Introduction
Sotiris Mitralexis

The recent translation of a number of Christos Yannaras' books in English prompted a new wave of international scholarly interest in his work. The present volume, emerging from the 'Polis, Ontology, Ecclesial Event: Engaging with Christos Yannaras' Thought' conference at the University of Cambridge,[1] is but one of the testimonies to this.

An academic philosopher, theologian, public intellectual and a profusely productive author with about seventy book titles[2] currently available in Greece, Christos Yannaras has authored treatises in philosophy (mainly ontology and epistemology), theology, and political science, while both his weekly newspaper *feuilleton* and his frequent public appearances establish him as a well-known figure in Greece's public sphere. His impact in Greece is undeniable,[3] but international engagement with his thought is steadily on the rise as well:[4] while his treatises 'began to be translated

1. 27-28 March 2017, Eastwood Room, Office of Post-Doctoral Affairs, University of Cambridge. Organising Committee: Dr Andreas Andreopoulos, Mr Pui Him Ip, Dr Isidoros Katsos, Dr Sotiris Mitralexis, Dr Dionysios Skliris. The conference concluded with a public discussion between John Milbank and Christos Yannaras.
2. Most of them, though not all, are listed in the last pages of his most recent book at the time of this writing, Christos Yannaras, *Ἡ Ὀντολογία Τοῦ Προσώπου (Προσωποκεντρικὴ Ὀντολογία) [The Ontology of the Person (Prosopo-Centric Ontology)]* (Athens: Ikaros, 2017), while two more are currently in press.
3. Russell notes that 'his books had huge sales' in Greece. Norman Russell, 'Christos Yannaras' in *Key Theological Thinkers: From Modern to Postmodern*, ed. Svein Rise and Staale Johannes Kristiansen (New York: Routledge, 2013), 725.
4. For a more or less full bibliography of studies on Yannaras up to 2014 see Basilio Petrà, *Christos Yannaras: L'Orizzonte Apofatico Dell'Ontologia* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2015), 172-9. It should be noted that the emergence of secondary

into Western European languages in the early 1970s',[1] the first decade of the new millennium has seen most of his books in English come to print, with translations of his works currently appearing in twelve languages.[2]

He is considered controversial both as a philosopher and as a theologian for reasons that include his very approach to these disciplines, politics, and the relationship between them: '[I]t is difficult to categorise Yannaras' thought. His work proceeds as if there were little distinction in practice between theology and philosophy, and even political theory. In that sense he transcends what can still be in the West rather rigid conventional boundaries between disciplines,'[3] proposing an alternative understanding thereof, with all the controversy that such a move necessarily entails. This has led to mutually exclusive criticisms: Yannaras has been criticised *both* with subordinating theology to philosophy *and* with subordinating theology to philosophy, for exhibiting *both* a disregard for Orthodox Christianity's continuity in tradition[4] *and* a traditionalist fixation on the past, for maintaining *both* a Greek anti-Westernism[5] *and* a fervent, uncompromising cosmopolitanism that denies the Greek nation-state to the point of undermining it.[6]

Born in 1935, Christos Yannaras studied theology at the University of Athens and subsequently proceeded to study philosophy in Bonn, Germany (1964-67) and to undertake doctoral research in philosophy at Sorbonne

literature is increasing its pace, with new studies appearing in English and other languages.

1. Russell, 'Christos Yannaras', 725. See also Norman Russell, 'The Enduring Significance of Christos Yannaras: Some Further Works in Translation', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 16, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 58–65, doi:10.1080/1474225X.2016.1152448.
2. Apart from English, these include French, Italian, German, Finnish, Polish, Slovenian, Russian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Ukrainian and Serbian, while some translations in other languages are underway.
3. Jonathan Cole, 'The Communo-Centric Political Theology of Christos Yannaras in Conversation with Oliver O'Donovan' in *Mustard Seeds in the Public Square*, ed. Sotiris Mitralexis (Wilmington, Delaware: Vernon Press, 2017), 62.
4. See, for example, the reactions to his *Freedom of Morality*, detailed in Christos Yannaras, *Τὰ Καθ'Ἑαυτόν [Autobiographical Sketch]* (Athens: Ikaros, 1995), 95-100.
5. Vasilios N. Makrides, 'Orthodox Anti-Westernism Today: A Hindrance to European Integration?', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 9, no. 3 (2009): 209-24; Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Ἑλληνικότητα Καὶ Ἀντι-Δυτικισμὸς Στὴ Θεολογία Τοῦ '60' ['Greekness and Anti-Westernism in the Theology of the '60s'] (PhD diss., Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 2008), 209-584.
6. Yorgos Karambelias, *Ἡ Ἀποστασία Τῶν Διανοουμένων [The Intellectuals' Apostasy]* (Athens: Enallaktikes Ekdoseis, 2012), 229-71.

