

# THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF POSTMODERNISM *VIS* *A VIS* THE WESTERN CLASSICAL TRADITION AND MODERNISM IN THE LIGHT OF RIELO'S GENETIC SEMIOTICS

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This International Seminar, here at St. Paul's College, in Kalamassery, Kerala, India, has as its objective the influence of postmodernist philosophical proposals, presumably those inspired by the works of Jacques Derrida and Jean-Francois Lyotard, among others, on postmodern and post-millennial literature. These thinkers, within the context of an epistemological frame, in view of their self-referential conception of language, reject attempts to enshrine, say, culturally-fixed binaries, in the case of Derrida, and grand metanarratives, in that of Lyotard, as somehow transcending extra-mentally or extra-linguistically the purported limits of language. Postmodernist thought is aligned within the context of a more Heraclitean notion that all is in flux, ever changing, within a logic of becoming, impermanence and difference. This position is in contrast with an earlier ancient classical tradition, termed the *original tradition*,<sup>1</sup> that, formulated from fifth century BC Athens to early fourth century Rome, the "Athenian miracle," that "watered Rome" and the West with a largely Platonic, though also, in part, Aristotelian, transcendent orientation, corrected in crucial ways by the Judeo-Christian worldview. This is to say that, while acknowledging the potential ways in which postmodernist forms of criticism may promote the cause of justice in its trenchant search to address the plight of the marginalized and the oppressed within multiple contexts, this philosophical orientation is also characterized by an optic that dismisses the belief in universal truths and, instead, espouses one or another form of metaphysical nihilism, epistemological skepticism, and moral relativism, that undermines the more classical tradition in regards to issues of truth, goodness, and beauty. The position here takes the position that postmodern thought itself consists in a broad epistemological orientation that is open to critical review so as to point out the limits of some of its principal tenets, so as to assure that its potential to illuminate the hidden and dark manifestations of the human condition does not itself become its own *meta*-metanarrative of all metanarratives. Yet the anchoring of postmodern thought will not be carried out by simply restating the *original tradition* but by critical review of

this tradition as a function of Fernando Rielo's *philosophia prima*, i.e., his *genetic metaphysics* that grounds his original genetic semiotics.

This paper<sup>2</sup> accordingly examines the philosophical *roots* of postmodernism and postmodernism *itself*, first, by articulating the main lines of the *original tradition* with its demise in the light of the contrary views of philosophical modernity that are part and parcel of the postmodern worldview; second, by examining two iconic conceptions of this movement, namely, Derrida's deconstructionism and Lyotard's argument against metanarratives. In a third and final section, we will introduce Rielo's genetic metaphysics, his *genetic conception of the principle of relation*, that, providing the proper grounding of the main tenets of the classical or *original tradition*, overcomes the postmodernist inability to move beyond the circularity of language as a self-enclosed system, and this by means of his novel conception of semiotics.

## I. CLASSICAL *ORIGINAL TRADITION* AND ITS DEMISE WITH THE RISE OF MODERNITY WITH ITS POSTMODERNISM SEEDS

### *The Elements of the Original Tradition*

To begin, Rist underscores Plato's groundbreaking contribution to the *original tradition*, *vis á vis* the pre-Socratic thought that preceded him, in these words: "In his the Laws, he [Plato] summarized what appears to be the cardinal points of his worldview: that God, not man, is the measure of all things; that even though the soul is immortal ... some souls become capable of evil; that well-formed political societies, like good individuals, are fashioned by observing and building on what we are by our nature: thus we are not accidental, arbitrary or artificial constructs."<sup>3</sup> Indeed the *original tradition*<sup>4</sup> hails a worldview that upholds the reality of God and Man as made in the *imago Dei*. Accordingly, the Platonic worldview developed in the light of Judeo-Christian teaching, such that the omnipotence of God is underscored as signifying, in line with the Book of Genesis, and in contradistinction to the ancient Greek view regarding the eternity of the universe, that not only is God in fact the *Creator* of the cosmos and of human beings, and this *ex-nihilo*, from nothing, but that God is indeed the Sovereign Absolute such that all things and beings are as a function extension of the God that brings them forth and sustains them in their existence and in their nature. Regarding the human being, countering the Platonic view in which body is understood as a prison cell of the soul, the tradition understood the human being more in line with Aristotle's view in which the

soul is the substantial or actual or essence-giving form of the body, the *definiendum*, that, as potential principle, instantiates the *definiens* or defining substantial form; hence, both soul and body are inextricably intertwined as correlative co-principles of the human being. Moreover, the *original tradition* encompasses a profound view of humanity as a wounded race, given the Original Fall, such that persons are only capable of loving the Good with a desire for a good life in a non-Pelagian manner with the assistance of divine energy or *grace*, here considered at the constitutive or ecumenical level, rather than at the level of sanctifying grace.<sup>5</sup> No one can be good therefore without supernal assistance. In line with the prevailing Greek view of his time, Plato contends, moreover, that human development takes place as members of a community as in a Greek *polis*, oriented by a political constitution that he broadly divides into two sorts: the first being, whether a monarch, aristocracy or moderate democracy, whose leaders rule for the common good as opposed to oligarchs or tyrants who rule for their own advantage. For Plato the eternal *Form* of Justice, which is identical to Goodness or God illumines the cardinal virtues that should guide human conduct rather than whim or caprice. To the degree that these virtues are lived by the ruler(s) and the subjects of a body politic, to the same degree the society flourishes, without which levels of personal and societal degradation ensue.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the *original tradition* underscores the ontological relationship of the human person with God or the Absolute in terms of which humans exist and in terms of which they are inexorably related to God as the Truth and the Good, such that God alone is the measure of what is true and good and certainly never human volition or caprice. The human being then is a being capable of intuiting a realm beyond the material one in which the perfect standards of goodness and virtue are to be found that serve to orient the human being so disposed in the direction of the excellence of virtue and primarily of *dike*, justice.

### *Demise of the Original Tradition and Modern Roots of Postmodernism*

The more metaphysical, God-centered period that flourished during Christendom permeated by the metaphysical resources of the *original tradition*, began to experience its demise already in the High Middle Ages and the Renaissance with the rise of an *alternative tradition*, a conception of Modern Man as increasingly autonomous and secular, as constituted by a number of “alternate,” ever-more materialistic conceptions of Man expressed generically, by Rist, as Enlightened Man, Scientific Man, Totalitarian Man.<sup>7</sup> A consideration of these will show that philosophical modernity provides postmodernism with some of its cherished presuppositions: a repudiation of all metanarratives especially the metaphysical which has as its crowning achievement the existence of God, the toppling of the

notion of an overarching Goodness or the metaphysical ground for values, the aperture to political domination in the face of intellectual skepticism and moral relativism. Postmodernism is all these things plus more as will be examined in the second part of this paper.

This said, I take the conception of Enlightened Man as referring to the dismantling of the ground of ultimate values, God as Ultimate *Goodness*, involving a fundamental break from the Christianity of the Middle Ages that came to be viewed as “unenlightened,” in favor of a notion of man that extolled his individuality, a rationality that revived the skepticism of more ancient times and a morality that was not divinely-ordained but instead the product of “moral sentiment.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the 14<sup>th</sup> century significantly contributed to this anthropocentric emphasis, in contradistinction to the earlier theocentric one, with philosophical arguments espousing the primacy of *will*—voluntarism—over and against reason—rationalism—, of will over reason, the seeds leading in time to the cardinal insight of a precursor to postmodernism, viz., Nietzsche and his proposal of the *will to power* as the dominant paradigm over and above any other limiting frame. With the loss of a theistic God as Goodness and consequent loss of the ground of ultimate and eternal values,<sup>9</sup> voluntarism served to invade social discourse, eventually leading to a veritable exercise of the Nietzschean *will to power* where every individual is encouraged to *decide* what they take to be the true and good.<sup>10</sup>

The notion of Scientific Man essentially outlaws rational discourse of God as the Metaphysical *Truth*, as Creator, Designer of the Cosmos, and Origin of botanical and zoological life forms, including human life. Although the rise of Modern Science was replete with scientists who fundamentally embraced the *original tradition*—Copernicus, Galileo, Descartes, Harvey, Boyle—, there followed a “scientific humanism” that is, in part, responsible for the collapse of the *original tradition* in favor of an epistemological frame that limits true knowledge to that derived by the scientific method within the context of a spatial-temporal material and mechanistic, Newtonian<sup>11</sup> universe in which there is no room for divine intervention or providence. Indeed Rist holds that scientists have emerged “flaunting a knowledge that the ‘layman’ may regard with awe as partaking of a quasi-priestly superiority,”<sup>12</sup> oftentimes, speaking outside of their field of expertise, in postmodern fashion. They are dismissive of anything transcendent, hence rendering judgments on matters for which they have no genuine authority; a case in point is Stephen Hawking when he pontificates that we have no need for God given the contradictory observation that “because there is a law of gravity, *the Universe can and will create itself from nothing*,” while blatantly oblivious to the fact that gravity is “something”

rather than nothing; and that the human race is “just a chemical scum on a moderate-sized planet.”<sup>13</sup>

Now once the Good and the Truth are no longer ultimately grounded in God or the Absolute, then there is the possibility that powerful forces enter this metaphysical and existential void in a manner that, while espousing atheism, produces Tyrannical Man or despot by which a body politic is at the mercy of a totalitarian political system that dictates what is the *good* and *true* according to the interests or whims of those with the reins of power. A society bred on such “enlightened” and “scientific” attitudes provides the conditions for the introduction, say, of a Marxist ideology in which the God-given autonomy of the human being under God, is gravely undermined. In such totalitarian nations, headed by a charismatic dictator, ideology is used to control every aspect of their citizenry, including the political economy, system of education, the arts, sciences and even the private-life morality of their subjects. In such totalitarian worldviews, one envisions the rise of a threatening cultural milieu that aggressively imposes its divisive ideology while inhumanely canceling all dissent without pity or the prospect of redemption. This Marxist view of reality as essentially a matter of class conflict and warfare is part and parcel of the postmodern mindset in which, paradoxically, postmodernism turns itself into the grand inquisitor of all schemas, that, while imposing its denial of ultimate principles, itself stands, as it were, as the grand narrative of metanarrative critique.

