THEISM AND REALISM: GOD IN THE (HUMANLY CONSTITUTED) WORLD[1]

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Abstract. This paper attempts to delineate a kind of realism, which incorporates some anti-realistic insights regarding the perspective, situated, and historical character of our forms of knowing and being in the world, and which resonates with the basic tenets of Christian theism. The first part of the paper analyzes the challenges anti-realism poses to Christian theism, particularly regarding the role, which the doctrine of creation played in securing the correspondence theory of truth as well as the fundamental experience of God as the foundation of order and meaning. Using Heidegger's hermeneutics in the second part, it is shown that epistemic pluralism can be made compatible with realism. Given that this form of hermeneutic realism still has problems with integrating the transcendence of God, as well as his/her presence and action in the "world," the notion of continuous co-creation as the basis for a pluralist realism that is amenable to Christian theism is explored in the final part.

I. INTRODUCTION

A strong affinity between realism and Christian theism has been traditionally held and emphasized. The former may be broadly understood as both an ontological and epistemological position, according to which the world exists independently of our conceptual schemes, epistemic practices, and worldviews, and can be known by us. Christian theism, in turn, can be very roughly described as the belief and experience that there is a divine personal reality who created the world, continues to act in it and is in a loving relationship

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with us. The fact that the world and its denizens were created, traditionally served to account for the independence of reality with respect to the human mind and the possibility of knowing it. The world has a form, structure, and order given to it by its creator, and which can be discovered and expressed by our cognitive operations, which are themselves configured after the same principles and laws that underlay reality. This form of realism, however, has been deeply challenged in contemporary thought in a way that seems to bear on theism. In this paper, we aim to explore to what extent criticisms to metaphysical realism have impacted theism, and how the criticisms can be addressed by a pluralist form of realism that is amenable to God's creative presence in the world.

Let us begin by exploring the affinity between realism and Christian theism. It can be appreciated in the appeal to God in the justification of both the order and intelligibility of the world, which can be found in different forms throughout the history of philosophy, theology, and science. Descartes' famous argument to prove that material things exist and can be known offers a prominent example. At the beginning of his fourth meditation, he says:

> […] from this contemplation of the true God, in whom all the treasures of wisdom and the sciences lie hidden, I think I can see a way forward to the knowledge of other things. To begin with, I recognize that it is impossible that God should ever deceive me. For in every case of trickery or deception some imperfection is to be found; and although the ability to deceive appears to be an indication of cleverness or power, the will to deceive is undoubtedly evidence of malice or weakness, and so cannot apply to God.[2]

The knowledge of the wisdom and goodness of God offers the ground to move toward and warrant the knowledge of "other things." In the last meditation, Descartes concludes that the ideas we have about the external world must, for sure, come from the "corporeal things" they represent, because God "has given me a great propensity to believe that they are produced by corporeal things," he "is not a deceiver" and "has given me no faculty at all for recognizing any [other] source for these ideas".[3] Thus, God becomes the epistemic guarantee of the truth of our ideas about the external world and of the real existence of the things to which they refer.

2 René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. II (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984), AT VII 53.

3 Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings,* AT VII 79.

Indeed, Christian theism and realism are not only consistent doctrines, but they have also been important allies. John Hedley Brooke carefully shows how the Christian doctrine of creation provides both the motivation for and the justification of the empirical study of nature at the beginning of modern science. According to Brooke, the very possibility of the scientific enterprise presupposes the causal interconnection of reality and the uniformity of nature, i.e., the stability and universality of natural laws. How can the order and regularity of nature be warranted? Brooke answers:

> In the past, religious beliefs have served as a *presupposition* of the scientific enterprise insofar as they have underwritten that uniformity. Natural philosophers of the seventeenth century would present their work as the search for order in a universe regulated by an intelligent Creator. A created universe, unlike one that had always existed, was one in which the Creator had been free to exercise His will in devising the laws that nature should obey. A doctrine of creation could give coherence to scientific endeavor insofar as it implied a dependable order behind the flux of nature.[4]

The doctrine of creation, therefore, indicates that God has established laws to which nature must conform. Being regulated by natural laws, the world is uniform in such a way that results are guaranteed for cause and effect relationships, which are the basis of scientific investigation. In this sense, the notion of "natural laws" that are discovered by scientific inquiry reveals the heritage, which science has received from the Christian doctrine of creation.[5]

But how can it be guaranteed that scientific theories really capture natural laws? Again, the creative role of God provides the relevant epistemic justification: "If the human mind had been created in such a way that it was matched to the intelligibility of nature, then the possibility of secure scientific knowledge could be affirmed".[6] God has created both the world and the human mind in such a way that the former is intelligible to the latter. Moreover, the Christian doctrine of creation gives a further purpose to the investigation of nature, insofar as discovering natural laws is a way to get to know its author, who reveals himself in his works. This is because:

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4 John Hedley Brooke, *Science and religion: some historical perspectives* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2014), 26.

5 Brooke, 26; cf. Alister McGrath, *Scientific Theology Nature: Volume 1.* (London: T&T Clark, 2014), 225ff.

6 Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 28.