University–Paris IV (*Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines*). A doctorate in theology from the University of Thessaloniki would follow. His visiting professorships in philosophy in Paris, Geneva, Lausanne, and Crete would be followed by a professorship in philosophy and cultural diplomacy at the Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences in Athens, which sparked an intense public debate on the relationship between philosophy and theology (1982). It would be safe to say that no other thinker has had such a profound influence on the development of modern Greek theology.

The rediscovery of the Patristic legacy, the engagement with the thought of the Russian diaspora (particularly Vladimir Lossky), the encounter with the corporeality of tradition and ecclesial life as well as the challenges put forth by the philosophical thought of Martin Heidegger and, later, Ludwig Wittgenstein are the elements that initially sparked Christos Yannaras' theological originality. Having already played an important role in the gradual turn from pietism and scholasticism to the new era of Orthodox theology in Greece through the publication of the journal *Synoro* (1964-67), Yannaras proceeded to receive theological stimuli such as Lossky's underscoring of the importance of personhood and to articulate an original synthesis, culminating in his *critical* and *relational* ontology of the person, which has yet to be systematically and comprehensively engaged with to an adequate degree.[1]

The title of this book, *Polis, Ontology, Ecclesial Event*, hints at its three parts: Yannaras' political thought,[2] his philosophy, and his theology respectively. The centre of gravity is on the first part, political thought, and the third part on the life of the Church is the shortest one, something which is *not* representative of the foci in Yannaras' oeuvre: there, philosophy would be ranked first and theology second – if we are, in an un-Yannaric way, to draw a line between the two – with political thought ranking third. This seeming lack of balance, owing to the conference's

1. Having first been translated in French, Yannaras' books started becoming available in English mostly after the 2000s, usually translated by the indefatigable Norman Russell. Consequently, an English *reception* of his thought (and not merely an overview) is still pending, despite Yannaras' enormous influence in Greece and Orthodox theology.
2. An important distinction needs to be made between Yannaras' treatises in political philosophy and theology, which will be discussed in the first part of this book, and his journalistic weekly *feuilletons*, first in the Greek newspaper *To Vima* and then in *Kathimerini.* While it should normally be obvious that weekly political commentaries and systematic political treatises are not the same thing and should not be treated as such, this distinction has not always been retained and respected (Kalaitzidis' 'Ελληνικότητα Καὶ Ἀντι-Δυτικισμός' is an example of such a confusion), leading to unavoidable yet systematic misreadings.

discussions, is rectified in treating this book as complementary to the forthcoming *Christos Yannaras: Philosophy, Theology, Culture*, edited by Andreas Andreopoulos and Demetrios Harper (London: Routledge, forthcoming in 2018), which emerges from the 2013 conference in Oxford[1] and focuses more on theology.

The book starts with **Dionysios Skliris**' take on Christos Yannaras' engagement with political philosophy and theology. Skliris observes Yannaras' complex relation not only with political theology, but with Marxism as well; Yannaras does assume a sort of humanist and Aristotelian Marx, by exalting the contribution of the German philosopher to a paradigm shift in the history of Western thought. The latter consists in situating man's essence in his praxis, his goal being the realisation of his specific difference, a view that brings Marx close not only to Aristotelian teleology, but also to the Greek Patristic tradition. However, according to Skliris, Yannaras also performs a deconstructive lecture of Marx, since he highlights the latter's contradictions, while trying to open the Marxist text to novel interpretations against the scientism and the positivism that prevailed in Marxism as an official ideology of socialist regimes. After Skliris' critical engagement with Yannaras' ideas, **Jonathan Cole** proceeds to question the charge of 'anti-Westernism' in Yannaras' thought. Cole places that purported 'anti-Westernism' in new perspective by considering the way that the problematic of contemporary Greek identity and the lived experience of Greek political disorder have shaped Christos Yannaras' critique of the 'West' and his political thought more generally. According to Cole, Yannaras' politico-ontological proposal to reconceive politics as the common human struggle for truth and authentic existence, which he retrieves from his Greek and Orthodox tradition, aims to resolve the problematic of Greek identity and Greek political order. Thus, although intimately bound to the particularity of the Greek context, Yannaras' political ontology offers a transcultural proposal that can provide a potent basis for dialogue with Western theologians.

