

God, the Mind's Desire
Reference, Reason and
Christian Thinking

PAUL D. JANZ



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Contents

Acknowledgements page xi

- 1 A reconnaissance of theology and epistemology 1
 - 1 Theological integrity between reductionism and positivism 1
 - 2 Theology and rational obligation within the basic structure of this book 8
- 2 Theology and the lure of obscurity 24
 - 1 'Post-subject' thinking: post-structuralism and ultra-pragmatism 26
 - 2 Consequences of anti-rationalism 43
- 3 Philosophy's perpetual polarities: anti-realism and realism 51
 - 1 Anti-realism and realism present and past 52
 - 2 Hilary Putnam's anti-realist ('internalist') account of rational obligation 60
 - 3 Thomas Nagel's realist ('externalist') account of rational obligation 68
- 4 Philosophy's perpetual polarities: making and finding 80
 - 1 Donald MacKinnon's conciliatory realism 81
 - 2 An integrated theory of correspondence: finality on four levels, from 'common sense' to 'focal sense' 89
 - 3 Assessment 98

- 5 Philosophy's perpetual polarities: act and being 102
 - 1 Bonhoeffer's 'transcendental attempt' 107
 - 2 Bonhoeffer's 'ontological attempt' 113
 - 3 Assessment 115
- 6 The Kantian inversion of 'all previous philosophy' 123
 - 1 Standard misconstruals of the *Critique of Pure Reason* 127
 - 2 Kant's 'Copernican revolution': the inversion of anti-realism (idealism) and realism 136
 - 3 *Empirical* realism 145
 - 4 Rational integrity and Kant's doctrine of noumena 157
- 7 Tragedy, empirical history and finality 168
 - 1 Tragedy and transcendence 170
 - 2 Theological reference as empirical reference 180
 - 3 The Eucharist as empirical referent 185
- 8 Penultimacy and Christology 191
 - 1 Penultimacy 192
 - 2 Autonomous and creaturely ways of being human 195
 - 3 A 'derivation' of penultimacy as creaturely human being 198
 - 4 Penultimacy and Christian thinking 213

Bibliography 223

Index 227

A reconnaissance of theology and epistemology

1 Theological integrity between reductionism and positivism

The idiomatic phrase ‘Christian thinking’ in the sense of theological cognition means to identify something specific. Its fundamental problem has traditionally been stated something like this: ‘How can human discourse refer meaningfully to a transcendent, incomprehensible and hidden God?’ Theologians of up to a generation ago often called this the most basic ‘formal’ question of theology, and by this they meant to designate the possibility of an introductory theological exercise, in some sense logically prior to the study of specific Christian doctrines per se, in which the question just stated, or the even more concise formulation ‘How is Christian theology possible?’, is given serious consideration as a problem in its own right. As a preliminary or ‘formal’ exercise it was often referred to more technically as a ‘propaedeutic’ or a ‘prolegomenon’ to Christian doctrine. Yet this was not meant in any temporally linear sense as an *actual* condition or prerequisite for the possibility of engaging meaningfully in theological endeavours. (After all, theology is often practised very fruitfully without a great deal of attention to the question of how the theological enterprise itself is possible.) It was meant, rather, simply to identify, on a level more general than the specific doctrines, certain fundamental parameters or indispensable conditions of thinking within which those doctrines come meaningfully to be engaged. In other words, although this exercise is not an actual methodological prerequisite through which proper theological engagement must always pass, it is nonetheless an indispensable orientation to which theology must again and again return in order to test its orthodoxy and assure its meaningfulness.

However, as indispensable as this kind of orientation is, it is clearly evident that the formal question per se has fallen into disuse in the last several decades. There are several reasons for this, two among which are most prominent. The first has to do with the by now tedious and standardly intransigent stand-off between 'natural theology' and 'revelational theology', to which this formal kind of questioning has invariably seemed to lead in the past century.¹ This of course has been most prominently manifest in what many would today agree have become the rather unimaginative and stereotypical polarizations between Thomism and Barthianism as the main exemplars of each. (Recent scholarship suggests increasingly that Aquinas and Barth may share a great deal more in common on these formal questions than the traditional scholarly consensus has been able or willing to acknowledge.) At any rate, few today would deny the tiresome predictability and present stagnancy of that stand-off. The second reason for the abandonment of this kind of questioning has to do with the growing tendency, in an array of disciplines including theology, simply to deflate any questions that appear to lead to irresolvable conflict (the deeper 'post-modern' worry here is that irresolvable conflict tends to yield 'dualistic' answers) and to declare those questions themselves, by very reason of their intractability, to be misstated or 'un-genuine'. If one adds to this the prevalent perception that these 'formal' questions *must* be anachronistic by virtue of their being framed in the dualistic language of 'form' and 'content', it is easy to see how the prospects of any such propaedeutic theological enterprise have come to be viewed as doubly foredoomed.

There is a third reason, I think, for the current avoidance of this kind of questioning: namely, that in a theological environment where the most visible theological-philosophical exchange often takes place amid such qualifiers as radical, startling, subversive, erotic or profound, the character of what I am outlining here as an enquiry into Christian thinking or theological reasoning may initially appear to be somewhat drier fare. Yet I hope to show that although the present focus, at least initially, will be around the rather less seductive terminology of epistemology and consciousness, reference and intention, anti-realism and realism, act and being, it need by no means signify any less important or less relevant, nor certainly for that matter any less interesting or stimulating a study. Indeed there is a

1. Roughly, natural theology has typically been seen as operating on the basis of a continuum between reason (or nature) and revelation, and revelational theology on the basis of a humanly unbridgeable break between the two.

growing group of thinkers today, even, or perhaps especially, those proceeding from continental influences, who demonstrate forcefully that a reclamation of the more traditional if currently less fashionable philosophical concerns of modesty, attentiveness, clarity, logical consistency and integrity, and so on, need by no means suggest merely unimaginative ‘incremental adjustments to a work already in place or positions already established’.² On the contrary, approaches that seek robustly to revive attention to these kinds of virtues can be strong arguments against ‘the assumption – one that is virtually constitutive of the modern conception of what it means to be a philosopher on the continent – that originality and, yes, truth are always and only the result of a rush to extremes or a radicalization of thought’.³ There are similar and equally compelling trends currently underway in analytical philosophy.