> Proponents of scientific inquiry would often argue that God had revealed Himself in two books–the book of His words (the Bible) and the book of His works (nature). As one was under obligation to study the former, so too there was an obligation to study the latter.[7]

Thus, the Christian doctrine of creation shows how theism and realism are not only related, but also primordial allies. The existence of the external world with a defined order and structure, and our capability of knowing it, are grounded on the idea that God created the world and the human mind.[8]

In a similar direction, Alvin Plantinga argues that there is no conflict between science and theism, but that there is a tension between naturalism and science. Plantinga thinks that the theory of evolution is self-defeating if it is put in conjunction with naturalism. In which case, the probability that our cognitive faculties are reliable (i.e., that they evolved to generate true beliefs) is very low or inscrutable. This is so because the truth value of our beliefs is irrelevant to the evolutionary process. The ability of a belief to offer evolutionary advantages and enhance survival does not directly depend on its capacity to veridically represent reality. After all, in some cases, false beliefs may enhance the survival of a species better than true ones. If so, then the conjunction of naturalism and evolution leads to radical skepticism, which of course presents a "defeater" to the theory of evolution and any other theory.[9] Here we also find that the truth of our descriptions of the external world is guaranteed in virtue of our cognitive faculties being created by God to function properly in each environment, which implies rejecting naturalism. All this shows to what extent the belief that God *created* the world underwrites the possibility that our ideas and beliefs *correspond* to reality, in a way that probably no other justification of knowledge can accomplish.[10]

Now, the image of truth and knowledge that underlies this form of realism has been the target of intense criticisms from different fronts in contemporary philosophy. Interestingly, for some thinkers, the apparent collapse of

7 Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 29.

8 Cf. McGrath, *Scientific Theology*, 135ff.

9 Cf. Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2011), 307–50.

10 Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, 'What Is Truth?', in *Basic Questions in Theology*, vol. II (Fortress Press, 1971), 17.

the correspondence theory of truth also implies an insurmountable challenge for theism. Commenting on Nietzsche, Foucault claims:

> If there is no relation between knowledge and the things to be known, if the relation between knowledge and known things is arbitrary, if it is a relation of power and violence, the existence of God at the center of the system of knowledge is no longer indispensable.[11]

A common interpretation of the historicity of knowledge is that, given that all our theories belong to ever-changing epistemic practices, which respond to diverse interests and needs apart from pure knowledge, they do not refer or correspond to the way things really are, but rather, they *constitute* reality. This ultimately makes God's epistemic foundational role redundant. Moreover, if there is no way the world is, and it is arbitrarily given shape by means of our practices, which respond to contingent motivations and purely human needs and tendencies, then the very idea of a creator of the order and intelligibility of the cosmos begins to fade away. In a similar vein, Richard Rorty compares the correspondence theory of truth with the belief in the will of God as the foundation of morality:

> There is a useful analogy to be drawn between the pragmatists' criticism of the idea that truth is a matter of correspondence to the intrinsic nature of reality and the Enlightenment's criticism of the idea that morality is a matter of correspondence to the will of a Divine Being. The pragmatists' anti-representationalist account of belief is, among other things, a protest against the idea that human beings must humble themselves before something non-human, whether the Will of God or the Intrinsic Nature of Reality.[12]

Rorty's analogy shows again the link between God and the idea of an external reality. Both are conceived as non-human powers to which "human beings must humble themselves." In the same way that an action was conceived to be good if it conformed to the will of God, a belief was considered true if it conformed to facts. Just like Foucault's, Rorty's critique of realism seems to involve an attack on theism, by defending the priority of historical human practices that structure the world over an ahistorical external reality. Given the strong affinity and historical alliance between realism and Christian the-

11 Michel Foucault, 'Truth and Juridical Forms', in *Power: The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954–1984* (Penguin, 2019), 10.

12 Richard Rorty, 'Pragmatism as Anti-Authoritarianism', in *A Companion to Pragmatism,* ed. John R. Shook and Joseph Margolis (Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 257.

ism, the weakness of the former seems to lead to a fracture in the latter. But is this necessarily the case?

In this paper we want to explore the challenges that the contemporary criticisms to realism present to theism, with the aim of delineating a pluralist type of realism, which, upon incorporated with the historical, embodied, and perspectivist character of human knowledge, can respond to anti-realism and simultaneously be amenable to Christian theism.

II. THE CHALLENGES OF ANTI-REALISM TO THEISM

The idea that truth is a relationship of correspondence (*adequatio*) between an independent reality and the mind (or certain mental entities such as beliefs or propositions) has been shown to be deeply problematic. What kind of relationship should this be and how is it possible? Philosophers in different traditions have repeatedly pointed out that correspondence has never been satisfactorily explained and justified. Heidegger, for example, showed that the idea of truth as *adaequatio intellectus et rei* "is very general and empty"[13] because the two terms of the relationship (mind and reality), as they were understood in traditional epistemology, have heterogeneous modes of being. Therefore, it is not clear with regard to what they should agree. How can something mental, characterized by meaningful relationships, *agree* with something material, presumably characterized by physical properties?

In a similar vein, Hillary Putnam raised the issue that while the mental operations by which we produce symbols that attempt to *represent* the world may be in a causal relationship to the world, "the objects which are the dominant cause of my beliefs containing a certain sign may not be the referents of that sign."[14] Thus, for instance, someone may have a belief about atoms because of having read about them in a book, but the relationship between the book and the belief is not the one expected from correspondence. Moreover, the very image of truth as correspondence implies that it would be possible to stand outside all language and cognitive practice to check how they would correspond to an enterally independent, non-linguistically mediated reality.

13 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 258.

14 Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981), 51.

But such completely disengaged point of view is simply unattainable for beings like us. All our cognitive practices and operations presuppose the use of historically changing language systems and procedures and are motivated by needs and interests besides pure theoretical contemplation. Correspondence is thus an empty notion, even if it retains its intuitive appeal. Every attempt to verify it involves the use of one or another set of concepts, language system and epistemic practice, without which there is no way of knowing the world.