This said, however, let me clarify that, in line with Merold Westphal, this paper sees positive contributions of the so-called atheistic philosophers of suspicion, viz., Friedrich Nietzsche and Karl Marx, including Sigmund Freud, and their critique of religion or, for our purposes, religious metanarratives grounded in so-called Christian metaphysics, as being actually rooted in the prophets of the Old Testament, such as Amos, Isaiah and Jeremiah, and Jesus in the New Testament. Westphal states, “What if the biblical prophets, apostles, and Jesus himself were the originators of suspicion against the piety of the covenant people of God?”<sup>14</sup> Briefly: Nietzsche contends, in line with Jesus’ own critique of the pharisees, that persons in the name of religion may use their own “will to power” to mete out revenge on those they view as their rivals. Regarding Freud, he holds that Freud’s rejection of religion stems from viewing it as a wish-fulfillment, the truth of which lies in that oftentimes those who profess the Christian faith do indeed create God into what we “wish” Him to be, for example, a God father figure to protect us from the inclemency of nature’s forces, a retributive judge who would be sure to give our enemies their due as we egotistically see it yet would be especially merciful with us. Finally, the positive point he upholds in Marx is that he calls out the German state that, although being

professedly “Christian,” was unduly oppressive, all the while deceiving itself into thinking it was following Christ’s teaching of justice.

Hence, the view here is that modernity provides postmodernity with the roots of some of its major tenets: the denial of an Absolute Subject or God, the *meta*-metanarrative, as the origin and creator of all that is and as the foundation of all values. Indeed, the modernist view favoring voluntarism provides the ground for the postmodern position that everyone is their own center of power. The individual and not science or political governance guides one’s freedom. It is solely one’s own decision of what one takes to be the true and the good for oneself that matters, however shifting and impermanent these “values” may be.

## II. PHILOSOPHICAL POSTMODERNISM AND PROMINENT PROPONENTS

*Structuralist Precursors to Philosophical Postmodernism:  
De Saussure and Levi-Strauss*

Already with the modernist philosophical repudiation of the *original tradition*, salient elements of postmodernist thought were brought to the foreground in the form of a growing anti-foundationalist orientation. Other elements constitutive of the postmodern worldview can be traced to the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, considered the father of structuralism, who held that humans share certain fundamental structural characteristics embedded in language and the nature of such structures is in the form of a binary arrangement wherein meaning is derived by distinguishing differences between things. This is to say that language is a system of signs and signification where the semiotic elements are only understandable in relation to each other and the system proposed. Primary among these relational elements of language are binary opposites that are defined and set off against one another as mutually exclusive terms, the means by which units of language have value or meaning with each unit defined in reciprocal determination with another term. A typical example is how *hot* becomes meaningful in relation to its structural complement *cold* and vice versa, or the word *good* comes to the fore in the light of its structural complement *evil*. Meaning is created in a linguistic system where one of the binary opposites is understood as dominant, as carrying more weight or is considered the primary meaning in relation to its opposite, say, *good* holds a dominant position in cultural interpretations over its relational term *evil*. What is central here is that, for Saussure, such binary oppositions are typically *value-laden* and *ethnocentric* and hence there is, in principle, nothing ontological about them.

Claude Levi-Strauss, a structuralist following de Saussure's lead, held that, just like language, human culture possesses underlying universal structures common to all humans that, in fact, may be uncovered through the concept of binary oppositions. Thus, in exploring the structures of human consciousness, he determines that all human beings are capable of the same mental processes, i.e., that the mind of the savage has the same structure as the mind of the civilized person, and that these universal structures may be uncovered through the concept of binary structures that, organizing human language, philosophy and culture, make meaning possible in terms of binary oppositions, including good vs. evil, light vs. dark, male vs. female, human vs. nature, order vs. chaos, youth vs. old age, that are markedly present in books or film tales in which plot development results by creating conflict between opposite character types, hero vs. villain, as in Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader. In addition to such binary opposites, Levi-Strauss speaks of the so-called "atom of kinship" as in the case of Father-son, Brother-sister, Husband-wife, Mother's brother, underscored as expressions of universal cultural structures that may help in the comparative study of cultures, where, in addition, the capitalized word, "Father, Brother, ...". are understood as dominant. Yet a problem with binary opposites is that they may oftentimes perpetuate negative stereotypes; for example, if the binary opposite was man vs. woman, according to gender stereotypes, the man may be portrayed to be 'strong' whereas the woman is the weak "damsel in distress."

Within this critical view of language's ability to represent reality *per se*, Lévi-Strauss was instrumental in challenging the ethnocentric view of Western societies, the objectivity of and universality of Western history, the belief that every culture has its *own* order and coherence, expressed with certain biases of what should be considered primary and preferred over the secondary and not preferred, such that there is no one language or culture that merits primacy over other languages and cultures. This mode of thinking came into prominence philosophically in the late-Wittgenstein's view of language games in which the meaning of a word and/or a sentence is nothing metaphysical, extramental or extra-cultural, but rather the meaning of such utterances derives as a function of their use or employment following the rules of the language game in which they are embedded, such that solely culture and context determine the meaning of words without an aperture beyond, indeed dismissive of all that tends in the direction of the metaphysical.

## *Two Proponents of Philosophical Postmodernism: Derrida, Lyotard*

Jacques Derrida (1930-2004)

Jacques Derrida's poststructuralist or deconstructionist approach, inspired from Saussurian linguistics, involves, for his part, the identification of a sort of original sin which he identifies as the metaphysics of presence or logocentrism which underlies, in his view, Western philosophy. He attempts to show that binary hierarchies can be identified in relation to some philosophical text or treatment in order to reveal the instability of such a philosophical cornerstone. He accordingly takes issue with the view that there is a transcendental signified that can ground everything, i.e., an ultimate metaphysical reality, viz., God, as origin of all things, being, essence, humanity and self, such that he takes issue with the notion that there is a transcendent center that can ground our thoughts in truth and our actions in goodness. In his *Of Grammatology*, he states, "There is nothing outside the text."<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, Derrida wants to point out that one signifier does not lead to a concrete totalized signified but to another signifier which, in turn, leads to yet another signifier and so on, in a chain of signification. This is contrary to, say, Hegelian dialectical thinking in which opposites contribute to a synthesis rather than to a destabilization of meanings.

Logocentrism then is responsible for the uncritical view that words and language serve as an authentic expression of an external reality, a view that privileges presence over absence and difference, binary hierarchies in which one of the binary terms as dominant over the subservient term that then Derridean deconstruction endeavors to subvert by decentering the dominant terms and focusing on the subservient or marginalized one as equally possible so as to underscore other possible meanings in a spirit, presumably, of justice. Indeed the term "*différance*," for Derrida, signifies the way meaning is always deferred, always in a state of becoming, never fully present; although logocentrism unwittingly creates the illusion that the meaning of words comes from the structure of reality such that truth is present in the mind. All then that can be known and affirmed is *caged* within the limits of language that can never transcend its ever-circular limits to convey extramental centers of reality. Derrida then attempts to show that certain binary oppositions can be identified in relation to some philosophical text or treatment and having done so he reveals the instability of such a, say, philosophical cornerstone.

Said, another way, for Derrida, Western Philosophy is committed to deep unarticulated presuppositions, *centers*, that govern and pervert understanding. These presuppositions are present beneath the veil of language and consciousness. His

deconstructionist techniques therefore, based on Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology<sup>16</sup>, as well as Saussurian structural linguistics and Levi-Strauss's cultural structuralism, have as their goal the dissolution of these underlying philosophical commitments by means of the detection of contradictions arising from some basic binary oppositions so as to expose the inherent instability and contradictions within these binary oppositions, showing how they are not always clear-cut or hierarchical as they may initially appear. A classic example of a binary opposition in deconstruction is the pairing of "male" and "female," where one is often seen as the dominant and superior term (male) while the other is considered subordinate (female), wherein allegedly societal power structures are perpetuated and legitimized favoring a specific majority or dominant term. Deconstruction by de-centering the dominant term and focusing on the marginal term as equally possible unmasks how this hierarchy can be challenged and destabilized within a text by highlighting instances where the "female" characteristics might be just as powerful or valuable as the "male" ones. Another example is that of the oppositional binary of the "husband and wife" relationship that Derrida deconstructs by exposing the inherent instability and contradictions within the seemingly fixed binary of "husband" as the dominant partner and "wife" as the subordinate one, underscoring how each term relies on the other to define itself, and ultimately challenging the idea of a clear, stable power dynamic within the relationship; essentially, showing how the "husband" role contains aspects of the "wife" and vice versa, undermining the notion of a strict hierarchy between them. Deconstruction thus endeavors to display how these binary opposites carry within them their other or their counterpart in the traditional polarity so as to promote, presumably, the cause of justice in its acerbic search to address the plight of the marginalized and the oppressed; in the cases considered, potentially that of woman and wife.