In the third chapter, **Angelos Gounopoulos** explores further elements of political theology in the work of Christos Yannaras, which, as Gounopoulos contends, is based on the 'freedom of relationship' as the ontological foundation both of the *polis* and of the ecclesia of Christ. The author analyses the semantic content that the Greek philosopher ascribes to the terms 'polis' and 'ecclesia' and puts them in dialogue with other versions of Western political theologies in order to understand the

1. 'Conference dedicated to Christos Yannaras: Philosophy, Theology, Culture', organised by the Orthodox Theological Research Forum at St Edmund Hall, Oxford, 2-5 September 2013.

way Yannaras correlates theology, the ecclesial event and political life. In the last chapter of the first part, **Paul Tyson** applies Yannaras' insights to more contemporary concerns: he states that the *polis* is intended as a discursive deliberative community that pursues the common good as an act of human freedom. In our day, however, power is increasingly defined by the global non-political necessities of international force; whilst globalisation offers the hope of the first truly inclusive community of human communities, in practise human freedom – indeed the freedom to be human – is under threat. Tyson examines the Greek referendum of 2015 as a case study in the triumph of necessity over freedom and explores, with the help of Yannaras' critique, how appreciating the dynamics of the *personal*-relational mode of existence is vital in resisting the unreality and violent necessity of our times.

The second part of the book shifts the focus to philosophy. **Deborah Casewell**'s 'Loving in Relation to Nothing: On Alterity and Relationality' juxtaposes Christos Yannaras to Emmanuel Levinas. Casewell notes their similarity, as both Yannaras and Levinas base their thought on Heidegger in an effort to transcend ontotheology in different ways: Yannaras to regain an apophatic account of God as beyond being, and Levinas to avoid the totalising violence that he sees ontology is when defined as static, abstract being. Furthermore, she engages with Yannaras' relational philosophy of the person and compares it with Levinas, for whom it is the interpersonal relation in the encounter with the other rather than ontology that is 'first philosophy'. Casewell proceeds to determine what Yannaras' account of relationality through incarnation and love can add to Levinas' knowledge of God through absence, and whether, with their love of Heidegger's account of nothingness, Levinas or Yannaras presents a more inviting account of human interrelatedness and the being of God. Following this, **Sotiris Mitralexis** presents Yannaras' critical ontology by attempting a reading of his book of the same name via three 'triads': relation, *logos,* and consciousness; substance, particulars, and activities; and, lastly, otherness, art and participation.

The succession of chapters continues with **Daniel Isai** bringing Yannaras' apophaticism in dialogue with Jean-Luc Marion's philosophy via the Dionysian corpus, also highlighting phenomenology's theological turn. In Chapter Eight, **Marcello La Matina** employs Yannaras' relational philosophy of language in order to apply it to *musical sound* and its philosophical implications, linking sound to ontology. The second part concludes with **Nikolaos Koronaios**' 'Education as Freedom: An Attempt to Explore the Role of Education through Christos Yannaras' Thought'. In order to clarify the 'meaning' of education, the author presents Yannaras'

distinction between 'utilitarianism' and 'communal relations', leading to an enquiry into the relationship of education and freedom. Turning to the life of the Church, Part Three opens with **Andreas Andreopoulos**' critical view of the Council of Crete – i.e. the 'Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church' held in Kolymvari, Crete, from 19 to 26 June 2016, in which ten out of the fourteen autocephalous local churches of the Eastern Orthodox Church participated in dialogue with Yannaras' insights. In Chapter Eleven, **Brandon Gallaher** provides a re-evaluation of Christos Yannaras' theological critique to the West, not approaching it as triumphalist anti-Westernism anymore but rather as Yannaras' declared *self-critique* as a Westerner.

It is an honour and joy to be able to conclude this volume by reprinting Lord Williams' review article on 'The Theology of Personhood: A Study of the Thought of Christos Yannaras'. First published in 1972 in *Sobornost*, when **Rowan Williams** was a student at Oxford and Cambridge and before his 1975 DPhil thesis on Vladimir Lossky, this is a detailed engagement with Christos Yannaras' 1970 doctoral thesis in theology at the University of Thessaloniki entitled 'The Ontological Content of the Theological Notion of Personhood' (*Τὸ Ὀντολογικὸν περιεχόμενον τῆς θεολογικῆς ἐννοίας τοῦ προσώπου*), the first part of what would later become *Person and Eros*. While Yannaras was one of the first theologians to write theology in *demotiki,* the vernacular everyday form of the Greek language, the thesis was by necessity and university regulations written in the obscure and now abolished *katharevousa*, an artificial compromise between Ancient Greek and the vernacular of the time. Rowan Williams' article is thus one of the earliest (if not *the* earliest) cases of international engagement with Yannaras' theology that, to the best of my knowledge, has not been reprinted before. This truly indispensable paper for the study of Yannaras' thought is now made available again thanks to the kind permission of the author and *Sobornost*, with some minor adaptations in the footnotes' bibliographical information.