Whatever the reasons for its having fallen out of favour, I want to argue for a return to this kind of questioning on the grounds that we ignore it or deflate it at great peril, more specifically at the very imperilling of orthodoxy itself. Yet with a view to avoiding the standard polarizations and stalemates, as just described, I want to ask the question in a somewhat different way. I propose to reframe the ‘formal’ question of Christian thinking – ‘How can human discourse refer meaningfully to a transcendent God?’ – as a twofold demand for integrity: a demand for the integrity of reason, or rational integrity, and a demand for the integrity of transcendence, or revelational integrity. More specifically, instead of pegging the varying approaches to theological reasoning in the typical conflicting manner at opposing poles (natural/revelational, Thomist/Barthian etc.), I plan rather to speak in terms of two polarities or extremes between which orthodox theology properly seeks to navigate its way. I shall designate these extremes by the terms ‘reductionism’ and ‘positivism’, which correspond exactly to the emphasis of one kind of integrity at the expense or to the exclusion of the other.

Reductionism in its most basic definition is simply the explanation of one thing in terms of another. It can occur in any number of ways and contexts. So, for example, in the cognitive sciences reductionism occurs when it is claimed that the success of psychological theories can be fully accounted for by neuroscientific theories, or more basically that

2. Stephen Adam Schwartz in the introduction to an important new book by Vincent Descombes, *The Mind's Provisions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. xiv.

3. Schwartz in Descombes, *The Mind's Provisions*, p. xiv.

psychological states *just are* bodily states. The same sort of claim is made by radically reductive materialist philosophers of mind (and some functionalists), who maintain that the mind *just is* the brain or that consciousness itself can be fully accounted for by physical functions inside the head. Another form of reductionism is logicism, which explains mathematics as a sub-discipline of logic, and so on. But, for philosophical realists at least, the broadest and most pervasive kind of philosophical reductionism is *idealism*. Idealism is deemed to be reductive because, in any of its historically varying degrees and guises, it at bottom does not want to allow for the full perceiver-independent integrity of a world outside the mind, but rather always demands to make the explanation of the world in some way necessarily dependent on the perceiver. Idealism thus reduces what the realist maintains is a world that exists in certain ways, whether it is perceived as such or not, to something the explanation of which is, in one way or another, necessarily dependent on the sensory and mental perceptions ('ideas') of the perceiver. In this light then, when we come to the analysis of religion or religious discourse, we find that the most common form of reductionism occurs precisely in this idealistic way: that is, in the explanation of religious phenomena or the content of theological statements in terms of 'projection theories', whether of psychological or sociological origin, for example as wish-fulfilment or fear-coping mechanisms along, say, Freudian, Feuerbachian or Weberian lines, and so on. All of these remain essentially forms of idealism inasmuch as they make religious experience and the subject matter of theological statements at bottom a product of mental or psycho-social processes or ideas.

However, it is important to recognize that for theology, unlike philosophy, it is not only idealism that can be reductionist in this sense. Philosophical realism or realist treatments of religion and theology can also qualify as forms of reductionism, even when they seek fastidiously to avoid the charge of naturalism. One sees this, for example, in different ways in the work Paul Tillich or John Hick, where religious transcendence, characterized as the 'ground of being' or as 'ultimate reality', is indeed given a kind of 'real' or perceiver-independent supremacy and autonomy. But even though they thus manage to avoid idealism (mind-dependence), what both of these approaches finally leave us with is a view of religious transcendence that in the end is still explainable in terms of something like a 'world enigma'. This effectively commits the same reductionist error as the idealistic projection theories, if in a somewhat different way, for it reduces transcendence merely to something mysterious within

immanence (e.g., ground of being, ultimate reality) and thus violates the integrity of transcendence. In more current language, the error made in this 'realist' sense is that of construing the reality of God merely in terms of 'ontological difference', as if God's transcendent otherness were expressible as just another higher and more mysterious version of immanentist otherness or difference; or in other words as if God's otherness could be understood in terms of the same ontological difference that exists between me and you. At bottom then, the first kind of error or extreme that orthodox theology seeks to avoid is the reduction of theological subject matter to any kind of natural explanation, even if that for which explanation is sought remains insolubly mysterious (world enigma). The point is that reductionism by definition, whether in the form of idealism or realism, compromises the integrity of transcendence, in the endeavour to make theological discourse about transcendence genuinely meaningful or referential.

The error at the other extreme is positivism. Positivism gives theological subject matter a positive autonomy and authority that is set totally apart from any sort of natural (roughly, rational or empirical) scrutiny. Or in other words, it is to 'posit' transcendence or revelation in such a way that it remains fully authoritative over matters of reason and sense and yet also fully immune from the justificatory demands or jurisdictions of these. It is precisely in this sense that the logical positivism of twentieth century analytical philosophy was 'positivistic': it posited the inviolability of its two principles of cognitive meaningfulness – that is, statements are meaningful or intelligible if they are either empirically verifiable or analytically true (true by definition) – even though these principles themselves are neither empirically verifiable nor analytically true. It is this same tendency within theology that Bonhoeffer claims to detect in Karl Barth, when he accuses Barth of engaging in a 'positivism of revelation'. Again, it is debatable to what extent Barth is really guilty of this (perhaps any more than Aquinas is of reductionism) even if he may tend in that direction.⁴ But the preliminary point has been made sufficiently clearly: positivism in theology is any position that seeks to uphold the integrity of transcendence (or revelation) by giving up the integrity of reason or of natural enquiry. Against this backdrop, the aim of the present study is to preserve integrity

4. A more obvious example of this extreme can be seen in what has come to be known as the Radical Orthodoxy project. Barth at least accords reason an authority in its own sphere whereas Radical Orthodoxy (at least in John Milbank) sees reason as self-destructive when it is not rooted in revelation or transcendence. (I have actually argued elsewhere that Radical Orthodoxy tends, relatedly, more toward a kind of gnosticism than positivism.)

on both levels: that is, without being drawn to the extremes at either end, to which emphasis of one kind of integrity at the expense of the other will inevitably lead.