It should be noted here that to the extent that deconstructive techniques endeavor to expose negative power relationships hidden in oppositional binaries, to this extent it fosters a preference for a certain sense of *justice* over injustice, such that justice then not only means something but it is the preferred outcome, thereby harboring at least a latent notion of what is *good* or the preferred state or just as opposed to what is *not good*. To this end postmodern advocates endeavor to deconstruct power structures that perpetuate injustice and inequality in favor of diversity of expressions and perspectives. Consider the binary relationship between justice and law and how justice may be understood by those in authority as including the practice of apartheid that then construe laws that favor such an understanding of what is *just*. This is reminiscent of the prisoners bound and fettered in Plato's famed Allegory of the Cave whose understanding of justice is but a figment of what is understood outside of the Cave in the realm of Absolute Goodness or Justice itself.

To the extent that these sorts of moral characterizations follow deconstructive processes to the same extent it may be argued that deconstruction functions with a window to something understood as more just than not. May this aperture not be precisely the realm that transcends the self-referential language bubble?

Now other examples of binary oppositions in deconstruction include: mind/body, and culture/nature, good vs. evil so as to examine how, say, a seemingly “evil” character might have morally complex motivations that challenge the simple good/evil dichotomy; analyzing how a text might portray emotion as irrational while simultaneously showing how reason can be influenced by emotions; examining how a text might use light to symbolize good and dark to represent evil, but also showcasing situations where the darkness might be positive. Yet, this said, from a critical stance, one may counter that in a general sense darkness is the absence of light. Thus, it is then not at all a contradiction to the state of illumination, for there may be a situation wherein darkness is superior to light, such as when someone’s safety may be ensured by the cloak of darkness. This, however, in no way proves that the two are equal. If (X) is superior to (Y) under conditions or context (Z) then it will always be so. The Derridean problem arises first of all because terms are vague and ambiguous and can be different things or have indefinite meaning. For another example, in this line of analysis, consider that many philosophers distinguish between Being and Nothing. While this polarity is similar, if not the same, to that between that in which God exists and does not exist, it needs to be countered that in Christianity nothing *is not* real. It is only an absence in relation to Being. Thus, while the Derridean locutions might contradict each other (God exists vs God doesn’t exist), the metaphysical reality of the relation between Being and Nothing is not one of contradiction. The latter is not itself something real. If only Being is metaphysically real, then it must be the privileged member of the binary pair. This is why perhaps St. Anselm utilizes an assumption in the Ontological Argument that Existence is superior to non-existence. This might be related to the Aristotelian view that the Actual is metaphysically superior to the merely possible.

In a limited defense of Derrida, what he attempts to do to logocentrism Wittgenstein, in the *Philosophical Investigations*, does to the *Tractatus*. Yet Wittgenstein does not offer a retraction in relation to his earlier work. He claims that the *Tractatus* is correct but is limited in scope in the sense that there must be an underlying ground in which meanings are stipulated for anchoring discourse of objects that transcends language. Quine, in *Word and Object*, for his part, argues that the meanings of terms in propositions are inscrutable and underdetermined if one seeks meaning as a simple correspondence of terms. For sure this is why the Logical Positivist project failed as it attempted to simplistically reduce theoretical terms to

observational terms. Quine points out that meaning is holistic and thus involves a more coherentist approach. As a result, the notion of the verification and falsification of statements or theories is not as simple as a lone corroboration or failure of some prediction. Many relevant nuances and gradations of meaning are overlooked in a one-on-one comparison. Though it may be said that Derrida's claim that language is inherently false is true given the model of language with which he is working. This is in relation to, say, what Kant pointed out regarding Hume's skeptical conclusion with respect to the discernment of causes; namely, that it was correct given Hume's erroneous empirical model of the relationship between the mind and the world *via* the senses. Notwithstanding, Kant's starting point was that causes must indeed exist to explain our knowledge which is assumed as true. In order for him to be correct about this he suggests that there must be Categories of Understanding that enable us to make sense of sense experience.

Further, more pointedly, in response to Derrida and all forms of epistemological models that harness language to caged imprisonments, be it, for example, all forms of nominalism, phenomenism, transcendental idealism, conceptualism, although he sees his own deconstructive project not so much as a method with a fixed outcome but a continual process of questioning and destabilizing assumptions. One may begin by questioning one of his own cherished assumptions, for if one considers the triad of *language, concept, object*, deconstruction seems to assume a primacy and privileged position be given to language; the *ordo linguae*, i.e., the order of language, is preferred to the *ordo essendi*, i.e., the order of being or of extramental reality. One may ask why is this so? If one adopts a position, such as the Thomistic critical realism of Jacques Maritain, then ontology or the order of the object is primary. In the latter case *language is a reflection of what is real*. In the former *one never escapes from the linguistic circle*. Indeed, Derrida inverts then the relationship between language and object. But why is he entitled to change the order of being (*ordo essendi*) so that language is king? The point here is that reality comes first, then language, the designation of words that convey the reality of what is there to behold, and this however imperfectly grasped. This takes exception then to the Derridean view that language is not a neutral tool for representing reality but, rather, that it is engaged in actively constructing it. Meaning is not inherent in the words themselves but arises from the relationships between words within a system that is, in turn, grounded in relation to an extra-linguistic world that can be known via a transcendent epistemology as will be considered in the third part of this paper.

The primacy of *ordo essendi* is reflected in the Biblical account where God presents Adam with an array of living beings so that in the divine presence, he may

*name* them; such that, the human being is capable of language, capable of naming reality. The text in Genesis (2:19ff) states:

And out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought *them* to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name.<sup>20</sup> The man gave names to all the livestock, and to the birds of the sky, and to every animal of the field...

From this passage what we want to ultimately argue is that the human being is not in a linguistic bubble but exists in a constitutive relation to a non-oppressive Divinity who accompanies the human being and who brings the world of things and beings into focus so that they may be known and worded by the human being. The *ordo essendi* is first and then as a function of this the *ordo linguae*. The presence of God, moreover, indicates that this operation is not without divine assistance, on the one hand, and, on the other, that the human being is capacitated to know and name things. In contrast, as an example of language not tethered to reality is, say, the Holy Roman Empire, that was none of these in the light of the constant interplay between religious and secular power, including internal struggles for dominance. In this respect this paper agrees with Derrida's notion of logocentrism in the sense that there is no simple and direct correspondence between extramental/linguistic reality and words must be understood in constitutive relationship with the Divinity that constitutes both the human being and the world to be known. To ground this proposal will take us to the third part of this paper where we will present the master lines of Rielo's genetic metaphysics, or of the beauty of the *genetic conception of the principle of relation*.

Moreover, Derrida's deconstruction project is limited for many relevant nuances and gradations of meaning are overlooked in a simple one on one comparison. For example, one might consider whether Derrida is committing the fallacy of false dichotomy in conceiving oppositional binaries as the paradigm of binaries in general to the detriment of complementary binaries to be considered in the third part of this paper. Moreover, one might ask: Why is it the case that deconstruction doesn't undermine Euclid's *Elements*, Newton's *Principia*, or Einstein's Relativity papers. They also are literary texts. Demonstrating that it is possible to reverse a majority interpretation of Melville's *Moby Dick* or Shakespeare's *Othello* doesn't prove that deconstruction can overturn inviolable norms or truths.

Moreover, if one were to assume that a deconstructionist critique can be performed on any view (literary, philosophical, etc.), in this case it can also be used against itself. Thus, it is self-refuting. Why then should anyone trust its results? Derrida's deconstructionist *modus operandi* consists in forming binary conceptual oppositions. While purely a linguistic device it treads upon the ground of paradox. The distinction between deconstructionist binary oppositions and traditional paradoxes is that the latter deals with purported equivalences between contradictory statements in which both statements are perceived as true, while the former deals with purported equivalences between contradictory locutions in which both are deemed as equally false. Regarding Derrida, then it would be fair to see his deconstructive proposal of an endless chain or series of signifiers as somewhat reminiscent of Zeno's paradox of the hare in which the question is whether a faster runner can ever catch up to a hare that is given a head start; paradoxically the faster runner cannot overtake the hare and this because the distance between the two runners can be divided into an infinite number of smaller distances in which case the faster runner would have to take an infinite number of steps to catch the slower runner. This thought experiment conveys how the mind can conjure situations that are in the mind insoluble until one moves from the conceptually imaginable to the realistically doable. This works intuitively notwithstanding Derrida's type of deconstructive infinity in regard to the continual co-dependency of the meanings of binary terms depicting the infinite as an ongoing sequence without end and hence without involving any limiting space as in the paradox considered. Indeed, if meaning is exclusively in terms of binary opposition and infinitely deferred, then the application of Derrida's own proposal to his own deconstructive project would render it ultimately incomprehensible. This is to say that if deconstruction can perform its critiques on any given linguistic *text*, including Scriptures, because it is a language-based literary expression, then why, one may ask, cannot deconstruction itself, also being itself a language-based literary expression, be itself deconstructed? Followers of Derrida may smirk and claim that the deconstructive undermining of deconstruction proves their point, yet on what basis does deconstruction enjoy a sort of transcendent position over and above any other literary expression? This is reminiscent of the verifiability principle championed by the Logical Positivists of the early twentieth century, who, while asserting that a statement is only meaningful if it can be empirically verified or is analytically true, yet the principle itself could not be verified in either of these ways.