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This volume is primarily aimed at scholars already possessing an overview of Yannaras' thought and is not necessarily meant as an introduction to his *oeuvre*. For the sake of those readers that have not read Yannaras' works before and in lieu of an introduction to their primary tenets, I will proceed to an attempt at recapitulating the main lines of his thought.[1]

1. The following is based on my paper 'Person, Eros, Critical Ontology: An Attempt to Recapitulate Christos Yannaras Philosophy', first published in *Sobornost* 34:1

Christos Yannaras has written extensively on ontology, epistemology, ethics, theology, and politics. He has been characterised as 'Greece's greatest contemporary thinker' (Olivier Clément)[1] and 'one of the most significant Christian philosophers in Europe' (Rowan Williams),[2] whereas Andrew Louth describes him as 'without doubt the most important living Greek Orthodox theologian'.[3] A simple categorisation of his voluminous *corpus* would be to classify his main works according to the branches of philosophy to which they pertain. Thus one may classify the works *Person and Eros*, *Relational Ontology*, *Propositions for a Critical Ontology* etc. under ontology/metaphysics, the works *On the Absence and Unknowability of God: Heidegger and the Areopagite*, *The Effable and the Ineffable: the Linguistic Limits of Metaphysics* under epistemology, and finally *The Freedom of Morality* under ethics. Other notable contributions include treatises on social philosophy (*Rationality and Social Practice*), political economy (*The Real and the Imaginary in Political Economy*), the relation between contemporary physics and philosophy (*Postmodern Metaphysics*), philosophy of religion (*Against Religion: the Alienation of the Ecclesial Event*), and the historical background of the clash of civilisations (*Orthodoxy and the West*).

Yet Yannaras himself has provided us with a much better approach than this arbitrary categorisation. In his latest book in Greek under the title *Six Philosophical Paintings*[4] – which I would describe as a 'philosophical autobiography' – he introduces us to his thought in a manner that reflects the whole spectrum of his contribution to philosophy. I shall attempt to present such a prioritisation here by primarily referring to that particular book as encapsulating Yannaras' most mature and recapitulatory thought, while considering other areas of his research such as his political philosophy or his purely ecclesial writings as a corollary of this main body of ideas.

To approach Yannaras' work we must first consider the importance and scope of the term 'apophaticism' for him, which is exhaustively grounded in the Greek Patristic corpus in both *On the Absence and Unknowability of God: Heidegger and the Areopagite* and *Person and*

(2012): 34-40.

1. In his preface to Christos Yannaras, *De l'absence et de l'inconnaissance de Dieu d'après les écrits aéropagitiques et Martin Heidegger*, trans. Jacques Touraille (Paris: Cerf, 1971).
2. See Rowan Williams' endorsement on the back cover of Yannaras' HC Press translations.
3. In his introduction to Yannaras' *On the Absence and Unknowability of God* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2005), 1.
4. Yannaras, *Ἕξι φιλοσοφικὲς ζωγραφιές [Six Philosophical Paintings]* (Athens: Ikaros, 2011).

Eros. It is the Areopagite corpus and Maximus the Confessor's works that provide Yannaras with primary sources for the most explicit elucidations of apophaticism in the Patristic tradition.

The term 'apophaticism' is usually understood as a method to speak about God in theology, as the 'via negativa', that is to say by defining God not through the characteristics that God has, but through the characteristics that God *does not* have (in-effable, etc.). Yannaras, however, saw in apophaticism something immensely wider in importance, namely the epistemological tendency of the whole of Hellenic/Greek civilisation from the time of Heraclitus (with his famous quote, 'for if we are in communion with each other, we are in truth, but if we exist privately, we are in error')[1] to that of Gregory Palamas. As an overall *stance* and *attitude* towards the question of the nature of knowledge and truth, towards epistemology, and not as a *theory* on epistemology, explicit formulations concerning this apophatic *stance* can only be found in fragmentary form in the corpus of Greek texts and seldom as a systematic exposition. As is almost always the case with the epistemological attitude of a civilisation, this attitude cannot but be *implicit*, as it is taken for granted in the context of that civilisation itself.