One further introductory point must be made here with regard to the term ‘meaningful’ or ‘meaningful reference’ (which has already occurred several times in these opening paragraphs) with respect to the way I will be employing it in this book, especially within the context of speaking meaningfully of God. The point, most concisely, is that the word ‘meaningful’ can be used intelligibly in the present context without requiring a prior full-fledged exposition of a theory of meaning. For all that the term purports to designate here is the possibility of ‘aboutness’ or intentional reference in human discourse, and this is something entirely different from the more technical and abstract metalinguistic concerns about the ‘meaning of meaning’ as explored within the philosophy of language and linguistic theory. These questions are indeed important, perhaps especially so for theology where nowadays scant work is being done in that field. But insofar as they seek to approach the problem of meaning on a more general and abstract level, detached from human discourse (even if somehow claiming to be inclusive of it), those kinds of questions aim at something fundamentally different from the focus of the present study. In fact, the sense in which I am equating ‘meaningfulness’ with ‘aboutness’ or ‘intentional reference’ here, or making these terms univocal or identical, is not really asking about the ‘meaning of meaning’ in any interesting sense at all. The equation rather expresses something merely trivially true or tautological: that is, something that is true simply by the definition of these terms themselves as they pertain to human discourse. For example, when I ask you what you *mean* by a certain statement I am simply asking you to explain or to give a further account of what you *intend* to *refer* to by that statement, or what you intend that statement to express or to be about; and we do not need to come to a prior theoretical agreement on the ‘meaning of meaning’ for our discursive exchange to be successful or for there to be a genuinely communicative meeting of minds around a particular subject matter, whether agreeing or disagreeing.⁵

In fact we may engage successfully or intelligibly in discourse even if we disagree on virtually all the standard aspects of a theory of meaning.

5. It is important to note in the same vein that by asking about the meaningfulness of a statement in this trivial or tautological sense, I am not so much concerned with its truth or falsity but rather only with its intelligibility as an assertion of reference.

Thus, for example, we may disagree, in what is perhaps the most traditional sense, on whether the meanings of statements are to be defined at bottom by their ‘truth conditions’ (i.e., by correspondence to ‘what is the case’ in the world) or in terms of their ‘use’ (i.e., by the coherence of a statement within a certain context or worldview): in other words, I may be a realist and you an idealist about the theory of meaning. We may disagree further, and even more metalinguistically, about whether meaning is centred in some universal structure of language or in a universal structure of innate learning capacities, or in neither of these; or on whether meaning is to be assessed according to the ‘intension’ or the ‘extension’ of an expression; or on whether sentence-meaning or word-meaning should have priority in a theory of meaning, and so on.⁶ We may have opposing views on any or all of these legitimate theoretical questions. But none of these differences will in the least affect the tautological or trivially true nature of the claim that when you ask me what I mean by a certain statement you are concerned *by definition* with what I understand that statement to be about; nor will our theoretical differences affect my ability to understand the question as such. Indeed, our very ability to disagree in theory on these matters, and to express ourselves accordingly, already presupposes a shared understanding of discursive meaningfulness as intentional reference.⁷

In other words, the claim I am making here is really only a very minimal one, one that serves merely to emphasize that it will be entirely from within this tautological or true-by-definition sense of aboutness or intentional reference that the question of meaningfulness in theological discourse will come to be posed in this book. Nevertheless, far from this ‘trivial truth’ making the theological task any easier, the very clarification of it as such only serves to set our initial problem into even sharper relief. For *transcendence, by definition*, can never be a ‘referent’ of reasoning in the way that *meaningful discourse, by definition* (‘trivially’), demands that it must be. (Or conversely anything that could be a referent of thought would by that

6. See, e.g., Donald Davidson, ‘Truth and Meaning’ in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1984), pp. 17–36. See also Hilary Putnam, ‘The Meaning of “Meaning”’, in *Language, Mind and Knowledge*, Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science Vol. VII (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975), pp. 131–2. ‘Intension’ roughly defines meaning around the idea that sets of things have associated ‘concepts’ that they actually instantiate individually. ‘Extension’ roughly associates meaning with the set of objects in the world that a term seeks to identify.

7. It is of course true that a currently very prominent anti-rationalist sector of ‘post-modern’ thought will declare this whole philosophical enterprise to be a ‘ruse’, or to be fabricated and self-serving in the first place. But that is another story, with its own set of problems, and we shall discuss it extensively as a separate matter in chapter 2.

very possibility relinquish its claim to transcendence.) The ‘trivial’ or tautological question of meaningfulness on the epistemological level thus becomes precisely the intractable ‘formal’ problem of theological thinking stated at the outset of this chapter.

2 Theology and rational obligation within the basic structure of this book

With the foregoing distinctions and goals in mind, I want now to step laterally and make some parallel observations that will serve as a guide into an overview of the book’s basic structure and main sections.

Few scholars today would dispute the assessment that over the past several decades we have been witnessing something like an epistemological revolution. However disparately aligned and irreconcilable the several sides may otherwise seem, on the *fact* of the ‘revolution’ itself, at least, there will be agreement on all fronts: from the anti-rational ‘end of epistemology’ advocates, through the varying shades of anti-realism, to the group of stalwarts still remaining in the realist camp. Now I want to suggest that at the heart of this revolution there is a very simple question which not only captures, perhaps better than any other, what this revolution is essentially about, but on the basis of which the current intellectual landscape can be mapped out in a particularly helpful way. The question is this: Are there any *intrinsic obligations* to thinking or reason per se? Or more fully, are there any *inherent* features of thinking or discourse by which particular instances of it could be deemed to be ‘proper’ or ‘improper’, genuine or specious? This is not any new question. It has been asked in various ways and at various times by a wide array of prominent thinkers. For example, a persistently relevant essay by Kant entitled ‘What is Orientation in Thinking?’⁸ was trying to address precisely this question from within an epistemological context equally as volatile or revolutionary as the present one. And what I am claiming here, with this in mind, is that by laying out the present epistemological revolution against this question of intrinsic obligations or orientation in thinking, we will see unfolding a spectrum of responses to it, a spectrum that divides naturally and heuristically into three broad sectors.

8. This was written in 1786. It currently appears most prominently in English in Immanuel Kant, *Kant: Political Writings* (second edition), H. S. Reiss (ed.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 237–49.

2.1 A spectrum of obligation in thinking

If we now imagine this spectrum mapped out before us, we see at the one end of it a group of outlooks that simply answers the question at hand negatively. These are the self-described anti-rational or anti-epistemological outlooks; and what makes them anti-rational, at bottom, is precisely the denial that thinking or reason contains any intrinsic obligations or that there is any *inherent* normativity to rational discourse or processes. Because of their current popularity and present influence across broad sectors of the human sciences and theology, they are often taken to be a novel (i.e., ‘post-modern’ in the straightforward sense of the term) development, but they are not really anything new as such. In fact, they are, in basic respects, the same thing as what Kant was trying to describe two centuries ago in the forementioned essay when he used the term ‘rational unbelief’ to identify a group of intellectual outlooks that were then operating, in his words, according to ‘the maxim of the independence of reason from its *own need*’⁹ (original emphasis).

