Nietzsche’s goal for humanity itself. But as Badiou shows throughout his systematic thought (and in *Being and Event* in particular) this is precisely the logic of ontology as it manifests itself throughout history: what Badiou, apropos Cantor, will write in the general sense as $\emptyset \rightarrow \omega$. Nietzsche, who arguably went mad because of his circular entrapment within this logic¹⁷⁴ (that is, announcing the event prior to its arrival), far from dismantling mathematics, remains confined by its conditions: number must be thought.

¹⁷¹ Badiou, “Who is Nietzsche?” 8.

¹⁷² Badiou, “Who is Nietzsche?” 9.

¹⁷³ Badiou, “Who is Nietzsche?” 8.

¹⁷⁴ Or, perhaps syphilis. See R. J. Hollingdale, *Nietzsche: The Man and His Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 30 – 31.

To further understand how Badiou's notion of the event and $\emptyset \rightarrow \omega$ challenges the modern conception of number under capitalism, and the ontological consequences therein, consider how both Dennett's philosophy and at least Dennett's reading of Nietzsche's philosophy assume a notion of number, of One-ness, which is always-already within its framework. Simply put, Dennett and Nietzsche's naturalized ontology requires a notion of the infinite which considered from a set theoretical point of view is posited as a "One" or a "whole"; for example, the set of natural numbers, $\{1, 2, 3, \dots\}$, although infinite, composes a closed set, \mathbb{N} . Again, this is in spite of the fact that Nietzsche's philosophy claims to dismantle the notion of number in general. As David Deane has stated, for Nietzsche "number cannot re-present anything other than the naming of an object or space within the conceptual framework of the namer, and, as such, presents only itself."¹⁷⁵ The nature of Nietzsche's critique of number is situated amongst a plurality of related critiques—for example, his critique of Christianity or his critique of aesthetics—all of which aim at dismantling any hopes of attempting to construct a static notion of what is real. This is because for Nietzsche, to attach signifiers to the world is to deny the True reality of the world because the world is by nature a dynamic entity and as such is constantly in flux in accordance with the will-to-power. To apply stasis to the world is to denigrate the world. Such thought is operating in accordance with what Badiou refers to as the "Kantian question" and its response; that is, to ask "How is pure mathematics possible?" and then to respond, "Thanks to the transcendental subject."¹⁷⁶ This is to say, number only *is* insofar as the subject declares it to be; outside the transcendental subject

¹⁷⁵ David Deane, "Alain Badiou's Parodic Sacramentality of Numbers" (paper presented at the "What is Life?: Theology, Science and Philosophy" conference, Krakow, Poland, June, 2011).

¹⁷⁶ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 6.

who posits its existence, number *is not*. Here Nietzschean thought appears to diverge from Dennett's thought because Dennett, unlike Nietzsche, believes that number is in itself a constant of that which is real. He writes, "It is worth bearing in mind that mathematics and physics are the same throughout the entire universe, discoverable in principle by aliens (if such there be) no matter what their social class, political predilections, gender (if they have genders!) or peccadilloes."¹⁷⁷ Interestingly however, although on the surface Dennett and Nietzsche seem to be in disagreement about the nature of number, both of their systems—that is, eternal recurrence and an evolutionary model of consciousness—require the same understanding of number, the One, in order to function.

To understand how an understanding of number as a form of the One operates in both Dennett's and Nietzsche's naturalized ontologies (even if Nietzsche, as anti-philosopher, is announcing its completion), consider the paradox in Nietzsche's philosophy, that is, how he says number does not exist and yet he requires number to make such a statement. Nietzsche's critique of number begins by assuming that the process of counting is accomplished by attaching a signifier to a thing: for example, a kettle, a cup and a saucer can be "counted" and consequently assigned the signifier "3." For Nietzsche, and perhaps rightfully so, this process fails to acknowledge the dynamic and constantly competing nature of the world. Furthermore, it is a process that Nietzsche sees as not only wrong, but detrimental to our relationship with the real world. To attach "3" to a grouping of a kettle, a cup and a saucer is meaningless because the signifier "3" does not re-present anything other than the naming of the kettle, cup and saucer within

¹⁷⁷ Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, 494.

the mind of namer who named it “3.” The namer could have equally named it “blop” and if this namer ever saw a monkey, a dog and a fish, she or he could think or say “blop.” If I heard the namer say “blop,” the signifier would be meaningless to me, but to her it would be a way of re-presenting the world in a static form. In Nietzsche’s philosophical system, humans construct a set of signifiers (a move which separates them from what he would call “proto-humans”) which they can then attach to things, {kettle, cup, saucer, apple, monkey, booga boo, blop, ... }, and then subsequently categorize these signifiers. The categorization of these signifiers on the part of the namer defines things like the namer’s Morals, Reason, Aesthetics, Values and Number. For example, person X, considering himself a Christian, constructs a set of signifiers for Good-ness, Good = {cheek turning, giving to the poor, being nice to his wife when she is annoying, loving his son even when he is awake at 4 in the morning, ... }, which he attaches to things of the world. In the same way the bird participates in bird-ness if it does {x, y, z, ... } the person, in X’s view, participates in good-ness if it does {a, b, c, ... }.¹⁷⁸ For Nietzsche, good-ness is determined by means of some axiomatic function (some mental process) and this function only works for certain static elements/signifiers of a special set called the “Good”, Good = {cheek turning, giving to the poor, ... }. Number, the One, for Nietzsche must work in the same way. For example, X, considering himself a mathematician, constructs a set of signifiers for Number-ness, N = {1, 2, 3, ... }, which allow him to make statements like, “2 + 1 = 3”. But, X can only make that statement because he

¹⁷⁸ It is important to note that this is a notion that would have been foreign to someone like Thomas Aquinas, for person X doesn’t arbitrate the Good, God alone is Good. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica Prima Pars, Question 5 Articles 1 – 6*, accessed October 24, 2012, <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1005.htm>.

decides (along with all the others who consent to do the same) to call the kettle, cup and saucer by the arbitrary symbol, “3”. Apart from X’s (and those who consent to do the same) choice to capture the image of the cup, saucer and kettle, “3” is meaningless. Or as Deane writes, “Numbers for Nietzsche represent a language game which has a coherence and absolute functioning within its own terms, the conceptual realm of mathematics, but not outside of it. A number, for Nietzsche, is a term which represents nothing more than the placement of an entity within a preconceived set of rules, the information it transfers about the nature of the object is limited to its functioning within such a linguistic framework.”¹⁷⁹

However, from a Badiouian perspective, Nietzsche, far from dismantling the notion of number, is in fact demonstrating his strict adherence to a specific understanding of the infinite as a closed whole. To understand what I mean by this, let us consider an example of number counter to what Nietzsche must utilize to describe the world, to construct his ontology (that which is central to Badiou’s vision of the history of ontology, from Plato to Heidegger as manifestations of $\emptyset \rightarrow \omega$). Badiou’s hero, Georg Cantor, said we can also count (in a sense) by putting things into one-to-one ratios: for example, if there are a bunch of cups on a table, and a saucer for each one, we do not know how many there are numerically, but we do know there is the same amount of both cups and saucers. Thinking of things in terms of one-to-one ratios as opposed to counting in a one-by-one manner (ie., a cup, a saucer and a kettle are “3”) ends up with some pretty strange results when we no longer consider finite sets (ie. the set of things I see on the table, {cup, saucer, kettle}) and start thinking about infinite sets (like the set of natural

¹⁷⁹ Deane, *Nietzsche and Theology*, 9.

numbers, $N = \{1, 2, 3, \dots\}$). For example, there are as infinitely many odd numbers as there are natural numbers. At first this does not seem to make sense, one would think that there are twice as many natural numbers as there are odd numbers (every second one!) but if you put them into one-to-one ratios, they are the same. Cantor will say they share the same “cardinality”, that is the number of elements in the set, for example the cardinal number of {cup, saucer, kettle} is, as I have discussed at length above, called “3.” There are also as infinitely many rational numbers (any number that can be written as a fraction with integer values in both the numerator and the denominator) as there are natural numbers, because they too (like the odd numbers and the natural numbers) can be put into a one-to-one ratio. But, the set of real numbers (both rational and irrational numbers, numbers that cannot be written as fractions with integer values in both the numerator and the denominator, for example e , π , ϕ , $\sqrt{2}$, $\log_2 3$...) between 0 and 1 cannot be put into a one-to-one ratio with the natural numbers, they do not have the same “cardinality.”¹⁸⁰

There are more real numbers between zero and one than natural numbers, despite both sets being infinite. Now, of course, one may say that from a Nietzschean perspective that calling this new method of counting “cardinality” just proves Nietzsche’s point that “that number cannot re-present anything other than the naming of an object or space within the conceptual framework of the namer, and, as such, presents only itself,”¹⁸¹ but the point is not that there is just a new signifier which we use for number, *but that to do any “ontology” we need to have some concept of number*—whether we are aware of it or not.

¹⁸⁰ Mary Tiles, *The Philosophy of Set Theory: An Historical Introduction to Cantor’s Paradise* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1989), 95 – 117.

¹⁸¹ David Deane, “Alain Badiou’s Parodic Sacramentality of Numbers.” Paper presented at the “What is Life?: Theology, Science and Philosophy” conference, Krakow, Poland, June, 2011.

As Badiou proclaims, number must be thought.¹⁸² To think in this way is counter intuitive because, as I identified above, Nietzsche's philosophy first asks, "How is pure mathematics possible?" and then respond by thinking, "Because of the transcendental subject." However, Badiou, recognizing the necessity of number in ontological statements in general, turns this question upside down by asking, "Pure mathematics being the science of being, how is a subject possible?"¹⁸³ Far from being something that deceives us from seeing the truth of the will-to-power, number is always operative in the subject, and yet at the same time it is never One, never complete. We can count that which is One (Badiou will call this a situation, the count-as-one), indeed we must given that we can never not count, but this means of counting is never All, never One. It is precisely this paradox, this bizarre and paradoxical form of excess, which fuels Badiou's ontological thought.

Badiou, opting for a Cantorian notion of number puts together $\emptyset \rightarrow \omega$, from which he can point to Nietzsche and see how he is stuck announcing the event before its arrival. For Nietzsche to say number is a concept-less submission relative to the one who proclaims that system, maybe he is right, but to make such an ontological statement (as we learn from set theory and in particular Badiou's reading of set theory) Nietzsche must already have a sense of what number *is*. Thus the paradox, there is no number, but to make this case I need a concept of number. Nietzschean scholars such as Deane may critique the idea that Nietzsche, without knowing it, has a stable notion of number the same way he critiqued Danto and Schacht's notion that Nietzsche has a stable notion of

¹⁸² Badiou, *Number and Numbers*, 1.

¹⁸³ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 6.

nihilism that he then proceeds to utilize in any text which bears (or perhaps even does not bear) the signature, “Nietzsche.”¹⁸⁴ In the case of a static “nihilism” to be found in Nietzsche, Deane, via Derrida, quite rightly (as I discussed at length above) illustrates “that the presupposition of a unified self called ‘Nietzsche’, which does thinking and is re-presented through an extenuation of the self Nietzsche in the texts bearing the signature ‘Nietzsche’, is never shared by Nietzsche himself.”¹⁸⁵ But the same argument will not hold for Nietzsche’s notion of number, his adherence to the One, precisely because it is not Nietzsche’s number, it is the infinity he inherited. If one is capable of recognizing that indeed Nietzsche uses a notion of the One to construct his ontology, then it follows that one will also recognize that the infinity which Nietzsche utilizes for his ontology is nothing more than the mathematics available to him at his time in history. This is why Badiou argues in the introduction to *Being and Event* that if one is really dedicated to forming a new ontology one should learn all available mathematics and then *perhaps* an event will occur from which a new mathematics arises which one could then utilize to speak of being in a new way (once again, the stress is on *perhaps* or *contingency*). Or, as in the case of Badiou, find an old mathematical event which has not been properly mined just yet: ie. Cantor. In the same vein, if Badiou were to engage Dennett (which I am confident he would never do because in it seems that Dennett is simply a failed Nietzschean in the sense that he ascribes to the tenets of eternal recurrence and the will-to-power, but for whatever reason does not take this philosophy to its proper end—that is, there is no truth, God is dead—rather he opts for a notion of

¹⁸⁴ Deane, *Nietzsche and Theology*, 31.