Jean-François Lyotard (1924—1998)

Whereas Derrida's critique centers on overcoming logocentrism by means of his view that *reality* is a construct of language, Lyotard, in his *The Postmodern Condition*,<sup>17</sup> criticizes metanarratives, or grand narratives, for whom *postmodernism* simply signifies disbelief towards metanarratives, i.e., overarching stories or theories that, claiming to provide a comprehensive explanation of reality, historical events, experiences, including social and cultural phenomena, have lost their credibility and authority. He especially is critical of such grand assessments given that, claiming universal validity, they may be used to legitimize knowledge and power structures to the detriment of those marginalized. Examples of grand narratives are found in the Enlightenment's naïve ideology that reason and science inevitably lead to continuous progress for the benefit of humanity although contradicted by the fabrication of nuclear armaments of mass destruction. For Lyotard, Marxism is a flawed ideology that sees history as proceeding according to predictable patterns of class struggle leading in the end to a communist utopia rather than the totalitarian regimes that have ensued under this narrative as in the case of a Marxism in a Stalinist variety. Indeed, religious ideology, while promising salvation may, in fact, be oppressive and limit personal freedom as, for instance, Calvinistic Christianity that sees some persons as saved by God's arbitrary choice and others as not. All, indeed, are limited worldviews and, worst, even potentially sinister capable of generating epic suffering and loss of life.

In view of this, Lyotard proposes that peoples and societies should, instead, be dedicated to the more modest task of composing a plurality of "*petits récits*," or more modest narratives or language games that, subjectively contextualized, focus on specific events or social issues, that, multiple, reflect diverse perspectives and experiences of often marginalized and localized narratives in a manner that advances a focus on voices that have been historically silenced, promoting inclusivity and diversity in philosophical inquiry. But let us also consider the question of how large a "story" has to be to qualify as a narrative. The Enlightenment is a narrative, but why is not every individual belief also a narrative. After all a large narrative is constructed of small narratives. If one is to reject these grand Lyotardian metanarratives, why stop there? Why should you believe my name is Robert and that I live in New York City. Both of these claims are narratives. If a Lyotardian metanarrative is compared to a novel, then our rank-and-file beliefs are short stories, some very short. But why should we then believe anything? Lyotard upholds, in short, that the accepted cultural version of any narrative almost always contains constructions which may be false such that everything can be doubted. What Ratzinger called the dictatorship of relativism he views as the democratization of

opinion. The latter sounds pretty good on the surface, but so does the word *choice* in pro-choice affirmations regarding the alleged right to end unborn life.

The problem with Lyotard's emphasis on subjective context has to do with the issue of the relativity of knowledge and ethics that fosters a more situational understanding of truth and morality. Indeed, such a view, while promoting multiple perspectives, leads to a blanket dismissal of universal truths in favor of "subjective" truths or individual experiences that, however, informative and enlightening, can never be viewed but as limited and potentially not in line with universal truth and normative goodness if such be possible. While it is true that many a grand overarching narrative is bound to be at best partially constructed and at worst a full-blown myth, a million such myths, however, do not land a logical blow on the concept of truth. If I tell you, for instance, a million lies about the nature of God, this does not prove that there is no God. Lyotardian reasoning, for sure, does not undermine the need for solid ground. Is it possible, for instance, to build the Eiffel Tower without resorting to Euclidean geometry? Is it possible to undergo a heart transplant without knowledge of cardiology? Indeed, the falsity of 99/100 models of reality does not mean that no true model exists. In fact, doubts and revisory thinking in science, for example, are motivated by an underlying belief that scientific truth exists. The scientific enterprise begins, not only in wonder, but with the need and intuition to seek the fundamental truth that governs all. Both attitudes therefore, the scientific and religious, seek a foundation which systematically unifies all.

A Rielian way to address Lyotard's critique against all metanarratives is to note that these may merit rejection because they incur in what Rielo identifies as ideology.<sup>18</sup> The problem with ideologies, whether referring to the human being, the world, religion, history, culture, and science, ..., stems from their expressing conceptions of the real in a manner that actually reduces, excludes and imposes themselves onto others at any cost. For Rielo, ideologies foster a reductive vision of the human being, for instance, by defining the same by means of a single characteristic that is absolutized; for example, the reduction of human being to reason, will, liberty, symbol, material, sociology, pleasure, that, in turn, foster ideologies such as rationalism, voluntarism, freedom, symbolism, materialism, socialism, hedonism. Ideologies promote an exclusionary vision that, fomenting an inauthentic moralizing attitude, excludes those human beings possessing a distinct vision from one's own, thereby excluding the values that others possess. Another feature of ideology is fanaticism that is not without violence and aggressiveness toward the opponent, whether intentional, verbal, moral or physical. For Rielo, generally, whatever is not for the spiritual, psychological and physical well-being of the human person is degrading.

For Riello the only property that authentically defines the human being and that puts an end to ideologies is love, i.e., a love always opened to the Absolute. In this respect, love is the action par excellence of the human being that rather than reduce empowers, elevates, magnifies; instead of excluding includes, comprehends and supports; rather than fanaticizing dialogues, communicates, pacifies. “Love is the motor of life and history, science and investigation, art and culture, family and society, religion and ethics. Without love there can be no progression, creativity, peace and justice. Where love is lacking there is corruption, violence, regression, death. Love transforms hedonism in lasting happiness; sadness into gladness; vice into virtue. All the vicious inclinations are transformed into the opposite virtues (cf. Gal 5,16-26): laziness into diligence; lie into truth; malice into goodness; ugliness into beauty; misery into richness; lack of interest into motivation; loneliness into communication; misfortune into hope; death into life.”<sup>19</sup>

This said, for Riello, it is the mystical definition of the human person that opens the human beings to the source of their existence and being, namely the divine constitutive presence, that furnishes the same with all that is true, good, and beautiful, always assuming their free response. Freedom in human beings must be formed by that which constitutes them and not by the degrading attitude of an ideologized or egotized freedom.

### III. RIELO’S GENETIC METAPHYSICS GROUNDS GENETIC SEMIOTICS

Let me begin this section<sup>20</sup> with a few introductory remarks. The Absolute or God is understood according to the *original tradition* principally as the creator of the universe: “*The universe has been created from nothing by an omnipotent and immaterial God, source of the moral law in his own person and being.*”<sup>21</sup> One may add that such a view of God as the origin of the universe is now even more warranted as a result of the standard view of science that the cosmos came into being approximately 13.7 billion years ago. This naturally leads to the quest for the origin of the universe, its manifold objects and living impersonal and personal beings, that metaphysically, as construed in the cosmological argument purports God as origin of all cosmic finite and contingent reality. Yet the *God* of the *original tradition*, according to Riello, is constituted by an absolute conceived as a singular being that, as such, is bereft of any *intrinsic* relational dimension and hence is incapable to serve as the agent of creation, for an alleged absolute in self-identity *ad intra* is incapable of an act of presence in the *ad extra* realm of the Absolute, the void of being, in which a *relational* Absolute can indeed create. For Riello such an absolute must be

constituted at the rational or metaphysical level, by two beings, that can thereby serve as the agent of creation. Note that without this *ad extra* realm, one would metaphysically incur the absurdity of pantheism. While Rielo proposes then metaphysically the absolute as constituted by a *Binity* of two beings (theologically of three beings or Trinity<sup>22</sup>), he rejects the sterility of such purported absolutes that formulated in conformity to the so-called principle of identity, that he terms the pseudo-principle of identity, elevate tautological and a-relational terms to absolute such as Absolute Being, Goodness, Existence, although these invariably are susceptible to the fallacy of the *petitio principii*, for such pseudo-absolutes are self-certifying and self-referential.