Expanding on this for the contemporary context, we could say that the current anti-rational trend involves precisely something like a shift away from the view of rationality arising *naturally* as ‘need’ (and thus normatively, orientatingly) and toward the view of rationality arising unnaturally or *artificially* as ‘power’ (and thus ‘hegemonically’ and ‘self-legitimizingly’). More specifically, in ways that will be made clear below, the rejection of such a ‘need-oriented’ view of reason involves at bottom the rejection of the traditional consciousness-centred or semantic language of intention, reference and aboutness. The embrace of a ‘power-oriented’ view of reason involves the adoption in its place of the tactic-centred or syntactical language of ‘coping mechanisms’, or ‘performativity’, or non-purposive tactics in writing or in speech acts, and so on. We will discuss these anti-rational or negative responses to the question of rational obligation in some detail in chapter 2, but the real focus of the book thereafter will be on the different kinds of responses occurring on the positive side of the spectrum. The reason for this will be obvious enough: Any approach that rejects the idea of intrinsic obligations in discourse

9. Kant, *Political Writings*, p. 248. Kant’s target at that point was a particular group of anti-rationalist outlooks, prominent among which was the radically fideistic pietism of Jacobi. The group of anti-rationalists today tend, to the contrary, to be from more atheistic quarters. But this is not always the case. For example, the Radical Orthodoxy project, cited above, is anti-rational in the sense I am describing here; indeed the radical pietism of Jacobi is among its formative influences.

will thereby also be unable to accommodate any talk of integrity, which orthodox theology with its intrinsic claim to authority must by definition be able to do, and which this book wants to make central. The summary contention of chapter 2 then, will be that, despite the good prospects they may initially seem to offer on several levels, nevertheless, because these anti-rational approaches cannot respond to the demands of integrity implicit in the claim to orthodoxy, their promise proves to be hollow and their strategies unworkable for theology.

It is at this point that the hard task of articulating a positive theory of theological reasoning begins. The task is made difficult in part because even as we move away from anti-epistemological responses at the far negative end of our spectrum and back into affirming the legitimacy of genuine philosophical or intentional-referential questioning for theological purposes,¹⁰ we find that we are still, within contemporary theories of knowledge, confronted with the complex task of evaluating a widely disparate array of possible *positive* responses to the question of intrinsic obligations or orientation in thinking. As a way of gaining some mentally visual perspective on this, we can, by returning to our spectrum image, configure the affirmative responses to this question as taking place broadly between the two opposing poles of classical foundationalism and holism. But it is important as such to reiterate the proviso that, even though I speak here in terms of ‘opposing poles’, we are now dealing only with the positive ‘subsection’, so to speak, of the more complete spectrum of all possible responses to the question of rational orientation or obligation (from positive to negative), such that both foundationalism and holism, in the sense that I am speaking of them here, seek to offer different kinds of *affirmative* answers to the question at hand.¹¹

With this in mind, we can now lay out a general comparison between foundationalism and holism in the following way. Foundationalism is the well-known (and currently highly polemicized) view that seeks to justify

10. I will explain the significance of philosophical questioning as intentional-referential questioning in the next chapter.

11. One of the reasons that this proviso is so important to bear in mind is that ‘holism’ in current usage has itself become a highly ambiguous term that is employed in confusing ways. It is used not only in the positive epistemological context in which I am employing it here, but also in a decidedly anti-epistemological vein, and the term comes to signify something importantly different in each case. In the former, rational sense, holism appeals to a kind of coherence theory which reflects certain basic commitments to normative stability. In the latter, anti-rational sense, it constitutes a radically free-floating kind of coherence. We shall discuss this distinction in detail in the following chapter, but it is in the former, normative epistemological sense that I use the term at this juncture.

intrinsic rational obligation in discourse based on certain ‘foundational’ assertions: that is, assertions that cannot themselves be called into question, or that are ‘indubitable’. (Traditionally ‘indubitability’ has meant either rational incorrigibility or empirical self-evidence.) It is of course undeniable that the centre of gravity has in recent decades shifted decisively away from foundationalism, and this to such an extent that it is now decidedly a minority view. But there remain, as we shall see, prominent advocates of newer versions of it, versions that are articulated in more temperate, self-critical and less self-assured ways than the stereotypical understanding of foundationalism. Holism by contrast (with the crucial distinction in the foregoing footnote borne firmly in mind) will seek to justify rational normativity or assess rational obligation for discourse, not based on indubitable or incorrigible foundational principles, but rather based on how an assertion contributes to the overall coherence or reflective equilibrium of the entire context from which or into which it is spoken. In sum, as different kinds of affirmative responses to the question of intrinsic rational obligation or orientation in thinking, foundationalism would construe these obligations as stable and fixed, and holism (in the *epistemological* sense of the term) as in some way stable but not fixed.

2.2 Philosophy’s perpetual polarities: anti-realism and realism

Now the reader who is somewhat familiar with recent developments in epistemology will recognize that all of this maps generally onto another, currently more visible and prominent intellectual dispute. I refer to what has come to be known as the anti-realism/realism debate, where realism sits roughly at the foundationalist end of the positive spectrum and anti-realism at the holist end. At the risk of being overly repetitive it must be reiterated as such that anti-realism in this dispute does not signify anything like the negative anti-rationalist responses discussed briefly above, and which will be the main focus of chapter 2. Anti-realism is not anti-rationalism, despite the fact that in many current discussions the two are routinely conflated. The main point of differentiation between the two in our context is once again that anti-realism responds positively to the question of intrinsic obligations or orientation in thinking whereas anti-rationalism denies any such intrinsic authoritative orientation. Richard Rorty, for example, a self-described anti-rationalist, is fully aware of this

and is continually at pains to distance himself from the anti-realism with which others frequently and erroneously try to associate him.¹²

The best way to understand the current anti-realism/realism debate is to see it as just the latest manifestation of the perennial idealism/realism conflict, a dispute that has been at the centre of philosophical debate in different guises ever since the time of the Greeks, and that continues to re-emerge in new forms. In current discussion, for example, this perennial conflict is also often described as reflective of the two most basic and opposing temperaments of philosophical enquiry: one ‘internalist’, espousing a perceiver-dependent view of reality (idealism or anti-realism), the other ‘externalist’, espousing a perceiver-independent view of reality (realism). But there is another, arguably more helpful and less fractious way of configuring the perennial dispute; and this is in its even more venerable formulation as a disagreement about whether human *sensation* or *intellect* should be given priority in philosophical questioning.¹³ This disagreement is seen perhaps most formatively in the ancient conflict between *aisthesis* and *noiesis*. (The atomism of Democritus, which privileges sensation, is often contrasted with Platonism and neo-Platonism here, which privileges thinking. Aristotle, like Kant after him in a different way, sought a harmonization of the two, even though Aristotle is often somewhat misleadingly contrasted with Plato here, as privileging the former.) The same distinction underlies the conflict between empiricism and rationalism, between scepticism and dogmatism, albeit here with a more negative emphasis (we shall discuss this extensively in chapter 6), and of course, coming full circle, it has been very prominently visible within British and American philosophy in the debate between idealism and realism.