According to Yannaras, apophaticism is the stance towards the verification of knowledge that underlines every facet of this civilisation and can be defined as 'the refusal to exhaust truth in its formulations, the refusal to identify the understanding of the signifier with the knowledge of the signified.'[2] Formulations of truth can only *refer* to the signified truth or knowledge, not exhaust it. By coming to know the formulations that refer to truth, one does not *know* truth – truth can only be lived, experienced, and as such it is not static. There is a gap of crucial cognitive importance between the signifier and its signified reality.

In an apophatic epistemology, the individual cannot conceive truth individually as a finite formulation. Truth lies in the field of experience and, more specifically, shared experience because 'there is no relation that does not constitute an experience and there is no experience . . . not arising from a relation or establishing a relation. Moreover, relation is the foundational mode of the human logical subject: the way in which Man exists, knows and is *known*.'[3]

Truth can only be attained through shared experience, communed experience, or life in communion, and cannot be confined in finite formulations.[4] This excludes the possibility of *a priori* truths, prescribed

1. Diels-Kranz, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, Band I, 148, 28-30.
2. Yannaras, *Ἕξι φιλοσοφικὲς ζωγραφιές*, 32.
3. Ibid., 58.
4. Yannaras often reminds us of Democritus' example about the 'bitter honey', Diels-Kranz, II, 119, 22-6.

doctrines and axiomatic theories.[1] Yannaras writes: 'Prerequisite and criterion for critical thinking (that is, thinking that strives to discern right from wrong, truth from falsehood) was the communal verification of knowledge.'[2] According to him, 'communed experience and not the accuracy of the individual's intellectual faculty verifies knowledge, even if proper communion of experience presupposes the accuracy of intellectual faculties'.[3] These signifiers allow us 'to share our common reference to reality and experience, but cannot replace the cognitive experience itself. This obvious difference can only then be understood when the criterion of the critical function is the communal verification of knowledge.'[4]

I must here note that Yannaras' apophatic epistemology and the usual understanding of apophaticism (in the context of the study of religion and theology) as the *via negativa* that banishes knowledge to the realm of mysticism are not merely different, but can be seen as polar opposites of each other. The cataphatic approach (either to the understanding of God in theology or of *anything else* in general) would be to attribute characteristics to something and attest that these characteristics truly reflect the nature of their object or phenomenon. *Via negativa* is the choice of negative attributes or of non-attributes in our attempt to encircle reality and knowledge with our intellect. The *via negativa* consists in the attempt to progressively claim the knowledge of an object or phenomenon by *rejecting* certain characteristics or attributes, by defining it in terms of what it is *not*, in order to arrive at a closer intellectual understanding that excludes certain errors and misconceptions. In this context, true knowledge – and above all transcendental knowledge – can only be achieved in the realm of radical subjectivity, in the realm of 'mysticism', without any possibility of sharing it effectively through language and without any vital reference to the community that would exclude the transmutation of radical subjectivity into radical individualism. However, apophatic epistemology, i.e. the refusal to exhaust truth in its formulations and the refusal to identify the understanding of the signifier with the knowledge of its signified reality, lies beyond this polarisation between cataphaticism and *via negativa* and beyond a choice of negations rather than affirmations: it is based on the symbolic character of every epistemic expression. Apophaticism sees language as *referring to* truth and reality, *signifying* reality and *iconising* it,[5] while not exhausting it. It is not *negation*,

1. *Ἕξι φιλοσοφικὲς ζωγραφιές*, 26.
2. Ibid., 25.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., 27.
5. On the iconising function, cf. Yannaras, *Person and Eros* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross, 2007), 184-7.

but the *signifying/semantic function* that characterises the relationship between language and reality. As such, language is not an obstacle hindering us from achieving an individualistic 'mystical' knowledge, but a medium to share, to commune knowledge and truth and an attempt at a communal participation to it. This elevates the communal verification of knowledge to a criterion of knowledge itself.

So, whereas the *via negativa* is usually understood as *anti-realism,* apophaticism for Yannaras is the prerequisite for realism and realism is the goal of apophaticism. Or rather realism is the *stance and attitude* that is guaranteed by a consistent apophaticism.