The recognition of the necessarily situated, interested, and perspectival nature of knowing in contemporary thought allows for diverse developments. Anti-realism, in its strongest versions, challenges the idea of there being a reality independent of our mind, language, and epistemic practices, to which they should correspond. On the contrary:

> Frames of reference seem to belong less to what is described than to a system of description […]. If I ask about the world, you can offer to tell me how it is under one or more frames of reference; but if I insist that you tell me how it is apart from all frames, what can you say? We are confined to ways of describing whatever is described. *Our universe, so to speak, consists of these ways rather than of a world*.[15]

Goodman claims that the attempt to know things in themselves lacks sense, for what we call "the world" is only our description of the world. What is real is determined by our frames of reference or conceptual schemes. Here we find the first trait of Anti-realism that seems to conflict with Cristian theism. Without attempting to fully represent the perspective of all authors who defend this kind of position, let us explore this trait trying to show where the conflict lies.

(1) What is real (objects, properties, facts) *depends on* our conceptual schemes, frames of references, cultures, ways of organizing experience, and so on.

Given that all we know about the world requires the use of a language and a conceptual system, which are historical and local formations, and given that it is not possible to rise above all perspective to directly see how the world is independently of all frames of meaning and reference, then it makes no sense to ask which theory better corresponds to the way things really are. In

15 Nelson Goodman, 'Words, Works, Worlds', *Erkenntnis* 9, no. 1 (1975), 58, *italics added*.

this sense, what counts as real depends on the conceptual scheme, language game, or epistemic practices, in which it is being defined. In Hilary Putnam's words, "to hold *what objects does the world consists of?* is a question that it only makes sense to ask within a theory or description".[16]

Now, this dependence of "reality", *i.e.*, of everything that counts as a fact, on our conceptual frames and epistemic practices is *constitutive*.[17] This means that our conceptual schemes, languages, and practices produce their objects, which cannot be separated from the way in which they are described. In defining his internalist position, Hilary Putnam exposes this sense of "dependence" in the following terms:

> "Objects" do not exist independently of conceptual schemes. We cut up the world into objects when we introduce one or another scheme of description. Since the objects and the signs are alike internal to the scheme of description, it is possible to say what matches what.[18]

In this approach, no object can exist independently of a particular conceptual scheme. The sun, the moon, the planets, the Earth, the rocks, the animals, as well as numbers and social institutions and any kind of object we can imagine, are what they are thanks to our ways of thinking and describing them. If there is a correspondence between sign and object, this correspondence is only possible because both the sign and the world are established by our conceptual schemes. In Putnam's words:

> Signs do not intrinsically correspond to objects, independently of how those signs are employed and by whom. But a sign that is actually employed in a particular way by a particular community of users can correspond to particular objects *within the conceptual scheme of those users*.[19]

There is still correspondence, but it is internally set up within a system of concepts, which also produces their objects and determines how language can refer to them. Ontology, accordingly, is not free from our frames of reference. Reality is constitutively dependent on our cognitive operations. This clearly seems to be at odds with traditional Christian Theism. If the ontological com-

16 Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981), 49.

17 Cf. André Kukla, *Social Constructivism and the Philosophy of Science*, Philosophical Issues in Science (Routledge, 2000), 21; Paul Artin Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge: Against Relativism and Constructivism* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2006), 17.

18 Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History*, 52.

19 Ibid., 52.

ponent of realism asserts that there is an external reality, Christian theism declares that the primordial independent reality is God, who is the creator and main source of reality. Thus, the fact that the world is and that it is in a certain way, are consequences of the creative will of God. As we saw before, the doctrine of creation served to warrant the independence of reality, its inner structure, and the possibility of human knowledge. Moreover, finitude, as an essential mark of human beings and the world, suggests that we do not have our foundation in ourselves, but in our creator.[20]

Likewise, the existence of God implies that there is a source of independent meaning and orientation for human life, which cannot be thought of as simply founded by human conventions and dealings in the world. Christian Theism implies the sense of a transcendental meaning, which cannot be reduced to our conceptual schemes, practices, and forms of life, but rather makes them possible. There is Other who interpellates and challenges us, both through the resistance of an order of being, which does not allow that any interpretation of reality equally works, and by means of a call to plenitude and flourishing to which we must respond.

The point is not that the criticism of the correspondence image of truth and knowledge directly amounts to a sort of argument against the existence of God. But the relationship between God and "the world", from which human embodied forms of knowing, representing, and acting cannot be excluded, needs to be reinterpreted. How can the creative action of God in a world which is humanly constituted be understood?

This leads us to a second point, related to the first, in which anti-realism seems to be at odds with the belief in God the creator. As with the first trait, it corresponds to a strong version of anti-realism, to which not all those who declare themselves to be anti-realists would subscribe, but which is representative of the contemporary rejection of classical forms of realism:

(2) There is a plurality of conceptual schemes (and worlds) and it is problematic to establish neutral criteria for deciding between them.

20 Cf. Medard Kehl, *Contempló Dios toda su obra y estaba muy bien: una teología de la creación* (Herder, 2009), 53; cf. Karl Rahner, 'Welt in Gott', in *Anstösse Systematischer Theologie. Beiträge Zur Fundamentaltheologie Und Dogmatik, Vol. 30*, ed. Sämtliche Werke (Herder, 2009), 499.

Immanuel Kant thought that all cognitive creatures had the same conceptual scheme, and thus objectivity could be warranted. Incorporating historical awareness into this Kantian move, the anti-realist claims that there are many conceptual schemes that emerge and change, depending on contextual circumstances. In a famous passage of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* Thomas Kuhn says: "In a sense I am unable to explicate further, the proponents of competing paradigms practice their trades in different worlds".[21] Instead of a singular framework for organizing experience for all rational beings, the anti-realist thesis presents a plurality of frameworks and worlds.