It is in connection with this long and highly visible history then, that anti-realism and realism will in chapter 3 become something like a springboard for an extended enquiry into rational integrity for theological purposes. We will initially focus on Hilary Putnam and Thomas Nagel as contemporary exemplifications of the respective sides of the traditional

12. See, e.g., Richard Rorty, ‘Realism, Anti-realism, and Pragmatism’, in Christopher Kulp (ed.), *Realism/Antirealism and Epistemology* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield 1997), pp. 149–71; and Kulp (ed.), *Realism/Antirealism and Epistemology*, pp. 7, 11.

13. We may set aside for the time being the suspicions of dualism that anti-rationalists may see lurking in this distinction between sensory and noetic faculties. This will be addressed in chapter 2. However, it can already be said at this juncture that these suspicions often (but not always) reflect a bias against dualism that is applied so indiscriminately and uncritically that it borders on a kind of obsession, and thus is itself ‘irrational’, in the ‘unconsidered’ sense of that term.

debate, before moving on in chapter 4 to Donald MacKinnon, whose simple but highly illuminating reconfiguration of idealism and realism as a problem of learning – specifically, the question of whether learning is at bottom to be understood as ‘invention’ (idealism or anti-realism) or ‘discovery’ (realism) – opens up the debate in important new ways. In MacKinnon, for the first time, we will begin to see the fruitfulness of framing the traditional debate in terms of different approaches to *finality*. We will also for the first time see the theological question of transcendence come to be posed from within the anti-realism/realism framework straightforwardly as a question of *reference* (meaningfulness). Nevertheless, at the end of chapter 4, all three broad types of approaches on our spectrum – anti-rationalism, anti-realism and realism – will be found in varying degrees to be incapable of yielding satisfactory answers to the problem of how reference to the transcendent is possible; this, however, with the proviso that realism will have been shown to be preferable among the three in one particular sense: namely in its capability of providing at least a suitable preliminary disposition for theological questioning.

2.3 Philosophy’s perpetual polarities: act and being

In hopes of making progress beyond these modest but important results, the book now moves outside of the stricter anti-realism/realism debate to what is probably the most basic or most broad of all philosophical polarities: the question of act and being. The guide in exploring this will not be Hegel or Heidegger, as might be expected, but rather Dietrich Bonhoeffer, whose early work, *Akt und Sein (Act and Being)*,¹⁴ approaches the philosophical question specifically with theological purposes in mind. One of the most important contributions that the consideration of act and being brings to our overall focus is that it problematizes the very subjectivity or anthropocentricity out of which all the other polar outlooks proceed, yet which they all either ignore or trivialize. The act and being configuration will thus yield important new insights with regard to the theological demand for rational integrity in the face of transcendence or revelation. But here too the final result will be that human beings are not capable of placing themselves into the truth about themselves.

As we come to the end of chapter 5 then, we find that, although we have made a certain amount of progress negatively (i.e., where *not* to begin in

14. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Akt und Sein*, Hans-Richard Reuther (ed.), Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke, 16 vols. (Munich: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1988), vol. II.

trying to build a contemporary theory of theological reasoning), we appear nonetheless to have arrived at a rather inauspicious intermediate destination with respect to making any positive progress in our enquiry into Christian thinking. The problem, specifically, is that at every turn in attempting to speak *meaningfully* about God – that is, in a way that preserves both the integrity of reason (i.e., discourse that is genuinely *meaningful*) and the integrity of transcendence (i.e., discourse that is genuinely *about God*) – at every turn, we find ourselves thrown back onto some configuration or other of philosophy’s perpetual polarizations, and thus relatedly to unacceptable answers in the theological enterprise as well, since these polarities will always demand to treat transcendence inadmissibly either as invention or discovery or as some combination of the two. It seems at this point then, having all but exhausted the standardly diverging philosophical ways of approaching intentional reference or meaningfulness – *aisthesis/noiesis*, idealism/realism, empiricism/rationalism, anti-realism/realism, act/being and so on – it seems then, if we are to have any hope at all of making further progress on the theological question, that we will have to find some other way of asking that question. It will have to be a way that is different from any of the standard philosophical approaches, all of which lead back into philosophy’s perpetual polarities, yet which nevertheless, unlike the anti-rational responses, leaves the possibility of rational integrity intact while preserving the integrity of transcendence.

2.4 The Kantian inversion of all of these polarities

In fact, what I have just been describing is (in its philosophical aspect) not only the most basic initial premise of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, but it is also the driving impetus for his undertaking what he calls a ‘Copernican revolution’ in philosophy more broadly, a revolution in which all of these standard philosophical questions are turned radically on their heads. Unfortunately, this ‘revolutionary’ core of Kant’s philosophy has been largely overlooked in recent Anglo-American discussion,¹⁵ even though it

15. I will discuss this and the reasons for it in chapter 6. Putnam’s professed ‘indebtedness’ to Kant is really an indebtedness to only half of Kant and as such still reflects clear vestiges of a strong Strawsonian bias (I will explain this below), and accordingly constitutes a fundamental misconstrual of integral elements of Kantian epistemology. In other words, despite the value of Putnam’s work on Kant in important ways, it is in equally important ways very far from what Kant himself is attempting to do, as we shall see in chapters 3 and 6.

is pervasive and pivotal in the *Critique*'s own development, to say nothing of its obvious and important relevance to contemporary anti-realism/realism issues. The book thus turns in chapter 6 to an examination of this revolutionary character of Kant's epistemology with a view to determining how this might help us forward in the problem of theological reasoning. Again, Kant seems especially relevant and promising for this endeavour because the polarizations with which until now we have found ourselves confronted at every turn (*aisthesis/noiesis*, idealism/realism, act/being etc.) are precisely the polarizations against which the *Critique* builds its own starting point. More specifically, Kant actually opens the *Critique of Pure Reason* by deploring philosophy's perennial stand-offs, especially lamenting the fact that these perpetual conflicts have throughout philosophical history invariably led to some form or other of the opposing intellectual stalemates of scepticism and dogmatism, both of which breed philosophical 'stagnancy'.

