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MIHI QUAESTIO FACTUS SUM ("I HAVE BECOME A QUESTION TO MYSELF", AUGUSTINE: CONFESSIONS X. XXXIII): FICTION AND TRUTH-SEEKING IN THEOLOGY.

ABSTRACT

This article explores a suggested radical instability of knowing human persons – selves and others – and the perennial undecidability of claims about what may be true with respect to them, by employing the novels of Philip Roth and E. L. Doctorow. If persons fundamentally are construed as questions to themselves, as Augustine says, then definitive assertions of what is true about being human are profoundly problematic. Within the history of both philosophy and theology, declarations of *an* or *the* irrefutable truth about inceptive and final purpose and ultimate meaning often have been asserted. A reflection upon Lambert Zuidervaart's (2017) recent "critical retrieval of truth" prompts invoking Shakespeare's *Lear* to intimate that, at least within theology, oracular and peremptory pronouncements upon *the* conclusive and objective intention and *telos* of



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being human and of the created order, may themselves undermine the essential vocation of Christian theology.

1. INTRODUCTION: FICTION'S QUESTION

In his critique of “the American dream” and, especially of the standard portrait of its complacent, satisfied, and comfortable suburbia, Philip Roth, in his novel, *American Pastoral* (1997),¹ records the fragmentation of the putative ideal “all-American family”. The detonation of a bomb at the Old Rimrock Post Office in 1968, in protest against the USA’s participation in the Vietnam War, by the nascently politicised teenage daughter of Seymour Levov, a former high school athlete, and now an affluent and successful businessman, and his wife, Dawn, once a Miss New Jersey (Roth 1997:15), the regional beauty queen, batters their suburban perfection, and ultimately shatters their coherent world. The local doctor is killed (Roth 1997:68), and Meredith, the daughter and perpetrator of the tragedy, becomes a fugitive. Wanted by the FBI, her young life becomes one of vigilance and hidden refuge, of constant movement, of homeless wanderings. The Norman Rockwell (1894–1978) realism of suburban life, of school attendance, of sport and homework, of employment and regular office hours, of birthday celebrations and family vacations, all the quotidian, weekly, and annual patterned norms of structured intimacy that advertise the privilege of citizenship in “the land of the free and the home of the brave” are shown to be illusions. The story unfolds as “[t]he brutality of the destruction of this indestructible man” (Roth 1997:83), and reveals the dream of the enclosed and secure space of regional America as a mask of deception that conceal nightmarish truths. Indeed, the novel records the end of “pastoral America”.

As he begins to record these events, Nathan Zuckerman, Roth’s not infrequent narrator, reflects upon understanding and knowing others, and the prior or attendant implications of understanding and knowing oneself. What he thought he knew of his boyhood hero, Seymour, who, as he says, “starred as end in football, centre in basketball, and first baseman in baseball” (Roth 1997:3), and of his family, requires radical revision. But, likewise, he observes that what Seymour himself believed he knew about those closest to him and about his community, and, significantly, of himself, had unravelled and disintegrated. For the glowing images of a daughter, for whom he had thought he was providing what was needful for a stable and secure home; of a wife, whose love he had believed was unassailable and without question; of a local community, whose respect

1 This novel won the Pulitzer Prize in 1998 for the best work of fiction.

he had earned and had long-since taken for granted, now are shown to be thin deceptions in his failures of knowing and loving, and of an assumed self-esteem. Idyllic, politically-sanitised suburbia initially is interrogated crassly and then opposed fatally by his daughter, the indissoluble “till death us do part” marriage-bond breaks, and the respectful deference of neighbours and acquaintances become frowns of disapproval and eyes turned elsewhere. In the wake of these events – a bomb, a death, a childless home, a departed wife, deserted friends and colleagues – what is supposed to be “known” of oneself and of those to whom one relates daily, together with the unquestioned belief in the singular groundedness of one’s own self-identity, disintegrates. The gilded portrayals of evenings of shared lives at family meals, of pleasantries exchanged in sitting-rooms overlooking the oak-shaded street lights that are assumed to be portraits of the “true likenesses” of self and others, are replaced with images of refracted and shadowed selves, perceived, now more honestly, in the sliding mirrors of chromatic human portrayals. The assumptions about selves and others – definitively distinguishable, of self-identities simply “there” and tangible, and instantly recognisable and understood – radically are destabilised. As Nathan Zuckerman (Roth, 1997: 35) ponders these now blurred lineaments, which have darkened into less decipherable vignettes, so he observes that

You fight your superficiality, your shallowness, so as to try to come at people without unreal expectations, without an overload of bias or hope or arrogance ... sans cannon and machine guns, and steel plating half a foot thick; you come at them unmenacingly on your own ten toes ... [to] take them on with an open mind, as equals, man to man, as we used to say, and yet your never fail to get them wrong. ... You get them wrong before you meet them, while you’re anticipating meeting them; you get them wrong while you’re with them; and then you go home to tell somebody else about the meeting and you get them all wrong again. Since the same generally goes for them with you, the whole thing is really a dazzling illusion ... an astonishing farce of misperception.