Knowledge emerges from participating in experience, not from the understanding of a linguistic formulation. 'And the experience is not exhausted in what is affirmed by the senses,' writes Yannaras. 'Nor is it simply an intellectual fact – a coincidence of meaning with the object of thought. Nor is it even an escape into a nebulous "mysticism", into individual existential "experiences" beyond any social verification. By the word *experience* I mean here the totality of the multifaceted fact of *relation* of the subject with other subjects, as also the relation of the subject with the objective givens of the reality surrounding us.'[1]

For Yannaras, every ontological system or statement presupposes and is based on the epistemology on which it is built, i.e. the criteria through which knowledge is considered as valid or invalid.

That is why, he remarks, 'we conclude from history that common epistemology (incorporated in the everyday life of the people) and not common ontology constitute a common civilisation, i.e. the otherness of common way of life: it is not the content we attribute to truth, but it is the way in which cognitive validity is confirmed that confers otherness in shaping public life, identity of civilisation, and ensures the historical continuity of that cultural otherness.'[2] Therefore, the criterion of the communal validation of knowledge is a crucial prerequisite for the understanding of the ancient Greek ontology and the early Christian ontology as well.

This apophatic epistemology, this communal epistemology, refers the possibility of 'existence in truth' not in the individual level, but in the field of the relations between logical 'othernesses', relations that manifest the 'other' in these 'othernesses'. The most suitable term for the will-to-relate, not as a quality of the individual but as a way of being, a mode of existence, is ἔρως. 'For Plato, the fullest knowledge is love, ἔρως: a relationship that attains freedom from all selfishness,

1. Yannaras, *Person and Eros*, xiii-xiv.
2. Yannaras, *Ἕξι φιλοσοφικὲς ζωγραφιές*, 45.

that attains the offering of the self to the other.'[1] If valid knowledge and truth can only be attained through a self-transcendent relation with existence, then the mode of truly existing is the transcendental relation, ἔρως according to the Greek language and the Platonic and Areopagite writings.

With the word ἔρως, we are introduced to the first of the two elements that constitute Yannaras' ontology of the person (or more precisely, *prosopocentric ontology*, as it is termed in proposition 12.3.2 of *Relational Ontology*; I use this term in order to discern it from personalism),[2] the 'person' (πρόσωπον) being the second.[3] 'The replies given to the ontological question, as I have identified them in the particular philosophical tradition that I have studied, may be summarised under two basic terms: person and ἔρως,' Yannaras writes. 'In the Greek philosophical literature of the early Christian and medieval periods, the starting-point for approaching the fact of existence in itself is the reality of the *person*. And the mode of this approach which makes the person accessible to knowledge is ἔρως.'[4]

Ἔρως here means what it meant for the author of the Dionysian corpus or for Maximus the Confessor, i.e. self-transcendence, the offering of the self to the other. If we define the subject merely as

1. Ibid., 26.
2. Cf. Zizioulas' distinction between personalism and the ontology of personhood (*prosopocentric ontology*) in his *The One and the Many*, 19-24. Zizioulas regards their comparison as a 'superficial association in terminology' (p. 20), noting that no substantial similarities exist between these two approaches, as the term 'person' bears a different semantic content in each case. As such, references to an 'Orthodox personalism' remain unsubstantiated. I would say that Zizioulas' explanation is wholly applicable to Yannaras' works as well; the ontology of personhood (*prosopocentric ontology*) is not to be regarded as a stream of thought within (or parallel to) personalism in which the term 'person' denotes an individual – instead of a being of relations and otherness.
3. After the publication of Yannaras' breakthrough studies on the importance of the notion of πρόσωπον for philosophy through Patristic thought in 1970, Zizioulas' 'Personhood and Being' (first published in 1977 in Greek and subsequently in English in *Being as Communion*, 27-65) offered a comprehensive analysis of the development, content and importance of the term from ancient Greek philosophy to Patristic thought and came to be recognized as a landmark publication on this ontological proposal in the English-speaking world. Confusingly enough, this contains a long footnote (in 44-6) downgrading Yannaras' 1970 dissertation, i.e. the very source of this prosopocentric understanding of theology and philosophy of which 'Personhood and Being' is such a fine specimen, as wholly subjecting Patristic thought to Heidegger's ontology, thereby alienating it from its source. In my opinion, the cited arguments bear little or no relevance to Yannaras' actual text.
4. Yannaras, *Person and Eros*, xiii.

an individual, as ἄτομον, as an undifferentiated unit of a whole that cannot be further divided,[1] then by definition it cannot manifest ἔρως.