It is in hopes of renewing the possibility of progress in philosophy in the face of these prevailing deadlocks that Kant then proposes his Copernican inversion of the traditional approaches, in which many of the most basic questions of philosophy come to be asked in a fundamentally different way. It is vitally important to be clear about how central the *revolutionary* character of the *Critique of Pure Reason* really is to its proper comprehension.¹⁶ The fundamental philosophical inversions that it proposes are to be understood quite literally; and I ask the reader to bear with me in the following few sentences in which a rather cumbersome use of qualifiers, parentheses and caveats must unavoidably be resorted to in order to explain in a brief summary form the basic sense of what Kant is trying to achieve in his 'Copernican revolution' vis-à-vis 'all previous philosophy'. Two inversions are most central. First, the traditional 'empirical idealism' (this is idealism in the standard sense addressed thus far, as reflected in *aisthesis* or empirical approaches; i.e., outlooks that privilege sensation in philosophical enquiry, and which invariably – because of the fallibility of sensory phenomena – end up placing the reality of the material world in doubt, leading to *scepticism*): this traditional 'empirical idealism' is now to be inverted to yield what Kant calls 'empirical realism', which avoids the scepticism of its opposite. Second, the traditional 'metaphysical

16. When approached ignoring this revolutionary character, the *Critique of Pure Reason* can indeed be seen, as anti-Kantian polemicists like Strawson and Pritchard have claimed, as 'perverse', 'disastrous' and 'incoherent'.

realism', or in Kant's terms, 'transcendental realism'¹⁷ (this is realism in the standard sense addressed thus far, as reflected in *noiesis* or rationalist approaches; i.e., outlooks that privilege intellect over sensibility in philosophical enquiry and that have invariably led to *dogmatism*, a term Kant uses polemically to denote the unjustifiable rational positing of a 'more ultimate' supra-sensible reality beyond the sensible world): this traditional 'transcendental realism' (metaphysical realism) is also inverted to yield what Kant calls 'transcendental idealism', which avoids the dogmatism of its opposite, and yet which, despite its name, is utterly different (actually the opposite) of any kind of idealism or anti-realism we have encountered thus far.¹⁸ These are the two most fundamental inversions of the *Critique* and both will be explored in detail.

But for present purposes it must be noted further that this latter inversion (transcendental idealism) includes Kant's famous doctrine of noumena or things-in-themselves, a doctrine that, as the scholarly consensus today would broadly allow, has 'in the past been the victim of more various misinterpretation . . . and of more shamelessly ill-informed criticism' than virtually any particular doctrine put forward by any other prominent historical thinker.¹⁹ As we shall discuss in chapter 6, there are thankfully important 'corrections' currently taking place in Kant studies after several decades of what is now acknowledged as having been a particularly unfortunate period of Kant interpretation in Anglo-American philosophy in the second half of the twentieth century. Again, what this means will be addressed more fully below, but for now I will only say that these 'corrections' are driven by a renewed concern to allow Kant *to speak for himself* rather than, as had become almost standard procedure, utilizing

17. I grant that the terms 'metaphysical realism' and 'transcendental realism' are not entirely equivalent, but the rough alignment of them here helps to convey, appropriately and without any great distortion, what Kant is attempting to accomplish in this particular 'inversion'.

18. When one looks closely at the way Kant has set this up, it becomes clear that his two 'pillars' of inversion, so to speak (empirical realism and transcendental idealism) each generate, not one, but two opposites with regard to traditional theories of realism and idealism. If we look at these terms carefully, it is easy to see how this is so. 'Empirical realism' is initially set up as opposed to traditional 'empirical idealism', but it also turns out to be the opposite of 'metaphysical realism'. Likewise, 'transcendental idealism' is initially set up as opposed to 'transcendental realism' (metaphysical realism) but it also turns out to be the opposite of 'empirical idealism'. Thus Kant's empirical realism and transcendental idealism actually share opposites and are shown to be, unlike any other configurations of realism and idealism, not contraries but complementaries.

19. Actually this particular quote by G. R. G. Mure is in reference to Hegel's philosophy, but the force of it aptly expresses a common scholarly assessment today with respect to this aspect of Kant's philosophy. See G. R. G. Mure, *The Philosophy of Hegel* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p viii.

simplistic caricatures of Kant to serve all manner of specialized agendas, or co-opting him for particular purposes. Permitting the genuinely ‘Copernican’ or ‘revolutionary’ Kant to speak for himself, moreover, will reveal Kantian perspectives that are often fundamentally at odds with what have become the stereotypical misrepresentations of him, perspectives that are capable of speaking with surprising depth and freshness to an array of present concerns in both philosophy and theology.

Kant will offer a great deal that impacts our study, but with regard specifically to the central theological question of how reference to or characterization of the transcendent is possible he will enable an important reconfiguration of the question of aboutness or reference itself. More precisely, he will allow us to reformulate the requirement for theological reference as a new kind of demand for *finality*²⁰ and no longer as the seemingly impossible demand for an ‘ontology of transcendence’ for which Bonhoeffer initially sought in vain. The particular benefit of this, again to use more current terminology, is that by paying attention to central developments in the *Critique* we will be able to map the beginnings of a way for theology to remain genuinely *realist* (or genuinely referential) without becoming onto-theological, that is, without construing the real otherness or over-againstness of God merely in terms of ontological difference. Yet just as importantly, Kant’s avoidance as such of ontological presumption with regard to transcendence (i.e., transcendence understood as ‘discovery’) will not point us back in the direction of idealism (‘invention’) either.

However, despite thus making an enormous contribution to the formal theological endeavour by fundamentally altering our questioning with regard to it, Kant himself will in the end not bring us far enough for what theology requires. For what the *Critique of Pure Reason* ultimately leaves us with is a finality of the transcendent, purely as an *als ob* (‘as if’) in which God is encountered merely as a ‘hypothetical transcendent’ or as a purely ‘provisional’ transcendence. We will thus need to explore ways of re-fashioning Kant’s otherwise dispositionally appropriate finality into something more robust in order to pave the way for genuine reference in the way that meaningful discourse about God requires. And in order to broach that task we will turn in chapter 7 to an extended discussion of tragedy as a kind of finality.