¹⁸⁵ Deane, *Nietzsche and Theology*, 32.

altruism, a philosophy of the One) he could make the exact same critique of his understanding of number. Dennett says person X does a good act if it fits the Moral First Aid Manual, which we could call set MFAM = {has food to eat, has shelter, ... }. And here again I am forced to repeat Badiou's maxim, number must be thought.

And here we arrive at a crucial point in Badiou's thought: this notion of number, this thinking of the One, which I have shown to be found in the ontology of Nietzsche and Dennett, *is precisely the notion of number that capitalism requires*. Under the rule of capital we must count, and count in a very specific way. As Badiou writes,

The ideology of modern parliamentary societies, if they have one, is not humanism, law, or the subject. It is number, the countable, countability. Every citizen is expected to be cognisant of foreign trade figures, of the flexibility of the exchange rate, of fluctuations in stock prices. These figures are presented as the real to which other figures refer: governmental figures, votes and opinion polls. Our so-called 'situation' is the intersection of economic numericality and the numericality of opinion.¹⁸⁶

The unquestioned notion of number underlying the structure of such contemporary ontologies as Dennett's evolutionary model of consciousness and Nietzsche's philosophy of eternal recurrence, the One, is the same as that which underlies capitalist logics. Inherent to such logics are the two elements I teased out of Dennett's philosophy in Section 1.01 and 1.02 of this thesis, that is, (1) Western liberal democracy as a "natural" progression, and (2) the necessity of positing an abstraction by which to engage with real world societal relations. And it is because of contemporary culture's "unthought slavery"

¹⁸⁶ Badiou, *Number and Numbers*, 3.

to this structure that Badiou asks at the beginning of *Number and Numbers*, “isn’t another idea of number necessary?”¹⁸⁷ And why he then proceeds, in chapters 7 through 18, to construct a rogue ontology based on Cantor’s insights into mathematics. (Chapters 1 through 6 are a brief history of the understanding of number beginning with Greek understandings and ending with Cantor.) Perhaps Badiou constructs a faulty or even failed ontological structure in *Number and Numbers*, but such is not the point. The point is that if one takes his foundational maxim seriously, that is “number must be thought”, which I have argued one must, Cantor’s insights demonstrate that a new understanding of being is possible, regardless of what the exact details of such an ontology would look like; from the mystical to the philosophical. To challenge the dominant form of number active in one’s mind is to rage against one’s adherence to capitalist ways of being, against what Žižek describes, apropos Lacan, as the “point of apocalypse [..., the] saturation of the Symbolic by the Real of *jouissance*,” or “the full scientific naturalization of the human mind.”¹⁸⁸

To understand what shape Badiou’s ontology takes one must consider how Badiou thinks of nothingness, and in particular, the relationship of nothingness to philosophical thought. In a lecture entitled “Beyond Positivism and Nihilism” delivered at the European Graduate School in 2010, Badiou spoke about the state of knowledge in contemporary philosophy.¹⁸⁹ He began his lecture by appealing to Socrates’ famous statement, “I know one thing, I know nothing.” Socrates’ statement is ironic, of course,

¹⁸⁷ Badiou, *Number and Numbers*, 4.

¹⁸⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 193.

¹⁸⁹ “Beyond Positivism and Nihilism” 2010, video clip, accessed October 21, 2012, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=i_kvL1Sg6ms.

because it equates something with nothing; however, Badiou suggests that the tradition of philosophy is somehow about this paradox, that nothing is the unique thing that we can know. This paradoxical equating—of nothing and something—reveals that philosophy is interested in the great question of nothingness, the question of the existence of negativity. If one can accept this line of reasoning, then a number of questions follow: is it possible to know something that does not exist? If there is something that does not exist, what is our relationship to it? From contemplating such questions Badiou comes to accept that philosophy in general is concerned with the difference (albeit a very obscure difference) between “to be” and “to exist.”¹⁹⁰ And furthermore, that the distance between “to be” and “to exist” is precisely the difference between something and nothing, being and nothingness. It is significant to note that this exact point will be raised again in Section 1.13 when considering Radically Orthodox responses to contemporary ontology, but viewed from a Thomistic perspective.

As stated in the Introduction to this thesis, Badiou understands there to be two main opponents to philosophy: positivism and nihilism. He names positivism the affirmation that there exists only knowledge: what exists is only in the form of objectivity and therefore the true form of knowledge is science. The positivist, like Dennett, must say that philosophy is a science or it does not exist. As such, Badiou presents the following question to the positivist: “From which point of view are you saying that that sort of process is science and that that sort of process is not science.” If all knowledge is science, then the knowledge of what science *is* is also a science—but a science of

¹⁹⁰ A difference, it is worth mentioning, that Thomas Aquinas is also very interested in. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica Prima Pars, Question 3 Article 4*, accessed October 24, 2012, <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1003.htm>.

sciences does not really exist in the sense that science determines *is*-ness. Badiou argues one must discern what the difference is between the being of science and the existence of science or else one succumbs to the failures the positivist makes in having always-already assumed the distance between “to be” and “to exist.” Science says truth exists if it follows certain rules, for example if a phenomenon is repeatable and quantifiable. In this sense science is capable of constructing a potentially infinite set of truths. This set could be represented as, $T = \{F = ma, F = G(m_1 \cdot m_2)/r^2, a_R = v^2/r, \text{ cell structure, the periodic table, ...}\}$. Because set T adheres to certain rules, science as a field of knowledge says set T is true, but paradoxically the rules of science do not belong in the set T. The scientist must first assume the *being* of set T in order to establish the *existence* of its truths.

In contrast to the positivist’s position, the philosopher cannot begin by saying anything about being as such, because being is not a knowledge. Knowledge begins and continues, it is transmitted in stages as in physics, mathematics, chemistry, sociology, history, etc. Philosophy refuses this position by always beginning; and as such it assumes its past as a sort of successive beginnings. If philosophy’s past is composed of beginnings, then given that it does not continue, the beginning of philosophy is a very important question (as I examined in relation to Badiou’s reading of Nietzschean thought). Badiou argues that philosophers do not, like Dennett say, “I now know this, so let’s proceed from here.” On the contrary, like Nietzsche they say, “I begin...” then they give new interpretations of the past (however, and as Badiou observes as unfortunate for Nietzsche, their beginning stems from an event that has already been). As a scientist one can state the beginning of an evolutionary model of consciousness or a Newtonian law of

physics, and build upon it, but such a move is different than philosophy, for philosophy is the beginning of a new world in a sense. It begins something, but, what is this beginning?

Badiou argues that if philosophy does not begin by an object, because it is not in the field of knowledge, then philosophy must begin by negativity: one must begin, like Socrates, in nothing-ness. Beginning in nothing-ness implies a form of subjective experience common to all philosophy. Of course the nature of this experience may differ between individuals (Badiou offers Kierkegaard and Heidegger as examples) but the key is that this experience is something that happens. For Badiou, it is in the possibility of nothingness that one experiences the possibility of the complete non-sense of life; and one is never the same after this experience, one is transformed. If philosophy is not a knowledge, it is precisely because the object of philosophy is not a thing, but rather, because it is this form of subjective experience. And consequently, the existence of philosophy is the possibility that something *is* which does not *exist*. As such, philosophy does not begin in books (although, of course, Badiou acknowledges that one must read books), or in a rational decision, rather it begins in experience. In this sense Badiou sees in Descartes' radical doubt, a transformative experience that allows him to move from nothing to something, as a move which gives certainty to his existence. This movement is what Badiou understands as the universal philosophical experience, and it is this universal philosophical experience which Badiou argues as the proper structure for our understanding of number (apropos Cantor).

At this point, one must note that nihilism, for Badiou, is when one cannot go beyond the experience of negativity: or, in Cartesian language, when one cannot get beyond the doubt without God. Nihilism is the reverse of positivism (what Badiou

defines as thinking without the experience of negativity), it is the conviction that there is indeed something that is not knowledge; however, it simultaneously maintains that knowledge is not serious. For the true nihilist, what is important is subjective experience, a point which is in common with philosophy—to admit that we must begin with a radically subjective experience—but nihilism insists that this position of negativity cannot be interrupted, we stay in the experience of negativity. The subject can only exist in nothing-ness itself. Interestingly, however, without the experience of nihilism, there is no philosophy. Without this experience, philosophy is academic, or reducible to a knowledge. Philosophy is the idea that we can go beyond nihilism: there exists truth, we can understand the difference between being and existence. And in this sense, although negativity is the beginning of philosophy, the great question of philosophy is affirmation. The beginning is a rupture with the positivist position, but the great question is a rupture with nihilism.

Badiou believes that in every great philosophy you find this “double fight”: between nothing-ness and affirmation of some-thing. Using the metaphor of music (Badiou argues that music also takes part in this “double fight” of philosophy because it first fights against the silence, only to return to it), Badiou challenges his students, to find the “tonality” of the nihilism in the philosophical writings with which they engage: where is the nihilism of Descartes? Kierkegaard? Heidegger? But it is a double tonality, so Badiou also challenges his students to find the other tonality, the affirmative position, the one that came from this nihilism. He argues all philosophy must be read from this dialectical position. For example, Badiou points out that Kant begins with negativity in saying, all that we can say about God in the affirmative is imaginary or false, we cannot

know the real being: this is the first fundamental affirmation of Kant. Therefore the first experience of Kant is not positive, it is negative. But, only in beginning in negativity can Kant transform and consequently construct his positive arrangement of the real (albeit an incorrect arrangement). And most importantly, this challenge is a challenge to modern conceptions of number, of One-ness, and the experiences that lie therein. Badiou summarizes this as $0 \rightarrow 1$, a specific case of moving from nothing to something, and $\emptyset \rightarrow \omega$, that which is ontology in general. Thus to do as Badiou asks is to seek an alternative understanding of number to that which is dictated by the contemporary context: that of capital. From this perspective, the philosophical position of Dennett, the protestors (the Occupiers), the political leaders and the bankers are all a case of $0 \rightarrow 1$. Badiou will claim that theology, and thus Christianity, is a specific case, $0 \rightarrow 1$. But, is Badiou right? Is even Christianity a philosophy of the One, even if it is “the foundation of universalism”¹⁹¹? It is to this question to which I turn in Section 1.1 of this thesis.

¹⁹¹ Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2003).

1.1 Thinking the One: A Theological Example

In this section I examine the extent to which the theological movement known as Radical Orthodoxy is operating in accordance with the Badiouian category of a thinking of the One. Putting aside the wide range and depth of ideas found in Radical Orthodoxy, the movement is a good contemporary theological example to engage because it has earned a fair amount of attention, both positive and negative, since its inception in the early nineties. Perhaps the most popular theorist to engage Radical Orthodoxy on a critical level has been the immensely famous Slovenian philosopher and cultural critique, Slavoj Žižek.¹⁹² Of the various engagements Žižek has made with Radical Orthodox theologians,¹⁹³ one notable contribution is his debate with John Milbank in *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* In this text, Žižek, acting as an atheist, rightly sees an opportunity to engage in debate with a theist which does not result in the same form of theist/atheist debates made popular by the likes of Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris and the late Christopher Hitchens. Creston Davis describes such main stream debates as “limited and not very intellectually significant. [They are] more an exercise in ideological (mis)interpretation of the same premises than a real debate, because [they

¹⁹² For example, Žižek has been described as one of “the most widely read living thinkers in Anglophone continental philosophy today.” See Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek and Graham Harman (eds.), *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism* (Melbourne: re.press, 2011), 3.

¹⁹³ For example see John Milbank, Slavoj Žižek, and Creston Davis (eds.), *Paul’s New Moment: Continental Philosophy and the Future of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2010), Creston Davis, John Milbank and Slavoj Žižek (eds.) *Theology and the Political: The New Debate* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), Slavoj Žižek and Boris Gunjević, *God In Pain: Inversions of Apocalypse* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2012), and Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009).

fail] to risk forgoing the very existence of what both sides presuppose.”¹⁹⁴ In contrast Davis correctly describes the conversation between Milbank and Žižek as taking “place on an entirely different plane, as they are not only concerned with how reason (*Logos-Word*) connects up and distinguishes between different concepts, but also—and perhaps more importantly—they interrogate the very foundation of reason as such, and help stage a theology that resists global capitalism.”¹⁹⁵ It is precisely the extent to which Radical Orthodoxy is capable of staging such a theology that is my interest in this section of my thesis.