Classic logical positivists drew a difference between the context of discovery and the context of justification. Roughly, the context of discovery is the set of non-scientific conditions, in which a scientific theory arises (e.g., time, culture, political or economic interests, and so on). The context of justification is the set of conditions that are relevant for determining whether a scientific theory should be accepted or rejected. This distinction could be extended to all forms of knowledge, not just scientific theories. According to (2), in all forms of knowledge, the distinction between the context of discovery and the context of justification cannot be drawn. Therefore, the success of our theories, and in general, the functioning of our cognitive practices depends on non-epistemic and historical factors. In Kuhn's words:

> [Observation and experience] cannot alone determine a particular body of such belief. An apparently arbitrary element, compounded of personal and historical accident, is always a formative ingredient of the beliefs espoused by a given scientific community at a given time.[22]

In contrast with the classic picture of knowledge, which considers it as a pure and disinterested activity oriented only to theoretical contemplation, this trait of anti-realism emphasizes the primacy of the sociological and historical aspects of knowing practices. Historical conditions are decisive to determine the content and normative criteria of theories and belief systems. Given this primacy, different historical conditions produce several conceptual schemes.

Now, if there are several conceptual schemes depending on non-epistemic factors, and if conceptual schemes constitute what is real, then they are also equally valid. All criteria of rationality and justification already belong to one

21 Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970), 150.
22 Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 4.

or another conceptual scheme, and thus, there is no common tribunal able to adjudicate which belief system or conceptual scheme is more valid, correct, or true. Every attempt to justify a conceptual scheme is necessarily circular, for it is only possible using the criteria constituted by the same conceptual scheme.[23]

A good example of this position was developed by Barry Barnes and David Bloor in the so-called Strong Program in the Sociology of Knowledge. These authors defend the "equivalence postulate," according to which "all beliefs are on a par with one another with respect to the causes of their credibility".[24] This is so because "there are no context-free or super-cultural norms of rationality".[25] On this widely extended view, there are no neutral criteria to choose between alternative conceptual schemes, because all principles of rationality are already manifestations of a local set of rules, which only have meaning and application within a framework.

Why does this second feature of anti-realism raise a challenge to Christian theism? In the plurality of conceptual schemes the possibility of theism is open, but limited. Indeed, according to the second trait, we can conceive a framework in which God could have a significant role. However, in another conceptual scheme "God" could simply be an empty term. A strong tension underlies this possibility, because the existence of God would be relative to a framework and depend on a chain of exclusively historical circumstances.

Even if we focus only on the "theistic framework" in which God is meaningful, theism has to face the same challenge that the first trait of anti-realism imposes on it. If there are several conceptual schemes, some of which imply the existence of God, then the reality of God would be relative to particular conceptual schemes. In other words, God would be constitutively dependent on us. The ontological *independence* of God would be threatened. This is clearly a problem for theism, because God could no longer be regarded as the creator. Instead, like in some classical 19th century critiques of religion, human beings would have become the creators of God through their situated and historical frameworks. The creative relation between God and human beings would thus be fractured.

23 Cf. Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?* (Harvard Univ. Press, 1999), 68ff.
24 Barnes and Bloor, 'Relativism', 23.
25 Ibid., 28.

Furthermore, the relativist consequence of (2) implies that we cannot decide between a theistic and a naturalistic framework. Since there is no external criterion for evaluating between two alternative conceptual schemes, a world with God will have the same value as a world without God. There is nothing that assures us that the theistic framework *corresponds* to reality while the naturalistic one does not.

The criticisms raised by anti-realist against traditional realism certainly resonate with our contemporary self-understanding as historical beings, creators of meaning, and active agents in our cognitive practices. It is no longer an option to maintain an image of knowledge as a disengaged relationship between a non-historical subject and a constellation of neutral objects. However, is it possible to reconcile the creative activity of God with the historical and active role of our cognitive practices? Can the tenets of Christian theism be maintained while assuming the pluralistic and perspectival vision that anti-realism invites?

III. HERMENEUTIC REALISM AND TRANSCENDENCE

The intimate connection between realism and Christian theism, which we have been exploring, however, does not imply a unique version of realism that is unable to recognize the historically situated, interested, and active character of human knowledge, and of our ways of dwelling in the world—as it has been constantly emphasized in the last decades, realism is not incompatible with epistemic pluralism.[26] In this section, we want to explore a form of pluralist realism that is able to respond to the challenges of anti-realism. This pluralist realism would also be able to integrate whatever valuable insights of anti-realism that are proper to our contemporary self-understanding as historical beings, while maintaining the fundamental tenets of a theistic outlook of reality. How can we reconcile the belief and experience of the guiding, meaning-giving relationship we have with God, the creator of reality, with the awareness of our constructive participation in reality?

To begin with, the "fact" that human beings in one sense or another (as spelled out by anti-realist theories), through their conceptual schemes, epis-

26 Carlos Miguel Gómez Rincón, *Racionalidad y trascendencia. Investigaciones en epistemología de la religión*, (Sal Terrae, Universidad del Rosario, 2020), 231ff.

temic practices, forms of life, worldviews, etc. *construct*, *constitute,* or, less radically, *contribute* to determine what counts as real, is itself part of reality. Historical consciousness and the awareness of the situated character of our forms of knowing *affirm something* about ourselves and our place in the world, and thus imply a basic realist claim. The very processes through which reality is produced by us belong to reality. This means that these processes have a way of being, which has an origin other than themselves. Our creative participation in reality requires certain conditions that ground and make this participation possible. These conditions, even if are subjected to historical change and variability, cannot produce themselves, but need to be presupposed for the constructionist process to work.[27] Indeed, these conditions are studied by anti-realist and socio-constructionist theories (discourse, language, power, culture, etc.) and thus have an independent reality with respect to them.

In other words, the presupposition of the theories, which affirm that reality is constructed or constituted by human beings, is that such a reality, even if depended on history, language, power, and so on, is to an important degree, independent from the history, language, and culture *of the investigator,* who can find out and describe how it was constructed. A painful auto-referential contradiction would be the result of denying such basic independence. However, beyond the traditional logical argument against relativism, the recognition of this basic independence of a "socially constructed reality," brings to light an irreducible trait of what we call "reality." Constitutive dependence, which in the last section we identified as one of the basic features of anti-realism, is not only compatible but also requires a basic realism.