This said, returning to Derrida, his binary approach is atomistic and discontinuous with the full spectrum of meaning. Meaning is holistic. If we assume that *objective* meanings and *truth* exist, then it logically follows that deconstruction is a misconceived approach. Instead, in his genetic metaphysics, i.e., the science at the rational level of God or the Absolute Subject, Rielo proposes the genetic conception of the principle of relation as the supreme expression of a *complementary binary* in which two eminently *complementary* terms or beings constitute the Absolute Subject or God in a manner that is free of any sort of opposition, subordination or dominance by one term over the other. For if, contrarily, God was conceived as constituted by a singular being, such a being raised to absolute would consist in a being constituted in self-identify, as a being *in itself, for itself, by itself*, hence a being that, imploding in itself, for lack of an intrinsic, second relational term, would be unsuited, as has been noted, to serve as the agent of creation. For Rielo, moreover the two beings constituting the Absolute Subject or God, are persons, given that, for Rielo, the person is the highest expression of being. Moreover, these two persons, raised to absolute, constitute *one* sole Absolute Subject without thereby incurring in the paradox of the double absolute.

This is because the two persons are “in a state of immanent, intrinsic complementarity,” wherein the term *immanent* indicates that it is not possible for one person [P<sub>1</sub>] to transcend the other [P<sub>2</sub>] or vice versa, for in this case subordinationism would be introduced in the Absolute. The term *intrinsic* underscores that the relation between the two persons is a constitutive or essential one such that one term cannot be but in constitutive relation to the other nor can the other be but in constitutive relation to the first term such that the two personal beings are entirely open one to the other to such a degree that the first term [P<sub>1</sub>] is entirely *in* the second [P<sub>2</sub>] and the second [P<sub>2</sub>] is entirely *in* the first [P<sub>1</sub>]. Hence each person constituting the Binity possesses the other personal being such that one person cannot be conceived as, say, one half of the Absolute, or in opposition to the other,

for each person possesses the other person intrinsically, i.e., both persons mutually indwell in each other. The Binity accordingly eradicates any conception of self-same identity as a metaphysical principle, for there is no such a thing as a self-same “being in being,” for much to the contrary, all *absolute* reality or *relative* reality is constituted by *relation*. The term “complementarity” underscores that the two personal beings, [P<sub>1</sub>] and [P<sub>2</sub>], while being really distinct, nonetheless are constitutively and essentially necessary one to the other, constituting the absolute unity of one single Absolute Subject with its sole absolute act. This relation may be understood as signifying absolute openness or, equivalently, the metaphysical expression of absolute love, that is, as the ecstatic mutually indwelling compenetration of the two persons.

Further, the two personal beings cannot be conceived either as absolutely *different* for, in this case, the two persons would be in a state of hopeless contradiction, nor can they be understood as absolutely the *same* for, in this case, identity is introduced. Rielo argues that the only possible way to conceive the personal beings constituting the Absolute as both *different yet the same* is to conceive the first personal being [P<sub>1</sub>], as the origin or progenitor [Father], who engenders or transmits as *agent action* the whole of his genetic patrimony to [P<sub>2</sub>], who receives as *receptive action* [Son] the agent action of [P<sub>1</sub>]. In this case [P<sub>1</sub>] and [P<sub>2</sub>] are the same in that they possess the same genetic patrimony, yet they are different insofar as the two personal beings have different metaphysical roles: [P<sub>1</sub>] serves as agent action or progenitor of [P<sub>2</sub>], while [P<sub>2</sub>] serves as receptive action or replica of [P<sub>1</sub>]. Hence [P<sub>2</sub>], in being constitutively formed by the genetic patrimony conferred upon him by [P<sub>1</sub>], is defined by [P<sub>1</sub>] as replica; yet, [P<sub>1</sub>] in being actively received by [P<sub>2</sub>] is defined by [P<sub>2</sub>] as progenitor for, in receiving the genetic patrimony conferred by [P<sub>1</sub>], [P<sub>2</sub>] renders [P<sub>1</sub>]’s act of engendering efficacious, such that [P<sub>1</sub>] and [P<sub>2</sub>] are mutually “subject” to each other in a complementary manner and absolutely never in an oppositional way. Hence, the two persons constitute sole *Absolute Subject* without circularity or question begging, whereby [P<sub>1</sub>] serves as *definiens* to [P<sub>2</sub>], and [P<sub>2</sub>] serves as *definiendum* of [P<sub>1</sub>], each person serving as the ground of the other. It is to be noted that [P<sub>2</sub>] does not receive its existence from [P<sub>1</sub>], for in this case [P<sub>2</sub>] would be created; both [P<sub>1</sub>] and [P<sub>2</sub>] have their own existence as divine persons.

The genetic relation then, between [P<sub>1</sub>] and [P<sub>2</sub>], arises as complementary, open, dialogical, communicative, generous, loving or ecstatic. This conception of the Absolute as constituted by two personal beings corrects the view of the *original tradition* that viewed God in terms of a unipersonalist monotheism, with Rielo one has, instead, at the level of metaphysics, a binitarian monotheism, and at the level of

theology, a Trinitarian monotheism, that renders all the levels of creation, in principle, as complementary realities.

### *Human Persons Constitutively Complementary*

For Rielo, just as there is no such a thing as a self-referential being constituting the absolute, the human being, in his genetic ontology, is neither self-defining but, rather, is constituted by two irreducible and complementary components, first, the form or created nature of the human being as a psychosomatic spirit,<sup>23</sup> and the second “+” referring to the transcendent or uncreated nature in terms of which the human being exists and is defined by the *divine constitutive presence of the Absolute Subject*, the *definiens*, in the created nature of the same human being, the *definiendum*. The divine constitutive presence of the Absolute Subject serves to define intrinsically the human being as a deity, made to be open to the same Absolute Subject formatively in an uncoercive way. The human person then is a *homo mysticus*, a deitactic being in the *imago Dei* that exists by and for the same Absolute Subject<sup>24</sup> from the moment of conception, a finite being opened to the infinite. What Rielo means by a “mystical being” has nothing to do with something esoteric, but, rather that the human being is a personal living being with potestative consciousness who can actively respond to the *agent action* of the divine constitutive presence of the absolute subject, a mystical deity of the metaphysical Divinity.<sup>25</sup> For Rielo, personhood is conferred in view of the divine constitutive presence of the Absolute Subject in the created spirit such that personhood does not take place at the moment of quickening nor when brain waves are detected. Indeed, it can be said that just as the genotype is present biologically at conception in the zygote, the genetic patrimony is present ontologically at conception in the created spirit.

The human person is thereby fashioned precisely to be freely *in union with*, first and foremost, the Absolute Subject that, indwelling, defines *filially* the same human being and that defines *fraternally* the manner of relationship with one’s fellows. Moreover, as epistemic principle, the divine constitutive presence serves as the included middle between the knowing subject and the object to be known. Rielo calls this principle inspiration that opens the knowing subject to the object under consideration and the object under consideration to the knowing subject such that the human being knows not without the hard condition of the limitations, conditionings and resistances of the senses and reason. As actual or ethical principle, the Absolute Subject renders the human being a veritable mystical deity, a moral being, capable of responding positively to the divine presence in a non-coercive way by choosing truth over falsehood, desiring the good over evil, esteeming beauty over ugliness. Indeed, what is poetically and universally termed the *voice of conscience*,

at root, refers to the influence of the divine constitutive presence as actual/ethical principle such that to resist such a formative influence is dysgenetic; indeed the origin of evil is not metaphysical but rests on the resistance and rejection of the formative influence of the divine constitutive presence by the human person, an action that is essentially irrational for which no good reason can be given. For Riello, additionally, in virtue of the divine constitutive presence of the Absolute Subject in the created nature of the human person, every human being is worthy of receiving dutiful veneration. The complementary binaries man and woman, husband and wife, parents and children, are understood here as ontologically complementary, as formed by the Absolute or God for loving, dialogical relationships. Dysgenetic action then are the ground for opposite binaries that incur in any form of unjust power plays, where the human person dismisses the positive and formative influence of the divine presence in relation to one's neighbor.

Riello's notion of the human person as defined by the indwelling and formative presence of the divine constitutive presence as epistemic and ethical principle in the created nature of the human being supersedes by ineffable magnitudes the identity-laden notion of the human person as an *individual* substance of a rational nature embraced by the *original tradition*. Riello's conception of the human being provides the ontological basis for arguing that the human being is not to act in accordance to subjective whim in terms of a malformed conception of freedom but in accordance with the salubrious exigencies of the indwelling divine presence.

### *Genetic Conception of Semiotics*

Post-structuralism, including deconstructionism, challenged the structuralist view of *meaning* as a stable system of significations and argued that meaning and intellectual structures are, to the contrary, shifting and unstable, such that claims to fixed or ultimate significations, even if purely conventional, amount to ideological limitations of the potentially limitless meanings which any given sign may evoke. For Riello modern versions of semiotics have developed principally out of formalistic orientations excluding the real subject and object of the sign, which are converted into semiotic phenomena and rule out metaphysics and, along with it, the mystical dimension.<sup>26</sup> Such systems of signs are unable by themselves to signify the sublime transcendence of the human person in relation to the Absolute Subject or take into account the language which expresses such an experiential relationship.