2. EPISTEMIC FRACTURE

Such a bleak and graphic depiction of the lack in human epistemic proficiency with respect to the lives of others and of one’s own life, profoundly interrogates the interpretations of one’s own perceptions, and of what one, as a result of deliberating upon what one has looked at and listened to and touched, claims to know of oneself, of others, and of one’s position in a particular place and at a particular time in history; and of the grounds

upon which one's knowledge of its occupants, its geography and politics, its cultural and sacred forms that generate and sustain some modestly recognisable narrative self, are justified. The pressing consequence of Nathan Zuckerman's observation is that it engenders a foundational uncertainty about the considered reflections that engender, sophisticate, and maintain one's beliefs about meaning in a human world of self and others: its coherence, and the inaugural intentions and telic destinations of self and others, and the narrative of events in which one participates and to which one contributes. This, probably, traumatic realisation may well inflict upon the *corpus* of that set of decided convictions that one holds, and the beliefs by which one shapes and orders one's life, a wound so fatal in its derisive mockery of the earnest, reverent, and resonantly sure tones with which one confidently utters one's deeply held, so called, incontrovertible truths, so as to recast one's statements into stutters, one's sentences into stammers of incoherence.

When these tremors of doubt and of deep uncertainty shift and crack the foundations upon which one's life has been constructed, so the unquestioned security of dutiful, quotidian domesticity and its established constancy, with its protective carapace of shelter and preservation, is substituted by at least some intimation of the fragility and corrigibility of being human, and the powerlessness to do no more in a lifetime than merely "shore up one's paltry fragments against one's ruin", to adapt T. S. Eliot's (1998) lines from *The Waste Land*;² indeed, only "fragments" remain.

The implications of this maimed instability of who one is and of what one knows – or thinks one knows – of both self and others, perhaps is more fatally wounding to those who rely upon divine sanction for their ultimate meaning; those who turn to revealed truths and holy words in sacred books, and who appeal to the gods or to God. But when the Mosaic stone tablets of the divine commandments have been smashed at the sight of human self-confidence and hubris, so no other route may be chartered than that of entering a wilderness of disorientating errancy, of vagrant wanderings, and of homeless migrations.

In such circumstances of frightening vertigo, a return to self-preservation, to conserving sealed identities, is tempting, but it may be deeply, even schismatically, deceptive. Having peered over the edge of unknowingness, it may be difficult to convince oneself that an unequivocal return to unshakable sacred stability is possible. If God has become indecipherable in every more definite formulation of the divine nature, then it is with and in the undecidability of ultimate truth that one must live. Is

2 "These fragments I have shored against my ruins" ("What the Thunder Said", l. 430).

there a way back to absolute certainty, if, doubtful as it may be, there ever was a period of an ineradicable and definitively justifiable confidence in the existence and presence of a Being of beings? Is there a past of unassailable confidence in a personal volitional act of creaturely inception that is indisputably valid? Or, are pasts, like futures, challenging in their openness, searching in their provisional findings, reaching towards an ever-receding horizon of answers that, so disconcertingly, as one accepts them as “true”, they simply become new questions? Is there a final and stable site, an abiding “heavenly Jerusalem”, an eternal Augustinian “city of God” that will replace this tectonically shifting earthly citadel and environs of growth and decay, of achievements and disappointments, of friendships and betrayals?

In his radical recasting of the “two cities” in the aftermath of Wittgenstein’s (1922) *Tractatus*, of the representational function of language, the limits of speech, and of the silence of mysterious otherness, and in the smoky *tefillin* marking the end of poetry (Adorno 1982:34), consumed in the “black milk of morning, noon, and nightfall”³ in the death camps of the *Shoah*, to advert to Celan, in that “calamity” of the Nazi genocide during the Second World War, E. L. Doctorow’s Augustinian entitled novel, *City of God* (Doctorow, 2000), finds its central character, Father Thomas Pemberton, an American Anglican (Episcopalian) priest of an attenuating faith, pleading with, and yet more so for, a God who may re-establish an invulnerable foundation upon which, once again, the aleatory predicament of being human may be recast anew. The novel was published in 2000, the threshold of a new millennium, which, in religious imaginaries, so often marks the liminal zones of danger and hope presented in apocalyptic visions of destruction and unprecedented promises of fresh beginnings. Fr Pem, as he is known, living in this precarious climate of disorientation and defenceless exposure, returns to the call of the Christian gospel to undergo *metanoia* – a change of mind or mind-set – and cries out:

If we are to remake ourselves, we must remake You, Lord. We need a place to stand. We are weak, and puny, and totter here in our civilization. We have only our love for each other for our footing, our marriages, the children we hold in our arms, it is only this wavery sensation, flowing and ebbing, that justifies our consciousness and keeps us from plunging out of the universe. Not enough. It’s not enough. We need a place to stand. I ask for reason to hope that this travail of our souls will find its resolution in You, Lord, You of the Blessed Name (Doctorow 2000:304).