Although composed of many different theologians with numerous unique interests,¹⁹⁶ in general it can be said that as a movement Radical Orthodoxy offers a re-reading of history in an attempt to do what Henri DeLubac calls “absorption,” or, what John Milbank will refer to as “out-narration.”¹⁹⁷ Milbank describes his motivations to out-narrate as being fueled by a drive to confront to the rise of a secular liberal autonomy in the West, particularly since the end of the Second World War.¹⁹⁸ However, out-narration does not aim to counter the rise of secular reason with a new and secure theological rationality which is resistant to secular reasoning in late modernity; rather, it aims to trace the history of how the problems of modernity came to function and in doing so to show how these are not problems outside of theology but within it. In doing so, Milbank and the Radical Orthodox movement in general can outnarrate the problems they

¹⁹⁴ Milbank and Žižek, *The Monstrosity of Christ*, 10.

¹⁹⁵ Milbank and Žižek, *The Monstrosity of Christ*, 10.

¹⁹⁶ See James K. A. Smith with Shannon Schutt Nason, “Radical Orthodoxy: A Select Bibliography,” accessed October 24, 2012, <http://www.calvin.edu/~jks4/ro/robib.pdf>.

¹⁹⁷ D. Stephen Long, *Speaking of God: Theology, Language and Truth* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 56.

¹⁹⁸ John Milbank, “Theologians in Conversation: Radical Orthodoxy,” 2012, video clip, accessed October 21, 2012, YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LRemJU5mTPc>.

locate in late modernity by showing how these problems can be viewed under a different aspect in a similar way to how DeLubac aimed to “absorb” such problems.¹⁹⁹ As a result, the same language used in late modernity is illuminated by theology; as Radically Orthodox theologian D. Stephen Long describes, not in the form of “some special privileged epistemology, but [in] a way of recognizing a depth to our everyday natural vision that need not conflict with that vision.”²⁰⁰ This illumination presents humanity with the struggle of wrestling with a mystery of which one cannot know and it is within this human condition in which reality is made manifest. In this way, the concept of absorption or outnarration is central to the theological project of Radical Orthodoxy in that it hopes that by telling a more beautiful story it can respond to the banality fabricated by what Milbank refers to as the “bastard dualisms” of modernity.²⁰¹ In telling a better story than that of modernity, humanity can address the otherness of God while acknowledging the reality of its being in the world. This is to say, humanity can open itself up to the love of God by His gift of his only Son through the power of the Holy Spirit, and only then can the world become illuminated in relationship with the reality of the Triune God.

Before proceeding with my analysis I would like to note that in the same way I was not restricted to choosing Daniel Dennett’s philosophy as a means of presenting a positivist discourse acting in accordance with the Badiouian category of a thinking of the

¹⁹⁹ Henri DeLubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), xii.

²⁰⁰ Long, *Speaking of God*, 58.

²⁰¹ John Milbank, Graham Ward and Catherine Pickstock, “Suspending the Material: The Turn of Radical Orthodoxy,” in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, edited by John Milbank, Graham Ward and Catherine Pickstock (New York: Routledge, 1999), 2.

One, I fully recognize that I am not restricted to choosing the work of Radical Orthodoxy as a means of addressing the extent to which theology adheres to the same logics as Dennett's philosophy. For example, instead of Radical Orthodoxy, I could have addressed the turn to negative theology amongst such writers as J. D. Caputo. J. Aaron Simmons has used Caputo as an example when arguing that the "genuinely important negative theological trajectory in much of postmodern/continental/deconstructive philosophy of religion has led to its own problematic dogmatism."²⁰² Simmons correctly understands that "Although Caputo does claim that he offers 'no final opinion' about God 'as an entitative issue' (2006, 10), his account of the 'strong theology,' to which he is so strenuously opposed, ends up looking a lot like any perspective that understands God as a personal being."²⁰³ Does the dogmatism that Simmons locates in the recent negative theology employ the same logics at work in Dennett's philosophy? Does negative theology assume the notion of number, that of the One, implicit to modernity? I believe that such questions deserve attention, however, they are also well beyond the scope of this thesis.

²⁰² J. Aaron Simmons. August 27, 2012.

<http://theotherjournal.com/churchandpomo/2012/08/27/postmodern-kataphaticism/> (accessed on October 24, 2012).

²⁰³ J. Aaron Simmons. August 27, 2012.

<http://theotherjournal.com/churchandpomo/2012/08/27/postmodern-kataphaticism/>. Accessed on October 24, 2012.

1.11 (De-) Evolutionary progression

To begin my investigation into how Radical Orthodoxy represents an example of a Badiouian thinking of the One in this section I address the logical element described in Section 1.01, that is, how both Western liberal democratic capitalism and an evolutionary model of consciousness need to be understood as natural progressions. I start by describing Michael Foucault's notion of historical ontologies from his essay, "What is Enlightenment?" Here I distinguish between thinking of modernity as an attitude as opposed to a period of history. Such a distinction makes it clearer as to how theological re-readings of history, such as that made by Radical Orthodoxy, present evolutionary discourses if they advance a view of a period in history when things were "better" and then went awry, or a "before" things got disoriented: an outlook which Slavoj Žižek perhaps unflatteringly refers to as "nostalgia."²⁰⁴ I then establish how this outlook is equivalent to the element of capitalist logic I identified in Daniel Dennett's philosophy,²⁰⁵ this is, of course, in the sense that Radical Orthodoxy offers the obverse side to Dennett's evolutionary model of consciousness: a de-evolutionary discourse operating in a similar way to which Žižek describes communism as simply the obverse side of capitalism.²⁰⁶

In his essay, "What is Enlightenment?" Michael Foucault suggests that we view modernity not as a period of history, but rather an attitude or a contemporary mode of

²⁰⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 111 – 114.

²⁰⁵ See Section 1.02 of this thesis.

²⁰⁶ Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute*, 18.

relating to reality.²⁰⁷ This mode of relationship is a way of thinking and feeling and furthermore, for the purposes of this thesis, “a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task.”²⁰⁸ The task which Foucault refers to here is the attempt within the contemporary context, what I have been referring to as late modernity, to distinguish oneself from selves in other periods of history. The time period which Radical Orthodoxy aims to distinguish the contemporary time period from is “the pre-modern” or perhaps more specifically, a Thomistic or an Augustinian period.²⁰⁹ Foucault argues that “rather than seeking to distinguish the ‘modern era’ from the ‘premodern’ or ‘postmodern,’ [...] it would be more useful to try to find out how the attitude of modernity, ever since its formation, has found itself struggling with attitudes of ‘countermodernity.’”²¹⁰ As such, Foucault claims that modernity is not only a form of relationship with the present, in distinction from the past, but in addition it is a “mode of relationship that has to be established with oneself. The deliberate attitude of modernity is tied to an indispensable asceticism. To be modern is not to accept oneself as one is in the flux of the passing moments; it is to take oneself as object of a complex and difficult elaboration.”²¹¹ As I explained in Section 1.0 of this thesis, in Dennett’s terms this is to say modern man is nothing more than a complex system of memes all competing for space in a brain acting as a self-sufficient closed whole that can be rewritten like the hard drive of a computer. This “man” can write a

²⁰⁷ Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment,” in *The Foucault Reader* edited by Paul Rabinow (United States of America: Vintage, 1984), 37.

²⁰⁸ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment,” 39.

²⁰⁹ Milbank, Ward and Pickstock, “Suspending the Material,” 17.

²¹⁰ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment,” 39.

²¹¹ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment,” 41.

“Moral First Aid Manual” and determine what memes should stay in the system as “conversation-stoppers.” In terms of this description Foucault rightly observes that modern man “is not the man who goes off to discover himself, his secrets and his hidden truth; he is the man who tries to invent himself. This modernity does not ‘liberate man in his own being’; it compels him to face the task of producing himself.”²¹² Such is the state of philosophical thought in late modernity: “one that simultaneously problematizes man's relation to the present, man's historical mode of being, and the constitution of the self as an autonomous subject. And such is the attitude of man: a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era.”²¹³

This contemporary attitude results in what Foucault refers to as the “blackmail”²¹⁴ of the Enlightenment. This blackmail defines a certain manner of philosophizing, a mode of reflective relation to the present. Thus, in the contemporary context philosophy is faced with a choice:

you either accept the Enlightenment and remain within the tradition of its rationalism (this is considered a positive term by some and used by others, on the contrary, as a reproach); or else you criticize the Enlightenment and then try to escape from its principles of rationality (which may be seen once again as good or bad). [...] We must try to proceed with the analysis of ourselves as beings who are historically determined, to a certain extent, by the Enlightenment.²¹⁵

²¹² Foucault, “What is Enlightenment,” 42.

²¹³ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment,” 42.

²¹⁴ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment,” 43.

²¹⁵ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment,” 43.

Blackmailed into this form of philosophizing Foucault perceives that one must perform a series of historical inquiries that are as precise as possible; However, these historical inquiries are not an attempt to achieve the kernel of truth that the Enlightenment project sought, on the contrary, “they will be oriented toward the ‘contemporary limits of the necessary,’ that is, toward what is not or is no longer indispensable for the constitution of ourselves as autonomous subjects.”²¹⁶ In light of this, Foucault warns that “the historical ontology of ourselves must turn away from all projects that claim to be global or radical. In fact we know from experience that the claim to escape from the system of contemporary reality so as to produce the overall programs of another society, of another way of thinking, another culture, another vision of the world, has led only to the return of the most dangerous traditions.”²¹⁷

It is here that my concern with the project of Radical Orthodoxy becomes obvious. Does the Radical Orthodox project, one which strives to respond to the failures of modernity, simply offer another ontological option that claims universality in the same way as Dennett? This is to ask, does Radical Orthodoxy overlook the task of contemplating the “contemporary limits of the necessary”²¹⁸ by simply constructing a “[project] that claim[s] to be global or radical [...] a] return of the most dangerous traditions”?²¹⁹ My apprehension is in accordance with Foucault when he wonders, “if we limit ourselves to this type of always partial and local inquiry or test, do we not run the risk of letting ourselves be determined by more general structures of which we may well

²¹⁶ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment,” 43.

²¹⁷ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment,” 46.

²¹⁸ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment,” 43.

²¹⁹ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment,” 46.

not be conscious, and over which we may have no control?”²²⁰ If Radical Orthodoxy demands that we engage pre-modern ways of being, that is Thomistic or Augustinian ways of being, then what does this engagement imply? D. Stephen Long argues that the future of theology depends on how we inherit Aquinas,²²¹ but, who or what is this “Aquinas” we are to inherit? Is there a True-reality, a True-Aquinas from which discourse of the real has simply regressed from? And is it simply a matter of *returning* to said discourse?

The now famous opening line to Milbank’s book, *Theology and Social Theory*—which is widely considered to be the inaugural text in the history of the Radical Orthodox movement—is, “Once, there was no ‘secular’.”²²² So begins the historical narrative with which Milbank hopes to woo his audience. In imagining a world in which there is no secular one is imagining a world in which all facets of life, from the political to the aesthetic, are in some way informed by a notion of God. Humanity is in some sense governed by its orientation to the Church.²²³ However, with the rise in the wars of religion and the development of science a sense in which humanity is able to be liberated through the use of reason alone manifests itself as the dominant philosophical position. Here it is no longer a perception of a sacred order which directs the world, but rather an objective perception of a natural order.²²⁴ In this world it is accepted that there is a

²²⁰ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment,” 47.

²²¹ Long, *Speaking of God*, 215 – 260.

²²² John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Malden: Blackwell, 1993), 9.

²²³ “Radical Orthodoxy Simon Oliver,” 2012, video clip, accessed October 25, 2012, Youtube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8sY-m9AuPvA&feature=related>.

²²⁴ “Radical Orthodoxy Simon Oliver,” 2012, video clip, accessed October 25, 2012, Youtube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8sY-m9AuPvA&feature=related>.

neutral public space from which humanity can consider things such as politics, aesthetics and ethics.