To fully appreciate this, it is necessary to move beyond an understanding of constitutive dependence as an arbitrary imposition of meaning on a fundamentally disordered and formless world. We need a notion of interpretation and meaning that is able to present them not as a barrier that keeps us apart from a forever lost noumenal reality, but as a way of being in contact and taking part *in* reality. Moreover, it is necessary to show that constitutive dependence is already part of reality, which includes all our operations and meaning.

27 Cf. Christian Smith, *What Is a Person? Rethinking Humanity, Social Life, and the Moral Good from the Person Up*, (Univ. of Chicago Press, 2010), 132ff.

This creative participation in reality is the starting point of a pluralist form of realism that is amenable to theism. The first step in this direction will be to overcome the image of knowledge on which the whole realism/anti-realism discussion rests. This image places our cognitive processes on a separate realm *in front of* which reality stands, either as something given to be discovered and adequately represented, or as that which is constituted or produced by our cognitive operations. In both cases, we are taken as disengaged subjects, standing before an external reality to which we do not integrally belong. The basic form of being would then be cognitive, and the bound between us and the world would be mental representations. It does not matter if representations are taken as attempts to get to the way things really are, or as forms of projecting order, structure, and meaning on a fundamentally unordered reality. Dreyfus and Taylor[28] call this foundational image of Western epistemology, the "mediational picture of knowledge," which is based on the subject/object dichotomy.

Reality, either constituted or grasped by means of our cognitive operations, neither include these operations nor the forms of dwelling and relating to reality. Overcoming this picture, implies a richer understanding of the relational nature of our cognitive operations in a way that allows to see that even though reality is, for us, always a meaningful world, in which we can act and live, these orders of meaning are not an arbitrary projection of alien categories into a neutral, inaccessible stuff, but constitute our ways of being in contact and skillfully interacting with the world. Heidegger's *Being and Time*[29] offers a starting point for this form of pluralist realism, which has been recently developed by Dreyfus and Taylor in their contact theory.

Instead of a conceptual picture, resulting from a cognitive process, Heidegger claims that our primordial form of understanding is embodied in how we skillfully cope with the world. Prior to any theoretical thematization, we had been practically engaging with the world in which we live and of which we form part. This practical involvement (*Besorgen*) constitutes our basic form of being-in-the-world. Here understanding has the form of pre-theoretical dealing, that is, of being able to do things and meaningfully act.[30] Rather than

28 Hubert L. Dreyfus and Charles Taylor, *Retrieving Realism* (Harvard Univ. Press, 2015).
29 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Blackwell, 2001).
30 Cf. Heidegger, *Being and Time,* 83.

a collection of neutral objects, the world is already a network of significant connections from which each thing receives its meaning. These connections are established by *Dasein*'s practices and forms of dwelling, so that instead of conceptual entities in the mind or a conceptual scheme, each object is what it is pre-theoretically in the pragmatic context in which it is used in-order-to-do something.[31] For this reason, Heidegger uses the term *Zeug* (*equipment*, according to Macquarrie & Robinson's translation) to designate the entities that constitute the world: our basic form of understanding is "not a bare perceptual cognition, but rather that kind of concern, which manipulates things and puts them to use".[32] In our dealing with entities, which are for-something, their meaning lies implicitly.

This pragmatically oriented character of primordial understanding allows us to integrate historical diversity with a basic realism.[33] This is because while in our dealings with the world, we discover it from the perspective that our interested and culturally determined practices allow, these practices only work and permit us to successfully move in the world because they are forms of contact with a reality that resists certain uses and practices and makes others possible. There may not be a total, perspectiveless grasp of things, but a plurality of forms of coping, in which different aspects of things are discovered. However, these aspects need to be presupposed by our dealings. They disclose themselves by permitting our culturally situated practices to work. Mastery in any practice implies this ability to read "materials" and use them for the purposes of the practice, even if a direct, thematic investigation of materiality as such, always comes a second place and is also a form of interested practice. This allows us to continue speaking in terms of normative criteria to discriminate between adequate and inadequate forms of dealing and interpreting things.

In other words, even if reality is always interpreted, interpretation is not a barrier that separates us from the way things are in themselves; it is rather our way of being in relationship with the world. In our practices "environing Nature [*die Umweltnatur*] is discovered and is accessible to everyone. In roads, streets, bridges, buildings, our concern discovers Nature as having some defi-

31 Cf. Heidegger, *Being and Time,* 97.

32 Ibid., 95.

33 Carlos Miguel Gómez Rincón, "Diversity and Interpretation. Toward a Pluralist Realist Description of Religious Experience", *Religions* 12, no. 10 (2021), 848.

nite direction".[34] Meaning may be local, i.e., dependent on a particular cultural horizon, but it is not entirely made up by our practices. Contrariwise, "at the most basic, preconceptual level, the understanding I have of the world is not simply constructed or determined by me. It is a 'coproduction' of me and the world".[35]

This form of hermeneutical realism moves beyond the mediational picture of knowledge, which most of the participants at the realist/anti-realist discussion presuppose, insofar as the primordial place of meaning and understanding are not representations or conceptual schemes, but our engagement with the world. Consequently, the dependence of reality on our practices, proper to anti-realist positions, moves from the constructionist role of concepts, discourse, or language —which presupposes an arbitrary, contingent (and somehow inexplicable) relationship to the world— to the relational character of dealing and skillfully coping with it. We are already part of the world, and therefore, no arbitrary projection of meaning must fill the gap between our cognitive operations and reality. Primordial meaning is relational, and thus, it requires that the entities, with which we deal, let themselves be used and captured in the direction that our dealings allow.