In this semantic frame, only the person (πρόσωπον) can manifest ἔρως, and πρόσωπον is a word with an absolutely unique semantic content. It is constituted of the words πρὸς (towards, with direction to) and ὤψ/ὠπὸς (face, eye), so that it defines someone whose face looks at, or rather is directed towards, someone or something.[2] Someone that exists in-relation-to, only in relation and in reference to other beings, someone who refers his existence to the other, coming out of his existential individuality; someone who exists only by participating in relations and relationships.[3] So, πρόσωπον is not merely defined as reference and relation but it defines a reference and relation itself.[4] This entails that personhood is the only possible relationship with beings, as beings are 'things-set-opposite', 'ἀντι-κείμενα' in Greek, 'Gegen-stände' in German, etc. Being is manifested only in relation to the person and as such beings emerge as phenomena, they appear/are disclosed in the horizon of personal relation.[5] Yannaras adds, in a Heideggerian tone, 'beings are (εἶναι) only as phenomena, only insofar as they become accessible to a referential relation or disclosure. We cannot speak of the *being-in-itself* of beings; we can speak only of being-there or being-present (παρ-εῖναι), of co-existence with the possibility of their disclosure. We know beings as presence (παρ-ουσία), not as substance (οὐσία).'[6]

From early Christian times the word person, πρόσωπον, was very wisely identified with the word hypostasis, meaning actual existence. 'The fact that the identification of the terms person and hypostasis was originally used to logically clarify meta-physical references of the ecclesial experience does not restrict this identification from being used in the field of anthropology. However, a prerequisite for that would be to retain the communed experience of relations as the criterion of the formulations in language.'[7] These pairs of terms, person/hypostasis (πρόσωπον/ὑπόστασις) and substance/nature (οὐσία/φύσις) were first defined and at some point agreed upon and elaborated (as there were many different schools of terminology before the Cappadocians) in

1. See Yannaras, *Ἕξι φιλοσοφικὲς ζωγραφιές*, 61.
2. Ibid., 63.
3. Ibid., 103.
4. Yannaras, *Person and Eros*, 5.
5. Ibid., 6.
6. Ibid. This first chapter of *Person and Eros* provides a thorough analysis of the signifier πρόσωπον and its implications for philosophy.
7. Yannaras, *Ἕξι φιλοσοφικὲς ζωγραφιές*, 104.

relation to God and Christology. This, however, only reflects the way in which the philosophers and Church Fathers articulated their understanding of the world in language: these terms cannot be reserved exclusively for Christology, as they also reflect the Church Fathers' approach to ontology.

Yannaras observes that 'self-transcendent love, ἔρως, was recognised in the philosophical language of the Christianised Hellenic and Byzantine civilisation as the highest existential attainment (or fullness and causal principle) of freedom'.[1] Freedom, because self-transcendence is not really self-transcendence until the subject is freed even from the necessities and prerequisites of his own substance (οὐσία).[2] This can only happen if the hypostasis of the subject, the actual and specific manifestation of its substance, has an ontological priority over its substance and is not restricted to the constraintments and prerequisites of its substance.

According to the Patristic corpus, the testimony of the ecclesial experience identifies such a priority in the case of God, a trinity of persons/hypostases with common substance. It is being testified in the case of Jesus Christ, who transcends the necessities/prerequisites of his divine substance/nature ('logical' necessities of being outside the boundaries of time, space, the cycle of life and death) without losing it or impairing it by being incarnated as a human being, a crying baby in the manger, in a very specific time and place, and by dying on the cross. He transcends the necessities/prerequisites of his acquired human substance/nature through the resurrection. Ecclesial experience testifies man as being made 'in the image of God' and in the image of this triune existence-as-πρόσωπον, establishing man's capability to transcend by grace the necessities/prerequisites of his substance and nature through its hypostatic manifestation.[3]

With the co-ordinates of person, ἔρως and otherness, Yannaras builds a 'relational ontology'. He states 'otherness is realised and known in-relation-to-the-other, always relationally. It is an outcome and an experience of relation and relationship. Through this perspective, we can speak (with logical consistency) of a relational ontology.'[4] Relation and relationship is never granted or finite, but a dynamic event which is continually found or lost, a fact which can be traced in our human

1. Ibid., 60.
2. There is a crucial difference between being freed from the *necessities* and *prerequisites* of one's own substance and being freed *from the substance itself*: overseeing this difference has led to much confusion.
3. Ibid., 74.
4. Ibid., 58.

experience. Given the apophatic nature of the epistemology on which we base 'propositions for an ontological interpretation of existence and reality that are subject to critical verification or refutation',[1] Yannaras concludes a relational ontology can only be a 'critical ontology'.[2] He defines 'critical ontology' as follows:

> We term onto-logy the theoretical investigation of existence (τὸν λόγον περὶ τοῦ ὄντος), the logical propositions for the interpretation of reality. We try, with our rational faculties, to interpret reality and existence as to the fact that it is real and that it exists. We try to interpret the meaning of existence, the cause and purpose of existence.
>
> With the word 'critical' we term the process of evaluating ontological propositions, evaluating the logical accuracy of these propositions on the grounds of κοινὸς λόγος (i.e. common sense, word, rationality, language and understanding), evaluating the capability of the ontological propositions to be empirically verified through shared, communed experience accessible to all.[3]

Propositions of a critical ontology are never finite, granted, or 'closed': they are always subject to communal verification or refutation, to the communal criterion of truth, due to the fact that there is no way of individually 'securing the truth' of said propositions.

According to Yannaras, every attempt to continue the philosophical tradition of the ancient Greek or Christianised Hellenic and Byzantine civilisation without the fundamental prerequisite of apophaticism is inherently dysfunctional. He writes 'despite the post-Roman West's boasting of inheriting and continuing the ancient Greek tradition of philosophy and science, the refutation of the fundamental characteristics of Hellenism, i.e. apophaticism and the communal criterion, leaves no room for the validity of such a claim'.[4] Based on this, Yannaras argues the reception of classical and Christian thought in the West was crucially undermined by the reversal of its epistemological preconditions and their replacement with epistemological criteria that are entirely based on the individual's capacity to think rationally (*facultas rationis*), a criterion that the West ascribes to the philosophical legacy of Aristotle.

1. Ibid., 54.
2. As such, I will use these terms interchangeably, as synonyms. To be precise, a relational ontology is the outcome of a consistently critical stance towards ontology.
3. Yannaras, *Ἕξι φιλοσοφικὲς ζωγραφιές*, 51.
4. Ibid., 35.

I will come to the philosophical importance of the activities[1] (ἐνέργειαι) for Yannaras and their relation to the hypostatic manifestation of the substance in Chapter Six of this book. But I must stress here that Yannaras regards the activities as absolutely important for a coherent ontological terminology. He remarks that '[A]n ontology which (out of conviction or ignorance) denies to discern the substance/nature and the hypostasis from the activities of substance/nature, which are hypostatically manifested is condemned to an irreversible deficit of realism; it is trapped in the separation and dissociation of thinking (νοεῖν) and existence (εἶναι).'[2] This insistence in the *concreteness* and realism of philosophical reasoning remains a priority throughout Yannaras' work.

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As noted in the beginning, we are currently witnessing the *beginning* of a more sustained and systematic engagement with Yannaras' multifaceted work in Anglophone scholarship: a new phase, in which many of Yannaras' books are finally available in English, putting an end to the monopoly of second-hand engagement with his thought, mediated mainly through Greek scholars writing in English,[3] which was so often the case until recently. Even though a collective volume such as this

1. I have chosen to translate ἐνέργειαι as 'activities' throughout this study for a variety of reasons. The obvious translation of the Patristic term ἐνέργεια as 'energy' leads the English speaking researcher to misunderstand its meaning, as the word loses its crucially important polysemy and it is often understood as some sort of 'magical agent' (i.e., in the same way that some theologians understand χάρις, grace). For example, in the context of the Monothelite controversy, Maximus speaks of the two 'energies' of Jesus Christ, but the meaning of this is better conveyed in English with the word 'activities'. Andrew Louth, Torstein Tollefsen, Melchisedek Törönen and others have preferred 'activities' over 'energies' as the translation of 'ἐνέργειες', and I will here follow their example. However, the word 'activity' has certain disadvantages of its own. For this reason and to prevent further misunderstanding due to the use of the improved translation of ἐνέργεια as activity, I will attempt to mention the Greek original word ἐνέργεια side by side with its translation as 'activity' as often as possible in this book. Nevertheless, 'activity' is still an incomplete translation of ἐνέργεια with inherent semantic problems and we are still in search of a better translation.
2. Yannaras, *Ἕξι φιλοσοφικὲς ζωγραφιές*, 101.
3. Apart from the few books by Yannaras that were indeed available in English in previous decades, and apart from Francophone scholarship, an exception to this would include Anglophone scholars reading Yannaras through French translations, which were in relative abundance, with six major titles available prior to the 1990s.

constitutes by definition secondary literature on Yannaras (and even though some of the contributors are indeed Greek), we remain with the hope that this book can act as a 'bridge' to this new era.