3 See Paul Celan’s poem, *Todesfuge* (*Deathfugue*), 1944. Translated in Felstiner (1995).

If in this precarious and often menacing world, there may remain a residue of ultimate self-purpose, of an intimation of an intention to life's trajectory, even of an allusive and fractured narrative arc of partial continuity from *archē* to *telos*, so as to conjecture that there is some sense of meaning to one's own life, and, hence, to the lives of others, then, when the beingness of being human is the subject, the most acute inquiry may reside in the penetrating scrutiny of the meaning of meaning in its widest and most threatening terms. Undoubtedly, the human need of explanations, and, possibly, an almost ubiquitous hope of a sure and certain foundation upon which to stand, have produced utopian projects from those of drastically scathed simplicity to the most generously polymorphic complexity, and, within a universal arena, have licenced peremptory declarations of eternity, of heavenly dwellings, and of everlasting bliss. Specifically, the Christian faith has minted doctrinaire creeds about a Being who calls beings to a final, stable, and inviolable home, and returns them to a prelapsarian state of edenic perfection. But, all too often, the stridency with which such orthodox *dicta* are affirmed merely belies the probity entailed in, and the honesty of, such assertions, and, in their stead, demonstrates an unattractively dogmatic, yet (oxymoronically) deeply shallow, sincerity that frets fitfully from beneath Plato's long and bedimmed shadow.

If Nathan Zuckerman's (Roth, 1997: 35) observations are not without substance, so that, as he says:

[t]he fact remains that getting people right is not what living is all about anyway. It's getting them wrong that is living, getting them wrong and wrong and wrong and then, on careful reconsideration, getting them wrong again. That's how we know we're alive: we're wrong[.]

then must the search for truth, for truths about persons, and, within theology, the truth about a Being behind beings, and truths about this Being, called "God", and, as a consequence, truthful convictions about this God's presence with human persons and in a created world, finally be discarded? Does the Thomistic state of doubt about selves, others, and God – "unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and place my finger into the place where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I shall not believe" (Ἐὰν μὴ ἴδω ἐν ταῖς χερσίν αὐτοῦ τὸν τύπον τῶν ἡλων καὶ βάλω τὸν δάκτυλόν μου εἰς τὸν τύπον τῶν ἡλων καὶ βάλω ἄ μου τὴν χεῖρα) εἰς τὴν πλευρὰν αὐτοῦ, οὐ μὴ πιστεύσω, John 20: 25) – or the tenebrous finality that, at the final meal, follows the earlier Judas kiss of betrayal – "then, straight after having taken the bread, he went out. And it was night" (λαβὼν οὖν τὸ ψωμίον ἐκεῖνος ἔξῆλθεν εὐθύς). ἦν δὲ νύξ, John 13: 30) – conclusively erase the possibility of truth-seeking or of truth-needings?

For to admit the difficulty of speaking knowingly and truthfully about persons,⁴ about other persons and oneself – persons as material centres of consciousness,⁵ with the ability of reflective and reflexive thought, of possessing counter-factual and imaginative conceptions and their expressive language tenses and moods of hope and of possibility,⁶ and of being responsible for deliberation and therefore accountable for subsequent actions⁷ – so as to interrogate truth and knowledge only in partial, dispersed, even relatively incoherent modes, may solicit a tremor of intra- and inter-active human alienation and restless displacement so profound that one appropriately may question the worth of what one may call the human experiment. If one allows such searching challenges, not merely to emerge, but, more courageously, to be one’s critical companions in self-responsiveness and other-relatedness, then repeatedly one would hear in one’s voice the plaintive fragility of being human, which itself would disclose the fugal counterpoint to the desperate tenacity with which one clings to one’s definitive convictions and beliefs about the condition of being human. Furthermore, to disenchant one’s meaningful world and to haunt one’s narrative orthodoxy with such a tragic melancholia contests not only the fundamental implications of holding beliefs and convictions about theology’s God and how these convictions shape meaning, but may well dislodge the “truthful truth” of the beliefs and convictions themselves.

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- 4 Johnson (2015: 775: 2; original emphasis): “Personhood has been thought to involve various traits, including (moral) *agency*; *reason* or rationality; *language* or the cognitive skills language may support (such as *intentionality* and *self-consciousness*); and the ability to enter into suitable *relations* with other persons ...”.
- 5 Strawson (1959: 104; original emphasis) argues that “the concept of a person is to be understood as the concept of a type of entity such that *both* predicates ascribing states of consciousness and predicates ascribing corporeal characteristics ... are equally applicable to an individual entity of that type”.
- 6 To employ predicates of persons, it is necessary, in Strawson’s (1959:106) view, to be able to do so of others, because conceptions of one’s own state would not be known, and, therefore, with respect to language and its possibilities, cannot be articulated.
- 7 Taylor (1981) issues some challenges to Strawson’s views (see notes 5 & 6, above); finally asking whether “we take language-using ability *as such*, as the criterion for personhood” (135), which, of course, would require more exactitude as to both the definition of language and also what would constitute its usage. As in Taylor’s (1981:133-134) ascription to his dog of Strawson’s “P” and “M” predicates, so the ability of his dog to communicate would need to exclude the use of “language”, or, at least, his definition of it and how it is used.