Now, in Heidegger's view, the whole network of meaningful connections that constitute the world is, in the last term, referred to human beings. The world is for-the-sake of *Dasein* (2001, 116), and reality "is grounded on the being of *Dasein*".[36] There is only meaning and truth for *Dasein*, in whose mode of dwelling the world opens itself. This, however, "does not signify that only when *Dasein* exists and as long as *Dasein* exists, can the Real be as that which in itself it is".[37] Here, we find a decisive element for our search of a pluralist realism.

The central issue is how to understand the dependence of reality to our forms of being-in-the-world. We have already indicated that multiple forms of understanding are both possible and grounded on the mode things are, since different kinds of practice and coping permit to "discover nature in certain direction." While there is no complete, definitive understanding, independent from all perspective and hermeneutic situation, diverse forms of

34 Heidegger, *Being and Time,* 100.
35 Dreyfus and Taylor, *Retrieving Realism*, 93.
36 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 255.
37 Ibid., 255.

engagement in the world are grounded in how things are "in-themselves." Simultaneously, what counts as real is so only as it is understood in those practices. For this reason:

> Only as long as Dasein *is* (that is, only as long as understanding Being is ontically possible), 'is there' Being. When Dasein does not exist, 'independence' 'is' not either, nor 'is' the 'in-itself'. In such a case this sort of thing can be neither understood nor not understood (…) *In such a case* it cannot be said that entities are, nor can it be said that they are not. But *now*, as long as there is an understanding of Being and therefore an understanding of presence-at-hand, it can indeed be said that *in this case* entities will continue to be.[38]

The emphasis on "in such a case" and "now," which are all that we can have in this regard, amounts to the lack of a sense of the question regarding the independence of the world. Particularly, because it is "raised by Dasein as Being-in-the-world".[39] Reality, as that which is understood and inhabited by us, is grounded on the forms of being of Dasein, which is the being who *exists understandingly*. Accordingly, "only if understanding of Being *is*, do entities as entities become accessible".[40] This clearly is not a reformulation of Berkeleyan idealism, but an expression of our fundamental affiliation to the world and to being.

In works after *Being and time*, this dependence of Being on understanding takes the form of "a belonging together that concerns man and Being".[41] This intimate affiliation signifies that while human beings are part of the order of being, just as any other being —"the stone, the tree, the eagle"[42]—thinking confers on us a unique characteristic. In our thoughts, we are "open to Being, face to face with Being; thus man remains referred to Being and so answers to it. Man *is* essentially this relationship of responding to Being".[43] Since this belongingness is mutual, Being, which means the coming into presence (the appearance) of what exists, is and "abides only as it concerns man through

38 Heidegger, *Being and Time,* 255.
39 Ibid., 247.
40 Ibid., 256.
41 Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference* (Harper & Row, 1969), 30.
42 Heidegger, *Identity and Difference,* 31.
43 Ibid., 31.

the claim it makes on him. For it is man, open toward Being, who alone lets Being arrive as presence".[44]

What is this claim Being makes on human beings? Clearly, it does not mean that human beings posit or establish (*gesetzt*) Being. Here, again, we find the basic hermeneutic realist stance, which Heidegger recurrently affirms in various works.[45] Rather, this claim means that we are called to "listen" and respond" to Being, who "needs the openness of a clearing and by this need remains appropriated to human beings".[46] This clearing, in which Being can come to presence, is the experience of thinking, and therefore "man and Being are appropriated to each other. They belong to each other".[47]

But, here, Heidegger's hermeneutic realism enters a diffuse territory, regarding its possibility to resonate with theism. While he makes clear that "Being is the *transcendens* pure and simple"[48] and "remains mysterious, the simple nearness of an unobstrusive prevailing";[49] this mutual belongingness (*Zusammengehören*) of man and Being, makes Being susceptible to presence and understanding in a way that compromises the relationship between God and the world. Clearly, Being is neither God or a "cosmic ground" in Heideggerian terms[50], nor is the world, as we already mentioned, to be identified with nature, as in the different works that inquire into the way God acts and is present in a physical universe. But from a theistic perspective, all that *is* is in relationship with God. Even if this relationship cannot be thought any longer "onto-theo-logically" as one of grounding or causation[51], it is nonetheless vital to account for it.

How is God present in a world, which is a constellation of meanings, by means of which human beings make it possible that Being comes to presence (discovering certain aspects and concealing others), in the historically situated and changing practices and forms of thinking by which we try to understand the meaning of Being? Formulated in a simpler way: How can

44 Ibid., 31.

45 E.g. Martin Heidegger, 'Letter on "Humanism"', in *Pathmarks* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), 256.

46 Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, 31; cf. Heidegger, 'Letter on "Humanism"', 251ff.

47 Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, 31.

48 Heidegger, 'Letter on "Humanism"', 256.

49 Ibid., 253.

50 Ibid., 252.

51 Cf. Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, 60.

we understand the creative activity of God, on which all beings depend, and his/her presence, in a world whose reality is dependent on our forms of understanding?

It would seem that the challenges anti-realism poses to theism cannot be overcome by hermeneutic realism. Let us explore whether we can continue further in this direction. According to Heidegger, Being has a history. This means that it is "destined" (*geschicklich*) to manifest itself according to the language and concepts proper to different epochs.[52] Thus, there is Being only in this or that *mark* which has been destined (*Es gibt Sein nur je und je in dieser und jener geschicklichen Prägung*). The fundamental concepts of metaphysics are offered by Heidegger as examples of this historical and destined "marks": *Physis, Logos, eidos, entelequia*, substance, objectivity, subjectivity, the will, the will to power, etc.[53] What does it mean that Being is destined to be understood according to certain fundamental concepts, which appear historically?

