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THE DISCUSSIONS ABOUT SUBJECT and validation in our late modernity tend to oscillate between the “weak” self of post-modernity (“empty” or “rhetorical”) and neo-Cartesian versions trying, as they do, to recover a discredited foundation. Correspondingly, the solutions advanced range from calls for a new Enlightenment (in the face of the resurgence of myth and the irrational), to attempts to “re-enchant the world” (in the face of the growing threat of an impersonal instrumental Reason).

The present study seeks to respond theologically to such a situation from the perspective of God’s action in and towards the world. Its aim is to trace a view of rationality that follows the drama of God’s engagement with the world, thus involving dying and resurrection, asceticism and abundance, suffering witness and Eucharistic communion. Since, as Calvin notes, knowledge of God and knowledge of self are intimately bound together, this exercise of discerning the shape of a theological rationality in the present arena of competing promises of meaning and truth is carried out on two levels: the theo-logical and the anthropological.

As a theo-logical task, it engages with the concerns of the legitimacy of our God discourse. Following Barth, we want to hold to the task of theology as being the effort of the Church to clarify its own language about God. Such an effort takes place in the world (John 17:15) and in this respect has significant ethical overtones in its dependence upon God. This is why theology is fundamentally not a striving for relevance, as a genuinely “public discourse” is not born from such concerns. Yet, theology must take seriously the claim that the world is still God’s world, as God’s good Creation, despite the Fall. To affirm that is to allow for a certain intelligibility of both human experience and history, which in turn presupposes a reconsideration of the more ontological/universal claims (their nature and possibility in the light of Revelation). To paraphrase

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Von Balthasar, it may be the case, indeed, that true philosophy cannot exist outside Christianity, or conversely that philosophical discourse is at bottom theology, albeit, more often than not, bad theology.

But this rather universalist perspective is counterbalanced by a parallel concern with the radical nature of Revelation as being not only *in* history, as we experience it, but actually *over against* it, and, indeed, as inaugurating a new history in the very midst of the present one. This latter claim challenges the “God’s eye” perspective, uncovering the seriousness of our fallenness and finitude and revealing both the gap between what we presently are and what we are called to be and also our utter dependence, as authors of discourse, upon God.

As an anthropological task, it situates the project in relation to modern philosophy by taking seriously a different, and yet related, set of opposing claims. First, the claim of description, manifest in a concern for ontology (as found in Heidegger and in some post-Heideggerian philosophy for instance), and second, the complaint of critical thought in regard to the implicit prescriptive dimension in any ontological claim. While this is usually rendered as the inevitable presence of human interests or subsumed under the more general category of desire, arguably such critique only reveals the same tension between “what is” and “what can or must be,” or, spelled out in theological register, the invincible connection between ontology and soteriology.

Such claims are relevant not only in terms of how theology should address or respond to them but in the more general sense in which both the “descriptive” and the “critical” dimensions are inherently present in the kerygmatic and the prophetic aspect of the Gospel respectively. What is more, God’s action in and towards the world not only mediates the tension between the two perspectives, between “is” and “ought,” but enables us to situate the anthropological task itself within the same theological endeavor, as God brings about his salvific acts through human beings in history and ultimately through the one man Jesus Christ.

Our aim, therefore, is to restate the terms of theological rationality in the light of this mediatory role of agency, both divine and human. A way back to properly epistemological questions may be opened up in this way, freed from the burden of the distinctions which set the agenda for the modern discussions about the self with their deep metaphysical assumptions (noumena/phenomena, transcendental subject / empirical subject, etc.). I shall only add that such an inquiry into human knowing, acting and being, from a theological perspective, is not (or at least not

yet), a Christian anthropology, but fundamentally an investigation into the nature of the Christian claims to knowledge.

Formally, our analysis will emerge as a reply to a hermeneutical situation found to be pervasive in the present intellectual climate. In the first part, we shall attempt to trace the terms and problematic of this hermeneutical debate, in a critical engagement with Paul Ricoeur. Guided by his philosophical journey, we shall have the opportunity to assess theologically both the strengths and the weaknesses of the hermeneutical rejection of modernity. While a promising opening suggested by a mediation between a theology of the Word and a theology of Creation will be retained, Ricoeur's hermeneutical subject will be shown to remain ultimately inadequate from the perspective of God's relationship with his Creation. Such reflections will prompt us to turn to Hegel's bold self, to the philosopher who brought (or so he claimed), Revelation to the very heart of his philosophical system.

The appeal to Hegel, however, is prompted not only by the need for a more open engagement with ontological issues, but also because Ricoeur's own critical discourse uncovers a speculative dimension which needs to be further explored. Our engagement with Hegel is a battle on two fronts. On the one hand, I shall attempt to retain a "critical realist" reading of Hegel by reconsidering his profound engagement with history and historical questions, while, on the other, I shall use and pursue further Hegel's attempt to recast the meaning of history in Trinitarian categories.

In the light of our more general concerns, our engagement with Ricoeur and Hegel will help us to establish the problematic of our theological argument, to rethink what it means for theology to be faithful to its *Sache*, to carve out its own specific "realism" between "idealism" and critical approaches, to reimagine responsible theological speech that "looks forward to the day of God and hastens its coming." One may perhaps wonder whether we are trying to resuscitate an old debate about historical consciousness and the role of history in theological discourse. While we are neither directly engaging with this question here nor debating the starting point of theology, it must be said from the outset that this is in many ways true. As McCormack remarks at the end of his book on Barth, our relationship with nineteenth century theology is more complex than is usually thought. This must be thought through however not only in relation to Kant, but also to Hegel. The postmodern incapacity to renounce (Hegelian) speculation as well as the more recent neo-Marxist

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concomitant call for both “universality” and radical subjectivity (Alain Badiou, Slavoj Žižek) makes this task even more urgent.

If our engagement with Ricoeur and Hegel helped us to establish the principal coordinates of this problematic and to trace the lines of a theological reply it will have attained its goal.

In the last part, we shall reconsider “the ontological claim” (the “source” of our standards of rationality) in the light of contemporary Trinitarian thought. By engaging with a number of theological positions and recent proposals, we shall suggest that the basic grammar of the Trinitarian description, considered in its ontological intention (i.e., aiming at “the way things are”), calls for a “return to the world.” This “return” is still “ontological talk” to be sure, yet it entails an invincible epistemological dimension which will be spelled out at the intersection between “Creation” and “Word” in a polemical disputation with both an idealism of “sense,” and an idealism of “freedom.”

Under the guidance of a Trinitarian view of agency, but specifically focusing on illumination, the emerging theological rationality will be conceived “under the sign of baptism,” and articulated as *doxic obedience*, as a form of *holistic response* to God’s redemptive acts, in and towards the world. Finally, by testing our proposal against a number of recent epistemological models, such response will be shown to trace the parameters of a theological rationality freed from both modern and post-modern (hermeneutical) anxieties.

By recasting reason in this new context, we hope to make a contribution to the present epistemological discussions in at least two ways. First, by clarifying the theological background of the collusion between ethics and epistemology (making thus a contribution to “virtue epistemology”), and second, by unveiling the dispute between “internalism” and “externalism” in a new (Trinitarian) light.