Riello further notes that, while semiotics aims at freeing one from the ambiguity of language, the sign "proves, in turn, to be ambiguous in the light of the varied conceptions applied to it." He accordingly concludes that "this unrealizable

utopian idealism seems to be confirmed as such by a semiotics which has been unable to reach an agreement on ‘deciphering’ what the concept of the sign consists of, in view of the numerous meanings and nuances brought out by different thinkers.”<sup>27</sup> This situation is especially exasperated by the post-structuralist emphasis on the polysemous nature of language, by which meaning is deferred from one interpretation to another in an endless play or movement. This, in turn, is viewed as especially devastating to the aim of articulating normative proposals. Yet if one examines the most radical contemporary critique of such proposals—i.e., the deconstructionist rejection of ultimate signifiers and foundations—it may be argued that deconstructionism itself incurs in contradiction, for, in determining what is “acceptable” and “unacceptable” discourse, it emerges as the Grand Arbiter of Discourse. In this pretense, it inevitably privileges those assertions which favor *difference* and takes issue with those that it considers restrictive, though such restrictions may be legitimate in their own right if the underlying assumption that informs deconstruction is itself deconstructed or considered suspect—viz., the binary opposition between what it thinks should be promoted, *difference*, and what it thinks should be demoted, hierarchies. Indeed, with respect to the sort of cultural pluralism which post-structuralism advances, Tran Van Doan states that such a “pluralism is not only impossible, but it could turn out to be a new form of cultural imperialism.”<sup>28</sup>

This said, for Riello the task of grounding mystical experience and language within the context of a genetic conception of semiotics rests on genetic metaphysics—i.e., the genetic conception of the principle of relation: “If man is a mystical being, semiotics should be studied by way of a mystical conception shaped by a genetic conception of metaphysics.”<sup>29</sup> Riello’s genetic conception of semiotics conceives the two personal beings constituting the Binity as metaphysical signs which define and constitute each other by virtue of their reciprocal immanent divine presence. Riello states:

The metaphysical sign is thus the “presence of someone in someone.” I replace Saussure’s arbitrary relation between signifier and signified—the relation between the level of content and that of expression, or the “representativism” furnished by the common definition of the sign as “something representing something else”—with the immanent relation between a *signans* and a *signatum*: the Father is a *signans* who becomes an immanent presence in the *signatum* of the Son; the Son is a *signans* who becomes an immanent presence in the *signatum* of the Father....<sup>30</sup>

More specifically, Rielo distinguishes among three elements in his semiotics: “sign,” “signal,” and “symbol”:

The *sign* is the intrinsic relation constituted by a *signans* and a *signatum* (for example, the immanent presence of the Father [*signans*] in the Son [*signatum*] and of the Son [*signans*] in the Father [*signatum*]); the *signal* is the *signatum* which, by virtue of its intrinsic relation, leads to the *signans* (for example, the Son, by virtue of possessing the presence of the Father, leads to the Father, and the Father, by virtue of possessing the presence of the Son, leads to the Son).<sup>31</sup>

The genetic conception of semiotics begins by asserting that the *sign* is always presence of one reality in another such that a *signans* is present in a *signatum*. In other words, the sign is constituted by the relationship of a *signans* to a *signatum* which it indwells. If we consider the metaphysical sign, that of the Absolute Subject, understood as constituted by the Binity, it is one that is constituted by the immanent presence of the *signans*—i.e., the Father—in the *signatum*, the Son, and vice versa.

The significance of the foregoing is rendered more explicit by the second element which is fundamental to Rielo’s conception of semiotics, the *signal*; the *signatum* in view of its intrinsic relation to the *signans*, directly leads to the *signans*—i.e., the Son, as *signatum*, in whom the Father as *signans* is present immanently, by virtue of the immanent presence of the Father, directly leads to the Father, and, vice versa, the Father as *signatum*, in whom the Son as *signans* is present immanently, directly leads to the Son. Metaphysically, the sign is constituted by a Binity wherein one Divine Person leads to the other.

The third element of Rielo’s semiotics is the *symbol*, which is the cultural lingualization of the sign expressed in terms of a phoneme, when spoken, or grapheme, when written. The symbol, then, is the “garb of the sign,” by which the sign is expressed in speech or writing. The employment of the word “Father,” with its phonemic and graphemic expression in English, stands as one of any number of other phonemic or graphemic expressions as indicated in any number of languages in which the term Father may be represented (“Father,” “Padre,” “Pater,” “Père,” etc., or by means of the symbolic simplification [P<sub>1</sub>], signifying the sign reality of the personal being of the Father, which can be only in relation to the personal being of the Son). “The symbol, then, is the more or less adequately prepared garb of the sign, which is subject, moreover, to the most varied cultural modifications.”<sup>32</sup>

Now, the human person, given genetic ontology, is in the image and likeness of the Binity, such that every human personal being constitutes a single sign mystical reality—i.e., the “indwelling divine presence of the absolute act and its absolute subject in the created element of the human person.” Each human person is thus a mystical sign of the divine sign; in this sense the Binity is “the *signans* of a *signatum* represented by the human person.”<sup>33</sup> The human person, accordingly, as an *alter deus*, leads to the Binity.

Yet the human person’s likeness to the Absolute is subject to increase or decrease. The human person possesses, in the image and likeness of the metaphysical liberty of the Absolute Subject, ontological liberty to proceed in accordance with the ethical standard represented by the indwelling Binity or to act in violation of it. Although to be free is to act in conformity to said standard, it is possible to make ethical choices in the light of one’s own finitude and thus in breach of one’s genetic constitution. To act in defiance of the Binity that indwells the human person is to act dysgenetically—i.e., in terms of self-centered or identitatical forms of behavior. Indeed, dysgenetic behavior is rooted in identity—i.e., it rejects the formative influence of the divine constitutive presence, which amounts to rejecting the genetic patrimony received. This manner of behaving turns such an agent into the bearer of antivalues whose insalubrious fruits are error, deformation, disunity, a lack of love, and confrontation.

Further, every creature is a sign of the divine sign, each in accordance with its essence and nature. Nonpersonal living beings are reverberative signs of the divine sign in accordance with their essence and nature, given the reverberative or extrinsic divine presence constituting them. Nonliving realities, in turn, are vestigial signs of the divine sign in accordance with the *actio in distans* of the divine presence constituting them. Human beings, since they have been created in the image and likeness of the Absolute, have also been endowed with the capacity to communicate their presence in diverse ways. A way to understand this human presence (or human beings making themselves present in others) is evidenced in their capacity for projecting personal qualities onto nonhuman aesthetic creations, as in the case of literary personification (or, to use Rielo’s term, *prosopopeya*). For example, Walt Disney projects human qualities onto his animated character *Mickey Mouse*, rendered capable of thinking, speaking, feeling, and desiring.

As regards mystical experience and language, for Rielo the Binity charismatically and immediately communicates a text or message to a transmitter or apostle, who may serve as a conveyer of the same message to one or more receptors. The message does not arrive through the labor of semiotic decodification, but via the

immediate charismatic communication of the Binity in the human person. The mystical text communicated by the Binity, Riello contends, can be understood only because the human person is constituted as open to the Absolute Subject and is therefore capable of receiving—via the indwelling divine presence—charismatic communication. Riello states, “My conception of communication does not, then, involve the external relation of a transmitter to a receptor by means of a message and its code, but, rather, the intrinsic communicative relation of the Divine Persons to our deity.”<sup>34</sup> The Binity acts both on the transmitter, to whom the infused message is made known immediately, and on the receptor(s), to whom the message is directed so that they may understand it in the manner in which the Binity wishes it to be understood. The degree of this mystical experience is determined by the moral attitude of the *signatum*. In this respect, mystical or highly spiritual figures, such as Moses, Confucius, and Gandhi, are transparent *signata* in whom and through whom God as *signans* manifested Himself. Those who received inspired pronouncements felt morally obligated—i.e., were charismatically touched—to act in fulfillment of those pronouncements. Typically, to go against the prophetic statements of such personages, once made known, led to personal or communal misfortune.

For Riello, moreover, “mystical language—which may be robed in natural or symbolic language, as in the case of Sacred Scripture and the writings of the mystics—can never be attained to by semiotic formalism.”<sup>35</sup> It is not possible, then, “to move from the reading of the mystical text to the comprehension of the message except by supernatural charismatic communication to our deity, projected into the mind in the form of a divine personal revelation.”<sup>36</sup>

In Riello’s metaphysics mystical experience is communicated via a divine act in the transmitter and in the receptor—i.e., grace. Riello states, “Grace is the conduit which places the human spirit in communication with the Most Holy Trinity and other human beings. I may affirm, in this regard, that grace possesses a quality which I express in the form of a statement: grace speaks.”<sup>37</sup> Grace, or the immediate communication of the Binity in the human person—whether directly to a transmitter or by means of a transmitter to a receptor—implies that, while language may impute varied and disparate significations to cultural phenomena, there is a transcendent openness in human persons, by virtue of the divine constitutive presence, whereby they may receive a mystical understanding or knowledge that is a replica of divine understanding or knowledge.