This story is precisely the same “simple and enchanting tale”²²⁵ I quoted from David Bentley Hart in Section 1.b of this thesis; However, as I pointed out in Section 1.01, one must keep in mind that the important point about this tale was not the extent to which it is true, but rather the fact that it is *the* dominant story within late modernity. In *Theology and Social Theory*, Milbank goes to great lengths to show that this tale is erroneous in the sense that rather than the theological getting pushed out of the public realm, in modernity the theological takes on warped and disoriented forms. The secular as a public and neutral sphere remains pseudo-theological as it maintains accounts of ultimate truths, meanings, orientations and priorities.²²⁶ There is never a space where the theological is not operating, for in a sense all discourse is inherently theo-logical. Secular space establishes a plurality of “bastard dualisms”²²⁷ which contemporary culture unconsciously accepts as being capable of reconstructing reality in language. For Milbank however, such dualisms become the pseudo-theo-logical discourse by which one may speak of what *is* and consequently compose idolatrous understandings of the real. Consider the university for example: within the university there are two main areas of study, the natural sciences and the humanities. In these two areas there are sub-categories which intend to say everything about their individual field. Thus, for example, the historians aim to say everything about history, the chemists aim to say everything about chemicals, the English scholars aim to say everything about literature, the biologists aim

²²⁵ Hart, *The Atheist Delusions*, 33.

²²⁶ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p. 54.

²²⁷ Milbank, Ward and Pickstock, “Suspending the Material,” 2.

to say everything about life and the theologians aim to say everything about something called religion. Radical Orthodoxy however rejects this particular mode of thinking about the world by appealing to the work of Thomas Aquinas and a pre-modern sensibility: that which one could refer to as a participatory ontology. Thomas says that theology, far from being about some-one-thing called “religion,” is about God and all things in relation to or in participation with God. Interestingly, this definition too concerns everything, it excludes nothing in creation. This is enormously provocative because it implies that there is nothing to which theology is not concerned. Theology under the Radical Orthodoxy banner is thus in conversation with all fields of specialization: be it science,²²⁸ economy,²²⁹ nihilism,²³⁰ the erotic,²³¹ language²³² and so on and so forth. Radical Orthodoxy claims that we can only say something about the different fields insofar as they are in relationship with the transcendent. In this way Radical Orthodoxy sees itself as a playful and imaginative movement at the same time that it is incredibly serious.

Because Radical Orthodoxy tells a story in which there is an historical development into a secular realm, which nonetheless maintains (because it must) a theological sensibility (albeit an idolatrous theology) it is important for the movement to decipher what form of sensibility this comes to take. For Radical Orthodoxy, within modernity a theology of power takes the place of a theology of the sacred under the

²²⁸ Simon Oliver, *Philosophy, God and Motion* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

²²⁹ D. Stephen Long, *Divine Economy: Theology and the Market* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

²³⁰ Conor Cunningham, *Genealogy of Nihilism* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

²³¹ Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

²³² Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Malden: Blackwell, 1998).

secular.²³³ As evidenced by the naturalized ontologies of both Dennett and Nietzsche, ontologies of power are by their very nature ontologies of conflict and competition. Within this ontology, as I described in Section 1.02 with regards to Dennett's "Moral First Aid Manual," it is understood that at the very basic level political subjects, human beings, need protection from one another. For Dennett, the idea of "rights," written in the "Moral First Aid Manual," were the means to establishing this protection. However, as I discussed in regards to the examples of art, charity, and economics, the ability to categorize these rights is not always straight forward. Thus, the freedom to exercise one's "rights" is in a perpetual state of competition and conflict. Or, as Dennett would say, the "good" meme's are constantly in competition for space in the brain's inner hard drive. For Milbank, and Radical Orthodoxy in general, Dennett's philosophy must be understood as a pseudo-theology. The roots of this equating can be traced back to an orthodox Christian notion of being in the work of Augustine; however, in Augustine we find a narrative that says this competitive and violent ontology is not the normative ontological state of humanity. For Augustine the normative ontological state of humanity is that of love, an ontology of peace as we find in the early Biblical creation stories.²³⁴ Creation in its most fundamental sense is a loving gift, and thus violence is alien to the original state of the created order. Radical Orthodoxy argues that we need to come to see the competitive order, which is so prevalent today, far from being a natural state of things, as a deviation from the Real order of things. Radical Orthodoxy, in this sense, aims to direct one's view away from the view of the world as existing in an inherently

²³³ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p. 58.

²³⁴ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p. 65.

competitive and violent state of being, into an ontology of love and peace, as described by the early Church Fathers: where what is primary is the order of the Good and as such evil is not a positive thing, but rather a privation of this Good.²³⁵

At this point however one can clearly see that this beautiful and persuasive story, this re-telling of history that aims to out-narrate, is indeed a story of the de-evolution of the mind. It the obverse side to Dennett's reading of the history of the mind as a natural progression from simple replicators to the complex hardware IBM scientists are reverse engineering today. This is to say, Radical Orthodoxy must read the passage of time, specifically over the last seven hundred years or so, as an un-natural digression from that which truly *is* (as opposed to a natural evolution into that which *is* as Dennett aims to establish). In this sense Radical Orthodoxy adheres to the same "simple and enchanting tale" told by Hart in Section 1.01 of this thesis, simply in reverse. Radical Orthodoxy's theology is precisely what Foucault describes as "a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era."²³⁶

In response to the charge that Radical Orthodoxy operates in accordance with the same evolutionary logics as Dennett's philosophy, certain Radical Orthodox theologians would certainly argue that such is only the case if the concept of time is not an issue. For example, Radically Orthodox theologian Laurence Paul Hemming describes how our understanding of time has direct implications on our understanding of faith. And consequently, our understanding of faith in general may render the very notion of the development of a thing called "history" as problematic. Hemming writes,

²³⁵ John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 1 – 25.

²³⁶ Foucault, "What is Enlightenment," 42.

Faithfulness is so, not because I attempt to bring myself into conformity with a particularly conceived tradition or body of thought—a kind of ‘correspondence’ of myself to what is true (carried out as an act of will and its repetitions) and which therefore is always looking backwards, into what has gone before as the deciding and so decisive determination of my being-true as being-faithful. This understanding of time immediately raises the unfolding development of tradition as a problem. Rather, I belong to the tradition as something which lies ahead of me and from within which, and so out of which, I am formed. Tradition, the *traditio* or ‘handing over’, is not simply something which is handed over to me, but rather something over to which I am first delivered, am ‘proper to’.²³⁷

In contrast to the vision of history as some-thing which proceeds through time, or, as some-thing which *is* in-itself, or some-thing which I can objectively view, history is rather the tradition to which I am constitutive by being in relationship with, forming it as I am being formed. As Hemming notes, “I am the potential horizon of its being made actual, its realization. Thought in terms of salvation, my being is the place where, through this conversation, this ‘being proper to...’ God comes to be, which means the ‘how’ of my being Christian will indicate something about me (from the perspective of my growth and maturity in Christ) and something about God (how God comes to be found in me by

²³⁷ Laurence Paul Hemming, “Nihilism: Heidegger and the Grounds of Redemption,” in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, edited by John Milbank, Graham Ward and Catherine Pickstock (New York: Routledge, 1999), 92.

others).”²³⁸ Faith is not adhering to a Reality which is unfolding in-itself through time, rather, faith is that which makes something real by bringing it about in time.

Indeed, John Milbank would agree with this view of time, when he describes how “[time] forms habitual *patterns*, whether of things or of people. Both *are* these habits, which impose a kind of ‘actual necessity’ beyond the reign of mere logical possibility, whether or not this actual necessity is itself a mere accident.”²³⁹ For Radical Orthodoxy, this view implicitly conceives of time as a means of disclosing both the “how” and the “what” of being-human. And in this sense time orients the person in relationship toward others and towards God. Thus Hemming can argue,

Orthodoxy in this sense ceases to be ‘assertion’ and is better understood as prayer and, most formally, as sacrament—as relationship to God brought about in the communal speech of the assembly as a mode of being of Christ: a mode of revelation of something not-human (the divine) within something human (me, the assembly). In outline (and it is here no more than a sketch), this is the way in which many of the patristic authors at least thought the relationship between God, the creation and the human person: pluriformity redeemed as unity.²⁴⁰

Here Radical Orthodoxy unquestionably uses Christology and sacramental categories as ontological classifications. This is to say, in light of fact that time is not comprehended as a transition from the past to the future via the present forming something Real which we

²³⁸ Hemming, “Nihilism,” 92.

²³⁹ John Milbank, “Stanton Lecture 3: Immanence and Number” (lecture delivered at the annual Stanton Lectures at the University of Cambridge, Cambridge, England, February 2, 2011), 10 – 12, 13.

²⁴⁰ Hemming, “Nihilism,” 93.

could then refer to as “history,” we can “nonetheless hear and repeat the truth of this passage in the ecclesial praise of the Father offered through the Son in the Spirit.”²⁴¹

Radical Orthodoxy’s nuanced understanding of time undoubtedly complicates the accusation that the movement in general follows a (de-)evolutionary model of consciousness understood as an (un-)natural progression; however, in composing a hierarchy of discourse (of which Aquinas and the Church Fathers would be at the top) the threat of Radical Orthodoxy presenting “a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era”²⁴² remains. Again, this is to ask, does Radical Orthodoxy overlook the task of contemplating the “contemporary limits of the necessary”²⁴³ by simply constructing a “[project] that claim[s] to be global or radical”²⁴⁴ by insisting upon a return to the past? A positing of a True-reality that once *was* but *is* no longer, and consequently, of which we must overcome certain obstacles in order to return to? It is with these questions in mind that in the next section I compare the logic governing the theological language of Radical Orthodoxy with the logic governing the language of Dennett’s philosophy of consciousness. A task which ultimately intends to further illustrate the extent to which Radical Orthodoxy operates within the category of a Badiouian thinking of the One.

²⁴¹ John Milbank, Graham Ward and Catherine Pickstock, “Suspending the Material: The Turn of Radical Orthodoxy,” in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, edited by John Milbank, Graham Ward and Catherine Pickstock (New York: Routledge, 1999), 8.

²⁴² Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment,” in *The Foucault Reader* edited by Paul Rabinow (United States of America: Vintage, 1984), 42.

²⁴³ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment,” 43.

²⁴⁴ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment,” 46.

1.12 Positing an abstraction: Radical Orthodoxy's *analogia entis*

After a lecture entitled “What are the Roots of the Distinction between Theology and Philosophy,” at Georgetown University on April 7, 2011, Jean-Luc Marion was asked by Ilija Delio, “Are we coming to a new place where we are either at a new level of metaphysics, or kataphysics; [...] or are we coming back to a new patristic experience of reality, in other words, are we kind of revisiting what took place in the early patristic period, that spirituality in a sense, that experience of being.”²⁴⁵ Such questioning is precisely the sort of thinking that may potentially lead theologies such as Radical Orthodoxy to posit an abstraction representative of a “True-theological-reality,” or a “revisiting-of-what-took-place.” And furthermore, particularly since the dialogues that took place between Jacques Derrida and Marion in the late nineties,²⁴⁶ such questioning invokes a debate in philosophy regarding something which is sometimes referred to as the “theological turn.” The details of what is implied by such a turn bring up a number of diverse controversies and discussions, the details of which are well beyond the scope of

²⁴⁵ “What are the Roots of the Distinction between Philosophy and Theology?” April 7, 2011, video clip, accessed October 20, 2012, YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dIDMhwT6srl>. Marion, who is not a part of the Radical Orthodox movement, responds by speaking to the end of metaphysics and how in the contemporary context we cannot make any sense of anything that is not an object. This situation makes us incapable of saying that we stand for anything in terms of justice, beauty, goodness, unless we reduce it to the level of “values,” as I described, for example, in the work of Dennett. For Marion this is the most pure form of nihilism: when the highest values become values, when even the most real realities can only be spoken of as values, when even God becomes a value. As an example, Marion asks his audience to imagine that everyone in the world stopped believing in God, and then suggests that some may argue this is the death of God. Marion however, on the contrary, says this is the death of humanity, not the death of God. In this sense, the role of the work of the Fathers is to read them in such a way that they give us a new set of concepts: a new set of cards or a new way of looking at our old cards from which we can make a bet.