The affirmation that "there is Being only in this or that mark" repeats the essential belonginess of understanding and Being. It does not mean that understanding creates Being, but that to be is to appear in understanding. And since for Heidegger, only *Dasein* understands, this belonginess is between human beings and Being. All understanding, as we saw, discloses certain aspect of beings, while Being itself, which is not an entity in the world, a particular being, remains hidden. Also, some other aspects of "things" remain concealed because the "marks" are historical perspectives and allow only certain forms of experience and understanding. Reaching one of these marks requires the manifestation of Being, i.e., a movement that humans cannot produce or force only through our practices. "The advent of beings lies in the destiny of being".[54] Being has to *happen*, to give itself, to come to sight (*Ereignis*). Thus, the initiative and primordial role in the movement of understanding belong to Being. Human beings must *listen* and *respond* to the "truth of being."

The studies on Hölderlin's poetry, as examples of the "essential word," attempt to show how this happens. Here "the openness of a clearing" needed

52 Cf. Heidegger, *Identity and Difference,* 21; Heidegger, 'Letter on "Humanism"', 252.
53 Cf. Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, 66.
54 Heidegger, 'Letter on "Humanism"', 252.

by Being to come into presence is language, understood as *conversation*. This is, not as a mere logically ordered system of symbols, but as the ability to talk and to listen to each other. In this conversation, which unfolds historically, "man has experienced much and named many gods. Since language has authentically come to pass as conversation, the gods have come to expression and a world has appeared".[55] Interestingly, in these studies, the historical manifestation of Being and the possibility of expressing its destined marks, is related to the manifestation of the divine. God and Being cannot be identified, but nonetheless they are closely related. The poet has the responsibility of "founding what remains," what endures against the flux of passing things, "what supports and dominates beings".[56] This equals to naming the gods and "all things with respect to what they are […which means that] by speaking the essential word, the poet's naming first nominates the beings as what they are. Thus they become known as beings. Poetry is the founding of being in the word".[57]

Once again, naming the gods, and thus, opening the space for the manifestation of being, does not mean inventing the meaning of being. For "the gods can come to expression only if they themselves address us and place us under their claim. A word which names the gods is always an answer to such a claim".[58] The founding role of the essential word of the poet implies both a free bestowal of the divine and "the firm grounding of human existence on its ground".[59]

But this does not imply a decision in favor (or against) theism.[60] Even if the manifestation of the divine is required for the founding of Being, "Only from the truth of being can the essence of the holy be thought. Only from the essence of the holy is the essence of divinity to be thought. Only in the light of the essence of divinity can it be thought or said what the word 'God' is to signify".[61] Thus, after a long detour through the "holy" and the "divine," God

55 Martin Heidegger, 'Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry', in *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, (Humanity Books, 2000), 56.
56 Heidegger, 'Hölderlin', 58.
57 Ibid., 59.
58 Ibid., 58.
59 Ibid., 59.
60 Cf. Heidegger, 'Letter on "Humanism"', 267.
61 Heidegger, 'Letter on "Humanism"', 267.

becomes subordinated to Being, and since Being gives itself historically in understanding, God emerges conditioned to finitude. This conditioning is a serious limitation not only of God's transcendence, but also of his/her possibility to act and be in relationship with human beings; to the point that the experience of God requires certain exercise of thinking both as a "preparation" and as the place for his/her manifestation: "The holy, which alone is the essential sphere of divinity, which in turn alone affords a dimension for the gods and for God, comes to radiate only when being itself beforehand and after extensive preparation has been cleared and is experienced in its truth".[62]

Some important critics of Heidegger have pointed out some concerns in this intersection. Jean-Luc Marion, for example, has clearly shown that the priority of Being over God implies the priority of *Dasein* over Being, given the belonginess together that we explored above.[63] This is, for him, a signal of "conceptual idolatry." That is, the attempt to define God in terms of what a particular concept is capable of grasping.[64] Decades before, Edith Stein[65] questioned the priority of *Dasein* as the only way to access the question of the meaning of Being. Even if it is necessary to ask a being for the meaning of Being, *assuming* that *Dasein* is the only being we can ask, given that it is the only one that is capable of understanding, implies that Heidegger "recognizes no meaning distinct from understanding, but dissolves meaning in understanding".[66] This identification between meaning and (human) understanding, closes the way to access other forms of meaning, and limits God's possibility to act in history and relate to human beings.

Indeed, divine transcendence implies that no concept can totally grasp or fully describe God. It is not a certain way of thinking Being, beyond metaphysics, what can make God's "manifestation" possible. God is not required to fulfill any condition to act, communicate and be present to human beings, especially no intellectual condition. Accordingly, a pluralist form of realism, which is compatible with theism, requires a different understanding of God's presence in the constellation of meanings that the "world" is.

62 Heidegger, 'Letter on "Humanism"', 258.

63 Cf. Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2012), 41ff.

64 Cf. Marion, *God without Being,* 29.

65 Edith Stein, 'Martin Heidegger's Existential Philosophy', *Maynooth Philosophical Papers* 4 (2007): 55–98.

66 Stein, 'Martin Heidegger's' 82.

VI. CONTINUOUS CO-CREATION

A successful interaction between theism and a pluralist realism needs to show in which sense God is "the intimate core of the world and the world is in him".[67] Consequently, in this final section we need to address a decisive question: How can we understand the presence of God in the world, hermeneutically understood as a relational constellation of meanings, in which all our activities, symbols, and forms of understanding occur? This is of course an analogous question to that which, in the context of a scientific view of reality, inquires how God acts in a world that is causally determined, or how God relates to a universe governed by physical law. In both cases, the idea that all reality is created by God is a basic starting point. But in the perspective of hermeneutic realism, the "world," as we saw, cannot be identified with a collection of objects, or with a positivistic understanding of nature; rather, it involves our being-there, experiencing order and living meaningfully.