3. TRUTHFUL SEARCHINGS

But one must observe that not to be able to speak knowingly and, in that sense, truthfully, about persons, is not the same as not being able to speak truthfully and yet unknowingly, about persons. First, and fairly obviously, if the truth is that oneself and others, ultimately, are unknowable, then one may speak truthfully about oneself and others as unknowable, and also one may know oneself and others truthfully as unknowable. Second, and as a consequence, if the truth about the human knowledge of persons is present in the absence of the true knowledge of them, then it is this absence of their knowability that constitutes the truth of the human knowledge of persons. Third, degrees of predictability about others – their speech and their silences, their actions and their gestures – do appear to support some knowledge of others, as, indeed, of oneself. As acceptable – probably, as truthful – as this third claim may be, it is not unlikely that, on occasions, after listening to a supposedly “well-known” friend’s words or actions, one may well find oneself saying: “But I did not think that you would have subscribed to such views”; or “I could not conceive of you as behaving in that way”. Similarly, the retrospective examination of one’s own life may well elicit some surprises, even unpleasant shocks, so that one may ask: “Why did I say that? I have never before used such forthright terms”; or “For what possible reason did I act in that way in that situation? It really was so out of character”. These kinds of questions do not merely ask: “Did I mean what I said?”; or “Did I mean this or did I mean that?”, but “What did I mean?”; or, more troublesomely, “What could I possibly have meant, when I made that statement?” With regard to actions, the questions appear to probe somewhat deeper: “What reasoning facilitated that action?” – that is, “How am I to apply sensible speech to what I did?”, and “How am I to account for that action of mine with words that convey, at least, some degree of coherent meaning?” Therefore, although one may concede that there are some recognisable traits of speech and action, traits that engender a sense of continuity in self- and other-recognition nevertheless, the perplexing issue of predictive inaccuracy, and of self- and other-misrecognitions, merely emphasises the anxiety of not really knowing oneself and others – of getting it wrong, again and again.

Thus, what these troublesome notions about the unknowability of selves and others may suggest is that human persons, less so, are self- and other-knowable revealers of themselves; and, rather more so, are unselfconscious concealers of who they are in the supposed clarity of their self- and other- reflected images. And if, at present, it may be too precipitate to assert that a more secure narrative continuity of persons entitles a greater confidence in the predictive futures of the speech and

the behaviour of oneself and of others, as is being suggested, it is because this desired confidence may, on reflection, appear rather self-invested and self-projective; and also, more dispassionately, may be quite unwarranted, which, as Nathan Zuckerman (Roth 1997:35; original emphasis) phrases it, leads to an uncongenial and questioning realisation:

What are we to do about this terribly significant business of *other people*, which gets bled of the significance we think it has and takes on instead a significance that is ludicrous, so ill-equipped are we to envision one another's interior working and invisible aims.

If this forbidding notion may be entertained, then in the absence of a clearly charted course to a founding entailment that informs an expressed inner core of decidable convictions, the difficulties of being human, of attempting to “read” others and to know oneself with a veridical accuracy, to some extent at least, fractures self- and other-identity. Without some degree of implicit trust in an interpretive veracity of the informing creedal constraints to which persons subscribe, and in the absence of a modest reliance upon a genuine and discernible probity in the ability to account – and, consequently, to be held responsible – for purposeful human actions, the accords of human self-identity appear to rely upon a spectrum of undecidable and shifting conjectures and interpretations, and where greater or lesser degrees of inner epistemic coherence largely is unverifiable.

If one admits such an instability of being human, then these deeply disconsolate thoughts bruise, if not break, the self-betraying – yet noble – charms of “authenticity” and “honesty”, of the reality of a veritable “true self”, with which, *inter alia*, philosophers and theologians perennially, and more recently, psychoanalysts and psychotherapists, have enticed, and continue to entice, *aporetic* humanity, and who, as a result, have sanctioned the production of disingenuous human selves, who, probably all too often, are quite unaware that the palpable emotional sincerity with which they defend their newly grasped or rediscovered “selves” merely betrays its own deceptive shallowness. Thus, even when one may accept that the illusions of human transparency may be less opaque than evinced in Nathan Zuckerman's stark portrayal, the problematics of certainty do appear to place one, at the very least on occasions, in serious self-reflective interpretive quandaries. As a consequence, one may well harbour an abiding suspicion that there are times when one may be deeply mistaken about the meaning of one's own verbal assertions, about one's gestures of assent to the words of others, and about the trust that supposedly builds human relations and community, especially when it is founded upon words, smiles, frowns, and gestures that seem to convey

a mutual understanding of, and an assent to, the words spoken and the actions performed.