²⁴⁶ See, for example, Richard Kearney (mod.), “On the Gift: A Discussion between Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion.” in *God, The Gift and Postmodernism*, edited by John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 54 – 78.

this thesis;²⁴⁷ however, one reoccurring idea has been what different theorists, including a number of Radically Orthodox theologians, have referred to as the “difference of theology.”²⁴⁸ Although a complicated and nuanced idea, in one sense the difference of theology can be understood as setting up of an either/or with other ontologies; such as Dennett’s evolutionary model of consciousness I described in Section 1.0 of this thesis. At a certain level this either/or is capable of being reduced to either utilizing some notion of the transcendent in various ways—for example, Levinas and the face, Marion and the saturated phenomenon, Pickstock and transubstantiation, Hart and the aesthetics of Christian Truth, etc.—to guarantee the possibility of meaning (the theological turn), or, understanding existence as a violent will-to-power, where there is no good and evil, simply the play of power structures: or in other words, Dionysus against the Crucified.²⁴⁹

For example, consider Radical Orthodox theologian Graham Ward’s introduction to the *Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology*, “Introduction: ‘Where We Stand.’” In this article Ward performs an investigation of the present relationship between thinking and cultural/historical context. To do so Ward begins by distinguishing between two forms of cultural transformation: (1) transformation *within* the logics of a certain movement, and (2) transformation as *breaking from* the cultural logic of the past or present.²⁵⁰ This distinction means Ward, unlike many of his contemporaries, differentiates between post-modernity (the *position* in which we presently find ourselves)

²⁴⁷ See, for example, Dominique Janicaud, Jean Coutine, et al. *Phenomenology and the Theological Turn: The French Debate* (Bronx: Fordham University Press, 2000).

²⁴⁸ For example see Conor Cunningham’s, *Genealogy of Nihilism*, or Graham Ward’s Introduction to the *Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology*.

²⁴⁹ David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 35 – 152.

²⁵⁰ Graham Ward, “Introduction: ‘Where We Stand’” in *Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology* edited by Graham Ward, (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2001), p. xiii.

and post-modernism (a *philosophy* in rejection of meta-narratives: this is of course, ironically, with the exception of the meta-narrative which establishes the rejection of meta-narratives). In progressing from these foundational principles, Ward very aptly observes how “[w]e have produced a culture of fetishes or virtual objects. For now everything is not only measurable and priced, it has an image. It is the image which now governs what is both measured and priced.”²⁵¹ In this new world, after the transformation from *being* governed by calculation and control to *being* governed by the possibility of reification and commodification, desire is captured and subsequently disoriented by the seemingly infinite production and dissemination of floating signifiers.²⁵² As Ward describes, in post-modernity “we move beyond the death of God which modernity announced, to a final forgetting of the transcendental altogether, to a state of godlessness so profound that nothing can be conceived behind the exchange of signs and the creation of symbolic structures.”²⁵³ For Ward, the acceptance of this state, what he calls “society’s real unreality,”²⁵⁴ demands the realization of the ineffectiveness of any cultural critique and consequently “the implosion of secularism.”²⁵⁵ Ward argues that this implosion of secularism ultimately opens up a radical space for a return of the theological, not only for theologians, but for artists, philosophers, and cultural analysts. Thus, Ward argues that “without the radicality that a theological perspective can offer the postmodern critique, the postmodernist is doomed also to inscribe the ideology he or she seeks to overthrow.

²⁵¹ Ward, “Introduction: ‘Where We Stand,’” xiv.

²⁵² Ward, “Introduction: ‘Where We Stand,’” xiv – xv.

²⁵³ Ward, “Introduction: ‘Where We Stand,’” xix.

²⁵⁴ Ward, “Introduction: ‘Where We Stand,’” xv.

²⁵⁵ Ward, “Introduction: ‘Where We Stand,’” xv.

The radical critique is not radical enough.”²⁵⁶ And this is precisely where the difference of theology becomes a new and intriguing position to consider. There is no question that Ward raises a number of pertinent concerns in regards to the relationship between modern thinking and its cultural/historical context, but is Ward capable of making such confident statements about the difference of theology without slipping back into the exact position he critiques, namely a “real unreality”²⁵⁷? This is to ask, is there really a difference of theology? Or is theology just simply one more ontological option, one more Badiouian thinking of the One: be it Bonhoeffer-ian, Barth-ian, DeLubac-ian, Marion-istic, Ward-ian, Radically Orthodox? Is Ward “doomed [...] to inscribe the ideology he [...] seeks to overthrow”²⁵⁸?

It is tempting to categorize Ward’s argument in terms of what Paul Lakeland describes as the “nostalgic postmodern or countermodern.”²⁵⁹ Ward’s rallying cry—alongside his Radically Orthodox counterparts—for a “new emphasis upon reenchantment”²⁶⁰ seems to suggest precisely what Lakeland refers to as a “suspicion of the recent past and [an] attempt at the retrieval of what they perceive to be characteristics of an earlier time,”²⁶¹ regardless of how hard Ward may insist that “[w]e live in the trajectory of what is coming to us from the future; we never return to the same place twice to rethink the choices abandoned.”²⁶² Indeed, Radical Orthodoxy has had to deal with the critique of promoting a sense of nostalgia. For example, in the March 2006 issue

²⁵⁶ Ward, “Introduction: ‘Where We Stand,’” xxiii.

²⁵⁷ Ward, “Introduction: ‘Where We Stand,’” xv.

²⁵⁸ Ward, “Introduction: ‘Where We Stand,’” xxiii.

²⁵⁹ Paul Lakeland, *Postmodernity: Christianity in a Fragmented Age* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 18.

²⁶⁰ Ward, “Introduction: ‘Where We Stand,’” xv.

²⁶¹ Lakeland, *Postmodernity*, 18.

²⁶² Ward, “Introduction: ‘Where We Stand,’” xvii.

of the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Ward responded to Elizabeth A. Castelli's argument that his writing conveys the sense of a "future-nostalgia."²⁶³ In his response to Castelli, Ward describes how his initial reaction to her description of his work was denial; however, after deeper reflection Ward came to believe that this reaction was "[n]ot on the basis of believing [he was] right and she [was] wrong. Rather, [his] denial arose from being enmeshed in a certain cultural politics concerning Radical Orthodoxy—such that [his] comments on the future of religion were being read through a lens provided by a circumscribed understanding of whatever Radical Orthodoxy has come to mean."²⁶⁴ Radical Orthodox theologian Catherine Pickstock picks up on this very point in her critique of Richard Cross's reading of Radical Orthodoxy and its understanding of the work of Duns Scotus (who will be discussed at length in the next section, Section 1.13). Pickstock notes how Cross reads Aquinas *and* Scotus through a lens which presents them as both having a representational theory of knowledge and as such one would clearly read Scotus as the more convincing theologian.²⁶⁵ Having come to understand Castelli's comments in this way Ward began to accept "nostalgia" as a fair description of his work (albeit without the negative connotations prescribed by Castelli). He felt justified in accepting this description insofar as one accepts that

since at least the work of Gadamer and de Certeau on historiography and the writing of history, we can appreciate the past is never simply the past.

²⁶³ Graham Ward, "Reply to Elizabeth A. Castelli," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 74, No. 1 (2006): 192–193.

²⁶⁴ Ward, "Reply to Elizabeth A. Castelli," 192 – 193.

²⁶⁵ Catherine Pickstock, "The Univocalist Mode of Production," in *Theology and the Political: The New Debate* edited by Creston Davis, John Milbank and Slavoj Žižek (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 323.

It is the past as conceived through the cultural emphases of the present. In reaction to the abstractions, dualities, and grand narratives of modernity, postmodernity has fostered an academic concern with practices, performances, embodiment, and material cultures. No doubt these emphases, which have also refashioned investigations in religious studies, become visible in [Ward's] reading of Augustine's treatise on religion, and [he constructs] the future trajectories of religion in terms of a "return." But this is not a "return home"—the original Greek meaning of "nostalgia." As [Ward sees] it there is at the moment a struggle between genuine and self-denying practices of piety and banal self-serving religious simulacra. [He takes] someone like Augustine or Aquinas or de Lubac or Rahner as providing benchmark reflections, for Christianity, of genuine and self-denying practices of piety. The "future" of religion I construct is not a fantasy (understood negatively as a wistful fabrication), rather it is an imagining—and an explicitly political one insofar as it is an imagining that pitches itself against the banal commodification and commercializations of pop transcendence. To be satisfied with, to be uncritical of, the kitsch and superficial, particularly with respect to the sacred, to that which expresses life's ultimate values, is simply decadent.²⁶⁶

But these "benchmark reflections," these "imaginings" (not "fantasies") are no different from the "True-reality" I described in Section 1.02 in terms of the political leaders and

²⁶⁶ Ward, "Reply to Elizabeth A. Castelli," 192–193.

the protestors at the G20 meetings in Toronto. In the same way Žižek argues that communism is not even immune to the spectral law of capital insofar as it is just the obverse side of capitalism—it is still a system in which capital dictates the real world societal relationships of material things—Ward’s imagining does not escape the logic that requires the positing of a True abstraction. Indeed, Ward, and Radical Orthodoxy in general, may argue for the “decadence” of the abstraction which “expresses life’s ultimate values,”²⁶⁷ but they fail to address how such argumentation is any different than the decadence of the True-reality that the protestors or the bankers articulate in regards to the abstractions which express value in their lives. Again it seems that Ward’s talk “with respect to the sacred”²⁶⁸ is “doomed [...] to inscribe the ideology he [...] seeks to overthrow.”²⁶⁹

Indeed, as indicated by Ward in his quotation above, amidst all the theological turning one of the most powerful voices to be reinvigorated in recent thought, particularly in the work of Radical Orthodoxy, has been that of Thomas Aquinas. Radical Orthodox theologian D. Stephen Long argues in his book, *Speaking of God*, that the future of theological thought depends on how the next generation of theologians receives Thomas Aquinas.²⁷⁰ John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock have written at length about how Duns Scotus distorted True Thomism and as such we must return to the authentic Thomas for guidance in how one must engage the world in light of the failures of late

²⁶⁷ Ward, “Reply to Elizabeth A. Castelli,” 193.

²⁶⁸ Ward, “Reply to Elizabeth A. Castelli,” 193.

²⁶⁹ Ward, “Introduction: ‘Where We Stand,’” xxiii.

²⁷⁰ D. Stephen Long, *Speaking of God: Theology, Language and Truth* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009).

modernity.²⁷¹ And Radical Orthodoxy as a whole has drawn a significant amount of inspiration from the work of such Thomistic thinkers as Alasdair MacIntyre and Henri DeLubac, both of whom locate similar distortions of Thomism by the pious theologians who followed him. These theologians yearn for a “return” to pre-modern, True Thomistic ways of thinking in light of the distortions that happened to his thought after his death. However, in light of my discussion in regards to positing a True-reality/abstraction in Sections 1.02 of this thesis, it would seem that such radical theologies are simply repeating the same logic as Dennett’s philosophy. This is to say, theologies that yearn for a True pre-modern Thomistic notion of consciousness operate in accordance with the same foundational elements that Dennett’s naturalized ontology, the United Nations ontology of human rights or even Greenpeace’s ontology of a pure earth. To speak of Jesus Christ as simply the new ideal human from which we can determine evil a priori, that which “expresses life’s ultimate values,”²⁷² although a decadent approach to thinking, does not actually offer a difference in terms of its logical foundations. In this sense, theology as understood from a Radically Orthodox Thomistic perspective simply offers another “universal acid”²⁷³ from which to engage reality.

The obvious question at this point is, perhaps Radical Orthodoxy does indeed posit an abstraction from which to engage the world, but what other option is there? Must one posit an abstraction simply *to be*? Jacques Lacan’s formulae of sexuation would suggest that such is not exactly the case. As I described in Section 1.02 of this thesis, for Lacan there are two sides to the formulae of sexuation: the logic of the masculine side, as

²⁷¹ John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

²⁷² Ward, “Reply to Elizabeth A. Castelli,” 193.