20. ‘New’, that is, compared to the finality of realism versus anti-realism discussed in chapter 3.

But before outlining that in broad introductory strokes here, we must first mention briefly a vital, related point in Kant's treatment of transcendental ideas or noumena, a point that, again, has been routinely misconstrued because the essentially revolutionary character of what Kant is doing has been ignored. I speak of Kant's insistence that his 'transcendental ideas' or 'noumena' – despite the fact that he describes these ideas as 'things-in-themselves' – are always to be treated in the same *als ob* vein as all Kantian transcendentals, that is, only *as if* they were things-in-themselves, and never as *real things-in-themselves*. (Indeed, as we shall see, Kant would be the first to agree with his would-be detractors that any talk of a *real* thing-in-itself is entirely incoherent, or 'sheer illusion' as Kant himself puts it.) This is why Kant names his doctrine of noumena 'transcendental *idealism*' and *not* its opposite 'transcendental realism', which falsely construes noumena or things-in-themselves as real, or in some sense 'ultimate', entities. (To Kant this is dogmatism.) All of this will be amply demonstrated in chapter 6. But just granting that for now, there is a further crucial result following from it that is the real focus of my concern here. The point is that, just as noumena, according to Kant, are always to be treated only *as if* they were things-in-themselves, so by extension they are never to be treated as anything like *ends-in-themselves* either.

To the contrary, Kant clearly stipulates that things-in-themselves or noumena are instead merely ideas that are posited *by* the understanding for another *specific purpose outside of themselves*. In other words, the *purpose* (or end) of the transcendental ideas is not self-referential. They are not posited to serve themselves or to serve 'pure reason'. (It should not be forgotten in this light that the *Critique of Pure Reason* is a *critique* of pure reason and not merely a *defence* of it.) Rather, and here we come to the pivotal point, the specific purpose outside of themselves for which things-in-themselves or noumena are posited is, in Kant's own words, to preserve 'the greatest systematic unity of *the empirical use of our reason*'.²¹ In other words, things-in-themselves are never self-sustaining or self-referential, or anything ultimate on their own, but rather always point beyond themselves back to the real, empirical, spatio-temporal object. The fact is that, from beginning to end, from the first page virtually and quite literally to the last, the *Critique's* 'transcendental idealism' is always portrayed in this way as operating in the service of 'empirical realism'. This, as I shall demonstrate

21. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (tr. and eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A679/B707, emphasis added.

fully in chapter 6, will be unmistakably clear when Kant is permitted to speak for himself on these matters. But the further important point, which will later be so pivotal for theological purposes, is that the real *finality* put forward in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is therefore not to be looked for or located in abstract noumena or things-in-themselves at all (for these again are all merely *als ob* ideas²²), but rather in the contingencies of spatio-temporal *empirical reality*, in relation to which these noumena will then in turn provide a kind of universal a priori orientation (and by extension, obligation) for thinking. It is unavoidable that all of this will appear rather cryptic at this juncture but I am confident that even the reader without a great deal of prior familiarity with Kant will be able to follow what he is attempting to do here as these ideas are presented in a way that is carefully attentive to Kant's own explications of them.

But now, what all of this is leading to more ultimately is the suggestion that if we look at the kind of thinking per se that Kant proposes in the *Critique of Pure Reason* – that is, thinking that is grounded in *empirical reality*, and whose primary concern at all stages along the way, even at its most thoroughly abstract (noumena), is the redirection of the understanding back to its *empirical use* – then we will find here a kind of thinking, a kind of intellectual or epistemological disposition, that is capable of being uniquely responsive to theological demands and open especially to Christological promptings. In other words, the direction in which all of this is moving is ultimately toward Christology. But the ground must be further prepared in order to show how Christology can respond to these newly formulated epistemological questions without resorting to positivism or succumbing to reductionism.

Consider then, with these goals in mind, the following pivotal twofold result of our discussion thus far.²³ The most essential, important and unique feature of Kant's doctrine of noumena, or transcendental idealism, is its ability to supply a genuinely *rational justification* for the kind of *empirical finality* that we encounter in the real, spatio-temporal world of human

22. And I am not forgetting that finality is developed subsequently by Kant in a somewhat different, yet by no means contradictory but complementary, way in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. But even here the *als ob* stipulation is still clearly apparent: 'So act as if your maxims were to serve at the same time a universal law'; Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, tr. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981), p. 43.

23. The reader should not be overly concerned if this particular paragraph is not entirely clear at this early juncture. Its content will be clarified in chapter 6. I only need to state these results here preliminarily in order to give some introductory indication of how our Kant enquiry will connect to the last two chapters.

experience (empirical realism).²⁴ Yet the equally important point is that it is also able to do so without speaking of this finality ontologically, that is, without resorting to the kind of rational presumption that treats the sensible, spatio-temporal object as a kind of mental possession (via conceptual classification), thus violating the empirical integrity of that finality.²⁵ If, then, we are to use this mutually inter-working relation of Kant's empirical realism and transcendental idealism as something of a preliminary model for theological reasoning, we will have to be able to respond to two separate but inseparable kinds of requirements. In the first place we will have to show how the finality of the transcendent can be encountered, not merely as a hypothetical 'as if', but with the same kind of robust tangibility as the finality encountered in empirical experience. Secondly, we will have to be able to locate a conceptual or rational account of this finality which does not seek to bring it into any standard ontological framework, yet which nonetheless preserves rational integrity with regard to it.

2.5 Tragedy and finality

It is toward these ends then, and especially in anticipation of the convergence of the concept of penultimacy and Christology in chapter 8, that we move in chapter 7 beyond the more strictly epistemological concerns, with which we have been dealing thus far, into the domain of ethics, and specifically to an investigation of the kind of finality that we encounter in tragedy. The question here will be whether the finality of tragedy can in any way help us to understand how the finality of the transcendent might be encountered as something more tangible and robust than a merely hypothetical 'as if'. The initiating impetus as such will be MacKinnon's claim that in tragedy we encounter a kind of finality or authority that enables us to project our questioning in reference to the transcendent in entirely unique ways. The depth and brilliance of MacKinnon's work in this area often remains enigmatic and critically undeveloped (and perhaps for this reason under-appreciated), in part because of the kind of literary style he often adopts, but also quite evidently because of an underlying conviction that too much 'clarity' would threaten the very integrity of what he is trying to bring to our attention in tragedy. As such, an important

24. Transcendental idealism is thus how Kant's empirical realism will avoid the scepticism that naturally results from what he calls 'mere empiricism'. It is also what most fundamentally distinguishes Kant's empirical realism from mere empiricism.