These thoughts of an agitated and inconstant human condition may replace Father Pem's "place to stand" (Doctorow 2000:304) with a dispersed and destabilised sense of, at best, a "wavery" self-presence. Even ameliorating the boldly stated directness of Nathan Zuckerman's views, a more searing, and, perhaps, less emotionally enamoured, scrutiny of this created world may evince an inhospitable avid rawness about it, even a fickle and "ludicrous" malignity, that may compel one to acknowledge "the baseless fabric of this vision", so that, when entering into the theatre of this human experiment of becoming persons, one accepts that it is peopled with "such stuff/As dreams are made on" (*The Tempest*, IV. i) – an arena of imaginative and unsubstantiated tragic hopes. For a confidence in the biblical created "image and likeness" of humanity (Genesis 1: 26-27) to a creator, founded upon a resolute fidelity to this being as the unshakable and determinative "refuge and strength" (Psalm 46: 1; 71: 7; 94: 22), "shelter" (Psalm 57: 1; 61: 4; 71: 1), "strong tower" (Psalm 61: 3; 62: 2, 6), "strong rock" (Psalm 62: 2, 6, 7), "fortress ... and ... stronghold" (Psalm 71: 3), as the psalmist repeatedly affirms, may generate instead despondence, dejection, and, not improbably, a mood of hopeless and solicitous anxiety, of mere human shadows donned in "inky cloak[s and] customary suits of solemn black ... the trappings and the suits of woe", as Hamlet (*Hamlet*, I. ii.) says. But it is "[n]ot enough. It's not enough", cries Father Pem. And if it is not enough, then perhaps before despairing too disconsolately and before capitulating too prematurely to the blackened residue of the ever-changing and decaying human chancel house, may one speculate that this "ludicrous" drama of an, admittedly, tragic human condition, may be recast into one containing a deeply etched earnest of ineradicable hopeless hope, if one were to "take upon's the mystery of things/As if we were God's spies" (*King Lear*, V. iii)?

The context of this quote "take upon's the mystery of things/As if we were God's spies" (*King Lear*, V. iii) from Shakespeare's *King Lear*, finds Lear and his youngest daughter, Cordelia, the one who, finally he has realised, really does love him, captured in their battle to right the injustices of Lear's other two daughters, Cordelia's older sisters. Now defeated, Lear says to Cordelia:

... come let's away to prison:

We two alone will sing like birds i' th' cage.

When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down,

And ask of thee forgiveness. So we'll live,
 And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
 At gilded butterflies; and hear poor rogues
 Talk of court news, and we'll talk with them too,
 Who loses, and who wins, who's in, who's out;
 And take upon's the mystery of things,
 As if we were God's spies ... (*King Lear*, V. iii.).

To look down upon this world as “God’s spies” is to be aware of its mystery in the context of the final mystery of being: to acknowledge the mystery of existence, simultaneously, in its bewildering brutality and its yielding compassion; and to experience the mystery of being human through being and becoming persons, concomitantly, in its despairing and unsettling bewilderment and its emplaced local habitation. To adopt this perspective is to live in, or into truth, rather than for truth to live in one (see Caputo, 2013: 29-38). This is not to name this truth, but it is to accept that one’s own unknown, unauthorised, and unasked for existence is conditioned by the awareness of its ending – that, in contrast to one’s inception, one knows one’s end: that one is a “being-towards-death” (Heidegger 1962:§§ 240-241; 249-250; 258-259; 263; 266), ineluctably moving into the nothingness of a truth that meets one as the final horizon or limit that marks the remit within which one lives (see Mackey 1987:18-21; 185-189).⁸ To appropriate this sense of existence, as an inquiring being who seeks to understand one’s life in terms of one’s “end and the number of one’s days”, to invoke the psalmist (39: 4), resists a conception of truth that only permits logical and justifiable propositions that are verified by human reason, that, ubiquitously, are applicable, and that, consequently, imposes a cataleptic silence upon of all else. But this is not necessarily to jettison propositional truth, or to deny it a place – and a place not without importance – within a more comprehensive notion of truth. Rather, it may be to suggest that the end – the finality of one’s ending – may condition being human in a way that desists from depending exclusively either upon the founding of meaning upon some inaugural narrative, or upon empirical and verifiable proven truths of experiential existence. For it is to admit mystery – to, in Lear’s words:

... take upon's the mystery of things,
 As if we were God's spies ... (*King Lear*, V. iii.).

8 Mackey offers an instructive “modern” – or, possibly, postmodern – theological appropriation of Heidegger, especially with respect to death and resurrection and the Eucharist.

4. SEARCHING TRUTHS

Recently, Lambert Zuidervaart (2017) has sought to extend the assertions and conclusions of Husserl, Heidegger, and the Frankfurt School in the cause of such a more expansive definition of truth that incorporates both non-propositional and propositional claims, although not quite to the mystery of one's end. Returning to Thomas's definition, *Veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus* in *De Veritate*,⁹ the *Summa*,¹⁰ and elsewhere,¹¹ Zuidervaart notes Husserl's approval of the necessity of some sense of *adaequatio* – "equality", or, as McDermott (1989:45) translates it, "conformity" – for the possibility of true knowledge which generates two forms of adequation. In the endeavour to know truth as the "conformity of mind and thing" (McDermott 1989:45), both intuitive and synthetic activities operate, and the evidence that is required for the assertion of true propositions comprise both truth-makers – facts, states of affairs, objective existence – and truth-bearers – the mental and linguistic conveyances and articulations of the "intuitive fullness", the "objective identity", of a perceived object (see Simons 2000). In this sense, true propositions are asserted of intentional objects that provide an ideal compositional fullness (see Zuidervaart 2017:32-38). Zuidervaart's (2017) appropriation of Husserl's schema of attributing "truth" in such instances, is qualified by a "critical retrieval" of truth as less subject related, and where self-disclosive (both to adaptively appropriate and anticipate Heidegger) predications of objects arise in a mode in which the objects available for knowing offer themselves for predicative claims. Such a rendering of the objects of knowledge is *existentiell*,¹² which, necessarily, interpolates the