²⁷³ Dennett, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, 61 – 84.

opposed to the feminine side. I explained how Dennett's philosophy forms an economy identical to the process of imposing a universal core in order to establish an ideological order:²⁷⁴ the universal acid known as Darwinian theory.²⁷⁵ The universal core inherently implies an exception which constitutes the universal as a universal and all other particulars are forced into the realm in which this core operates.²⁷⁶ This has enormous consequences for an ontology operating within the masculine side as all that *is* must be knowable in relation to the universal core; therefore, for example, if Dennett's naturalized ontology is true, then all that *is* is that which can be known in relation to Darwinian theory. If Christianity sets up an abstraction called "Thomas Aquinas" or "the pre-modern" then it follows the same logic as Dennett's philosophy in that all that *is* must be understood in relation to a Thomistic notion of "God," and thus, at its core Christianity is not distinguishable from Dennett's philosophy. The alternative to the masculine side is the feminine side; however, and as Slavoj Žižek maintains, they are not symmetrical opposites, rather he argues that the feminine side has priority.²⁷⁷ The feminine side advocates a logic which refuses the notion of a closed system, refuses a whole or a One.²⁷⁸ All that *is*, only *is* insofar as it is revealed to the individual by way of the symbolic order, and because it is not everything that *is*, it is *pas-tout*. In establishing a *pas-tout*, or a "non-whole," there is understood to be an absence of a static exception, of a

²⁷⁴ In describing Lacan's 'formulae of sexuation' Žižek will use the proper terms from psychoanalysis, which I am not doing here to remain in agreement with the informal language used in previous sections of this paper. This is to say, for example, where I am referring to a "universal core" Žižek will refer to a "master signifier" and where I refer to the "*what is*" Žižek will refer to "the Real."

²⁷⁵ Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, 61 – 84.

²⁷⁶ Adam Kotsko, *Žižek and Theology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 48.

²⁷⁷ Kotsko, *Žižek and Theology*, 49.

²⁷⁸ This is, of course, in the same sense that Badiou advocates a transfinite notion of number, that is because for Badiou the One is not.

universal core. The *pas-tout* operates within the *what is* and reflects the logic of the *what is*, but “society can never fully correspond to or overtake the [*what is*], yet the [*what is*] is operative everywhere in society, undermining and distorting it.”²⁷⁹ In this logical structure Žižek argues that a vanishing mediator, or fragile absolute, manifests itself at the site of a particular event in relation to the universal. In language almost uncharacteristic to Žižek he describes the fragile absolute as

[s]omething that appears to us in fleeting experiences—say through the gentle smile of a beautiful woman, or even through the warm caring smile of a person who may otherwise seem ugly and rude: in such miraculous but *extremely fragile* moments, another dimension transpires through our reality. As such, the Absolute is easily corroded; it slips all too easily through our fingers, and must be handled as carefully as a butterfly.²⁸⁰

Within this space Žižek understands the functioning of a proper universal/particular dialectic which brings us into relationship with the *what is*.

There is insight into Lacan’s formulae of sexuation to be found in the Book of Daniel and the Book of Job. The Book of Daniel is filled with famous images of dreadful dreams and apocalyptic visions: the vision of a fourth figure in the fiery furnace, the mysterious hand writing on the wall, Nebuchadnezzar’s vision of a huge tree being cut down, Daniel’s vision of the great beasts, the seventy septets and the North and South Kings. Interestingly, there is a division in the book as to how these visions are presented. Prior to Daniel 7, all the visions were first given from God to a character other than

²⁷⁹ Kotsko, *Žižek and Theology*, 49.

²⁸⁰ Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute*, 128.

Daniel: to Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2 and 4 as dreams and to Belshazzar in Daniel 5 as mysterious writing. In all these instances, although God did not originally give the visions directly to Daniel, God only gave Daniel the True interpretations and the True meanings of the dreams. Because he was in possession of the Truth, Daniel was then capable of bringing the interpretations and the meanings of the visions to the kings wherein they could then possess the newly unencrypted meanings. In contrast to the first section of the Book of Daniel, in what I understand to be a second section beginning in Daniel 7, God first gives the visions to Daniel and then by way of another character Daniel is told the interpretation. Interestingly, however, despite the fact that Daniel is given the meaning of the vision, *he is continually left incapable of understanding the meaning of the interpretation*: “I was appalled by the vision; it was beyond understanding” (Dan 8: 27); “I heard, but I did not understand” (Dan 12: 8). These two sections can be summarized as follows: in the first section, Daniel 1 – 6, Daniel is not the first to receive the visions, however, Daniel is the first (and only) to receive the interpretations and the meanings of the dreams which he is then capable transmitting to others. In the second section, Daniel 7 – 12, Daniel is the first (and only) to receive the visions, he is given the interpretations via some other character, and yet he himself is left incapable of understanding the meaning (and thus he is incapable of transmitting their meaning to any other character). This distinction between the first and the second section—that is, between the subtle switch in how God distributes the elements of the hermeneutical structure of Daniel (vision/sign → interpretation → understanding/true meaning)—in the Book of Daniel is precisely the distinction between the masculine and

feminine logics: the masculine logic being demonstrated in the first section and the feminine logic being demonstrated in the second.

This distinction is further demonstrated in the Book of Job. As in the second section of the Book of Daniel, one of the central themes to be located in the Book of Job, although requiring the rest of the text as a whole, comes from its concluding chapter. As Yakov Leib HaKohain has written: “The closing passages of Job are a paradigm of the Final Days, the End of Time, and the destiny of Israel, the Jewish People, as an agent of that apotheosis. Just as Job’s three Edomite-gentile friends attach themselves to him for their salvation, so God swore to Israel: ‘The gentile will join [you] and attach himself to the House of Jacob’ (Isa. 14:1, 2).”²⁸¹ However, and in accordance with Slavoj Žižek, this does not mean that the conclusion of the Book of Job should be interpreted in agreement with the traditional view that the book’s true meaning is that even in the absence of meaning, that God has a meaning-full plan. Such masculine logic constructs an image of God’s understanding as forming a complete set (which are abstractions to humanity) from which humanity is on occasion incapable of deciphering; however, if we are to face God Himself we would have an objective view of this set. Interestingly, such a view implies that not understanding is in-itself a form of understanding. If we accept this masculine logic of God’s understanding, Job becomes characterized as a patient sufferer who endures all that God puts upon him with blind faith. Consequently, this logic provides an account of suffering which we can then read as analogous to the suffering in our own lives: if God has a reason for everything (death, hunger, depression...), then we must

²⁸¹ Yakov Leib HaKohain, *Dor L'Dor: Journal of the World Jewish Bible Society of Jerusalem* Vol. XVII, No. 2 (1988/89):124.

always have faith that God has a meaningful plan even if we do not understand. In contrast, Žižek argues against the interpretation that the lesson of Job is that in the face of meaninglessness in the world, God has a plan for us. He argues

Job's properly ethical dignity lies in the way he persistently rejects the notion that his suffering can have any meaning, either punishment for his past sins or the trial of his faith, against the three theologians who bombard him with possible meanings—and, surprisingly, God takes his side at the end, claiming that every word Job spoke was true, while *every word the three theologians spoke was false*.²⁸²

Considering the Book of Daniel in the same light suggests that the subtle alteration of the hermeneutical structure in the second section of the Book of Daniel demonstrates that in the second section of Daniel the logic of the relationship between the sign and its meaning changes along with God's means of disseminating the particular elements of the hermeneutical structure. In the second part of Daniel, in contrast to the first part, utilizing a feminine reading of the text, God does not give Daniel the understanding of the End Times because there is no-understanding. God does not give Daniel the understanding of the interpretation, as he did in the first section, because God does not have any understanding of the End. In the same way we can logically think of the nature of the material world as inherently incomplete, we can logically think of the nature of understanding as inherently incomplete. Unlike when using masculine logic, when

²⁸² Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 125. Emphasis mine.

utilizing a feminine logic there is no set of understanding that when considered together forms a whole; rather, understanding is always in a state of lack.

From such a position, Žižek argues that God is recognized as a weak figure, and perhaps Daniel was well aware of this divine helplessness. For otherwise, in the second section Daniel, in a state of sheer frustration, surely would have said to God: “What is the deal here? Since the day I was captured by the Babylonians you have been giving me understanding after understanding, and all the magicians, sorcerers and kings down here have been really impressed with what I have been capable of transmitting to them, why not anymore?” On the contrary, Daniel behaves in the same way Job behaved when faced with the same conundrum from the same God. As Žižek writes in regards to Job’s behavior in the conclusion of the Book of Job:

[Job] remained silent neither because he was crushed by God’s overwhelming presence, nor because he wanted thereby to indicate his continuous resistance—the fact that God avoided answering his question—but because, in a gesture of silent solidarity, he perceived the divine impotence. God is neither just nor unjust, but simply impotent. What Job suddenly understood was that *it was not him, but God himself who was in effect on trial in Job’s calamities*, and he failed the test miserably. Even more pointedly, I am tempted to risk a radical anachronistic reading: Job foresaw God’s own future suffering—“Today it’s me, tomorrow it will be your own son, and there will be no one to

intervene for *him*. What you see in me now is the prefiguration of your own Passion!”²⁸³

And cannot the same radical anachronistic reading prefiguring the Passion of the Christ be made in the Book of Daniel? In Daniel 8, what I have defined as the second section of the Book, Daniel has a vision of God Himself suffering on Earth: “[The little horn] grew until it reached the host of the heavens, and it threw some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them. It set itself up to be as great as the commander of the army of the LORD; it took away the daily sacrifice from the LORD, and his sanctuary was thrown down. Because of rebellion, the LORD’s people and the daily sacrifice were given over to it. It prospered in everything it did, and truth was thrown to the ground.” (Daniel 8: 10 – 12) Even the language used here is reminiscent of Jesus falling on three separate occasions: “threw some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them,” “his sanctuary was thrown down,” and “truth was thrown to the ground.”

Indeed, the argument could be made that Daniel could not possibly be prefiguring the Passion, because the event which is the Passion had not yet *been* at the time in which the Book of Daniel was written; however, in Dan 8: 15 – 17, Daniel is very clear that he does not understand the vision: “While I, Daniel, was watching the vision and trying to understand it, there before me stood one who looked like a man. And I heard a man’s voice from the Ulai calling, ‘Gabriel, tell this man the meaning of the vision.’ As he came near the place where I was standing, I was terrified and fell prostrate. ‘Son of man,’ he said to me, ‘understand that the vision concerns the time of the end.’” (Dan 8: 15 – 17)

²⁸³ Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 55 – 56.

The key to note here is that Daniel can see the vision but he does not understand it; not because there is something to be understood, but because at the time when Daniel is seeing this vision *there is no-understanding*, and as such Daniel wants nothing. Daniel refuses to turn away from God to say “This is a hard teaching; who can understand it?” (Jn 6: 60) Of course, we can now look back and possess the understanding (Christ the Father’s only son is given as a perfect offering, light from light, to save humanity through the power of the Holy Spirit), but just because we can do so does not necessarily imply that this understanding always *was*. On the contrary, as indicated by Gabriel in Dan 8: 17, there was no-understanding until the arrival of Christ, through whom all is made new: “Through him all things came to be, not one thing had its being but through him” (John 1: 3). In the same way that we cannot assume that the reality of the physical world stays “what-it-is,” we cannot assume that God has a plan “all-the-way-down” that he chronologically reveals to humanity.²⁸⁴ In this way, and in accordance with Daniel and Job, the Truth of reality is not clarity of the now, but rather the promise of the new.

1.13 Number: To speak of the Other

The first volume of essays collected under the name “Radical Orthodoxy”, *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, make it extremely clear who the movement as a whole

²⁸⁴ Is this not the promise of the Eucharist? As Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt writes: “the presentation of God in the negated sign of Jesus on the cross and in the resurrection—the shattering of the Christ-form by which it ‘reveals the meaning of the eschatological promise it contains’ —is an event that cannot be confined to a single moment in time, but is eucharistically extended through history in the Church.” See Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, “Aesthetics: The Theological Sublime,” in John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward (eds.), *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 211.

understands to be the villain (albeit an ignorant and pious villain) responsible for the inadequate state of theology in late modernity: Duns Scotus.²⁸⁵ According to Radical Orthodoxy, Scotus's re-interpretations of certain key aspects of Thomistic thought—most significantly, his shift from the analogy of being to the univocity of being—were to have detrimental effects on the future of not only theology, but ontology in general. This is to say, for Radical Orthodoxy, Duns Scotus marks an extremely significant, if not decisive point in history in which ontological thought was not only radically altered, but more importantly, radically altered for the worse.