## IN CONCLUSION

This paper has reviewed the master lines of the history of Western philosophy, including the classical *original tradition* and its beliefs in God as creator of all things and ground of what is true and morally good, and the demise of this tradition during the modern period with the rise of voluntarism espousing the primacy of the human will over reason and scientism dictating the limits of reason to know metaphysical reality, both of which embraced as tenets postmodernism. Then in the light of the influence of the structuralist views of de Saussure and Levi Strauss, we introduced critically the postmodernist proposal of Derrida and his critique of logocentrism and deconstruction of oppositional binaries, and that of Lyotard and his argument against metanarratives. Though acknowledging the potential utility of these critical proposals, Derridean verbal pyrotechnics may have something positive to offer in a limited epistemological sense, but it doesn't capture—it only dismisses—metaphysical reality; in the case of Lyotard, though it rightly points out the danger of metanarratives that may involve oppressive power plays, it does not thereby dismiss the possibility of a metanarrative that is indeed empowering rather than reducing, elevating rather than excluding, dialogical rather than fanaticizing.

This paper then provided a novel response to this restrictive view of language by means of the genetic metaphysics of Fernando Rielo, that argues for a conception of the metaphysical Absolute as consisting, not in the historical Being in self-identity, but rather as constituted at the rational level by two beings, the Binity, the metaphysical complementary binary that constitutes the Absolute Subject at the level of reason in a state of immanent, intrinsic complementarity. In this way, just as the Absolute Subject is not a singular self-referential being subject to the charge of the fallacy of the *petitio principii*, but an Absolute constituted by the relationship of two personal beings in genetic relation, so human beings are thus constituted by a created element, their psychosomatic spirit, and their uncreated nature, namely, the divine constitutive presence of the Absolute Subject in the created spirit that capacitates human beings to relate mystically with God. Both Rielo's conception of the Absolute Subject or God and his conception of the human person as indwelt corrects substantially the notions of God and human being as understood by the *original tradition*. In the light of this mystical definition of the human person, genetic semiotics proposes that language is constitutively mystical, that the divine presence has deified the word so as to communicate reality, truth, goodness and beauty, if the word is spoken as a function of the inspiration of the divine presence in the knowing and communicating human subject. What does not conform to this mystical inspiration is anti-mystical and to that extent is indeed subject to critique as occurs

in all forms of discourse that seek to lay bare the manner in which human beings may incur in dysgenetic actions affecting the well-being of persons or communities.

Indeed, when we say *Logos* may we not now mean in the light of Rielo's mystical definition of the human person that human language is suffused at its core by divine inspiration that has allowed humanity to develop and thrive throughout the millennia notwithstanding its dysgenetic resistances, actions and communications that nonetheless have been unable to obscure the fact that love of neighbor is the ontological cure for a good deal of the maladies of the human being. When love is practiced genuinely, human persons, their families, their social, political and religious communities flourish.

A final note: Rielo's genetic model offers a "metaphysical" and "ontological" ecumenism:

My system...refers to a metaphysical and ontological ecumenism, since the first sphere of my genetic conception of the principle of relation can be accepted by human intelligence without the antecedent of infused theological faith. In my view, this is the cultural foundation for religious ecumenism, not only among the Christian churches, but also among all creeds.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John and Anna Rist, *Confusion in the West: Retrieving Tradition in the Modern and Post-Modern World*, (Cambridge University Press, 2023); henceforth: *Confusion*. When speaking of John and Anna Rist, for reasons of simplicity, I will simply say *Rist* to refer to the two.

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to my colleague at St. John's University, Dr. Glenn Statile, for his review of this paper and insightful comments.

<sup>3</sup> *Confusion*, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> The elements of the *original tradition* that follow are from *Confusion*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>5</sup> See section 3 for Rielo's grounding of the constitutive or ecumenical conception of grace.

<sup>6</sup> The point that needs to be underscored here is that, for Plato as presented in *Republic VIII*, a *just* society cannot be just unless its citizenry consists of *just* persons that are oriented according to the dictates reason in conformity to Goodness as Justice itself. The moment that the ruler, whether referring to the individual as the head of his own being or the ruler(s) as the head of a body politic is no longer guided by reason opened to wisdom, opened to Goodness itself—this is to say when the will usurps the authority of reason—various levels of evil or degradation, each worse than the one that preceded it, usher in, characteristic levels of injustice ensue in the state (*soul writ large*), namely: *timocracy* where the ruler(s) seeks, rather than the common good, honors, recognition, power; *oligarchy* where those in power seek wealth and material possessions; *democracy* where the people indiscriminately seek the satisfaction of any and all desires; and *tyranny* where, as in the case of the man who falls prey to a single master-passion, the citizenry come to be enslaved, dominated, oppressed by a tyrant, a despot, who rules with an iron fist in accordance to self-interest with little concern for the common good. Similarly, Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VII, identifies four character types in accordance to a person's relative cultivation or lack thereof of good habits in line with the cardinal virtues (justice, prudence, fortitude, temperance), namely: the *virtuous* man who habitually fulfills virtuous action, the *continent* man who acts virtuously most of the time, the *incontinent* man who for the most

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part does not fulfill virtuous action and the *vicious* man who fails to act in accordance to the demands of virtue. The point here is that for both Plato and Aristotle, whose ethical positions are integral to the *original tradition*, the demand of virtuous activity is fundamental to individual, community and political flourishing.

<sup>7</sup> See *Confusion*, chapters 4,5 and 6.

<sup>8</sup> *Confusion*, p. 78.

<sup>9</sup> With the demise of a philosophically grounded theistic God as ground of ultimate values, Luther's break with the Roman Catholic Church and its Pontiff, as supreme head and as the ultimate authority in matters of faith and morals, contributed singularly to the sense that there is no one supreme philosophical truth nor one supreme religious truth. A sort of slippery slope followed as Rist indicates, "The success of the first generation of Reformers in Germany as also in England, had depended on the will of kings and princes, but the more extreme version of Protestantism ushered in by Calvin threatened monarchs as well as prelates. Both versions would be rephrased in seventeenth-century England as the creed of the national Church of England, Henry VIII would never exert the authority, political or spiritual, it had in the previous age" (*Confusion*, pp. 75-76).

<sup>10</sup> Historically, voluntarism stems from the medieval discussion on the omnipotence of God with Duns Scotus' exaltation of God's will over the primacy, purportedly, of reason as understood in the *original tradition* given that any view limiting God's omnipotence or will would compromise or place limits on God's power. This signifies that our universe and moral space no longer depends on God's nature but "directly on his 'will.'" Morality here appears as "mere obedience" to God's will that can be otherwise if He, willy nilly, chooses it to be so. Moreover, with Ockham's voluntarist theory of double-truth, there is one truth derived from the sphere of reason limited to the consideration of spatio-temporal material reality, never equipped to consider allegedly "metaphysical" realities such as God and soul, and another truth derived through the employment of faith that alone is capable of knowing revealed truth, separating science from metaphysics, essentially saying that unaided reason cannot discover God, for knowledge of God is a gift of grace. This empiricist, anti-metaphysical view was exasperated with Hume's reduction of mind and matter to mere "impressions," while denying all efficacy to the principle of sufficient reason that safeguards the ontological nexus between cause and effect, thereby undermining metaphysical discourse by which, generally, the cosmos and all it contains are understood as an effect of God's creative agency. Kant, instead of pushing back against Humean phenomenalism, in the manner of Thomas Reid and his School of Common Sense Realism, came under the spell of Humean empiricism in a manner leading to his transcendentalist epistemology in which the human mind can never know extramental reality but is limited to know phenomena subjectively via the imposition of the so-called pure forms of intuition and the categories of understanding. Indeed, Additionally, there is another strand that weakens the sense of a metaphysical ground for morality deriving from the British empiricists and moralists. John Locke, for one, understood humans as corporeal beings seeking pleasure while avoiding pain, inspiring Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism that holds actions are morally right if they promote happiness or pleasure and morally wrong if they bring about unhappiness or pain as determined by his hedonistic calculus. This move toward the pleasurable, the comfortable, potentially the luxurious, indeed the material, led John Stuart Mill and Adam Smith to a global capitalist view with its emphasis on material wealth creation. The point here is that the movement away from a metaphysical goodness grounded in God towards a morality grounded in choice and in the direction of the pleasurable offers no moral imperatives or duties, relegating, say, the Ten Commandments to the periphery. This with the specter of Newtonian physics understood deterministically, led Kant to his conception of a noumenal self that, existing outside of the categorial causal laws of phenomenal experience, is capacitated to act autonomously in view of his free will guided by the dictates of the Categorical Imperative. Yet, the maxims derived from reason are not divinely grounded independently of the human mind and hence can be vague and fail to consider problematic consequences as when one is not forthright with a person seeking to do harm to, say, an innocent person.

<sup>11</sup> Ironically, in this regard Newton, who required God's intervention to avoid a gravitational collapse of the solar system, was not himself a Newtonian a la Pierre-Simon Laplace who dispensed with any sort of divine agency so as to propose a strictly mechanistic, material universe.

<sup>12</sup> *Confusion*, p. 155.

<sup>13</sup> As cited in *Confusion*, pp. 170-171.

<sup>14</sup> In "Atheism for Lent," *The Other Journal*, Issue 11: Atheism (February 2008), Westphal states, "What if Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud are plagiarists, who should have footnoted their biblical sources? What if today's believers should explore the religious uses of these modern atheisms before trying to refute them? What if their critiques are all too true all too much of the time? If "all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth" (Isa. 64:6) and "The heart is devious above all else: it is perverse" (Jer. 17:9), then believers, too, might be among those "who by their wickedness suppress the truth" (Rom. 1:18), creating God in our image and in accord with our own desires." For a full exposition of these themes, see Westphal's *Suspicion and Faith: The Religious Uses of Modern Atheism* (Fordham University Press, 1998).