9 *De Veritate* 1.1: "dicit Isaac quod veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus; et Anselmus in *Lib. de veritate*: veritas est rectitudo sola mente perceptibilis". <http://www.corpusthomicum.org/qdv01.html> [Accessed: 23 August 2018]

10 *Summa Theologiae* 1a. 16. 2 obj. 2. <http://www.corpusthomicum.org/sth1015.html> [Accessed: 23 August 2018].
See also, Heidegger (1962: § 214).

11 See, Vnuk (2013: 31, n. 2).

12 Inwood (1999:61 & 62): "The 'existential' [Heidegger's] concept of existence means the selfhood of man in so far as it is related not to the individual self but to being and the relationship to being *Existenziell* ... with a French-derived ending: *existentiell*, 'existentiell' ... applies to the range of possibilities open to Dasein, its understanding of them and the choice it makes (or evades) among them. If Dasein does what THEY are doing, or alternatively chooses to choose and decides to become a soldier or a philosopher, these are *existentiell* matters. The distinction between 'existential' and 'existentiell' is parallel to that between 'ontological' and 'ontical'".

primary condition of Heidegger's (1962:§ 219; original emphasis) *Dasein* as "Being-in-the-world", and which, helpfully, he explains:

If a *logos* [a statement or explanation] as *apophansis* ["predication"] is to be true, its Being-true is *alêtheuein* [literally, "to truth" – the use of the verb here one takes to be implicit in the act of stating truth, that is, it asserts truth] in the manner of *apophainesthai* [the middle form of the infinitive indicates "its own appearing" or "its showing of itself"] – of taking entities out of their hiddenness and letting them be seen in their unhiddenness (their uncoveredness). The *alêtheia* [truth], which Aristotle equates with *pragma* [something, some "fact"] and *phainomena* [its "appearing" or "showing" of itself] ... signifies the "things themselves"; it signifies what shows itself – entities in the "how" of their uncoveredness.¹³

Here, then, appears a less subjectively constrained notion of truth, but one that worries Zuidervaart owing to the seamless acceptance of a *pragma phainomena* as true, and as true to the subject who then knows that it is true. What test is employed, as Zuidervaart (2017:68) asks, in order to claim that "the entities discovered are truly discovered and that their discoveredness itself is true"? Heidegger's answer that "what helps distinguish true disclosure from false is ... the authenticity with which human beings face the possibility of their own death" (Zuidervaart 2017:72-73), is, for Zuidervaart, even more so than with Husserl, too individualistic.¹⁴ Thus, Heidegger too is chastised, less so for the subject-centred location of verifying what is true, and more so for the individualistic manner in which *Dasein* fathoms the self and the givenness of truth. For Zuidervaart, what is required for truth – truthful assertions that are both propositional and non-propositional – are not hermetic subjects who self-consciously know, whether with self-confident assurance (in the case of Husserl) or in a state of anxious trepidation (in the case of Heidegger), but subjects in their openness to other subjects, precisely because what is said and

13 The Greek in this quotation has been transliterated.

14 Somewhat forthrightly, Zuidervaart (2017:90) states later that "his [Heidegger's] account reduces authenticity to a formal state of self-relation, transfigures historical ruptures in modern society into an ontological state of alienation, and turns the truth of *Dasein* into a denial of mediation. Because of the pivotal role 'authenticity' plays in Heidegger's general conception, his idea of truth become internally untenable: despite the emphasis on interdependence and intersubjectivity in this notions of 'being-in-the-world' and 'being-with', the most primordial truth of *Dasein*, whose own disclosedness is itself truth in the most primordial sense, lacks interdependence and intersubjectivity. Or, rather, authenticity displays interdependence and intersubjectivity only in a privative way, as that from which *Dasein* must distance itself in order to be authentic".

what is claimed to be known, include the reception of what is offered up for knowledge, and hence available for truth. And if this is so, then, if one may inflect the argument, the objects of knowledge in their givenness not only are available to human selves, but human selves also are participant knowers as other givens of what may be known, as well as fellow participant inquirers as to what is true.

Therefore, it is in the existentiell experience of human persons, not merely as self-enclosed human subjects who may know, but also as subjects and objects in their relational interaction and sociality as knowers and known, that claims about truth are made. One would suppose that Adorno would be helpful in this respect, but, for Zuidervaart, he too fails in a manner not dissimilar to Husserl and Heidegger, because an élitism pervades Adorno's project. Those who discern "the truth" about being human in the world are "self-nominated and self-elected" (Zuidervaart 2017:95), a notable *hubris* that is not casually introduced by Adorno. And the reason for this self-assertive presence is that society imposes an ideological blindness upon its participants that renders the overwhelming majority of people incapable of observing the truth of its deceptions. One may have suspected that Habermas, Zuidervaart's final visitor in his "critical retrieval of truth", would forge the societal link after which Zuidervaart reaches. However, because Habermas has retained an "early" conviction "that truth 'is not a property of assertions' and rather only ... claim[ed of] the propositions or statements we assert" (Zuidervaart 2017:115), Zuidervaart's requirement that, to appropriate an earlier remark, the "truth-makers" are implicit in the "truth-bearers" – that "truth-makers" predicatively are entailed in "truth-bearers" – has not been satisfied. That truth is interactive, dialogic, and justifiable through contextual authentication is central to Zuidervaart's thesis, and yet, propositional truths also are integral to this thesis (also see, Caputo 2013:59).