To understand the nature of this ontological shift one must first consider how Scotus understands of the infinite. For Scotus the finite represents a part of the infinite. It

²⁸⁵ For example, in the Introduction to *Radical Orthodoxy*, the editors, John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward write: "while it is the case that the 'epistemological' era, which assumes that the true is that which is fully graspable by human reason, derives from an earlier prising away of ontology from theology in the wake of Duns Scotus, this prising apart was itself governed by ironically 'pious' motives: it arose because God was now regarded as a supreme, untrammelled individual Will rather than that *esse ipsum* in which mere existences come to share." (5) In the first essay of the collection Milbank writes, "Luther [...] broadly accepted the framework of late medieval nominalist philosophy. Now this philosophy was itself the legatee of the greatest of all disruptions carried out in the history of European thought, namely that of Duns Scotus, who *for the first time* established a radical separation of philosophy from theology by declaring that it was possible to consider being in abstraction from the question of whether one is considering created or creating being." (23) Following Milbank, John Montag writes in his essay, "It was not Francis Bacon, or even Ockham, but Duns Scotus who, merely a generation after Thomas Aquinas, first deontologized language by construing being as that univocal *universitas*, the whole inclusive of God and creation. Without any distinction in being between the infinite God and finite creation, created beings have nothing by which to gain their bearings in relation to God." (51) Again, Laurence Paul Hemming in the same volume, "the position often erroneously ascribed to Aquinas is in fact held by Duns Scotus—that God is known by way of an enquiry into being (*ens*), and therefore that God as univocal *primum ens* is the same as being (which, for St Thomas, the whole doctrine of analogy was set up to avoid), and therefore that God is understood as *summum ens*, and *ens finis*." (94) Michael Hanby, the same thing, "Michael Allen Gillespie rightly traces the origins of nihilism, not to Nietzsche who largely misunderstood it, but to the possibility of divine deception engendered by Scotus' and Ockham's reconfiguration of God's omnipotence and infinity, conceived now as the arbitrary exercise of a divine will unqualified by its other essential predicates, and not intelligibly and iconically manifest by the arrangement of the created order." (109) And Philip Blond as well, "The outcome of the univocal thesis of Scotus was a twofold abandonment and scission of the inter-relation of God and creation. The univocal thesis allowed the world to abandon God, as one could now wholly dispense with God by explaining the world in terms of this higher ground whatever it might be." (233) See John Milbank, Graham Ward and Catherine Picstock (eds.), *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

is a quantitative, as opposed to a qualitative, measurement or unit. One can only understand the infinite in that it is both a part of, and juxtaposed to the finite. Thus, the infinite is dependent on the finite and predisposed to the finite's limitations. The infinite exists only as an essence, unlike the finite which has corporeal presence, and is therefore above every *assignable* proportion because such proportions are made by the limitations of the finite; however, there is an infinite proportion that can be said to exist but is nonetheless impossible to comprehend because of the fact that one can only understand the infinite in terms of the finite. This incommunicable measure is the *is-ness* of being.²⁸⁶ It follows that, for Scotus, the difference between the natural and the supernatural is one of degree. As described in Section 1.03 of this thesis, such an understanding of number is precisely in line with the notion of number which Badiou critiques, that is, One-ness.²⁸⁷ Or in other words, the notion of number constructed in terms of the infinite set of natural numbers by the process, $n_k = n_{k-1} + 1$, where the infinite is always approached, never reached, but nonetheless can be thought of in terms of the *single* set which forms a whole or a One, $N = \{1, 2, 3, \dots\}$. This is the same form of number I have shown, apropos Badiou, as the necessary foundation for capitalist ideology (and also the form of number I have been contrasting with a Cantorian understanding of number). In this sense, Radical Orthodoxy is right to critique the form of number inherent in theology post-Scotus; however, the question remains as to whether or not Radical Orthodoxy is prepared to offer an alternative to this notion of number. If the movement cannot do so, then it is trapped operating in accordance with the same form of number which they critique; a

²⁸⁶ Conor Cunningham, *A Genealogy of Nihilism: Philosophies of Nothing and the Difference of Theology* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 29.

²⁸⁷ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 23.

Badiouian thinking of the One. This is to say, they fall victim to the same fate as Nietzsche in his attempt to critique the very existence of number: that is, he had to use a form of number to critique number, namely a form of One-ness.

Rather than explicitly addressing an alternative form of number, Radical Orthodoxy refutes the univocity of being by appealing to Thomas Aquinas' *analogia entis*. The difference between univocity and analogy is perhaps best explicated in terms of how language functions for both Saint Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus. Both theologians agree that knowledge of God starts from creatures and that we cannot know the essence of the supernatural in the natural. They disagree in their understanding of the functioning of theological semantics. For Saint Thomas, words can only be used analogically to speak of God, and therefore, words applied to God have a different meaning when applied to creatures; a process he terms analogical predication. Such thinking exposes how Aquinas was significantly concerned with the logic of existential statements. In an essay dealing with Aquinas's notion of *esse*, Peter Geach²⁸⁸ deals with the logic of three different forms of existential statements: existential statements (1) with

²⁸⁸ In speaking to the "crisis of modernity" and the subsequent importance of contemporary philosophy, Holger Zaborowski notes the "trend to re-connect a pre-modern knowledge and to bring back into consciousness what has been lost in sight of modernity." He understands there to be three basic theological camps in which this trend occurs, to which Peter Geach belongs in the first: (1) Those who attend to "most prominently, the rediscovery of Platonic, Aristotelian, and Thomist philosophies, and the re-appreciation of natural-law theories, virtue ethics, pre-modern political philosophy, and teleological philosophies of nature." He gives examples of Etienne Gilson, Alasdair MacIntyre and Peter Geach. (2) A group which differs from the first particularly in terms of its method. "While the philosophers of the first group prefer a strictly philosophical and very often highly technical style, the second group has a greater variety of styles—very often highly accessible ones—at its disposal." Here he gives such examples as G. K. Chesterton, Iris Murdoch and C. S. Lewis. (3) The final group is also identified as having a differing method, "but in a more substantial way. Modernity has found its theological opponents, most of whom do not consider themselves 'post-modern' (in the philosophical sense of the term) and cannot be labeled as such." Examples include Karl Barth, George Lindbeck, John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward. See Holger Zaborowski, *Robert Spaemann's Philosophy of the Human Person: Nature, Freedom, and the Critique of Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 8.

proper nouns as their grammatical subjects, (2) with common nouns as their grammatical subjects, and (3) which ascribe passed actuality to some bearer of a proper name.²⁸⁹

Geach first examines existential statements with proper nouns as their grammatical subjects and concludes that in this case it is only the use of the proper name which is at stake. Propositions of this form only serve to deny that in this use the name actually names anything.²⁹⁰ Geach then considers existential statements with a common noun (as opposed to a proper noun) as their grammatical subject.²⁹¹ As Aquinas recognized, there is something peculiar about this form of existential statement: that is, to make the statement “ x exists” when x is a common noun does not attribute *actuality* to an x , but the quality of x -ness to something or other.²⁹² For example, consider one of the fundamental statements Einstein needs to make in establishing his theory of general relativity: “four-

²⁸⁹ Peter Geach, *God and the Soul* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Limited, 1969), 42 – 64.

²⁹⁰ Geach, *God and the Soul*, 55. For example, consider the statement “Homer Simpson does not exist” as opposed to the statement “DJ DeCoste exists.” Geach recognizes that the comparison of these statements does not imply that DJ DeCoste possesses a univocal trait, called “existence”, which Homer Simpson does not; therefore, “exists” is not a predicate of the subject “Homer Simpson” because “exists” tells us nothing about “Homer Simpson.” Therefore, the statement “Homer Simpson does not exist” is not about a thing called “Homer Simpson,” but rather, in essence it is about the *use* of the name “Homer Simpson.” While “DJ DeCoste” actually refers to something, “Homer Simpson” is a term we only *pretend* has reference.

²⁹¹ These statements are deceptively similar to the first form of existential statement but the difference is clarified in examining how the second form differs from the first: Suppose that sometime last year DJ. DeCoste claimed to have discovered a living species on a distant planet called “dragons” and that one of the “dragons” he discovered he called “Homer Simpson.” A very excited Stephen Hawking would have looked into DeCoste’s claim only to discover that there was absolutely no scientific evidence to support the allegation. Hawking would then have responded by making two existential statements: (1) “Homer Simpson does not exist” and (2) “As far as our research has shown, dragons do not exist.” As Geach describes, Hawking’s first “proposition is to deprecate the premature introduction of the term [‘Homer Simpson’] into [scientific] discourse. But in the [second] proposition [Hawking] does not deprecate the use of the term [‘dragons’], but himself uses that term to make a scientific remark. He is not, however, using that name as a subject of predication, but as a logical predicate. [...] Now the use of a logical predicate in general does not commit you to allowing that there is something it applies to; it does so commit you if you make an affirmative assertion with that as the predicate but not if e.g. you use the predicate negatively or in the antecedent or consequent of a hypothetical. So saying ‘nothing whatever is a [dragon]’ does not commit you to allowing that there is after all such a [species of living thing].” See Geach, *God and the Soul*, 56.

²⁹² Geach, *God and the Soul*, 57.

dimensional space-time exists.” It is impossible to imagine any-*thing* in regards to what four-dimensional space-time is;²⁹³ however, we can observe the effects of a four-dimensional space-time which “is curved, or ‘warped,’ by the distribution of mass and energy in it.”²⁹⁴ The statement “four-dimensional space-time exists,” does not expose any-*thing* in regards to some explicit knowledge of four-dimensional space-time, but rather, applies some quality of *four-dimensional space-time-ness* to the universe. Denys Turner uses the example of a computer to illustrate this same point: most people have no idea what a computer is insofar as how it operates, however, they are very capable of using the term “computer” because they know of its effects: it provides email messages, simulates video games, and makes power point presentations. Turner writes: “The use of a descriptive term is *not* dependent on an explicit knowledge of the reality which that term is describing, but on an implicit knowledge which results from our familiarity with (the effects of) that reality.”²⁹⁵ Finally, Geach considers existential statements which ascribe passed actuality to some bearer of a proper name by considering the phrase from Gen 42: 36, “Joseph is not and Simeon is not.” In this passage Jacob is clearly referring to the death of his two sons, however, “[i]f somebody has died (is no more), the bearer of the name has disappeared, but the reference is still intact.”²⁹⁶ Here, unlike in the first case which also deals with proper nouns, “the problem of non-being cannot occur because, once a proper noun has referred to an individual, it keeps doing so, even after the bearer

²⁹³ Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (New York: Bantam Books, 1988), 24.

²⁹⁴ For example, that the path of the planets follow geodesics with great accuracy or the apparent position of stars. See Hawking, *A Brief History of Time*, 29.

²⁹⁵ Frederick Depoortere, *Badiou and Theology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 49 – 50.

²⁹⁶ Depoortere, *Badiou and Theology*, 48.

of the name does no longer exist.”²⁹⁷ Therefore the third form of existential statement indicates *actuality*. Aquinas summarized these three forms of existential statements in terms of *esse*: “‘To be’ can mean either of two things. It may mean the act of essence [*actus essendi*], or it may mean the composition of a proposition effected by the mind in joining a predicate to a subject.”²⁹⁸ The first two forms of existential statements apply to the second form of *esse* of which Aquinas speaks: “to the signifying the mental uniting of predicate to subject which constitutes a proposition.”²⁹⁹ The third form of existential statement applies to the first form of *esse* in which Aquinas speaks: “the act of essence.”³⁰⁰

This distinction is precisely the distinction I summarized in accordance with Badiou in Section 1.03 of this thesis. There I described how Badiou clearly articulates science articulates knowledge about things which science itself need not act in accordance with. This distinction was described by Badiou as the difference between being and existence. As I described, Badiou understands there to be two main opponents of philosophy: the positivist position—that all there *is* is knowledge—and the nihilist position—that knowledge itself is not important. Badiou argued on the contrary, that truth is a process which is only possible when carried out in relation to an event.³⁰¹ In a similar way Jean Porter explains how “Aquinas argues, every human person necessarily acts for some single end, which provides the overarching motivation in terms of which all her

²⁹⁷ Depoortere, *Badiou and Theology*, 48.

²⁹⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica Prima Pars, Question 3 Article 4*, accessed October 18, 2012, <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1003.htm#article4>.

²⁹⁹ Depoortere, *Badiou and Theology*, 51.

³⁰⁰ Aquinas, *Summa, I, Q. 3. Art. 4*.