25. Transcendental idealism is thus also how Kant will avoid the dogmatism naturally resulting from mere rationalism.

part of what chapter 7 seeks to accomplish is to provide certain mechanisms that will illuminate the darker aspects of MacKinnon's brilliance on these issues without undoing what tragedy uniquely brings to the whole problematic.

The first of these mechanisms unfolds around a new kind of distinction between what I will portray as *two senses* of finality: a 'finality of resolution' and a 'finality of non-resolution'. For the most part, when we speak of finality (in the sense of authority) we mean something like a 'finality of resolution' or a finality of justification; that is, a finality that derives its authority from a certain capacity for settling disputes or problems by resolving the queries involved. For example, the kinds of finality we grant to a mathematical theorem or to a scientific theory or, in theology, to an apologetic strategy or a theodicy, these are always at bottom finalities of resolution inasmuch as their authority rests on the way they can be shown to resolve into proofs (deductively), or on their explanatory capacity (inductively), or even just in some way on their plausibility (e.g. through abduction or perhaps holistic evaluation etc.).

Tragedy, by contrast, in its very definition admits of no such resolution; *and yet* its tangible empirical finality is as unquestionable as the most conclusive finality of resolution. Tragedy confronts us with what we might call a kind of mind-stopping finality, a kind of finality we encounter, for example, in certain unspeakable episodes of human history such as the Jewish holocaust at the hands of Nazi Germany. What we are confronted with here can only be spoken of as a 'finality of non-resolution', in the sense that any attempt to 'account' for this evil in a broader apologetic strategy or theodicy utterly breaks apart and shatters against the actual, individual and collective, tangible experiences of ineluctable human demise, violation and undoing that comprise these events. Tragedy here means the end of every kind of design or *telos* or system of explanation. Dietrich Ritschl gives powerful expression to this conviction: 'Anyone who wants to say that Auschwitz – as a paradigm of evil and suffering in our time – is willed by God or good, even if we only realize it later, has to shut up, because such statements mark the end of both theology and humanity.'²⁶ In this light, and as insensitive as the application here may initially appear, this mind-stopping or epistemologically final feature of tragedy can actually help us forward with regard to the question of how reference to or characterization of the transcendent is possible.

26. Dietrich Ritschl, *The Logic of Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), p. 38.

The initial point is that the finality or authority that we encounter in the transcendent can be seen as somehow related to what I am calling the ‘finality of non-resolution’ which we encounter so tangibly in tragedy. Of course this is not to say that tragedy per se will somehow ‘open up’ a way of gaining reference to the transcendent. It is not as if tragedy and transcendence are ‘similar’, or as if the former becomes a model of some sort for the latter, for this would be precisely to participate in the kind of presumptuous and thoughtless reasoning that Ritschl and others condemn as both ethically and theologically bankrupt. To do so would be a violation of the finality of non-resolution of tragedy by orienting it to some more ultimate end. And so our attention in chapter 7 will rather be turned to something else. And here we come to a second mechanism for illuminating what remains rather cryptic in MacKinnon. Our concern will not be with any sort of analogical similarity between tragedy and transcendence. Rather it will be the particular *relation* that will be found to obtain between what I will distinguish as *two senses* of tragedy – tragedy-as-discourse²⁷ and real tragedy in history – that will help us further with the question of tangible reference to the transcendent. At bottom, tragedy-as-discourse will be found to be able to give expression to real tragedy in history in a way that no other form of discourse can, precisely because it alone, by definition, never allows resolution into any broader system of explanation or ‘moral’ or rationale; tragedy-as-discourse remains utterly unredemptive, so to speak. It is on the basis of these kinds of distinctions that we begin to see the promise and power of MacKinnon’s initial statement that tragedy as a form of discourse is able to represent the relation of the familiar to the transcendent like no other form of discourse.

Yet MacKinnon himself always leaves us in purely negative territory on these matters, again arguably out of concern that any sort of positive development might violate the intrinsic character of tragedy. Nevertheless, we remain in search of an affirmative result. And so it will be on the basis of these essentially negative parameters that we will then in the second half of the chapter broach, via Bultmann, Bonhoeffer and Marion, some existing approaches offered by others for locating a suitable *positive* referent for theology – that is, a referent that is both fully tangible (empirical) yet that does not admit of resolution into any broader system of explanation (i.e., which remains a finality of non-resolution). More exactly, we will first explore the basic problems involved in epistemological reference for

27. As seen in different ways, for example, in Sophocles, Shakespeare or Racine.

theology in general, before turning to one specific and compelling current account of this in Jean-Luc Marion's treatment of empirical reference and the Eucharist. All of these explorations, however, will for various reasons ultimately fail to provide for the requirements of theological discourse but most decisively because of their invariable susceptibility to enigma and positivism.

2.6 Penultimacy and Christology

As an alternative to these, chapter 8 then offers a new way forward for meaningful theological reasoning, based on the clarifications in the previous chapters of what the 'formal' question of Christian thinking must involve. This 'new way forward' begins from a theological deployment of the logical or analytical relation between ultimacy and penultimacy, an idea that comes to powerful, if somewhat enigmatic expression in Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*, and that allows for application in our context in ways that he himself perhaps did not initially envision. The theological appropriation of penultimacy then builds toward Christology, and the provision of a 'counter-ontology' for meaningful discourse about God. In an oblique way, penultimacy and Christology will be seen as belonging together on a theological level in much the same way that Kant describes empirical realism and transcendental idealism as separate but inseparable descriptions of the same thing. Yet this indirect likeness will not be treated as anything formulaic or general, especially not in the sense of an attempt to find any sort of continuum between reason and revelation. It will rather offer a new, hitherto virtually unexplored way of understanding the convergence of (or the confrontation between) epistemology and Christology, which preserves the integrity of both of them. In short, it will outline a way in which theological subject matter can become the focus of rational scrutiny without succumbing to reductionism or resorting to positivism; that is, in a way that preserves the demands of orthodoxy.