How, then, is truth to be retrieved, when these dominant thinkers either retreat into forms of solipsism, and/or arrogate to themselves *the* truthful perspective, or impose a chasm between, perhaps what one may express as, truths known and truths experienced in their knownness? Zuidervaart returns to Heidegger's "On the Essence of Truth" (1930) to state that it is in history that freedom is experienced, with the result that being a person is to live within the remit of the givenness of freedom; or, to adopt Heideggerian speech: the essential nature of freedom is an experience of being "let be" within the history of a being who is open and is availed of what is encountered in being human and free (Heidegger 1993:125). The awkwardness here is attempting to convey the dual nature of knowing truths to claim; truths that, in their duality of experience and deliberation

upon experience, and in their self-reflexive counter-factual and imaginative construal, let beings be in their openness to the promise of unconcealment.

This partial opaqueness, not simply in these expressions, but also in their attempt to mean, evokes the space of being human, as human space of penumbral loss. And it is within the terminal sadness of this human condition of not knowing that which one wishes to know, and yet of possessing the giftedness both of the tense of hope, and more so – perhaps, almost annoyingly – of the subjunctive mood of possibility, that the tragedy of being human most acutely may be acknowledged. In the acceptance that all that will remain will be one’s dusty fragments and, as Father Pem has stated, that there is “no place to stand”, one may concur with Zuidervaart’s proposal and critical retrieval of truth: that truth requires non-propositional and propositional warrants within the on-going *agôn* of communal and societal engagement, adversarial debate, fractured dissentience, and perennial negotiation.

Zuidervaart’s proposal to widen a conception of truth, not merely that it may hold propositions, existential givenness, discursive exchange, and contextual formulations within its remit, but also that it may empower relational interactions between these frequently segregated aspects of what comports truth and the descending degrees of disparagement with which they often are ranked, is attractive. Within this proposal, the experiential interaction of subjects with a variety of kinds of truth-makers facilitates their own predicative self-disclosure to the truth-bearers within a social context that offers the promise of living humanly – of the advancement of human flourishing.

If Aristotle’s voice is heard in the last phrase, then the single citation by Zuidervaart of the one whom Thomas called “the philosopher”, does not refer to this notion. Zuidervaart’s (2017:98) alliance of “bearing witness to the truth” and “authentication” – the former, participatory of oneself and invitational of others to do likewise; the latter, the locative specifics of participation, which may be diverse – does not prevent him from inserting his own perspectival witness-bearing about, precisely, human flourishing, but one that, in his recasting of this threaded and intertwined retrieval of truth, is a particular view from somewhere with respect to justice, equality, and ecological responsibility (Zuidervaart 2017:70- 71; 98-99; 179). But views from elsewhere – of the implicitness of engaging with “truth-makers” and their presence in the “bearers of the truths” of a way of living – may well demand an openness to this world – a “letting beings be” – in all of its indeterminate capriciousness, and in all of its, perhaps, regrettably, corrigible epistemic fragility; in its variegated conceptions of what is just, in how authority ought to be ordered, in the approbation of different

modes of ecological engagement, in communal rather than individualistic justifications, and in the diverse ends – the *telè* – of being human meaningfully. And it is this “somewhere” *sub specie humanitatis* that may recall an alternative, subjunctive perspective *sub specie aeternitatis*¹⁵ in the imagined cell of Lear and Cordelia, so as to

... take upon's the mystery of things,
As if we were God's spies ... (*King Lear*, V. iii.).

5. CONCLUSION: THEOLOGY'S QUESTION

What contribution, then, if any, may theology – Christian theology – make to “bearing witness” to the truth? Unfortunately, theologians – in the plural, and therefore, somewhat bewilderingly – continue to announce *the* Christian truth as a singularly definitive, and incontrovertible claim – with a seemingly selective amnesia that they do so in their many voices from plural “somewheres” – and yet, setting aside the propositional problematics of these “proofs”, perhaps upon deeper reflection, such a claim, or claims, may well constitute as profound a contradiction as the central claim of Christianity which they summarily declare. For what one may suggest – neither in the cause of propositional proof nor in the cause of historical veracity – is that the central claim of Christianity—that God is both human and divine – is not an answer or *the* answer, but a question; it is not a truth or *the* truth, but, at best, a truthful question to a humanity that questions itself as to which truths by which to live (see Williams 1990:1-2). In the cause of this argument, the interpretation of Lear’s words, that to

... take upon's the mystery of things,
As if we were God's spies ... (*King Lear*, V. iii.).