³⁰¹ See Section 1.d of this thesis.

actions can ultimately be explained.”³⁰² Like with Badiou’s truth process, this motivation may differ between subjects, but in some sense all these acts are the same, as every human being seeks truth in one way or another.³⁰³ Just as human beings have an innate desire for food or sex, we also have an innate desire for truth and meaning.³⁰⁴ As David Bentley Hart describes, “human nature’s perfection (τελειότης) is nothing but this endless desire for beauty and more beauty, this hunger for God.”³⁰⁵ In accordance with Badiou, our ability to reason shapes and directs this desire³⁰⁶ and consequently “[f]or Thomas [...] reason already, and in its own nature, as it were ‘anticipates’ the structurally ‘mystical’ character of faith itself.”³⁰⁷

This somewhat radical position in contemporary culture is not unique among medieval theologians.³⁰⁸ For example, Saint Bonaventure maintained that Christian faith “elevates human reason to see divine things, stabilizes it in truth, and fills the human mind with a multiform *lumen* enabling the mind to speculate about the things of God.”³⁰⁹

³⁰² Jean Porter, *Right Reason and the Love of God* in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas* edited by Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame, Indiana: UND Press, 2005), 172.

³⁰³ Porter, *Right Reason and the Love of God*, 172.

³⁰⁴ Aquinas upheld that desire for God must be innate, for if it were elicited “nature [becomes] ‘pure,’ devoid of desire for that which lay beyond it. This leads not only to a deformation within theology, but a loss in philosophy as well [as nature] becomes a self-enclosed, autonomous sphere.” See Long, *Speaking of God*, 74.

³⁰⁵ David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 189.

³⁰⁶ “[F]or Aquinas, reason looks downward and opens upward; it draws on the intelligibilities inherent in pre-rational nature, and it is also open to the transforming effects of grace.” See Porter, *Right Reason and the Love of God*, 183.

³⁰⁷ Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, 51.

³⁰⁸ “Thomas’s Franciscan contemporary and friend, Bonaventure, shares this much with Thomas that for him too, this Neoplatonic, ‘mystical’ dialectic of affirmative and negative derives from, just as it structures the articulation of, his most central theological teachings. For Bonaventure, the dialectic of affirmative and negative derives, as the structuring principle of *all* revealed theology, from its ultimate, Christological, source.” See Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, 51 – 52.

³⁰⁹ John Francis Quinn, *The Historical Constitution of St. Bonaventure’s Philosophy* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1973), 671.

Turner describes how Bonaventure's work *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* (The Mind's Road to God) shows how

through the drama of Christ's life on the one hand and death on the other, through the recapitulation of the symbolic weight and density of creation in his human nature on the one hand and its destruction on the cross on the other, the complex interplay of affirmative and negative is fused and concretely realized. In Christ, therefore, is there not only the visibility of the Godhead, but also the invisibility: if Christ is the Way, Christ is, in short, our way into the *unknowability* of God, not so as ultimately to comprehend it, but so as to be brought into participation with the *Deus absconditus* precisely as unknown.³¹⁰

In contrast to post-Kantian attempts at doing theology, in pre-modern theology the tensions between knowing and unknowing reveal the very structure and dynamic of reason itself. What shows the existence of God shows that we *can* speak of God—theology is possible. But precisely that which shows the existence of God shows also and at the same time, and in the same determination of proof, that we cannot have any final hold on what we mean when we do so—so theology is inherently uncompletable, open-ended, a 'broken language'.³¹¹

Contrary to Thomas's view of theology as an "inherently uncompletable, open-ended, [and broken] language" Scotus claims that certain words can be used with the

³¹⁰ Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, 53.

³¹¹ Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, 79 – 80.

same meaning when used to speak of God and when used to speak of creatures; a process he terms univocal predication.³¹² In Scotus's univocal predication, all terms designating meaning can be understood to fit into one of three categories. All predicates that do not designate anything regarding what God is in Her essence but only how She is related to other things are discarded. All remaining words are classified in one of two ways after being put through the following test. Consider the predicate x . It is either (a) better in every respect to be x than not to be x , or, (b) in some respect better to be not x than x . Any x within category (a) is labeled a "pure perfection" and understood to be any predicate that can be used to univocally speak of God.³¹³ For Scotus, this process allows for a discourse capable of projecting an accurate concept of God. Take, for example, goodness; I know how much goodness I have, I know that priests have some other degree of goodness, Mother Theresa had a greater degree of goodness and thus I can deduce the enormity that is the goodness of God. Radical Orthodox theologian Catherine Pickstock argues that this process of speaking of God results in what she refers to as a "mimetic doubling" insofar as it cannot involve any form of elevation of the actual represented finite.³¹⁴ Thus, this process is guilty of forming the abstractions discussed in the previous section, Section 1.12. As Pickstock rightfully explains, "[W]hen the mind abstracts being from finitude, it undergoes no elevation but simply isolates something formally empty, something that is already in effect a transcendently *a priori* category and no longer

³¹² Thomas Williams. "John Duns Scotus." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, December 23, 2009. Accessed October 20, 2012. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/duns-scotus/>.

³¹³ Williams, "John Duns Scotus."

³¹⁴ Catherine Pickstock, "Duns Scotus: His Historical and Contemporary Significance," *Modern Theology* 21:4 (October 2005): 546.

transcendental in the usual mediaeval sense of a metaphysically universal category which applies to all beings as such, with or without material instantiation.”³¹⁵

Radical Orthodoxy’s distinction between the analogy of being and the univocity of being clearly identifies there to be problems with using a notion of One-ness when thinking ontologically. Furthermore, as I have shown, this distinction demonstrates Badiou’s close proximity to Aquinas in his understanding of truth. A closeness one can observe as being acknowledged by Radical Orthodox theologians as well: for example, Catherine Pickstock Pickstock rightfully identifies Badiou’s notion of the event as presenting a “secular account of grace.”³¹⁶ During the third lecture of the Stanton Lectures in Cambridge in 2011, “Number and Immanence,” John Milbank stated

[I]s paradox really such a problem? Does not modern science exploit the mathematics that engenders paradox and throw up paradoxes of its own? Moreover, the one recent thinker, who, beyond Quine’s gestures has attempted a systematic mathematical ontology, namely Alain Badiou, has embraced it *precisely because* he is attracted by the paradoxes. For it is the latter, he suggests, which allow a mathematical ontology to be non-reductive: by exposing the holes, gaps or cracks in ontological reality they suggest the obscure spaces in which both phenomenal and the subjective realities can emerge into being: singular, self-founded realities ‘beyond

³¹⁵ Pickstock, “Duns Scotus,” 548.

³¹⁶ Catherine Pickstock, “The Univocalist Mode of Production,” in *Theology and the Political: The New Debate* edited by Creston Davis, John Milbank and Slavoj Žižek (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 317.

being' in the sense of the ontological repertoire, and so themselves not subject to any mathematical accounting.³¹⁷

In this sense, both Radical Orthodoxy and Badiou share in Augustine's "constant and almost obsessive concern with the Platonic 'aporia of learning'—how can I seek for knowledge of something if I do not already know it; yet how can I know something without having come to know it."³¹⁸ This aporia rightly demonstrates how a true and proper ontology refuses all "metaphysical foundationalisms which fantasise either empirical givens which precede our knowledge of them or else *a priori* modes of knowledge somehow given in advance of our actually knowing anything."³¹⁹ From this shared perspective the concern that Radical Orthodoxy presents to Badiou is the idea that in his system contingent possibility itself becomes the metaphysical foundation of being.³²⁰ As Milbank describes,

The problem for possibility left to its own devices as it were, without the assistance of either the Good or of God, is that it has to produce 'insistence' from chance and arbitrariness without a will. And the result of trying to supply it with an 'insistent' force on the one hand, or the power of randomness on the other, is that it tends to get supplied after all with a kind of quasi-actuality -- indeed as we have seen with a 'virtuality' and with a quasi-will, as with Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Beyond the latter,

³¹⁷ John Milbank, "Stanton Lecture 3: Immanence and Number" (lecture delivered at the annual Stanton Lectures at the University of Cambridge, Cambridge, England, February 2, 2011), 14 – 15.

³¹⁸ John Milbank, Graham Ward and Catherine Pickstock, "Suspending the Material: The Turn of Radical Orthodoxy," in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, edited by John Milbank, Graham Ward and Catherine Pickstock (New York: Routledge, 1999), 8.

³¹⁹ Milbank, Ward and Pickstock, "Suspending the Material," 8.

³²⁰ As indeed Quentin Meillassoux and various other members of the Speculative Realist movement argue. See Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 82 – 111.

the poet Stephane Mallarmé tried to construe the world as simply a ‘throw of the dice’. But the recourse to chance rather than force or decision remains haunted by the spectre of the living gambler on board the deck of Mallarmé’s world-ship.³²¹

Without theology preparing the way for God to somehow mysteriously act in relationship with reality—via sacraments, prayer, liturgy, etc.—Badiou is stranded in a helpless and constant state of perpetual waiting.

In denying the possibility of speaking of reality apart from God, Radical Orthodoxy clearly awards theology the role of policing both that which can be said of reality and the conditions in which reality may be made material: through such material things as bread, water, wine, or flesh. As I have shown in this section, Radical Orthodoxy reasons that such discourse is properly articulated in accordance with the writings of Thomas Aquinas, and furthermore, that such ways of thinking are strikingly resonant with the work of Badiou himself. However, in universalizing Thomistic ways of thinking about reality Radical Orthodoxy must also prohibit Badiou’s thinking of the event in a general sense, because for the theologian there is only one True-event; Christ’s death, resurrection and ascension. Only theology can enforce the words and conditions which make the reoccurrence of this event possible, what Catherine Pickstock describes as the condition for the possibility of meaning.³²² In contrast to Badiou, there is never creation *ex nihilo*, and as such, Radical Orthodoxy proclaims there to be no need to helplessly wait for an event simply because *it* has already arrived. Theological discourse is not only

³²¹ Milbank, “Immanence and Number,” 4 – 5.

³²² Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 253.

necessary for the sake of the real, it is readily available to all of humanity; there is no need to helplessly wait.

And yet, such a confident stance seems strange given Milbank's conclusion to his 2005 book, *Being Reconciled*. There Milbank writes, "The Gospel concerns, above all for us today, this issue of affinity....Affinity is the absolutely nontheorizable, it is the almost ineffable. Affinity is the *mysterium*....[W]e cannot say *in what respect* we are like God; the image [of God] simply is an ineffable likeness."³²³ I am left wondering why Milbank works so hard to instill a theological tyranny, only to then turn around and for a brief moment surrender it to silence. I am reminded of the closing passage of Elizabeth Bishop's famous villanelle, "One Art":

—Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture
I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident
the art of losing's not hard to master
though it may look like (*Write it!*) like disaster.³²⁴

Bishop, mourning the suicide of her partner, contemplates the event of losing; something that has taken place at various levels throughout her life, from the simple losing of car keys to the difficult loss of her mother. Throughout the poem she insists she has always persevered, that she has mastered the art of losing, and so she will overcome this loss as well, and yet, in the last line through the bracketed phrase, *Write it!*, Bishop sacrifices all of her previous confidence. She has not mastered the art of losing and the disaster it

³²³ Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, p. 203.

³²⁴ Elizabeth Bishop, "One Art" in *The Complete Poems 1927 - 1979* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1984), 178.

brings; this time, despite what she tells herself over and over again, she is no longer the woman she was: after this event, she will not remain the same.

In opposition to the theological and the positivist forms of discursive closure, Badiou refuses the belief that we can know of all the elements in a situation: that which *is* is inherently incomplete. And as such no theology can create the conditions in which truth is made manifest. In accordance with Radical Orthodoxy, Badiou says that the Christian subject can only be insofar as it comes about through the Christ-event, and yet, as Ben Woodard argues, in contrast to Radical Orthodoxy “effability is not the guilty and unfortunate necessity of a ‘fallen world’; declaration is instead the first mode through which the subject emerges.”³²⁵ In a world in which capitalist logic permeates all understandings of worth, when thought is blackmailed into either going along with Enlightenment values or pitting oneself against them, when love is exchanged for banal romanticism and mere sexuality, from the most talented philosopher to the most mysterious mystic, (*Write it!*) it is Badiou’s logic which truly offers a new opportunity for thinking of reality.

³²⁵ Jared Woodard, “Faith, Hope, and Love: The Inducement of the Subject in Badiou,” *Journal of Philosophy and Scripture* 3: 1 (Fall 2005): 35.