In this light, for our purposes in this paper, the question becomes: How can we understand the creative action of God in a world, whose reality, insofar as it is experienced and lived as a historically determined horizon of meanings, implies our dealings and forms of embodied understanding? Likewise, how can we understand our creative participation in reality, i.e., the permanent emergence of new horizons of meanings or "worlds" proper to our mode of being, vis-à-vis God's creative action? In this final section we can only suggest some basic ideas that require further development.

According to Christian theology, in creating the world God does not only give being to what exists, establishing something other than Godself, but also "participates in that other surrendering himself in loving ecstasy".[68] Creation is thus not only *ex nihilo* but also *ex amore*.[69] Creation implies the self-communication of God to his/her creatures, generating a deep unity between them, even though their ontological difference remains. Creation, in this sense, is different from a simple causal relationship. Additionally, it is not limited to a single event at a fixed "first moment," in which it all started. On the contrary, God's creative action permanently occurs. This means both

67 Rahner, 'Welt in Gott', 502.
68 Ibid., 506.
69 Cf. Kehl, *Contempló Dios*, 51.

that God continues to maintain and preserve what has come into existence[70], and that God is "constantly engaged in drawing the world out of nonbeing and into existence with the aim of consummating this creative work in the future".[71]

This idea of continuous creation has important consequences for our discussion. On the one hand, it indicates that the very reality of creatures and their actions spring, at each moment and permanently, from God's creative activity.[72] This should also include the reality of the world, in the hermeneutical sense, which in turn involves our forms of life and our dealings from which it emerges. For this reason, on the other hand, even if God's being is not dependent upon the existence of the world, his/her creative action requires and invites, for its full realization, the cooperation of his/her creatures.[73] In this sense, reality is not only fundamentally open toward a future, in which new unexpected forms of being may be brought about by God's free and loving creative power, but this newness and originality of creation is at least in certain dimension and to a certain extent also mediated by our creative involvement as co-creators.[74] All our historical horizons of meaning, our lived worlds, are dimensions of the moving, unfinished reality, which continues to be created.

This should not be understood in the sense of a rigid teleological direction for history. Human creative participation in reality implies freedom and the radical openness of the horizon of future. As Ted Peter's (2000) proleptic theism indicates, from the perspective of continuing creation, the reality of the world does not depend that much on its past, in the form of a primordial mythical act of creation or a given essence, which is there from the beginning and only needs to be actualized. Rather, "God creates from the future. His power comes to us not as a brute determination from the past but as that which counters such determinations".[75] God's creative activity, insofar as it is

70 Cf. McGrath, *Scientific Theology*, 184.

71 Ted Peters, *God-The World's Future: Systematic Theology for a New Era*, (Fortress Press, 2000), 132.

72 Cf. Rahner, 'Welt in Gott', 504; McGrath, *Scientific Theology*, 150ff.

73 Cf. Peters, *God-The World's Future*, 132; Kehl, *Contempló Dios*, 401; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* (T&T Clark, 1985), 515.

74 Cf. Philip Hefner, *The Human Factor. Evolution, Culture, and Religion* (Fortress, 1993), 23ff.

75 Peters, *God-The World's Future*, 144.

a permanent and constant act oriented toward the future, redeems the past leading each thing toward its fullness. Creation is thus bound to redemption. It draws "free and contingent beings into a harmonious whole".[76]

It is important to understand how this direction toward an eschatological future does not count as a sort of predestination of history. Peters' way of understanding the movement of creation toward salvation seems to limit the spectrum and meaning of the creative act, linking it almost exclusively to deliver the world from sin, regardless of other complementary destinations, such as, generating a more complex, diverse, and beautiful universe. There is a sense of adventure, wonder, and delight in continuous creation, the permanent opening of new avenues for being, the manifestation of further dimensions of meaning, which cannot be reduced to or foreseen by previous events or conditions.[77] The richness and diversity of human cultures and religions, the plurality of modes of being in the world, experiencing reality, and giving form to what it means to be human, need to be seen as spaces of new continuous co-creation. Social, cultural, historical reality is a dimension of the all-encompassing moving reality that is being continuously created. Human historicity is itself a realm of experience of this process of continuous co-creation.

How can we understand God's action in this realm? The clear difficulty here is to reconcile the divine guidance of history with human freedom to move creatively in unexpected directions. The motive of a call, an inspiring force, and an attracting dynamism, which proceed from God as an invitation rather than as an obligation, leaving space for human beings even to refuse giving a response, can be remembered here.[78] In this sense, Pannenberg[79] develops the idea that since human history is a formative process oriented toward the future, it needs to proceed by means of anticipations of that toward which it moves. Unless the final form of humanity is merely a contingent side effect of human actions and decisions, certain totality of meaning of what is truly real among all transient things, and about that which constitutes our fulfillment, needs to be present in history.

76 Peters, Peters, *God-The World's Future*, 144; cf. McGrath, *Scientific Theology*, 162, 185ff.
77 Cf. Peters, *God-The World's Future*, 145.
78 Cf. Kehl, *Contempló Dios*, 419.
79 Cf. Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, 515ff.

These anticipations, of course, are not fully developed beliefs or theories. Rather, they may be considered as pre-theoretical forms of understanding, proper, for example, of religious experience, in which we feel that which human beings can attain, and thus receive impulse and orientation. They also imply ways of seeing and being in the world, i.e., basic positions and forms of relationship with reality, in which, according to hermeneutic realism, nature is discovered in a definite direction and Being manifests certain aspects, while hiding others. The diversity of these experiences and the traditions to which they give rise, indicate to what extent the future is open and human worlds can continuously be created and recomposed in a dialogical adventure with the divine.

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