suggests less a sudden “understanding” or “divine revelation” of “the mystery” (Wells 2000:257, n. 16), with the implication that it has been resolved; and rather that, precisely because one, as a human person,

15 See Sutherland’s (1984) philosophically nuanced and elegantly presented articulation of *sub specie aeternitatis*. With respect to Zuidervaart’s (2017: 70-71; 98-99; 179) “interest” in particular views about justice, racism, and the ecology noted above, Sutherland (1984: 100) observes that *sub specie aeternitatis* “cannot be just like elaborating any other view of the world. For example, the world viewed under the aspect of economic development, or of the maximization of pleasure, or of the political supremacy of this race or that, or even of distributing material benefit as equally as possible, in each case is the world understood under some limited and, to that extent, manageable aspect”.

possesses God's view as "God's spies",¹⁶ so one now knowingly bears the burden that the mystery of being human is to live within the remit of knowing unknownness.¹⁷ For, if God is both human and divine, it allows for the view that to be "God's spies" requires no statement to be uttered and no incontrovertible creedal formula to be acknowledged upon the pains of excommunication or everlasting damnation. Rather, "God's spies" – those who see from that perspective – speak to, call to, humanity. But this hail to humanity may be less so Murdoch's (1970) notion of "perfection" and the "Good"; or even Sutherland's (1984:102) carefully established proposal of the "possibility of the intelligibility" of such a viewpoint, addressing humanity. In an inflected contrast, it may constitute a more demanding summons to humanity to its unsettling vocation, which is that being human entails being confronted by the question about being let be in the presence of self and other unknownness, and of the final, unyielding, and unavoidable mystery that will meet one.¹⁸ Perhaps one may suggest that, possibly in its most lapidary form, all that Christian theology offers in its contradictory central claim is so to destabilise the human categories of speech and sight – of saying knowingly and seeing clearly – that the primary resistance to dogmatic truth claims is to become "God's spies". For this vantage point, *sub specie aeternitatis*, calls a person to look upon, and to ponder, what it is to see and to know unknowingly, and that being a human person means

16 The setting of *King Lear*, supposedly in a pre-Christian era, ought not to preclude observing Christian views, images, and allusions within the play. Nuttall (2007: 307), who has "long argued that the savage ending ... makes it an anti-Christian play", found himself "shaken in this view" by the argument of Medcalf (2007; cited by Nuttall, 2007: 307-308) and the Christ figure, Cordelia, and, subsequently, more sympathetic to the earlier religious reading of the play by Bradley (1965; cited by Nuttall, 2007: 307-308). Similarly, Kermodé's (2000: 237) analysis of *Timon of Athens*, supposedly of the Peloponnesian War period (431-404 BCE), observes fairly clear references to the institution of the Eucharist in the play (I. ii. 46-49; III. ii. 65-66; I. ii. 40-41).

17 In this regard, Ioppolo (2008:103, n. 17) may be more helpful than Wells (2000) cited above, in the sense that "God's spies" may be "doing divine service" on behalf of humanity.

18 For the Christian, for whom communication with God enacts the human-divine responsive relationship, Jean-Louis Chrétien's notion of "prayer" as a "wounded word" (cited by Caputo 2013:83), provides a way of conceptualising the ultimate woundedness of being human in precisely the ways observed in this article: the capacity to imagine, and to use language and imagery about, completion, perfection, utopia; but the awareness of being unable to achieve it. Thus, in this sense, *au fond*, prayer for the Christian believer may be said to communicate one's incompleteness in the face of a commitment to God who completes and perfects one.

to be confronted by, not a truth to which assent must be given, but by unsettling questions that interrogate the self about the inceptive and final purposes of being human, and of the meaning of the meaning of being for the being who is human. To see humanity under the view of eternity is to acknowledge that eternity may be no more than the time and space of one's life that is lived zetetically in the presence of a horizon of mystery. In *The Human Stain*, Philip Roth's (2000: 52) later novel, his narrator, again Nathan Zuckerman, considers the seemingly incongruous relationship between the seventy-one-year-old, former professor of Classics, Coleman Silk, and the thirty-four-year-old, janitor and farmhand, Faunia Farley, and Zuckerman recognises

my own fascination with their extensive disparity as human types, with the non-uniformity, the variability, the teeming irregularity of the ... arrangements – and with the injunction upon us ... the highly differentiated and the all but undifferentiated, to live, not merely to endure but to *live*, to go on talking, giving, feeding, milking, acknowledging wholeheartedly, as the enigma that it is, the pointless meaningfulness of living[.]

and so of living without the provision of a definitive answer to the human experiment in which one participates unaskingly, and, as Augustine realised, “with the sheer incompleteness of the endeavour of self-knowing” (Williams 2016:22). Therefore, “to *live*”, as Roth emphasises, may well constitute the very subversion of the initial and *unrequested* condition of existence – the brute fact that, without request, one is; and one is here and now. Rather, “to live” is to exist *interrogatively*, not merely as one who asks about being and meaning, but as one whose own unknownness questioningly probes the conditions of the possibility of being human in this present time and this locative space, and of living within the horizon of what ultimately confronts one – whether it is named, “mystery”, “God”, or “nothingness”.

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