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<sup>15</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Johns Hopkins Press, 1976), p. 158.

<sup>16</sup> Husserl, for his part, since he could not prove the truth and logic of mathematics and science, turned from proving truth in the realm of ideas to centering phenomenologically on human experience, i.e., our consciousness of the phenomena in the lived world providing, at best, “true” ideas of forms, that without metaphysical grounding provides permanence and meaning to his concrete lived experience. Following this lead, Heidegger sounds an alarm throughout the West with his existential concern regarding the central question that has been forgotten and lost to the detriment of his era, viz., the question of why is there something rather than nothing, that he takes as signifying the meaning of what “to be,” “being,” that has been obscured with dire consequences as humankind seems to drift into a profound state of spiritual decline, into inauthentic existence. Heidegger takes the solution in *Being and Time* to involve the examination of the word “to be” (*sein*) “being” (*das sein*) in terms of restoring its original pre-Socratic Greek meaning which led him to plummet the depths both of the grammar in which the term had been fixed in the West and its etymology comprising over two thousand years of sedimentation or layers of meaning throughout the word’s history. By means of a process of reduction, construction and *destruction*, working backwards while uncovering the layers of the term with a view to freeing it from the distortions by which the infinitive form of “to be” was drained of all but the most general meaning, for in its primitive form it signifies not a static state of the infinitive “to be” or the nominative gerund form as “being,” but the dynamic constellation of meanings, including: taking and maintaining a stand, a process of dynamic unfolding, coming into presence, self-manifesting, setting itself within its own so as to allow “being” to endure without falling back into an inarticulate inert state. For Heidegger, moreover, *Being*, the concept of existence itself, refers to the fundamental, underlying structure that allows entities to exist as *beings*, meaning it’s not a specific thing itself but rather the condition that makes something *be* - while *beings* are the individual entities that exist in the world, like a chair, a person, or a tree. In contradistinction, then, to the extramental and spatial comprehension of ultimate reality, say as Goodness in a Platonic supernal world beyond the present material and temporal one, or as a function of Aristotle’s metaphysics as the study of being *qua* being with its analysis of the so-called ultimate principles of being, substance, essence, causes, Heidegger discovers the essence of human beings as beings in time, as *dasein*, within a specific spatio-temporal context. For Heidegger the study of metaphysics begins with human beings, the ones who are precisely at the conscious epicenter of their own existence as beings in the world, conscious within the context of a temporal mode of being, aware of their present state, past and future. Additionally, what is philosophically relevant here is the utility of Heidegger’s method of *destruction* given that reason, science and the Western philosophy suffers from the subject’s influence on the object of study such that there are no value-free perspectives that are not in need of existential analysis of a phenomenological sort. Though Heidegger’s line of thinking influences Derrida in his rethinking of the relationship between language and history, the latter disagrees with him on the idea of a stable, singular meaning, as Derrida’s concept of *deconstruction* argues that all language and meaning are inherently unstable and riddled with contradictions. Heidegger, despite his critique of traditional metaphysics, still seeks a foundational “Being” that provides a stable ground for understanding, even if it is not readily accessible.

<sup>17</sup> See his *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979).

<sup>18</sup> Fernando Rielo: *Concepción mística de la antropología*, ed. José María López Sevillano (Madrid, Fundación Fernando Rielo, 2012) p. 97ff; henceforth “Antropología mística.”

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>20</sup> The first section of this part takes freely from my “Rielo’s Genetic Ontology: The Human Person in Constitutive Relation to the Absolute Subject or a Non-Pelagian Conception of the Human Person.” Proceedings of the World Conference, “Fernando Rielo: Founder, Thinker, Poet,” October 25.26.27, 2023, online, (Rome: Fondazione Idente di Studi e di Ricerca), in press.

<sup>21</sup> See footnote 4 above.

<sup>22</sup> Although for Rielo, the question of who may be [P<sub>2</sub>] cannot be resolved on the intellectual level alone, he maintains that what is *sensu stricto* original to Christ’s revelation may be articulated in two truths that exceed reason unaided by theological faith, viz.: (1) that he, Jesus Christ, is himself a divine person, i.e., [P<sub>2</sub>] of the genetic principle, in immanent intrinsic complementarity with [P<sub>1</sub>]; and (2) that there exists a third divine person [P<sub>3</sub>], whom he names Holy Spirit. Christ declares quite explicitly that the Father and he constitute the *unum geneticum*: “*Ego et Pater unum sumus*” (Jn 10:30). In fact, he indicates to his contemporaries that though they do not believe in him, they should believe in the light of his deeds: (Jn 10:38). According to José María López, “The Gospel encloses a special and daring message, of a human being that affirms of himself to “exist” before Abraham existed (Jn 8, 58); of a human person that places himself above religion and is sought to be put to death because he states of himself to be equal with God the Father: “For this reason, the Jews were determined to kill him, because he not only broke the Sabbath, but also called God his own Father, making himself equal to God” (Jn 5, 18). This human person, Christ, reveals to us that the first person [P<sub>1</sub>] is called Father, that the second person [P<sub>2</sub>] is the Son, and this Son is *one* with the Father; he is ~~28~~

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revealing to us that with Him the Absolute Subject is fulfilled at the dianoetic level: two divine persons in immanent intrinsic complementarity. Christ also reveals that there exists a third divine person [P<sub>3</sub>] whom he calls Holy Spirit. We therefore have the Trinitarian model at the hypernoetic level” (“Antropología mística,” p. 26). For Rielo, moreover, [P<sub>3</sub>], although a metaphysical surplus, has nonetheless metaphysical validity, because of the functions that it fulfills. See Fernando Rielo, “Hacia una nueva concepción metafísica del ser” in *¿Existe una filosofía española?* (Seville: Fernando Rielo Foundation, 1988), p. 123; henceforth “Hacia una nueva concepción”. These three persons, absolute subject of the Rielian model, constitute among themselves sole trinitarian substance, nature, essence, divinity...” Moreover, with [P<sub>3</sub>] a [P<sub>4</sub>] would result unnecessary because it would be devoid of any possible function. See Fernando Rielo, “Concepción genética de lo que no es el sujeto absoluto” in *Raíces y valores históricos del pensamiento español* (Seville: Fernando Rielo Foundation, 1990), pp. 114-15.

<sup>23</sup> This term “psychosomatic spirit” refers to the human being as consisting, formally, in a spirit with a body and soul, explained in accordance to the demands of reason without the support of supernatural faith. For Rielo, the formal or created nature of the human person is composed of three elements: a created soma, a psyche and a pneuma that, integrated, yield a psychosomatic spirit, that is, a spirit that assumes the psychic functions of the soul and the somatic functions of the body. It is plain that the human being participates qua body in matter (composed of carbon, nucleic acids, proteins, lipids and fluids), yet inert matter within its deterministic inertial frames does not account for life; this is to say that the four standard forces (electromagnetic, nuclear strong, nuclear weak, gravitational) nor the interaction of elementary particles (quarks, leptons and gluons) can account for the emergence of living organisms; pre-biotic matter has no propensity to auto-organize into life forms. For Rielo there is then not only the big bang of inert cosmic matter and its laws of nature but also the big bang of life in which the organizing principle or soul is introduced that forms instinctually-governed living vegetative and sentient organisms. At human conception, there emerges then a psycho-soma, a living unicellular organism, in which, for Rielo, at the very moment of fertilization, the Absolute Subject infuses the created spirit that is indwelt by its “+,” by God or the divine constitutive presence, that renders the person a living deity capable of knowing and acting freely (“Antropología mística,” p. 43ff). Regarding the human person as a psychosomatic spirit, St. Paul states, “...may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless...” (1Thessalonians 5:23; italics mine).

<sup>24</sup> Fernando Rielo, “La persona no es ser para sí ni para el mundo,” in *Hacia una pedagogía prospectiva* (Madrid: F.F.R., 1992), pp. 89-118.

<sup>25</sup> Rielo, “Hacia una nueva concepción,” p. 144f ...

<sup>26</sup> Fernando Rielo, “Mystical Experience and Language,” in *The Genetic Model in My Thought*, trans. David G. Murray (Madrid: E.F.R., 2004), p. 43; henceforth “Mystical Experience.”

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> For an illuminating critique of the sort of cultural pluralism that post-structuralism, which includes postmodernism, champions, see Tran Van Doan, “Pluralistic Culture versus Cultural Pluralism,” in *To the Mountain: Essays in Honour of Professor George F. McLean*, eds. William Sweet and Hu Yeping (Hsinchuang, Taiwan: Fu Jen Catholic University Press, 2004): 29-65; quote is from p. 34.

<sup>29</sup> Rielo, “Mystical Experience,” p. 44.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63, italics mine.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 79-80.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>38</sup> Marie Lise Gazarian, *Fernando Rielo: Dialogue with Three Voices*, trans. by David G. Murray (Madrid: Editorial Fernando Rielo, 2000), p. 135.